

Faith & Fellowship

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Grace Alone



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Email prayer requests to: pray@clba.org

Mercy and Grace

MARTIN LUTHER



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God's mercy and grace are not human emotions or attitudes. Rather they are divine blessings we receive by believing that our sins have been forgiven in Christ. The righteousness we receive comes completely outside of us. It's a genuine gift from God, who is compassionate and merciful to us because of Christ.

Suppose a man deserving the death penalty was brought to a prince's court. But the prince released him out of compassion, even though he deserved nothing but death. Wouldn't you say that this man's guilt was forgiven, not because of anything he had done, but because of the kindness of the merciful prince?

Yet it's not enough for this man to be forgiven for the crime he committed. He also must be released from jail, must be given clothes to wear, and must find a job so that he can live. The same happens to us when we receive God's approval. After God in his mercy frees us from guilt, we still need the gift of the Holy Spirit to clean away what sin remains.

Dr. Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483 and died on February 18, 1546 at the age of 62. He was Doctor of Bible at the University of Wittenberg. Luther, Martin, By Faith Alone. Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1998.

No Turning Back

TROY TYSDAL

I had just finished lunch and it was time to return to work. As I left the restaurant, I looked down the street and saw an old acquaintance standing on the sidewalk about a block away. It had been almost twenty years since our paths had crossed and I was anxious to say *hello*. As I made my way toward him, I began to second guess my desire to reconnect. Even from a distance, I could tell that our lives had taken very different paths. But it was too late. He had noticed me, and there was no turning back.

After greeting one another, and briefly reminiscing, I commented on his tattoos. He explained that he had received most of them in prison. He recalled a laundry list of past crimes that left me intimidated and slightly concerned for my safety. After a quick recap of his past twenty years in and out of jail, he asked me, “So, what do you do?” Somewhat sheepishly, I shared my faith in Jesus Christ and told him how I had gone to seminary and entered the ministry. “Cool,” he replied. I was shocked. “Are you a believer?” I asked. He laughed, and said no. He went on to explain how he had subscribed to the *warrior lifestyle* found in the ancient Nordic belief system called *Odinism*. Not that he believed in all the gods, but he believed that life is conflict, and through conflict you learn and grow. I told him that I used to share a similar belief, but now my conflict—my war... was over... it ended when Jesus Christ cried out from the cross, “*It is finished!*”

After that, we parted ways. As I walked back to my car, concern gripped me. What if I had offended him? What if he looks me up? What was I thinking, engaging such a ruffian?

The following week, my concerns were temporarily put to rest. On the front page of the local paper was the man’s photo. He had been arrested. I breathed a sigh of relief—unaware that God was planning something much bigger for us than a brief encounter on the side of the road. A few



Men Praying in Church/RyanJLane/iStock

weeks later, I had all but forgotten the incident when my phone rang. It was the chaplain from the County Jail. He said the Gideons had been there. They had told the man that he was a lost sheep and that if he looked back on his life he would see a pattern of God pursuing him. The man reflected on their comments, his life, our conversation... and the *grace* of God transformed his heart.

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Over the last several years, I have observed my friend’s faith. I’ve seen it burn bright like a star, and I have seen it flicker like an ember about to burn out. I’ve seen the highs and lows, but most of all, I’ve been reminded of a God who looked at the cross and *did not turn back*. A God who pursues us no matter what we have done. A God who follows us into our darkest thoughts and our worst deeds, and says to us, “*You are mine.*” That is the God we serve, not because we have

earned the right to do so, but because, by *grace alone*, he has marked us as his own.

Who is on your heart today? Are they worthy of Christ? Of course not, but neither are you. Go to them. By *grace*—you have been created for moments such as these. Do not turn back. The eyes of the lost are fixed upon you. It is time to reconnect.

Rev. Troy Tysdal is Director of Communications and Prayer for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and serves as editor in chief of Faith & Fellowship magazine.



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Monument of Martin Luther in Eisleben.

Grace Alone **It's time to have compassion**

KLAUS DETLEV SCHULZ

This is 2017, the year we commemorate the 500th year of the Reformation. There are many reasons for celebrating Luther: his translation of the Bible into German—thus helping to unify the German nation, his support for an individual's freedom and autonomy from the oppressing hierarchy of the Church, and his stance on Church and state separation. But particularly noteworthy for those who call themselves Lutherans is his rediscovery of the Gospel that brought out the fact that salvation comes to us humans freely (Latin: *gratis*) and undeservedly, not because of our merits but because of Christ's death and resurrection.

In that regard, the Reformation is a summons to reflect on our relationship with God and with one another. The concept of *grace* facilitates that reflection on how we have become and remain God's children. Every Sunday we hear "grace, peace and mercy to you," but who has time for much thought on what that really means? The 500th anniversary of the Reformation is a year that should not pass without us becoming aware of a key concept in Luther's doctrine on preaching salvation to all nations.

