

Pines over Pews:
The Spiritual Experience of Campers Who Do Not Attend Church in The United
Church of Canada

By

Alicia Dawn Cox

A Grad Project submitted to
Atlantic School of Theology, Halifax, Nova Scotia
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
A Degree of Masters of Divinity

March 26, 2015

© Alicia Cox, 2015

Approved: Rev. Dr. Susan Willhauck
Associate Professor of
Pastoral Theology

Date: March 26, 2015

Table of Contents

REB Certificate	2
Abstract	3
Introduction	3
Purpose and Research Question	5
<i>Research Question</i>	5
<i>Definitions</i>	5
<i>Purpose and Goals of Research</i>	5
<i>Review of Literature</i>	6
<i>Theological Rationale</i>	10
Method	12
Data Collection	13
Data Analysis	14
Emerging Themes	17
<i>Nature</i>	17
<i>Community</i>	21
<i>Discipleship</i>	27
Evaluation and Implications	30
Bibliography	35
Appendix 1- REB Submission	37

Certificate of Ethical Acceptability for Research Involving Humans

This is to certify that the Research Ethics Board has examined the research proposal:

AST REB File number:	0142014
Title of Research Project:	“Pines over Pews: The spiritual experience of campers who do not attend church in the United Church of Canada”
Faculty Supervisor:	Dr. Susan Willhauck
Student Investigator	Alicia Cox

and concludes that in all respects the proposed project meets appropriate standards of ethical acceptability and is in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) and Atlantic School of Theology’s relevant policies.

Approval Period: 3 November 2014 to 25 March 2015

Dated this 3rd day of November, 2014 at Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Dr. Alyda Faber
Chair, Research Ethics Board
Atlantic School of Theology
660 Francklyn Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3H 3B5

**Pines over Pews: The Spiritual Experience of Campers Who Do Not Attend Church
in The United Church of Canada**

By Alicia Dawn Cox

Abstract:

“Pines over Pews: The Spiritual Experience of Campers Who Do Not Attend Church in The United Church of Canada” is a research project by Alicia Dawn Cox, submitted March 26, 2015, in partial fulfillment of the Masters of Divinity degree at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

This qualitative, phenomenological study seeks to explore the spiritual experience of United Church of Canada campers who do not attend church. Five people with three or more years of camping experience were interviewed from across Canada. Through a review of literature, theological exploration, and data provided by the participants, this essay will explore relevant themes of the spiritual experiences of these campers. Implications and limitations of these findings will be explored as to how they might impact The United Church of Canada and its’ camps.

Introduction

On a warm summer’s afternoon, I had one of the deepest theological conversations I’ve had about faith and God that I remember. It was on a beach at camp over an afternoon agape meal of grapes and bread. Of course, our discussion led to the Eucharist, which led to a discussion about the resurrection of Jesus. I was not surrounded by published theologians, or my fellow AST classmates. I was sharing in conversation with a group of teenage boys, many of whom do not attend church.

Through my work at United Church camps the past five years, I was always pleasantly surprised how profoundly deep these campers and staff could express their spirituality, and how willingly and honestly they would offer extemporaneous prayer. As someone who always saw church camp as the summer version of Sunday School and grew up in the church, I was intrigued that there were so many people with no faith

background that were highly engaged and spiritually active within a United Church camping context. I wondered what brought them and caused them to stay in a place whose mission is to nurture Christian development in a natural and fun environment?

Camping has a long history. An early form of Christian Camping here in North America was the camp meetings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Author Clarice Bowman wrote in *Spiritual Values in Camping* that circuit riders would gather in brush arbors, as there was a lack of buildings large enough to hold large gatherings of people to share the Gospel.¹ Within the United Church of Canada, camping has been an important part of its ministry since the beginning.

According to the United Church published document on camping, called “Who We Are,” over 20,000 campers attend one of over sixty United Church camps across Canada each summer.² While exact statistics are unknown, it is obvious from my research and discussions with other camp leaders that a number of these campers have no connection to the United Church of Canada, or any faith tradition. What do they receive from this form of faith formation? What do they learn and experience in this context? And what can the spiritual experience of these campers and staff teach the United Church?

This research paper will explore these and other questions about these campers experiences of church-based camping. I will do so by addressing the purpose of this study and reviewing current literature and theological rationale. I will describe the methodology

¹ Clarice Bowman, *Spiritual Values in Camping* (New York: Association Press, 1954), 6.

² United Church of Canada, “Who We Are: United Church Theology, Culture, and Traditions,” Toronto: United Church of Canada (2009): 3-4.

and data collection process. I will address the common themes that arose from the data and explore them theologically. Finally, I will provide some implications and limitations of the conclusions and how they may impact the United Church and its camps.

Purpose and Research Question

Research Question

What is the spiritual experience(s) of United Church campers who do not attend church?

Definitions

- Campers: for the purpose of this study, campers refer to those who have had experience as a United Church of Canada camper at a recognized United Church of Canada overnight summer camp. The camper may have also been a staff member, and their experience as a staff member is also part of their camping experience as a camper in this study.
- United Church: Within this study, I will refer to the United Church of Canada as the United Church, unless otherwise stated.

Purpose and Goals of Research

The goals of this research were to explore the spiritual experience of campers who do not attend church and how they are affected by the faith formation that happens at camp. It will explore how their experience may help United Churches and camp boards to better understand their experience, and find new ways to engage these campers.

Eleven open-ended questions were developed to explore how these non-church campers actively participate in faith formation programs, how they describe their

spirituality, and how they experience camp as a whole. The purpose of this was to uncover common themes of the spiritual experience of these campers and what the church and camp community can learn from their experience.

Review of Literature

In reviewing the literature concerning camping and spirituality, three main themes arose in the literature. These themes are:

- 1) Impact on a camper's identity and well-being
- 2) Relationships with others and the natural world
- 3) Impact on a camper's spiritual beliefs and faith formation

I will explore these topics in relation to my research and with each other. In reviewing the literature, I found that camping and outdoor based leisure gatherings have been found to have a significant impact on a person's life; mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

All the literature reviewed for this project agreed that learning was a valuable outcome of camping, both in secular and religious ways. Bowman noted the value of campers learning experientially about salvation through interaction with others and the natural world.³ Moushon goes further stating that students "learn more effectively from student involved experiential learning than from a traditional lecture approach."⁴ Snyder notes an interesting way in which learning happens within the camping context. Snyder argues that in a camp setting, persons learn about their personal values through having them confirmed through translocalization; in which persons learn that their values and

³ Walter Bowman, "The Church and Camping-Some Biblical Considerations," *Brethren Life and Thought* 24, no. 1 (1979) : 7.

⁴ Raymond Moushon, "Learning Post Hoc and Ad Hoc: Educational Programs in Camping," *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 2 (1993) : 72.

beliefs work in a meaningful community outside of the local community where they learned these values.⁵ Much of the research reviewed notes the valuable learning experience of camping in an outdoor setting. It is interesting to note that although much of the literature reviewed was exploring this learning from a spiritual viewpoint, often Christian, there was little observed about the biblical or theological learning. Most of the learning noted in the literature was around self-identity or community interactions, often in secular language. There is a need to discover what value of learning campers receive in terms of biblical or theological learning from a camping experience.

