# The Link to a Place Apart

Lutheridge Lutherock Luther Springs




## HEARD

"Luther Springs isn't something we add on to our youth ministry," says Anne Corti. "At Grace, it's woven into the heart of how we do youth ministry."

As the Director of Youth and Family Ministry at Grace Lutheran Church in Tampa, Florida, Anne is grateful for all the ways the congregation connected at Luther Springs in 2025. "We kicked off the year with the Luther Springs EQUIP High School Leadership retreat," Anne shares. "During the summer we hosted a Luther Springs Day Camp. We also took 10 youth on the Luther Springs Disaster Response Mission trip in Fort Myers and sent seven youth to Gators Week at Luther Springs. We finished the year at the Luther Springs ADVENTure Retreat."

Anne says there are lots of reasons her congregation participates in so many of the opportunities at Luther Springs. "We use camp retreats as a home away from home," Anne says. "At Luther Springs we feel safe and comfortable and tucked away from all of life's distractions. It's a place we can create a deeper bond as a church family, make new friends from churches across Florida, and feel accepted and cared for. We also know we can trust the staff to create programs that give our youth a solid faith foundation mixed with the fun and fellowship they know happens at every retreat."

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# A Message From The CEO



Dear Friends of NovusWay,

One of the greatest gifts of camp and conference ministry is the way it connects people across places, generations, and seasons of life. Again and again, we see how congregations and camps are woven together through shared service, shared stories, and shared faith. This issue of The LINK is full of those connections, and I hope as you read it, you'll notice how deeply Lutheridge, Lutherock, and Luther Springs are rooted in the life of the church.

Those connections are visible not only in programs, but also in the ways our communities show up for one another. Over the past year, generous support has helped us pass the $3 million mark in the Lutheridge 75th Birthday campaign. Because of that generosity, guests are already enjoying the completed Hill Cabins and renovated bathrooms at Lakeside Lodge. Work on Pioneer A is well underway and will be finished in time for summer camp. New offices for NovusWay staff are nearly complete and we're preparing to transform Mission Hall into lodging. Each project strengthens our ability to welcome campers, retreat groups, and congregations with care and excellence across all three sites. The campaign continues as we get closer to our $3.6 million goal, and we are so grateful for your generosity.

At the same time, we continue to navigate recovery from the hurricane at both Lutheridge and Lutherock. Cleanup is ongoing, and we are grateful for the steady presence of FEMA at Lutherock as this work continues through the spring. Even in the midst of disruption, our staff and volunteers have embodied resilience, hospitality, and hope.

In recent weeks, we've had the joy of reconnecting with former summer staff during reunion weekends at Lutheridge, Lutherock, and Luther Springs. Spending time with these young leaders and hearing how their experiences continue to shape their faith, leadership, and sense of purpose was a powerful reminder of the lasting impact of this ministry.

That same sense of shared mission was evident during our recent all-staff retreat at Lutheridge, where team members from all three sites gathered for learning, worship, laughter, and prayer. Together, we focused on how we live out our core values of safety, care, joy, unity, and inclusivity. We were deeply cared for by residents of Lutheridge, St. Mark's Lutheran in Asheville, Nativity Lutheran in Arden, and the NovusWay Board of Directors, whose hospitality reflected the very spirit we strive to offer every guest who comes through our gates.

As you read the stories in this newsletter – from bridge-building programs and disaster response teams, to long-standing congregational partnerships and a remarkable legacy gift that will help shape the future at Luther Springs – I hope you'll see the common thread: NovusWay exists because of community. Together, we are creating places where faith is nurtured, relationships are strengthened, and God's love is made tangible.



Lauri SoJourner

*Continued from Cover*

Like many congregations, Grace takes steps to assure youth and children get to go to camp. “The people of Grace believe so strongly in the ministry of Luther Springs that they cover the cost of sending the kids to camp each summer,” Anne says. “Every child who wants to go to camp goes, regardless of their financial situation.”

