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to Tell  
the STORY

South Carolina Synod  
Assembly 2022

*Our Stories*







# Never Stop Making Space

## South Carolina Synod

Mary Katherine King attended Mt. Tabor Lutheran Church in West Columbia as a child because her parents made her. “I didn’t want to put on a dress. I wanted to put on jeans,” she laughed.

But her attitude about attending church began to change around the 3rd grade. Mary Katherine started to enjoy confirmation, at first because of her friends, but it all began to grow from there.

She has powerful memories of going to National Youth Gatherings in New Orleans and Detroit, and she remembers visiting Camp Kinard with South Carolina Lutheran Church Youth (SCLCY).

Her faith story has a pattern to it. Each key moment begins with her not being involved, not knowing an opportunity exists, being asked to consider it, eventually saying yes, and then finding a place in God’s community through her participation.

The youth at Mt. Tabor constantly texted and invited each other to events. She appreciated a new afterschool program at church on Wednesdays and then was asked to consider staying even later to sing with the choir. Mary Katherine loves to sing and found an extended community there.

When she moved off to Clemson, the Lutheran Campus Ministry members knew she was coming because her

pastor had alerted them. They connected with her in multiple and personal ways. She admits she didn't get very involved that first year, but she appreciated that they never gave up and yet weren't pushy at the same time. Freshman year was a hard one for Mary Katherine.

Then, during her first summer on staff at Lutheridge, a Clemson Lutheran Campus Ministry (LCM) member heard Mary Katherine share discouragement about her current major. "I really just love camp, camping, camping ministry, and my LCM friend told me that I could major in camp at Clemson. I had no idea." Because of the connections made at camp with LCM members, her second year at Clemson was very different, and she became more involved. She even joined the leadership council for LCM.

After college, Mary Katherine found herself in a new place, with a new job in a leadership role at a camp in Pinewood, SC. Unfortunately, due to covid, she lost her job and was forced to move back home – not where she expected to find herself. "But I wasn't alone," she shared. "So many people I had met along the way reached out to help me. Lori Bode was a reference, and Pastor Josh Kester from Clemson LCM told me about a job with South Carolina Lutheran Retreat Centers."

Because of her time visiting Camp Kinard and the Coastal Retreat Center for SCLCY retreats with Mt. Tabor as a youth, she felt a safe connection to apply. She now serves as the Hospitality Coordinator.

As she made her way back to Mt. Tabor, this time by choice, she was invited to sing for Women of the ELCA Sunday. Then she was invited to be part of the contemporary choir. "Everyone kept making sure I knew there was space for me even when I was the one holding myself back from joining in. That feels like my story over and over."

Looking back now, after starting to serve in a synodical organization, Mary Katherine can see how the synod was quietly and actively part of driving all the opportunities that directed her path toward a vocation and calling. "The synod supports LCY, Youth Gatherings, Lutheran Campus Ministry, NovusWay, and South Carolina

Lutheran Retreat Centers," she shared. **"Because my congregation is part of something bigger, I have been connected to the community of believers throughout my childhood and now as an adult. I want people in the synod to know that even if they don't see it, they should not stop asking people to be part of something bigger. They should never stop making spaces for people and never stop inviting them."**

Your mission support and generosity to the South Carolina Synod make it possible for these ministries to carry out their mission and build a community that connects us to each other and God's radical story of salvation for each of us.

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# The Outward Package

## South Carolina Women of the ELCA

At the young age of 22, Donna Fulmer found herself widowed with a 7-month-old baby. When she eventually got remarried and started attending a Lutheran church, she worried she would be received poorly. “I felt like I had a letter on my chest,” she shared. “People didn’t know my story, but they could certainly assume it.”

To her surprise and delight, she was wrong. “I was accepted by the women in the WELCA circle at Macedonia Lutheran, in Prosperity,” Donna shared. “Here I was coming into a marriage and a new church with a child. They didn’t know my story, but they welcomed me. They encouraged me to share my faith and made me a leader in the circle. I was seen as a child of God. Through our regular program of sharing prayer, scripture, song, and message, I learned how Jesus gave the woman at the well spiritual water. I learned that we are all in this together.”

