Implementation Team Needs Your Help

by Chris Minnich, Team Chair

The synod council adopted a strategy for our synod in 2019 and appointed a Strategy Implementation Team to help us to engage our mission, never imagining that we would find ourselves in a worldwide pandemic. The novel coronavirus has caused us to look anew at how we live together as Christ’s church—what we consider essential and how we understand our purpose. In light of the changes brought about by our societal response to COVID-19, the Strategy Implementation Team asks for your input as we look at our synod strategy in a changed context.

We ask you to look at the objectives in our strategy and reflect on whether they resonate with your understanding of our church’s purpose in this time. Then provide your ideas for how we might carry out the objectives or recommend new objectives you’d like to see. Are the objectives we set for ourselves valid or do we need to change how we approach our mission?

Please take some time to complete our survey to let us know what you think. Please also share the link with others who might not get this request. We are looking for a broad representation of our synod. On behalf of the Implementation Team and synod council, thank you for your time and ideas. You can also reach the survey by pasting this link into your browser:
https://tinyurl.com/yb25uxgw

Creativity During COVID

While in-person worship has been suspended and congregational communities across the synod have been unable to meet, lots of creative ways to stay connected have been borne out of this pandemic. Here is a list of some of those activities known to the synod office staff. There are certainly more activities than this so send what innovative things your congregation is doing to news@uss-elca.org!

**Pastor Justin Lingenfelter** (*United In Christ, West Milton*) has recorded interviews with members and others to post every weekday to allow congregation members to “get to know you.” He also has organized a virtual choir that performs during their online worship.

**Pastor Curtis Zemencik** (*Stone Valley Parish*) is leading a joint parking lot worship for his congregations utilizing auctioneer sound system. Meanwhile, **Pastor Tormod Svensson** (*The Table, Bloomsburg*) is leading parking lot worship utilizing an FM transmitter and providing worship for a local nursing home. **Pastor Erwin Roux** (*Zion, Turbotville*) started a parking lot worship mid-May and was lifted up on a scissor-lift to lead worship.

**Pastor Lowell Chilton** (*Messiah, New Berlin*) holds a virtual coffee hour following their online worship service. **Pastor Jim Vitale** (*Beaver, Beavertown*) holds Sunday worship and Bible and Brews via ZOOM. Vitale and **Pastor Andy Weaver** (*United, Sunbury*) holds an evening Zoom check-in with members for their individual congregations.

**Pastor Erin Bovendam** (*Trinity, McAlisterville*) shares a Chapel Time worship for families with children, in which her sons join in.

**Pastor Stina and Deacon Gary Schaeffer** (*Salem, Selinsgrove; St. Matthew’s, Shamokin Dam; and Milton Lutheran Parish*) lead worship together to share with all of their congregations. Other clergy couples are doing things together too.

**Pastor Ela Robertson** (*St. John’s, Belleville*) has provided a community radio broadcast of worship.

**Pastor Gretchen Johanson** (*Trinity, Oak Grove; St. Peter, Grovania*) is mailing the lessons to members because many do not have a computer. **Pastor Charles Hershberger** (interim, East Kish Parish) is sending sermons to members of that parish.
Grants Available from Synod

United, Supporting, Serving: the Upper Susquehanna Synod hears God’s call to the church as one to a people called together in order to support one another in service to our neighbor. Saint Paul writes that we are all one body with Jesus as our head. In this time of global pandemic, we are aware that some of the body suffers and that “if one member suffers, all suffer together with it”. Thus, we are drawn to care for the suffering members, supporting one another so that together we might serve.

The synod council recognizes the suffering of our members and has made funds available in the form of grants so that congregations and rostered leaders might weather short-term shortfalls of cash until regular operations can continue. These grants will be available until funds run out. Grant applications can be downloaded and completed by visiting this link: https://www.uss-elca.org/synod-covid-19-grants/

Camp Seeks Support

Camp Mount Luther’s Staff and Board continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation and make decisions about their operations. On May 2, the camp board met via Zoom and voted to postpone the start of our summer camping season until around July 1. They will be working on a new, condensed summer schedule and hope to publish it very soon. The board will meet again before the end of May to evaluate state restrictions and decide whether summer camp is viable for this season.

