Historic Gathering Brings Together Outdoor Ministry Professionals

About 550 outdoor ministry professionals, board members, and others gathered together this month for the first-ever ecumenical conference for mainline Christian denominational camp and retreat associations. The Outdoor Ministries 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.

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 they 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. (continued next page)
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.

Great Gathering Co-Chairs Nathan Pile of LOM and Elise Bates Russell of the PCCCA welcome the crowd on the first day of the event. Deb Roberts of LOM served was chair of the workshop planning team.

Rev. Tracy Polzin, a former LOM camp director and currently a parish pastor, served as one of the chaplains at The Great Gathering. Here, she shares a devotional time during a morning at the gathering.

The communion table at the closing worship, featuring chalices from all the denominations represented.
Great Gathering participants celebrated the 100\textsuperscript{th} 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. In addition, the first of two LOM business meetings of the conference was held at Lutheridge. The annual budget was presented as well as new board members elected.

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).

Auction Raises Over $40K

LOM held an auction at LOM Day at The Great Gathering. Items donated by LOM organizations raised $42,460. A gift of $4,246 will go to Lutheran Refugee and Immigration Services. We have worked with LIRS to use this donation to establish a fund whose purpose will be for them to identify children from migrant or refugee families, or unaccompanied minors, who will benefit from a summer camp experience at an LOM organization. We also received confirmation that Sharon and Jack Wineman of Florence, AZ, have offered a challenge match gift for the auction tithe. They have agreed to match up to $4,000 of the 10\% of auction proceeds that LOM will be sending to LIRS so that will mean that we’ll be tithing over $8,000 to LIRS!!!! The auction has become a highlight of the conference and continues to raise needed funds. Paul Hanson (pictured at left) served as auctioneer.
Third Leadership Award Presented at Conference

The third Manlove-Howells Leadership Award was presented at LOM Day at the 2019 Great Gathering. It was given to Jerry Olstad, former director of outdoor ministries for the Lutheran Church in America. Videos were shown with remarks by Jerry Manlove, Andrea Scoffield, and Paul Hill. Olstad was unable to attend because of flight cancellations but was live streamed into the Faith Center at Lutheridge.

Mark Burkhardt of the ELCA, who was hired as Jerry’s assistant in the late 1980s, talked about three strengths he saw in Jerry. The first was his dedication to shared leadership. “It was never about Jerry,” Burkhardt said. Olstad always wanted to split up staff roles in a way that made sense. The second strength was his big ideas. “He wasn’t afraid to tackle the big stuff,” Burkhardt said. One of those big ideas was the International Camp Counselor Program, which is still in existence today. Over 900 international counselors from 50 countries have come to camp during the program. Finally, Olstad recognized leadership abilities in people. “He would always talk about new leaders he discovered in his trips,” Burkhardt said. He added that Olstad was intensely loyal to those leaders and stuck by them.

In accepting the award, Olstad said, “Jerry Manlove and Paul Howells were certainly leaders in the church. I was glad to join that club and now we see how that work is being lived out in you.” Due to bad weather, Olstad’s scheduled flights were cancelled, changing his plans to be at the event in person.

Second Diversity Grant Awarded

LOM presented the second Diversity Grant at the second LOM business meeting on Wednesday morning of The Great Gathering. The winner this year was Luther Height’s New American outreach program. Executive Director Kelly Preboski accepted the award from Recognitions Committee Member Tracy Polzin. The camp has worked for the past two summers to bring youth to camp to provide a safe haven and quality experience to youth who likely would not get a camp experience within the refugee population. Summer 2018, they brought 14 youth to camp. With expanded efforts in fundraising and partnering, they were able to bring 26 youth to camp, two different weeks in 2019. In summer 2020, they would like to bring more youth to camp, but begin an outreach effort in Boise, where a high population of New Americans are located. They hope to create a family night during one of their day camp events in the city where summer staff can create a camp night for families who have registered their youth to come to camp or are interested in sending their youth to camp. The Diversity Grant of $2,000 was made possible with the funds coming from “ELCA Outdoor Ministries Endowment Fund.”