Today, Donna serves at the national level for WELCA. She remembers being on the other side of accepting

those for whom we do not yet know their story.

“I was in Chicago for a WELCA event,” she reflected. “The Conventional Chaplin had an outward appearance I wasn’t used to. She had colored hair, tattoos, and piercings. She was very different from me. I admit that I wondered what she was going to be able to teach me. But then, she stated talking about how she ministers with young people in college. I found myself very thankful for her ministry. I found myself giving thanks that we are all different. I realized that I couldn’t possibly relate to those students the way that she could, and I was grateful she was part of our full ministry together.”

WELCA provided holy welcome to Donna during a time when she may have appeared to be something other than what people were used to. It taught her how to lead and tie the elements of a prayer, scripture, song, and program together. It also opened her eyes to the many gifts and talents of other women from across the church, regardless of the outward package they come in.





# The Fringes

## Lutheran Campus Ministry

When Kelly arrived at Winthrop as a Freshman 4 years ago, she was tentative about attending college. “She didn’t feel she had a lot of options,” shared Olga-Maria Cruz, the Campus Minister for WELCM, “but she trusted that God had something for her here.”

Kelly had grown up in a church. Sadly, because Kelly is gay, the campus ministry program run by her denomination caused her to feel more closeted than accepted. “She left that church and the campus ministry program questioning if she was okay with God and if God was okay with her.”

“When I met Kelly,” shared Olga-Maria, “it was a couple of years later. I was serving on a panel discussion facilitated by the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Winthrop. The panel was there to discuss the relationship between the gay community and the church. Kelly was in attendance and her girlfriend was on the panel. I was describing a God who had love for everyone and a God who had love for Queer folk who could be fully welcomed.” Hearing this message of love and acceptance made Kelly and her girlfriend want to connect with WELCM.

After getting connected to WELCM, Kelly served as an intern with a peer mentorship. She served as an intern at HOPE of Rock Hill and connected to dozens of members of Grace Lutheran in Rock Hill. They started

coming to church and Sunday evening prayer service. She graduated from Winthrop and feels more connected to God and hopeful she can find a church family and welcoming service. “WELCM has impacted my life,” Kelly shared, “because before finding this affirming space, I did not know that my identities as Christian and queer could both be present and accepted in one community.”

“The church talks a lot about wanting young people,” shared Olga-Maria. “Campus Ministry is where the church keeps its baptismal promises to walk through life with you – your whole life. At Winthrop Campus Ministry, I have zero cradle Lutherans. Instead, we have 20+ young adults, like Kelly, seeking a spiritual home and trying to build a faith community. None of us, including myself, have a Lutheran background. Instead, we are finding a place in the ELCA because we hear Good News. We can preach to those who have been alienated. We are nimble. We exist on the fringes and the margins to find young adults who need to hear the Good News and to meet them where they are.”

WELCM (Winthrop Ecumenical Lutheran Campus Ministry) is pronounced “Welcome.” It is financially supported through the generosity of individual donors, Grace Lutheran in Rock Hill, SC and the South Carolina Synod of the ELCA.





# Comfort, Dignity & Grace

## Lutheran Homes of SC: Lutheran Hospice

It was during a weekly Lutheran Hospice staff meeting when the on-call weekend nurse made record of receiving a message from a woman in distress. “Her words were hard to understand. She appeared to be in so much pain it was difficult for her to talk.”

When Lutheran Hospice reached out to her, the caller was pleading for assistance with her pain. She was clearly looking for help but simply wasn’t making any sense.

Working through their network of hospital case managers, the Hospice Team soon discovered that the patient (we’ll call Ms. Carol) was in her 50s and had just been diagnosed with end stage metastatic cancer the week prior.

In the course of four months, Ms. Carol had also experienced the loss of her brother, sister and mother. At the moment of her call, she had no place else to turn. It was now Friday morning, and the hospice team traveled to Newberry to knock on the door of a small trailer, but there was no answer. A neighbor came out and directed them to a small metal workshop out back where they found Ms. Carol living alone.

