



Lutheran Outdoor Ministries

Encouraging, Educating, Equipping, and Empowering
Camp & Conference Leadership

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

*for LOM and its
Member Organizations*

Winter, 2017



For many years, the camps and retreat centers affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and its predecessor bodies have provided rich and powerful ministry resources for congregational, synodical, and churchwide expressions of the ELCA and their institutions.

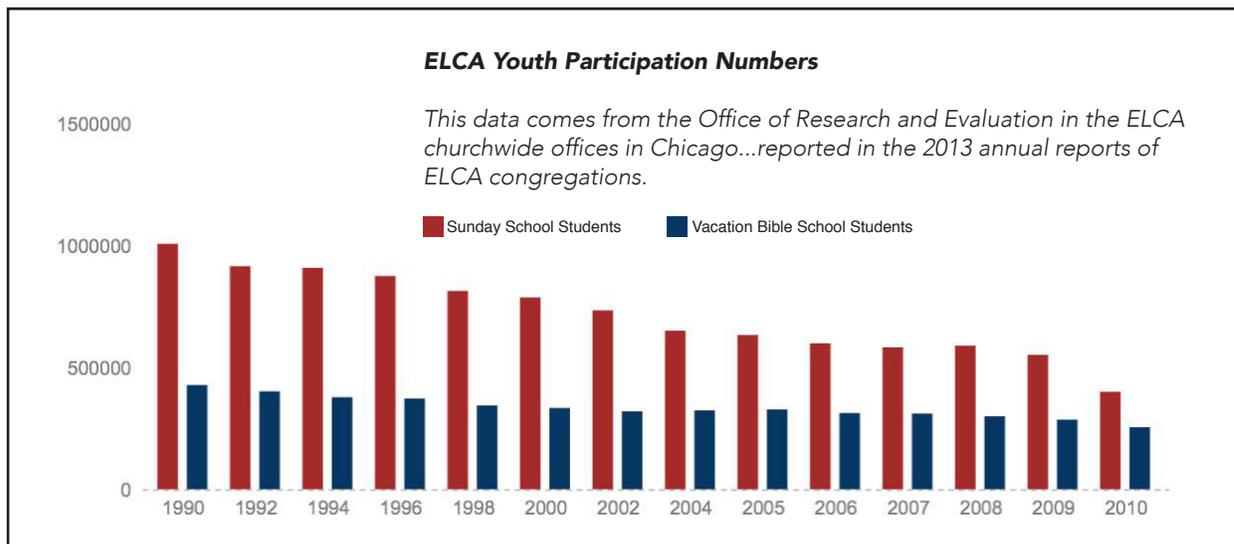
The changing contexts in which ministry takes place creates challenges for our ELCA congregations, and these challenges compel changes that are indeed challenging for our outdoor ministries. In many ways, the challenges can also be embraced as opportunities, as has so often been the case over the years, to be at the cutting edge of the church's proclamation of the Gospel.

What follows is intended as a summary of some of the challenges and opportunities currently facing LOM and its member organizations.

1. Declining ELCA membership and attendance.

Declining membership and attendance in ELCA congregations: LOM camps and retreat centers (OM's) have traditionally served as "an extension of the ministry of congregations." Generally speaking, the decline in the membership of congregations (the "feeder system" for our camps and retreat center programs) has consequently created enrollment challenges for our programs.

- Camps and retreat centers have staff members who are experts in bringing people together for relationship-building and the experience of Christian community. There are opportunities here for our OM's to help congregations become re-rooted in their own neighborhoods.
- Now, more than ever before, it is important for OM's to cultivate relationships with the leaders and members of congregations in our service areas.
- At the same time, we need to be reaching out and establishing new "markets" with individuals and groups who have not been traditionally part of the Lutheran community. In this way we can be testing new models for outreach that will undoubtedly have application for other forms of the church's ministry.
- OM's have traditionally been "magnetic" in their appeal to children, youth, and young adults. This continues to be the case in spite of the lack of involvement of younger generations in other ministries of the church. OM's have an opportunity to keep people in the first third of life connected with the church and for many, to be the primary source of Christian Education and Faith Formation. Perhaps there is an opportunity for OM's to partner with grandparents who, in many instances, appear to be more concerned about Christian Education and Faith Formation than the grandparents' children who are the parents of the grandparents' grandchildren.
- Institutions and traditional systems are being questioned and/or ignored. OM's are expert in experiential learning which has a way of transcending the traditional and institutional.
- There is an unquestionable need for collaboration and to develop partnerships with groups and organizations both within and outside the structure of the ELCA.



2. Lacking Diversity

The demographics of the church are often not aligned with the demographics of the contexts in which we serve.

- Outdoor Ministries, like so much of the ELCA, is lacking in racial diversity, especially in the executive and program leadership.
- There are few women in executive leadership positions.

3. Need for Leadership Development

The challenges facing outdoor ministry organizations confront us with an ever increasing need (and challenge) for highly professional and capable leaders.

