2018 Year in Review

Here is the USS Ark’s look back at the past year’s highlights:

SYNOD ASSEMBLY: Gathering under the theme, “On the Way Together: Open Ears, Open Hearts,” the Upper Susquehanna Synod gathered in assembly at Susquehanna University on June 15 and 16. The assembly featured a new format, allowing participants to have table conversations, sharing their best experiences of Church. The assembly passed a resolution regarding the treatment of migrant children in the custody of the United States, urging its congregations and members to call for humane, compassionate treatment of persons designated as undocumented minors. Minutes of assembly are available at https://wp.me/a9Gqgm-P8

STRATEGIC PLAN: The Synod Mission Strategy Table and Synod Council continue to work on a new strategic plan for the Upper Susquehanna Synod. During this summer’s Synod Assembly, conversations were held around tables and following the assembly, facilitators gathered to reflect on the conversations and discern strategic directions for our synod. From this gathering, areas of focus and objectives began to take shape. Goals were then developed that would lead our synod and strengthen congregational vitality.

YOUTH GATHER IN HOUSTON: From June 27-July 1, the ELCA Youth Gathering occurred in Houston, Texas, with 176 teenagers and adults from our synod (our biggest ever) attending. The theme for the gathering was “This Changes Everything.”

8th SEAFARERS COLLECTION: Members in 39 synod congregations and one individual filled a total of 670 Christmas At Sea gift bags for the ministry of Seafarers’ International House. The bags are given to merchant seamen who come into port to off-load their cargoes during the Advent/Christmas season. Two large vans came from New York City to our synod office to pick up the gift bags on December 11th. First-time contributors included St. John, Northumberland; St. Paul, Middlecreek Dam; Himmel, Rebuck; and Zion, Kratzerville. Zion members broke all records with 70 gift bags.

GROW IN THE SNOW: The synod youth retreat was held on February 9-10, 2018, at Camp Mount Luther. Over 65 youth and their adult leaders attended, exploring the theme “Hello God, It’s Me.” The theme looked at prayer and particularly the Lord’s Prayer.

LIBERIAN VISITS: Bishop Collins visited Liberia during the first week of March to visit with our companion synod, the Lutheran Church in Liberia. During her visit, she was part of an International Women’s Day celebration at St. Peter’s Lutheran Church in Monrovia, the country’s capital. In January, a team of six people from the synod also traveled to Liberia.

MISSION SUPPORT VISIT: Mr. Nick Kiger, from the ELCA Mission Support team, visited in our synod for several days in late April to learn more about the work supported by mission support dollars. He visited several congregations, Camp Mount Luther, and Susquehanna University. That weekend, he also led a Mission Support Symposium in State College. Bishop Collins and several synod members attended the event with representatives of the Allegheny Synod.

VATERS SPEAKS TO LEADERS: Karl Vaters, pastor of the Cornerstone Christian Fellowship and founder of New Small Church and the New Small Church Blog, came to the Upper Susquehanna Synod in late October. He spoke to synod leaders on how equipping people to build relationships is our mission.

JOINT DISASTER RELIEF: A combined effort of Northumberland Presbytery (PCUSA) and Upper Susquehanna Synod (ELCA) filled two pickup trucks with relief supplies which were shipped to the Church World Service warehouse. The churches filled 76 clean-up buckets, 35 hygiene kits, and 25 school kits, and are looking at ways to continue this partnership.

SUMMER CAMP SEASON: Camp Mount Luther had 600 participants take part in both on and off-site programs during the eight-week session in 2018. Campers got to do crafts, go swimming, play games, camp out, hike, and sing during their time at Mount Luther. This year’s theme at Mount Luther was “Awesome God, Awesome Love.”
Constitution Resources Available

Has it been awhile since your congregation updated their constitution? Did you know that congregations must comply with the ELCA model constitution and there are updates made by Churchwide Assembly that should automatically be added to your constitution?

To learn more about the constitution update process, visit the synod website at https://www.uss-elca.org/constitutions/. There, you will find a document detailing the procedures for updating your constitution. Also, the highlighted changes in the most recent update to the model constitution is available. Other resources on that webpage will help you in the process, too. You can also check the ELCA website for updates to required provisions.

After a congregation changes their constitution, it must be reviewed by the synod’s constitution committee. The synod, after review, notifies the congregation of its decision to approve or disapprove the proposed changes. The changes shall go into effect upon notification that the synod has approved them and when the congregation votes on them.