Innovative Program Award: LOM presented the 2019 Innovative Program Award to Camp of the Cross Ministries (ND) for their program, “Building Bridges with the Three Affiliated Tribes.” The camp would like to create an atmosphere of trust with in the three Affiliated Tribes so they can have another Day Camp this upcoming summer in one of the segments called “White Shield.” The camp would also like to offer scholarships to campers to come be on site with in 2021.
2019 Leadership Training Event Recap
By Gretchen Bachman, LTE Chair

An energetic group of 14 students gathered with eight faculty for the 2019 LTE in Lake Junaluska. This year's track was focused on camp administration and included such topics as budget and finance, board function, risk management, food service, social media policy, financial development, and more. In addition to the faculty, we had four guest lecturers join us and they all did an amazing job! Each course of this 4-day event was filled with thought provoking ideas, reminders of things we should be doing, and the challenge to build relationships in all that we do. We were reminded that grace is enough, that people give because they are asked, and that inclusivity is about more than simply inviting people to the "party". Thank you to all who made this event possible - faculty, participants, and the LTE planning team.

2020 marks the 25th year of the Leadership Training Event. If you have not attended one, or you know someone who is thinking about getting into Outdoor Ministry, plan to attend November 5-9 at Luther Park in Chetek, WI. And while next year's event is a program focus, the information is applicable to anyone (not just program directors) who works with the program that happens at your organization (and it's all program, people!).

LOM Board Elections

The following were elected to the LOM Board at the annual meetings held during The Great Gathering: Jake Sorenson (at large), and Amanda Rasner (professional). Chris Olsen Binga was announced as the new board-elected member. Elected to the Nominating Committee were C.J. Clark and Hannah Loeffler-Kemp. Also, at the annual meeting, the 2020 Budget was adopted. It includes money for the development of a new app for staff recruitment. In addition, Jake Sorenson announced a new camp and church leadership research project, aimed at getting data from summer staff. See next page for bio info of new board members!

Thanks to our Sponsors

A big thank you to our major sponsors of this year’s LOM Day at The Great Gathering.

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God’s work. Our hands.

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God’s work. Our hands.
New LOM Board Members

Chris Olson Bingea, elected by the Boards of Directors of LOM Member Organizations - Chris is an ELCA Pastor working at First Lutheran Church in the inner city of St. Paul. Her congregation works with many people experiencing poverty and they are an RIC congregation affirming LGBTQIA+ persons. This congregation owns an island camp in Northern Minnesota serving LGBTQIA+ groups, multi-cultural groups, interfaith, and secular non-profits. Chris brings 40 years+ experience in camping ministry, a desire to shake up the Church with a wide welcome, and a concern for those on the margins, particularly LGBTQIA+ folks, people experiencing poverty, and those black and brown people we need in leadership in this Church.

Jake Sorenson, reelected to a second term as an At-Large member of the LOM Board Jake has a PhD in practical theology, and his work (mostly research and writing) has focused on outdoor ministry. He directs a research and consulting company called Sacred Playgrounds, which specializes in research on outdoor ministry. Through his work, he is connected with other Christian camping organizations, so he brings to the board some ecumenical sensibilities and a desire to collaborate. He also brings some unique research skills.

Amanda Rasner, elected to a first term in one of the three Board seats limited to practicing outdoor ministry professionals - Amanda serves as the camp director at Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp and she’s been in this role since January 2019. Her passion and skills are around staff development, programming, and radical hospitality. Amanda strongly believes in collaboration. She loves the community she’s experienced in LOM and the rich resources LOM provides. She feels that LOM has a forward thinking, Spirit-driven, inclusive approach and serving on the Board will provide an opportunity to learn and give back.

C.J. Clark, reelected to a second term on the LOM Nominating Committee – CJ is the executive director of Living Water Ministries (MI). He is passionate about the communities formed at camp and the ability of the camp environment to destroy stereotypes while laying a foundation for the reign of God to be made real. He explains that “the reign of God becomes evident as we learn to see Christ in each other and in ourselves, create access to all, and reform our communities to be diverse, welcoming spaces. I believe the vehicle of camp can be used to dismantle systems of oppression through immersive experiences and help participants find each other and find God.”

