

# Leading Campfire Ministry in Community of Christ

By Mike Hoffman, Youth Disciple Formation Specialist

Adapted from *Campfire Leadership*, the 1977 supplement to *Camping from the Ground Up*

## Introduction

Gathering a community around fire is part of the human experience. Humankind has not only relied on fire for protection, warmth and preparing food, but fire captivates us by its beauty and power. Some ancient civilizations revered it as the earthly representation of a sun god. Some linked fire with immortality.

As time passed, fire became a place for social gatherings and storytelling. The oral traditions of the sacred story were shared around fires. It was a place to tell and retell adventures and dreams, share rituals, and experience the divine.

Today, campfire remains as a place of contemplation and renewal, whether it's in front of a fireplace inside a home, near a chiminea or outdoor grill on a patio, or around a traditional campfire during camp or reunion. For many young people who come from urban and suburban areas, fire can be frightening, but more likely dramatic, mysterious, and interesting. They are drawn to it.

Campfires at reunions and camps are a great opportunity to experience blessings of community when people share skills, abilities, talents, and ministry with one another. We

share the stories of the past, become aware of night sounds, and catch a glimpse of the mystery of God. Campfires have a role in our ministry events. They bring rich, deep memories and experiences to each disciple and to the community. Taking care to lead in a way that draws in the young as well as mature by choosing songs, skits, and participants from across the ages will go far in making campfire a place for everyone. With such possible ministry, campfires need to be well planned and prepared to bring spiritual formation.

Living out the Enduring Principles also happens at campfire. Does the campfire's physical surrounding display sacredness of creation in the way the fire is created and the materials used? Do skits honor the worth of all persons and blessings of community? Does humor used by the leader and in skits honor each person's worth by not making any person the target of a derogatory comment or skit? Low-level bullying begins with making someone the butt of a joke. Some of our camp songs have been around a long time. The counsel in Doctrine and Covenants 163:7c ("It is not pleasing to God when any passage of scripture is used to diminish or oppress races, genders, or classes of human beings.") is also applicable to the music we sing. Listen carefully to the words of the songs. Do they reflect Community of Christ theology and Enduring Principles?

# Building the Campfire Ministry

The ministry of campfire during camps and reunions can be shaped by different experiences: the first campfire experience of the camp or reunion may be the first campfire experience ever for a person attending. Daily or event-long themes shape the direction of the ministry. Traditions of the sponsoring jurisdiction should be part of building the campfire ministry.

## First Night

In a multiday event, the first night's campfire is important in setting the direction and tone for the rest of the event. Campers new to reunion or camp may feel insecure because they have not had time to build friendships. The gathered community may be made up of individuals and groups of friends or families. The message of the first campfire should be one of expectation and hospitality.

This first night is an excellent opportunity to have an especially good skit using staff, leaders, and experienced campers. When new campers see this involvement, they are more likely to be comfortable joining in later. Another way to help campers feel comfortable the first night is to use familiar songs. Before the first night, share a list of songs with participants and see how many people know each one. Most people will be able to adapt to regional differences in songs. You may still need to review words and melodies.

This is also a good night to begin a continuing story. This will help campers look forward to the next episode—and the next campfire. With young children at reunion or at junior camp, avoid scary stories altogether. It is wise to have fewer serious, quiet songs on the first night to keep the younger campers from feeling homesick.

At the beginning of the first campfire, icebreaker stunts or mixers can help everyone to get to know others. A simple way to do this is to ask an open-ended question for each to share with another person. (If I were an animal, I'd be a ... because....) Welcome those who are attending from out-of-state by asking them to share where they are from. You might ask which college or universities they support, how many have attended Graceland University, or what countries those in the group have ever visited. These opening activities are opportunities to live out the Enduring Principle of worth of all persons. It is important to be sure stunts, skits or other fun activities are not intended to embarrass or cause someone to look foolish without their prior consent.