Let us go back to Luther's time. If one were to ask a medieval man what grace meant for him, he would explain it most likely in transactional terms. "God's favor," that is God's good and benevolent attitude towards humans, comes to him

not entirely undeserved. "You've got to give your best, do everything possible within you," and in doing so you will grab God's attention. (The Latin phrase is, "*facultas applicandi in se est*"—literally: apply the faculties that are in you.) True, God is almighty and still free to decide where and when it pleases him to give his grace, but once you get his attention by trying to be and do good, you may be assured of his grace at work in you. In Luther's medieval tradition that appeal was directed to man's will, and the grace that became operative in someone would instill love for God in them. God then returned his favor when aware of that love toward him. (In Latin that faith formed by love was called: *fides caritate formata*. For Lutherans that faith would not be justifying faith, but rather our sanctified faith. Love is a good work.)

Such a transactional understanding of a relationship between God and man is, in our society today, not much different. Perhaps not as institutionalized as then, but the idea that God rewards "good" people for what they do is as prevalent today as it was during Luther's time. This subtle, naïve, merit-based thinking is in every human being by nature, and it is influenced by the prevalent religious trend called Arminianism, a theological position that regards natural man as wounded but not spiritually dead. The translation of the Latin jargon Luther had to contend with, would read today

something like Benjamin Franklin's mantra: "If you pull yourself up by your own bootstraps, then God will reward you with blessings in this life and in the life hereafter."

Luther, instead, concluded that "the righteous live by faith." In other words, those who want to receive God's favor will receive it as a *gift* apart from their own doing. That sounds too good to be true. It comes across as too cheap. In reality it is not, because that grace was earned hard by the death of God's Son Jesus Christ. "He turned to me a father's heart; He did not choose the easy part but gave His dearest treasure" (Luther's hymn, *Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice*, Lutheran Service Book, #556, stanza 4). What Christ has done elicits God's favorable disposition toward us, not due to any merit or credit on our side.

We stand before God's throne of judgment totally corrupt, rebellious against him, and thus deserve his condemnation. In the most recent Luther film, *Martin Luther: The Idea that Changed the World*, Luther's central concern is captured in one burning question: "How good am I as a person?" And for Luther, after a time of spiritual turmoil and soul searching, the answer is "not one bit of good." There is nothing that we can appeal to within us, no love, no will, no reason. "My own good works came to naught; no grace or merit gaining; free will against God's judgment

J-Term: Watch the Videos



On January 24, 2017, Dr. K. Detlev Schulz spoke at Lutheran Brethren Seminary's annual J-Term event commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.



Session #1

Martin Luther and Mission in the Eyes of Modern Critics

Session #2

In Search of the Missionary Intention of Martin Luther's Mission

Session #3

The Soteriological and Missiological Implications of Luther's Anthropology

Session #4

Mission as Understood in the Post-Reformation Era



www.CLBA.org/jterm2017

fought, dead to all good remaining. My fears increased till sheer despair left only death to be my share; the pangs of hell I suffered" (*Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice*, stanza 3).

God's favor is received as a gift, *gratis*, freely bestowed through faith. In our culture, a gift is usually not free but earned or deserved through merits on our part. However, when it comes to defining our relationship with God, the words "earning" or "deserving" are totally misplaced. What matters now is the work of Christ. Luther gave back to Christ the central place in the Church's preaching and teaching, and then he explained how Christ's merits are applied to humans by the three *solas*: by grace, by faith and by the Word alone (*sola gratia, sola fide, sola verbo*).

Thus, the concept of grace reveals a number of important theological issues: It uncovers the anthropological dimension of us humans as sinful and corrupt. It brings out from Scripture what Christ has earned on the cross. It teaches that righteousness is a free and gracious gift from God. It points to faith as a gift of the Spirit that is received through God's delivery system—his Word and Sacraments.

We have here in a nutshell the description of our justification in which grace becomes the key operative term describing God's willingness and motivation to save us. He is no longer

angry and dismissive but forgiving and gracious. But does this description in any way require human agency? Does it impact our relationship with other humans, or is this a discovery we keep to ourselves?

Indeed, that could happen, partly, because of the detractors who have claimed that Luther had little to do with missions. However, in Luther's eyes the Church needs to take a wider perspective on this: "Then go, bright jewel of My crown, and bring to *all* salvation" (*Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice*, stanza 5). Christ did not die for those who believe; he died for all humans in order that they may believe. Mission is by definition the application of Christ's righteousness to the unbeliever or sinner through the proclamation of the Word, and Luther underscored that dimension with a clear intention of bringing it to the Jews and Turks. In fact, the missionary dimension of Luther's theology connects to the article on which the Church stands and falls. God's grace that is benevolent to us pushes the Church out to those who have not yet received it, who still stand before God's judgment throne as condemned sinners.

Thus, mission is to the Church as heat is to fire. That inextricable connection of Church and mission is also so because of how faith and good works relate to one another. When we speak of being justified because of God's grace, then our

justified faith drives us to a response—to a "brotherly love" and concern for our neighbor's welfare. That has been a motive for missions through the time of the Reformation and Lutheran Orthodoxy. When we look at other humans, we see them as those to whom God wishes to restore his image that has been lost through the fall.

