



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

Executive Director Report to the Annual Business Meeting

2020

The 2019 LOM Annual Meeting was held at Lutheran Day during the Great Gathering of the Outdoor Ministries Connection (OMC). During the Annual Meeting on that day, Jerry Olstad was presented with the Annual Manlove-Howells Leadership Award. Following the Annual Meeting, LOM celebrated with a 100th Anniversary banquet magnificently hosted by Lutheridge, one of the sites of NovusWay. It was a splendid affair that was expertly orchestrated by the masters of ceremonies – Margie Fiedler and Ralph Yernberg. The Auction at the 2019 Conference was extremely successful, raising a little over \$40,000. Thank you to Dave Jarvis and the Auction Planning Team from Rainbow Trail (CO) for planning and implementing a great event, and to auctioneers extraordinaire, Paul Hanson and Jake Hanson, both of Lutherans Outdoors in SD. LOM made a tithe of over \$4,000 to Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service to establish a scholarship fund for children of migrant families to have camp experiences at LOM camps. The tithe from LOM was matched by a challenge gift of \$4,000 from Sharon and Jack Wineman of Florence, AZ. Little did we have the slightest hint that the first year of the next century for the outdoor ministries of the ELCA would be so different; so challenging; so filled with so much upheaval.

From the time of Annual Report (November 1, 2019), until around March 15, 2020, LOM was humming along and although not much is ever really routine with LOM, it might be said that things were about as routine as they ever get. Plans for the LOM Annual Conference in November were moving along nicely. We were making progress for the two Total Inclusion! symposiums to be held early in 2021. We were about to have the Executive Directors Gathering at full capacity. The planning process for the new LOM Strategic Plan was on track. Darryl Thompson Powell and Dianna Parks were about to join me in representing LOM at the annual meeting of the Outdoor Ministries Connection (OMC) Coordinating Council. The West-Midwest and East-Midwest Territories were poised for joining for a combined Share-A-Thon and Curriculum Re-Write.

During that time, LOM Committees and Task Forces met as follows –

- Strategic Planning Task Force – November 25, January 24, February 7
- Education Committee, January 24

- Conference Committee, January 6, February 10
- LTE Committee, January 6-8
- Executive Directors Gathering Task Group, January 17
- East Midwest Territory Gathering at Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, December 2-4
- East Territory Gathering at Mar-Lu-Ridge, Jefferson, MD, December 7-8

Total Inclusion! Meetings

- Mission Advancement staff at ELCA Churchwide, December 4
- Program Coordinator Interviews, December 16 and December 19
- Get acquainted meeting with non-LOM members of the Steering Committee, January 15
- Total Inclusion! Steering Committee at ELCA Churchwide, January 28-29

Other Meetings

- Deeper collaboration exploration with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), December 8
- Emmanuel Academies, Mission Partner exploration meeting, December 17
- ACA, changes in procedures for our partnership, January 16
- LOM was represented at the Youth Ministry Network Extravaganza, January 31 – February 2
- Lakyn Muilenberg, site director at the time at NeSoDak, represented the Curriculum Committee and all of LOM at a planning meeting for the Inside Out church camp curriculum to explore collaboration possibilities.

LOM Member Organizations and/or Executive/Site Directors visited.

- Mount Olivet (MN), January 17
- Bay Lake (MN) (MN), January 7
- Mount Carmel (MN), January 8 – Board consult
- Luther Crest (MN), January 8
- Pathways (MN), January 9
- Park River (ND), January 9
- Red Willow (ND), January 9-10 – Board consult
- El Camino Pines (CA), January 30-31
- Bear Creek (PA), February 24

Then there was the COVID-19 pandemic. Now there still is the COVID-19 pandemic. We don't know for how long we will have the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Executive Directors Gathering was first postponed and then cancelled.

The OMC Coordinating Council cancelled the meetings scheduled to be held in California and had abbreviated ZOOM meetings. One of several decisions was to distribute the balance of funds from the Great Gathering to the denominational associations in the same proportion as attendance at the Great Gathering. LOM has now received our share: \$21,045. It couldn't have come at a better time.

Compass Points is an ecumenical outdoor ministry continuing education certification program in which LOM participates. Judy Smith, camp director for adult and family programs, Calumet (NH), member of the LOM Education Committee, and the first member of LOM to earn a Compass Points certificate, is now serving as the LOM representative to the Compass Points Coordinating Council. Unfortunately, the first meeting for which she was going to represent LOM, was cancelled because of COVID-19.