Many of the researchers noted the value of interaction in the camping experience on a variety of levels, both secularly and religiously. Gee examined this through the interactions of young offenders in wilderness justice camps. He argued that the wilderness provides a unique environment for youth to break down barriers and social structures. He notes that fancy clothes are impractical in the wilderness so social structure is less important in a wilderness setting.⁶ Snyder argues that camping allows us to come into a closer relationship with God, as the simplicity of living in the wilderness requires us to have more dependence on God to provide for us.⁷

There are a variety of views about the impact of church camping on a person's faith and spirituality, both positive and negative. Heintzman looked at the impact of outdoor recreation experiences and how they impacted one's spirituality. He found that outdoor recreation experiences had a positive impact on many aspects of one's spiritual

⁵ Gray Snyder, "The Impact of Camping on the Life-Style of the Faith Community," *Brethren Life and Thought* 24, no. 1 (1979) : 21.

⁶ Christopher Gee, "Wild Epiphany: Turning Child and Youth Care Inside Out," *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice* 23, no. 4 (2010) : 40.

⁷ Snyder, 22.

well-being including one's sense of purpose, connectedness with others and with God, and a fulfillment of hope, love, peace and joy.⁸ Yust adds to this research by arguing that although these aspects happen in the camping experience, the effects are not long lasting. Yust found in her research that although campers gained spiritual growth and commitment while at camp, the effects did not remain, and only returned when returning to camp. She argues that this is not a healthy spirituality.⁹ Yust touches on the lasting effects of spirituality at camp, but it was not the main focus of her research. She notes that is an area that should be investigated further. In my research, I hope to explore the lasting effects of spirituality at camp through my interviews with campers outside of the camping atmosphere and season.

Kenda Creasy Dean looks at the important impact camp has on a youth's experience of eschatology. She argues that campers learn about eschatology and find hope in camping experience because camp has a short time frame in which campers find meaning and feel as though they matter through participation and ritual, particularly closing rituals.¹⁰

Not only has there been research on camp's affect on the individual camper, but also how camp affects the church as a whole. Yust found that camps had a difficult time creating a spiritually rich environment, allowing for less transference to communities of

⁸ Paul Heintzman, "Nature-Based Recreation and Spirituality: A Complex Relationship," *Leisure Sciences* 32, no.1 (2010) : 82.

⁹ Karen-Marie Yust, "Creating an Idyllic World for Children's Spiritual Formation," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 11, no. 1 (2006) :182.

¹⁰ Kenda Creasy Dean, "The Eschatological Significance of Summer Camp," in *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, edited by Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean (Illinois: IVP Books, 2011), 170.

faith after the camping experience.¹¹ She states that this is because camp is a high emotion event and suggests to campers that these are the norms of everyday life, and thus it is highly unlikely that a camper can achieve this level of emotion and impact in every day life and in a traditional place of worship.¹²

The spiritual experience of campers has been researched in a variety of ways, both quantitatively and qualitatively. In all the qualitative studies reviewed for this project, campers and staff were interviewed either before, during or shortly after a camping session. There is very little discussion as to the impact of camping much later after the camping season, so it has been difficult to know what the impact of church camping is long term. The goal of my research is to learn more about the long term effects camping has on a camper's spirituality by interviewing persons with a few years of camping experience.

Heintzman conducted a quantitative research study about the impact of nature-based recreation on spirituality. He noted that it is very complex to study in such broad terms because there were a lot of influencing factors on whether a person experienced a spiritual impact.¹³ Most of the qualitative research was done through a phenomenological approach, as it best gets to the lived experience of the campers and staff interviewed in order to learn more about the phenomenon of living in a camp setting for a short period of time.

While many of the research studies reviewed interviewed campers attending church-affiliated residential camps, none addressed a camper's previous affiliation (or

¹¹ Yust, 187.

¹² Yust, 182.

¹³ Heintzman, 79.

non-affiliation) with a church or religion. In some of the research, it seemed assumed that those attending church affiliated camps were regular church goers. None of the research reviewed explicitly addressed the spiritual formation of non-church campers who attend church camps.

While there is some research on the spiritual experience of campers, much of it is outdated and does not reflect the changing landscape of both the church and church camps. Much of the more recent research around this topic focus more on the physical landscape of the camps, or approach camping from a secular viewpoint. As noted earlier, none of the research addresses those whose only faith formation is from a camp setting. Most of the research studied large camping settings in the United States. More research is needed in this area to discover the spiritual formation of youth in a Canadian setting, with smaller camps, such as those found in the United Church of Canada.

Theological Rationale

According to *The United Church of Canada Camping Standards Manual*, the mission of United Church camps is to provide an immersion in faith development while living in community, developing leadership skills, experiencing the outdoors, having fun, and deepening faith in God.¹⁴ Faith development is the key mission of United Church camping, and is experienced in a number of ways. If faith development is key, why are not all of our campers developing a faith that leads them to church? I sought to explore this through my research, which is why I decided to interview those campers with little to no church experience.

¹⁴ The United Church of Canada, *The United Church of Canada Camping Standards Manual*, The United Church of Canada (2014), 5.

It is interesting to note that the United Church uses the word development to describe the way faith is formed. John Westerhoff III recognizes that the acquisition of faith is understood in terms of nurture and growth, and is a gradual process.¹⁵ Faith development is an ongoing, gradual process.

Rebecca Nye, well-known researcher of children's spirituality, recognizes six criteria for ensuring spiritual foundation for children. She describes them as SPIRIT-Space, Process, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy, and Trust.¹⁶ I will address these in this research and how they relate to my participants' experiences. Church camps, as settings for spiritual formation, are settings in which providing spiritual foundation is important. I sought to discover if United Church camps were creating space for all of these criteria for spiritual formation.

Space refers to the physical, emotional and auditory space that is created and how children react in these formed spaces.¹⁷ Within the camping setting, the setting within nature, outdoor worship spaces, cabins, and group formation are all elements of space. Process is an ongoing method of learning, and values the learning and creative process rather than the product.¹⁸ This is seen within many areas of camping, from arts and crafts to Christian education programs. Imagination encourages children to go deeper in their spirituality and to be more creative in how we express our spirituality.¹⁹ Relationship and

¹⁵ John Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith? 3rd Revised Edition*, New York: Morehouse Publishing (2012), 35.

¹⁶ Rebecca Nye, *Children's Spirituality: What it Is and Why It Matters*, London: Churchhouse Publishing (2011), 41.

Please see this book for further information on the 6 criteria.

¹⁷ Ibid., 43-45.

¹⁸ Ibid., 46-48.