The message of "grace alone" is like a banner we keep holding up in front of us as we walk on earth, and it is a strong message that tears down false edifices built by man. It is a timeless truth, but at the same time also a truth that does not ignore the particular issues of our time. In the early Church, Augustine held "*sola gratia*" against Pelagius who thought natural man is not totally corrupt. In the medieval times, Luther leveled it against the subtle merit-based monastic piety. In the Enlightenment era, it tore down the *apothecosis* of man, that is, to make himself god, who thus thought himself free and autonomous to do whatever he wanted apart from God. Today, "*grace alone*" corrects the subjective creation of one's own religiosity built on the idea of actually being "good" and doing "good" which God rewards with some kind of happiness here and now.

Dr. Klaus Detlev Schulz, Th.D. is Professor and Chairman of Pastoral Ministry and Missions, Dean of The Graduate School, and Director of Ph.D. Missiology Program at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Grace Alone

Grace Delivered: The Means of Grace

DAVID RINDEN



JimBatt/Stock

This time of year brings apprehension to young people who are around the age of 14. What generates this fear? The public catechization that marks the end of confirmation instruction.

For many young people, public catechization evokes fear of humiliation in front of parents, grandparents, siblings and friends. No one wants to stand in front of the church tongue-tied, stumbling over words, or with a mind that has gone completely blank.

I recall hearing of a young man who at his confirmation was asked the question, “What is the meaning of the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed?” This question and answer is on page 75 in the Church of the Lutheran Brethren’s *Explanation of Luther’s Small Catechism*. I think it is the question with the longest answer.

The boy began the answer correctly. “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel...” Suddenly the boy stopped, his mind blank. After reciting these words he just stood there, humiliated.

The pastor asked, “Is that all?” The boy nodded his head. Yes, that was all. “Well,”

said the pastor. “That is the farthest your pastor has gotten as well.”

A DESPERATE NEED:

“I believe... that I *cannot* believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him!” No amount of reason or strength can or will change this. The “old sinner” in each of us is spiritually dead. We cannot come to God on our own. Ours is a hopeless condition that calls for divine intervention by the Holy Spirit.

Our Synod’s Statement of Faith expresses this hopeless condition: “God created Adam and Eve in His image to live in fellowship with Him. They fell into sin through the temptation of Satan and thereby lost fellowship with God. Through their disobedience the entire human race became totally depraved, that is, self-centered sinners who oppose God, and who by nature are unable to trust, fear or love Him. They are subject to the devil, and are condemned to death under the eternal wrath of God” (*Constitution of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, Article II, D.*).

A GRACIOUS PROVISION

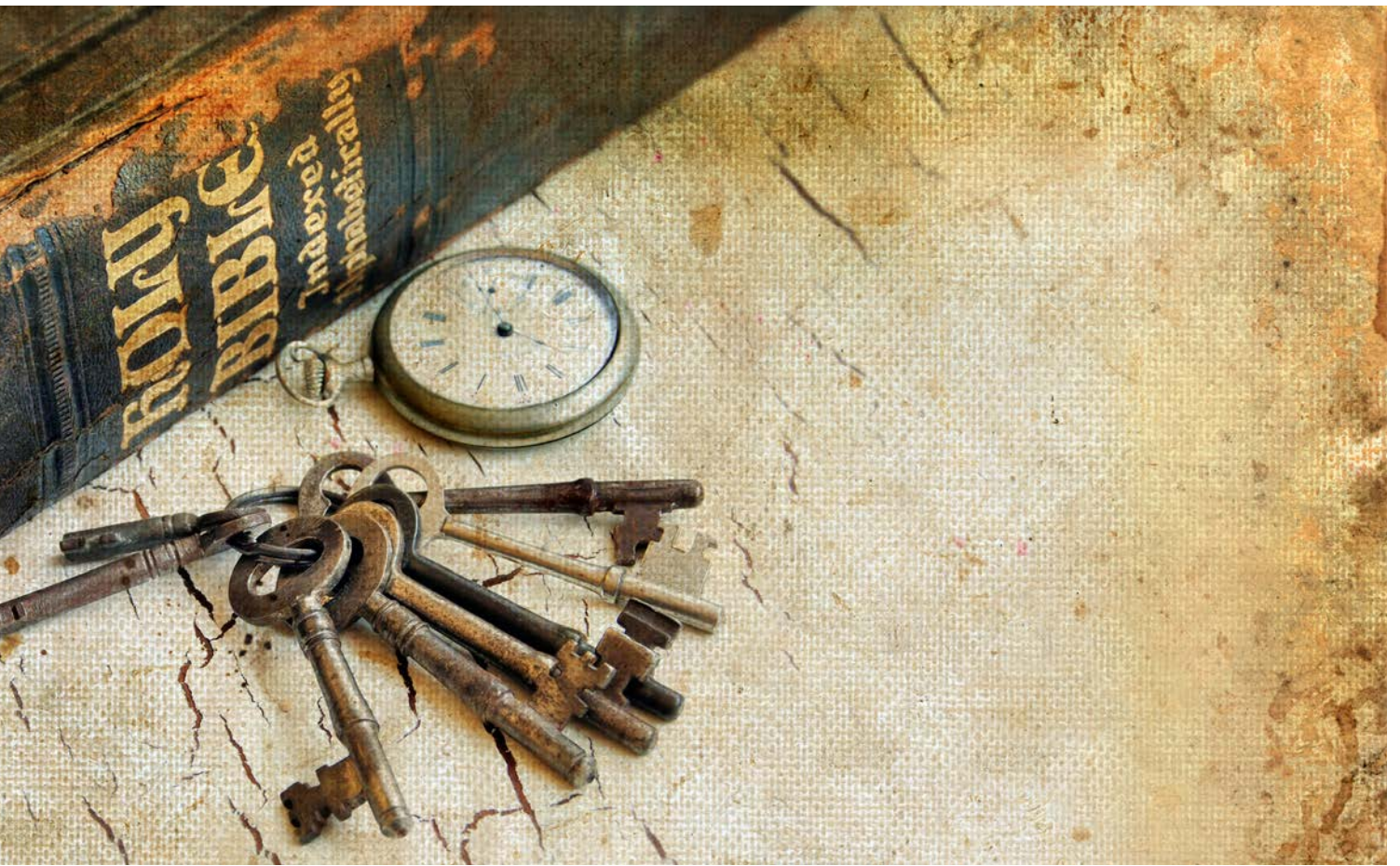
Our desperate need would leave us hopeless were it not for Jesus whom God

