



# SIMONHOUSE

BIBLE eCAMP

★ evangelism ★  
★ discipleship ★  
★ leadership development ★

## POINTING LIVES TO JESUS! since 1977

### A very Different Year!



Well it has been another interesting year to say the least. After a great summer in 2019, preparations for 2020 were going very well. By the end of 2019 we had about 75% of our required staff for 2020 committed, and by the end of February 2020 we had a full slate ready to go, which is unheard of! We also had two large projects on the go being fundraised for; that being the portable **climbing tower** and the new **staff cabin**. In January the Board of Directors agreed to proceed with both projects and those were put into the works, committing around \$100,000 to accomplish both. I had a great staff recruitment trip to some of the Bible Colleges. At those I participated on a camp director's panel as well as made some new connections with potential indigenous leaders, which is always exciting! Things were looking very good! However, March soon came and COVID-19 became very real here in Canada. I remained cautiously optimistic, as I watched what was happening, that camp would still be able to run, but as time went on that optimism began to fade into realism. In order for camp to be allowed to operate each year, we need to receive a *Recreational Camp Permit* from the Public Health department of the MB Government. I watched every provincial update and began to run countless scenarios and timelines of what I'd need to know, and by when, to make camp happen. I had staff wanting to know what was happening, and parents contacting me to see if camp was a go for their kids. I was constantly analyzing the evolving situation and trying to think how we could continue ministry IF camp wasn't able to run and this had me working in multiple directions. There were so many unknowns, and so many questions. The Board of Directors and I met by conference call at the end of April to take a real honest look at

*"Thank you for creating the ecamp option instead of giving up and closing the doors this summer"*

the situation. It was at that meeting that the decision was made to suspend all on-site camp programs for the summer of 2020.

The hours following that decision were heartbreaking and a low point for me personally. While I fully agreed it was the right decision, I was swept with a sense of sadness and loss. Over the history of the camp there is very little that has cancelled camps from running; through forest fire evacuations, crazy weather, major system breakdowns, etc., we have always found a way to continue. A verse that always motivates me is found in Romans 10:14, **"But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?"** Though a session at camp is short, it has an amazing impact and is the way we can tell children, youth and families about the one they can call on!

The fact that the Board of Directors made the decision to suspend summer camps when they did was a true blessing! For me, it allowed me to work in one direction; find an alternative way to share the gospel, and given the particularly difficult times, I really felt we needed to be there for families. In fact, I made a post on our Facebook Page to reach out to families which included several crisis line phone numbers and even my own cell phone. There were so many unknowns and people were in panic mode. Here in the north we already have such a high suicide rate and my fear was that the unknown about this virus could significantly exacerbate the issue. We couldn't just do nothing!

I made a quick pivot and decided to offer a virtual, at home, program we ended up calling **Simonhouse eCamp**. I adjusted our grant application for the *Canada Summer Jobs* grant and we ended up receiving four positions for eCamp Cabin Leaders for the summer. I now had a rough direction of where we were going, and a team to work with to get there. The team consisted of past staff being **Jessica Buhler** (Winnipeg, MB), **Marissa Koop** (Selkirk, MB), **Josiah Hoeppner** (Chilliwack, BC), and **Nolan Plett** (Landmark, MB). These four worked incredibly hard to create our virtual program in the short amount of time we had to put it together. I watched closely what other camps around North America had been doing, and listened to what was working and what wasn't. I wanted to make a program that capitalized on the most meaningful parts of camp, one that was as close to the traditional program as reasonably possible, and one that was flexible so that families could still do things together during the day.



Sidewalk Chalk Artwork

We came up with a program that consisted of three general components: **1) Live interaction times** through Zoom (cabin meetings, games, Kahoots, etc., **2) Pre-Recorded video** content (chapel talks, singspiration, crafts, games, etc., and **3) Printable/Viewable content** (Bible X, activities, Escape room, etc). Like traditional camp, camps were on specific weeks for specific ages. Once registered, campers could log in each morning, no earlier than 7:00 am, and the suggested schedule and content for the day was available. The only portions that had to be done at a specific time were the live interaction activities through Zoom. Everything else could be done around the family schedule.

We ran six sessions in July and August with 49 registered campers in those. Many of those who did one session also signed up for a second session, as a few had two weeks for the same age range to choose from.

One of the great things about a virtual program is that geographic proximity to the camp isn't an issue. We had kids from the north, but also from southern Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. We even had an inquiry from northern Ireland! Traditional boundaries and distances didn't matter. One family of three signed up from Saskatchewan because they were told about it by their "furnace repair guy" who was over doing work for them.

A sample schedule for a day would include getting up and doing singspiration by singing along to the videos the staff recorded, then viewing/printing off the Bible X worksheets to go through the Bible study for the day. After that might be a craft or baking by video or Zoom games. More activities were scheduled for the afternoon including a sidewalk chalk art or a Bob Ross style painting or working through a virtual escape room. In the evenings was chapel by video and a final Zoom cabin group similar to the great conversations that often happen in the cabin before bedtime. This was a great way for the staff to talk about Bible X, and chapel. Also, just like camp, there was time for room (cabin) cleaning with a chart and a sheet for parents to evaluate and score points. Apparently, from the feedback we got, it worked! Parents commented on that in a positive way!



