

Camp Future Summary Report: Revised: December 2008

Introduction

The “Camp Future Project” of BC Conference of The United Church of Canada is a multi-year project to ensure that BC Conference has a high quality, sustainable camping ministry well into the future.

History

At a gathering of the Conference’s Outdoor Ministry Committee in the Fall of 2003, it was widely recognized that significant changes needed to take place in the Conference’s camping ministry if it was to continue into the future. A commitment was made to investigate new ways to finance and govern the ten camping ministries within the Conference.

In March 2004 the Executive Secretary, Doug Goodwin, contracted with Derek Evans to conduct a review of the camping ministries and bring back recommendations. The Terms of Reference for the review and recommendations stipulated that the ministry would need to reflect four key values: camping ministry would need to be mission-oriented (integrated with the goals of healthy congregations, effective leadership and faithful public witness); excellent (characterized by high quality in program, facilities and operations); accessible (physically, financially, geographically); and sustainable (able to rely on human and financial support for the long term).

After visiting the camps and assessing questionnaires regarding camping ministry, in November 2004 Evans tested with the BC Conference Executive several key directions his research was pointing, including: wide support for high quality camping ministry; emphasis on a small number of camps; a professional core camping staff.

Evans’ report, entitled “A Future for Camping Ministry: Assessing and Improving Camping Ministries in BC Conference” was made public in December 2004. Discussion of the report was vigorous throughout the Conference in the winter and spring of 2005. The BC Conference 2005 General Meeting affirmed the key elements of the report and asked that a final decision be made in November 2006.

After the 2005 General Meeting the Executive Secretary invited formal responses from the constituency with comments about the report and ideas for improvements. These responses were received until the end of December 2005. In January 2006 a committee read and assessed the submissions, leading to several alterations in Evans’ original recommendations. These changes were presented to the BC Conference Executive in March 2006 and accepted.

Since a number of different groups – two congregations, a Presbytery, BC Conference, and the General Council – own camps within BC Conference each situation requires a unique approach. Following acceptance of the recommendations by the Executive in March 2006, Derek Evans and Doug Goodwin approached the “owners” of the camps with the BC Conference position and invited negotiations to try to reach a mutually acceptable final plan for action.

At the General Meeting of the Conference in May 2006 numerous voices were heard expressing concern about the potential sale of some camp properties. A motion to delay the final decision by another year was not adopted. Negotiations with Presbyteries and congregations continued until the end of Oct. 2006.

During that time research was also conducted into the potential value of the camping properties. A final report by Derek Evans was presented to the BC Conference Executive in early November 2006. This was accepted by the Executive, giving the “green light” to move forward with the Project. In January 2007, Terry Harrison was hired as the Project Manager to begin the implementation process.

The summary of actions and decisions taken throughout this process follows.

City of Surrey buys Camp Kwomias

In September of 2007 Camp Kwomais was sold to the City of Surrey for use as a city park. The sale of Camp Kwomais generated \$19,470,588.48 after expenses for the Camp Future Project. This money is invested, divided into two equal funds. One fund is invested for significant long-term growth. This fund will provide the basis for the endowments stipulated by the Project. The second fund is invested to ensure liquidity while still providing growth. This fund will be the source for the ongoing organizational and capital development undertaken by the Project. Camp related liabilities have been settled using these funds (\$ 494,175) and \$100,000 is earmarked to pay off any Cultus Lake Camp liabilities at the end of its lease.

On-going Negotiations

Negotiations are ongoing with Kootenay Presbytery regarding the two camps in that Presbytery (Koolaree and Rock Lake). At their meeting in October 2007, the Kootenay Presbytery made clear their intention to participate in the Camp Future Project. Conference and Presbytery are now working together to consider various options that would enable Kootenay Presbytery to be a part of the Camp Futures framework and a member of the emerging Regional Camping Ministry. Negotiations are also continuing with Comox-Nanaimo Presbyteries regarding decisions about Moorecroft Camp, and with Kamloops United Church regarding Camp Grafton. The plans that follow may change once the results of these negotiations are known. The report below is presented *without prejudice*, i.e. without desire or intent to influence the outcome of these conversations.

Non-Project Camps

Some decisions regarding the Camp Future Project were taken early in the process, prior to the release of the 2006 Camp Future Report. Trinity United Church (Vernon) decided to operate Camp Hurlburt as a congregational camp. Kamloops-Okanagan Presbytery decided to supervise Camp Mackenzie as a Presbytery camp. Fraser Presbytery has decided that it will supervise Cultus Lake Camp as a Presbytery camp until its lease from the BC government on Cultus Lake expires. Such camps may eventually be regarded in some manner as associate or “affiliated camps.” However, these local ministries will not be seen as part of the Camp Futures framework *per se*. While they may benefit from administrative or program resources that become available as a result of the Project, these camps are not regarded as contributing to or drawing from the Camp Futures Project in terms of finances or planning.