sent. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God’s love finds its expression in Jesus’ suffering and death. He died on the cross and shed his blood in our place. Martin Luther called this the Great Exchange. Jesus took our sins; we receive his righteousness.

“This righteousness is called the righteousness of God. That is, it is a righteousness provided by God. What the Law demanded, God has provided and given to us in Christ Jesus. Here is revealed a righteousness which is given to us as a free gift in Christ Jesus” (Class notes on Romans 3:21-26, by Professor M.E. Sletta, former President of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and former President of Lutheran Brethren Seminary).

A LIVING WORD

The Word of God and the Sacraments are God’s way of showing us Jesus and speaking his grace to us. God does this primarily through the sacred Scriptures. These stand alone. All other books are man’s word, but the words of the Bible are God’s Word, which gives life to the spirit and enlightens the mind.



Jesus came as God's Word in the flesh and has returned to the Father's right hand. According to his promise he will come again. In the meantime, he comes to us through the words of Scripture, which are "...the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16).

This is true for believers throughout the world who read the Bible in their own tongue. It is true for Christians who live in a country where meeting together has been banned and, of necessity, they meet secretly around the Word of God. It is true for anyone who gathers in the Name of Christ and hears his Word. "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Romans 10:17). We cannot overemphasize the power of this Word to change lives.

The Word of God is the primary way that God brings us the Good News. God, however, knowing our weakness, is not limited to the spoken or written Word. He also uses the Sacraments he established before Jesus' ascension, namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are visible means of grace. When connected to God's written Word they are *sign* gifts that assure us of God's promises.

Baptism, when connected to the Word of God, creates faith. Listen to the Apostle Paul's testimony: "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior..." (Titus 3:4-6).

Similarly, the Lord's Supper creates faith when connected to the Word of God. The Apostle Paul writes of this Sacrament to the believers at Corinth, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:16-17, NKJV).

A VISIBLE WORD

"Do you want to go to town?" my father asked my brother and me. Saturday night shopping was a regular event for nearly everyone in our farm community in northern Iowa. Of course we did. We looked forward to this Saturday night trip because that meant our father would buy

us each a bag of popcorn from the street vendor.

This treat, however, was more than a bag of popcorn. This gift assured my brother and me that our earthly father loved us and cared for us. We belonged to him. It was something we could hold in our hands as evidence of our father's love.

Our Heavenly Father has given us something tangible to show us his grace—the Sacraments. By themselves they are ordinary. But when connected to the Word of God they become vehicles proclaiming the Good News. Therefore we gladly go into all the world making disciples by baptizing and teaching (Matthew 28:19-20). As we go, we will proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Rev. David Rinden served the Church of the Lutheran Brethren from 1979 to 2000 as editor of Faith & Fellowship magazine. He was vice-president of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren from 1991 to 2003 and retired from pastoral ministry in 2014.



Kristin Ronnevik/2015

The Stenberg family (L to R): Judah, Daniel, Silas, Karen, Caleb, and Asher—Elijah pictured on page 9.

Grace Alone **Elijah's Birth**

DANIEL STENBERG

My wife, Karen, gave birth to Elijah Quentin at 9:06 a.m., February 3, 2017. Elijah didn't come when we hoped, or how we hoped. But if he had come according to our hopes, he wouldn't be here at all.