We have a “conference swap” agreement with LuMin (ELCA Campus Ministry Network). Unfortunately, the 2020 LuMin Conference was cancelled because of COVID-19.

The Share-A-Thon and Curriculum Re-Write events were cancelled.

The LOM 2020 Annual Conference was cancelled. We were able to apply the deposit on hold with the conference hotel to a conference with a similar program now scheduled for November 8-13, 2021. Adjustments to the Total Inclusion! grant were made that will provide for most of the costs of the 2021 Conference to be paid from the Total Inclusion! Grant.

The LOM Strategic Planning process has been temporarily suspended and for now, the LOM Board has identified these operational priorities until such time as we can be more discerning about what the future holds:

- Continued networking and sharing
- Marketing and media relationships
- Resourcing member organizations during these challenging times
- Advocating for diversity and inclusion
- Sustainability of LOM

LOM was approved for a PPP loan in the amount of \$18,500 from Thrivent Credit Union. Those funds have been deposited into our checking account. We have been assured that the loan will be forgiven.

The challenges imposed on our outdoor ministry organizations by the COVID-19 pandemic have been monumental and unprecedented.

A great deal of my time has been devoted to encouraging everyone in the LOM network and beyond to identify resources that can be helpful to our member organizations as they deal with the challenges they are facing. Many of these resources have been collected on the LOM COVID-19 Resources page on the LOM website.

Some of the strongest resources we have as a network are derived from the encouragement and empowerment that we get from each other. Since the start of the crisis, we have had 45 hours of ZOOM Forums for all of LOM and the territories. Many thanks to our current territory coordinators – Kyle Lefler, Dave Holtz, Jeff Thompson, Sarah Lefler – for what they have done to convene and facilitate the territory forums.

There have been many friends of LOM who have helped us identify the resources needed by our member organizations and in many cases, they, themselves, have been the resources. At the risk of inadvertently forgetting some –

- Evan Moilan of GSB made a presentation on fundraising at an LOM Forum and provided pro bono consultation for the strategic planning process.
- The whole GSB organization organized a virtual fundraising conference for outdoor ministries in September.
- Troy McQuillen of McQuillen Creative Group contributed a new LOM video – “Lutheran Outdoor Ministries 100 Years”.
- Rob Waterman of Calumet (NH) – contributed a new LOM video – “I Love My LOM Camp”.
- Kristin Wiersma and Jana Swenson of Kairos provided consultation on fundraising during times of crisis
- My counterparts in the other associations of OMC: Jessica Gamache (UMCRM); Joel Winchip (PCCCA); Bill Bourdon (OMA-UCC); Patty Olson Lindsey (ECCC); Joe Richards of the United Church of Canada.
- Nicole VanderDoes, Jessica Hacker, and Kelly Pierce of ELCA Mission Advancement.
- Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies made significant adjustments to the Total inclusion! grant in response to the COVID-19 crisis.
- Molly Beck Dean of ELCA Youth Gathering.
- Ben Pearthree, ELCA Leadership Initiative Coordinator.
- Amy Reumann, ELCA Advocacy.
- Casey Fuerst of TicTacToe Marketing and Jake Sorenson of Sacred Playgrounds collaborated on a survey of camp parents’ attitudes about camp during the pandemic.
- Henry DeHart and Grechen Throop – American Camp Association (ACA)
- Annie Trafton and David Hunstad – Old Lutheran

From the cadre of retired and former executives of LOM member organizations (often referred to as “emeritus directors”), an initiative emerged known as the COVID-10 Response Team. It began with Dave Holtz of Luther Crest (MN) and Joel Abenth of Voyageurs (MN) asking Ralph Yernbeg and Keith Johnson for their advice as they guided their organizations toward making decisions about the summer and beyond. Subsequently, Ralph and Keith developed a framework for camp and retreat ministries that move toward a decision for what they refer to as “Conservancy”. Ralph agreed to serve as the coordinator for the LOM COVID-19 Response Team and provided some orientation for the Conservancy Model he developed. Members of the team included, in addition to Ralph and Keith: Don Hayn, Paul Evenson, Kathy Haueisen, Jon Hoyme, Mike Dismer, and Susan Troutman.

Keith Johnson of the LOM Emeritus group and founder of BoardCoach is volunteered to provide a sequence of best practices orientation components for outdoor ministry Boards of Directors. This resource was conceived by the LOM Education Committee following a survey taken at the 2018

Conference. The sequence of seven 10-minute components is intended to supplement, one at a time, the agenda of a Board meeting for discussion around important best practices for non-profit Boards. They are now available on the LOM website. Thank you, Keith Johnson!