Due to her pain and condition she had barely been

eating and weighed less than 90 pounds. The Lutheran Hospice team quickly assessed that Ms. Carol qualified for immediate 24-hour care. Unfortunately, she had no money to seek help at a hospital or any other type of care facility.

She needed to be transported to a safe place where she would not be endangered and to receive the necessary care for her to live her remaining days with comfort, dignity and grace.

Hospice contacted the Lutheran Homes of SC Foundation and submitted a referral for emergency funding. The Foundation approved funds for her placement within an hour, and the Hospice Team moved her to her new room at their sister ministry, the Heritage at Lowman Rehabilitation and Health Care Center.

“She spent 10 days surrounded by our Lutheran Hospice team and her niece until she died in peace,” staff shared. “Talk about a community coming together and helping a woman who was being underserved.”

Your generosity to the Lutheran Homes of South Carolina Foundation makes it possible to meet the needs of God’s most vulnerable through the work of Lutheran Hospice and all of Lutheran Homes’ care ministries.



# Circle of Welcome

## Lutheran Services Carolinas

“After the militias took over, as a religious minority, Yasmin and her family were forced to flee from Iraq for their own safety,” said Seth Hershberger, area manager for the Columbia office of the New American’s Program at Lutheran Services Carolinas (LSC). “Their lives were at risk, so they fled to Turkey. Yasmin and her sisters were legally eligible for resettlement in the United States, which meant leaving her parents behind.”

Yasmin, like all those in the New Americans Program, has experienced trauma and fear. They have also undergone a strenuous vetting program by the Federal Government to be here.

“They have every right to come here feeling defeated, but instead, what we see are strong, resilient individuals who have escaped and now want to start a new life so they can give back to the country and people who welcomed them,” Hershberger said.

Yasmin fled Iraq in 2013 and a full two years later was finally able to be resettled in the United States in 2015.

In the beginning, Hershberger said she had a lot of struggles finding work. She came with no English or transferrable skills. But through the support of her caseworker and volunteers, she signed up for English classes and determined that she was interested in working at a hospital. “She wanted to do work that allowed her to give back,” Hershberger said. “She wanted to help others.”

After working hard to learn English, Yasmin also excelled at the necessary classes to earn her certificate in Phlebotomy and started working at the local hospital. Today, she enjoys her work helping others and is happily married.

Yasmin is one of many stories of new Americans who make a lot out of a little. LSC offers eight programs to new Americans through federal contracts. The first program addresses the initial resettlement. It is intense and provides for basic needs for the first 90 days.



Through other programs they are also eligible to receive services for up to five years to ensure they become independent and self-sufficient which is the goal of the program.

“After they complete the program, they know English,” Hershberger said. “They are culturally adjusted. They have a career, and they are self-sufficient.”

The initial funding from government contracts for the LSC New Americans Program is limited. “Churches and civic groups provide the difference through our Circle of Welcome Program to help get them on their feet,” Hershberger shared. “We pair each family or individual with a church group, who takes them to the doctor, get them registered for classes, and provide their core services. They also become their extended family and provide fellowship. When churches and individuals give to the New Americans Program, 100% of their generosity supports families directly.”

Since the Taliban took over Afghanistan in 2021, LSC has welcomed over 750 Afghan refugees and expanded its program. There are now five LSC New Americans Program offices located in Raleigh and Asheville, North Carolina and Charleston, Greenville, and Columbia, South Carolina.

In the Columbia office alone, 195 were resettled with the support of 15 LSC teammates and 25 churches helping to provide for these children of God. Churches can get involved by contacting Lutheran Services Carolinas at 1-800-HELPING or by visiting <https://lscarolinas.net/refugee-and-immigrant-services/>.





# Experiential Learning

## Newberry College

“My parents are both pastors in Poland,” shared Newberry College student Kornelia Rudkowska.

“Our bishop sent an email sharing that there were a few ELCA International Women Leader Scholarships available. The chances were really small, and I never thought I would get it, but I applied.”