My parents were visiting in January. My dad was to be with us for a week, and my mom for three. We thought it would be nice for dad to hold his newest grandson before he left. So the sooner Elijah came, the better.

We did all that we knew to try to convince our youngest that it was time to breathe the fresh Minnesota air. We went for walks. Karen kept working. She ate spicy food... But the little guy could not be convinced.

Dad left, and the days went by.

Karen went to her doctor's appointment the day before her due date. The baby

was looking really good, and Karen's body was ready, so the doctor decided to induce labor a couple days later. Karen was excited about this. She had never been induced before, and that meant she could actually get the drugs! Previous labors had gone so quickly that there hadn't been time for any drugs.

On Friday February 3 at 5 a.m. they started Karen's induction. Everything started out normal. The doctor showed up around 8:30, saw that things were progressing well, and decided it was time to break the water and give Karen her epidural.

We woke up a little too late for breakfast that day (4:30 a.m. comes WAY too early for me) and since I have an aversion to seeing people stick huge needles into my wife's back, I decided it was time to grab breakfast. So I left.

I went down to the car and found, to my intense frustration, that my windshield had frosted over. Again. I had scraped it that morning. Well, scraped might be generous. I had cleared sight lines that morning in the frigid cold, and was frustrated now that I would have to do so again. It is not a fast process. I decided against it. Who needs breakfast anyway? I headed back up to Karen in the delivery room.

When I walked in the door I was greeted by bloody towels. Everywhere. Not what I wanted, or expected to see. Karen was bleeding.

I returned seconds before the doctor arrived. I will never forget sitting in that chair and watching his face. He looked at my wife, he looked at the towels and floor, and then back to my wife. His brow was furrowed with growing worry.



Karen and Elijah.



Daniel holding Elijah in the hospital.

“I know this isn’t what we had planned, but we need to do an emergency C-section.”

Those words tore into me.

They also kicked over a beehive of commotion. Next thing I knew we were being whisked down the hall. We were practically running, but our pace couldn’t match what was going on in my head. What was going on? Was Karen in danger? Was the baby? Both? Why is this happening?

When we got to the O.R., they pushed her into the room, and they left me outside. They had to get the baby out as quickly as possible. There would be no epidural. They were going to put Karen under. It had to be quick. The bleeding had to stop.

I was ushered into a room that resembled a large closet. There was a patched couch along one wall, an overused desk and a rolling chair. I slowly sank into the chair, rested my head on the desk and prayed. A rush of emotion washed over me and I began to feel tears carve paths down my cheeks and then fall to the floor. I reached out to family and friends via text and asked for prayer.

What else could we do?

Soon, a nurse found me. She told me that it wouldn’t be long now. It was probably only eight minutes, but it felt like an hour. I was brought to a room where Elijah was undergoing a battery of tests. They told me he was great. Beyond great, surprisingly healthy.

Soon I was holding my fifth son. This was the first time I had held one of my children before my wife. Which brought me back to Karen.

How is my wife doing?

It wasn’t too long before the doctor came in. He congratulated me on an

amazingly healthy son, and he told me Karen was doing really well.

So what happened? Why the bleeding? Why the emergency C-section?

The doctor told me that it turned out that Karen had a condition called Vasa Previa. It is a rare occurrence, and it is hard to spot during ultrasounds.

Vasa Previa is a condition where the blood vessels that attach the umbilical cord to the placenta run in between the baby and the birth canal. When Karen’s water broke, the blood vessels broke as well, and that blood was supposed to be going to Elijah.

About an hour later, Karen was wheeled into the room. I brought her Elijah. We were both so relieved to have a safe and healthy baby that it took a while for our emotions to settle. It wasn’t until Saturday night that we decided to do a bit more research on Vasa Previa.

Here are a few statistics:

- 95% of Vasa Previa pregnancies that are not prenatally diagnosed end in the death of the child.
- If a pregnancy is diagnosed as Vasa Previa, the mother is recommended to be put on bed rest between weeks 30-32.
- It is strongly discouraged to let the mother go into labor and have the baby naturally, but should she decide to anyway, it is necessary to be prepared for a blood transfusion for the child.

The realization of what I read began to hit me.

Not only was my son in the 5% who survive; he didn’t even require a blood transfusion. Added to that, we had TRIED to get Karen to go into labor. We

had gone for walks, worked hard, eaten spicy food. If Karen had gone into labor, if her water had broken anywhere else but in a delivery room, statistics and science say this story ends differently.

It began to sink in.

Thank you, Jesus. Thank you for my son.

So how do we respond?

The initial reaction is to say, “God is good!” And he is good. But God would still be good even if he had decided to take Elijah the morning of February 3.

Another reaction is to say, “God is faithful!” And he is faithful. But God is also faithful to those who have lost their children.

Another response is: “Man, God must have some plan for this little guy.” And he does. But it might not be what we would typically classify as “amazing.”

So, again, how do we respond?

With humble gratitude and thankfulness that God is God. Praise be to God for the gift of his Son Jesus Christ, and for the gift of our son Elijah—God’s miracle on a frosty February morning in the sleepy little city of Fergus Falls.

