What’s Inside
Don’t have time to read the whole issue right now? Here’s a quick summary and the bottom lines:

Page 2: Coronavirus Response Resources

- Lutheran Outdoor Ministries is responding to the COVID-19 virus in a number of ways.
- **The Bottom Line:** Check out our website for a special page devoted to these resources and keep tabs on Facebook for announcements of Zoom forums.

Page 3-4: News Shorts

- Journeys, Auction, Conference, LTE all announce plans.
- **The Bottom Line:** Looking ahead to future events, hoping they will happen!

Page 5: The Impact of LOM

- Lakyn Muilenberg, site director of NeSoDak, one of the camps of Lutherans Outdoors in South Dakota (LOSD) tells us her LOM story.
- **The Bottom Line:** It’s all about changing lives!

Page 6: Words from Don

- Our executive director gives us thoughts of our response to the Coronavirus outbreak.
- **The Bottom Line:** You are doing some creative things!

The Back Page

- We conclude with more leadership thoughts by your newsletter editor.
- **The Bottom Line:** You can see leadership lessons every day in these times by just looking around!

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April 27-30, 2020: Sustainable Pathways

May 14, 2020: Shape for Women in Outdoor Ministry ZOOM Meeting

August 31-September 3: Executive Directors Gathering

September 20-23, 2020: Shape for Women in Outdoor Ministry Retreat 2

September 5-9, 2020: Leadership Training Event

November 9-13, 2020: LOM Conference

January 24-27, 2021: Shape for Women in Outdoor Ministry Retreat 3

March 2021 (dates TBD): Shape for Women in Outdoor Ministry Retreat 4

More information at www.lomnetwork.org
Cover Story

Coronavirus Response Resources

The COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic is real and the concerns about the outbreak are widespread. We are in the midst of watching the mass reaction to it and are seeing impacts on camp/retreat ministries’ ability to host groups and to attract and keep summer staff and campers. Our summer camp programs may also be impacted. It’s in our best interest to stay up to date on current developments in this regard.

Lutheran Outdoor Ministries is responding to the COVID-19 virus in a number of ways. The best place to get the latest information is on our webpage of resources to deal with this outbreak. Visit www.lomnetwork.org/coronavirus to view those resources. They are updated frequently, so check our website and Facebook page for the latest information and updates as things change.

Rather than “reinvent the wheel”, we encourage outdoor ministry leaders to check in frequently with an excellent resource for information and recommendations. This is being provided by the American Camp Association (ACA). Here’s the link: https://www.acacamps.org/resource-library/coronavirus-information-camps

Casey Fuerst, our marketing guru, says we need to look the risk straight in the eye and prepare well. Let’s communicate clearly and consistently. Let’s do such a good job that it increases our constituents’ trust in us! Being prepared gives you the time, tools, and confidence to respond in the best way possible. Thanks to Casey Fuerst and Tic Tac Toe Marketing for preparing this comprehensive guide for planning and communications. Here’s the link: https://umcrm.wildapricot.org/resources/Documents/BONUS%20Monthly%20Marketing%20Kit%20-%20Coronavirus.pdf

Don Johnson is convening Zoom forums to check in with one another and share resources and information. Look on our Facebook pages for information about those.

Coronavirus – Information and Recommendations

Here’s a few more resources you might find to be helpful –

And finally, for this time anyway, these words to congregation leaders from Bishop Hazelwood of the New England Synod offer wisdom for outdoor ministry leaders as well, “All this is to say, that you as leaders have an important role in this or any destabilizing event: If you are calm, wise and thoughtful, that will impact how an event plays out in your congregation. Therefore, in this time of the coronavirus, I encourage you to balance the need for thoughtful decisions around worship practices and congregational gatherings, with the need for calm and less reactive responses. Yes, it’s serious.... but let’s be calm and remember the most frequently used words of Jesus in the New Testament, ‘Fear not’.”
ACA Update

In the past few years, LOM has sent out renewal letters for the annual ACA membership and dues in March. This year, that paperwork will come directly from ACA. ACA says they send a first notice in February and will be sending a reminder.

