

**Please Note:**

This newsletter was written when BLDM was still known as Bethesda Auxiliary and the newsletter was posted to the AbleLight website. Going forward, the newsletter is the sole property of Bethesda Lutheran Disability Ministries and will be posted on our website (www.BethesdaLDM.org).

Shepherd's News – April 2023

From the President

Dear Auxiliary Friends and Donors,

I am excited to share with you about the Auxiliary's Governing Board meeting held via zoom in March, 2023. Your board is a wonderful group of Christian men and women with great concern "for the least of the brothers" as shared by Christ in Matthew 25:40: *The King will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.*

The board was blessed to have the Vice President of Faith Integration, Shelley Bobb, join our meeting. Shelley began working for AbleLight on August 31, 2022. If you look further in this newsletter under the AbleLight update, you will find some of the many things she is working on for the people served by AbleLight and the associates/employees who work for AbleLight.

At the September, 2021, Governing Board meeting, \$20,000 was approved as scholarship money for the AbleLight college students for the 2023-2024 school year. There are currently 19 college students at Concordia, Ann Arbor, MI, and Concordia, Mequon, WI. Each student received a scholarship for \$1,050. The students and families were overwhelmed with joy for these scholarships. Please see additional information in this newsletter.

Scholarships for the 2023-2024 school year will again be available for upper class college and seminary students who are planning a career in a disability related field. Please look for information in this newsletter if you know someone who could apply for this scholarship.

The Auxiliary will be looking for Cross and Bell recipients for 2023. Additional information and a form to return are found in this newsletter.

The future leaders school program “Changing Lives One Heart at a Time” is available for the 2023-2024 school year. The Auxiliary is searching for 5 Christian schools who might want to use the curriculum. Upon completion of the program, a grant of \$1,500 is available for the school for participation in the program. Please email me at craigail@yahoo.com if you would like more information about the program.

Long-time Governing Members, Nancy Kunert (Shepherd News Editor) and her husband, Dan Kunert (Parliamentarian), tendered resignations from the Board. They have served together on the Board for approximately 20 years. The Kunerts were a great asset to the board and will be sorely missed. I wish them God's blessings on their future endeavors.

Prayers are very welcome for the people served by AbleLight and their caregivers (staff and direct support professionals) as they work together each day; for the Bethesda Executive Team that their decisions will be reflective of God's love and mercy; and for the Bethesda Auxiliary as they seek to do God's will and share their love and concern with persons with IDD.

Reaching forward in faith and serving Christ in love,
Gail Nicolaus, President

From our Pastoral Counselor: Pastor Martin Koeller

“Lord, help me to see!”

“He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?” Luke 24:38

“If only I could see God, I would believe!” How often I have heard that phrase. How often I wish I could miraculously open people’s eyes to see the Lord! But I can’t! And I wonder, how could people be so blind? How can they not see the evidences of God’s presence in their lives? How can they doubt? But then it dawned on me that I, too, go through periods of darkness. I, too, sometimes cry out, “Lord, help me to see!”

Many times we rely on our senses more than we rely upon God! In the 1800’s there was a skeptic who said, “People tell me that God exists, but I can’t see Him. People tell me that there is a judgment to come, but I can’t see it. People tell me that Jesus has died and risen for me, but I can’t see Him.”

As the man stepped down from his platform some people clapped for him. He felt good that he had gotten his point across. Then another man stood up to speak. “People tell me that there is green grass around here, but I can’t see it. People tell me that there is a blue sky above, but I can’t see it. People tell me that there are trees nearby, but I can’t see them because I am blind.” In reality, both men were blind. One was blind physically. The other was blind spiritually.

On Good Friday, at the foot of the cross, stood people who were blinded by their unbelief. The Pharisees and priests were blinded

by their jealousy and hatred for Jesus. Maybe even some of the believers near the cross that day were blinded, as they saw Jesus die on the cross. Maybe they believed at that moment that their hope had died with Jesus! For there He was, dead on the cross!

