9TH Seafarers Collection

Members in 51 synod congregations and several individuals filled a total of 905 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 10th. This is a ministry of the ELCA whose port chaplains go aboard ships to distribute the gift bags, conduct worship services, and to offer other forms of assistance and hospitality to the crews.

Thanks to all those who supported our efforts this year! This is the largest number of bags collected in the nine years the synod has been participating in this program. In fact, it’s almost 260 more than 2018.

Next year, the deadline will be earlier. We will need bags by November 5 so that the bags can get to the seafarers, as now some of them don’t get them until January or February because of our post-Thanksgiving deadline.

New App and Giving Option Available

The Upper Susquehanna Synod has partnered with Tithe.ly to create a new synod app that allows you to give a direct donation to the synod. The app is now available by going to https://tithely.app.link/upper-susquehanna-synod-elca and downloading it to your favorite device.

The app features the latest synod news, events, links to the USS Ark, our assembly webpage as well as a place to make direct donations to the synod. You can even designate your gifts to certain synod ministries through the app. There are also links to the synod’s social media pages, blog, and a digital Bible.

With the synod’s fiscal year ending on January 31 and synod council trying to close a projected budget deficit, it is hoped that individuals would use the new app to give monetary gifts to the synod to support our ministry together.

Synod Office Holiday Closing

The Upper Susquehanna Synod Office will be closed from Tuesday, December 24, 2019, to Wednesday, January 1, 2020, in observance of the Christmas and New Year’s holidays. The office will reopen at 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, January 2, 2020. If you have an emergency, please call the synod office (570-524-9778) and the voicemail will give you phone numbers that you can call. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the Upper Susquehanna Synod Staff.
Holiday Breakfast Held

Camp Mount Luther and Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village in Lewisburg held a “Breakfast with Santa” in December at The Village Common. Children and their parents could visit with Mr. and Mrs. Claus and get their picture taken. They also enjoyed breakfast and could make crafts, including God’s eyes, cereal ornaments, and decorated cookies! The two Lutheran organizations have been partnering for five years on this event, held at Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village.

Up and Down the Valleys

About 550 outdoor ministry professionals, board members, and others gathered together last month for the first-ever ecumenical conference for mainline Christian denominational camp and retreat associations. The Outdoor Ministry Connection (OMC) Great Gathering was held from November 10-14, 2019, at Lake Junaluska, located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. Under the theme of RelationSHIFT, they built relationships, discovered each other’s gifts, and equipped vital ministries to meet the emerging needs of God’s people. Participants came from 300 camp/conference centers across the U.S. and Canada from 11 denominations. Among them was the executive director from Camp Mount Luther, Chad Hershberger.

Clergy Notes: Rev. Brian Vasey was installed as the new pastor at St. Mark, Williamsport, on November 24. The Port Royal Parish installed Rev. Richard Adams as their new pastor on December 8. On October 20, the people of Messiah, Mifflintown, voted to accept Sam Leister as Vicar. Sam was lifted up as a candidate for the ELCA’s TEEM program. Rev. Chad Hebrink is the interim at St. John, Mifflinville. Rev. Timothy Sadler and Rev. Karen Minnich-Sadler have transferred into our synod. Tim serving at Geisinger and Karen being retired and busy serving as a supply worship leader.

On November 17, Bishop Collins celebrated with the East Kish Parish (Interim Pastor Charles Hershberger) for their 200th Anniversary. Services were held at both St. John’s, Siglerville, and St. Paul, Milroy.

Salem, Selinsgrove (Pastor Stina Schaeffer) is holding “Monday Morning Movies” during Advent. They watch a movie, eat popcorn and reflect on how the classic holiday movie intersects with the Biblical Christmas story.
BISHOP’s WEBSITE BLOG

On the first of every month, Bishop Collins submits a blog to our website, which also connects with our Synod Facebook and Twitter accounts. The writings connect with our synod’s current strategy for mission and the focus areas of our work together. It is her hope that these blogs will encourage and challenge every member of every congregation across our synod to be more active in ministry or do something new as the church that will make a difference in their community. Below is her December blog.

BISHOP’s DECEMBER BLOG

This first day of Advent begins another season of hope, anticipation and wonder. We have hope in the fulfillment of God’s promises and anticipate Christ’s coming. It is a new liturgical year that, with familiar scripture stories, hymns and adornments, we will be reminded of the hope God provides for the whole world in the wonder and anticipation of Jesus the Messiah.

