

Summary of Oversight Visit Report to Camp Fircom

by Vancouver Burrard Presbytery

During the month of March 2004 a team of presbyters visited with Camp Fircom staff and directors for the purpose of offering support, encouragement, and counsel as well as to establish stronger relations between Presbytery and the Camp Fircom Society. The team met with executive director Ruth Curran, camp director and administrative assistant Stacey Cunliffe, board chair Eric Hamlyn, and members of the board Bob Burrows, JR Westgate and Marcena Croy.

Results of the report indicated Camp Fircom to be a unique ministry with a rich history of supporting youth, children, and families since 1923. The camp, located on Gambier Island, a short 20 minute boat ride from Horseshoe Bay, provides an environment of belonging, nurture, and acceptance of others with over 65% of campers receiving financial support.

Highlights of this vibrant ministry include a strong board and staff. The quality of youth staff at camp is a strength. The individual stories from children and parents about how the camp has affected their lives is witness to the incredible work happening there. Many families return year after year and often become volunteers and leaders. The staff have focused on improvements to the facilities at camp over the past five years and feel good about the renovations that have been completed. The society feel blessed by Ruth's leadership for the time she has been with them.

Challenges identified by Ruth, Stacey and board members include the on going financial strain of operating the camp. This year increased insurance costs and provincial cutbacks have added to the difficult financial picture many United Church Camps face. Maintaining enthusiasm during times of financial stress is always difficult. Ruth will be leaving her position with the camp this year, and the board will face the challenge of filling her shoes.

In July, I visited the camp on behalf of the oversight team and found the camp to be exactly as stated above. The staff were warm, capable, and inviting. There was evidence of caring relationships between campers, staff, and visitors. The camps mission and safety requirements were visible everywhere. I met many people who had a 20 or 30 year commitment to the camp. The food was fabulous, healthy, and received rave reviews from the campers. I felt welcomed and restored, and enjoyed my day very much.

I clearly understood the financial challenge of maintaining such a facility, and pray for stronger support in this regard. There is also a need for volunteer chaplains who are willing to be part of the camp staff during the summer months. Please email the camp at info@campfircom.bc.ca if you can help in this regard.