- Many summer camps have difficulty in finding summer camp staff members in sufficient quantity and competency to fill their seasonal programmatic needs. The camps with more success than others tend to be the ones that have an opportunity for summer camp participants to transition from campers to trainees to junior staff to senior staff. LOM can be of greater assistance by serving as a “clearing house” for summer camp staff prospects. There will hopefully be ways for LOM to find collaboration partners with colleges and seminaries that will recognize the summer camp staff experience as a legitimate internship.
- We need to make sure that the LOM Annual Conference is meeting the needs of our executive leaders as well as our program leaders.
- We need to make sure that the annual Leadership Training Event (LTE) and other educational activity of LOM is changing in ways that continue to make it relevant for the changing contexts in which we serve.
- We must make sure that LOM is addressing the need for continuing education and competency development beyond the foundational components of the LTE.
- LOM is in the process of responding to the need expressed by executive directors and Board members of many organizations to provide assistance during times of executive director transition. We will soon have in place a system of identifying those who are open to and have the skills for serving as interim executive directors, providing the necessary training, and having a roster of willing and trained persons willing to serve when organizations request such services.
- It is generally recognized that for young adults serving on summer camp staffs, it is a time of intense vocational discernment including discernment of call to public ministry. For this reason, it is important that OM's continue to collaborate with the ELCA seminaries for the sake of ongoing leadership for the whole church.



4. We know that outdoor ministry is effective, but can we prove it?

- It continues to be important for LOM and our member organizations to document our professionalism and adherence to best practices by our participation in American Camp Association, International Association of Conference Center Administrators, and similar accrediting organizations.
- It behooves LOM and all our organizations to encourage and provide support for research projects like the PhD dissertation recently completed by Jake Sorenson. The recent Confirmation Project documents in academically sound ways what we all know but need help in demonstrating to donors and other stakeholders: “OM is more than fun and games; OM experiences lead to greater engagement in congregations; OM's are effective because they take Christian community seriously; OM's are effective because they are places to unplug; OM's are effective because they take young people seriously.”
- There continues to be expressed need among many OM's for assistance with articulating the value of OM experience among their constituencies. The challenge lies in the diversity of the constituencies, the diversity of OM sites and programming, and the diversity of options in presenting the message. There is an opportunity for LOM is to get very clear and succinct in presenting these messages.



5. Need to be in Partnership

The need for collaboration is so important at this time but, oh, it takes so much time and energy to develop collaborative relationships.

- Collaboration is “the name of the game these days,” and that’s why it’s so important for LOM to have “a seat at tables” throughout the ELCA, with our ecumenical partners, and in the organizations that help us document our effectiveness.
- One of the most often expressed needs among our LOM organizations is for LOM to be the organized expression in which all of us, working together, can be there for each other in times of crisis, transition, or the need for particular expertise. LOM now has in place the capability of responding to requests for such assistance with the guidance of its executive director and the potential of providing organizations the services of “LOM Consultation Teams.”
- New or restored collaborative initiatives are now underway with: ELCA Youth Ministry Network, ELCA Youth Gathering, Lutherans Restoring Creation, ELCA Mission Interpreters, ELCA First Third of Life Faith Formation Network, ELCA Campus Ministry Network, ELCA Affiliated Colleges and Universities, ELCA Seminaries, Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Lutheran Services in America, Lutheran Volunteer Corps, ALT, YAGM, and other faith-based gap year programs, Lutheran Men in Mission, Women of the ELCA, Living Lutheran magazine, Outdoor Ministry Connection, and American Camp Association.



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**
God's work. Our hands.

If there ever was a time when a strong, relevant, robust, nimbly responsive LOM has been important, now is that time! Your comments and assistance are invited in order to make this document more thoroughly inclusive of the challenges and opportunities facing LOM and our member organizations.



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DON JOHNSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR LUTHERAN OUTDOOR MINISTRIES

Don Johnson started serving as LOMs Executive Director in August, 2015. Since that time there has been significant development of LOMs advocacy for outdoor ministry and collaboration throughout the ELCA and with our ecumenical ministry partners, support of LOM organizations



experiencing crisis or executive transition, and being nimbly responsive to the fast pace of issues as they emerge for camps and retreat centers. Prior to his appointment as LOM Executive Director, Don was, for 35 years, the Executive Director of Calumet, the camp and conference center of the New England Synod, and more recently served as the Director of Project Connect of the Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries.

Helpful Resources:

Lutheran Outdoor Ministries:
www.lomnetwork.org

Effective Camp Research Project:
www.vibrantfaith.org/effectivecamp/

ELCA Demographics Reports:
[www.elca.org/en/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/
Research-and-Evaluation/Demographic-Reports](http://www.elca.org/en/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Research-and-Evaluation/Demographic-Reports)

ELCA Areas of Ministry:
www.elca.org/en/Our-Work