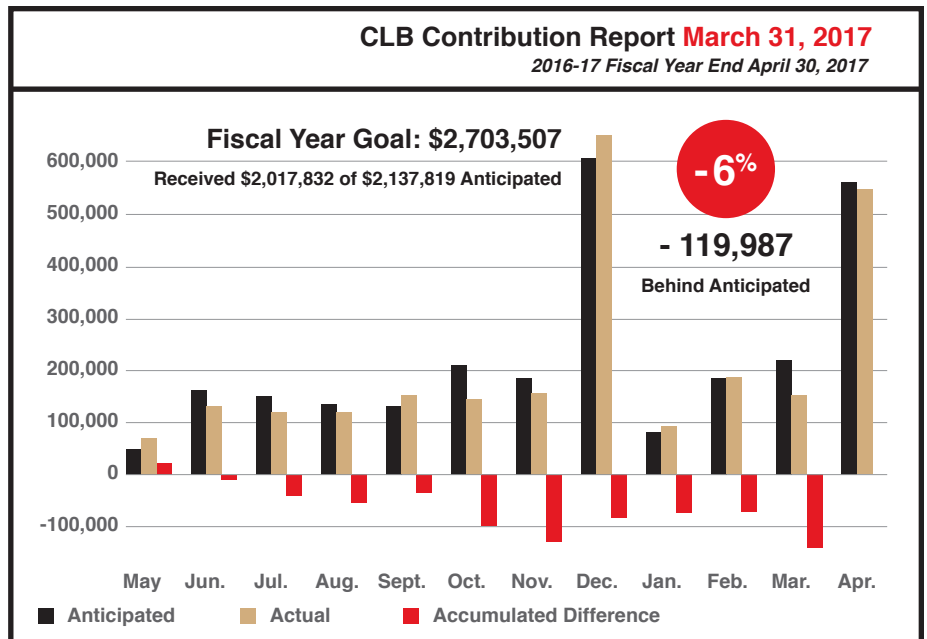
Daniel Stenberg is a third-year seminarian at Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Upon graduation, Daniel has accepted a call to serve as pastor at Calvary Lutheran Church in Bergenfield, New Jersey.

Graceful Giving

ROY HEGGLAND

As the Apostle Paul begins his letter to the Romans, he paints a picture of the human condition which is so stark and bleak that we find ourselves without any hope of avoiding the wrath and punishment of God. But when it seems that all is lost, Paul, in Romans 3:21, uses the words “but now...,” as he begins to describe the wonderful plan of God to rescue us from damnation by *giving* the righteousness possessed by his Son Jesus, as a free gift of grace to those who believe in him. This gift is beyond measure and is for all people, but not all receive it. After describing many of the benefits of God’s gift of salvation, Paul then says, in Romans 10:14-15, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

Did you notice the progression in these verses? Only those who believe in Jesus can call on him. We have no ability to even call on him unless we are given faith to believe in him. And we are given that faith, that belief, by hearing the Word about him, so that only those who have heard of him can believe. But how can they hear about him if no one preaches the good news to them? Notice that good works alone are not enough to cause someone to believe. They must hear the good news! The Word alone brings faith. Our good works must always be accompanied by the Good Word. But how will someone go and preach the good news to the lost of the world, to those in the unreached places on earth, unless someone sends them to speak the words of life?



We could continue the progression by asking the next question, “How can they be sent unless faithful stewards provide the resources to send them?” You and I are the ones that God uses to provide the means by which he sends people who proclaim the Good News. Our missionaries to the Bilala, Bagirmi and Fulbe are sent as we provide the funds for their living and travel expenses. The same is true for our missionaries to Taiwan, Japan and China. Our missionaries and pastors are trained by our Lutheran Brethren Seminary through our gifts which cover two-thirds of the cost for their education. Our gifts provide for our Regional Pastors as they care for our pastors and congregations, lead efforts to plant new churches and plan our youth conventions. New congregations such as Epiphany in New York City are able to begin through our gifts and offerings. Our Communications and Prayer Ministry, the Office of the President and the Finance Office—which exist to serve the needs

of all of the ministries and congregations of the CLB—are supported through our generosity.

So, here are the questions for each of us: Why do we give? Is it important? Do we care if people hear the gospel? The answer is easy. Because we have experienced the *grace* of God that Paul describes in Romans, we are compelled to give so that others may hear and believe and be transformed by the Word into brothers and sisters in Christ who will one day join us in praising and worshiping the Lamb of God forever!

Roy Hegglund is Associate for Biblical Stewardship for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.



