



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

June 9, 2020

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” – John 15:12

Current and Recent Events

During the past couple of weeks, I’ve been doing much thinking and reflecting on the issue of racism in the United States. I’m not sure it would be possible for anyone living in this country to do otherwise. This time of introspection has included much energy around my calling throughout most of my career as a rostered leader in the ELCA, particularly in the outdoor ministries of the ELCA. Now, serving as the executive director of LOM, I feel compelled to share some of these reflections as they pertain to and on behalf of LOM.

I am confident that I speak on behalf of all of LOM by stating that we are horrified by the violent and senseless killing of George Floyd and all that this awful event represents from four centuries of overt racism in this country. To all persons of color who have been close to events such as this, indeed victimized by events such as these, our hearts have been captivated in ways that join with you in your grief, pain anguish, fear, anger, lament. LOM will always stand behind the words of our LOM Board president, Darryl Thompson Powell, as he prayed in last week’s LOM ZOOM worship:

“Goodness is stronger than evil;
love is stronger than hate;
light is stronger than darkness;
hope is stronger than despair.”

It’s almost a no-brainer to make a public pronouncement condemning acts of violence and their root causes that so many of our fellow citizens have been protesting. Therefore, LOM went on record about a year ago to proclaim a commitment to welcoming and including those who are often marginalized (and for that matter often brutalized) into every aspect of our life together. This, now, is what we of LOM proclaim to the rest of the world:

“In all our programs, activities and events, Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM) is committed to providing safe and inclusive environments that reflect the lessons Jesus taught us: “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another”. (John 13:34) LOM values diversity, opposes discrimination and promotes equal opportunity for all people, regardless of age, abilities, race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, or others who are often marginalized. We strive to ensure that all participants and staff are valued as unique individuals and can reach their full potential by living and working in a community of inclusion and mutual respect. As an association, we encourage our member organizations to do likewise.”

Lest we of LOM get too comfortable about our statements of welcome and inclusion, current events will provide lessons for us and how we, too, may have been missing the mark. It's one thing to open the door for those who are knocking to get in. The issue for LOM is that there aren't that many people who have historically been marginalized who are knocking on our doors. As a result, our association and most of our member organizations are homogeneously comprised of constituents who represent the majority even though that majority continues to shrink in proportion to the overall population.

Once we get through this pandemic I feel that one of the paramount challenges for all of us will be, instead of waiting at the door for someone to knock, to go out the door and find those who are hungering for what we provide on our side of the door and to bring them with us. One of the ways we can use the pandemic in a constructive way is to plan now for how we will be strategic to be proactive in our reach-out to all persons, especially those who are marginalized. We know that we will have the gift of financial resources to actualize these strategies because of the Total Inclusion! grant from the Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies.

We know, too, that outdoor ministry is uniquely poised to be part of the solution for what ails our culture because of our expertise in building communities of goodness, love, light, and hope. What better way to break down the walls of racism than to bring people of different races together in communities of trust, forgiveness, and friendship?

A significant part of our strategy in this regard will, in the view of many in our association, involve being proactive in developing leadership that includes those who represent the marginalized persons who we intend to include in everything on our side of the door. Our efforts to develop leaders from marginalized communities have been even more futile than our efforts to include persons who are marginalized as participants. For all of us who are in positions of influence pertaining to leadership development, I encourage reading this article that was in the NY Times: "Corporate America Has Failed Black America" <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/06/business/corporate-america-has-failed-black-america.html> My challenge as you read this is to substitute LOM wherever you come across a phrase that refers to corporations. My sense is that we in LOM have much in common with our fellow citizens on Wall Street, at least in regard to leadership development.

My purpose in making these comments in such a public forum is not to disparage LOM. Quite to the contrary, my intent is for this to be a call to action for all of us to realize the vast power we have to be agents for the changes that our world so desperately needs. Most of us in this network know from our first-hand experience how incredible is this treasure of outdoor ministry because of how it has impacted so profoundly our formation of faith and development of passion for serving others. The world needs more of this!

Living in the Era of COVID-19

Gretchen Bachman, chair of the LOM LTE Committee, calls your attention to this announcement –

An Update on the 2020 Leadership Training Event

The bad news - the LTE committee has decided to cancel the traditional format of the November 5-9 Leadership Training Event.

The good news - We still want to connect with you...all of you!

We are working on some leadership training sessions that will be offered this fall. Yes, it will be virtual but we are camp people - we can make virtual FUN! Plus, - WOW - think of everything that we are learning and experiencing this year. We cannot lose an opportunity to share, process, teach, and learn together. We are just starting our planning for this training, but we are excited to bring you this experience this fall. Watch for more information coming later this summer.

The intriguing news - the LTE is getting a bit of an upgrade and facelift for 2021. (This was coming anyway, even before Covid-19.) Get excited people!

Update on Summer Camp Decisions

Here's the update on where things stand with LOM organizations in regard to on site programs of traditional overnight summer camp for children -

- 15 of our 90 organizations are retreat centers only, even in normal circumstances. That leaves 75 of the LOM organizations that needed to make decisions about traditional overnight summer camp for children.
- 58 of the 75 remaining LOM organizations have cancelled all activities that can be described as traditional overnight summer camp for children. One of these organizations has closed permanently. These 58 organizations account for 81 of a total of 119 sites.
- Of the 58 that have made the decision to cancel, some have decided to close their site completely through the summer. There are others that are offering other activities on their sites, such as day camp for children; cabins and some program resources for families and in some cases for retreat groups (things that remove the responsibility of in loco parentis); contracting with governmental and other organizations for things such as housing for temporary migrant workers; etc.
- That leaves 17 organizations. There are a few (only a very few) that have not yet made a decision. There's a few more that will be open if their licensing jurisdiction allows them to be open but decisions have not yet been made by licensing jurisdictions. The majority of these 17, however, have made a decision to be open for traditional overnight summer camp for children. Most of those will be with a reduced schedule and modified plan for sessions and procedures.

Have You Made Your Individual Contributions To LOM?

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a shock for everyone. It has necessitated major changes for the outdoor ministries provided by the camps and retreat centers of LOM. The financial consequences have been monumental. Please consider making a contribution to an outdoor ministry that has been important for you by going to the "SITES" tab on www.lomnetwork.org where you can be linked to the website of your outdoor ministry.

LOM is the glue that keeps all our camps and retreat centers together for the mutual support and encouragement that has never been more important than it is now. Traditionally, most of the financial support necessary for all of LOM's resources and services comes from the contributions of the member organizations of LOM. Most of these organizations are not in a position to make a contribution this year because of COVID-19. As a result, the need has never been greater for your contribution. To make a contribution to LOM and in that way support all of the encouraging, educating, equipping, and

empowering that is so essential during these trying times, please click on the "DONATE NOW" tab at the bottom of the homepage of www.lomnetwork.org.

Or you can send your check made payable to Lutheran Outdoor Ministries to: LOM, 1218 W. Addison Street, Chicago, IL 60613.

Thank you.

Prayers

For the family, friends, and countless persons touched by the life and ministry of Rev. Ray Engh, who died a few days ago. Ray served as the executive director of Lutherdale (WI) from 1976-1981. His family includes his daughter, Judy Engh, who has been involved in several ways in LOM, not the least of which was during her tenure as the executive director of Lutheran Lakeside (IA). May God give comfort to all those who mourn.

In Conclusion

As always, it is an honor to serve on your behalf.

Don Johnson, Executive Director