I’m curious as to what you are hopeful for this week, this month, or the coming new year. I’m curious as to what our congregations are hopeful for in their life together as the Church. Good health, living in safety, unwavering relationships, financial sustainability and peace throughout the world come to mind.

I’m also curious as to what the world is hopeful for, especially the neighbors and communities in which our congregations exist. Do you think they are hopeful that their neighborhood church will provide something that will change their lives? Do you think they are anticipating new things from our congregations that will make a difference for the whole community? Do you think they wonder if the church knows that they exist – or even cares?

Being one in Christ and providing faith filled worship...being physically present and offering support beyond the needs...being faithful in teaching what discipleship is all about so that strong leaders are raised up – these are our areas of focus for being the Church together in this time and place, in this new season of hope, anticipation, and wonder. I wonder how we will live into our expectations to be these things together across the Upper Susquehanna Synod.

Today’s gospel from the 24th chapter of St. Matthew tells us to stay awake, to keep watch. I hope that we will all stay awake, keep watch, and be alert to the needs of those around us so that, as the Church, we can make a difference. I hope that, together, we will be faithful in our proclamation of the hope we have in the life-giving Triune God so that by our words and actions we do make a difference for our communities and neighbors who are looking hopefully to us. And I hope that I won’t have to anticipate or wonder when these things will take place because of hearing that you are already doing them!

Shalom,
Rev. Barbara J. Collins, Bishop
Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA
2020 Lutheran Marriage Encounter Weekends Announced

Your marriage relationship is something that provides the greatest potential for happiness. Is yours living up to this potential? Please make 2020 the year you resolve to attend a Lutheran Marriage Encounter Weekend to learn how to maximize the joy and intimacy that God intends for your marriage!

The following Northeast US Weekends have been scheduled:

- **May 1-3, 2020** at Heritage Hotel in Lancaster, PA. A recently-renovated hotel, home of the unique, treehouse-inspired restaurant, "Loxley's."
- **October 2-4, 2020** at Comfort Inn Latham-Albany North--just 10 miles north of Interstate 90 near Albany, the vibrant capital of NY.

Please go to the national website: [www.GodLovesMarriage.org](http://www.GodLovesMarriage.org) to see the very reasonable group rate for each Weekend. You may make your payment for the cost for your lodging and 5 meals for each of you plus the registration fee with your credit card, or you may mark the option to send a check. Scholarships are available for those in need who request them at the website. Registrations are limited by the size of the conference rooms, so to be sure to get the Weekend of your choice, sign up at your earliest convenience at [www.GodLovesMarriage.org](http://www.GodLovesMarriage.org). For questions please contact Northeast US Directors of Lutheran Marriage Encounter, Fred & Julie Schamber, at fjschamber@comcast.net or 724-325-3166.

December 21, 2019: Longest Night Worship Service

The Community Longest Night Worship Service will be held on Saturday, December 21, at 2:00 p.m. at Covenant Central Presbyterian Church (807 West Fourth St., Williamsport) A time of fellowship and light refreshments will follow the service. In this season, when the world seems overcome with joy, many of us find ourselves feeling other emotions. This ecumenical, community worship service is designed to bring peace to those who are experiencing sorrow, pain or loneliness during the season. We come to share one another's burdens, sadness and fears and we gather to offer hope and encouragement to each other. We are not alone. Emmanuel, God is with us. It was into a world of pain, hurt and confusion that God came, in the form and nature of Jesus Christ, so many years ago and God’s everlasting peace and comforting presence remains with us still. Join us! All are welcome!

