If I Weren’t a Counselor, a YAGM I Would Be

Written by Katie Romano

They’re a little gritty, occasionally sunburnt, and enthusiastically dishing out high fives. They’re advocating for justice, standing in solidarity, and witnessing the global church in action. They were once camp counselors, cooks, and camphands serving at one of 128 Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM) sites within the USA. Today, they’re Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) serving communities in eleven country programs around the world. While their scenery has changed dramatically, current YAGMs share the ways in which their summers with LOM prepared them for the consistent themes of living simply and building relationships boldly.

“Camp requires a willingness to give every activity your all, even if you aren’t 100% sure what you’re supposed to do,” said Rachel Mann, a staff alumnus of Camp Emmaus (Paths – MN) who is currently serving in Fianarantsoa, Madagascar. Mann reflected on the difficulties of language and cultural barriers even seven months into her year of service. “But I jump in anyways and try to experience everything to the fullest. And that’s something I learned how to do (and enjoy) at camp,” she said.

For some, like YAGM Central Europe volunteer Megan Freudenberg, working at camp was the first exposure they had to the YAGM program. She noted that her summers at Camp Lutherhill in La Grange, Texas taught her to open up and praise God out loud in her community. This year in Nyírtelek and Görögszállás, Hungary, Freudenberg utilizes her LOM experience to lead Bible study, mentor at a Confirmation Camp, and teach English camp songs and hymns. “It should be noted that I would not be doing YAGM if it wasn’t for my time as a LOM camper and staff member,” asserted Lars Anderson, a staff alumnus of both Voyageurs Lutheran Ministry (MN) and Luther Park Bible Camp (WI) who currently serves in the Jerusalem and the West Bank program volunteering at the Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour.  

Continued on the next page
Upon arriving in the Holy Land, Anderson observed, “For the first time in my life, I was no longer part of the majority. Although this was intimidating when I first arrived, skills that I learned at camp helped me to acclimate to my new environment. Camp taught me to listen to and learn from other people, to treat others with love and respect, and work with others to grow as a community. Being in an international context helped me to realize how well camp trained me to live alongside people from all backgrounds.”

When it came to doling out advice for future LOM-prepped YAGMs, Anderson stated, “I consider working at camp and YAGM to be the two best decisions that I’ve made in my life... You will grow as a person, gain new perspectives on life, meet and love people from a different culture, and experience God in a way that you haven’t before.” Mann agreed, encouraging interested individuals to, “go in with an open mind and an open heart. Get ready to love up on your community just like you would love up on your cabin every single week. Don’t be afraid to be vulnerable. Just like when you bond with camp staff and campers, being vulnerable and authentic with your community leads to incredible relationships and experiences.” With servant hearts, grit, and a bit of aloe vera, the experiences gained through LOM changed the way in which these YAGMs interact with their siblings in Christ from every nation. Mann concluded, “Jump in, give it your all, and be amazed at where God will take you.”

LOM Conference in 6 Months

Travel information and costs for the 2018 LOM Conference are now available on the LOM website. See that information at www.lomnetwork.org/conference. That’s also where registration will go live soon. This year’s annual conference will be held on November 5-9, 2018, at T Bar M Camp and Retreat Center in New Braunfels, Texas. To see more about the site, visit https://www.tbarmcamps.org/retreats.

The theme is “Good Works in Grace Spurred in Love.” Our theme verse is Hebrews 10: 24 which reads, “Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds.” Baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we have been redeemed and blessed with God’s gracious and eternal love. Everything we have and everything we are is because of God’s love for us and this love empowers us – it spurs us on in good works to a life of service for others. We gather as outdoor ministry professionals to celebrate the many gift’s God has given and to challenge one another in the development of these gifts, to strive for excellence in our work, that the gifts given are fully utilized and through which all may experience God’s love.
Executive Directors’ Gathering in April

LOM Executive Directors gathered for a conference at Lutheranch (GA), April 23-26. Lutheranch provided an outstanding and comfortable setting for all that they did to support and consult with each other around the theme of "Navigating the Future."

Using the World Cafe model for the group process of identifying the most important issues for outdoor ministries to emerge from the group itself, Mary Kay Duchene, the keynote speaker, was masterful in bringing the deliberations to practical and realistic conclusion strategies for dealing with those same issues. The group was honored by the participation of Rev. Dr. Stephen Bouman, executive director for ELCA congregational and synodical mission, throughout the entire event, and much attention was given to the value of outdoor ministries for the strategic goals of the whole ELCA.

