2019 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: United, Serving, Supporting,” the Upper Susquehanna Synod gathered in assembly at Susquehanna University on June 14 and 15, 2019. The highlights included conversations with geographic conferences, talking about how to implement the synod’s new mission strategy. The assembly heard from ecumenical partners and passed a memorial regarding engagement in the Holy Land. Members also enjoyed learning more about congregational vitality from the representative from the ELCA and elected a new vice president. Elected to a four-year term as synod vice president was Holly Fry, a member of Washingtonville Lutheran Church.

NEW SYNOD STRATEGY: At their February meeting, the Upper Susquehanna Synod Council adopted a new strategy for the synod. The strategy was in the works for two years, culminating in conversations at the 2018 Synod Assembly which guided the direction of where the synod might go in the coming years. As part of the adoption, Synod Council established an Implementation Team (to replace the former Mission Strategy and Mission Tables) to propose annual goals, processes and procedures to put this strategy into effect. The bishop also began a monthly blog that gives more information on the strategy.

CAMPUS MINISTRY APPEAL: As part of the synod budget, Synod Council initiated an appeal in 2019 for Campus Ministries that the synod supports. To balance the budget and not make cuts to these ministries, council decided to ask individuals and congregations to support the work of campus ministries through this appeal. So far, just over $5,000 has been raised toward the $6,000 goal. The synod allocation funding helps to support the faith formation of young adults, provide opportunities for leadership development, and to form connections to the larger church.

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. This was a new record! 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.

GROW IN THE SNOW: About 35 youth and leaders attended GROW in the Snow synod youth retreat at Mount Luther in February. They learned more about the Ten Commandments through study, worship, fellowship, and fun.

RECONCILITATION BECOMES DISCERNMENT: At the synod assembly this June, the Bishop’s Reconciliation Team reported, “We as a team are in a discerning process as well. We continue to search for ways to serve congregations and pastors in a more effective way. We are at one of those points in our history when we want to renew our understanding of who we are and what resources we can offer. We will certainly be in touch with you as those thoughts become plans.” In the fall, they reconstituted so that they can deal not only with conflict directly but can assist congregations in identifying needs that can be met by committees, task forces and other tools available through the synod.

NEW TEAM: The synod launched its Advocacy Team, approved by Synod Council in September, with its inaugural meeting on October 22. Bishop Barbara Collins shared her dreams and expectations for the team, reflecting on the advocacy of synod hunger leaders and hopes that the synod might grow from that to advocate in other areas of ministry as well. Part of the team’s work will be to grow leaders who, in this time of division in the public square, can help the church “fill the space differently.”

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SUMMER CAMP SEASON: Mount Luther had 500 participants take part in both on and off-site programs during the eight-week session in 2019. 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 “Transformed Community: God’s Agent of C.H.A.N.G.E.”

NEW MISSION START: The Table, a new mission start congregation in Bloomsburg, received approval from the ELCA to be a Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community and got a grant of $20,000. The congregation was formed as a pro-ELCA remnant from St. Luke, Bloomsburg, who voted to leave the ELCA in March.

NEW APP AND GIVING OPTION: 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 here https://tithe.ly/upper-susquehanna-synod-elca. 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.

Release Party A Blast!

Camp Mount Luther’s second Summer Brochure Release Party was held on the Sunday after Christmas. About 60 people came out to play games, do crafts, sing, participate in a campfire program, and see the brand new 2020 brochure of summer programs. Members of last year’s staff, along with a few other alumni staff, led activities in the Evergreen Center. In addition, about 12 folks attended the annual Camperson Meeting, held in conjunction with the party. Campersons serve as ambassadors, regularly promoting camp news.

The latest prayer petitions for the first quarter of this year are available now from the Liberia Committee. You can access them in our news section on the synod website.

Camp Mount Luther has announced some office staff changes. Office Manager Linda Aurand retired at the end of 2019 but remains as part-time bookkeeper. A new part-time position of Administrative Assistant has been created and filled by Charlene Rineer. This new position is a nine-month position. Karen Watters will also be staffing the office two days per week on a volunteer basis.
**Support the Seminary in March**
At their meeting in September, Synod Council passed a resolution to encourage congregations to designate a Sunday in the month of March for a special appeal for giving to United Lutheran Seminary. Our synod has several candidates in candidacy who are attending ULS. We may have up to 14 in the coming year and council felt the need to support the seminary with this appeal.