“In Poland, we are part of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, but it is simpler to say, ‘I am Lutheran.’ People know what you mean when you say that,” shared Kornelia. “I really didn’t allow myself to have expectations about coming to Newberry because even up until the last day it didn’t feel real. I arrived in the US at 11 pm and I was still thinking it wasn’t real.”

“There are three types of High Schools in Poland, and I was in the high school plus technical school for 4 years. I took my final exam, and I could have had a ‘real job’ there, but Newberry College is very different than that school. In Poland, I would sit and do book learning for 6 hours and then have tests. Here, the education is more experiential work. It is more helpful in an actual job and improves my qualifications.”

Kornelia is a Communications Major and would like to be a Public Relations Specialist working in advertising after she graduates from Newberry in 4 years. She

enjoys video production, photography, and design.

Kornelia is in her second semester now. “For the first month, I was closed off. I was in my shell because I was struggling with the language barrier,” she shared. “But I got a lot of support from the school. Dr. Michael Smith (Assistant Dean for Student Engagement) picked me up from the airport, helped me get a social security number, and supported me in other ways. Then I started making friends and now I have people to sit with at lunch – I have real people to spend time in addition to seeing my friends from back in Poland online.”

While Kornelia isn’t sure how God will use what she is learning in her future, she is grateful for the opportunity to continue her education and experience a new culture and country.

“Newberry’s participation in the ELCA’s International Women Leader Scholarship Program brings tremendous value to the college,” shared Jay Salter, the External Communications Coordinator for Newberry College. “It is an active, visible manifestation of the college’s Lutheran roots in action and prepares students for our mission to be global citizens. Lutherans from all over the world can come here and have educational experiences rooted in faith.”





# Taught & Caught

## ELCA Foundation, Regional Gift Planner

“My mother made a little box and kept it by the phone. She would write down every single organization she gave to,” shared Laurel Suggs. “She included when, how much, and what for. She was an original Lutherock person in 1997 – a charter member of Ridge Rock Builders.”

Arthur and Laurel Suggs learned generosity from their parents and grandparents. “Generosity is taught” she shared. “And it is caught,” Arthur finished.

As members of St. Paul’s Lutheran in Columbia, SC, it was important to the Suggs to leave a legacy of generosity as others in their family had done. “We met Stephanie Burke, the ELCA Gift Planner by Zoom at the start of Covid,” Laurel shared. “She helped walk us through some creative ways to leave a legacy well, and I am so glad we met with her.”

“St. Paul’s is an engaged community of believers. The church has a long history of being good stewards,” shared Arthur. “We have been ministering on the corner of Bull and Blanding for 125 years. We want to make sure that the work of the saints that came before us can continue. That is one of the reasons we wanted to

include St. Paul’s in our charitable estate plan, and why we needed Stephanie to help us.”

“Meeting with the gift planner gave us the education to do it right,” shared Laurel. “She held our hand all the way through the process. She made it a pleasure – something that isn’t easy to do. She helped us look at all our options and make the right decision for us. We all have a legacy. We have a desire to do something positive for future generations to come.”

Laurel and Arthur have shared the process with their children who are both married adults. “Now that the paperwork is in place, we feel like we have accomplished something.”

Through a partnership with the ELCA Foundation and the South Carolina Synod, our Regional Gift Planner is available to help members of our congregations like the Suggs leave a comprehensive charitable estate plan. The Gift Planner is available to help our members navigate all the complicated options and make the best plan for them. Through the generosity of our members, the work of the church will live on for generations to come.





# 8 Inches Away

## Novusway Ministries

“Jacque attends one of the 300 schools labeled failing in Florida,” shared John Bryant, pastor at Joy Lutheran in Palm Bay. “His family attends the little Haitian Pentecostal church that meets in the strip mall by the liquor store.”

“Jacque is autistic. He refers to himself in the third person and he has no physical boundaries,” Pastor John said. “He gets right up in your face, in your bubble. The reality is a lot of people have trouble relating to Jacque.”

Joy Lutheran is located in a very diverse area. “A lot of people won’t live here because of the diversity,” Pastor Bryant has a long history with Luther Springs. While he served at Zion Lutheran in Hickory, NC they offered a Luther Springs Day Camp each summer. Now, at Joy, they do the same.

