

Camp Kintail Report

Synod of Southwestern Ontario

October 16, 2020

As I thought about this report, I realized that there were at least two headlines that tell the story at Kintail this year. Both headlines are necessary to give a full picture of this difficult and stretching year.

Ministry and Mission Happening at Camp Kintail

Despite the complicated circumstances of 2020, Camp Kintail lived out its mission to “provide Christian hospitality and programming forming a community where people play, live, and grow in God’s creation.”

In the first weeks of the pandemic, we received a call from the Huron Women’s Shelter. They were looking for additional housing for women, as the shelter was full, and they were anticipating a need for more secure housing. Because of the Nest (the new year-round building at Kintail), we were able to say yes. Camp Kintail housed and fed women for three and half months. The Executive Director, Corey Allison, says, “I think it is a special partnership that happened, and reflects a spirit of radical love that’s needed to transform the world. I feel really strongly about the kindness and generosity we as an organization (and our women) experienced at Kintail.” In a time when it was difficult to know what to do to help, it was wonderful to be able to provide peaceful and healing space, nourishing food, and Christian hospitality. The Nest became a home, a safe place to land, for women who needed it most.

Throughout the spring and summer, the Camp Kintail staff provided a program called Kintail@Home. This included FLASH (Faith, Learning, and Sharing) sessions for families, junior high youth, senior high youth, and alumni. Every Friday was a “Special Day” with activities for families to participate in together at home to remember the fun of camp. Daily through the spring and weekly through the summer, a morning “Cha-Podcast” was produced with the incredible help and support of the wider Kintail community and chaplain Rev. Reuben St. Louis. Music and campfires were shared through zoom and social media. The Leader in Training program went virtual. While being together is best, community was formed on-line, and God’s love was shared to the many participants.

For congregation and clergy, Camp Kintail has provided several resources and opportunities. The staff have produced two worship services that a congregation can use for an on-line worship service. Cha-Podcasts and Sunday Stories (found on social media and on the Kintail blog) can be used for children’s stories in on-line worship. Music for worship is found in social media and on the Kintail YouTube page. We have also invited congregations and individuals to participate in The Kintail Psalter project. In this time when we are unable to gather, we are inviting individuals to hand-write a psalm that is meaningful to them and send it to Kintail. We will gather all the psalms together to create a psalter.

In mid-July, once the province opened to Phase Three, our Health Unit approved Camp Kintail’s plans to offer “Weekend Away” trips for families. While being physically distant, families were able to come for four days of beach, outdoor space, prepared meals, and hospitality. Families were so relieved and grateful to have a safe space to get away, after months of being home. Some of our guests are front-line workers and expressed their thanks for the respite of Kintail. These weekends will be continuing into the fall and winter season as we are able.

As we look towards the fall season, Kintail will be offering some retreats with limited numbers and increased safety precautions. As it is difficult to plan too far into the future, they will be advertised through the Kin-Tales e-newsletter and social media. We look forward to offering new and creative retreats to allow for respite and renewal.

Over the past three years, Camp Kintail has been fundraising and building the Nest, the new year-round building. This past winter, before the pandemic, the Camp was working on winterizing MacDonald Lodge (which is why our financials report capital cost for 2020). These two projects will allow us to continue safely hosting groups throughout the fall and winter. The Nest provides rooms with bathrooms as well as additional showers for those staying in cabins. Having the use of the dining hall in MacDonald Lodge through the winter will allow staff and guests to have lots of room for social distancing.

Difficult Year at Camp Kintail

Because of the challenging circumstances, it has been an exceedingly difficult year at Camp Kintail. In mid-March, all programming, retreats, and rentals were cancelled. In mid-May, the board made the decision to cancel the overnight and day camp programs. A couple of days later, the province made the decision final when they announced that all overnight camps would be closed across the province. By June, it was clear that the Kintail on the Road programs would also need to be cancelled. These decisions were made with an abundance of care, prayer, and debate by the Kintail staff and Camp Board. This is the first time in 91 years that summer camp has not happened at Camp Kintail.

These decisions meant that children did not get a week to explore their faith, make new friends, and experience God's beautiful creation. Congregations were not able to offer Vacation Bible Camp and reach out in love to their community. Weddings were postponed, retreats did not happen. The normal group of 100 staff members was reduced to four.

While we have been able to host small "Weekend Away" groups, this should not be confused with a normal summer or a normal income. Our estimate is that Camp Kintail will have lost approximately 83% of our earned income. Kintail has reduced all possible expenses. We applied for and received CEBA (a \$40,000 loan from the federal government). We received a \$1000 innovation grant from The Presbyterian Church in Canada for the virtual Leader in Training Program. The ten year-round staff members wages have been subsidized by 75% federal wage subsidy program. We were able to hire four summer staff and four fall staff through the Canada Summer Jobs program. We have been receiving donations from individuals, women's groups, congregations, and presbyteries. Even with all this support, we estimate that the Camp will end the year with a \$100,000 deficit.

Regular expenses continue at the camp, whether the camp is open or not. Insurance, utilities, administrative costs, telephone, 25% of the staff wages, and water testing are all on-going. There have also been additional costs as we worked to meet and exceed all government and health unit recommendations and requirements. This includes plexiglass, hand sanitizer, infra-red thermometers, and signage. Camp Kintail is not alone in this reality. The Globe and Mail reported that up to 40% of camps in Ontario may not survive.

We had hoped that the mortgage for the Nest would have been paid off this fall. There was \$180,000 remaining on the \$700,000 mortgage. The Presbyterian Building Corporation and the Royal Bank have given permission for us to borrow back on this loan up to \$400,000 if it is needed. While this is a much different story than we had hoped to share at Synod, this loan will allow us to continue operating.

As we look to the future and to the 2021 summer season ahead, there are very few answers. The Camp Staff and Camp Board continue to meet regularly and get advice from the Ontario Camping Association, the Huron Perth Health Unit, and the international on-line community of summer camp professionals. It is difficult to plan more than four to six weeks ahead. We hope that there will be a summer camp season of some duration next summer, but it will be smaller and look different.

Faithful Through the Storm

Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage. Wait for the Lord! (Psalm 27:14)

This line of scripture has sustained me through this difficult and complicated year. Every note we receive, every prayer offered, every donation receipted, every family of campers that reaches out, makes a world of difference. We are all navigating this new world together, strengthened by God's presence. Camp Kintail is blessed to be a part of a supportive Synod, and we are grateful for the many individuals, congregations, women's groups, and presbyteries who have reached out. These months have been incredibly stressful, and the difficulties are not over, but if we all work together, Camp Kintail will be able to survive this season.

We are looking back with gratitude and looking forward with hope. Together, let our hearts take courage as we wait for the Lord.

Rev. Theresa McDonald-Lee