Now more than ever, the camp needs the support of people like you to help them continue to minister to children, youth, adults, and families. With the loss of income from spring retreats and outdoor education, they invite your donations via mail or their website.

If you are able, we ask that you consider sharing some of your government stimulus check for these needs. Know that those who don’t itemize their tax deductions receive bonus deductions for charitable donations of up to $300 this year. Whatever you can give, it will help Mount Luther ensure the continuation of this ministry that helps so many connect to others, nature, and God.

Up and Down the Valleys

The First Community Foundation and area United Way distributed grants during this time of COVID-19 to support community needs including food, rental and utility assistance; diapers and infant needs; personal protection equipment for staff and clients; laptops, tablets and connectivity devices for telehealth services; and finance assistance for small businesses. Phase I grant awards included $2,000 to United In Christ, West Milton (Pastor Justin Lingenfelter).

As part of last year’s synod budget, Synod Council initiated an appeal for Campus Ministries that the synod supports. The appeal raised $5,364.75 of 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.

Check out Seafarers International’s Annual Report with our bishop on the cover and the news that our synod supplies one-third of the Christmas at Sea bags this year: https://tinyurl.com/ybtlbql9.

The response was tremendous and Lutheran World Relief met its 75,000 Face Mask Challenge. To reach even more people, they’re collecting 75,000 more masks! How many will you make to help stop the spread of COVID-19? Sign up for more info: www.lwr.org/masks

ELCA Presiding Bishop Eaton’s Synod Assembly video has been shared and you can view it here: https://www.facebook.com/Lutherans/videos/950402888726253/

Our webpage of coronavirus resources continues to be updated. Visit https://www.uss-elca.org/coronavirus/. They are updated frequently, so check our website and Facebook page for the latest information. Bishop Collins also continues to meet with rostered leaders in a weekly call-in on Zoom. Contact Craig Miller for call-in information (prcmiller@uss-elca.org or call/text 347.327.3777).
Upper Susquehanna Synod Events

Be Counted!
This is the year for the decennial US Census. Response rates for the Susquehanna Valley are tracking ahead of both National and Pennsylvania averages, with over 50% of households in the region already completing their form. Faith communities are encouraged to make sure their members are counted. See links below for and FAQ for Faith Communities and a direct link to respond to the 2020 Census.

https://2020census.gov/content/dam/2020census/materials/partners/2020-01/Faith_Community_FAQ.pdf
https://my2020census.gov/

Stevenson School of Ministry News
A partnership of the Episcopal Diocese of Central PA, the Lower Susquehanna Synod, and the Upper Susquehanna Synod.

- **Podcast listeners:** Looking for ways to prepare for the way forward and to capture that which we have learned in ourselves and in the life of the church through all the changes? We invite you during this time of making important choices to listen to and engage the wisdom shared in Telling our Stories: Practicing Forward, Capturing Change with Rev. Dr. Gina Campbell. Right now, we wonder, “how is it with our hearts and souls?” [https://diocesecpa.org/ssfm/practicing-forward-series-with-rev-dr-gina-campbell/](https://diocesecpa.org/ssfm/practicing-forward-series-with-rev-dr-gina-campbell/)

- Join our June **Praying with the Psalms** module to continue next steps with Practicing Forward, Capturing Change. Consider your earliest experience of the Psalms, what challenges you and what wisdom do the Psalms have for us today. Led by The Rev. Richard Jorgensen. To register click here: [https://diocesecpa.org/shaped-by-faith-courses/registration/](https://diocesecpa.org/shaped-by-faith-courses/registration/)

- **The Gospel of John:** Join us as Dr. Deirdre Good leads us into a deeper dive into a critical introduction to and explanation of study of the theology and spirituality of the Gospel of John. For more information and to register: [https://diocesecpa.org/shaped-by-faith-courses/](https://diocesecpa.org/shaped-by-faith-courses/)

