



Encouraging, Educating, Equipping,
and Empowering Camp and Retreat Leadership

March 16, 2020

To the leaders of the organizational members of Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM) –

These are unprecedented times. There's nothing in our lifetime, even for those, the oldest of us, that can serve as a model for what we are confronting in the Covid-19 crisis. In the midst of all the anxiety caused by navigating through uncharted territory without a map (or GPS!), I open this message to you with Prayer 747 from the New Zealand Prayer Book, a prayer that I have been praying for you and with you constantly, knowing all that you are dealing with at this time –

“God of the present moment,
God who in Jesus stills the storm
and soothes the frantic heart, bring hope and courage to all who wait or work in uncertainty.
Bring hope that you will make them the equal of whatever lies ahead.
Bring them courage to endure what cannot be avoided, for your will is health and wholeness;
you are God, and we need you.
Amen.”

I'm sending this message to you today, not with any answers or solutions to the issues you are facing, but as a reminder for all of us that it's at times like this that the network we know as LOM is of most value. The whole purpose for LOM has been, from our founding 15 years ago, to provide a platform for sharing from the experience and expertise of one another in order for all outdoor ministries affiliated with the ELCA to be as strong and vibrant as possible. As our friend and colleague Chad Hershberger (executive director of Camp Mount Luther and LOM webmaster) said last week, LOM provides us the reality “that we are here for each other and to lean on one another. We have lots of talented people with varied expertise and these are the times that LOM can really shine and show how important we are to one another.”

There are a few things that we are all doing together by way of the platform of LOM to support and sustain each other through these difficult times.

- LOM is serving as a clearinghouse for documents, ideas, programs, activities, etc. that are being developed by outdoor ministry organizations as we strive for our ongoing forms of ministry to continue to be relevant and for new initiatives that focus on camps and retreat centers continuing to serve church, community and the world in spite of or because of social distancing restrictions. You can find these resources at: <https://www.lomnetwork.org/resources/coronavirus/> You are encouraged to add resources from your organization by emailing them to Chad Hershberger (webmaster@lomnetwork.org).

Another place where resources are being shared is on the LOM Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/lutheranoutdoorministries/>

- As a more interactive way of sharing ideas and giving support to one another, LOM organized its first ZOOM Forum on how outdoor ministry organizations are dealing with the Covid-19 crisis. It was conducted on Friday, March 13. This was publicized on the LOM Facebook page. Leaders from 19 LOM organizations participated. There will be similar opportunities from time to time. The next one is scheduled for this Thursday, March 19, 12 EDT, 11 CDT, 10 MDT, 9 PDT. The link to log onto ZOOM for this forum is: <https://zoom.us/j/587400004>
- The financial distress that this crisis has already caused for our retreat centers is enormous! And the uncertainty of how the crisis will impact summer camp operations is very scary indeed. LOM is about to begin an initiative to ask the bishops of the ELCA to advocate among their congregations and other groups to consider providing the revenue to camps and retreat centers that is being lost because of cancellation or postponement of reservations. Or at least to not require that deposits be refunded. We know this is a small drop in a big bucket, but maybe it will help you as you struggle with your organization meeting its financial obligations and avoid the horrifying prospect of reducing compensation for staff.
- During the time that infectious disease specialists are recommending that meetings, gatherings, and non-essential travel be curtailed, LOM will do our part by complying. As a result, the Program Share-A-Thon and Curriculum Rewrite scheduled for this week at Good Earth Village (MN) will not take place at this time. The LOM Executive Directors Gathering scheduled for next week at Coastal Retreat Center (SC) has been postponed. The LOM LTE Committee, scheduled to meet at Agape (NC), has been cancelled. In order to be a good role model for the action we are advocating from others, LOM will not ask for deposits to be refunded from host sites of LOM events that have been cancelled.

Please keep the lines of communication open. Know that you have a cloud of colleagues who are struggling with similar dilemmas. Contact me when you have ideas to share or feel the need to access the LOM network for advice and/or support. And keep in mind the words of advice that Casey Fuerst, formerly of Nebraska Lutheran Outdoor Ministries, immediate past Board president of LOM, and founder of TicTacToe Marketing, provided during the first LOM ZOOM Forum on Covid-19. She reminded us that what our constituents and stake holders need to know about our ministries –

- Our ministry is a voice of reason.
- Our ministry is a steady and dependable resource, especially during times of turbulence.
- We are a ministry partner that didn't turn into ourselves during times of crisis. We found ways to keep on serving, and serving, and serving...

And don't forget the words of Paul to the Romans – "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things to come, not powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Amen.

Sincerely,

Don Johnson, Executive Director