Do we sometimes stand by and wonder if our hope had died? Do we sometimes doubt Jesus' presence and think, "Can God really help me?" "Does God really care for me?" "Does Jesus have the answers that I need?" How wonderful it would be if our eyes were always open to see that Jesus died for us. He died for our sins. He rose again on the third day. He lives! He forgives! He loves! He cares! He's near!

God has asked us to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8), so others can come to know Christ through our sharing of the Gospel. We can be His salt (Matt. 5:13) and His lights (Matt.5:14) to help people see Jesus through us. Lord, help us never to overlook anyone but to help everyone, especially those with disabilities, to see Your wonderful face.

Through the power of the Holy Ghost working through God's Word, may God strengthen us daily. May our loving Lord remind us that He died for us. He died for our sins, for our troubles, our doubts, and our fears. And He rose again for our salvation and eternal life. And He is present now, watching over us and taking

care of us. "Open our eyes Lord! We want to see Jesus!"

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

Dear Jesus, show me the cross! Why would I ever doubt Your love for me? Amen.

Thank you, Dan and Nancy Kunert, for your years of serving our Lord with us in the Bethesda Auxiliary!



Dan and Nancy Kunert met at a square dance their first week at Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Illinois. Starting in 1962, after graduating from CTC, and marriage soon after, they served 25 years in Papua New Guinea as Educational Missionaries for the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. They have taught and administered at all levels from pre-school to University.

After returning to the US in 1987, Nancy taught at various levels from Kindergarten to University (at Portland Lutheran School and Concordia, Portland, even Concordia, Irvine). Dan joined Aid Association for Lutherans and soon hooked up with Pat Arent who had joined AAL just before he did. They worked well together, having similar values. Dan served AAL, later named Thrivent, as a local Representative, then as an Assistant General Agent in southern California, and finally, as a Divisional Sales Director for the Western Region of the US, including all states from the Dakotas down to Texas and everything west of them. Dan and Nancy moved to Hawaii in 2003.

Almost 20 years ago, Pat asked Nancy to join the Good Shepherd Auxiliary Board as Treasurer and soon after asked Dan to join as Parliamentarian. The rest is history. Dan and Nancy will celebrate 61 years of marriage on June 2. “We have been blessed”, says Dan.

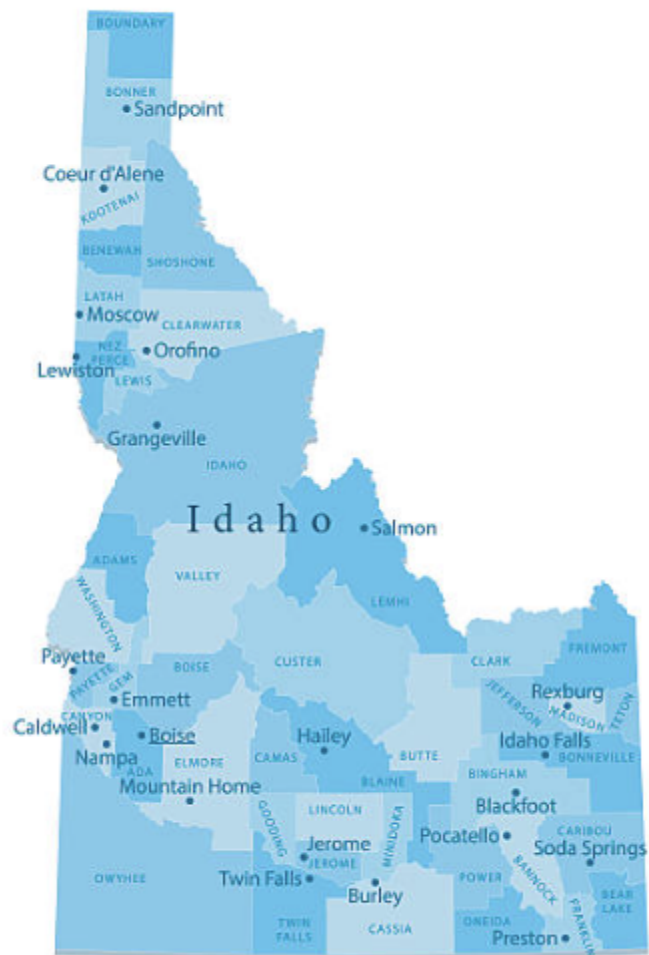
Bethesda Auxiliary News from State Chapters

IDAHO

The Idaho Unit met and surpassed its 18-19 pledge.

