

# The Link to a Place Apart



## TINY SPARKS

Nine-year-old Frances Baylor spends one week every summer at Family Camp with her sister and parents. “I’ve been going since I was in my mommy’s tummy,” she said. “The thing I love most about camp is the people.” When we asked her where she sees God at camp she replied, “I see God in everything at camp.” We agree Frances.

This past summer, during a summer vacation package weekend, Frances’ family met up with the Cowans. “Our families are always at family camp together each summer,” said Laura, Frances’ mom. “We missed seeing them this summer so when we learned they would be here, we met them on site. The children played games together outside safely and we had a chance to catch up and share stories around the campfire.”

As they were leaving camp, Laura and her older daughter shared concerns about the financial strains cancelling summer camp and other programs would have on the ministry. Laura did not realize that Frances was listening in the back seat, worried about a place she loves so much.

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# A MESSAGE from the CEO

The last printed edition of the LINK Newsletter was mailed out in early March of this year. While much has changed in the world since then, what remains steady and strong is the power of our camps and programs to form faith and develop leaders.

On May 22, 2020, we announced that summer camp 2020 would be suspended due to COVID-19. We knew this would be a major emotional and financial loss. Since then, together with the board, staff, and our larger ministry family, we continue to navigate an estimated \$3,000,000 loss in revenue for 2020. Through the combination of a Payroll Protection Program loan, payroll and pension cuts, expense cuts, unrealized expenses, and the generosity of our camp family, we find ourselves in a stronger position than we were anticipating. God's provision and your generosity have been an overwhelming blessing. Thank you!

There is still a great deal of work ahead, but we want to share some ministry joy and gratitude for where we find ourselves today. On September 20, we hosted our Lutheranch Barn Grand Opening virtually. Rescheduled from March to September due to the pandemic, we did not want to postpone yet again the opportunity to share about the exciting equestrian ministry happening there. Since the summer, we have welcomed nearly 200 riders to Lutheranch for various program and trail riding opportunities. Because horses create a natural spacing buffer and the programs are outside, we have been able to move forward with this life-changing program in the midst of social distancing. You can see all the videos from the grand opening on our Lutheranch Facebook or YouTube pages.

Before closing our sites due to COVID, work had begun on the Atonement Chapel at Luther Springs – a project from our Mission Possible



Campaign that was previously delayed by permitting. The builder was already on site, the project was funded by a previous campaign, and an additional restart would have added significant expense. For these reasons, we decided to move forward with that project while the site was closed. We anticipate the new 125-person chapel will be ready for use by the end of the year. Once we reach the other side of social distancing, the chapel will provide much-needed space for larger groups to meet for worship and gatherings that, until now, have not been possible.

Lastly, we celebrate YOU! Since closing our sites in March, we have found creative ways to stay connected as a ministry family. Together with virtual editions of Cabin Time, Vespers, Alumni Spirit Week and the telling of camp stories, you have made the separation feel less strained for our camp family spread far and wide. You have also given more than \$900,000 toward our \$1.8 million Light the Fire appeal to help bridge the gap to summer camp 2021. Thank you all for this generosity and show of love for our camps and programs. We will continue to do the work God has called us to until that time when we can gather together again at our sites safely. Gratefully in Christ,

Boyd W. Harris, IV  
Executive Director-CEO

*Continued from cover*

The next morning, Frances opened her piggy bank and took out a \$100 bill her grandmother gave her last Christmas. She brought it downstairs to her mother and said, “I want to give this to camp. I want camp to be there next summer.”

From the loaves and fish of a little boy, Jesus fed the 5000 men plus women and children. Frances offered her loaves and fish to camp – not because her parents asked her to – but because her generous spirit and love of camp called her to respond. She gave selflessly.

Frances is a spark, and she is not alone. Since we started the Light the Fire appeal, we have received notes and messages that include piggy bank gifts from Moses (3), Adeline (4), John Thomas (6), Isabella (10) and others.