“We have around 35 children who come from the neighborhood and only about 6 of them are from Joy.” While the church recognizes the power and importance of Day Camp, they acknowledge that the children in the area, children like Jacque, can’t afford to pay for day camp, so the church includes the full program in their budget each year. “We include it, but the church really hasn’t had to pay for it, because we have families who want to pay for it every year,” he shared.

“His behaviors never seem to be an issue at day camp,” shared Pastor John. Jacque returned in 2019, but in 2020, due to Covid there was no day camp.

On the first morning of Day Camp 2021, Pastor John pulled into the church parking lot and there sat Jacque and his mother – one hour early. “No one is here?” Jacque shouted.

“That is because you are an hour early,” replied Pastor John warmly. His mother needed to get to work, so Pastor John allowed Jacque to stay in the office until day camp started.

“He came right up to my face – 8 inches away,” Pastor John smiled.

“Rev-er-an’t’ Byrant! We didn’t have day camp last year. It made Jacque sad. We have it this year. It make Jacque happy. It is the one week in the summer that Jacque have friends.”

The camps and programs of NovusWay, Lutheridge, Lutherock, Luther Springs, and Lutheranch offer children a safe place to be their whole selves, just as God created them. Whether it is on one of our sites or in a congregation reaching out into the community, God is present offering the welcome and joy.

Jacque’s first summer at Joy Day Camp was in 2018.



# A Crashing Economy

## Mission Investment Fund

Jon Heiliger was in commercial real estate before being called as a pastor in the ELCA. When he arrived at Lord of Life, Bluffton, SC, a new mission start, they had already formed a building committee and were preparing to build their first unit.

“We were worshipping in the gym at the elementary school,” Pastor Jon reflected. “Our reality was a leaky roof, noisy air handlers, and carpet with mold. Sometimes we would move the large plastic garbage cans to collect water,” he shared. “Then, we were accidentally locked out of the gym on Palm Sunday... to say we were ready for our own place was an understatement.”

They were also ready to be a consistent presence in the community, not simply a sign that goes out on Sunday morning.

Lord of Life worked with the ELCA Mission Investment Fund to finance their first unit. After getting the design they realized that working with a straight commercial lender was problematic. “They aren’t used to working with churches,” Pastor Jon shared. “They are heavily slanted toward a business model. We can make revenue projections but not guarantees.”

Pastor Jon had worked with MIF through Spirit of Joy in Weddington, NC. “The resources provided and

the added touch of knowing the funds came from other people helping and investing to grow the church made it an easy choice,” he shared.

When Lord of Life was ready to build their final sanctuary, they went back to MIF. “MIF understands congregations, and this was 2008 and 2009. Again, by then, the congregation had a sense of true partnership and relationship with MIF. They knew our story - what we had hoped to do and what we were able to do.” When Lord of Life built their final sanctuary, they were the only real estate development going on in the area. “We were a sign of hope that in the crashing economy, God was moving us forward. MIF made that possible.”





# Walking Alongside

## South Carolina Candidacy



E. P. Martin was nurtured in faith in his home congregation, Joy Lutheran, Moore. Recognizing God was calling him to become a rostered minister, he would be quitting his job. E. P. was concerned about paying for his seminary education. His wife, Sandi, could stay employed if the family could remain geographically located in the upstate of South Carolina.

He started out unsure, not knowing how it would all work out, entered seminary, and began the candidacy process. Relationships were established in the candidacy process. In particular, he received affirmation along the way from a rostered minister who was his contact person and from a member of the bishop's staff who kept in touch with how things were going.

Financial support was provided along the way. "Each semester I received encouragement and affirmation through the financial support from the seminary and the South Carolina Synod", he said. Along the way he took time for discernment between chaplaincy or parish ministry. "The obstacles that I worried about in the beginning were removed," he shared.

E. P. will be graduating in May from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary and is currently in the call process. He is confident that he wants to serve

as a minister of Word and Sacrament in a congregation and that is where he is called to be. "I just can't imagine doing anything else," he shared. "This is what I need to be doing."