Time spent at Luther Springs has a real impact on youth back home in the congregation. “Youth feel heard at camp,” Anne says, “They come back to church and expect the same thing, and it’s awesome!” Each year the youth from Grace share a Camp Sunday worship service with the whole congregation. “It’s a service full of camp songs, skits, thoughtful sermons, and prayers inspired by the summer theme,” Anne shares. “It brings an energy that ripples through our community, giving our youth the support they need throughout the year.”

Anne also appreciates what spending time at Luther Springs means to her personally. “As a youth director, it’s a place for me to take a deep breath. Many of us who serve as youth directors do much of the ministry on our own with few volunteers. When I am at Luther Springs, I have partners in ministry. I get to share with other leaders, getting new ideas and feeling less alone in ministry.”

Youth and leaders from Grace are once again making plans to be a part of the ministry at Luther Springs this year. “One of the best ways to bond as a youth group is to create shared stories,” Anne says. “For us, so many of those stories we reminisce about happen at Luther Springs.”

Thank you for your gifts to NovusWay which give congregations the opportunity to partner with camp to create faith filled programs and life changing memories.






# HIGHER GROUND

"Spending a week at Lutherock with our church group was truly amazing," says John, an adult leader from First Lutheran Church in Albemarle, North Carolina. "Everything worked together to create a wonderful environment for us to reflect, work, and grow." The group of youth and adult leaders John was a part of came to Lutherock for last summer's disaster response program. Staying onsite at Lutherock, the group served in the local community with organizations and among people who are still recovering from Hurricane Helene.

Pastor James from First Lutheran says the congregation was looking for an opportunity to do a youth mission trip in an area affected by the fall 2024 storm. "Our youth have done other mission trips, going to impoverished communities and helping people there. This time we really wanted to help people in North Carolina."

Throughout their disaster response week, the group from First Lutheran worked in a variety of settings. "We worked at a food pantry that had been impacted by flooding," Pastor James shares. "We helped clean the property and build a new platform on higher ground for a storage shed." The group also spent time working alongside local residents and hearing about their experiences. "Getting to know other volunteers and hearing some of their stories from the hurricane was really important to us. I feel like hearing stories and developing relationships was half of what we were there to do."

This was the group's first trip to Lutherock and Pastor James says they were all impressed by their time at camp. "It was a good week. A significant part of our experience was being there at Lutherock. We served offsite during the day, but when we came back to camp, we got to have that Lutherock camp experience. We really appreciated being a part of the culture of camp."

The week at Lutherock serving in disaster response had a real impact on the group from First Lutheran. “They all want to go back,” Pastor James says of the youth in the group. “Our youth group grew closer together because of their experience.” Xeem, one of the youth from First Lutheran, summarized his time this way. “This mission trip showed me that serving others is serving Christ. It humbled me, deepened my gratitude, and helped me see every act of service as a way to live out God’s love.”

The youth group from First Lutheran will be back at Lutherock this coming summer to serve again and adult leader John sees the time at camp as an integral part of their ministry. “Seeing the positive interactions of all the participants last summer showed us the good work camps and congregations are doing with our youth,” John says. “I look forward to future visits and adventures at Lutherock!”



# BRIDGE

The Lutheridge bRIDGE program aims to equip and empower parents and caregivers to make faith formation a part of their family culture. bRIDGE does this by building a bridge to overcome the distance between camp, the congregation, and a family’s daily life. Gone are the days when a camper has to wait until next summer to “go to camp” again. bRIDGE extends Lutheridge’s faith formation expertise, creativity, joy, and fun to participating congregations and families year-round.

St. Michael Lutheran Church in Greenville, South Carolina has been involved in the bRIDGE program since 2024 and the experience has been transformational for many of their church families. St. Michael member Ann DiAntonio and her family were eager to be a part. “We were leaving camp a few years ago and our son said in

a sad voice, 'I don't understand why church can't be more like camp!' My husband and I knew these were formative years for his faith and didn't know what to do. We heard about the bRIDGE program a few weeks later and knew it was an answer to our prayer."