The production of another LOM resource was delayed by complications with the COVID-19 pandemic – the “Camp Match” app to help prospective summer camp staff to find a summer camp program that appeals to them. We expect this will be helpful for many of our LOM camps that have had difficulty finding enough summer camp staff during recent years. It is now ready to be rolled out. An announcement about its availability will be made shortly after the Virtual Annual Meeting of 2020.

Because the LOM curriculum has the same theme as the ELCA Youth Gathering (a triennial event) and because the Youth Gathering was postponed from 2021 to 2022, we have now asked camps to consider using the 2020 or prior year curriculum again in 2021. and using the curriculum with the theme of *Boundless* to be released for use in 2022.

LOM successfully worked with ELCA Mission Advancement to petition the Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies (MACP) to reconfigure the Total Inclusion! grant in such a way that the grant will now pick up the cost of all program, lodging, meals for the LOM 2021 Annual Conference for 150 participants (2 from each of 75 member organizations plus LOM contract staff and LOM Board members). This was accomplished by having 4 regional Total Inclusion! symposiums of 4 days each instead of 5 and eliminating a significant amount of the need for airline travel. These symposiums are now scheduled for 2022 as follows:

- March 7-10, 2022: Briarwood (TX)
- March 21-24, 2022: Nawakwa (PA)
- April 4-7, 2022: Lutherdale (WI)
- April 25-28, 2022: Joy Ranch (ND)

Starting at the end of this year and leading up to the 2021 LOM Conference and the 2022 Symposiums, we will be providing a series of introductory online webinars and other Total Inclusion! resources to provide a foundation for the in-person conference and symposium events. We have formed the volunteer task groups that will be determining what these experiences will include. We intend for these task groups to be comprised primarily of the demographic group on which they are focusing and include people who have personal experience and understanding of outdoor ministry.

- Persons of color. Darryl Thompson Powell, LOM Board President, is the convener for this group.
- Persons who identify as LGBTQ. Ross Murray, executive director of The Naming Project, is the convener of this group.
- Persons who live with disabilities. Rev. Lisa Heffernan is the convener of this group.
- General principles of welcome and inclusion. Anthony Briggs, executive director of Cross Roads (NJ) is the convener of this group.

Our primary major sponsor for the 2020 LOM Conference was slated to be the Mission Investment Fund (MIF) with a commitment of \$10,000. Then we found it necessary to cancel the 2020 Conference. MIF, however, has gratefully decided to provide the gift of \$10,000 in spite of the Conference being cancelled. We are also grateful to Gronlund, Sayther, Brunkow, Consulting Firm (GSB), and the Seminaries of the ELCA, for doing likewise, each with a commitment to contribute \$2,500. They will be recognized as sponsors of all the virtual events in lieu of the cancelled 2020 conference and all of the educational events leading up to the 2021 conference.

On September 4, an email was sent to all LOM member organizations announcing the availability of Operational Support grants from the primary Total Inclusion! grant of \$9,000/organization. One criterion for eligibility for these sub-grants is participation in the virtual educational event opportunities throughout 2021. 71 LOM member organizations, plus The Naming Project and Rescue, Restore, Release and LOM itself have now applied and been approved to receive these grants by the end of December, 2020.

The LOM Board of Directors adopted a revised budget for 2020 based on the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The LOM Board of Directors adopted the following statement as an official position of LOM – “Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM) commits to being an anti-racist association. As followers of Jesus Christ, LOM deeply believes that love and justice are at the core of our mission and ministries. We commit to the constant ongoing work of anti-racism. We believe unequivocally that Black Lives Matter. We condemn the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and too many others. We stand in solidarity with protestors doing the hard work of love in action. For LOM, the hard work will include identifying, discussing, and challenging issues of race and color, along with the impacts they have on LOM, its member organizations, its systems, and its people. Admittedly, LOM is a network made up of imperfect organizations and individuals. As such, we acknowledge that racist actions can be conscious/intentional or unconscious/unintentional. We also acknowledge that identifying racism as an issue does not automatically mean those involved in the act are intentionally racist or intending for a negative impact. We commit to identifying and correcting any inequities we discover and developing a better understanding of ourselves during this purposeful process. We resolve to explicitly and publicly affirm anti-racism as an important part of our identity.”