¹⁹ Ibid., 49-50.

intimacy seek to provide safety and privacy for children to be able to express themselves and join in relationship with others and God.²⁰ Camps provide many unique opportunities for campers to meet and interact with others and with God's creation. Trust is the final criteria and values the ability to know or not know the answers to everything, and to be able to live in that experience of not knowing.²¹ These important criteria encouraged me to explore how United Church camps are developing spirituality, and whether they are doing so in a successful way.

Method

For this research project, I chose to conduct phenomenological research. John Creswell describes a phenomenological study as “the study of a common meaning for individuals of lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon. From such study, themes or the essence of the lived experience is derived.”²² I chose this method because I wished to discover the unique experiences of these campers. Camps are a unique environment, providing a unique phenomenon to study the lived experience of these individuals whose only faith development is in a camp setting.

To recruit participants, I posted an invitation on the National Camping Network, United Church of Canada Facebook page, and also sharing it to other United Church camp's Facebook pages. Interested participants were invited to contact me via email or phone, although all of them contacted me by email. All emails were received through a password-protected address and deleted at the completion of the study. There were a few

²⁰ Ibid., 51-54.

²¹ Ibid., 54-56.

²² John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, London: Sage Publications (1998), 38.

interested persons who did not fit the criteria. Those interested individuals that did not fit the criteria were thanked for their interest.

I sought to interview five individuals between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four who had at least three years of camping experience within the United Church of Canada and who didn't attend worship services. I chose this group to explore because I wanted them to be at an age where their decision to attend church and camp was a decision of their own. I did not seek to find long-term camp people who deeply love camp, but that is what I received. Participants were invited to share their experience of camp and how it impacted their spirituality. They were also invited to describe their spirituality both inside and outside of camp. Before being interviewed, all participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent form that included information about the research. All participants were informed that they could decline to continue to be a participant of the research at any time.

Data Collection

I interviewed five participants between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four years of age. All interviews were conducted in person or through video calls if distance was too great, and audio only was recorded in both cases. All interviews were conducted in a quiet, public place, such as the local library. My participants have a combined total of sixty-nine years of camping experience. They are from a variety of United Church camps across Canada. All of the participants have participated in many aspects of camp: as camper, counselor, director, and even sitting on the camp board. All my participants have been given pseudonyms and camp names have been removed. There were four women: **Lily, Lavender, Penelope, and Katie**, as well as one male participant, **Oliver**.

Each participant was invited to share their experience during a twenty to forty-five minute interview. Eleven open-ended questions were asked to help discover the spiritual experience of my participants. Each participant was given the opportunity to add any thoughts they had concerning their camp experience that they did not feel were addressed by the questions I had asked. Each interview was transcribed. Data was then analyzed using a phenomenological approach. John Creswell described the process as:

- Finding significant statements within the data,
- Grouping these statements into units of meaning,
- Reflecting on other possible meanings and descriptions,
- and Constructing an overall description of the essence of the experience.²³

Data Analysis

After conducting and transcribing my interviews I read and analyzed the transcripts, discovering the essence of their lived experiences at camp, their thoughts of church and decision not to attend. My participants shared with me graciously and enthusiastically about their camping experience.

For my participants, camp was an exciting world of friends and fun, whether they were campers or staff. All of the camps were described as places of beauty. All of my participants spoke about having designated times for a Christian Education program, as well as times for worship. The Christian Education program took on a variety of forms. Oliver spoke about the form the Christian Development program took at his camp:

²³ John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 147-150.

“We were able to incorporate something into an entire day and we were able to not make it so scheduled and make it more about being involved with something, whether it was using nature, or activities or the entire camp, or talking with your cabin. We were able to just incorporate it in a way that just wasn’t so curriculum, but able to have a designated time for spiritual growth but make it in a way where I think it’s really applicable, not forced. “

Penelope spoke about the Christian worship elements of her camp- “In the morning, we’ll have a Bible verse, we’ll do grace at every meal. We have vespers. We do a chapel where we sing pump up songs with the guitar, outside in nature.” She described the music as known hymns and contemporary praise songs, as well as songs written by staff based on the theme for that week.

I purposely sought to discover the spiritual experience of those campers who do not attend church. Two main reasons arose for not attending church.

For some, it had to do with their schedules, with work, school and activities scheduled for Sunday mornings. Katie said,

“I went away to university I was in a different city and I didn’t know anybody there, I didn’t know of any United Churches, and on top of that I was very busy with schoolwork. That Sunday was either my catch up on work day or catch up on sleep day, so it’s mostly just a time management issue.”

Most of my participants also found church to be too formal for their liking. Katie had this to say about church-

“Faith, or religion, in society, it seems so organized. I mean in church it’s I read this part and then you read that part, it’s kind of structured. At camp it just seems much more fluid. It’s kind of spontaneous and just happens. It kind of goes with the flow.”

The formal, organized aspect of church often made my participants feel uncomfortable and made church seem foreign to them.

I wished to compare this to how what they thought of The United Church of Canada. All of my participants described the United Church as accepting, open, and welcoming. Lavender told me this about her experience at a camp gathering at a united church where she saw the rainbow flag on the front lawn of the church.

She said:

“When I walked up and I saw that, I was so proud. Like in that moment before I’d even met anyone, before I’d gone to camp, or anything, I was just so proud to be affiliated with a church that could fly that flag so proudly right in front of their church and just be that accepting. Like, I was, I just wanted to like praise them, or something. It was just amazing.”

What was very interesting was that my participants used many of the same words to describe camp as they did the United Church. For example, the following are two quotes from Lily. When asked about her experience of camp she said, “I think at camp it’s very free and open to whatever interpretation, however you feel like, and I really enjoy that.”

When asked about her thoughts of The United Church she said,

“I think they’re very open to everything, everyone. They are very welcoming, accepting. I know that there’s lots of religions and things out there that are very closed minded, who don’t like gay people, or this person for some reason or another, and I don’t feel like the United Church is like that at all. They want to welcome everyone and I think that’s just a good life lesson.”

From their experiences, three main themes arose; nature, community and discipleship.

Emerging Themes

Nature

“The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;

night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.”²⁴

Just as the writers of the psalms spoke of nature and gave praise to God for creation, so do my participants.

For my participants, nature was an important aspect of their spirituality of camp. It was a key factor of the place, and helped to make it special. A few of my participants commented on it being an ever-present thing in connection with their spirituality.

Oliver stated about his camp’s outdoor chapel: “The space is just always so beautiful and it’s just known that it’s a space where we’re going to, the tone changes.” Katie added, “I think there’s just something about being in the area, in the location, being on the property and just having that feeling the moment you’re there.”

The natural space was an ever-present part of their spiritual experience. When asked about where he experienced God at camp, Oliver said: “It’s crazy because camp’s in nature and so my answer to that question is nature. So, like I don’t know if I stop experiencing it when I’m at camp. I think it’s like a 24/7 thing.”

Nature was also a part of daily activities and used as a tool for learning and discovery. Penelope described a few activities that their Christian Education leader organized: “he would just have us lay down and count how many colors were in nature.