Your Spring Assignment: LOM Auction

Think about a cool donation for this year’s LOM Auction in Minneapolis! With the current circumstances of the world, allow this to be a time to think creatively about what that may be. 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? So, get thinking about who you know and what resources they may have to donate cool, new items to the annual LOM Auction! Daniel Kirschbaum will be chairing this year's auction. If you have any questions about this year's auction please contact him: daniel@rainbowtrail.org

Consider a Monthly Gift

Please consider including LOM as you plan your charitable contributions for 2020. More and more LOM contributors are finding it helpful to make their contributions on an automatic monthly basis. It’s easy to do and whether you choose to make your contribution this way, or with just one contribution at any time, you can do this online at: https://www.lomnetwork.org/donate/
Or, if you prefer, you can send a check payable to Lutheran Outdoor Ministries to: Jon Skogen, LOM Administrator, 1218 W. Addison St., Chicago, IL 60613. Thank you to the following current automatic monthly contributors:
- Jeff Bluhm
- Rod Boriak
- Anthony Briggs
- Jenny Frantz
- Chad Hershberger
- Paul Hill
- Dave Holtz
- Meggan Manlove
- Lindsey Scheid
- Jake Sorensen

Organizations:
- Luther Crest Bible Camp

Another Journeys Reminder

Have you set your adventure camps, servant trips, and senior travel programs for 2020 and 2021? If so, please submit them for LOM’s Journeys for Youth website. We’d like to list these camps by May 1, 2020. For more information about the website and to submit, go to http://journeys.lomnetwork.org/about

A New Business Partner

Insurance Board is a nonprofit corporation established by the participating Conferences of the United Church of Christ. Our mission is to support and protect your church, camps, and ministry by offering superior property and casualty risk management and insurance services. That means working with you to help avoid the disruptive impact of a loss and providing insurance solutions to protect your camp in case a loss still occurs: prevention first, insurance second. Insurance Board administers a church property insurance and church liability insurance program serving churches and related entities within the United Church of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Presbyterian Church (USA), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Reformed Church in America, and the Alliance of Baptists. We understand your ministry. We work hard to help you continue it. For more information visit us at: www.InsuranceBoard.org
Save the Date: LOM Conference

Join us for the LOM Annual Conference, which is held each fall. The annual conference is a gathering of LOM members and features continuing education, networking, fellowship, and time for renewal. This year’s annual conference will be held on November 9-13, 2020, at the Great Wolf Lodge in Minneapolis, MN. Gather with outdoor ministry professionals, speakers and leaders to dive into the theme of “Total Inclusion.” This year’s conference is inspired by the ELCA Total Inclusion grant initiative and will focus on opportunities and resources as we work towards a wider and more intentional inclusion of people who have been historically marginalized in the church. The conference schedule allows for plenty of time for discussion with peers in ministry, as well as dynamic worship and fellowship. Learn more about all the amazing projects taking place around LOM, spend time getting to know exhibitors and partners in ministry, bid on amazing items at the annual LOM auction and enjoy Minnesota. We are thrilled to welcome these three leaders to be our Keynote notes speakers and Worship leaders:

- **Pastor Lenny Duncan** - ELCA Mission Developer, Jehu’s Table, Brooklyn, New York. Author, “Dear Church: A Love Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the U.S.”
- **Bishop Yehiel Curry** - Bishop of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod of the ELCA. Former ELCA Mission Developer, Shekinah Chapel. Former Executive Director SIMBA/SIMSA camps.

They will be joined by several others who will serve as Workshop leaders, panel participants and conference resources to inspire and lead us in this important initiative. Other conference highlights include a large group service project at The Sheridan Story and a celebration dinner with the Sioux Chef and closing worship at Central Lutheran, Minneapolis. Registration is coming soon!

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Sustainable Pathways Event Postponed to 2021

Due to low enrollment, the Sustainable Pathways event scheduled for April 27-30 has been postponed to 2021. We feel strongly that the coaching theme of this event is important for our camp and retreat professionals and will find a good date in 2021.

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Plan to Attend LTE

LOM invites you to participate in the Leadership Training Event (LTE) happening November 5-9, 2020 at Luther Park Bible Camp in Chetek, WI. This training is designed for anyone serving in camping ministry - whether you are new to your position or have been doing this for quite a few years. The conversation, fellowship, and learning gives all participants a deeper understanding of their job and their ministry. You also leave the event with a great network of people who will walk with and support you in your work.

