2020 Year in Review

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

RESPONSE TO COVID-19: The synod responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in a number of ways. Information was shared on a website resource page. Bishop Collins met on Zoom with rostered leaders regularly. The synod office hours were initially reduced, with staff working from home. In addition, guidelines were shared for in-person worship and when not to gather.

SYNOD ASSEMBLY: Synod Council voted to postpone the 2020 Upper Susquehanna Synod Assembly, scheduled for June 19-20. Eventually, the assembly was cancelled, and an all-virtual assembly will be held in 2021.

ROUX REPRESENTS USS: At the ELCA Churchwide Assembly this summer in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Noah Roux of Zion, Turbotville (Pastor Erwin Roux), was elected to serve on the ELCA Church Council. Between meetings of the Churchwide Assembly, the Church Council provides guidance and leadership for the churchwide organization and the ELCA. The Church Council serves as the board of directors for the church. Its members include the churchwide officers, liaison bishops from each of the nine regions, and up to 45 other people elected by the Churchwide Assembly. They meet together at least twice a year and communicate by other means when necessary. The Region 8 Bishops and Church Council members got together after February meetings of the Conference of Bishops and Church Council. This was the first time both bodies met jointly.

NEW GIFT PLANNER: The ELCA Foundation, in partnership with Lutheran agencies, organizations and the synods of Allegheny, Lower Susquehanna, and Upper Susquehanna, introduced Sister Marianne Brock, as the new Regional Gift Planner. Sister Marianne most recently served a dual role as the Associate Executive Director of the Lutheran Camping Corporation of Central PA and Director of Camp Nawakwa in Arendtsville, PA. Prior to that time she served in congregational settings in youth, children, and family ministries. Sister Marianne is a rostered deacon in the ELCA and a member of the Deaconess Community of the ELCA, thus the title, “Sister.”

SYNOD STRATEGY: The Implementation Team continued to work on the synod strategy and looked at new ways to approach the strategy due to the pandemic. They spent time with synod council in refining their work and focus moving forward.

TENTH SEAFARERS COLLECTION: In total, 698 bags were picked up from the synod office on November 10 for the Seafarer’s Christmas-at-Sea bag program. The synod has been supporting this ministry for a decade.

GROW IN THE SNOW: This year’s Upper Susquehanna Synod Youth Retreat, GROW in the Snow, was held on February 7-8, 2020, at Camp Mount Luther. Over 55 youth and their adult leaders attended, exploring the theme “I Believe, I Do Believe.” The theme looked at the creeds of the church.

SUMMER SEASON ONLINE: Camp Mount Luther engaged in some creative ways to still have camp activities despite not being together on-site. Twelve returning staffers were hired for three weeks to do leadership training, service work, and develop a virtual camp. The virtual camp lasted one week. The camp also developed a webpage where they posted resources to help parents and kids affected by school and other closings early in the pandemic.

CLERGY RENEWAL DAY: Thanks to our synod council, the Bishop’s Retreat planning team, and the generosity of the ELCA Mission Investment Fund, a Renewal Day for rostered leaders was held on August 13, at Camp Mount Luther. This day gave rostered leaders opportunities for worship, conversation, relaxation, recreation, and refreshment, all while observing necessary pandemic precautions.
Food Cupboard of Blessings

St. Matthew’s, Shamokin Dam (Vicar Mindy Bartholomew) started a food cupboard for the homeless and food insecure in the area. The idea came from a member and her husband. The congregation embraced it. Rather than build one of the little boxes which had been the impetus, they created a large cupboard with food and other needed items. The congregation used a Thrivent grant to get it started and adds items regularly.

A Word from the Bishop on Covid-19 Vaccines

As we see the distribution of the vaccine beginning to take place, Bishop Collins strongly encourages everyone to connect with your healthcare provider to receive the vaccine as soon as it is available to you. For rostered leaders, note that you are included in Phase 1B of distribution. Receiving the vaccine is the next step we can all take to not only protect ourselves, but to protect our most vulnerable neighbors from this virus. It also provides hope for returning to in-person gatherings safely.

Up and Down the Valleys

A reminder for rostered leaders and congregational leadership: Congregational Leaders forms are due as soon as changes occur. We realize some elections have been delayed, while others aren’t held until mid-year. Please submit updated information as soon as changes occur.