"For others entering the call process," he shared, "you may not see how it's going to come together in the beginning, but the Holy Spirit puts people and opportunities in our lives to walk along with us in the journey."

E. P. spoke with deep appreciation for the members of the candidacy committee who have accompanied him on this four-year journey, put in a lot of time, effort and diligence into this process and making it a labor of love.

The distinctive role of the South Carolina Synod Candidacy Committee is to work with the Churchwide Office, the seminaries and congregations to ensure that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America prepares gifted people who are called by God to serve as rostered ministers in this church. Through your generous Mission Support, a portion of the offerings received in your congregation, given to the synod and the wider church, the candidacy process is making a difference and seminarians receive financial support for their education. Thank you for your Mission Support!

# Zero Percent

## South Carolina Lutheran Men in Mission



“Christ Community is a new mission start in North Charleston,” shared Philippe Cote the President of South Carolina Lutheran Men in Mission (LMM). “Unfortunately, they haven’t been able to worship in their sanctuary for a couple of years due to termite damage.”

“I preached my first Sunday at Christ,” share Pastor Josh Knutson. “My first Sunday in my first call.” After worship, a couple members came to Pastor Josh to inform him they had found some holes in the wall. After an inspection the new congregation learned termites had been eating away at the structure for years. They had eaten so much that the building was no longer structurally sound. “In two years, I have only worshipped in the sanctuary one time,” Pastor Josh shared, “that first Sunday.”

After learning the structure could be repaired the congregation embarked on a capital campaign to pay for the repairs. Combined with this, the SC LMM gave them a 0% interest loan. “They took a major load off of us as a new congregation,” Pastor Josh said with gratitude. “To know that we were going to be able to get the money and it wouldn’t cost us more than we needed for the actual repairs was a clear sign of God’s abundance. In a congregation where people would say they were giving as much as they could, giving has doubled between the annual fund and the capital campaign. The motivation to see this project through comes from seeing the generosity of the Lutheran Men.

They not only gave us the loan, but they are one of our supporters as a mission start. Knowing that LMM is in our corner enables us to do what we are doing outside the sanctuary to support the community.”

While the loan is truly appreciated by Christ Community, for Philippe the work of LMM goes beyond financial generosity. “It is about being in bold relationships,” he shared. Recently, a group from SC LMM visited Christ Community to partner with them in one of their local outreach ministries. “There are veterans who live in the woods near us,” shared Pastor Josh. “The congregation provides feeding ministries for them as well as supporting three transitional houses. Now we are building a community garden, so these homeless veterans have access to healthy produce.”

SC LMM brought desserts, fried chicken, and drinks to share during one of their Sunday meals for the veterans. “The shelter is an old motel and we set up tables in the middle of the U shape,” Philippe shared. “I really didn’t expect the veterans to stick around and talk to us, but many of them did.”

The relationships built through the work and generosity of SC LMM continue to reach farther into our communities. “The generosity of SC LMM makes it possible for us to be less focused on money and more focused on doing the work of honoring and loving our neighbors,” shared Pastor Josh. “Christ Community is grateful for SC LMM.”





# Paths to Explore

## South Carolina Synod Vitality Team

Jason Lee is a pastor in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and by all the metrics, things were going well. At a past Synod Assembly, the Director of Evangelical Mission pulled him aside and asked if he'd be willing to help with something. "It turned out to be the start of me serving on the Synod's congregational vitality team," he shared.

Through his involvement in and commitment to the vitality team, Pastor Jason hopes that others who come in contact with the vitality team's work will get the things that have positively impacted his ministry. He hopes others find useful resources and the inspiration to always be moving forward with saying yes to the things that are possible.

This culminated in a trip to Baltimore, MD alongside other members of the SC Synod vitality team and others throughout the ELCA. "It reminded me of all the best classes in seminary that left you inspired, that didn't give you answers but paths to explore," he says of the trip. Through continued participation in the vitality team, Pastor Jason says, "I get that burst of not what was, but what could be, of ministry and moving forward."

"God is present and calling," he shared. "We keep moving forward through relationships and sharing resources. Participating in the synod's congregational vitality team has been a vitalizing experience for my own ministry."

