



The Ministry of Blake Marles

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The Ministry of Blake Marles



Reprinted from the 2007 edition of Making Christ Known, the booklet that interprets the mission of the ELCA that is distributed at synod assemblies and other gatherings.

“Lutheran institutions are the church in the world,” says Blake Marles, an attorney from Macungie, Pennsylvania. He goes on to say: “I attempt to use my talents and gifts within Lutheran institutions not only for self-exploration but also to have an impact, to make a difference in people’s lives.”

Outdoor ministry, an ELCA-related college, an ELCA social service institution, and his congregation have been arenas for Marles’ ministry in his daily life over the years.

Marles’ sense of calling to serve others began in the home of his parents, who were role-models for him, and continues in his own family with his wife, Marilyn, and their two grown children, Adam and Lindsay.

Experiences at Camp Ministerium and Bear Creek Camp (both related to the Northeastern and Southeastern Pennsylvania Synods) were formative for Marles. From his first time at camp at age nine, through serving as a counselor and a director, then being a member of the board, Marles continues to be convinced that outdoor ministry transforms lives. Having a time away from one’s familiar context, he says, provides a tremendous opportunity to explore one’s self in relation to God, others, and nature.

As a student at Muhlenberg College thinking of transferring



out, Marles was challenged by an admissions director to list 10 things that should be changed, then was told, "You can change these!" Through his leadership on campus and as a student representative to the Board of Trustees, and later in his dozen years as a member of the board, Marles was an agent of change. His proudest accomplishment was forming a partnership between the college and an elementary school in which hundreds of undergraduates tutor students, coach sports and theater, and engage in other activities. "A church-related college," he says, "should help the disadvantaged open doors for themselves."

In the year after college during which he worked fulltime at Bear Creek Camp, Marles enrolled in Temple University Law School. Why be a lawyer? His answer: To immerse himself in the problems of others and to seek out creative solutions. "The highest calling of a lawyer is to be a problem solver." As a member of a large law firm, one of his specialties is advising college and university leaders in strategic planning and on complex staff and student issues.

Several pastors early in Marles' life who spoke of social service agencies "as what Lutherans do in the world" influenced him to accept membership on the Board of Directors of Good Shepherd Rehabilitation Network, the largest independent ELCA-related rehabilitation complex. Serving earlier as secretary and most recently as chair of the board, he has been a trustee for 14 years in two different stints with a whole-hearted dedication to Good Shepherd's philosophy: God has called us to minister to, serve, assist and enable people with disabilities to enhance their capabilities as human beings.

All of Marles' involvements and actions have their basic motivation in his baptism and his experience in several ELCA congregations. "Here is the place," Marles says, "to be rooted and refreshed in worship." An important component has been adult Christian education. "I need a place to think things through with others, to explore why I do what I do," he says.

And that is the kind of learning and commitment that has marked Marles' journey of faith in action.