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in PA (LAMPa) Program Director Lynn Fry will conclude her service with LAMPa in January 2021. She has served in the position for three years. Early in the New Year she will transition to a new position at United Lutheran Seminary serving as the Coordinator of Stewardship and Donor Relations.

Camp Mount Luther, the outdoor ministry of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, is now accepting applications for Summer Staff. Candidates must possess a commitment to Christ, a passion for the outdoors, and strong leadership and teamwork skills. The camp is accredited by the American Camp Association. If you or someone you know might be interested, please contact the camp office, or apply online at www.campmountluther.org/application

Chad Hershberger (Christ’s, Lewisburg, and synod director of communications) was quoted in the January 2021 edition of Living Lutheran magazine regarding the 50th anniversary of the TV show, Davey and Goliath.

Did you know that 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 here: https://tinyurl.com/y3rpr5xd
Upper Susquehanna Synod Events

January 23–February 14, 2021: Buffalo Valley Lay School of Theology
The Buffalo Valley Conference of the Upper Susquehanna Synod is excited to once again offer our annual Buffalo Valley Lay School of Theology! This year, they will be offering multiple workshops running from January 23rd through February 14th. A catalog of offerings is available here: bit.ly/BVLST2021. Please note that some workshops gather multiple times over the weeks while some are offered as asynchronous videos on YouTube (see the link below for the Buffalo Valley Lay School of Theology YouTube channel). Any workshops with a date and time associated with them will be offered via Zoom; login information for those Zoom gatherings, as well as any additional supplemental resources, will be provided by the moderator after you register for workshops. You can register to participate in workshops here: http://bit.ly/2021bvclayschool. Visit the YouTube Channel here: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMHt3TS0Fi5sPTZLBBXbtRA

Sunday, February 7, 2021: Camperson Meeting
The annual camperson meeting at Camp Mount Luther 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. This may be held in-person or via Zoom, depending on current conditions. Campersons will get Camel Bucks to the camp store for all those from their church who attend!

February 14, 2021: 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 participate in outdoor ministries on this day, February 14, 2021. 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. Normal 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/2021/01/2021-Mount-Luther-Sunday-Flyer.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. Because of the pandemic, the camp is asking congregations to be creative and promote camp in some way.

March 5–6, 2021: GROW in the Snow
This event has now been cancelled for this year.

June 19, 2021: Synod Assembly
The Upper Susquehanna Synod Assembly for this year will be all digital. The planning team has been busy working on preliminary preparations for the event. Voting members from each congregation will need to be identified by mid-February. Serve your church by being part of this historical event! Talk to your pastor about being your congregation’s representative. Please know that you will need to be able to use technology and/or have someone next to you to help you navigate this digital experience.

October 28, 2021: Lutheran Day at the Capital
As we continue to move through the pandemic, we look forward and invite you to mark your calendar for this year’s Lutheran Day. We will gather in Harrisburg on Thursday, October 28, 2021. We have moved this annual event from the spring into the fall in prayerful anticipation that we may safely gather by then. Learn more here: https://www.lutheranadvocacypa.org/save-the-date-for-lutheran-day-2021-october-28/
The Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod will offer an introductory course in Lutheran Confessions by Zoom, February 20-April 3, 2021, 10:00 a.m.

The course is a portion of the synod’s instructional program for Authorized Lay Worship Leaders. Other interested persons are invited to participate. The Rev. Michael L. Lozano, Bishop will be the instructor.

There is no fee for taking the course. Students are responsible for the purchase or borrow of the textbook.

Please register by contacting Pastor Sandra Jones at prskjones@gmail.com by February 10. A syllabus and Zoom link will be provided by Bishop Lozano.

Introduction to the Lutheran Confessions

This course will delve into the writings of Martin Luther and the early reformers. Audio, video and written materials will be used to introduce Lutheran history and theological concepts. Conversation, lecture and the adult learning model will facilitate individual and group synthesis of the materials. Weekly questions and small projects will assist individuals in discovering the application of Lutheran theology for application for the authorized lay worship leader instructional program.