**Annual Report Covers Available**
Did you know? The ELCA annually produces a cover for congregation annual reports that includes a message from Bishop Eaton, along with prayers and a hymn for opening a meeting. You can find the latest cover on our synod website here (https://www.uss-elca.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2019_Annual-Report-Cover-4pgr.pdf) or in the resources section of www.elca.org

**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 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 . For questions please contact Northeast US Directors of Lutheran Marriage Encounter, Fred & Julie Schamber, at fjschamber@comcast.net or 724-325-3166.

**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 Glasoe 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 4-5, 2020: Sharing the Gospel in the “Age of the Spirit”**
WV-WMD is offering an event this February, titled, "Sharing the Gospel in the 'Age of the Spirit,'" with The Rev. Dr. Cheryl Peterson. It will will be held February 4-5 at Mary Help of Christians in Huttonsville, WV.
Peterson serves as Professor of Theology and also as Associate Dean for Academics, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Capitol University. She also serves on the International Lutheran-Pentecostal Dialogue. Peterson will bring both her expertise as a scholar and an ecumenist to explore a range of pneumatological issues, including Charismaticism and Pentecostalism. Peterson's proposed outline includes:

- Living as Lutherans in the "Age of the Spirit" in a time of "religious decline"
- What Lutherans can learn from the rise of the "Spiritual, but not religious"
- What Lutherans can learn from the rise of Pentecostalism and charismatic movements
- New directions for Lutheran pneumatology, ecclesiology, and mission

There is also a boundaries training pre-event. They may be taken as a combo or either one individually. Registration deadline is close of Sunday, January 19. Folks from other judicatories (Lutheran and non-Lutheran) are welcome. This event is for clergy and seminarians. Details at [http://wv-wmd.org/clergy/index.html](http://wv-wmd.org/clergy/index.html). Facebook event postings at 

- [https://www.facebook.com/events/2175409562767461/](https://www.facebook.com/events/2175409562767461/)
- [https://www.facebook.com/events/2567991840097621/](https://www.facebook.com/events/2567991840097621/)

**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](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](http://www.fulleryouthinstitute.org)) Register online at [https://tithe.ly/event-registration/#/1059905](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.
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-734f054bc9ff4373aedda26f0ea05175.aspx?fqp=true. Click to register: https://tinyurl.com/ycnlgl4q. 
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

April 7, 2020: Chrism Mass
The annual Chrism Mass with Renewal of Ministry Vows will take place on the Tuesday of Holy Week, April 7, 2020. 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.

May 6-8, 2020: Bishop’s Retreat
The annual bishop’s retreat will be held on May 6-8 at Camp Hebron, Halifax. More details are forthcoming but save the dates!

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 A Blast!

Our second Summer Brochure Release Party was held on the Sunday after Christmas. About 60 people came out to play games, do crafts, sing, participate in a campfire program, and see the brand new 2020 brochure of summer programs. Members of last year’s staff, along with a few other alumni staff, led activities in the Evergreen Center.

In addition, about 12 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 program another success!

New Staff Positions in Office

We are pleased to announce that following the retirement of Linda Aurand, our longtime office manager, we have restructured the workings in our office. As was reported in Camel Tracks, Linda is going to continue in a new part-time role as our bookkeeper. She will be in the office on Fridays from 10-2, doing the books and answering phones.

A new part-time position of Administrative Assistant has been created and we are pleased to announce that Charlene Rineer will be filling that role. Charlene is well known in the camp community, serving as our assistant director in the summer. This new position is a nine-month position. Charlene will staff the office on Tuesdays from 10-2, be our summer registrar, and help with some program planning for camp.

On Wednesdays and Thursdays, the office will be staffed by Karen Watters. Karen is the wife of our site manager, Tom, and she will answer phones and help us do office tasks from 10-2.

Be a Camperson!

In December, we held our annual camperson meeting. A camperson is a liaison between camp 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!
Celebrate Outdoor Ministries with a Camp Sunday

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 February 23, 2020, 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.

If you can’t celebrate on February 23, 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, including worship resources to tie our summer curriculum into your service, are available on our website.

GROW in the Snow Next Month; Deadline Jan 31

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 and to register.

As part of the day, a Youth and Young Adult Ministry Summit will also be held. 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.