December 29, 2019: CML Summer Brochure Release Party

Camp Mount Luther is hosting this event again for everyone to learn about their Summer 2020 programs. Everyone, but most especially campers, parents, alumni staff, and potential campers and families are invited to come to this exciting winter camp event! It will be held on Sunday, December 29, 2019, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. in the Evergreen Center. Celebrate the holidays and meet up with camp friends to do crafts, games, singing, eating, and more. Members of the 2019 Summer Staff will lead this program! While the kids are playing with the camp staff, the annual **CAMPERSON MEETING** will be at 3:00 p.m. A camperson is a liaison between camp and your congregations. They are our ambassadors, regularly promoting camp news. Each synod congregation is asked to send a representative to this event to learn more about Mount Luther! At 3:30, details will be released for everyone about Summer 2020’s schedule and theme. You can get your own copy of the summer brochure and start making plans. You won’t want to miss it! Camel Bucks for the camp store will be given to those who attend this event. Campersons will get Camel Bucks for all those who attend from their congregation! Promote it by using this flyer: [https://www.campmountluther.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019-SBRP.pdf](https://www.campmountluther.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019-SBRP.pdf)
January 12, 2020: Solidarity Not Solitary
A program called “Solidarity Not Solitary” is scheduled for Sunday, January 12, 2020, from 1:00-3:00 p.m. at St. Stephen’s Cathedral in Harrisburg. In this program, important information on the use of solitary confinement will be shared. The program will engage participants in experiential learning and have formerly incarcerated persons tell their stories about their personal experiences with spending time in solitary. The goal is to engage and mobilize faith communities to become advocates for reducing the use of solitary confinement in Pennsylvania—a practice that has been recognized as torture by the United Nations and by faith communities throughout our nation. Click on this link to find the flyer: https://www.pachurchesadvocacy.org/event/solidarity-not-solitary-jan-12/. The registration page is at https://www.pachurches.org/event/solidarity-not-solitary-january-12-harrisburg/. There is no charge to attend, but they would like to have registrations so we know how many handouts to prepare and to gauge refreshments.

February 1, 2020: Church Leader’s Day
A Church Leader’s Day for all congregation council members and rostered leaders will be held on February 1, 2020, at Christ’s Lutheran Church, Lewisburg, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. New to council? Get off to a good start with spiritual grounding and practical tools. Been on council often and for a long time? Refresh yourself and your practices for a deeper ministry of the church together. Workshops include Vision and Discernment, Church Finances, Church Constitution, Effective Meetings, Church Technologies, Synod Resources, Committees and Policies. We welcome anyone interested in coming. The fee is $10 per person. Any questions can be directed to Pastor Tom Glaseo at secretary@uss-elca.org. Here is the link for registration: https://tithe.ly/event-registration/#/1087053. A flyer is available here: https://www.uss-elca.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/churchleadersday.pdf

February 7-8, 2020: GROW in the Snow
This year’s synod youth retreat at Camp Mount Luther will be held on February 7-8, 2020. All youth in 6-12th grade and their youth leaders are invited to attend. The theme of this year’s retreat is “I Believe, I Do Believe,” dealing with the creeds. 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 $62 (whole program) or $40 (Saturday only). Please register by January 31, 2020. 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/2019/11/2020-Grow-in-the-Snow.pdf

February 8, 2020: Youth and Young Adult Ministry Summit
A Youth and Young Adult Summit will be held on Saturday, February 8, 2020, from 9:00 am to 2:30 pm at Camp Mount Luther. This will coincide with the GROW in the Snow Youth retreat. Lunch is included and you are invited to stay for closing worship with the Youth Retreat. There is no cost to attend this event. We will be exploring ways to engage youth and young adults to become leaders in our churches and present Growing Young, a strategy from the Fuller Youth Institute to involve youth and young adults within all areas of our congregations and ministries. We are also looking forward to having you share your ideas and how we can collaborate and support each other in this common mission of accompanying youth and young adults in their faith journeys. (For information on Growing Young go to www.fulleryouthinstitute.org.) Register online at https://tithe.ly/event-registration/#/1059905. Deadline for registration is January 31, 2020. For more information, email bingaman.sherry@gmail.com.

February 11-13, 2020: Ignite the Church Conference
Are you looking for a continuing ed event to inspire, encourage & challenge your ministry? Would Florida in February be a blessing? Consider attending the Ignite the Church Conference in Orlando, Florida, February 11-13. In addition to four large group gatherings with talks and panel discussions on topics
related to Congregational Vitality, there will be 12 intensive electives on a wide range of important topics like Reaching Younger Generations, Expanding Kingdom Impact, Church Renewal and Discipleship, Renewing Music, Vitality through Mission, Engaging Your Neighborhood, Evangelism, Social Justice, and Raising Up and Equipping Leaders. There will also be a field trip to Orlando's Castle Church Brewing Community, one of the ELCA’s newest and most unique mission starts. The $99 Super Early Bird registration rate includes 2 meals and snacks when you register by November 30th. Rates increase to $109 in December and $129 in January. 75 Leaders from 20 states attended last year’s gathering. All conference proceeds are donated to the ELCA Fund for Leaders. Last year’s gift totaled $2,500. For more information go to www.IgniteTheChurch.net  We hope to see you there!