- **Holy Places- Liturgy in Space & Time with Dr. Joshua Davis:** The class meets for six sessions and its organized around our "Liturgical Centers": font, pulpit, altar, Presider's chair, choir space, and congregational space. This class is an asynchronous, online course, with direct access to the instructor. For more information and to register: [https://diocesecpa.org/shaped-by-faith-courses/](https://diocesecpa.org/shaped-by-faith-courses/)

- **Joining the Jesus Movement with The Rev. Canon Kate Harrigan:** This five-week course module centers on Presiding Bishop Michael Curry calling us to join the Jesus Movement in a loving, liberating and life-giving Way. For more information and to register: [https://diocesecpa.org/shaped-by-faith-courses/](https://diocesecpa.org/shaped-by-faith-courses/)

May 28-29, 2020: **Navigating the Rapids- Finding Hope in Trying Times**
Join in this Zoom event. A link will be sent after registration and before the start of the conference. It will be held on Thursday, May 28, from 5:30- 9:00 p.m. and Friday, May 29, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Join Keynoters Tod Bolsinger and Peter Steinke offering presentations on "Hope and the Mountain of Despair: Resilience for Change Leaders" and "Bowen Theory and Brain Functioning.” The event includes:

- An introductory workshop on Bowen Theory with Dana Runestad and Fulgence Nyengele
- Opportunities for prayer and conversation
- Q and A time with presenters
- Testimonies on the impact of systems thinking on ministry life
- Workshops
September 13, 2020: “God’s work. Our hands.” Day of Service
You are invited to add your voices to this year’s “God’s work. Our hands.” Day of Service. And, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry of PA can help you take your service to neighbor a step further toward justice through advocacy. Learn more here: https://tinyurl.com/y8a4p2hu

September 21, 2020: Bishop’s Open Golf Classic
The annual Bishop’s Open Golf Classic scheduled for May 11, 2020, has been postponed until September 21, 2020, with the same schedule. Registration starts at 11 with lunch following and a shotgun start at 12:30 p.m. at the Susquehanna Valley Country Club in Shamokin Dam. Snacks and prizes after golfing. The tournament benefits Camp Mount Luther’s annual fund. A flyer/bulletin insert containing information and registration form is available here: https://www.campmountluther.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2020-Sept-Golf-Tournament-Flyer.pdf. The camp’s golf tournament committee is currently looking for hole sponsors, silent auction items, and golfers. If you can help, please contact the camp office at 570-922-1587 or cml@campmountluther.org. Congregations are also encouraged to become hole sponsors. Get involved and help our synod’s outdoor ministry!
Camp Continues Response to COVID-19

As we are in our second month of dealing with the coronavirus outbreak, we continue to monitor the situation and make decisions about our operations. We are seeing light at the end of the tunnel! The immediate area around us is in the first wave of “turning yellow” with some restrictions being lifted. Hopefully, we are over the worst of this pandemic.

On May 2, the camp board met via Zoom to discuss our summer program. The board voted to postpone the start of our summer camping season until around July 1. We will be working on a new, condensed summer schedule and hope to publish it very soon. The board will meet again before the end of May to see where we are with restrictions and decide whether summer camp is viable for this season. The board is hopeful at this time that we can have an on-site summer program, but will be guided by government authorities as to whether that is possible.

As we look toward the start of July, we will work to finalize our plans, using input from the state, CDC, and the American Camp Association. New safety protocols will be developed and as they are finalized, we will communicate them to you.

This summer may not look like any summer before or any summer to come. But we do know that camp plays a vital role in the lives of children, youth, adults, and families as they connect with others, nature, and God. The board and staff will continue to be flexible, innovative, and proactive in developing plans for this ministry. This, too, shall pass and we ask for your prayers and support as we move forward with an even stronger program and facility than we had before this outbreak!

Don't forget we are still posting to our webpage “Resources for Kids during Coronavirus:” campmountluther.org/coronavirus

Spring Appeal

Now more than ever, we need the support of people like you to help us continue to minister to children, youth, adults, and families. With the loss of income from spring retreats and outdoor education, we have three new initiatives available for you to help us continue our work:

1. **Support the Staff**- donations are being sought to raise funds to hire summer staff this year. Our goal is to deliver camp in whatever method is appropriate as we learn more. If we are unable to be on-site, ideas are being developed to send out our summer staff to do service in your communities if we have funding.