²⁴ Ps 19:1-4 (NIV)

What we could just see or he'd have us go and find something and bring it back and discuss it. “

Vespers was an important part of nature that all my participants spoke of. Vespers is an evening worship service, but the space was also used for a morning worship as well in some cases. In all of the camps my participants spoke of, the vespers area was a special space on the camp property, set in the woods or near a body of water such as a lake or the ocean. Lily described her experience of vespers:

“I think vespers is being outside and doing all the things where you are not confined to an area. Like if we're in a church, like it's a space where you have to sit and do certain motions, I think at camp its very free and open to whatever interpretation, however you feel like, and I really enjoy that. “

Penelope spoke about how she felt in her camp's worship space: “I'd be sitting there and I'd just get the shivers down my spine with whatever song we sang together, it just felt so meaningful and that there was a presence right there in the middle of the woods while we were all together.”

Oliver shared his experience of vespers:

“I can't even describe all the vespers moments I've experienced and all the touching moments and all the tearful moments or life changing moments, it's just that it was always this quiet, confident place; It's where I've always went. When I think of spirituality I always think of that spot next to a lake, it's just for me, it's sunset, at that spot. And its where I've done all my growing and thinking and I just feel like, you know it's a spot where you're connected everywhere, but it's just a spot where I feel directly connected and its cool.”

Vespers did not always take the same format or take place in the same area. Lavender spoke of her experience of vespers on special outdoor overnight outtrips.

She said,

“It’s one of my favorite things ... because it usually ends up in the dark. And it’s just more close together with the people that you connect with your cabin. So once you have a vespers in a different place, not surrounded by everybody at the camp, and you’re kind of isolated, you get this different sense of spirituality, and this different sense of connection versus just being with the whole camp, you get it with the individuals, which is really really cool. “

My participants spoke about experiencing the presence of God in nature. They recognized God in the beauty and awe of all the creation that surrounded them.

Lily spoke of a particular morning when she experienced God:

“So, one morning, we woke up the senior kids early, like before breakfast, and we all got into canoes and went for a sunrise canoe. So we could see the sun coming up over the water, and the water was like glass, and it was beautiful, and in that moment you knew there was something bigger out there, like watching over you, that creates this beauty every single day, it was amazing.”

This was even viewed in a participant’s decision not to attend church. When asked about why he had decided not to attend church, Oliver responded:

“Because that building doesn’t do it for me... There’s something more beautiful about that (being in nature) to me than building up this building with the stained glass windows,...it’s just being in a building in the middle of the concrete jungle, the city, it doesn’t feel spiritual to me at all.”

Vespers was also an important space for prayer, both communal and individual prayer.

Lavender stated:

When I was a camper, my first couple years as a camper I was kind of scared of vespers because you’d see people praying but I had never grown up in church...So at first, being at vespers was like, “Who is this person that people are staying behind and talking to? Why are people staying behind and praying and

being quiet? That's so weird." So I used to run away. But then honestly by the end of the week the first time I was like, "Woah, I wanna stay! I wanna talk! I wanna have this time of reflection onto myself." As a camper, ...I kept getting more connected with it.

Nature was a very important aspect for all my participants. Space was a very important part of nature.

On page eleven, I identified Rebecca Nye's 6 criteria for spiritual foundation, creating the acronym, SPIRIT.

My participant's experience of camp is an example of the criteria of Space. Rebecca Nye recognizes that space helps us to "enter into God's presence. This space becomes a sanctuary- our experiences here convincing us that this is both a holy, and safe, place to be."²⁵ For Nye, space is both physical and emotional. The space must be set apart, having a threshold.

For my participants, much of camp, and in particular would be a space for spiritual foundation. Lavender found that safety in the space in her story about prayer. All of my participants recognized that the space was special, or sacred, and set apart. Oliver spoke about how the tone changes here.

Rev. Dr. John Westerhoff III states in his book *Will Our Children Have Faith?* that arts and beauty are a means of revelation of the presence of truth and goodness, and of God.²⁶ He expressed the importance of regaining the ability to wonder, create, and dream, within the context of Christian Education.

²⁵ Ibid., 42.

²⁶ John Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 79.

My participants were in awe of the natural beauty that surrounded them at their camps. They spoke about feeling a connection with God in this place, and spoke of taking time for reflection and activity within this natural setting.

Community

“Many miracles and wonders were being done through the apostles, and everyone was filled with awe. All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. ... Day after day they met as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.”²⁷

Like the early church, camp is a community, even though it may only be for a week. Campers and staff share meals together. They play and learn together. They worship together. Community is a large part of my participants’ spiritual experiences. I’ve divided their experience of community into two parts, the shared and individual aspects of community.

The larger community of camp was an important part of their spirituality. Oliver offered a story of community. When he was a camper, one of the other boys set off a fire extinguisher in the bathroom. The director told the boys that unless someone fessed up, they would all have to sit out of the final game, which was usually a highlight of the week. Oliver took the blame, even though he didn’t do it. He had to sit out of the game but one by one, the boys showed up and joined Oliver in solidarity.

He said: “ The next morning we did this huge talk about that’s how community is supposed to work ... It just showed I think how a bunch of very different people will

²⁷ Acts 2: 42-47 (Good News Translation)

come together and do amazing things that you would never expect. And that to me is faith, community is a huge part of faith for me.”

All of my participants named camp as a “home away from home.” This was reflected in the acceptance and love they found at camp as part of this shared community. Katie had this to say about camp: “One of the things I liked about camp was that you could just do funny things and no one was judging you ...it’s just you can be yourself... obviously its not always perfect, but sometimes it just feels like it is.” She shared an example of this in a story about a special meal she had at her camp. After attending an event for staff training with another staff member, they decided to incorporate their memories of training time by naming a meal activity after the funny name of the street they stayed on. This special meal incorporated all of their meal activities, such as staying silent, moving space, and eating with funny utensils. The scene she spoke of was pure chaos and fun, but allowed each camper and staff to just be themselves and be goofy together.

Penelope simply stated: “Our goal is just to let the campers know that God loves them.”

Oliver added, “I think that ... the fact that nobody even knows their background, nobody knows what family they come from, nobody knows the monied and poor, ...and the delinquent kid can feel like the most normal kid. And the kid that’s shy can suddenly sing and dance.”

Lily shared an experience of love with me. Lily told me that one summer a close family member had died a few days before the beginning of camp that week. During one evening’s vesper service, she started crying and sat on the beach. One of the lifeguards came and sat down beside her and wrapped her arms around Lily. Lily said: “It just felt

sort of good to know that I was in a place where it didn't matter how I was feeling, there was always going to be people there no matter what. That has always been very, very meaningful for me.”

So what exactly does community look like at camp? All of my participants talked about two aspects of community, living and learning together. Campers lived together, literally, within cabins, but also lived together as a whole, sharing in meals and fun together.

They also learned together. All of my participants, when asked about their Christian education component, spoke about the importance of learning together and talking and listening to one another.