Arctic Fox Logistics delivers the tower

We received nothing but great feedback for those who took part in eCamp. At the beginning I had no idea if we would have anyone attend or what the numbers would be like. With school being finished virtually for many, we know that kids were Zoomed out or may too closely assume that eCamp would be too much like online school. It's interesting, too, since camp has always been about getting away from technology, but obviously things were significantly different this year and the reality is that technology is a big part of our lives and culture, so we always need to be assessing how we can use it to complement our ministry. One of the things in the back of my mind through all this was to take

note of how we can learn from this to benefit us in the future even when camp is back to running normally. One of our ongoing struggles is follow up with our campers. We have campers from a dozen communities or more, many of which don't have any churches or programs for them. Perhaps there is opportunity to create a camp virtual youth group which could be easily run by volunteers wherever they live?

I'm proud of the team who pulled off a completely new program, with a new delivery method to continue with our mission of "Pointing Lives to Jesus!"

## Projects - Climbing Tower

Besides creating and building a new platform to deliver our eCamp program I spent a considerable time working at our projects. With COVID-19 came so many delays and obstacles to overcome. The climbing tower build was delayed due to the pandemic and when it was finally ready the ability to get it was challenged with the closing of the Canadian - US border. I waited for awhile to see what would happen and it became clear that I would not be able to get across to go and get it. I put out a request on our Facebook Page looking for options to see if there was a commercial trucking company that would be able to help us as they were still able to cross the border to deliver goods. A couple of our past staff knew a couple, Michael & Esther Schultz, who have a trucking company (**Arctic Fox Logistics**) and they both contacted him. Michael got a hold of me and we discussed the need. Originally the plan was to have the climbing tower company ship the tower to a town just south of Swift Current where I would go, pick up the tower and bring it over. Michael said to leave it with him and ultimately he drove all the way to Utah to pick up our tower and brought it safely all the way to Flin Flon where **Major Drilling** was generous to let







us use their unloading dock and even used their loader to pull the tower off for us! Michael & Esther donated 100% of their trip from Utah so thank you so much! Also, our friends at **Bakers Narrows Lodge** housed Michael & Esther for free when they heard how generous they were being to us! What a blessing and great example of people being able to serve and show generosity in the areas they are gifted and have the ability to! The support we get for our ministry and for the families of the north is so encouraging! Thank you!

## Projects - Staff Cabin



Similar to the climbing tower, the cabin project had its fair share of delays and pauses, including the three permits I had to obtain to even start on it. However, we got the package on site and the work crew, who has been coming up for the past number of years, was able to travel up north again to begin putting the cabin up. We were able to

get most of it done but still need to finish off the siding and the interior pine siding. This was a package that I made a deal on at the end of last summer when I took my family to Edmonton for a holiday. We took a day to visit the factory and were given a great deal on it!

## Site Damage

Besides COVID-19 having a huge effect on camp, we also found the weather was not in our favour this summer. We had a very wet and windy summer resulting in the lake rising and the waves incessantly pounding against our docks and shoreline. Both our docks were destroyed by the ongoing barrage of waves, and a lot of our shoreline has been washed away. Additionally some trees came down on a cabin destroying the chimney and pipe inside, and a number came down on a fence. We held a Work Day in August to help clean up some of the trees and the docks will need to be on our project list for the

spring. The work never seems to end! Thanks to those who came and helped clean up. We will need to do some more tree and dock cleanup in the spring.

## Final Thoughts

Thank you so much for your prayers! This has been a crazy year but in reality, all years have their challenges and unique surprises! It keeps me on my toes. There is the classic saying, **“we don’t know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future.”** What very true words that can give us comfort during times of unknowns which cause great anxiety. We can be assured that God is in control and that as the writer of Jeremiah points out, that He has a plan for us. One of the classic analogies used about hard times is the story of the caterpillar and the butterfly. In order to turn into the beautiful butterfly the caterpillar must first undergo the struggle of getting out of the cocoon. One time a person thought he would do the caterpillar a favor and helped to cut the cocoon open with scissors to make it easier to allow the butterfly to emerge, but unfortunately, when it did its body was swollen and its wings were shrivelled. The butterfly never flew. While the man had good intentions, it is the physical struggle of breaking through the cocoon that is needed for the butterfly to develop properly. It is God’s way of forcing fluid from the body to the wings in order for it to be able to fly as intended. The lesson in this story is that



hard times are not fun, but perhaps we go through them so God can develop us into the people we are to be. During these difficult times, be encouraged and help those around you. Be the hands and feet of Christ to those in need. Don’t fear the struggle; grow from it!

Thank you for your prayers! Thank you for telling others about our ministry and suggesting it to people as a place to volunteer. Thank you for being a part of our ministry through financial support! Each year has its challenges and together we continue to share the love of Jesus to many who many not hear of Him otherwise!

Be blessed!

*Darrell Janzen*

Darrell Janzen  
Executive Director