Before this first campfire, safety rules and etiquette should be shared. These can be shared by the campground manager, camp director and the campfire leader. It is important the campfire leader stress and support these rules. Older adults at reunion and cabin leaders at camps should also help campers be safe and respectful. Factors to consider include:

1. Evacuation procedures
2. What to do if the fire gets out of control
3. What to do in case of inclement weather
4. When to be quiet (a signal or something similar)
5. Information specific to your setting

## Themes

In most camps and reunions there are event and daily themes that should influence each campfire. In addition, campfires might focus on Native American traditions, church history, or family night (where each family shares funny stories from their past). Be creative, keeping in mind the purpose of campfire and the themes

and direction of your reunion or camp. Be sure to discuss theme ideas with your camp or reunion director.

## Traditional Approach

Over the years, a traditional approach to campfires has emerged, with local and regional variations:

1. Lighting the Fire—this can be done in creative ways reflecting the purpose of the campfire. See the section on “building and lighting campfire.”
2. Fun Section—this includes rousing and fun songs, yells, icebreakers, awards for cabin clean-up, action songs, skits or stunts.
3. Transitional Section—this includes sentimental or folk songs moving toward serious songs.
4. Serious Section—this includes sacred songs and chants, a serious or scripture story, a personal story related to the gospel (testimony), and prayer.
5. Closing—this includes a benediction or closing prayer, forming a circle, a candle ceremony, a closing song, and a sending forth (perhaps a simple “good night”).

It is important to know, either by practice or by talking to campers ahead of time, what traditions are considered an important part of the campfire.

## Campfire Music

Music is perhaps the most important feature of campfire. It creates the tone for any given section and it prepares campers for what’s coming next. Campfire leaders do not need

to be professional musicians, but should be willing to be prepared. It is important to:

1. Know the songs. Even if someone else has volunteered to lead the song, it is helpful for the campfire leader to be a lead singer off to the side.
2. Talk and sing loudly enough to command attention. To save your voice, once a song is underway, it is not necessary to sing throughout the whole song—but starting each verse is important.
3. Stand where you can be seen, heard, and understood. If more volume is needed, use a wider sweep of the arms; if less volume is needed, use a narrow sweep.
4. Listen for sections which are going too fast, slow, or are off-key. To bring the singers back together or on-key, sing louder and use broader hand movements.
5. Walk around and among the campers. Encouraging full participation by everyone helps to build the community spirit.
6. Near the close use less movement, keeping to the side so campers can focus on the fire. To be out of sight and still have unified singing at the end is the goal.
7. Teach new songs during the day before campfire. Many camps use a “campfire class.” This is great time to teach new songs. During reunions, work with children and youth class leaders to teach new songs during class times. Only simple songs should be taught at campfire. Songs might be taught while people are waiting in lines for meals or during free time. It helps (but not required) to use a guitar or keyboard to help teach new songs.

# Music Progression

One of the keys in planning campfire includes working out the progression of music:

- Lighting the fire..... This Little Light of Mine
- Icebreakers..... One Elephant Went Out to Play (on a Spider Web One Day)
- Sound effects ..... John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt
- Many verses and variations..... Poor Little Bug on the Wall
- Action songs ..... Father Abraham
- Quiet fun ..... You Are My Sunshine
- Beginning transition ..... Give Me Oil in My Lamp
- Middle transition..... He's Got the Whole World
- Late transition..... Do, Lord
- Beginning of serious..... Lord, I Want to Be a Christian
- Serious..... Spirit of the Living God
- Close of campfire ..... Father, I Adore You

Another possible way to look at it is:

- Lighting the fire..... Rise Up, O Flame
- Fun beginning ..... Shake a Friend's Hand
- Fun action ..... A Ram, Sam, Sam (A Pizza Hut)
- Fun rounds..... Scotland's Burning
- Fun, many verses ..... On Top of Spaghetti
- Fun, general..... Throw It Out the Window
- Quiet fun ..... Down by the Bay
- Semi-transitional..... When the Saints Go Marching In
- Early transitional..... Study War No More
- Later transitional..... Jacob's Ladder
- Serious..... Seek Ye First
- Hymns ..... Wondrous Love
- Specialized ..... Holy Ground

All songs suggested in these lists can be found in *Rise Up Singing: The Group Singing Songbook*, edited by Peter Blood and Annie Patterson (Sing Out Publications, 2004, ISBN 9781881322139).

