

SHEPHERD'S NEWS



**BETHESDA LUTHERAN
DISABILITY MINISTRIES**

PASTORAL COUNSELOR'S MESSAGE

The Passing of the Torch

"...how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" Romans 10:15

With the Winter Olympics upon us, the image of the Olympic torch captures our imagination once again. Lit in Greece, the flame journeys mile by mile toward Milan, Italy, passed from runner to runner—hundreds participating, each carrying the same fire with one shared goal: the opening of the Games.

In a similar way, this past year we witnessed a meaningful passing of the torch within our own ministry family. For many years, Bethesda Lutheran Communities Auxiliary faithfully provided

Lutheran resources and materials to serve people living with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Now, as the torch has been passed to the newly formed Bethesda Lutheran Disability Ministries (BLDM), the mission continues. As a new Recognized Service Organization of LCMS, BLDM steps forward with gratitude for the past and commitment to the future, carrying the same Gospel flame entrusted to us.

BLDM now runs its leg of the race with joy and purpose—delivering the Good News of Jesus Christ to all people, especially those with disabilities, so that they, too, may hear, know, and believe the love of Christ. The goal before us is far greater than any earthly finish line: eternal salvation in heaven above. By God's grace, we carry the torch together until that day when the race is complete and faith becomes sight.

Hebrews 12:1b–2a

"...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith..."

VICE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BLDM Pastor Survey

In November, we sent a 10-question survey to all LCMS congregations for which we had an email. Our goal was to discover which congregations included (or didn't include) some form of disability ministry in their congregations and where BLDM might be able to partner with them to help them start new programs or to make those existing programs more effective. We sent this to 4,699 congregations and about 2,000 total opened the survey. To date, we have received 108 responses, about 5% of those who opened them.

All who responded appreciated our work. Some of the respondents don't see a need for local disability ministry while others are already reaching out to people with disabilities in their congregations. Most requested more information. 3 requested presentations from BLDM. Finally, there were congregations seeking assistance to start or enhance a program of local disability outreach. Karen, Linda and Reuben are following up with these congregations (through their pastors or volunteer) to provide the assistance requested.

The information we received from the survey, while there were far fewer responses than we had hoped, will help us guide the future direction of this ministry and has identified preliminary partners in disability ministry. We hope to continue to reach out, via mailings, emails, convention displays and future surveys, to continue to build a nationwide network of congregations who are actively sharing the gospel to and with people who have intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Pastor Reuben Schmitz
BLDM Vice-Chairman



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Recognized Service Organization of
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WHAT IS NEW?

- Applications are being accepted for the Lutheran Student Scholastic and Service Scholarship for undergraduate and postgraduate students. Guidelines and applications are available on our Website.
- The Berea Project is now available on our Website under resources/devotions. This collection of lessons published many years ago by the Bethesda Institute, is compiled from earlier issues of 'Breakthrough'. It is intended to guide those people who have answered the Lord's Call, "Whom shall I send?" - as they bring the message of God's unconditional love to people who have never heard, including people living with disabilities.

IDEA CENTER



Meet Linda and her friend Lucy. Lucy often makes an appearance during Linda's Bible Studies with group home residents via ZOOM. Whether "in person" or via ZOOM, puppets are a great way to pique curiosity, draw attention to key points and create a fun atmosphere for people living with IDD. Consider using them in your homes or during church children's messages, Bible studies or Sunday School. If you have friends like Lucy, send us a picture!

FAITH WITHOUT BARRIERS

"Thanks for not giving up on me." These are the words Pastor Dave Wiist hopes to hear on the other side of eternity. Bethesda Lutheran Disability Ministries recently sat down with him to learn about how his congregation has been sharing the love of Jesus with people who have intellectual and developmental disabilities.

For the past 22 years, Pastor Wiist has served the congregation at Concordia Lutheran Church in Evansville, IN. His call to Evansville was an unexpected homecoming where he, his wife, and their four children share family dinners together with extended relatives. That same sense of community runs deep within his congregation.

Soon after arriving, Pastor Wiist met Brian Pratt, a religious life staff member from the former Bethesda Lutheran Communities team.

OUR NEW BLDM WEBSITE AND QR CODE

Visit our website at bethesdaLDM.org or scan the code



Faith Without Barriers - (continued from left)

Brian invited him to join a visit to ResCare, which served people with IDD. Admittedly, he was initially apprehensive about how Bible stories, devotions and prayer could reach such an intellectually diverse group of individuals. Right away, Brian's gift of connection shone through. With a short devotion, prayers and guitar-led song, the whole room was filled with praise. Through the participant's God-given abilities, Pastor Wiist witnessed the Gospel's power to overcome any obstacles and growth in faith.

Over the years, Pastor Wiist continued nurturing the spiritual needs of dozens of people through ResCare, Bethesda Lutheran Communities, Arc, and Easter Seal programs. His congregation also launched a three-day day camp at Jacob's Village, serving a community of people that includes seniors and people with developmental disabilities.

Today, Pastor Wiist partners with Bethesda Lutheran Disability Ministries. Our focus remains on sharing Christ's love with people who have IDD and equipping congregations to start or expand disability ministries.

For the full story and pictures about Pastor Wiist and the ministry at Concordia Lutheran Church in Evansville visit our website seen on the left or scan the QR code and search "Faith without Barriers"



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