Oliver shared a story about leading Christian Education time with a group of teenagers: “You know, we would all sit in a circle, and there'd be like sixty of us. There was so much discussion and it came from every single individual and I feel like I created a space where all of us were just this little community together and I was really moved by that group.”

Small group experiences within the larger group setting were also important.

Lavender spoke about one of these moments when she was a counselor.

“There was this little girl once after one vespers, she was just like bawling her eyes out and I was just like, “What is going on with my camper, like oh my god, she's homesick”, ...but it wasn't even that. It was that vespers had moved her so much that she'd started thinking about her grandmother that had passed away like a couple years ago. And she was so sad about her grandmother passing away that vespers somehow had brought that up, that she was bawling. Like she was devastated. So, we ended up staying at vespers awhile, but afterwards we just kind

of walked towards the campfire, but she really wasn't ready to go to campfire yet. She was still kind of upset and you just don't want to push her when she's like that. So we just kind of sat up on the field where we could still see the campfire so she could still see what was going on. It was actually the last campfire, so it was kind of hard for me. But then at the same time I knew that this little girl needed me and she wanted someone to be with. So we sat up and watched the campfire, and we just talked about her grandmother, and just talked about how much fun she had with her grandmother, and how she loved to play with her, and you know, what happened. By the end of it, I wasn't so mad that I was missing campfire, you know? I was really glad because I got to know this little girl sooo well, and I was really happy that at the end of it that that had happened because I wasn't even thinking about campfire. I was just thinking about how awesome it was that she was feeling better about herself."

Penelope spoke about a special moment she had with a camper in a small group setting:

"I had this one boy ... sitting right beside me and ... I was sitting down with my hands behind me, to keep me up, and he grabbed my one arm and put it around his shoulders, and I had to put my arm back or else I would have fallen backwards, and he looks at me and he goes no, put it back, it reminds me of my mom. "

The community was also the foundation for self-growth for my participants.

Lavender spoke about learning life skills. She told me that when asked about whether she had dealt with certain situations, that she always went to examples from camp, even if she had seen it elsewhere in her daily life.

Penelope said- It's a place where I found myself and I've grown into that person...Because of camp, I've found I've grown so much that it's time for me to take what I've learned from camp into the real world.

Katie stated- "Camp, I like to say that camp made me the person I am today. ... I'll be owning my own business someday and I'll have to have those skills (that she learned at

camp). It's not just about fun and games I guess, it's about building strong people. And helping to foster the good qualities in youth.”

Oliver shared-“I was a kid who was always searching for independence and how to become a leader and I found that I was able to create and do that at a camp. I was able to, I was able to really self-grow and all the tools were there for me to do it.”

Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in his book *Life Together*, that genuine Christian community is a community of truth, light, fellowship, service, and love.²⁸ He expresses that the Christian community is one that is called by Christ, and moved by the Holy Spirit, to share in agape love with one another. For my participants, camp is a Christian community that allows campers to be who they are and live and share with one another. It is difficult to say if camp is genuine Christian community or not. Bonhoeffer argues that a pure, genuine Christian community is not normal and difficult to create as we are all human and become self-centered at times; we are not always serving others purely for Christ.²⁹ He adds that it is possible for many to have a good experience of genuine Christian community, but to stay in this place, faith must always hold us together.³⁰ It is possible that campers can have an experience of Christian community, but it is unclear if camp is a pure representation of Christian community. As campers do their best to live in community, sharing with and caring for one another, they do model agape love within a community. It is unclear from my participants' experiences as to what

²⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Life Together,” *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 5*, trans. By Daniel W Bloesch and James H. Burtness, ed. By Geoffrey B. Kelly, Minneapolis: Fortress Press (1996), 44-46.

²⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 46.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

degree faith is incorporated into their experience. While they do have faith, and are able to speak spiritually about their experience, it is hard to say if it is the guiding force behind their sharing of agape love within the community.

Sharing stories, biblical and personal, as well as reflecting on both together, were important to my participants experience. John Westerhoff states that when a faith community's story becomes our story, God's presence among us becomes part of our experience.³¹ My participants have learned their spiritual experience learning the biblical stories through their interaction and experience of camp with one another.

Dr. Rebecca Nye's criteria for spiritual foundation, relationship and intimacy, were also important aspects of my participants experience. Nye writes that having space for relationship with God, as well as one another is part of the foundation of spirituality.³² Nye also stresses the importance of intimacy, creating safe spaces for individuals to "come closer" to both God and one another on a spiritual level.³³ For my participants, some of their most meaningful and spiritual moments at camp were those that allowed them to share in community and to know one another on a deeply spiritual level.

Discipleship

"Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey

³¹ John Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 32-33.

³² Rebecca Nye, *Children's Spirituality*, 51.

³³ *Ibid.*, 53.

everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”³⁴

While my participants may not all classify themselves as Christians, they do communicate and value aspects of discipleship within their spiritual experience. All of my participants spoke about the value of learning about the Bible and the Christian faith, as well as how to live in a community, as valuable aspects of their camping experience. They described the learning they received as being simple and practical in form. Katie spoke about how her camp incorporated Godly Play into their Christian Education curriculum and that it was widely received by campers and staff alike as it gave everyone the chance to wonder and reflect on the Biblical story in an interactive way. All of my participants spoke about how the learning of Biblical stories was integrated into the daily life and activities of the camp.

Oliver said-

I really liked when someone could apply it and not just biblically but really relate it to what’s going on in our lives and I took that as my time for spiritual growth. Like I would really take the questions they asked and think about them in relating and take it as an opportunity to think about what I thought about the situation...I guess faith is talking about the real stuff that happens to us too and I feel like that happened a lot.

In some cases however, it wasn’t as obvious that learning was involved until sometime after when my participants had time to reflect on the event. Lavender said,

Growing up, when you go to camp, you don’t even really know what you’re doing until you’re doing it. You don’t really feel any religious aspect to it until you sit down and your counselor finally talks to you about it and you’re like, “WOAH, wait a second. I just made this spiritual connection, like what?!” But before that

³⁴ Matthew 28:16-20 (NRSV)

you were thinking that you were just playing games, right? You thought you were just crossing a rope bridge for the hell of it but you were actually trusting everyone around you to catch you if you fell ... You were never forced into this religious aspect but all of a sudden you would leave with this huge spiritual awakening that you would have no idea that you'd even had.

Not only were my participants learning about the Bible and the Christian faith, they also spoke about sharing what they had learned. This was particularly seen once they had become counselors and staff.

My participants had been transformed by their experience and learning and wanted to communicate that experience to others. Lavender shared this about her experience of sharing vespers as a counselor-

“And when you got that experience of getting to stay with whichever child decided to stay behind for a little while, that turned into my spiritual time. It wasn't really my time anymore, it was my time teaching and helping the other person, which was really, really cool. I really enjoyed that aspect of it for sure.”

