

## Bulletin of Reports: Mar-Lu-Ridge Camp and Retreat Center, Jefferson MD

The theme of the summer was “We are called...” 2 Timothy 1:9 says “So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time”. Campers and staff explored what it meant to be called into community, prayer, service, forgiveness, and love. They were challenged to take that servant attitude out into the world and make a difference in their homes, congregations, and schools.

This past year has been one of great reward as well as great challenge. The work of Mar-Lu-Ridge goes on each day in a variety of ways, many of which are never seen by the majority of our guests and campers. There is a community of people who are dedicated to preserving the history of this camp and working to ensure our presence for generations to come. On days when it is difficult to manage increasing costs and aging facilities, my mind is drawn to summer days, and the amazing community of campers and staff who fill the mountain with the joy of the Lord. I received a letter from a camper parent, and the words reminded me once again, that what we do here is important.

**“I asked her why (she loves camp) and she told me about all the friends she makes, the activities she does, but here’s the kicker. She said camp is the one place where at all times its 100% ok to talk about how much you love Jesus. She feels that camp is a place where she can show her faith in the company of others who are showing theirs and be loved and accepted. So I wanted to pass that on to you as an affirmation of the extremely important work that you do every summer. The faith formation of so many youth, along with connecting kids to God’s creation and our call to serve is just awesome. Thank you for all that you do and God’s continued blessings on your ministry!”**

During the month of February, we celebrated I Love Camp month. Photos and testimonies poured in from people who have been changed by their time at Mar-Lu-Ridge. Oftentimes, God is at work in ways we know nothing about – God is changing lives in this community, and those people take that joy and love out into the world. Our campers had the opportunity to make quilts for Lutheran World Relief. Together, we learned about brothers and sisters in need around the world, and poured our love and prayers into every quilt. Our Nature director spent hours leading campers and staff in simple lessons about our beautiful creation, and offered concrete steps for continuing this stewardship at home. Karl and I began to develop an Environmental Education program, which we hope will provide overnight and day retreat opportunities for school children throughout the year.

One of the highlights of my year was the opportunity to attend the Lutheran Outdoor Ministries conference in November. Camp directors and staff from Lutheran camps all across the U.S. gathered at Lutheridge, in western NC, for 5 days of continuing education workshops, small group discussion, worship and relationship building. The people I met are doing amazing things at their camp and retreat centers, and I was affirmed as I shared news of our programming and work with groups such as Lutheran Volunteer Corps, Lutheran Social Services, and a variety of outside camps who utilize our facility. I made many new friends and further developed my network of support – people who understand the unique issues we deal with on a daily basis and are quick to offer advice or prayers. I am very grateful to the Board of Directors for supporting me in this endeavor and hope to participate yearly.

It all comes down to community. Whether the people are right here in the form of my full-time staff, with us seasonally like our summer staff, volunteering time on the grounds or in the office, sharing news of the ministry in their congregations, hosting Mobile Mar Lu’s, or financially supporting our work, we are blessed beyond measure to be **community**.

In peace,  
Sarah Lefler, Executive Director