With their help and your help, we are pleased to announce as of September 30, 2020 that the Light the Fire appeal has surpassed \$900,000 of our \$1.8 million goal to bridge the financial gap to summer camp 2021. In addition to this amazing generosity, more than 160 people started new recurring/monthly gifts toward our goal of 400. Thank you camp friends for being sparks that WILL light the fire for summer camp 2021. Thank you!

**\$1.8 million**

**You have now given more than**

**\$900,000**

**toward our goal**

**THANK YOU!**

**Light the Fire**  
A Summer Camp 2021 Appeal

**A NOTE ABOUT PAST LINKS THIS YEAR:**

In an effort to be good stewards of financial resources during these uncertain times, we only published electronic versions of recent stories after March. Those can all be found on our website under Impact Stories. Visit [www.novusway.org](http://www.novusway.org) today.



## A Passionate Advocate

# A BRIGHT LIGHT

“My mom could make high school boys want to go to Sunday school after church,” said Amanda Lawniczak. “It blew my mind, that after the virus first hit, my mom was asked to start a Wednesday night Zoom Bible study by a high school boy. Pretty amazing.”

Pretty amazing. That was Jill Lawniczak. On July 1st, 2020 Jill Lawniczak died in a fatal car accident. Jill was a youth director at Grace Lutheran Church in Tampa, FL and taking children to summer camp at Luther Springs was a given for her. “She adored camp,” said her daughter Amanda. “She loved going to camp as much as the youth, maybe more. You know that kid that can’t stop talking about camp stories? That was my mom.”

Jill wanted children and youth to grow up in the faith, and she believed that camp gave them a place to do just that. Jill not only brought children, youth, and adults to camp, she also served on the NovusWay Board of Trustees. “Jill’s ministry impact and influence with youth, the church, and the wider community was profound and lasting,

and her contribution to the ministry of NovusWay, to camp at Luther Springs, and as a member of our Board of Trustees was invaluable and enduring,” said Bo Harris, CEO of NovusWay. “With Jill’s passing, we lost a bright light, a shining star, a smiling face, an encourager, teacher, and friend.”

While at camp with youth, Jill didn’t sit on the sidelines. She actively participated in activities alongside them, strengthening her relationships with them and their connection to camp. She was fully committed to the ministry in every way.

Deacon Sue Mendenhall, Program Director at Luther Springs, was a dear friend and colleague of Jill’s. “Jill’s smile, her infectious laugh and her mischievous sense of humor made her a person that could brighten a room just by entering it. In addition to being an amazing mom and youth director, she understood the life changing impact of camp and was a passionate advocate for Luther Springs and outdoor ministry. She worked with each family in her congregation to get their children and youth to camp every summer and for school year retreats.

She even encouraged youth to take on leadership roles at church and to attend leadership training at Luther Springs to prepare them to one day become camp counselors. Her favorite place at camp was the dock, chuckling at campers' early attempts to maneuver their canoes around the lake and then cheering them on as they mastered the skill. It was also a favorite place for her own personal reflection and to bring older youth for devotions. She always said it was one of those places she could feel the peace of the Holy Spirit surround her. During the Luther Springs confirmation and leadership retreats, Jill was a favorite small group leader, laughing with youth

from all over the synod, encouraging them and guiding them on their faith journeys.”

“When the virus first came around, she was worried about Luther Springs,” said Amanda. “She was worried about the loss of income and she was afraid that it would no longer be a place to take children and youth. For her, camp was the place where children felt safe opening up about their faith. There aren't many places to feel safe doing that anymore and she did not want that connection at Springs to be lost. To honor her, we asked people to give in her memory to Luther Springs. We know she would have wanted that.”



“I want to show you something,” said Marilyn Boop Swygert as she stood on the steps of a quiet Upper Efirid Hall looking down at a rock. “I remember it being bigger,” she paused.

“That’s my rock. All of my major decisions in life were made while sitting on that rock.”

Marilyn and her husband, Pastor David Swygert (retired), stopped by Lutheridge during late summer to share memories

and a gift with the ministry. Marilyn was a camper the first summer Lutheridge had campers in 1951. “During morning watch, we were asked to find a place to pray alone, and I found that rock. For years, I went back to that rock, and all my major life changing decisions were made there. That was the place I decided where to go to college and what to do with my life.”