Congratulations and thank you to all of you who worked so hard to exceed our goal by raising \$11,800 over the past year.

Projects included: a talent sale following our annual meeting in Caldwell in April, Magic Valley area “Junk for Jesus” sale in June, holiday bazaar at Faith Mountain Home in November, Immanuel Twin Falls crock pot Advent supper, bake sale at Zion Nampa in February, Bingo Bash at Trinity Eden in March, Sunday School offerings monthly from Faith Mountain Home, as well as donations and dues from many faithful individuals.





President Marilyn and Clover students demonstrate what it feels like when all abilities are not included.



Trinity School students at their chapel service on March 11.

Clover Trinity School students dedicated their chapel offerings the 1st quarter of this year to Bethesda, they watched Bethesda videos and learned about the work that Bethesda does. I had the opportunity to speak to them on March 14 during their chapel time. Wendy Barckholz stated, “this was a neat project for the students – one they will remember, for sure.”

Our Annual Meeting in Jerome has been postponed. Hopefully we will be able to reschedule it soon.

Please remember to take pictures of your fund raising event. We would love to be able to show off the hard work that you do.



OREGON

Greetings Faithful Bethesda Auxiliary members from the Oregon unit.

Celebrating the seasons is something we all anticipate with Joy:
The Holy Season of our Lord's life and of each season in the year
the Creator gives us.

Advent and Christmas were celebrated in the AbleLight homes:
In the Tualatin homes, Kathy Greene and her faithful crew took
food, decorations, and activities to the homes and had devotions

and sang with their friends and the staff. Pastor Fenster always welcomes them at worship at Living Savior Lutheran Church.

The homes and apartments in Beaverton, Aloha, Hillsboro, Cornelius, and Forest Grove received Christmas-in-a-Bag again this year but being able to go into the homes to visit, sing and give our friends their gifts was a joy for everyone. What fun we had as we shared the Christmas story and sang Christmas hymns and carols.



Longtime friends celebrated Baby Jesus at Christmas in David and Linda's home in Forest Grove, Oregon, where Ryan and his housemate live next door. All loved the Christmas carols sung with Rev. George and Terry Putnam.

Lindy and John Tysor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Hillsboro prepared wonderful gifts, music, and activities for the people and gifts for the staff. Cookies were donated by other Lutheran

churches in the area, and plates of goodies, including sugar-free, were prepared for each home. On the day of delivery, Rev. George and Terry Putnam helped load the cars and deliver the gifts on the mapped-out routes. The Trinity group also made Birthday cakes for Jesus to take a day or two before Christmas to each residential facility. This treat again reminded the people and staff of the real joy of Christmas: JESUS !!!



Goodies being loaded into John and Lindy Tysor's and George and Terry Putnam's SUVs for residents and staff of AbleLight homes and apartments in Forest Grove, Cornelius, Hillsboro, Aloha, and Beaverton, Oregon.



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People supported by AbleLight on Portland's eastside, were surprised on December 21, 2023 when Mona Fuerstenau, Rev. George Putnam, and Terry Putnam, brought goodies for the staff and gifts for the residents. Mona knows these residents well, so we gave them gifts which we knew they would enjoy. Grace Lutheran Church and Stella Lutheran Church, an ELCA congregation donated a dozen beautiful quilts for some of the people, while others received activities, music, and other treats. The staff received edible goodies. With such short time, a roll of wrapping paper was given to the staff to wrap the gifts for each

resident. The Christmas story was shared, and we sang Christmas carols and hymns, and prayed with each group at each home. Great blessings for all on such a joyful day. May the Lord use all these celebrations of His love for us in these treasured lives.



