Synod Report: March, 2017

During 2017, Lutheran Service Society, the most recent addition to the Lutheran SeniorLife ministry of services, will celebrate its 110th anniversary.

It is certain that the original founders of LSS never envisioned the size of the organization and the numbers served. Its core service, Meals on Wheels in Beaver County, now provides meals to more than 150 homebound or disabled adults each day.

In addition, rehabilitation services have been added at its fitness program at The Center at the Mall in Beaver County; and LSS opened its senior center at St. John of Highland Lutheran Church in McCandless through a grant from the UPMC Passavant Foundation.

St. John Community in Mars, which includes St. John Specialty Care Center, and Passavant Community in Zelienople have both also served seniors for more than 100 years.

Lutheran SeniorLife would like to think that years of service have added vitality, impact and meaning to those services, in addition to increasing the numbers served.

That is generally true for mission-driven organizations.

However, Lutheran SeniorLife chooses to emphasize the fact that it also is true of the individuals we serve. They too have become more vital and valuable with age, which is especially obvious throughout our living communities.

When Christ promised an abundant life® to us in the Gospel of John, there is no indication that His children are less valuable, less important or, for that matter, less impactful on His ministry as they age.

The term “Vintage” is representative of the very best of a past era.

Vintage also has made a comeback. It is cool again.

Vintage shops are popping up across the landscape.

In the words of a current Lutheran SeniorLife television commercial, vintage items grow more charming, more treasured, more priceless and more revered as they age.

That certainly captures the essence of how all of us associated with Lutheran SeniorLife view the thousands of people whom we touch each year through the programs, services and communities of Lutheran SeniorLife.

With that in mind, the theme of the 2017 Lutheran SeniorLife Annual report was: Growing Better with Age.
Lutheran SeniorLife is privileged to operate as a Social Ministry Organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Our church partners help Lutheran SeniorLife maintain the compassion, integrity and caring atmosphere critical to fulfilling our mission of providing an opportunity for an Abundant Life® for our participants and their families.

This report to the synod is also an opportunity to remind all of you--donors, friends, partners--that your efforts to help us succeed impacts people--individuals who need our programs and services.

More than 100 years since the founding of St. John in Mars and Passavant Community in Zelienople, Joan Gill, a current resident of Passavant community, reminds us that “One should never assume that they are too old to learn. Our brains may be changing, but there is always room in them for more knowledge.”

Though our staff most frequently are the focus of our efforts to create an environment where residents thrive, we also are constantly reminded that the residents form small communities and families of their own while participating in the programs of Lutheran SeniorLife.

One of our residents comments that: “It makes me feel grand to be helping others. There are so many amazing people here, and some of them can use a helping hand.”

Today, those stories that have evolved during the past 100 years are manifested throughout a broad array of services that our founders could never have envisioned: VNA, Western Pa., and its home care and hospice services; Lutheran Service Society senior centers and Meals on Wheels programs; our LIFE (Living Independence for the Elderly) programs in Butler, Beaver, Lawrence and Armstrong counties...the list goes on.

The affordable housing options throughout the system also are an expanding part of the ministry of Lutheran SeniorLife.

In addition to Luther Court, on the campus of Passavant Community in Zelienople, Butler County, affordable housing is offered by Lutheran Service Society at the following locations:

St. Michael Village, Allegheny County; Lutheran Village at Chippewa, Beaver County; Von Bora Place, Titusville, Crawford County; Martin’s Landing, Girard, Erie County; Lakeview Manor in Stoneboro and Lutheran Village at Jamestown, Mercer County; and Lutheran Place, Oil City, Venango County.

We think the original founders of Passavant, St. John, Lutheran Service Society; in fact, originators of all Lutheran SeniorLife programs, would be pleased.

As we reposition and create new opportunities in challenging times of change, it is important for us to recognize the many ways in which your support is vital.

Even in our independent living communities, where many of our residents are still healthy enough to not need specific services, that spirit of community and support, a critical part of living an Abundant Life®, shows itself on a daily basis.

Overbrook Pointe, a 53-unit apartment building in Mars on the St. John campus, includes many of those types of residents.
If our founders would have seen this particular community 100 years ago, it would have been viewed more as a vacation site than retirement community.

Through a variety of activities only limited by the imagination of residents, seniors of various ages are living together and living their version of an *Abundant Life®.*

We are so grateful to so many people for so many reasons. To our donors for their consistent and diligent support; to our staff for their loving and caring attitude; to our partners, such as Heritage Valley Health System, Butler Health System and ACMH Hospital; to our pastors and congregations for their prayers and program support; and to our volunteers for all of their work.

And, as a faith-based Social Ministry Organization, we are ultimately grateful to the consistent provision of God.

It really is clearly providential that many of the small efforts that began more than a century ago have grown into what they have today.

That is why the Health & Wellness Ministry, a partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, southwestern Pa., is such a critical component of Lutheran SeniorLife.

More than 80 congregations of various denominations now participate, with 17 conducting ongoing health and ministry activities with the program.

The Moral Owners Committee, which includes pastors and members of the community, continues to serve The Lutheran SeniorLife board of directors. The committee offers Lutheran SeniorLife leadership a perspective on ministry service that helps keep the organization grounded in faith and commitment as programs and services grow.

The mission never gets old, while the rest of us do; however our challenge is to remember that for those who serve, and for those whom we serve, that the aging process brings added value.

Our prayer is that Lutheran SeniorLife, and all of you, continue to get better with age.