Hannah Loeffler-Kemp, elected to her first term on the LOM Nominating Committee - For Hannah, “the purpose of camp is to provide a sacred space for campers to explore their faith through experiential learning in creation and intentional community. Outdoor ministry provides places filled with unconditional love, overflowing joy, and where a Christ-centered community is felt at its core. At camp, we accompany the youth and adults in their questions, doubts, identity, and self-understanding. Camp is a place where questions and doubts are met with understanding and acceptance. I believe that camp can equip and empower people to go out and intentionally engage in the world with love and grace.”
In Memoriam: Rev. Randal K. Gullickson

Rev. Randal K. Gullickson, died at his home on Sunday, November 10, at the start of The Great Gathering. He was surrounded by his family and friends and embraced in their love. Randy was the retired director of Lutherlyn (PA), where he served for 31 years. Before that, he served as executive director of Luther Park (Danbury, WI).

Randy is survived by his beloved wife of 45 years, Tracy Baker Gullickson; his son, Jason (Jessica) Gullickson, and grandson, Malcolm, of Baden; his daughter, Anna (Rob Morris) Gullickson of Butler; and his brother, Jeff (Mary) Gullickson of Hubertus, Wis.

Over the years, he served on many National Lutheran Outdoor Ministries committees, as president of the Association of Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Professionals, and on the board of directors of Lutheran Outdoor Ministries.

Randy had a deep and abiding love for God's creation, and he spent much of his time adventuring in the great outdoors. He made it his life's purpose to teach and challenge others to show God's love by making life-giving choices and living with open hands in God's grace. During his years at Lutherlyn, he changed the lives of thousands of campers and staff by listening, inspiring, and loving, with a passion for making the Gospel come alive.

He was known for his abilities to engineer, invent, build, and fix almost anything. He was an inspirational thinker, who was called to create things that awaken spirit. He loved camping, canoeing, travel, music, wood and leatherworking, telling stories, writing poetry, crafting pottery, philosophizing, mastering just about any skill that caught his interest, and making jokes, especially bad puns. His wit and sense of humor were gifts he freely gave to everyone he met, right up to the end.

At LOM Day at The Great Gathering, Randy Younquist-Thurow, gave remarks about his friend and colleague. They are reprinted here with his permission.

I believe it is fitting that our friend and partner in ministry died Sunday night during worship with his friends and colleagues gathered together in fellowship and renewal. Randy loved LOM and the things it stood for: Lutheran, Outdoor, Ministries. LUTHERAN = THEOLOGY, PASSION. He was a teacher of the faith. He was creative, a gifted worship writer and leader. He loved to write experiential Bible studies that could teach all ages. The love and grace of God were always central. Teaching was at his core. In fact, he taught his Hindu liver doctor about his God of Grace at his hospital bed in his last days.

OUTDOOR = LOVE OF THE OUTDOORS AND GOD’S WONDROUS CREATION. Randy loved to spend time in creation in his canoe or kayak. He has the vision to develop one of the largest environmental education programs in our network. That program has shared that passion of hundreds of thousands.

MINISTRY = MEETING THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE. He reminded us of that often. He also asked us to ask does what you do “give life” to others? Ministry is all about building relationships.

BLESSING OTHERS: In his final days, Randy called people not to tell them he was dying but to affirm their gifts and role in God’s world. He called to “give life.” Randy was creative. He loved to use his drama background. He was a poet, writer, deep thinker, risk taker, a teacher and preacher. He had a vision that included all of you gathered here tonight. He was one of the founding fathers of this professional organization. His style was not always the kindest to get us here. But without his drive and leadership, LOM would not be what it is today.

He mentored at least three of us, Lee Lindeman, Deb Roberts, and me. Likely, he impacted many more of you. But ever more, he is a friend. Please join me in a moment of silence to remember our partner in ministry, Randy. And in a thunderous applause to say thank you to a true saint!
SANCTUARY RESOURCE NOW AVAILABLE: A study guide is now available to congregations and other organizations throughout the ELCA, thanks to a collaboration of Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), and the ELCA strategy of Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO). This guide is especially timely in light of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly action last summer to declare the ELCA a Sanctuary Denomination. The guide is an adaptation of the Adult Bible Study section of the LOM 2019 Curriculum, Transformed Community. It is available, free of charge, on the LOM website: https://www.lomnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/TransformedCommunityStudy.pdf

Words from Don

The Great Gathering is now history. And what a truly great gathering it was! Excellence was written all over everything about the Great Gathering – the workshops, the keynote speakers, the worship, the music. LOM members were right there in the thick of it providing key leadership for this ecumenical event. Nathan Pile made a huge contribution to outdoor ministry by serving as co-chair of the whole event. Deb Roberts served as chair of the Workshops Committee. And our own Tracy Polzin was one of the two chaplains for the event. To say nothing of all the LOM folks who served on committees and in other leadership capacities. Thank you, one and all! And thanks especially to the 144 LOM members who participated in the event.