Pastor Andrea Bates from St. Michael says bRIDGE has been a gift to the culture of St. Michael. "As a pastor, one of the greatest joys is making space for families to form relationships with one another. Through bRIDGE our church parents have had a chance to share life and parent together. It's been a great way for new families in the congregation to connect with other people in the same stage of life." Pastor Andrea also says that because of bRIDGE many children and youth enjoy coming to church more than they previously did. "The friendships developed in our retreats have led to more boisterous gathering times on Sunday mornings," Andrea says.

Ann recognizes that their bRIDGE involvement has not only been a blessing to her son, but also to her and her husband as parents. "Raising a child isn't easy but bRIDGE gives us a chance to fill our cups, talk about wins and the challenges with other parents, and learn skills to support his ongoing faith formation at home. Our son has re-engaged with church in a way we didn't know to hope for, and we will be forever grateful for the bRIDGE that made it possible."

As we enter into the summer and fall of 2026, Lutheridge wants to invite more congregations and families to participate in the bRIDGE program. For congregations who are interested in bringing bRIDGE to their church once a month from September to May, reach out to Pastor Sara Yoos for more information (SYoos@NovusWay.org, (828) 209-6333). For families interested in participating in a retreat to experience the joy of camp, connect with other caregivers, and gain practical tools for strengthening faith formation in the home, register for the bRIDGE Family Camp this summer (July 19-22) at Lutheridge.org.

# SEEDS

In December, Luther Springs received an incredible gift! As the people of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Jacksonville, Florida prepared to conclude their ministry, they made a bold choice – to give a gift of $300,000 for the construction of a new family cottage at camp.

This act of generosity was a testament to the faith and character the people of St. Matthew's have had throughout their history. "St. Matthew's has a legacy of being shaped by a deep commitment to doing God's will and sharing the joy of Christ," explains Hali Hagist, a member of the congregation. "In recent years, as our membership declined and we discerned a holy closure, we remained steadfast in our outward focus. Even in this season of no longer being a formal body, we have chosen to serve beyond ourselves."

As congregation members considered how they might serve by sharing their remaining assets, they were helped by the staff of the Florida-Bahamas Synod. Pastor Nicole Eastwood, Assistant to the Bishop for Transition and Candidacy, worked




closely with the leaders of St. Matthew's to help them determine how they could support ministries with legacy gifts. "We talked together about what the congregation valued and what would be missed once there were gone," Pastor Nicole says. "A big part of the congregation's generosity had always been connected to youth ministry and building leaders."

Janice Hunter, another St. Matthew's member, says the congregation has always understood growing leaders for the church to be part of its story. "At least six youth and adults from St. Matthew's have gone on to become ordained ministers," Janice says. "Church camp was a place they received the seeds of their calling, demonstrating how God uses these experiences to shape lives and call leaders."

The gift from St. Matthew's to support ongoing ministry at Luther Springs has become an especially meaningful way to continue the St. Matthew's story. "Our gift represents the continuation of our congregation's faith, values, and witness," Janice shares. "Over our 70 years as a church, countless children and families were impacted by the ministry of Luther Springs. Through this gift, we trust that God will continue that work of discipleship long after our doors have closed."

Pastor Nicole recognizes that congregations like St. Matthew's who are making big decisions about closure often find deep meaning by giving to others. "Sometimes ministry is complete sooner than we thought," Pastor Nicole says, "but that doesn't mean it's over, because God is always doing a new thing."

Gifts from churches can support the ministries of NovusWay in powerful ways. To learn more about how your congregation can partner with us, contact Rev. Nathan Gragg, Chief Development Officer (NGragg@NovusWay.org, (828) 209-6326).

# NovusWay Ministries

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