



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

March 12, 2019

Reverend Fathers; Parish, School and Camp Colleagues; Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Last year, I wrote to advise you of a review of youth camps ministry in the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton and to invite you to participate in a survey of stakeholders. Our survey drew 979 responses, and we also received more than 60 messages through email and social media channels. I was truly heartened by the response, particularly by many personal accounts of transformational faith experiences at our camps.

I am therefore pleased to announce that after much prayer, research and review, we have begun planning for improvements to programming and facilities at both Camp Encounter and Our Lady of Victory Camp. In order to give our full attention to this work, both will remain closed for the 2019 season.

I appreciate that the news about the upcoming season will be received with some sadness and disappointment, and also that it has been difficult to wait more than year to hear news on something about which you care deeply. But I hope you will join with me in building a better and more sustainable future for camps ministry in the Archdiocese. Below I offer some helpful context.

Faith and Community

Camps are unique places for encounters with Christ in the environment of God's magnificent creation. They offer real opportunities to grow in our love for Him and for each other. We are, after all, a people of communion. As we worship together, sing together, eat together, and play together, we come to appreciate that God-given dignity in each and every human being. One correspondent put it this way:

Plain and simple, if it weren't for camp, I wouldn't be going to church anymore. It had the right environment to convey values and faith in a way that stuck with me to this day. In addition, it's where I learnt to listen to others. To trust. To love one

another despite our differences. I would not be who I am today without it and have met many friends there that are still close friends today. (CC)

This is what another correspondent shared:

I attended OLVC for two years, once as a camper and once as a counsellor. I learned the Angelus there and a lot of great songs. It was perhaps the first time I realized that 'the Church' was bigger than my parish. When I worked on the Archdiocesan Youth Retreat Team as a university student, I had wonderful experiences at Camp Encounter. As I look at Catholic adults in leadership positions, in our Catholic schools among other places, I see many who attended OLVC or Camp Encounter as children or youth. These camps are the training ground for tomorrow's leaders – lay, religious, and ordained – and a precious resource. (KK)

In other words, we have heard through personal witness that the camps help us answer the three pastoral priorities I have identified for the Archdiocese: Evangelization, Faith Formation, and Forming a Culture of Vocations. It is clear that they are a gift to the People of God, and we must work diligently to nurture them into the future.

Safety and Accountability

The physical facilities at our camps are aging. It was important to get an independent opinion on their current state, what would need to be done to bring them up to today's standards – in both government building codes and archdiocesan policies on safe environments – and whether they could accommodate the kind of programming we will need for the future. We selected the architectural firm of Burgess Bredo, which specializes in commercial and institutional projects and excels at complex renovations. We wanted them to keep in mind always that our youth and their families are precious; we must do everything we can to serve them in a safe, clean and welcoming environment. We need to be accountable to families who choose to send their children to our camps. The findings were clear: upgrades are required, but it would cost more to renovate these facilities than to build anew.

Sustainability

Sustainability into the future was another important aspect we examined. Camps cost money, both in terms of physical infrastructure and the human resources required to provide the programming. Over the years, the camps have operated at a deficit. While we aimed to keep the camping fees affordable for our families, these fees were simply not sufficient to pay the bills. How might we change that? Our staff and consultants have proposed a number of ideas for increasing revenues. These include expanding the demographic of those who use the camps, by providing a year-round facility that could be used by the wider Catholic community for activities such as retreats and conferences. We need to make sure we get this right, and that will take a little time.

Again, I share some thoughts from a correspondent:

OLVC had a dramatic evangelical effect on my children and now my grandchildren. It led one of my children to enter youth ministry as a career and another of my children found his spouse through the camp. Kids don't come home raving about all the activities (like in an expensive camp); they come home raving about the friends they've gained and about their spiritual experiences. Evangelization comes at a financial cost. My sense is that this a relatively economical way to form the Alberta Catholic community of the future. Even in the most crass economic terms, one could probably make the case that the lifetime giving of the committed Catholics these camps develop far outweighs the cost of these programs. (DV)

That brings us to the question of cost. We will need an estimated \$5 million to construct the facilities we need for the future. I stress that this is an estimate only; no detailed plans have been prepared. Once the details are finalized, we will be asking for financial support from you, the People of God in this Archdiocese. After hearing the passion and commitment of so many of you, I am confident that we can do this together. Messages like this back up my confidence in this project:

The investment in the camps for our children will pay back the Church a thousand fold. The relationships these children, counsellors and parents make with each other and God are worth the investment by the Church. (LS)

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I am grateful to all who have generously supported our camps over the years, and to the participants, counsellors, chaperones, staff, and volunteers who contributed to a great season of camping in 2018. Our goal is to reopen the camps with a new vision and beautiful facilities as quickly as the funds can be raised and the work completed.

I want you to be involved and informed as the plans advance, and so I am asking our staff to share regular updates, at a minimum every three months. Like you, I am looking forward to seeing the details of this exciting initiative. In the meantime, I ask that you pray for success in these efforts.

God is Love! Our Lady of Victory, pray for us.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Richard W. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

✠Richard W. Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton

P.S. If you simply cannot wait to donate, you can click on the Donation Options button on our website at <https://caedm.ca>, and choose Camps from among the options. All donations made through that portal will go into the Archdiocesan Camps Fund to support the capital project.