The Constitution Committee can serve as a resource to those considering updating or revising their constitutions. A “cheat sheet” developed by the committee is available on the synod’s constitution webpage.

Up and Down the Valleys

This year, Trinity, McAlisterville (Pastor Erin Bovendam) is starting the new year with a focus on God’s love for us, and then our call to love our neighbor. Starting Sunday, January 20, they’ll have a sermon series and book studies on The Five Love Languages.

Rev. Dr. Kerry Aucker, (St. John and St. James, Jersey Shore) received the Ecumenical Service Award at the Annual Assembly of United Churches of Lycoming County on November 30. He is the volunteer Administrator of The New Love Center Food Pantry which feeds nearly 450 families per month, distributes 110 senior boxes and 216 backpacks every Friday to students in the Jersey Shore School District. Over 170 volunteers operate The New Love Center out of the basement of St. John Lutheran Church. The photo is of Pastor Aucker and his wife, Karen.

Local churches and organizations, Protestant Campus Ministry (PCM) at Bloomsburg University (Pastor Jill Young) alumni and students, and other friends of PCM gathered in late November for an Advent Banquet. They enjoyed fellowship, good food, Advent hymns, and fresh insights for today’s church from Dr. Tom Sine and Dr. Christine Aroney-Sine.

Prayer petitions for January to April are prepared and sent by the Upper Susquehanna Synod Liberia Committee. Please use them in your congregation to lift up our companion synod program; for example, include them in your intercessory prayers, print them in your bulletin or newsletter. Download them here: https://tinyurl.com/y78b67j7

The Rev. Barbara J. Collins, Bishop

USS ARK is a publication of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA. Permission is granted for congregations to reproduce this newsletter. Send mission stories and ministry ideas by the first of the month to Chad Hershberger, Director of Communications, at news@uss-elca.org.

The Rev. Barbara J. Collins, Bishop
Annual Report Covers Available
The 2018 Annual Report Cover is available for congregations from the ELCA. Download them here:

Organist Wanted
Zion, Herndon, is looking for an organist/pianist. If you are interested, please call the church at 570-758-1575.

50% Off On 2019 Registration Fee for Lutheran Marriage Encounter Weekends
Because they are celebrating 50 years of Worldwide Marriage Encounter, the 2019 registration fee will be $50 instead of $100, so don't postpone your attendance any longer--take advantage of this opportunity! Also new this year, because couples have told them that they would prefer to know the costs and pay ahead, prices for the lodging for two nights and five meals for each participant will be posted on the website and payable upon registering. Those fees can be refunded up to approximately a month before the event should conflicts arise, and financial assistance is available for those in need. Some Weekends fill quickly, so don't delay, SIGN UP TODAY to avoid being on a waiting list. Your marriage relationship is one of the things in life that provides the greatest potential for happiness. Resolve to make 2019 the year you attend a Lutheran Marriage Encounter Weekend to learn how to maximize the joy and intimacy that God intends for your marriage. The 2019 Weekends are:
- April 5-7, 2019 at the lovely, warm and inviting Country Inn and Suites just off of Highway 99 in a very quiet area of State College, PA
- April 26-28, 2019 at Heritage Hotel Lancaster, a newly-renovated hotel, home of the unique, treehouse-inspired restaurant, "Loxley's" in Lancaster, PA
- October 11-13, 2019 at the spacious, modern decor rooms at the Hyatt Place Pittsburgh/Cranberry in Cranberry Township, PA
- November 1-3, 2019 at the award-winning Hampton Inn Berkshires beautifully situated on the edge of a nature preserve in Lenox, MA

See the website: www.GodLovesMarriage.org for the pricing for each Weekend, and sign up today using your credit card or by marking the option to mail a check. For questions, or if you would like a brochure mailed to you, please contact Northeast US Directors of Lutheran Marriage Encounter, Fred & Julie Schamber, at 724-325-3166 or fjschamber@comcast.net.

January 16-17, 2019: United Lutheran Seminary Preaching Perspectives
Come, by yourself, bring a friend or attend as a pericope group (to enhance your work as a group), to a one-day lecture for anyone interested in thematic ideas, exegetical insights and preaching ideas for the coming liturgical season. There are three of these held during the academic year. The event will be held in Valentine Auditorium on the Gettysburg Campus on January 16, 2019, and in Benbow Hall of the Brossman Center on the Philadelphia Campus on January 17, 2019, both from 9:00-3:00 p.m. The Rev. Dr. Kristin Largen will be presenting preaching ideas, themes, text insights and notable thoughts on texts for Ash Wednesday through Easter. Cost is $40 and includes lunch.