Quilts for group home residents in Oregon from Grace and Stella Lutheran Churches in Longview, WA



Mona Fuerstenau with gift quilt from Grace Lutheran Church, Longview, for Joni and Friends Disability Camp family



Ben Fuerstenau snuggled under gift quilt for camp family

Spring is late in coming this year, but Living Savior Lutheran Church in Tualatin is preparing to celebrate the season with their “Spring Fling” event for the people and staff in the AbleLight homes and their congregations. Visiting, a devotion, and fun activities will highlight the day.

Redeemer Lutheran Church in Tillamook, Oregon, have the opportunity to volunteer at the Joni and Friends Disability Camp and the Friends’ Camp at Rockaway Beach. Thirty-five families who had a member living with disabilities will be attending a fantastic week of being “loved on” with Jesus’ love. A vast variety

of special activities are available each day for all family members to enjoy. Choose what you would like to do! Each day begins with a devotion and singing after connecting with your volunteer buddy. Even siblings have a buddy. For parents: a pamper day and tea for the ladies, and a BBQ for the men.

Each of the 35 families is given a gift BAG filled with special items. Quilters from Redeemer Lutheran Church and Grace Lutheran Church in Longview, WA, are donating beautiful quilts. The Tillamook Creamery has also been contacted for donations of ice cream. What fun the families will have opening their gift bags.

Volunteers are the key to this camp— as the director for the week and those serving as buddies even pay to volunteer! The blessings of serving the Lord and his people living with disabilities and their families are so great that volunteers return year after year. All Glory to the Lord!

May the Ministry of Presence be part of our service to people living with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Oregon.



What fun for members of Redeemer LC in Tillamook as they helped people with disability build their own pre-drilled bird houses and decorate them! Olivia shared the Good News while some decorated a wooden cross with a Bible verse on the back. (Joni and Friends Disability Family Camp)

Washington/Alaska

For several years the WA/AK unit of Bethesda/AbleLight Auxiliary has been functioning without a board. However, a few of its members have been very dedicated and supportive of aiding those Bethesda residents in our local area. We thank our Lord especially for Joyce Scramlin (membership chairman, recently deceased September 2022) and Kristy Webster, our gift table chairman who has retired her post. Both had served in those capacities for at least twenty years exemplifying their faith in serving others.

We wish the Auxiliary blessings as the members continue to support the mission of serving those with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



LETTER FROM: Good Shepherd Lutheran Home, Dominican Republic

Hogares Luteranos el Buen Pastor

April 17, 2023

Over 12 years ago, LCMS missionaries in the Dominican Republic opened the first group home in the country for six orphaned children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Bethesda Auxiliary has generously supported this ministry over the years. The prayers and financial support have been a great blessing in making the operation of this Christ-centered home possible. It has cost between \$50,000 – \$60,000 per year to operate the home. Due to a government mandated raise in wages and higher costs of food and transportation from inflation, it now costs \$70,000 per year to run the home. In the United States it costs \$70,000 + just to care for one person living with IDD. The home is a wonderful blessing for the six young adults who live as a family and are supported by members (tíos and tías – aunts and uncles) of the Dominican Lutheran Church or other Christian churches.

Hogares Luteranos el Buen Pastor (Good Shepherd Lutheran Home), a Dominican non-profit organization was established to take guardianship of these six souls. A rented house was renovated by church members and missionaries to be able to receive the children from a Dominican government institution where they lived in squalor conditions. The children were baptized on Easter Sunday just a few months after coming to live in the home. A national LWML grant allowed for a permanent

group home to be built in 2013 next to Concordia Lutheran Church, school and seminary just 20 minutes outside of Santiago, the second largest city in the Dominican Republic. The four young men who live in the home each share two bedrooms, and the two ladies each have their own small rooms.

The “kids” can walk or wheel to the church, school, and seminary next door, and play on the playground and basketball court. Is there an activity going on at church? They are all there! The seminary and deaconess students all come to the home to visit and build relationships with the young people.

Ramona is being taught household skills, is very helpful and efficient around the house, and runs errand down to a small neighborhood store. She loves to wear dresses and has fun with visitors from the many mission teams.