**February 14-16, 2020: 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. You will have the opportunity to talk about God 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! No matter who you are, where you come from, or what your favorite cereal happens to be, you are welcome with open arms. To register, go here: http://www.cvent.com/events/happening-13/event-summary-734f054bc9ff4373aedd26f0ea05175.aspx?fqp=true. Click to register: https://tinyurl.com/ycnIgl4q. Cost is $125.00 and scholarships are available. For questions, contact cpayouthcom@gmail.com

**February 23, 2020: 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, February 23, 2020. 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 well as special offering being collected. Ideas are available here: https://www.campmountluther.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Mount-Luther-Sunday-Flyer-2020.pdf. For a bulletin insert to put in your church bulletin, click here: https://www.campmountluther.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/General-Bulletin-Insert.pdf.

**May 18, 2020: Lutheran Day at the Capital**

Lutheran Day at the Capital is set for Monday, May 18, 2020. Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in PA invites you to save the date and start promoting the event in your congregation. Bring your faith to the table and join Lutherans from around the state for worship, learning, advocacy and action. Learn more at https://www.lutheranadvocacypa.org/event/save-the-date-for-lutheran-day-2020-bring-a-team/
Brochure Release Party after Christmas

Want to know everything there is to know about next summer's programs. Well, come to an exciting winter camp event this month to find out. Everyone, but most especially campers, parents, alumni staff, pastors and potential campers and families are invited to our second Summer Brochure Release Party. It will be held on Sunday, December 29, 2019, from 2:00-4:00 p.m. in the Evergreen Center. Celebrate the holidays and meet up with camp friends to do crafts, games, singing, eating, Christmas caroling and more. Members of the 2019 Summer Staff will lead this program!

While the kids are playing with the staff, we’ll have our annual CAMPPERSON MEETING at 3:00 p.m. A camperson is a liaison between camp and your congregations. They are our ambassadors, regularly promoting camp news. Each synod congregation is asked to send a representative to this event to learn more about Mount Luther! If you can’t attend, we’ll have an electronic sign-up for campersons in January.

At 3:30, we’ll release details for everyone about Summer 2020’s schedule and theme. You can get your own copy of the brochure and start making plans for next summer.

Camel Bucks for the camp store will be given to those who attend this event. Campersons will get Camel Bucks for all those who attend from their congregation!

If you want to get some teases about new and returning programs, please check out our Facebook page this month. We’ll post more information there. It’s going to be a great time!

Holiday Breakfast This Weekend

Diakon’s Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village and Camp Mount Luther are once again teaming up to provide a fun morning of food, fellowship, and Christmas crafts and games on Saturday, December 7, 2019. The breakfast will feature an appearance and photos with Santa and Mrs. Claus, chocolate chip pancakes, craft stations, and cut-out cookies. Space is limited. Call Katie at 570-523-4285 to RSVP. The event will be from 9:00-11:00 a.m. at the Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village Common Building. For more information, visit our website.

GROW in the Snow Theme: I Believe I Do Believe

This year’s synod youth retreat at Camp Mount Luther will be held on February 7-8, 2020. All youth in 6-12th grade and their youth leaders are invited to attend. The theme of this year’s retreat is “I Believe, I Do Believe,” dealing with the creeds. 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 $62 (whole program) or $40 (Saturday only). Please register by January 31, 2020. 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.
Historic Gathering Brings Together Outdoor Ministry Professionals

About 550 outdoor ministry professionals, board members, and others gathered together last month for the first-ever ecumenical conference for mainline Christian denominational camp and retreat associations. The Outdoor Ministry Connection (OMC) Great Gathering was held from November 10-14, 2019, at Lake Junaluska, located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. Under the theme of RelationSHIFT, they built relationships, discovered each other’s gifts, and equipped vital ministries to meet the emerging needs of God’s people. Participants came from 300 camp and conference centers across the U.S. and Canada from 11 denominations. One of the participants at this gathering was Executive Director Chad Hershberger.