Commitment to Camping Ministry

BC Conference Commitment

BC Conference will assume primary responsibility for a Conference-based camping ministry at three sites: **Camp Pringle**, **Camp Fircom**, and **Camp Grafton**.

Purpose

The final Purpose and subsequent clarification of Goals and Values will be undertaken by the new governance structure of the Conference camps. The project suggests that the Purpose of the BC Conference camping ministry should be similar to the statements following:

- to provide an opportunity for children and youth to experience the sacred in themselves and in the natural environment;
- to provide an opportunity for children and youth to experience an encounter with Christ that leads to discipleship;
- to experience participation in a safe, residential and recreational Christian community.

Beneficiaries

The plan suggests that the chief beneficiaries of the camping ministry should be children and youth (ages 8-18) related to United Church congregations. It also recommends that the camps be accessible to persons, children and youth from low-income families, or who have other special needs.

Growth

The plan calls for providing space for a 20% increase in the number of campers (approximately 2,500 annually) plus the provision of facilities suitable for year-round retreat use.

Investment in Camping Ministry

Capital

In 2006, the project called for a total capital investment in the three Conference camp sites of approximately \$5.5 million to upgrade facilities. Predevelopment planning for the property development phase of the Camp Future Project began in spring of 2008. Updated order of magnitude budget estimates – based on current construction market prices – suggest that this amount will need to be more than *doubled*. While construction costs have increased between 2006 and now, so has the real estate market, which was to our advantage when we sold the Kwomais property (see “City of Surrey buys Camp Kwomias” above). Still, the increase in cost is significant. Construction budgets are being developed in line with maximum projected revenue, and will be adjusted accordingly, as we actualize revenue through the sale of the remaining properties (see “Divestiture of Properties” below).

Governance and Management

The project calls for local leadership with Conference-wide oversight. It anticipates a strong Board governing each camp, with significant Conference involvement linking the camps, providing for both supervision and resources. The 2006 Camp Future Report called for

approximately \$300,000 for Board transition and development. This estimate is being reviewed and will be updated, as needed, as the strategic and business plans are developed, and as the governance model takes shape.

Endowment

As identified in the 2006 report, an endowment will be established that will allow ongoing, long-term support of the Conference camping ministry. The 2006 estimate (of over \$7 million, providing close to \$350,000 annually) is being reviewed, and will be updated as necessary. This income will be used to hire a Conference-based camping ministry staff person, subsidize camp staff costs, provide financial support for camping programs in areas that do not have camps, and subsidize some participant travel and registration costs.

Off-Site Camping Ministry

Areas in the Conference that do not have camp sites will benefit and participate in the Regional Camping Ministry through innovative programming options. There will be priority funds dedicated to supporting non-traditional camping ministries in these regions.

Divestiture of Properties

Properties

The Camp Future Project, in order to fund this ministry, still plans to divest all or part of the following properties: Moorecroft Camp, Koolaree Camp &/or Rock Lake Camp (see “On-going Negotiations” above). Conversations are ongoing about each of these Presbyteries with respect to the amount of property to be sold, the structure of any potential sales, and the issues that might be encountered in effecting a transaction.

Process

BC Conference has committed to continuing dialogue and negotiation with the Presbyteries related to these properties. This dialogue has been undertaken with the assistance of professional real estate advisors/agents who will also represent the church in discussion with government and potential purchasers. This work has been ongoing through 2007 and 2008 and will continue into 2009. All property transactions will be conducted in a transparent manner appropriate to such undertakings.

Values in Sales

BC Conference has committed to a property transaction approach that allows for flexibility, seeking to optimize the realization of revenue while also providing protection of the environment and public access.

Ministry Fund

In 2007, as Conference began to implement this project, we expected that the sale of four properties in a robust real estate market would generate more money than was needed to obtain the goal of the Project: a high quality, sustainable camping ministry. It was anticipated that this surplus would be available for additional ministries, other than camping, within BC Conference. Since that time, however, we have sold only one of the four identified properties. While the

money revenue generated from the sale of Kwomais was higher than we had originally projected, the market has now begun to level out and this downward trend will negatively impact the sale of the remaining properties. Furthermore, the costs associated with the project – particularly the property development cost – have escalated (see “Capital” above).

The delay in the divestiture process and fluctuations in the global economy have increased the complexity of our planning, but we remain confident that the amount of money that will eventually be realized through the sale of property, as well as the final costs to fully implement the project, will be determined sometime in 2009.

While original plans called for the establishment of the Ministry Fund once the total cost of camp development and endowment were known, the delay of the sale of properties has meant the ability of the whole Conference to benefit from this Project, in ways other than camping, has also been delayed. In order to receive benefit sooner, it was decided that in 2009 some income (not capital) from the invested Camp Future funds could be used immediately to support the priority work of Conference. Terms of Reference for the use of Ministry Funds will be developed, in conversation with the Presbyteries, over the first half of 2009.