A Grace-Filled Day Lies Ahead

CHERYL OLSEN

I am remembering the serene blue waters of the Delaware River flowing along next to the winding tree-covered country lane leading to Tuscarora Inn & Conference Center. I'm remembering the excited voices and smiles of women reunited as friends, and others meeting for the first time. I'm remembering young women, moms, and grandmothers who were moved to tears listening to a mother and her two daughters sharing a story of tragedy with us, but also the grace and hope they had because of Jesus. Do you remember Women's Ministries Convention 2011 with Cindy Geraghty and her daughters Ellen and Anne? Or 2013 at Warm Beach, near Seattle, Washington with Trisch Johnson challenging us with the project Mercy Guinebor in Chad, Africa? How about 2015 in Minot, North Dakota with Stephanie Chell sharing God's strength revealed in the crisis of Minot's flood? Each of these WMCLB conventions were held in conjunction with one of our Regional Biennial Conventions. Each drew many women from the Region in which it was held, but drew some women from other Regions, as well.

This year, on June 24, 2017, we will again join the Eastern Region Biennial Convention at Tuscarora for our Annual WMCLB convention—this time more fully integrated with their schedule. We hope you will join us, whether you live in the Eastern Region or want to visit the East! You're invited to come for the entire family-friendly weekend! If you can't stay the whole weekend, come for the day, and definitely join us for our WMCLB Luncheon Saturday at 12:30, where we'll hear from our guest speaker, missionary Sandy Christofferson, as well as share updates, and hold elections.

Here We Stand. On Grace. As the Church. For the World. This is the theme for our day and the weekend. Saturday begins with a plenary session



The 2017 WMCLB Annual Convention will be held at Tuscarora Inn & Conference Center on June 23-25.

at 9:30 a.m., followed by two seminar sessions before lunch. Choices are varied, including sessions by Lutheran Brethren Seminary professors Dr. Veum and Dr. Boe, missionaries Ethan and Sandy Christofferson, the recent mission team to Chad, Youth Ministry with Andrew Little, Evangelism with Church Planter Erick Sorensen, and Choosing Bible Studies with interim Women's Ministries Chair Barbara Heggland.

Saturday afternoon will be a fun time of games and fellowship for everyone, including children, billed as a "Coney Island" experience! Evening activities include a banquet for everyone, a joint worship service with Women's Ministries as the ministry spotlight, communion, and church cluster group fellowship. (Check the schedule for additional opportunities: www.clba.org/here-we-stand-2017)

Registration is open at <http://www.tuscarora.org/clb-convention-2017/>. We ask everyone to register there, whether they plan to come for the weekend, the day, or even just the luncheon. Costs are as follows: Day Guest Rates (no lodging) for Adults: \$5 per day or \$10 for the weekend, plus the cost of meals,

\$10 Breakfast, \$12 Lunch, \$15 Supper or Sunday Noon Dinner. Children: 0-5 years FREE, 6-12 years 50% of Day Guest Rate. Costs for lodging on-site at Tuscarora vary according to your choice of accommodation.

We hope to see many of you there in June!

Cheryl Olsen is the Faith & Fellowship correspondent for Women's Ministries of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.



Visit: www.WMCLB.com



Mount Bethel Lutheran Brethren Church in Mount Bethel, Pennsylvania.

A Big Story

ANNA CAMERON

Anna Cameron is nearing the end of her freshman year at Wheaton College, a Christian school in the Chicago suburb of Wheaton, Illinois. Her hometown is Mount Bethel, Pennsylvania. Anna presented the following testimony to her home congregation, Mount Bethel Lutheran Brethren Church, shortly before her high school graduation.

My name is Anna Cameron, and in a few months I will be graduating from high school. I was reluctant to speak this morning because I never thought of myself as having a “big” story. I have always

known of Jesus, the love of God, and his Son’s suffering for my redemption and forgiveness.

But my story, like all of our stories as God’s children is a remarkably big story—it’s a story of the amazing blessing of growing up in a Christian home. Mine is not a perfect family—very crazy at times!—but a family that is under God’s amazing grace. And my story is also a story of this church. I grew up here, between these walls. I was baptized on this platform as an infant, along with my brothers. As a three-year-old, at a Christmas Eve service, I threw up on my dad’s shoulder and had to be rushed out

of the service. I ran the halls as a little girl, and year by year moved my way through the Sunday School classrooms. I played games on the grass out front. As an eighth-grader I stood right here, and recited all the Scripture I had memorized for Confirmation Sunday. And I sort of joined youth group years before I was old enough. We had many youth group events at our house, and sometimes it was annoying to have a house full of older students. In fact, my brother started to refer to our house as a youth hostel.

All of my closest friends throughout high school have been kids I’ve known through youth group. I met my youth



Anna and her mother Kim.



Anna enjoying a water balloon fight on senior day at her high school.

pastor, Andrew, when he was just out of college, and I watched as he dated and then married his now wife, Gwen, and now watch as they start their own family.

This is my family. I've seen amazing things: I've witnessed high school students come to winter weekend at Tuscarora, and I've seen God change their lives with his saving love. I've seen the dramatic transformation that comes with understanding God's forgiveness for the first time. Just as one example, I saw one of my best friends, Kylee, go from knowing absolutely nothing about God to wanting to follow and love God. Her transformation is just one of the things that showed me how powerful the Holy Spirit really is.