Chandler Carriker and Matt Simpkins provided enthusiastic leadership for the worship and music experiences, and Darlene and Tammy of the Lutheranch staff made sure the participants were well fed. Everyone involved agreed that this was a great way to enter into the "home stretch" of getting ready for the summer season after what most of the participants described as a very busy winter and spring. executive directors of 32 LOM organizations participated, and 10 of the participants are new to the position of executive director during the past year!

Sarah Lefler, executive director, and Amy Sowers, associate director, of Mar-Lu-Ridge (MD), have developed guidelines for the inclusion of staff who are transgender as staff members. They are willing to share the results of their work with other LOM outdoor ministry organizations. If you would like to get a copy of this document, please contact Don Johnson director@lomnetwork.org
OMC Gets Together in March

Representatives from LOM, Presbyterian Camp and Conference Association, United Methodist Camp and Retreat Ministries, the United Church of Canada, Episcopal Camps and Conference Centers, and the Outdoor Ministry Association of the United Church of Christ gathered together on March 18-21, 2018, for a meeting of the Outdoor Ministries Connection (OMC) at Lutheran Hills Camp (Morgantown, IN). The group discussed the current projects of OMC and visited the headquarters of the American Camp Association to talk about how ACA and the OM associations can partner.

Don Johnson, executive director of LOM, reflected on the event. “This was the first time that I had the good fortune to represent LOM at these meetings. These days were filled with an abundant agenda of exploring many ways that we have been and will be collaborating on projects that can be more effectively accomplished by pooling our many and diverse resources for outdoor ministry. These projects include endeavors like Compass Points, the recent Interim Executive Director Training Event, the OMC oversample for the impending research project of ACA, biennial surveys of all our camps to harvest data that can help us sense trends and needs as they emerge, and the upcoming Great Gathering,” Johnson said.

The Great Gathering will be an opportunity for all these associations to gather in conference together. It will be held at on November 10-14, 2019 at Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center in North Carolina. LOM’s own Nathan Pile is co-chair of the planning team.

Johnson added, “Another highlight for me was meeting such a great group of outdoor ministry folks from other denominations with whom we have so much in common. It was, however, demoralizing to lose so badly at some of the late night card games!!!”

Calling All Camps!!!

Do you have an item to donate for this year’s LOM auction in Texas? Start thinking and planning! Big or small, we’ll auction them all! It could be a small item you could bring for the silent auction that showcases your camp OR it could be a bigger item you bring for the live auction. Or, how about a trip or excursion that everyone will be talking about? Let’s break last year’s auction total and support an organization we love! Remember, we’ll have an online catalog of items to see ahead of time so you have plenty of time to apply for a line of credit for those big ticket items! Or, you can begin crowdfunding with all your friends to take that adventure trip you’ve always wanted. Plan ahead, open your wallets, and always remember, “It’s not about getting a good deal; it’s about supporting a great cause!” To correspond with the auction committee, e-mail auction@lomnetwork.org.

On April 15-18, the Coordinating Council for the Compass Points Certificate Program met at Columbia Theological Seminary (Decatur, GA). This meeting brought together representatives from the four outdoor ministry associations (PCCCA, UMCRM, LOM, and OMA-UCC) that share this program. This gathering featured a very productive meeting with the President and the Acting Dean of Faculty of Columbia Theological Seminary where the partnership between Compass Points and the seminary was reaffirmed. The council’s work included the evaluation of previous classes, the upcoming schedule of classes, the budget for 2018 and 2019, and the capstone process for the fall. There could have as many as 12 people graduate in the next nine months! The council is excited about the future of this program and we hope you will help spread the word about our upcoming classes in October.
**Words from Don: “Collaboration”**

LOM has been involved in some pretty exciting collaborations and it seems like the intensity of these collaborations has been recently expanding.

This issue of the newsletter is highlighting examples of some of these expanding collaboration possibilities. The article by Katie Romano in and of itself is loaded with examples of the “fruits” of collaboration with just one of the Ministry Partner members of LOM – Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM). It’s clearly the case that not only do all of us in LOM treasure the collaboration we have with YAGM, but it’s totally obvious that YAGM is mutually grateful for the impact that outdoor ministry experience is having to prepare YAGM volunteers for the challenges with which they are confronted.