January 24, 2019: Ecumenical Celebration
In recognition of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity the Roman Catholic Diocese of Scranton will host an Ecumenical Celebration of God’s Word on Thursday, January 24, 2019, at 12:10 p.m., in St Peter’s Cathedral, Scranton. The Rev. Rebecca Tanner, Moderator, Ashley Presbyterian Church, will preach and music will be provided by the students from All Saints Academy, Scranton. All are invited to this service.
Bishop Collins encourages all our congregations to remember God’s call to seek the unity of our church, especially during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, January 18-25.

**February 7 and 26, 2019: Mental Health First Aid Training at United Lutheran Seminary**
One in five adults will experience a diagnosable mental disorder in any given year. Even if you are not a trained mental health professional, you can be prepared and know what to do when a mental health crisis happens. Mental Health First Aid is a clinically proven training course that will help you identify and respond to the signs of mental health difficulties and give you the skills to apply a 5-step action plan to assess a situation and provide help. Participants will receive a nationally recognized course certificate of completion, a Mental Health First Aid manual, listing of local mental health resources and Certification as a Mental Health First Aid Responder. The eight-hour course is offered by WellSpan Philhaven. This event will be held on February 7, 2019, in Valentine Auditorium on the Gettysburg Campus and on February 26, 2019, at Benbow Hall of Brossman Center on the Philadelphia campus from 8:30-4:30 p.m. Cost is $40 and includes lunch.

**February 8-9, 2019: GROW in the Snow**
This year’s synod youth retreat at Camp Mount Luther will be held on February 8-9, 2019. All youth in 6-12th grade and their youth leaders are invited to attend. The theme of this year’s retreat is “The Apps on God’s Tablets,” dealing with the Ten Commandments. Experience your Creator, play winter games and find refreshment in the peace of camp in winter. The retreat is from Friday night to Saturday afternoon, but there is an option for youth and leaders to come just for the day on Saturday. Cost is $60 (whole program) or $40 (Saturday only) if registered by January 29, 2019. A late fee of $25 added after that date. No refunds will be given after the January 29 deadline. Each registered group should provide one adult (21 or over) for every seven youth and at least one adult for each gender represented. Cabin assignments will be made based on available adults and number of youth attending. Contact Chad Hershberger at chad@campmountluther.org with questions. Click here for a flyer and registration form: [https://www.campmountluther.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2019-GROW-in-the-Snow-Flyer-2.pdf](https://www.campmountluther.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2019-GROW-in-the-Snow-Flyer-2.pdf)

**February 15-17, 2019: Happening #12**
This is a program sponsored by the Episcopal Diocese of Central PA, held at Camp Mount Luther. Because of the synod and camp’s partnership with the diocese, Lutheran youth are welcome and encouraged to attend. All youth in grades 9-12 are invited for an exciting weekend of fun, friendship, and faith! Youth leadership is a key feature of the Happening program. The entire weekend is led “by youth for youth” with adult supervisions and guidance. Happening is not a traditional church retreat. As a Happener, whether you are a high school student or an adult (yes adults may happen, too!) You will have the opportunity to talk about God, as God is reflected in your daily life, with your peers, the people who will be experiencing the same event with you. Happening is truly an event designed with you and your faith in mind! Finally, a key piece to a happy Happening is dedication to a friendly, accepting, and understanding environment. No matter who you are, where you come from, or what your favorite cereal happens to be, you are welcome with open arms. Please register by February 8, 2019! Click to register: [https://tinyurl.com/ycnll4q](https://tinyurl.com/ycnll4q). Cost is $125.00 and scholarships are available. Please contact Mary Ellen Kilp or Theda Tallman at cpayouthcom@gmail.com for questions. Click here for a flyer about the event: [https://www.usselca.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Happening-flyer-12.docx](https://www.usselca.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Happening-flyer-12.docx)

**March 3, 2019: Mount Luther Sunday**
The Upper Susquehanna Synod Council has designated that Transfiguration Sunday each year be recognized as “Mount Luther Sunday” to help promote outdoor ministries in the synod. Members of USS congregations are encouraged to celebrate outdoor ministries on this day, March 3, 2019. Mount Luther is an extension of the ministry that is done in local Lutheran congregations. The camp asks that congregations promote the camp on that Sunday or designate another Sunday this spring to do so. Ways to promote the camp include bulletin inserts to share with congregation members, Temple Talks, camper testimonials, bulletin board displays, special camp music during Sunday school and church services, as
April 5–7, 2019: New Beginnings #2