Sometimes songs change over time and move from one category to another. An example is "Give Me Oil in My Lamp." It was once considered a late transitional song, but with new, funny verses, it might now be considered an early transitional or quiet fun song.

## Other Activity Progression

Songs and activity progression traditionally lead toward a worship experience at the close of campfire. The time for worship can vary depending on the circumstance and the intended purpose of the campfire. There are times when the campfire may be used for another purpose where worship is not the intended ending—but these examples are rare.

The quiet close of campfire is often an excellent time to give campers the opportunity to meditate, to hear poetry, music, scripture reading or story, and periodically to voice prayers or statements of commitment. The progression toward worship should be built into the planning. Avoid any movement toward contrived emotionalism or intemperate expressions of the spiritual.

## Reverse and Other Progressions

There may be times when campfire follows a more serious experience and needs to lead to a lighthearted ending. One example would be leading from reunion evening worship to an ice cream social. This progression would be from serious songs to ending with a fun song, especially a song about ice cream.

Another example of not following the traditional progression is when you've already reached a point that is beyond the fun songs. In this case campfire would start with middle or late transition activities and not include lighthearted skits or stunts. It would progress to a serious, worship style of ending.

## Campfire Timing

The following information is offered as a guide. It is important to consider the specific campers and experience desired.

### Total Length of Campfire

Children, ages 8–10.....	30 minutes
Youth, ages 10–14 .....	45 minutes
Youth, ages 14–18 .....	60 minutes
Families and intergenerational....	30-60 minutes

### Phase Timing

Children, ages 8–10 need movement and energy release before quieting down. They have short attention spans, so the serious phase should be short.

Fun Phase .....	10–15 minutes
Transition .....	10 minutes
Serious.....	5 minutes

Youth, ages 10–14 need activity; more time to settle down. They respond to serious thought if not too prolonged.

Fun Phase .....	15–20 minutes
Transition .....	10 minutes
Serious.....	10–15 minutes

Youth, ages 14–18 are adaptable; they can handle a more balanced approach to campfire.

Fun Phase .....	20 minutes
Transition .....	20 minutes
Serious.....	20 minutes

Family and intergenerational campfires need to have some planning for each of the different ages.

Fun Phase .....	20 minutes
Transition .....	10 minutes
Serious.....	15 minutes

# Skits, Stunts, Storytelling, and Drama at Campfire

Special activities in campfires provide a creative way to continue the progression. All skits, stunts, storytelling and dramatic expressions should be well understood by the campfire leader before placement in the progression and allowed to be part of the program.

There are simple ways to make campfires exceptional:

1. **Open-ended Sentences**—these can challenge the imagination with small groups creating spontaneous skits or stories. An example is “No one had ever taken the legend of the creature from the blue lagoon seriously until....”
2. **Reporting Skit**—Everyday events at camp can be converted into a “reporting skit.” A “TV reporter” can share the news of the day in a humorous way, upholding the worth of persons. The reporter could wear a shirt or hat with the word “reporter” on it, and stand in front of a faux camera.
3. **The Bag Skit**—the bag contains an assortment of unrelated objects, all of which the group must use in presenting a spontaneous skit.
4. **Spontaneous Melodramas**—creative approaches to scriptures as humorous skits. They are narrated while campers act them out. There is a book called *Spontaneous Melodramas* (Zondervan, 1996, ISBN 9780310207757), written by Doug Fields, a youth minister and trainer of youth ministers.
5. **Whose Line Is It Anyway?**—Games from once popular TV show, “Whose Line Is It Anyway?” Find these at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_games\\_from\\_whose\\_Line\\_is\\_it\\_anyway%3F](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_games_from_whose_Line_is_it_anyway%3F).
6. **Stunts**—are activities such as competition between cabins, displays of physical strength or mental aptitude. Many examples of these can be found on the Internet. Search for “campfire stunts.”
7. **Mystery camper**—information is shared with the campers in the form of clues describing someone at the camp. This includes interviewing people to gather information. This is a fun way to share information about an older member of the camp.
8. **Sing Down**—this is where the campfire leader divides those taking part into two or more groups and they compete in remembering and singing specified types of songs. A currently popular Sing Down includes putting the words of nursery rhymes to a common tune “Throw It Out the Window.” Broader applications could work with themes or holidays, such as patriotic songs, Christmas carols, hits from the 50s, songs from other nations, or hymns. No song can be repeated, and the group must begin singing before the campfire leader counts to three. A group leader can be put in place to help invite ideas and lead subgroups in singing.
9. **Cheers**—funny or appreciative responses done to skits and stunts. Check out the incredibly long and creative list put together by Scouting in Canada at <http://www.scoutscan.com/skits/cheers.html>.