And have you listened to the most recent podcast posted to the LOM website (lomnetwork.org)? There’s a longstanding LOM relationship with another Ministry Partner Member of LOM – Lutheran World Relief (LWR). In this podcast, Chandler Carriker does his typically great job of reminding us of the wealth of resources available to LOM organizations through LWR and how valuable we can be for helping this incredibly important ministry of the church to lift awareness of all they are doing throughout the world to be one more representation of “God’s work, our hands”. By the way, Chandler and his good friend Matt Simpkins will be the music & worship leaders for the LOM Executive Directors Gathering, April 23-26, at the newest site in the LOM network, Lutheranch (GA).

As I write this column, I’m taking a breather from the non-stop meetings during the annual face-to-face gathering of the Compass Points Coordinating Council. Compass Points is an in-depth outdoor ministry continuing education program that we do in collaboration with our Methodist, Presbyterian, and UCC outdoor ministry colleagues. The certificate for successful completion of all the individual courses is issued by the Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, GA. It’s another example of something that we Lutherans can provide for one another with a much higher degree of excellence with our ecumenical partners than we might be able to do on our own. Check it out: [http://www.compasspointsprogram.org/](http://www.compasspointsprogram.org/)

Speaking of ecumenical collaborations – LOM is part of an organization known as the Outdoor Ministry Connection (OMC). OMC is involved in lots of things that amplify what we might be able to do on our own. One example – the once every three years survey that we’ve been commissioning LOM’s own Jake Sorenson to do. It’s providing us all with a wealth of data that makes it possible to not only have an accurate snapshot of the state of affairs within our own Lutheran family, but also see comparisons with our ecumenical partners. One of the most exciting things that will be happening before we know it is the GREAT GATHERING that will be like our LOM Annual Conference on steroids because it will have about 600-700 outdoor ministry colleagues gathered together at the same time and place. The most recent past president of LOM, Nathan Pile, is the co-chair of this big event: RelationSHIFT: The Great Gathering: November 10-14, 2019, Lake Junaluska, NC. But the Great Gathering is in 2019, so I hope you are planning now to be part of the LOM Annual Gathering for this year: November 5-9, 2018, at [T Bar M Camp and Retreat Center](http://www.tbarm.com) in New Braunfels, Texas. We expect registration to go live on the LOM website by July 1.

And finally, as I think of LOM collaboration with so many resources that are available to us in the ELCA family, I’m still on a “high” from the opportunity that I had with several other LOMers this past weekend. At the invitation of Christina Jackson-Skelton, executive director of ELCA Mission Advancement, we who represented LOM joined with other organizations that have a particular mission focus of serving marginalized populations. We were invited to serve as a “think tank” for a grant proposal being prepared by the ELCA Continued on next page
for the development and/or expansion of ministries with marginalized populations. Other LOM members involved in this forum: our Board president Casey Fuerst; C.J. Clark, Living Water (MI); Brenda Olson Bingea, Bay Lake (MN). Ministry Partners of LOM: Rev. Yaheil Curry, Rescue, Release, Restore; Carol Josefowski, ELCA Disability Ministries Coordinator; Rev. Brian Krause, Camp Able at Joy Ranch (SD); Deacon Ross Murray, The Naming Project which takes place at Bay Lake Camp. From ELCA Mission Advancement: Deacon Jessica Hacker and Jeff VonWald. In addition to the privilege of knowing that LOM is being included in this process in a major way, those of us representing LOM were even more convinced of the opportunities for LOM to be more intentional and proactive in reaching out to marginalized populations and providing resources for our organizations to be better equipped to welcome and include marginalized persons in our ministries with the assurance of safety and full participation.

As you well know from the context in which you serve, there’s nothing like COLLABORATION to amplify and expand the impact we can have in this world!

So as you head into another exciting and busy summer season, may you experience the gratification of knowing that your ministry is important beyond measure; may you experience the joy and happiness of providing the kind of experiences that bring the truth and light of the gospel into the lives of so many individuals; and know that you are included in the prayers of your LOM colleagues for a safe and happy summer.

Thank you for your ministry.

Don Johnson, LOM Executive Director

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**Registration Open for Compass Points**

Now is the time to make plans to attend the two Compass Points certificate programs in October. Non-Profit Business Management will be offered on October 14-17 and the Articulating Our Mission, Role, and Value course is scheduled for October 17-20. You can take one or both of these classes which will be hosted by Kavanaugh Conference and Retreat Center (Crestwood, KY). Please go to [www.compasspointsprogram.org](http://www.compasspointsprogram.org) to learn more about these courses (and register).

