

Archdiocese unveils \$5M business plan to redevelop summer camps

A new \$5.6-million business plan has been approved to redevelop the Archdiocese of Edmonton's two summer camps over the next decade to make them sustainable for the future.

The Archdiocese operates two camps, [Our Lady of Victory Camp](#) at Gull Lake, northwest of Red Deer, and [Camp Encounter](#) at Lac La Nonne, about 110 kilometres northwest of Edmonton. Between them, campers can participate in canoeing, archery, swimming and other sports as well as faith-based activities, sacraments and Catholic fellowship. In 2018, they attracted a total of 667 campers.

Our Lady of Victory Camp is expected to open as soon as next summer with some spring and fall camping possible. Registrations will open in January for parents, parishes and schools.

Camp Encounter – which is need of more cleanup and redevelopment – is expected to reopen in 2022.

In addition to new buildings, facilities and programming at both camps, the sites will be divided into zones for students and families in an effort to increase attendance and revenue. Financing the capital improvements will depend on a successful fundraising campaign.

Both Camp Encounter and OLVC were shuttered this year in an effort to look at redeveloping both, while dealing with aging infrastructure at annual deficit of approximately \$100,000 for both camps.

For parents, volunteers and campers, awaiting news of the camps has been arduous.

"This is a highly emotional. It's been a very difficult process," said Lisa Macquarrie, coordinator of both OLVC and Camp Encounter, who has attended camp since she was 9.

"Waiting and not knowing and trusting in somebody else to put together a plan for something that means so much and has had such an impact on your life, it's hard to be patient with that process. I've been to camp. I know these people and I love my camp community, and this has been a very difficult process for them."

The business plan was developed by a 10-member Archdiocesan Camps Renewal Committee including experts in infrastructure, finance and family life, as well as clergy. It was approved by Archbishop Richard Smith late last month.

At OLVC, plans include a new multi-purpose facility, boy's dorm, maintenance building, wash zone, as well as beachfront and programming development. Seventeen aging buildings will be cut to eight. And organizers plan to increase the number of yearly campers to more than 300.

At Camp Encounter, the plan involves improving the beachfront, adding a new dock, dining hall, washing and multi-purpose facility as well as tent and recreational vehicles sites.

Each campsite is expected to be divided into zones, one for students and another for multi-generational families, which is expected to increase usage, attendance and revenue. The second phase will include additional programming at the camps, with a particular focus on new Canadians.

"Catholic families have changed. The Catholic Church has evolved. We have waves of – every parish knows this – new Canadians," said Steven Defer, coordinator of the archdiocesan [Office of Life and Family](#) and a member of the camps renewal committee.

"How do we invite them into the camping experience and what it means to be a Canadian, in this camping context, but also to be a Catholic? The goal is to share OLVC and Camp Encounter with the whole Catholic community."

In terms of fees, Camp Encounter – when it opens – will cost slightly less than it did in 2018. OLVC, meanwhile, will cost a bit more, reflecting a new bus service which will be available. The fee for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese will also be slightly higher. Precise fees will be set at a later date.

In addition, under the plan, both camps will require fewer staff in an effort to cut human resources costs, which represented almost all of the estimated \$100,000 deficit per year at both camps. The proposed programming has been adjusted so that it's more self-directed.

To get to a point where both camps can open, and are sustainable, will cost an estimated \$500,000.

Phase 1 of the business plan is to get the camps operational, which involves demolishing old buildings as well as cleanup, sewage and water costs at both camps, before new buildings are built.

Work on the camps will be reviewed and evaluated annually to ensure it's meeting the needs of the community and stakeholders. Over 900 people responded to an online survey on the future of the camps. Many of them stressed the need for creating a Catholic community, connecting youth to the Church, leadership skills and finding a personal encounter with God.

An official fundraising campaign for the camps hasn't started yet, pending the finalization of the business plan. The next phase will look at developing the

best way to implement that plan. An update is expected within a few months.

“The trigger for this project isn’t time. The trigger for this project is funding,” Defer said.

Over \$30,000 has already been raised for the redevelopment of the camps through the first annual [Archbishop’s Dinner](#) on Oct. 4. At the event, Archbishop Smith reiterated his commitment to both camps, noting that they have played life-changing roles of young people.

Archdiocesan Camps Renewal Committee members say they are confident in the future of the camps.

“Having a plan, and revisiting that plan annually to pick the best, next strategic move, is absolutely the right way to go. It has to be,” Macquarrie said.

“You can’t just set something on autopilot for 10 years where society changes, people’s personal costs change, the price of staff and everything else changes and make no adjustments to the course of your actions and expect a good outcome at the end of that.”

Macquarrie said that’s what was starting to happen before the Archdiocese took over direct management of Camp Encounter and OLVC from volunteer boards of directors in 2012.

Our Lady of Victory Camp was established in 1946 and Camp Encounter was built in 1980.

Lucy Kaakyo, chair of the camps renewal committee, said past problems will be addressed in the business plan with a new fee structure, new programming and fundraising efforts.