Estefani has completed 8th grade and would love to continue to take classes or vocational training. Unfortunately, due to errors in her birth certificate, she has been unable to receive a national ID card which she needs to take classes and really be participative in society. A lawyer has been hired to work to fix the problem. Stefani makes and sells beaded jewelry, enjoys participating in activities at church, and likes to visit her friends.

Junior is a tall, lanky young man who is known for his kindness. He is noble and loves to serve and help others. He faithfully does his chores to help the tíos and tías but what he would really love is to have a job. There are very few job opportunities for people with IDD in the Dominican Republic, but it is something that remains a goal and would help him live a more fulfilled life.

Moises was abandoned and found in the streets. After years in the orphanage, he was withdrawn, angry, and did not have a means to communicate with others. However, in his church family and group home family, he has received love and now knows how to give love to others. His favorite things to do are playing sports and acting out Bible stories during devotion time.

Randy lives with autism, so he likes a quieter environment. At worship he sits in the back but sings the liturgy and repeats back what the pastor is saying and preaching. He enjoys interacting one-on-one with others, especially if it involves shooting hoops, tossing a baseball, or kicking a soccer ball.

Francis is a great teenager who loves to tease, likes spinning Estefani around in her wheelchair, and enjoys watching videos on his tablet. He is deaf, but that doesn't slow him down as he wants to be involved in and try everything. A joy for him is wearing a white robe at worship and reverently lighting the candles on the

altar. He attends the deaf school and communicates with sign language and his marvelous smile.

Rev. George and Terry Putnam recently spent two weeks at Easter time in the Dominican Republic. They spent a fun afternoon at the beach with the kids who sat and played in the warm shallow water. Even after four years of not seeing the kids, Ramona came running up to them with big hugs. Gifts of shoes, socks, shirts, shorts, pants, and dresses were taken to each of the young people. What fun they had not only opening their own gifts, but also watching and rejoicing with each other at the gifts they received. Group home director, Dr. Marisol Martinez, continues to care for the residents and works to provide spiritual, educational, vocational, and rehabilitation activities and supports so that goals can be reached for each of these young people and their futures.

Please pray for:

- Estefani's paperwork to be resolved so she can continue taking classes and courses.
- Vocational opportunities for Estefani and Junior.
- The staff of the group home as they daily care for the residents.
- A sign-language tutor for Francis.
- Continued good health for the residents.

Needs of the home are:

- Secure the perimeter of the home with a wall and/ or fence.
- Cover an outdoor patio area so it can be used for recreation and rehabilitation activities.
- On-going financial support to fund the group home as no governmental assistance is available.

Bible verse: *May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 1*

Thessalonians 3:12



Deaconess Danelle Putnam-Schumann with Junior and Moises trying on new shirts



Frances, and Junior enjoying their gifts



Dr. Marisol Martinez, group home director, with Estefani showing her new pretty blouse



Terry and Moises delighted with their gifts



Randy delighted with his gift



Terry and Ramona dyeing Easter eggs



Deaconess Danelle and Moises rejoicing with Junior over his new tennis shoes

Bethesda Lutheran Communities Auxiliary Scholarships

The Bethesda Auxiliary, in partnership with AbleLight, is offering students up to \$3,000/person in scholarships for the 2023-2024 school year. Scholarships will be awarded to junior and senior college students and seminarians displaying interest in service to people with developmental disabilities in a congregational setting.

The deadline to apply is **May 12, 2023**, with results to be announced by July 1, 2023. To download an application, go to <https://ablelight.org/scholarships/>.

LWML 40th BIENNIAL CONVENTION, MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN (June 22-25, 2023)

Are you attending the LWML convention this summer? The theme is: “Celebrate the Lord of the Nations”

Scripture verse: *Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, for the people whom he has chosen as his heritage! The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man* (Psalm 33:12-13).

AbleLight will have an exhibit and there will be an LWML Special Ministries exhibit set up by the Special Ministries Task Force (SMTF) Come and see us! There will be handouts and drawings. Friday night you will create a fingerprint bookmark. Hope to see you there.