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**Prayer Requests**

Prayers of celebration for Melissa Kornkven, associate director of Metigoshe (ND), and husband Erik, upon the birth of a daughter, Sena Nanette Kornkven, on April 9.

Prayers for happiness upon the retirement of Don Shunkwiler, executive director of Sugar Creek (WI).

Prayers of success for Brittney Swanson, recently appointed to begin serving on May 15 in the position of executive director of Lutheran Lakeside Outdoor and Retreat Center (IA).

Prayers for happiness upon the retirement of Phil Geleske as executive director of Briarwood (TX).

Prayers for success for Matt Baumhardt, recently appointed as acting director of Briarwood (TX).
Innovative Program: Wittel Farm Growing Project

This is one of the programs nominated for LOM’s Innovative Program Award last year.

About eleven percent of the population of Lancaster County, PA, is food insecure. That’s 60,000 people, in one of the most productive agricultural areas in this country, who don’t have sufficient food to have three meals a day. And a third of these people are children. The Wittel Farm Growing Project is making a difference by growing fresh, healthy, nutritious produce for distribution through the Lancaster food relief system to help alleviate hunger in Lancaster County, PA.

The Lutheran Camping Corporation (LCC) of Central PA is blessed with many resources including three uniquely distinct ministry sites, one of which is the Wittel Farm. The Wittel Farm is an 80 acre farm composed of about 40 acres of agricultural fields with the remainder of the property being woodland and lawn around the farmhouse and barn. While LCC has been a thoughtful steward of the farm, the fields were rented to a local farmer who cared for them and utilized them in his farming operation. Over time, there has been a growing desire to utilize the fields more directly in a ministry capacity. This goal was realized in 2016 when the pilot effort of the Growing Project was initiated using a work force composed only of volunteers. This effort produced about 5,000 pounds of produce which were donated for distribution through the Lancaster County Food relief system in 2016. The Wittel Farm Growing Project is working in partnership with Hunger-Free Lancaster County, a coalition of more than 30 organizations including faith-based groups, businesses, charitable organizations, the media, and government to alleviate hunger in Lancaster County.

Building on the success of 2016, The Wittel Farm Growing Project expanded to producing vegetables on five acres in 2017. Beginning in May and continuing through September, volunteers from local churches, Camp Kirchenwald, businesses, and civic groups come to the farm two to three days each week to plant, tend, and harvest the crops which include sweet corn, tomatoes, peppers, squash, potatoes, cucumbers, green beans, lettuce and other greens, and pumpkins. Once picked, the vegetables are distributed directly to hungry people through a number of partners including Grace Lutheran Church in Lancaster, Elizabethtown Community Cupboard, Lancaster Council of Churches, Community Action Partnership in Lancaster, three Peter’s Porch Ministries, and the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank.

Additionally, there is an educational component to the project as volunteer groups and individuals are oriented to the project purpose, its goals, and its impacts/outcomes. Also, the Wittel Summer Day Program, “Faith on the Farm,” is a hands-on Christian education experience for children in first through sixth grades which runs throughout the summer at Wittel Farm and is focused on hunger and justice issues. Many Faith on the Farm activities overlap with Growing Project themes and include helping with the Growing Project tasks.

To read more about the Innovative Program Award and download an application, visit https://www.lomnetwork.org/awards/innovative-program-award/. Deadline for applications is in September.
From one of our LOM Ministry Partners

The Board Coach – Keith Johnson

“There is no more important task for LOM in today’s increasingly complex and rapidly changing world than to train and empower outstanding boards to enable camps to continue to thrive and effectively serve.”

After having served in outdoor ministries for 43 years in a variety of settings, Keith Johnson is committed to equipping boards and councils to meet today’s challenges and opportunities. He is launching “The Board Coach,” a spiritually-based consulting initiative to help camp boards take their ministries to the “next level.” Just as boards invest in education to enhance staff effectiveness, it is equally important for ministries to invest in board leadership and development.

Why Should You Consider Keith Johnson?

• Keith excels at developing dynamic and top-notch boards;
• Low rates with $50 per hour discount for LOM members;
• Additional reduction in rates for off-site consultation;
• A full array of workshops are offered; and
• References available from former board chairs.

The Board Coach offers three services:
1) Off-site governance audits;
2) Leadership training workshops, and
3) Follow-up consultation and support.

Off-site Governance Audits

Off-site review of your organization’s governing structure, job descriptions and related governance practices and policies. Use of a matrix to profile members and analyze their gifts, abilities, support and involvement, with suggestions for ways to enhance performance.