The 2020 LTE has a program focus and will be digging deep into program planning, curriculum writing, staffing, risk management and more. Visit www.LOMnetwork.org/LTE for more information on curriculum, faculty, and travel details.
The Impact of Outdoor Ministries

Lakyn Muilenberg serves as the site director of NeSoDak, one of the camps of Lutherans Outdoors in South Dakota (LOSD). She is active in many activities of LOM and currently serves on the LOM Curriculum Committee.

The smell of the great outdoors, the sights and sounds of nature, the crackling of the campfire, the peace and serenity of a slower pace, the laughter of the community and the songs of praise. Camp is a place that fosters lifelong friends and it is a community that has embraced me like family with open arms and has become my home.

I don’t know about you but to me, there is something very special about these camps we love so much. Camp offers a community unlike any other. It takes groups of young children, teens, and adults alike and puts them in the middle of the woods with limited distractions from the “outside world”. This allows us space for relationships to flourish and for us to draw closer as a community and to God. There is so much life to be lived and camp can help us discover that. We are able to leave our face-paced, technology-driven world to just be still in God’s creation. Maybe we can attribute a lot of this to having no cell phones or the fact that we are living, sleeping, eating, and learning with the same people that speeds up this development. Maybe it’s the freedom of expression to be wholly and completely ourselves. Maybe it’s about asking big questions and exploring life and faith together. Maybe it’s immersing ourselves in God’s creation more fully than we normally would. Maybe it’s a lot of things. But one thing I know for sure - relationships built at camp are priceless, endless, and full of love.

I have experienced these incredible bonds as a camper and staffer and have watched so many young people grow deeper into Christ-centered relationships. As a first-year counselor, I had a cabin of ten teenaged girls, and I thought to myself “I am NOT qualified for this”. We laughed hard, we talked about everything under the sun, cried and formed a bond that would never be forgotten. You can imagine that when Friday came, it was a very hard “see you later”. Two weeks later, one of their moms came back to drop off another child of theirs. She came up to me and said, “Lakyn, you changed my daughter’s life.” Since she’s been home from camp, I have seen such a light in her. Thank you for everything.” Followed by a big mama bear hug. I looked back at her with tears in my eyes and I explained to her that her daughter had changed MY life, too. Five years later… this particular camper worked for me as a counselor. I already knew the impact of camp, but wow, it is amazing.

You see, camp is a beautiful thing. People come from varied backgrounds and come to one singular place for one week. ONE WEEK. That’s all it takes, and a world of a difference can be made. Camp is full of adventures that vary from deep conversations about faith to playing capture the flag, to trying high ropes for the first time, maybe going canoeing. We are changing lives through God’s love and Jesus’ grace and we might even make a sweet tie-dye along the way.

There are some very beautiful lakes… state parks and other places to camp in this great big world of ours but there is something special this organization we are part of; Lutheran Outdoor Ministries. Our camps pride themselves on welcoming everyone, loving all, building strong relationships, and worshipping together in this unique community. Camp is a place filled with unconditional love, overflowing joy, and where a Christ-centered community is felt to its core.

Camp provides opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to be themselves, engage with peers and mentors, and experience exploring their faith. What an impactful thing to be apart of. God is SO good.
One month ago, when I penned the words for this column, we may have seen some clouds on the horizon, but I was among the many who had no inkling of the overwhelming crisis that our nation and our world are experiencing today.

In our mission statement as an association of outdoor ministry organizations, we proclaim that we provide for each other what we need in order to be “...bold and faithful outdoor ministry leaders for the Church and the world.” In the past few weeks I have witnessed over and over again the boldness and the faithfulness of your leadership of the ministries which have such an important presence in the lives of so many people.

The leadership I’ve observed around this network has been inspiring.