“New Beginnings” is a unique ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Central PA that shares the love of Christ with the middle school-aged (grades 6-8) youth of today. Because of the synod and camp’s partnership with the diocese, Lutheran youth are welcome and encouraged to attend. Throughout the retreat weekend, the high school youth will minister to the middle school youth. “New Beginnings” speaks, listens, and challenges middle school youth to be positive about themselves, their friends, families and their communities, in a critical time in their lives. This ministry reminds them that we are all children of God, we are special, we are loved, and there is nothing that we cannot overcome with Christ. The “New Beginnings” check-in begins at 6:00 p.m. on Friday, April 5th and continues through a special Eucharist at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday the 7th. (The entire weekend concludes around 12 noon). The event is held at Camp Mount Luther. Activities include a series of songs, skits, movie clips, and small group discussions. Topics such as God’s love, prayer, self, friends, parents, siblings, and school is explored with talks introduced by the high school youth and adult members of the team. Cost is $100.00 per participant! That includes housing in cabins with other youth, all meals, a t-shirt and an entire weekend of activities! To register, visit https://tinyurl.com/y78dlyx9. Registration deadline is March 29, 2019. After your registration has been sent in and accepted, you will receive a few additional forms to fill out along with a packing list for the weekend. Please feel free to email or call Mary Ellen Kilp or Theda Tallman at cpayouthcom@gmail.com or 717-475-2785 with questions. Here is a flyer for the event: https://www.usselca.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/New-Beginnings-1-Flyer-002.docx

April 16, 2019: Chrism Mass

The annual Chrism Mass with Renewal of Ministry Vows will take place on the Tuesday of Holy Week, April 16, 2019. Details will soon be announced. Pastors, Deacons, and Authorized Lay Worship Leaders are especially invited to renew vows and recommit to worship leadership. The service will include the blessing of oil and everyone is welcome.

April 28, 2019: Camp Mount Luther Spring Open House

Have you ever wanted to see Mount Luther’s site and facilities? Do you miss camp and want to visit in the springtime? Are you interested in coming to camp this summer but want to get more information and see the place first? Well, this is your chance. The Camp Mount Luther Spring Open House will be held on Sunday, April 28, 2019, from 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. You can ask questions, tour camp, and see what it’s like to be a camper! First time campers who are not yet registered for the summer and who attend the event can get a discount on their summer registration! To download a flyer for the event, click here: https://www.campmountluther.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2019-Spring-Open-House-Flyer.pdf

April 30–May 2, 2019: Generosity Transformed

At the Generosity transformed! your mission * your ministry * your money Conference, April 30 – May 2, 2019 in Indianapolis, church and organizational leaders will learn how to energize and revitalize their strategies for faithful generosity by connecting their missions, ministries, and resources. More than a typical workshop-based conference, participants will engage deeply in peer discussion groups and subject-based roundtables to develop practical implementation plans and leave ready and able to help their churches and organizations thrive through transformative practices of faithful generosity. The ELCA is offering a limited number of registration scholarships. Contact Keith Mundy (keith.mundy@elca.org) for information on scholarships and the conference. For more information, visit https://stewardshipresources.org/generosity-transformed-2019/
May 8-10, 2019: Bishop’s Retreat
The annual bishop’s retreat will be held on May 8-10 at Camp Hebron, Halifax, on the topic of forgiveness. More details are forthcoming but save the dates!

July 13-20, 2019: Theological Education with Youth
This program, sponsored by United Lutheran Seminary, is open to youth in grades 9-12 (completed as of June 2019). The program will focus on how Lutherans read the Bible and engage in response and dialog about our beliefs and how these beliefs meet the needs of our world. Leadership components will build on how to approach advocacy and practice through the Lutheran lens. Registration and more detailed information will be available soon.

July 14-20, 2019: Theological Education with Adults
This program, sponsored by United Lutheran Seminary, is open to all people interested in the topic matter. Registrations are available for one day, part of the week, or the whole week. The theme for 2019 will center around Biblical Hermeneutics (interpretation of the Bible and texts) using historical and cultural knowledge, reading through the Lutheran lens. Registration and more detailed information will be available soon.
Be a Camperson!