The theme, “RelationSHIFT” looked at expanding an understanding of relationship as God’s people. Conference attendees gathered together, recognizing the Holy Spirit was present, affirming the various gifts they brought, finding common ground, navigating a changing landscape, and figuring out how to journey together. The week included an insightful keynote from Joan Garry, currently Principal of Joan Garry Consulting, a boutique firm that helps nonprofits across a wide variety of sectors to untangle strategic knots enabling them to have a clearer path in pursuit of their missions. Garry challenged participants to reexamine priorities and better structure non-profits. Monday night’s worship featured Barbara Brown Taylor, New York Times best-selling author, teacher, and Episcopal priest. Brown Taylor gave a resonant message of appreciation and gratitude for the work of outdoor ministries. Shane Claiborne, prominent speaker, activist, and best-selling author, spoke of the need for a deep commitment to share Christ’s love to restore a world that seems so eager to break itself. Rev. Dr. Luke Powery, the dean of Duke University Chapel and associate professor of homiletics at Duke Divinity School, concluded the week at Wednesday worship, by reinforcing the potential one can have as a truly unified body of Christ, working together as unique parts, but divinely whole too. Dr. Jim Cain, author of 16 adventure-based teambuilding texts, led community building activities during the week. Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity was the artist-in-residence, creating art during the experience. Garrity is an artist, ordained Presbyterian (USA) pastor, retreat leader, and creative entrepreneur. Ken Medema was the event musician. He inspired people through his storytelling and song and creating songs that reflected the keynote speeches and energized the crowd. Medema, who has been blind since birth, has been inspiring people this way for over four decades. The event also featured 80 workshops and an exhibit hall with over 70 vendors. Outdoor Ministries Connection (OMC) is a consortium of mainline denominational camp and retreat associations.

LOM Great Gathering participants celebrated the 100th Anniversary of Lutheran Outdoor Ministry at a special day held on Tuesday of the conference. The event was held at Camp Lutheridge in Arden, NC, and featured a banquet highlighting 10 decades of history as well as the annual LOM Auction. During the celebratory banquet, Margie Fielder (Flathead, MT) served as Emcee and Retired Director Ralph Yernberg gave history bits. Chandler Carriker and Rev. Tim Canniff-Kuhn provided music for a sing-a-long of camp songs through the ages. Time periods were themed around “Blisters and Blue Jeans” (1920-1945), “A Postcard Tells a Thousand Words” (1945-1970), “The Times They Have Been Changing” (1970-1995), and “Toasting the Marshmallows” (1995-present). At Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Day on Tuesday of the conference, the Manlove-Howells Leadership Award was presented. It was given to Jerry Olstead, former director of outdoor ministries for the Lutheran Church in America.

During the conference, Lutheran Outdoor Ministries, a non-profit organization, met in business sessions. LOM is an independent association of outdoor ministry organizations, professionals, board members, businesses and students connected to Lutheran camping, conference and retreat centers. The annual budget was presented and adopted as well as new board members elected. Camp Mount Luther is a member of LOM.

The associations that participated in The Great Gathering were the Episcopal Camps and Conference Centers, Lutheran Outdoor Ministries, Outdoor Ministry Association of the United Church of Christ, Presbyterian Camps and Conference Center Association, United Church Camps of the United Church of Canada, and United Methodist Camp and Retreat Ministries.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR CAMP MOUNT LUTHER SUNDAY! It will be February 23, 2019.
Dear Camp Friends,

During Advent, we often focus on hope. At the recent Great Gathering of camp leaders from eleven Christian denominations, I attended a workshop where we were requested to tell stories of hope. Ken Medema, a musician who has blind by birth, listened to those stories and then sang an original song about our story of hope that he composed on the spot.

I told him how watching my own kids at camp gives me hope because of the lessons they learn and feeling accepted. I relayed that my son says he won't sing in the First Grade Choir for Christkindl Market this year in Mifflinburg. When I asked why, Aaron said he didn't want to get up in front of big crowds. But, I pointed out that he did it at camp this summer to tell jokes with me. He replied, "Well, that is camp. I'm comfortable there."

Camp gives me hope because I see wonderful life lessons and faith being passed on to the next generation. I see acceptance, learning to resolve conflict, talking to one another face-to-face, and spending time in God’s creation. I see campers whose faith is renewed from their encounter with Christ in this place. With the state of our world, nation, and church, I know camp is needed now more than ever.

Camp Mount Luther provides children, youth, and families a Christ-centered experience as they enjoy a week of camp in a safe, faith nurturing environment. We offer campers opportunities to grow in social skills, self-confidence, creative self-expression, stewardship, and living with others in peaceable ways. Most importantly, Mount Luther offers campers opportunities to grow in faith. And, we are committed to offering such opportunities for generations to come.

Your Christmas gift to Mount Luther will make a difference in the life of a child. Your gift of $25, $55, $100... whatever you can send... will help to provide a child the opportunity they need to grow in their faith. As Ken sang in his song about my son, "When he's at camp he's learning love." We thank you for your support in helping us share God’s love with all who come to Mount Luther.

All the best to you this season,

Chad Hershberger
Executive Director