My participants also became more interested in learning about the Christian faith and church through their experience of camp. Lavender said, “Ever since I came out of camp, I have been interested in attending church, you know, just kind of out of curiosity.”

All of my participants valued being able to share their spirituality with others in the camping context. They recognized their experience, and their ability to share their experience, as a key part of their spirituality.

Rev. Dr. John Westerhoff III states that “Experience is foundational to faith. A person first learns Christ not as a theological affirmation but as an affective experience.”³⁵ When speaking with my participants, they learned about God through their experience, more so than through their studying of biblical stories. Their lived experience of living and learning within a community of faith helped them to grow in their spirituality. It led them to be able to recognize the importance of sharing this faith or spirituality with others and sought to create a space where others could grow in their experience with God.

Westerhoff reflected on the life of Jesus stating, “The Word became flesh- Word and deed are never separated.”³⁶ For my participants, the biblical stories are alive and active. They learn the biblical narrative through activity and living in community. It is through this community that they continue to share the good news of the gospel with others within their camping community.

Evaluation and Implications

There are a few limitations to this study. The participants that came forward all had an overall positive experience of camp. The results may have differed if they had had a more negative experience. There may have also been other factors influencing their experience, such as their age.

In future research, it would be helpful to explore the long-term impacts of the faith formation of camp on participants such as the ones I’ve interviewed. Many of my

³⁵ John Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 92.

³⁶ John Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 93.

participants have recently been involved at camp, so it is difficult to project how their experience may or may not have impacted on them in a long-term way. It may also be helpful to research and compare the spiritual experience of camp with those campers who do attend church.

There are a number of implications that we can explore in both church and camping communities.

My participants illustrated Rebecca Nye's six criteria for spiritual foundation. Space, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy and Trust were all important aspects of their spiritual experience. These elements are all things that are crucial for us to nurture within both our camps and our churches. As outlined earlier, my participants experience camp as being good at creating space that allows for spiritual formation. My participants would encourage more flexibility in the created space in order to engage in the church. My participants valued time for discussion and reflection as part of their spiritual learning. Small group interactions such as discussion were also expressed as ways to grow relationships, intimacy and trust. Churches may find it helpful to model some of these small group interactions within our church as a form of faith formation. An ideal small group based on my participants' experiences would include space for discussion, creativity, and of course, fun. My participants valued being able to share on a deep level, and saw it as a meaningful, spiritual experience. Trust also stood out as an important part of my participants' experiences. All of my participants spoke about wanting to be able to communicate open and honestly about their experience at camp and their thoughts about camp. I would encourage churches and camps to be more trusting and open with one another. I would also endorse the use of imagination in our churches, as this was

something I heard was lacking from churches for my participants. I invite you to use your imagination to discover new ways for your congregation to engage in worship and praise of God, whether it be through art, activity, song, prayer, whatever you can imagine!

The campers I interviewed are passionate about their camping community. They describe these camping communities as accepting and welcoming, something that we are continuously striving to be in the church.

All of my participants spoke about the flexibility of camp in comparison to the church. While having a liturgy and an order of service is important, my participants would encourage to leave some room for the Holy Spirit too. Leave some space for congregational response in prayer. At camp we would call this a popcorn prayer, because the community is invited to pop like popcorn with their additions to the prayer, not worrying about talking at the same time, or spaces of silence.

My participants also valued space for small group interactions that allowed people to share stories and learning together.

Nature is an important aspect of the spiritual experience of camp. While it's probably not possible for the church community to worship outdoors every Sunday, there are some things the church can learn about these campers experience. Taking time for awe and wonder was an important part of the spiritual experience for these campers. As the United Church, we also need to take time to be awestruck by the beauty that surrounds us, both natural and manmade. Many of our churches have beautiful spaces, with amazing stained glass, but how often do we give ourselves time to admire in awe of this beauty? On a rainy Sunday, I encourage you to let the rain have a voice, take time to

recognize the sounds of creation, rather than talking a little louder to be heard over the rain.

As churches overseeing camps, and as camp staff and boards, we need to consider how we communicate and teach our Christian education programs. We need to take a critical look at what lessons are being shared with our campers, and are we communicating them in a way that allows campers to actually learn and have fun from them? While my campers may not see themselves as religious or Christian, they do express spirituality and a faith in God. Some may see these campers' experience as pantheistic rather than reflecting a Christian experience. While I would disagree that these campers are pantheistic, I do wonder whether our camp formation programs have aided this. I encourage camps to critically explore their camping curriculums and decide with input from staff how to best communicate faith formation in a way that is fun, engaging, and highly reflective of the beliefs and values of the United Church of Canada.

Camps may seem very different from our United Churches, but we are connected. The United Church camps are recognized by the United Church, and our United Church funds and oversees these camps.

One thing I heard from my participants is that what they experience at camp is only seen at camp, and often only understood and acknowledged at camp. My participants long for others to understand what kind of place camp is. Oliver had this to say:

“I think there could be a lot to be learned for adults in how we run things at camp. I think the world could learn a lot from how we run things at camp. We’re a bunch of youth and then almost like when we leave it we’re not credited for what we just did. Like we create a world, essentially. We make up rules, and we live by them, and people cry when they leave that world... I think that when people discuss camps and especially for boards and parents and stuff like that I think it’s just so important to really open your eyes and see what camp is doing for the people that are there-staff and kids-and I think again, you could just have so many people in this world. I think political leaders could learn things from coming to a camp for a few weeks and just seeing how it runs because its just so engrossed with love and selflessness and people forgetting about technology.”

I encourage camps and the United Churches to try and do a better job of talking to one another all 12 months of the year, not just those closest to the camping season. Trust is an important element of this communication. Within the trust of one another, we are able to take time to listen to one another and to discover together how camps can be better for all. I encourage churches to recognize and celebrate Camping Sunday, actively involving local campers, sharing stories and worship together.

While not everyone who attends camp has gone, or will go, to church, camp is still a valuable avenue for faith formation in a fun and loving community. Camp is not a means for conversion, or filling the pews. However, camp is a way for campers to learn about and experience God. My participants experienced their spirituality through nature, community and learning together. They expressed this spirituality through worship in a natural setting, being with one another, and sharing the knowledge and experience they received with others. As the church, let us share in that awe, and take time to wonder about how the Holy Spirit is working among us, and recognize God in the everyday.

Bibliography

- Balmer, Randall. "God and the Water Slide: Christian Camping is Bigger than Ever, but Some Rituals Never Change." *Christianity Today* 47, no. 9 (2003) : 54-60.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. "Life Together." *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 5*, trans. By Daniel W Bloesch and James H. Burtness, ed. By Geoffrey B. Kelly. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.
- Bowman, Clarice M. *Spiritual Values in Camping*. New York: Association Press, 1954.
- Bowman, Walter. "The Church and Camping: Some Biblical Considerations." *Brethren Life and Thought* 24, no. 1 (1979): 7-11.
- Creswell, John. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. London: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Dean, Kenda Creasy. "The Eschatological Significance of Summer Camp." In *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, edited by Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean, 169-173. Illinois: IVP Books, 2011.
- Gee, Christopher. "Wild Epiphany: Turning Child and Youth Care Inside Out." *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice* 23, no. 4 (2010) : 31-42.
- Heintzman, Paul. "Nature-Based Recreation and Spirituality: A Complex Relationship." *Leisure Sciences* 32, no. 1 (2010) : 72-89.
- Henderson, Karla, and M. Deborah Bialeschki. "Spiritual Development and Camp Experiences." *New Directions for Youth Development* no. 118 (2008) : 107-110.
- Madsen, Eric C. *Youth Ministry & Camping*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1982.