Auxiliary Update April 2023

[Faith Activities Update](#)

From Shelley Bobb, Vice President of Faith Integration

It has been a busy few months as I have been meeting people and building out our approach to faith going forward. Highlights include:

- **Virtual Worship Services** – For Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Easter, Developmental Disabilities Month
- **Providing Memorial Services** for staff and/or those we serve (virtual). Prayers for immediate staff and those we serve for people who have died or are sick
- **Weekly Devotions and Prayers** posted on AbleLink that are specifically designed to form all aspects of the Christian life of faith and deepen our understanding of Christ. They are designed to offer opportunities to grow and reflect on the faith in all its fullness and life.
- **Designing material** to help staff understand death and dying and become more comfortable with this element of care
- **Provide religious resources** for the people we serve
- **Assessing church involvement** and planning for the people we serve to attend and participate in a worshiping community
- **Getting to know the organization** – I am spending a lot of time getting acquainted with the operational leaders right now and visiting their markets. They will be responsible for aiding the people we serve to engage the materials we share, arrange for church relationships and watching any video/streaming materials we offer. The operations team has been extremely receptive to helping out, which is good news!

- **“Bible Study”**: A study of four of the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. Two separate offerings: one for the people we serve and another for our associates/employees. Shelley will be leading these Bible studies.
- **“Worship in our Homes”**: Designing weekly services offered to those we serve via taped video service. These will be designed to be simple services of prayers, music and readings with a short devotion. Beginning end of April.

AbleLight College

From Stehanie O'Connor-Schutt, Senior Director of Education & Transition Services

On behalf of the staff, students and families associated with AbleLight College at Concordia University Wisconsin and Ann Arbor campuses, **I would like to again extend the deepest gratitude for your extraordinary generosity in providing each student with a scholarship this semester!** The outpouring of responses that I received from families following this announcement was incredible. Many reached out and asked that I pass along to all of you their gratitude for your spectacular generosity and thoughtfulness in donating this money to their children's education. In conversation with students at both campuses, they expressed being shocked and amazed by this gift toward their continued education at AbleLight College. One student's comment struck me when he said, “wow I can't believe

someone who doesn't even know me would do something like this.....they must be the kindest people in the world.”

This project was indeed meaningful and beneficial. If consideration could be given to future projects that would be focused on helping to offset the cost of the AbleLight College tuition in the future, I am very confident that they will not only be appreciated but will be extremely beneficial to supporting the educational and long-term outcomes for individuals with IDD.

[AbleLight Programs and Operations Update](#)

Growing in Colorado – We continue to grow in Colorado, expanding our reach to make a difference for more and more people with developmental disabilities. As another example of that, we recently took over a day program, respite services and non-medical transportation services in Grand Junction and are very excited to extend a warm welcome to the families, guardians and employees that are joining our AbleLight family. This offering complements our growing host home operation in that area that has doubled in size over the past 6 months due to our purchase of the host home program from Rocky Mountain Health.

New Faces – We have recently welcomed several new state leaders to our team. Please reach out if you live nearby!

- Thomas Beatty – Area Vice President for Kansas and Missouri
- Kathy Burke – Area Vice President for Oregon
- Sonal Shukla – Area Vice President for California

Concordia Publishing House – Please don't forget that faith resources are available both on ablelight.org (PDFs), or through CPH. All materials through CPH are free and the Wonderfully Made brochures have just been reprinted by the Auxiliary and will soon be ready to order.

Bethesda Lutheran Communities Auxiliary Cross & Bell Award Nominations

The Cross and Bell award is given to an Auxiliary member for their outstanding charitable volunteer work for the Bethesda Lutheran Communities Auxiliary.

[Download the nomination form here.](#)

Please submit a short biography of what this person has done and why you feel he/she should receive the Cross and Bell Award. This summary can be on a separate sheet. You can submit by email to: Gail Nicolaus at craigail@yahoo.com to be received no later than **June 1, 2023**.