Whatever activities are chosen, it is always important to be sure they uphold the Enduring Principles such as worth of all persons and all are called.

## Drama

Formal drama can provide inspiration to close campfire. Here are examples of drama which can be part of campfire:

**Tableau**—people portray the roles of a family or group of young people with Jesus standing in back of them or among them. This can be done in a location close to the fire, but out of sight of the campers. The campfire leader leads the campers in song to a serious mood, and then leads them from the campfire site to the place to view the tableau.

**Narrative Play**—the acting out of a scene as a narrator speaks. The portrayal of Jesus is one of the more dramatic tools.

**Plays**—while a larger play production might take the place of campfire, a scene or shorter play might support the development or direction of the campfire. Simple costuming and make-up may help. Pay attention to issues of lighting so the dramatic work can be seen.

## Storytelling

Storytelling can be an avenue of bringing ministry during campfires. Continued stories are effective with cliff-hanger endings each night. Consider such works as *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis or *Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien. Stories should be told, not read. The storyteller should know the story well and practice telling it before campfire. Practicing in front of a mirror can be helpful to decide facial expressions and delivery.

The story should be told so all can hear. This includes understanding how the voice carries and what night sounds are in the campfire area. For reunions or unusual settings, microphones and portable sound systems may help so everyone can hear. Story length needs to match the attention span of the campers. Serious storytelling should relate to the theme of the campfire, with any story being screened by the campfire leader. Storytellers should be selected with care—well told stories will be the most effective.

# Worship Features in the Campfire

Plans for the serious part of each campfire should be coordinated closely with the camp or reunion pastor or camp or reunion director. It is important to understand how closing activities can help round out the day's activities with thoughts that reflect that day's theme, or with thoughts that lead into the next day's theme.

## Prayers

1. Periods of silent prayer
2. Prayers in unison
3. The Lord's Prayer, Communion prayers, or other prewritten prayers
4. Period of voluntary prayers
5. Sentence prayer circle
6. Short, preassigned prayers, possibly on a specific topic
7. Prayer for a particular need or group by one or more people
8. Prayer hymns spoken or sung
9. Lead prayer with a silent period after each sentence for private prayer
10. Prayers of dedication or blessing (pastoral or evangelist ministry)

## Music

1. Group singing
2. Solos or ensembles
3. Instrumental solos, ensembles, or accompaniment
4. Reading of hymn words followed by singing
5. Humming
6. Hymns, scripture reading, hymn singing in sequence
7. Prayer response
8. Meditation
9. Music accompaniment to readings
10. Recorded music or music videos

## Spoken Word

1. Poetry
2. Inspirational readings
3. Storytelling
4. Testimony
5. Inspirational message (homily)
6. Period of testimony
7. Preassigned testimonies
8. Individual expressions from the group
9. Free, but directed discussion (responses to questions)
10. Scripture reading, sentence, verse
11. Relating an experience (story form)
12. Hymn reading with background story
13. Directed meditation
14. Religious skits
15. Creative drama
16. Role-play or acting out a story
17. Audiovisuals (think displays of art, sound effects)

# Decentralized Campfires

Although decentralized camping is not often practiced at Community of Christ youth camps and reunions, decentralized campfires might offer ministry not available in larger setting campfires.

Decentralized camps are where each cabin or group of cabins has their own activities, including campfire. Different models of this at youth camps might be to have all the girls and women at one site, and the boys and men at another (this can sometimes defuse the sexual tension at camp).

Decentralized campfire requires a *group* of strong campfire leaders who can lead individual cabin groups, gender groups, or other groups in smaller campfires simultaneously. Singing may become more difficult but there's more time and less anxiety for deeper sharing.

# Building the Fire

Building the campfire requires careful and knowledgeable preparation. The person building the fire should know how to build a fire. If it's a camper or group of campers, there should be someone from the staff supervising their work.