Those same 144 Great Gathering participants from LOM made the trek on Tuesday afternoon and evening for LOM Day during the Great Gathering held at Lutheridge (NC). That day was intense! It felt like we fit a full LOM Annual Conference into about 8 hours. But how sweet it was! The 100th anniversary Banquet, hosted by emcee Margie Fiedler and grounded in the historical reflections of LOM emeritus member Ralph Yernberg, was an event we'll remember for a long time. And the Auction! With auctioneer Paul Hanson at the helm, we navigated our way to a result of $42,460 – a new record. Once again manifesting the reality that outdoor ministry folks are about the most generous folks on this earth! Thank you so much to everyone for a great time.

Our 100th Anniversary celebration gave us an opportunity to look back at the past 100 years of ministry. This time of year, particularly during the Annual Meeting, gives me an opportunity to reflect on the past one year. It’s been a good year, and I encourage you, if you haven’t already done so, to take a look at my Executive Director Report to the Annual Meeting.

Just as our 100th Anniversary is an opportunity to not only look back but also to begin our next century by looking ahead to the future, my Annual Report time is also an opportunity to look ahead to the next year. So, as I did at our Annual Meeting during LOM Day, I will take this opportunity to share with you some of the exciting LOM plans for 2020:

- Getting the Total Inclusion! initiative started. You can read FAQs about the program here: https://www.lomnetwork.org/resources/total-inclusion/
- Working toward a new Strategic Plan.
- The new resource for LOM Boards: a series of best practice mini-seminars with BoardCoach founder Keith Johnson (thank you! – Keith Johnson and thank you! -Education Committee)
- The new initiative to help in the annual summer camp staff recruiting effort: a “Camp Match” app for prospective applicants (thank you! - Hannah Loeffler-Kemp)
- LOM Compensation Survey and another new Research project from Sacred Playgrounds
- 2020 LOM Conference at the Great Wolf Lodge, Twin Cities
- 2020 LTE Prpgram Track at Luther Park (Chetek, WI)
- Generation to Generation, the LOM Curriculum for 2020
- Territory Gatherings
- The 2020 LOM Executive Directors Gathering, March 23-26, Coastal Retreat Center (SC).

And this is just the “tip of the iceberg.” It’s an exciting time for LOM!

--Don Johnson, Executive Director

P.S. Thank you to one of our LOM Business Members, CORD, Inc. At the Great Gathering, their representative, Jeff Acks, handed me a check from CORD payable to Lutheran Outdoor Ministries in the amount of $1,165.44. Each year, CORD contributes to LOM a percentage of their sales to LOM organizations. Thank you, CORD, and thank you to all of you who are purchasing supplies through CORD
From one of our LOM Business Partners

WHAT IS SAFE GATHERINGS?
Safe Gatherings is an abuse prevention and boundary awareness program. It incorporates an online application, electronic reference checks, 4 levels of background checks (including county of residence), and online abuse prevention training. Safe Gatherings makes it easy to track approved and pending applicants from your organization.

ARE BACKGROUND CHECKS AND REFERENCE CHECKS REALLY NECESSARY?
The power of a consistent system is consistency. When everyone commits to the same process, there is a greater amount of trust and reliability in the outcome. Often, people think, “It can’t happen here.” Unfortunately, they are wrong, and the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults is at stake.

CAN THE TRAINING BE TAKEN AS A GROUP?
Applicants are reviewed and approved or denied on an individual basis. Each applicant has his or her own application, references, and background checks ... and each applicant must pass the test at the end of the training, which is available online 24/7. This system is not designed for a group setting.

HOW MUCH WORK DOES IT TAKE FOR OUR ORGANIZATION TO USE THE SYSTEM?
Very little! It takes less than a 5-minute phone call to set up your organization’s account. Our primary mission is to protect the vulnerable, but our secondary goal is to make having a protection program as easy as possible on the organization.