In December, we held our annual camperson meeting. A camperson is a liaison between Camp Mount Luther and the local congregation. It's not too late to sign up to be a camperson. If your congregation doesn't have a camperson, contact chad@campmountluther.org. Chad Hershberger will confirm your request and send you a camperson registration form. Deadline to register campersons is February 1. For more information, visit: http://www.campmountluther.org/programs/campersons/. The biggest advantage to having a camperson is that everyone from your congregation who attends camp gets a discount!

GROW in the Snow Next Month
Deadline is later this month

This year’s synod youth retreat at Camp Mount Luther will be held on February 8-9, 2019. All youth in 6-12th grade and their youth leaders are invited to attend. The theme of this year’s retreat is “The Apps on God’s Tablets,” dealing with the Ten Commandments. Experience your Creator, play winter games and find refreshment in the peace of camp in winter. The retreat is from Friday night to Saturday afternoon, but there is an option for youth and leaders to come just for the day on Saturday. Cost is $60 (whole program) or $40 (Saturday only) if registered by January 29, 2019. A late fee of $25 added after that date. No refunds will be given after the January 29 deadline. Each registered group should provide one adult (21 or over) for every seven youth and at least one adult for each gender represented. Cabin assignments will be made based on available adults and number of youth attending. Contact Chad Hershberger at chad@campmountluther.org with questions. A flyer and registration form are on our website.

Big Crowd for First Ever Summer Brochure Release Party

When the Marketing Camel Crew met last year, they had an idea to try something new. They wondered if campers and their families would come to camp over the Christmas holiday to find out about the new summer schedule and programs. Well, they got their answer on December 30 when almost 100 people were on hand for our first ever Summer Brochure Release Party.

Members of last year’s staff, along with a few other alumni staff, led activities in the Evergreen Center. There were games, singing, eating, and crafts. A campfire program was staged and then next year’s programs were announced. Summer brochures were passed out and excitement grew about the upcoming season.

In addition, about 20 folks attended the annual Camperson Meeting, held in conjunction with the party. Campersons serve as ambassadors, regularly promoting camp news.

Thanks to everyone who attended and made this first-time program a great success!

January 2019 Camel Tracks
Celebrate Outdoor Ministries with a Camp Sunday this Spring

Members of the congregations of the Upper Susquehanna Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will celebrate outdoor ministries later this month. Congregations will join together to celebrate the annual “Mount Luther Sunday” on March 3, 2019, Transfiguration Sunday. The Upper Susquehanna Synod Council designated that day be “Mount Luther Sunday” to help promote outdoor ministries in the synod.

Mount Luther is an extension of the ministry that is done in local Lutheran congregations. The camp is asking that congregations promote the camp on that Sunday or designate another Sunday this spring to do so. Ways to promote the camp include bulletin inserts to share with congregation members, Temple Talks, camper testimonials, bulletin board displays, special camp music during Sunday school and church services as well as special offerings being collected. All are expected to be done during this event. Chad Hershberger, executive director of the camp, will be preaching and talking to the congregation at Follmer Lutheran Parish, Milton, that day.

If you can’t celebrate on March 3, please consider using another Sunday to promote camping in your congregation. Executive Director Chad Hershberger is beginning his “spring tour” of congregations in February and would love to come visit your church. Contact him at chad@campmountluther.org. Other ideas are available here: https://www.campmountluther.org/event/mount-luther-sunday-3/. Resources for worship, related to this year’s curriculum, can be found at https://www.campmountluther.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2019-Congregational-Resources.pdf

Gearing Up to be Agents of Change

Now is the time to think about being part of the Camp Mount Luther’s summer programs in the coming year. The brochure for Summer 2019 has just been published and will be mailed to campers and congregations this month. It will soon be on the camp website as well.

This year’s summer camp season will begin on June 16 and run until August 6. There are programs for all ages from preschool to senior high, and for adults and families. Camp Mount Luther is a special place where kids and families come together to grow with God and serve with smiles! Camp provides a safe place for people of all ages to relax and unwind in nature, discover God’s love, sing around the campfire, learn more about themselves, and make new friends while at the same time being renewed in mind and spirit.

GROW Time this summer is based on the theme “Transformed Community: God’s Agent of C.H.A.N.G.E.” The theme conjures up images of a mighty band of superheroes with secret missions. When we take on the mission of being God’s agent of change in the world, we must be ready to be transformed—individually and together. Daily themes will look at what transforms community: generosity, compassion, inclusion, justice, and forgiveness.

Start planning now on being at camp this summer and taking advantage of all that Mount Luther has to offer!