Before camp begins, the campfire leader must check with local rangers, fire marshals, or camp managers for the rules of the area about gathering of wood, fire hazard conditions, fire areas, and water availability. Ideally, enough firewood will be gathered before or at the start of the event for the entire week.

Consider the size of the area, the camp, and the time of campfire. Watch the fire carefully and put it out carefully when finished.

There are several types of campfire construction: tipi (teepee) fire lay; log cabin; crisscross layers, star fire, and many others. Details and pictures are available on the Internet. Don't build a boring fire—be creative.

Most campgrounds have campfire sites prepared. If you do need to choose a site, consider seating, wind direction, nearby brush, trees overhead, and water availability.

## Materials to Use

Regardless of which campfire you build, most methods use the same materials. It's helpful to know these when researching how to build a campfire.

**Tinder** is what that catches fire more easily from matches: shavings, thin twigs, bundles of brush or weeds, and pieces of bark (no thicker than a match).

**Kindling** consists of dry sticks and twigs in pieces just bigger than tinder. It can be up to twelve inches long with a circumference about the size of your thumb.

**Fuel** is the material that keeps the fire going and consists of larger pieces than kindling up to good-sized logs. The wood should be firm and not crumbling. Soft wood (pine, spruce, cedar, aspen) burns faster. Harder woods (oak, hickory, maple, ash) will burn more slowly with longer lasting coals.

## Spectacular Lightings

Lighting the campfire can add to the excitement of campfire—and it encourages campers to be on time. Here are examples of creative ways to light the campfire. Find more ways online.

**Fire from Heaven**—There are two effective ways in which fire can symbolically be called “from heaven.”

1. When the wood is being arranged for the fire, drive a stake into the center of the fire and build the wood around it, leaving a concealed opening. Fasten a piece of silver piano wire to the stake and to the limb of a tall tree outside the campfire circle. Weight a piece of oil or gasoline-soaked rag and attach to it the wire where it is fastened to the tree so it will slide down the wire when released. When the leader calls for the fire, a person hidden or camouflaged in the tree lights the rag or cotton waste which is released and slides down the wire into the center of the fire, igniting it. This is an impressive and rather startling method of lighting the fire. As with all such innovative fire-lighting methods, this should be tested before the campfire program begins.

2. Use the same set-up as in (1) but run the wire from any tall tree. Arrange before people begin to gather so the cotton waste is delicately suspended by a cotton thread. Underneath this thread fasten a piece of birch bark containing a small portion of magnesium powder (used in flashlight photography). Secure an automobile battery and hide it at the foot of the tree or nearby. Take two wires and run them to the top of the tree. Join them with a short piece of resistance wire obtainable at any electrician's or general store. Let this resistance wire run through the magnesium powder, resting in it so the wire is covered. Hide the wire by running it down the far side of the tree. When the time comes for the fire to be lit, have someone touch the two free ends of the wire to the poles of the battery. The resistance wire will become red-hot, set off the magnesium powder, which burns the thread and ignites the cotton waste sending it on its way down the wire, with no one to be seen up in the tree. This is one of the most mystifying of the types described. Consider the seating area when setting up this type of lighting. Do not send flaming material directly over the people.

Simple lighting by torch can be ceremonial or symbolic in nature. The fire is already laid. A person or people are chosen to represent the theme you selected and light the fire. Some camps use torches that have traditionally lit the fire for that area or come from another part of the country or world. Campers may each have worked on their own torch throughout the week in preparation for the closing ceremony. The fire could, for instance, represent the call of God to go into the world, with each one taking their torch to the fire, lighting it and then going to a certain position. At the close, it can be an inspiring sight to see the torches surrounding a small pond or lake or spread up a hillside to

form a ladder. A simple way to light a match surrounded by tinder is to wrap #26 or #28 copper electrical wire securely around the head of a wooden match placed under the tinder, and then run the wire to a battery hidden nearby. When ready, touch the wires to the battery terminals and the match ignites the fire. The lighting should be preceded, of course, by suitable chanting and pomp and ceremony, and asking the fictitious fire god to light the fire.