Six Leadership Training Workshops

“Board Governance 101” (introductory); “Toward Becoming a Visionary Board” (intermediate); Dynamic and Paradoxical Relationship Between the Board and Executive (advanced); Governance Committee (intermediate); Generative Thinking (advanced); and Board Member Role in Fund Raising (intermediate). Keith will also customize a training workshop to meet your specific needs.

Follow-up Consultation and Support

To insure the most productive use of any workshop, it is recommended that a minimum of three one-hour conversations be conducted electronically after three months, after six months and after one year.

For more information: keith.allan.johnson2@gmail.com; 828-230-7282
American Camp Association- Resources at Your Fingertips

As the summer camp season nears, directors and other staff have plenty of items to cross off before those campers arrive. To support the work of camp professionals, the American Camp Association (ACA), has assembled a list of valuable resources for you to have at your fingertips that can take you from staff training through the summer.

**S’mores and Other Sticky Stuff.** Available through the ACA bookstore, this interactive game is perfect for precamp and in-service staff training. S’mores identifies sticky situations and helps staff identify responses, promotes discussion about difficult issues, and helps reinforce the role each staff member plays in the camp’s risk management plan. Learn more. [https://www.acabookstore.org/p-5870-smores-and-other-sticky-stuffa-game-for-training-camp-staff-2nd-edition.aspx](https://www.acabookstore.org/p-5870-smores-and-other-sticky-stuffa-game-for-training-camp-staff-2nd-edition.aspx)

**Faith-based Activity Resources for Front-line Staff.** The ACA Bookstore has tools for faith-based camp staff, with resources from retreat models, to staff training, to games, activities, and scavenger hunts, to teaching about nature. Learn more. [https://www.acabookstore.org/c-273-faith-based-resources.aspx](https://www.acabookstore.org/c-273-faith-based-resources.aspx)

**Camp Crisis Hotline. 1-800-573-9019.** ACA offers a 24/7 crisis hotline serves as a confidential resource for camps in crisis and provides callers with the opportunity to talk through their crisis with a trained third party. Although the hotline is not a medical or legal expert call line, it can help you think through your issues and options. Keep the number posted where you can easily reach it, should the need arise.

**Crisis Communications Toolkit.** Communicating effectively during a crisis is critical. To help camps prepare in the event of a crisis, ACA’s toolkit helps you understand the components of a good crisis communications plan. Download the communication toolkit. [https://www.acacamps.org/resource-library/crisis-communications-toolkit](https://www.acacamps.org/resource-library/crisis-communications-toolkit)

**ACA Connect.** ACA’s online community lets you engage with your peers, other camp professionals doing the same work you are doing. Network with others on a variety of discussion topics, ask questions, or join an existing conversation. ACA Connect offers an Open Member Forum for all members across the country, along with localized communities so you can pose questions or discuss issues of importance to your own geographic area. Get connected. [https://www.acacamps.org/connect](https://www.acacamps.org/connect)

Questions about these resources and others? Call or email Grechen Throop at 765-342-8456 or gthroop@ACAcamps.org
Volunteer Opportunities Available

On behalf of our Ministry Partners of LOM, please share this information with those who you feel might be open to considering volunteer service opportunities like this:

Come do a year of service with either Border Servant Corps (BSC), Lutheran Volunteer Corps (LVC), or Urban Servant Corps (USC), the three domestic yearlong service programs of the ELCA. BSC, LVC, and USC operate off of four tenets: Simplicity/Sustainability, Service/Justice, Intentional Community, and Spirituality. Participants are placed at a non-profit full time for one year (in areas such as immigration, health care, education, environmental sustainability, and more). All volunteers in a program live together in community and practice simple and sustainable living. These programs offer all volunteers housing, health insurance, vacation time, a modest living stipend, and additional training throughout the year. You don't have to be Lutheran (or Christian) to participate. These programs welcome and encourage the participation of people of all gender identities and sexual orientations; and, you don't have to be a U.S. citizen to participate.

LOM News will not be published during the summer camping season. The next edition will be published in early September.

Have a Great Summer Season

From the LOM Board and Staff

SUPPORT LOM

To make a gift to LOM, visit http://www.lomnetwork.org/donate.html. If you would like to explore the possibility of including LOM in your will or other planned giving strategies, please contact Executive Director Don Johnson at director@lomnetwork.org or 603-848-9904.