- Miedema, Siebren and Bert Roebben. "The Two Contested Concepts of Culture and Tradition in Religious Education." *Religious Education* 103, no. 4 (2008): 480-492.
- Moushon, Raymond. "Learning Post Hoc and Ad Hoc: Educational Programs in Camping." *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 2 (1993) : 68-82.
- Nye, Rebecca. *Children's Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters*. London: Church House Publishing, 2009.
- Ribbe, Rob. "Redefining Camp Ministry as Experiential Laboratory for Spiritual Formation and Leadership Development." *Christian Education Journal* series 3, vol. 7, no. 1 (2010): 144-161.
- Snyder, Graydon. "The Impact of Camping on the Life-Style of the Faith Community." *Brethren Life and Thought* 24, no. 1 (1979) : 18-23.
- United Church of Canada. "Who We Are: United Church Theology, Culture, and Traditions." Toronto: United Church of Canada, 2009.
- The United Church of Canada Camping Standards Manual*. Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2014.
- Westerhoff III, John. *Will Our Children Have Faith?*. 3rd Rev. ed. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2012.
- Williams, Bud. "Theological Perspectives on the Temporary Community/Camping and the Church." Unpublished manuscript. Wheaton, IL: Wheaton College, 2002.
- Yust, Karen-Marie. "Creating an Idyllic World for Children's Spiritual Formation." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 11, no. 1 (2006) : 177-188.

APPENDIX 1

Research Ethics Board Proposal

Name of Student Investigator: Alicia Cox

Title of Research Project: Pines over Pews: The spiritual experience of campers who do not attend church in the United Church of Canada

Summary of Proposed Research

Description

What is the spiritual experience of campers and camp staff within the United Church of Canada and why do some of them not attend church? This project will consider the spiritual experience of campers and staff of United Church of Canada camps and how their experience either keeps them connected to the church or causes them to not attend church.

This is an important topic because an increasing number of United Church campers do not attend worship regularly but have a deep connection with God and are able to express deep theological thoughts in a camping environment. Over 20,000 campers are welcomed to United Church camps across the country each year³⁷. However, many of these campers do not attend church.

I became interested in this topic after my own involvement in United Church camps. I noted that many of the campers and staff did not attend or associate with a church of any sort on a regular basis but were able to express deep theological reflections and pray extemporaneously quite easily. I began to wonder how their faith developed and if they have a “camp faith” that is not related to church involvement and what that camp faith is like.

Proposed Research Field

Young adults between the ages of 18-25 with 3 or more years of camping experience will be interviewed individually in a public space or through online video conferencing if distance or schedule is a difficulty. If video conferencing is used, no video data will be saved. All interviews will be recorded through an audio electronic recording device and stored as an audio file with an assigned alias name on a password protected computer.

³⁷ United Church of Canada, *Who We Are: United Church Theology, Culture & Traditions For Staff and Volunteers at United Church of Canada Camps*, 3.

Principle Research Consultants

The Rev. Dr. Rob Fennell, Professor of Historical & Systematic Theology, Atlantic School of Theology

Waiting confirmation on second research consultant

Methodology

Using the phenomenological approach, 5 participants between the ages of 18-25 with 3 or more years of United Church of Canada camping experience (at least one year of being a camper), who do not attend church regularly will be interviewed about their camp experience and their lack of church connection.

Suggestions for interview candidates will be sought through conference camping ministry personnel and United Church of Canada camp boards, as well as by extending an invitation to potential interviewees through the National Camping Network, United Church of Canada facebook group page. See invitation to participate-Appendix B.

I will travel to visit with interviewees within Nova Scotia and will arrange video conference calls when travel is outside of Nova Scotia or at the request of the interviewee.

Public presentation of material will take place at Atlantic School of Theology on March 11 and 12 of 2015 and a detailed written project will be submitted to Dr. Susan Willhauck.

Potential Benefits from Study

The benefit to the participants would be the opportunity to discuss their camping experience within United Church of Canada camps. The participants will also be given the opportunity to express their visions and hopes for the United Church of Canada camping ministry and how to address this groups' spiritual needs.

The benefit to the United Church of Canada will be to learn the importance and/or challenges of the camping ministry, where it can be improved and how to meet the spiritual needs and desires of this group.

Potential Risks from Study

Speaking of camping experiences may cause painful memories to arise for the participants being interviewed. If this should happen, I will refer them to a local United Church clergy person in their area for follow-up with the participant. Participants may feel as though they are being judged for their lack of church attendance or being pushed into church attendance. At the beginning of the interview, I will ensure them that it is not my intent to convince them to go to church or to judge them in anyway, and that my focus is to learn about their experience.

All participants will be asked to sign an informed consent form.

Participants will be advised at the beginning of the interview that the interview may be stopped at any time if they feel uncomfortable or upset by the process or the questions. Should a participant experience stress or discomfort as a result of the process, they will be referred to Dr. Susan Willhauck, Professor at Atlantic School of Theology, as well as local clergy in their area for follow-up with participant.

Process for Obtaining Informed Consent

After I have identified potential participants, I will telephone or email them to ask if they are willing, in principle to participate. If their answer is affirmative, I will arrange an interview place and time. At the beginning of the meeting and before the interview begins, I will share the background of my project, answer questions they might have and ask them to sign a consent form (see appendix C). They will be able to end the interview at any point and I will delete the recording if they decide to withdraw from the study.