It took him from thinking "things are good" to dreaming of all the ways God could be working in his congregation to move them to be even better. Pastor Jason sees this involvement as crucial in always pushing him forward. It keeps him from saying "things are good, let's stay here" and helps him keep momentum for their shared ministry.

This is just one of the many ways the South Carolina Synod positively impacts our leaders and ministries through inviting pastors to participate in synodical ministry teams. By supporting the synod's initiatives like the vitality team, the lives of our congregations, their leaders, and their members are strengthened for the future.



# The Best Kind of Family

## South Carolina Women of the ELCA

Joy Meynardie Derrick became a lifetime member of the SC Synod WELCA at only 4 months old. “My parents were missionaries in Japan supported by WELCA circles,” she shared. She grew up attending Lutheran Camps and a Lutheran College, but when it was her turn to join a church, she chose St. Luke’s Lutheran in Summerville, SC so she could be in the same circle as her mother. “It became something we could do together.”

While WELCA has provided opportunities for Joy to express her Christianity in the ways she learned to do as a child, it has also been a support system for her. “As eagles get older, they start to molt,” shared Joy. “They kind of give up and go down to the ground and sit there waiting to die. The other eagles circle around them and drop food until the eagle is strong enough to get up again.”

When the pandemic hit, Joy felt an overwhelming sense of “what can I do?” She started writing a daily blog, a forum of sorts, to help keep the three WELCA circles at St. Luke’s together. She called it the Spirit of WELCA. What started with about 90 women from

St. Luke’s now has more than 130 women from across SC contributing ideas, devotions, poems, stories, thank you notes, and more. “During those times when we were completely isolated, it was about the only way we had of hearing from each other.”

The Spirit of WELCA was the result of Joy wanting to do something, like the eagles bringing food to the older eagle who needs to fly again. “WELCA has been like that for me. When circle members see someone in need, they ask what they can do, and they do it. When I lost my husband a few years ago, they were there for me and now I see them doing that for others. It is like family – like never being alone – the best kind of family.”

“My mother went overseas as a single women missionary right after WWII. The ladies of SC WELCA supporter her. They had a missionary for a day program. If you could give \$5, you would pay her salary for a day. Some of the circles named their circles after my mother. That long standing tradition, growing up away from the US, kept me connected to supportive and faithful women in the church.” For that, Joy is grateful.





# Answers

## Lutheran Campus Ministry: USC

Claire Dixon grew up in St. Mark's Lutheran in Charlotte, NC. When she arrived at the University of South Carolina she made the decision to join Campus Ministry as a place to remain connected to her faith while meeting people outside of her very demanding Engineering major.

While her first visit to Lutheran Campus Ministry (LCM) was intimidating, she eventually joined the Gamecock LCM Board and participated in the Call Process to call their new Campus Minister Jesse Canniff-Kuhn.

Even though Claire grew up in the church, she was still looking for a place to ask questions about her faith. "One of the things we really strive to do at LCM is ask questions and grow deeper in our faith. I appreciate having a place to ask questions post confirmation. I am still trying to figure out what I believe as I transition to adulthood. I don't just want to take on something that I was told to believe, but instead, I want to connect to my faith personally."

Every week, for an hour before worship, Pastor Jesse facilitates faith formation. "We did a series on Hell,"

Claire shared. "We talked about how it is defined in the bible and where our modern ideas come from." The students provide suggestions on topics that are used for the next faith formation conversation. "We get to look beyond the usual texts," said Claire.

While Claire finds she does get some answers through the process, she also finds permission to question. "It is interesting to know my perspective, but also to watch people change and grow into their beliefs as different experiences from new students add to the group dynamic. I don't have to have answers. It is about thinking through what we can say that we know vs. what we think we know. A lot of our questions don't have a single right answer. So, as Pastor Jesse explains, we can share what we believe as individuals, where we stand as a group, but we can also live in the uncomfortableness of not having exact answers."

"Campus ministry helps keep young people like me connected to the church. It helps as we try to figure out how to be an adult of faith on our own when our parents aren't dragging us to church," shared Claire.