Since the time of the last Annual Meeting, LOM Podcasts have been recorded with:

- Mark Burkhardt
- Knute Ogren
- Kyle Lefler
- Jake Sorenson
- Staff of some of the camps that had summer camp in 2020
- Staff of some of the camps that had alternatives to summer camp in 2020
- Nicole VanderDoes
- Daniel Kirschbaum
- Members of the LOM LTE Committee

On All Saints Day, Sunday, November 1, the first LOM Run4Camp 5K was held. With the umbrella of LOM handling much of the administration for this event, 16 outdoor ministry organizations joined together with LOM for the event that provided for all the funds raised by the participants going directly to the organization they represented. By the numbers, collectively –

- 15 LOM member organizations plus Kuriakos in Canada and LOM itself.
- 347 participants (runners, joggers, wheel chairers, paddlers, swimmers, hikers, bikers, etc.)
- As of November 4, \$96,280 raised.

Thank you to Knute Ogren, development director, Calumet (NH), for sharing his vision and wisdom for guiding this event. For three hours during the event there was a live-streamed broadcast on Facebook. Thank you to Rob Waterman and Nathaniel Mathieu for assisting with the technology support.

The following executive transitions have taken place during the past year –

- Agape (PA): Wayne Harrison concluded as Interim Executive Director; Rick Frederick has begun as the new executive director.
- Red Willow (ND): Rick Frederick resigned as executive director; Carolyn and Jerry Fritsch served and have now concluded as co-executive directors; Frank Johnson has now begun as the new executive director.
- Camp Roig, PR: continues to be in suspended operation while serving as a staging site for ongoing hurricane recovery.
- Bear Creek (PA): Collin Grooms has begun as executive director
- Koinonia (NY):– Don Hayn guided a future-discernment process; at the Annual Meeting on February 8, an interim Board of Directors was elected, chairperson Rev. Bob Wollenberg. Very close to re-opening after a series of calamitous events.
- Spirit in the Desert (AZ): Paul Evanson served as interim executive director; Eric Simonson has now begun as the new executive director
- Mount Carmel (MN): Dan Baker resigned his position of executive director; Tim Peterson has now begun as the new executive director.
- Vanderkamp (NY): decided to cease operations and disband as an outdoor ministry organization. We grieve with them for the necessity to come to this decision, grateful for the ministry of Vanderkamp for many years. Best wishes and Godspeed to Bill and Penny James, who most recently shared the position of executive director.

I cannot imagine serving in the position of executive director of LOM without the involvement of the persons who serve as our contract staff: Jon Skogen, administrator; Randy Younquist-Thurrow, events coordinator; Jenny Frantz, conference coordinator; Chad Hershberger, webmaster; and Kris Hinkeldey, bookkeeper. I am so grateful to each of you for your attention to the details, for your support and encouragement, and for your understanding of and advocacy for the importance of outdoor ministry for the church and for the world. A special word of thanks to our curriculum production manager, Andrea Lee, for her outstanding work on our behalf during the past year and

many prior years, and for her understanding of our predicament that has led to the suspension of curriculum production activities in 2021.

And a shout of gratitude to our Board of Directors. We all appreciate so much your willingness to share from your considerable and collective experience and expertise in ways that assure good decisions for LOM. I am particularly grateful to those Board members with whom I have worked most frequently during this past year – chairperson Rev. Darryl Thompson Powell and treasurer Dallas Shealy. The demands on the time and expertise of the Board have been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

What's especially impressive about LOM is the dedication of so many who volunteer so much to the success of this organization. There is definitely a sense of gratitude among our members for what we can all do together to assure strong and vibrant outdoor ministries throughout the whole church. Hats off and thanks to all who have been working so hard to make sure we can do for each other what would be difficult to provide on our own – to the Boards and committee members, all who help with events and task forces, and to all who make individual financial contributions, even more important now because the financial capacity of their organizations to make financial contributions is so limited because of COVID-19. All of LOM is very grateful.

In the face of the undaunting challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, I am hopeful and optimistic about the future for outdoor ministry once we emerge from this monumental disruption. The hope and optimism is due to the resilience and adaptability I have been so fortunate to observe in the outdoor ministry leaders who have guided their organizations with calmness, steadiness, and strength during these difficult times. I give thanks to God for the inspiration you give me every day. Thank you.

It is my honor and privilege to serve in the capacity that I do. Thank you for this opportunity.

Respectfully submitted,

Don Johnson, Executive Director
Lutheran Outdoor Ministries