Marilyn earned her 5-year patch in 1955.

She returned to serve on summer staff in '59 and '60. "I wasn't going to return the next summer, but Dr. Thornburg asked me to come help schedule the counselors." And for that she remains grateful. In 1961, when she returned as what would now be considered senior staff, she met her husband David in Efir Hall.

"My life was made real because of camp, because of the woman I met," reflected David. Marilyn and David spent the afternoon sharing memories and

reflecting on how their life was impacted by their summers at camp. As we flipped through Marilyn's photo album, the joy and strength of the relationships formed at camp were palpable.

Marilyn and David have lived an extraordinary life, fostering children, teaching, and sharing the Good News. Because of the profound impact Lutheridge had on their own lives, they have made it a priority to ensure other children are able to attend summer camp each year.



## A YEAR OF TOUCHSTONES

For two people who were never campers or summer staff, Pastor Eric and Kristi Childers are camp friends through and through. "My family moved while I was in middle school, and I missed Campfirmation at both churches that summer," said Kristi. Kristi's first visit to Lutheridge was with Eric during candidacy with the NC Synod. "I remember Pastor Tim playing his guitar and singing Holden Evening Prayer. It was beautiful and spoke to me."

Both Eric and Kristi were students at Lenoir-Rhyne University (College then) and remember people wearing Lutheridge sweatshirts around campus. Fast forward several years and it was Kristi who fanned a flame of camp in their new congregation where Eric was

now the pastor. "I stood up at Mt. Olive in Cherryville and asked if any of the women wanted to go with me to Wild Women," she said. "My good friend Meredith Gerhard West had made it sound so wonderful. To my surprise, 19 women from the congregation joined me. We went back each year after that, and now St. Matthews goes."

Eric, now the senior pastor at St. Matthews Lutheran Church in Charleston, SC, has made an intentional effort to shape the youth program there around the camp experience. "When we began looking for a youth director, I intentionally looked for someone with a strong history and connection to Lutheridge," said Pastor Eric. "I knew someone who had served on staff at Lutheridge would be well



## MARILYN'S 5 YEAR PATCH

trained and shepherded. I knew we would have a common language and they would understand the mission and vision I had for the program. I wanted them to shape youth group time like time at camp. They needed to understand morning watch and what it means to have a meal together.”

Pastor Eric added a requirement for youth to attend camp as part of confirmation. “Now they just go because they want to,” he said. The congregation lifts up Lutheridge and their shared experiences at camp in worship regularly. They share memories in the newsletter. They share highs, lows, and God moments in youth group. “Camp is a year of touchstones for us. We bring the lessons, music, and shared experiences back to St. Matthews each year. In the fall we look back at our time at camp and it rallies the people around an exciting faith experience,” said Pastor Eric. “Our endowment financially supports all 40 of our campers and staff to go each year... and all staff go... they want to go. That is why when we learned summer camp would be cancelled, the endowment committee decided to gift \$10,000 to camp immediately – before we even knew about the Light the Fire appeal. Camp is an anchor for our congregation and for our whole church. We recognize that it is a ministry that

has to be nurtured or it will go away.”

Pastor Eric and Kristi are actively working with the ELCA Foundation’s Regional Gift Planner, Stephanie Burke, to include Lutheridge in their charitable estate plan. “We can’t think of another ministry like camp. The vocation of camp is to shape people of all ages in the Christian faith – it is their calling – their mission. We appreciate that they have not strayed from this. Some organizations wandered away from their faith roots, but Lutheridge is unapologetically a place apart to form faith and develop leaders in that faith.”

Their decision to include Lutheridge was affirmed this summer, when the Childers and 5 other families from St. Matthews decided to come up for a Summer Vacation Package. “The children had trouble understanding that they would not have a counselor to shepherd them,” said Kristi. “After a couple hours of trying to figure out what it meant to not have a counselor, the children naturally slipped into a daily pattern of camp.” The patterns they learned at camp translated into self-guided play of a camp day. “Camp is a critical part of what the church offers our children, youth and families,” said Pastor Eric. “That was a clear witness to us.”

# NovusWay Ministries

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