HOW DO I START MY ORGANIZATION’S MEMBERS ON THIS PROGRAM?
Have them go to safegatherings.com and click on the “Get Started” button. Most churches and organizations are already set up in the Safe Gatherings system. When a person applies through a new organization, the Safe Gatherings staff contacts the organization to make sure the account is set up correctly regarding payment, the proper contacts, etc. If an applicant cannot find their organization in the system, he or she can call Safe Gatherings to get more information.

safegatherings.com · 888.241.8258 · info@safegatherings.com
Recent Legacy Gifts

Two legacy gifts have recently been reported to Don Johnson, LOM executive director. They are from:

**Jay Miller,** Camp Chrysalis Director of the Cross Trails organization in Texas. Jay has been active in LOM activities and events, particularly when the LOM Texas camps meet for their annual gathering. He represented LOM at the LuMin Conference in 2018.

**Dave and Ellen Herder,** of Rochester, MN. Dave is one of the past executive directors of Good Earth Village (MN). His second term on the LOM Board will be completed at the end of this December. During his tenure, he has been the Board liaison to the LOM Development Committee and the LOM Auction Committee. He is a development officer at Olmsted Hospital, Rochester, MN.

If you are among those who have included LOM in your estate plans, please contact LOM executive director Don Johnson ([director@lomnetwork.org](mailto:director@lomnetwork.org)) who is keeping the LOM record of future legacy gifts for LOM.

Please contact Don Johnson if you would like to explore the possibility of a legacy gift that will include LOM.

Congratulations, Judy!

Judy Hakanson Smith received her certification from Compass Points at the closing worship of the Great Gathering. She is pictured here with her fellow graduates. For more on Compass Points, go to [http://www.compasspointsprogram.org/](http://www.compasspointsprogram.org/)

A 100th Anniversary Treat!

Just in time for our 100th Anniversary celebration, we now have two significant historical records of the history of Lutheran outdoor ministry experiences available on the LOM website. They are:

- **A History of Lutheran Church Camping 1919-1949**, by Mark Burkhardt.
- **The Camping Movement of the American Lutheran Church**, by Ralph Yernberg

You can find these great resources on the LOM website: [www.lomnetwork.org](http://www.lomnetwork.org).

Thank you, Ralph and Mark, for the work these two books represent, and for making them available to our whole network.

And congratulations to Mark for being honored at LOM Day for 40 years in outdoor ministries. Additionally, Marianne Brock of the Lutheran Camping Corporation of Central PA was honored for 20 years in outdoor ministries.
In Conclusion

Parting Thoughts
from the LOM Webmaster/Communications Coordinator

Building Up

We all have times when we question if what we do is really important and is really what we should be doing. As the world changes rapidly, it seems as if when you are feeling comfortable or feeling like you are running on all cylinders, something happens to stop that good feeling. A wrench is thrown in the works and again, you question if you are up to the challenges.

The week of The Great Gathering was a time that I truly needed. After dealing with some work challenges this fall, I needed a week to gather with colleagues to share stories and hear that I’m not alone in this work. And, I needed the week to hear speakers and others affirm the work that is done in outdoor ministries.

It reminded me of another learning I got from looking at Nehemiah, Chapter 2, which we also looked at last time. The Bible Study leader from whom I learned a lot about this book told us when we were reading this book that when living in circumstances that you see those who are spoiling God’s work, don’t go after them. Instead, focus on Christ. Remember his early occupation? He was a carpenter. He was one who built up. When you are feeling torn down, keep God before us. Don’t get occupied with the circumstances but change your focus. Look up! After all, when things are in ruin, the builder overcomes them!

I’ve thought about that notion recently and want to work harder at building up. I want to work harder to be affirming of co-workers and those who I come in contact with. I think that if I focus more on building up, I won’t get overwhelmed by those things (and people) which tend to tear me down.

Nehemiah was a builder! If we are wanted to build, God will supply what we need to it. Maybe you and I can learn to live in the good of that and make a difference not only for ourselves but others in this world.

–Chad Hershberger

LOM News will not be published in early January due to the Christmas Holiday. The next edition, our Annual Report, will be published in early February.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year
From the LOM Board and Staff

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