### Colored Fires

Excitement can be added to a campfire with chemicals to create colored flames. Information about how to color a fire can be found on the Internet, at <http://chemistry.about.com/cs/howtos/a/aa052703a.htm>. Camp is not a place to begin to experiment with chemicals. Campfire leaders or other adults who wish to add color to their fires should search for sources of chemicals and become skillful in their use before camp. Extreme care should be taken when using and storing chemicals. Always have an adult in charge.

### Alternatives to Fire

In some places it is not legal or practical to have an open fire. In these instances, wood may be built into a traditional campfire shape and then lined with red and yellow cellophane with LED lights underneath it. LED lights burn cooler and reduce the risk of injury or actual fire. Strips of yellow and red paper can be attached and with a breeze from a small fan, will look like flickering flames. One website which offers instructions is [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_6186214\\_build-fake-campfire.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_6186214_build-fake-campfire.html). It is also possible to create an alternative by gathering flashlights and placing them inside arranged wood.

# Tips for Successful Campfires

## Personal Qualities

The personal qualities which will help make campfire leaders successful are many and varied. No one will have all of them, but people who want to succeed will seriously try to cultivate as many as possible. The most effective campfire leaders display these qualities:

1. Enthusiastic. When you enjoy the campfire, campers will enjoy it with you.
2. Disciplined. You can control a group and exercise discipline.
3. Prepared. Leaders continually strive to improve their abilities.
4. Flexible. You can be spontaneous, change a procedure, think on the spur of the moment, and display grace.
5. Thorough. You take care of details, delegate to others, and make sure it all gets done.
6. Sense of Humor. Good leaders can laugh at themselves, accept their mistakes, and be good sports.
7. Receive Criticism and Help. The leader can gracefully receive comments, criticism, and help from others.
8. Evaluate. The leader looks at the program and recognizes its strengths and weaknesses.
9. Cooperate. They work well with others, both the leadership of the event, and others who are involved in the campfires.
10. Knowledgeable. They understand the identity, mission, message, and beliefs of Community of Christ and can plan a campfire that reflects the Enduring Principles in each feature.
11. Humble. They display humility in how they lead, how they include others, and show gratefulness.

# Campfire Training

Training people, both adult staff and youth campers, in the purpose, structure, and planning of campfires is important. It will improve the quality of camps and helps keep the rich tradition of campfires alive in Community of Christ. The following outlines are suggestions for using this resource in a training environment.

## One-Day Workshop

- Registration, Coffee, Rolls
- Opening Worship
- History, Philosophy, and Purpose of Campfire
- Preparing the Area, Building the Fire
- Anatomy of a Campfire (the ministry, not the fire itself)
- The Music of Campfire
- Skits, Stunts, Storytelling, and Drama
- Plan a Campfire (small group work)
- Present Sample Campfires
- Closing

## Campfire Class for Youth

Here's a suggestion for how to arrange the information in this document for a class at camp to help youth understand campfires.

1. History, Tradition, and Purpose of Campfires
2. Preparing the Area, Building the Fire
3. Anatomy of a Campfire (Progression)
4. The Music of Campfires
5. Skits, Stunts, Storytelling and Drama
6. Closing the Campfire (Worship)

Each class period can also include planning the next campfire, putting into practice things participants learned specifically from that class period. This reinforces the campers' learning.

# Additional Resources

- *Sing a New Song* (Herald House, 1999)
- *Rise Up Singing* by Peter Blood and Annie Peterson (Sing Out Publications, 2004, ISBN 9781881322139)
- *Joyful Noise*, Ann E. Turner, ed. (United Church Publishing House, 1999, ISBN 9781551340869)
- <http://united-church.ca/sales/ucph>
- *Chants de Taizé* (Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 2001)
- <http://www.giamusic.com/products/P-5061.cfm>
- *The Macscouter Songbook* (PDF file available for free download)  
<http://www.macscouter.com/Songs/index.html>
- *Dragon's Campfire Songbook* by Becky Dragon  
[http://dragon.sleepdeprived.ca/songbook/songbook\\_index.html](http://dragon.sleepdeprived.ca/songbook/songbook_index.html)

More campfire helps can be found at  
<http://www.CofChrist.org/camphelps>.