Process for Protecting Identity of Participants and Confidentiality of Data

Protecting Identity of Participants and Storage and Destruction of Data:

- 1. Upon receiving a signed Informed Consent from research participants (no later than December 31, 2014), I will:**
 - a) provide one copy for the participants**
 - b) keep one copy for myself which I will place in a envelope separate from all other materials and store in a locked file cabinet in my home office.**

- c) **provide one copy for my supervisor (Dr. Willhauck), also placed in a separate envelope, who will store it in a locked file cabinet in her office at AST.**
2. **Participants will be given code names. Audio tapes of interviews will be recorded on a digital recording device. These digital recording devices will be kept in locked brief cases or safes and secured at all times during data collection from the time of Informed Consent through the public Grad Project presentations (March 11, 12) and until deleted permanently from my device (no later than March 26, 2015).**
3. **Within two weeks of each interview, I will transcribe the interviews onto a Word document. The Word Document transcripts will be kept on a password protected computer from the time of data collection until the final Grad Project paper is due on March 26, 2015.**
4. **The public Grad Project Presentations take place on March 11 and 12. On March 26, 2015 I will bring my recording device to my supervisor who will check to make sure all interviews have been deleted.**
5. **When the final Graduate Research paper is submitted to my supervisor on March 26, 2015, the Word Document transcripts of interviews will also be submitted to her, either printed as hard copies or disposable CDs and deleted from my computer and trash bin.**
6. **Dr. Willhauck will store transcripts of interviews in a locked file cabinet in her office at AST for one year and all data materials will be destroyed by shredding or crushing on March 26, 2016.**

Appendix A: Proposed Questions

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

Appendix C: Informed Consent

Appendix A- Proposed Questions

1. How did you get involved in camp?
2. What was camp like for you?
3. What elements of your daily schedule included a spiritual element of faith formation?
4. How was the faith formation program time and worship led, and what did you do during these times?
5. What was the most meaningful or spiritual moment for you at camp?
6. How would you describe your faith or spirituality?
7. Where do you experience God at camp? During your daily life?
8. How would you describe the United Church of Canada?
9. Why have you decided not to attend?
10. How do you extend your experience at camp into your daily life?
11. Is there anything else that I may have missed concerning your faith and/or camp?

Appendix B (a)-Invitation to Participate (letter/e-mail)

Dear [*contact name for camp board persons/outdoor ministry conference personnel*]:

I am a student enrolled in the Master of Divinity program at Atlantic School of Theology. As part of my course work under the supervision of Dr. Susan Willhauck, I am conducting a study on the spiritual experience United Church campers and camp staff who do not attend church. All interviews will be confidential and anonymous. In the event you need to speak to someone, such as a health care professional, counsellor or chaplain, a referral will be made available to you, but may incur a fee.

I will be interviewing young adults between the ages of 18 to 25 who have attended or worked at a United Church camp for at least 3 years in the past. Potential interviewees should not be attending church on a regular basis. Interested participants should contact me by phone [902-305-0562] or email [aliciadawncox@msn.com].

Please pass along this message to anyone you may know who may be interested in participating and fits the above criteria. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Alicia Cox

Appendix B(b)- Invitation to Participate-Facebook group Post

Are you a camper or camp staff person (past or present) between 18-25 years of age and do not attend church on a regular basis? Have you been involved with United Church camps for 3 or more years? If so, I'd love to talk to you! My name is Alicia Cox and I am in the Master of Divinity program at Atlantic School of Theology under the supervision of Dr. Susan Willhauck. I am conducting a study on the spiritual experience of United Church of Canada campers and camp staff who do not attend church. I am looking for potential participants who may be willing to speak to me about their spiritual experience either in person or by video conference call. All interviews will be confidential and anonymous. In the event you need to speak to someone, such as a health care professional, counsellor or chaplain, a referral will be made available to you, but may incur a fee. If you are interested, please contact me by phone [902-305-0562] or email [aliciadawncox@msn.com].

Appendix C-Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Pines over Pews: The spiritual experience of campers who do not attend church in the United Church of Canada

Alicia Cox

Atlantic School of Theology

660 Francklyn Street

Halifax, NS B3H 3B5

[Phone # 1-902-305-0562; e-mail address aliciadawncox@msn.com]

I am a student enrolled in the Master of Divinity Degree Program at Atlantic School of Theology. As a part of my course work under the supervision of Dr. Susan Willhauck I am conducting a study on the spiritual experience of United Church campers and staff who are not regular church attendees, interviewing people who are between the ages of 18 to 25 years old with 3 or more years of camping experience (at least one year of being a camper), and do not attend church regularly. I am inviting you to participate in my study. The purpose of the work is to examine what ideas and experiences you have had within United Church camps that have influenced your faith and spirituality. The purpose of this work is two fold: First, to increase the body of knowledge that we have on the topic of the spiritual experience and faith formation of United Church campers and staff who do not receive additional faith experiences in a traditional church worship. Second, to explore how these themes might filter into the life of the church.

Your participation in this project is appreciated. The questions and the project are designed to move to the contours of your experience as you actively speak about what it is like to be a camper. The researcher will audiotape the conversation, even when video conferencing is used as a method of communication. No video data will be stored, only audio.

The tapes and transcript will be held in a secure environment until the completion of this course of study, at which time the digital audio data of all interviews will be destroyed. This project will be completed by March 26, 2015. Printed transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Willhauck's office for one year following the completion of the study. All interviews will be confidential and anonymous. In the event you need to speak to someone, such as a health care professional, counsellor or chaplain, a referral will be made available to you, but may incur a fee.

If you are willing to participate in this project, please read the following and indicate your willingness to be involved by giving your signature at the bottom of this page.

I acknowledge that the research procedures outlined and of which I have a copy have been explained to me. Any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction. I know that I can contact the researcher at anytime should I have further questions. I am aware that my participation in this study is purely voluntary and I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time. I understand that the personal record relating to this study will be kept confidential.

I know that the researcher will make every effort to keep all information obtained in this study as **confidential and anonymous** as possible. Names and potentially revealing facts will be changed, thus affording me anonymity. To further protect individual identities, this consent form will be sealed in an envelope and stored separately. Furthermore, the results of this study will be aggregated and no individual participant will be identified.

The following is a time line for the storage and destruction of data:

1. Upon receiving a signed Informed Consent from research participants, I will:
 - a. provide one copy for the participants
 - b. keep one copy for myself which I will place in a envelope separate from all other materials and store in a locked file cabinet in my home office.
 - c. provide one copy for my supervisor (Dr. Willhauck), also placed in a separate envelope, who will store it in a locked file cabinet in her office at AST.
2. Audio tapes of interviews will be recorded on a digital recording device. These digital recording devices will be kept in locked brief cases or safes and secured at all times during data collection from the time of Informed Consent through the public Grad Project presentations (March 11 and 12) and until deleted permanently from my device (no later than March 26, 2015).
3. Within two weeks of each interview, I will transcribe the interviews onto a Word document. The Word Document transcripts will be kept on a password protected computer from the time of data collection until the final Grad Project paper is due on March 26, 2015.
4. The public Grad Project Presentations take place on March 11 and 12, 2015. On March 26, 2015 I will bring my recording device to my supervisor who will check to make sure the interviews have been deleted.
5. When the final Graduate Research paper is submitted to my supervisor on March 26, 2015, the Word Document transcripts of interviews will also be submitted to her, either printed as hard copies or disposable CDs and deleted from my computer and trash bin.

6. Dr. Willhauck will store transcripts of interviews in a locked file cabinet in her office at AST for one year and all data materials will be destroyed by shredding or crushing on March 26, 2016.

If you have any questions, please contact the student researcher, Alicia Cox, at phone # 902-305-0562 or e-mail address: aliciadawncox@msn.com

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of Atlantic School of Theology. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Alyda Faber at afaber@astheology.ns.ca, Chair, Research Ethics Board.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please keep one copy of this form for your own records.