2. **Team 21**- we determined that we need $21,000 per month to meet essential expenses. We did receive a Payroll Protection Program loan that will help us for the next two months. But, we'd like to secure recurring gifts that would be donated each month and total $21,000 to sustain our ministry.

3. **Health Furnishings**- should camp be held on-site this year, we will most likely have new protocols for screening and need additional medical supplies like gloves, masks, thermometers, and hand sanitizer. Giving money to help with these additional expenses would be a gift.

We are grateful for your partnership! If you are able, we ask that you consider sharing some of your government stimulus check for these needs. Know that those who don’t itemize their tax deductions receive bonus deductions for charitable donations of up to $300 this year. Whatever you can give, it will help us ensure the continuation of this ministry that helps so many connect to others, nature, and God.
Looking Ahead to Summer

As mentioned on page 1, we are working on a new schedule for summer programs because of our postponed start. Remember that we are extending the early registration discount to everyone this year and no late fees will be accessed.

This year’s theme at Mount Luther is “From Generation to Generation.” Campers will explore the stories of familiar Bible characters and their responses to God’s call and promised faithfulness in their lives. We’ll see how the enduring love instilled in the promise to Abraham and Sarah continues through Old Testament characters, to Jesus, to the early church, and on to us! Through the camp’s method of studying the Bible, called “GROW Time,” staff will help campers Gather and Reflect On the Word throughout their day, culminating in an evening worship service. Campers also get to do crafts, go swimming, play games, camp out, and sing songs during their time at Mount Luther.

Stay connected to camp this summer and find out what is happening during our various programs, visit Facebook (www.facebook.com/mountluther), Twitter (@mtluther) and our blog (www.campmountluther.wordpress.com). We try to update these daily but please realize that our staff is quite busy and if updates are not posted, it’s because the campers and staff are so busy that they can’t get an update posted. And, don’t forget, our daily First Light devotions will continue to be posted each weekday. Check them at www.cmlfaithformation.weebly.com.

Straight From the Camel’s Mouth

By Kyros T. Camel

The camels have quietly watched as some younger campers have been spotted taking hikes with their dad to post online. We even saw them discover one of our camel tracks. We can’t wait for more young kids to get back to camp!

Along with the camp staff, we are grateful for all those who continue to support the camp financially in this rough time. We heard that inFaith Community Foundation presented a check to the camp for $1,200. The grant was made possible through the generosity of a few of our donors who participated in the Thrivent Personal Donation Fund. Thrivent matched $1 for every $2 given to Thrivent Choice organizations during a special drive in March.

This time of year, we’d usually see a flurry of activity getting ready for the annual Bishop’s Open Golf Classic. You may have heard that it’s been postponed until September 21, 2020, with the same schedule. A new flyer/bulletin insert containing the new date and information and registration form is available on our website. The camp’s golf tournament committee continues to look for hole sponsors, silent auction items, and golfers. For more information visit our website or call the camp office.

Please know that the camels continue to think of all of you in these times and hope you are doing well. Make sure you stay well, eat your vegetables, and wash your hands. And wear those masks. Bandanas make great masks, too! Bye!

Give the Gift of Camp

A mother of two our campers wrote to our director and said, “I’m writing to thank you for helping my girls come to an amazing camp. My girls love this camp and everything you do. Thank you so very much!” These two girls were among 30 campers who received campership funding in 2019. One of the girls said, “I always have a fun time at camp. My favorite thing is to go swimming. I can’t wait to see you guys!” We attempt to allow anyone to have a camp experience, regardless of financial capacity. Campers apply to the director to receive a campership. We gave out almost $10,000 in aid last summer. While donations covered most of those costs, we were a little short in raising the needed funding. Consider giving a gift to the Youse Campership Fund today! Your donation will be put to good use and the recipients will be grateful. “Thank you for your generosity for me and my family. We really appreciate you paying my way into camp. I really love Camp Mount Luther. I love the staff and all the fun activities there,” the other daughter said.