You have been there for the people served by the ministry you lead. Using a variety of communication tools, most often the technology assisted formats that are not always the ones we most frequently use, you have been a calm and steady voice, reassuring the people your ministry serves that God is always with us, our “refuge in time of trouble.” (Psalm 37:39)

Your creativity has been, well, what so many have grown accustomed to expect from outdoor ministry folks. You’ve been inviting people to minimize the cabin-fever brought on by social distancing to experience the beauty of the natural creation that’s so evident in the wondrous places in which your sites are located. You’ve adapted camp activities and brought them into the homes of your people with technology from which our camps and retreat centers often are an oasis. You’ve brought interactive Bible studies and campfire singing and storytelling and craft projects and inspirational messages and... We could go on and on. You’ve done what outdoor ministry people are so good at doing: you’ve adapted the activity for a changed context, but the message has stayed the same – God is our refuge in times of trouble.

All of this is all the more impressive because I know, also, that there’s so much to fear. The uncertainty of it all! When will this end? When will life go back to the normal we knew before Covid-19? How are we ever going to survive the financial impacts of all of this?

There are no answers to our questions – yet. I do, however, have this admittedly opinionated ray of hope to share with you. I don’t believe that all the people for whom outdoor ministry has been such an incredible treasure in their lives, will allow for the ministry you lead to just go away. Especially when they see, now, that your first and foremost instinct has been to adapt and be creative in making the resources you steward as a resource for the Church and the world and the communities you serve, rather than putting your own needs first. As our friend and colleague, Joel Abenth, executive director of Voyageurs (MN), has been saying, “We, in outdoor ministries, have been preparing for this for 100 years.”

There’s no doubt that we have difficult days in front of us. There will likely be parts of our camp and retreat center programs that we will temporarily lose or in some cases even permanently. We will mourn those losses, for sure. And we will also look for the signs that we are so fortunate to see in the natural creation, of the life that springs up in the remains of that which has been lost. We will celebrate that, because, if nothing else, we are a Resurrection People.

We are also a people who thrive on the experience of community. I know in my heart, that through the thick and thin of this crisis as it continues to unfold, we will be there for each other – bold and faithful as can be!

My prayer for you: God our creator, we give thanks that you have called us and given us gifts for service. Grant us, we pray, wisdom to make right decisions. Teach us patience. Guard us as we deal with the perils that await us. And give us courage to trust in you. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

See ya around the network!

--Don Johnson, Executive Director
Look Around for the Lessons

In this space each month, I’ve been writing about leadership lessons. I wrote about some of the points I teach my summer staff at camp and we’ve been looking at leadership lessons from Nehemiah the past few months. I was prepared to look at another chapter of Nehemiah’s story and then the COVID-19 outbreak happened.

A lot of thoughts have been running through my mind as I watch colleagues who are struggling more than we are right now at my outdoor ministry site. I feel the pain of those whose work hours have been cut or who have had to lay off staff. My heart goes out to those who are wondering how they are going to make up six-figure incomes from rental groups that have to stay home.

In situations like these, I try to look at where the good is and where God is in all of this. And so, I offer three things that I’ve seen that I feel are key to leadership especially in these times:

1. Being positive. In our communications at camp, we’ve tried to be positive and have a hopeful message. I’d gotten feedback from folks that they appreciate that. They can get the bad news by turning on the TV, reading social media, or listening to the radio. Being a voice of reason with a positive message is something that I feel is helping us in these times.

2. Looking outward. One of the things that has helped me tremendously is when I was part of a conference call early in this pandemic and I heard that we need to focus on being outward, not inward. How do we continue to serve our communities in this time? If we continually are looking at ourselves (read—finances) we may lose sight of our overall missions and ministries.

3. Displaying creativity. When I was a camp counselor, I won the Jim Henson Award one year for being creative. I consider myself a creative person. And so, I’ve tried to use that creativity to find ways to continue to do things we usually do, just in a different way. And, I’ve seen colleagues doing that, too. Pastors are suddenly becoming televangelists through Zoom, YouTube, and livestreaming. Daily devotions and evening prayer are prevalent on social media. Camps are doing campfire programs, sing-a-longs, posting nature and Bible activities, and doing virtual hikes. We may be forced to be inside and practice social distancing, but creativity is flowing and connecting us together in new and exciting ways.

How do you achieve positivity, an outward mindset, and think in new, creative ways? That’s where God is in all of this. The Spirit is working through leaders in this age of coronavirus, lifting up new and exciting possibilities. We don’t need to look at the book of Nehemiah to get some leadership lessons right now. Look around you—they are everywhere! —Chad Hershberger