



Report to Partner Synods

Dear partners in ministry,

Greetings in Christ! Thank you for your generous financial and volunteer support of outdoor ministry. This year brought significant change for outdoor ministry in many areas. After more than twenty years of service as our Executive Director, Penny Christensen retired in June 2023. Her successor, Rev. Drew Tucker, overlapped with her at the end of her tenure to learn as much as possible about the organizations history and current operations to provide a seamless transition. Our Associate Director, Rev. Sara Cogsil, departed in March of 2024. With her departure, we reexamined our organizational structure and moved to hire more program staff to prioritize the delivery of faith formation and leadership development to campers year-round.

Change wasn't limited to personnel. Both the pool and office at Lutheran Memorial Camp at HopeWood Pines failed in May of 2023. While we're still fundraising to cover the total costs of rebuilding, the office was finished in February of 2024 and, at time of writing, the new pool is underway. While forced to build a new office, we took the opportunity to reevaluate our organizational needs. Thanks to partners at Lord of Life Lutheran in Worthington, OH, we've moved our administrative offices there, while moving all year-round operation offices to HopeWood Pines. This move will save the organization more than \$20,000 annually, savings that benefit all three expressions of our organization: HopeWood Pines, HopeWood Shores, and HopeWood Connect.

We're also working hard to finish our erosion mitigation of our Lake Erie waterfront for Camp Luther at HopeWood Shores, anticipating completion this calendar year. Other upcoming projects at this site include replacing the wood deck with composite decking for longer life, along with fundraising for a new summer staff cabin as well as other facility renovations and repairs.

This year was also a reminder that change, while difficult, isn't always bad. In our 2023 fiscal year, we had more campers than the previous year, more donors than the previous year, and received more total dollars than the previous year. More individual congregations have joined our congregational partner program. We gave away more than \$90,000 in camperships and other discounts to make camp affordable to all. 50% of our campers aren't Lutheran, and 20% have no religious affiliation, meaning that we introduce new people to the transformative love of God we know as Lutheran Christians. We've expanded HopeWood Connect to provide retreats and consulting to congregations throughout the year. This change is exciting!

But none of this is our work alone. As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 5, as we all contributed our various gifts, "God gave the growth" to this ministry and to the faith of the people who participate. Your continued partnership through volunteering and financially supporting HopeWood Outdoors are necessary parts of continuing this trajectory that God has set before us. Thank you for joining us on this journey of growth with God and for entrusting us with this ministry on behalf of your synod.

The Rev. Andrew (Drew) Tucker
Executive Director

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