**Course Dates**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tr>
<td>February 20</td>
<td>The Task of Theology</td>
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<td>February 27</td>
<td>The Power of the Word</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 13</td>
<td>Righteousness of God in Christ</td>
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<td>March 20</td>
<td>Promise of the Sacraments</td>
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<td>March 27 (Passover)</td>
<td>Reform of the Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 3 (Vigil of Easter)</td>
<td>Living and Dying as a Christian</td>
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**Concept for Learning**

1. Bishop Lozano will email each participant a final detailed syllabus prior to the start of the class.
2. Participants will spend approximately one hour engaging the texts for the week’s theme.
3. Participants will receive, no later than Tuesday of each week, additional optional materials for consideration along with a series of questions to guide their study prior to class.
4. The one and half hour class will be by Zoom at 10:00am on the dates provided. Participants will bring to class their questions from the readings, their self-discovery, and observations for class discussion.
5. Post Zoom class, participants will receive a short assignment each week to facilitate the integration and application of the week’s theme.

**Primary Reading Material** (digital, hard and paper bound copies can be found online)

*Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings 3rd Edition* by Timothy Lull (author), William Russell (editor), 2012
Camperson Meeting Next Month

The annual camperson meeting at Camp Mount Luther will be on Sunday, February 7, 2021, 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. Campersons will get Camel Bucks to the camp store for all those who attend from their congregation! A week prior we will decide if we will meet in person or virtually, depending on current COVID conditions.

GROW in the Snow Cancelled

This year’s synod youth retreat at Camp Mount Luther has now been cancelled due to the pandemic. It will not be rescheduled. Look for details in late 2021 about 2022’s event.

Summer Staff Reunite

Our 2020 Summer Staff got together to reconnect, eat lunch, and walk around camp on Saturday, January 9. Pandemic precautions were followed, and they all said that they enjoyed having face-to-face conversations with one another. Applications are now being accepted for next summer’s staff. Go to www.campmountluther.org/application for more information and to apply online.

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 to celebrate the annual “Mount Luther Sunday” on February 14, 2021, 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 14, 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.
Creating Memories that Last!
By Amy Shuck

After an evening event to Camp Mount Luther (at Shade Mountain Winery), I got to thinking of all the things camp means to me. My uncle, Gary Struble, told me how he hunted there, and how Grandpa Struble worked on the apple orchard before it was camp, (something I never knew.) Mom tells me stories of how her Luther League cleared the spot that I believe is now Maple village. Many years as a camper and two summers living there (as staff), AND the best thing growing up... it was literally in my backyard! So much history and many blessings from this very special place!

Amy is a former staff member from the early 90s and is also an Authorized Lay Worship Leader in our synod. She is a member of Messiah Lutheran, New Berlin, and works as a CNA at Evangelical Community Hospital.

2021 First Third Appeal

This year, the Camp Mount Luther Board decided to budget in thirds and appeal to our friends to help us meet the financial needs of our outdoor ministry. So, from now until the end of April, we estimate that to continue to provide ministry through salaries, operating overhead, and normal costs, we need to raise $135,000. That will allow us to do our ministry without relying on program fees that normally support us. Be part of this effort from the start with a gift to Camp Mount Luther this new year!

Camp Receives Total Inclusion! Grant

Camp Mount Luther was blessed to receive a $9,000 operating grant at the end of 2020 from the Total Inclusion! Program. Total Inclusion! is a collaborative effort of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) churchwide organization and Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM), the association of the camps and retreat centers affiliated with the ELCA.

Total Inclusion! is an opportunity to inspire, educate and resource LOM organizations as they move toward a wider and more intentional inclusion of people who have been historically marginalized in the church – especially people of color, people with disabilities, and people who identify as LGBTQIA+. The grant can be used for general operating expenses. As part of the grant, camp staff will be participating in some events to learn more about being a more welcoming and hospitable place. The grant originators recognized the strain COVID-19 placed on Lutheran outdoor ministries and made this opportunity available.

PPP Forgiven

As part of 2020’s CARES Act, we were fortunate to apply and be given a nearly $52,000 Payroll Protection Program loan in April. Monies from that loan were used primarily for personnel expenses from mid-April to the end of June. In December, we were notified by Mifflinburg Bank and Trust that our application for forgiveness was approved. We are grateful for this program from the federal government to help us financially during the pandemic. We have received information about the new PPP that Congress enacted recently and will be exploring our eligibility for that program.

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Please remember Mount Luther in your gift plan.