But, I've also seen difficult things... There are so many distractions that Satan uses to cause us to stumble. I've watched those who drifted away from Christ and the Church. I've seen the painful consequences that come with living a life in rebellion to who God has called us to be.

So it is a big story. I have realized that God's story is always a big story. As God's children, because of Jesus' sacrifice, we are all brothers and sisters. This makes us family. And like my home family, we in the church family sometimes look crazy and act crazy. But we always need to support, love, and forgive each other.

I am thankful for this church—for all of you who have helped me see who Jesus is; I'm thankful for Pastor Chris and Pastor Dan for teaching me; thankful for Andrew and Gwen who let me see what it looks like to fall in love with each other and to see the love they have for teens;

thankful to my parents for committing to raising me in this church; thankful for my grandparents who made similar decisions many years ago with their children; and thankful for all my friends who loved me and held me accountable.

In the fall I will be leaving for Wheaton College. As excited as I am about going to Wheaton, I will miss this church, miss my friends from youth group, and miss my church family. I am sent off, still a sinner, but a sinner who knows who Christ is, knows his love for me, and knows that he calls me to live for him. In closing, I'm going to share a portion of an essay that I wrote for a college application. The question was, "Which of your various activities in high school was the most significant?"

This is my response: My involvement with youth group has undoubtedly had the most significance in my life throughout high school. While many of my other activities offered social, academic and personal growth, the church youth group relationships with not only my peers, but the leaders of the youth ministry, continue to provide a Christ-centered foundation to my life. I strongly believe that surrounding myself with people who share my love for God will encourage me in my own walk with God. Proverbs 27:17 states, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." Our heavenly Father calls us to build relationships with one another to strengthen our faith. As I was growing up in public school, very few of my peers were believers. Spending time with the leaders and teens in various youth group activities became so important to all of

us. We grew up together, facing many of the same struggles, and enjoying many of the same accomplishments. Our lives became intertwined, and our relationships deepened, as we held each other accountable, encouraged each other, and walked together through our teenage years. I am forever grateful to have enjoyed this amazing blessing.

Anna Cameron is a member of Mount Bethel Lutheran Brethren Church in Mount Bethel, Pennsylvania. She is currently a freshman at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois.

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Visit www.mountbethelchurch.org to learn more about the exciting ministry God is doing through Mount Bethel Lutheran Brethren Church.



Hayley Filippini at Hillcrest Lutheran Academy.

Be Still



HANS HOLZNER

A Hillcrest Lutheran Academy senior passed away in December following a battle with cancer. Hayley Filippini was loved by her classmates. Her testimony of the Lord's providence in giving her peace during her journey left a significant imprint on those who knew her. In Hayley's memory, her classmates are starting an endowment, noting that Hillcrest was Hayley's favorite place because of how God strengthened her faith in classrooms and that she built lifelong friendships in the dorms. The article below is written by one of her senior friends, Hans Holzner, and gives perspective to how the student body is processing the loss of a classmate, friend, and sister in Christ.

On December 16, 2016, a beautiful daughter leapt into the ever-reaching arms of her Father. Hayley Midland Filippini was a senior at Hillcrest who passed away from cancer. She is the first graduate of the class of 2017 from Hillcrest Lutheran Academy.

Words could never do justice to Hayley. Her smile radiated joy. Her selfless character overflowed with a tender care for all those she encountered. God loved his sweet daughter more than we can ever fathom, and she fearlessly loved him back. Her life, short as it was on this earth, was a thing of beauty. No one who encountered Hayley was left unaffected by her gentle grace. But the fact still

remains: She's gone, and we're still here. We now face the relentless task of responding. We face a world fractured, a friend absent and a God faithful. We face Hayley, loved; and in this love, surrounded by God's faithfulness, we find *stillness*; for love often turns us to stillness. How can it do anything else?

We often say that love is an action. But at times, the loving act is to refrain; to be silent, to be still. We face circumstances in life—the paradox of need, the confusion of grief—that we cannot, try as we might, explain. Responding in love with stillness is not surrender. It's not giving in to the hardship. Rather, stillness is having the humility to step back, and the courage

to trust; the binding love that commits to friendship, holding people together. Stillness is not due to inability. It's a choice.

The Apostle John recounts in chapter 11, with touching simplicity, Christ grieving the death of his friend, and then follows with the miraculous account of Lazarus' resurrection. If we examine for a moment the person of Jesus—Immanuel, God incarnate—and the unimaginable power he wields, we realize that the resurrection is not the noteworthy occurrence in this story. No, the God of the universe, the very breath of life in his lungs, moved with love, stood *still*, and wept. Jesus always had the ability to heal, and yet for a time he chose to be still. This choice is made perfect in Christ's submission to death itself. Moved by love, Jesus took the cross: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).

We are called to be still. God desires for us to be still in him: "Be still and know that *I am* God" (Psalm 46:10a). This life is not easy, but that was never promised us. No, in fact Jesus tells his disciples, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." As we face these troubles, God tells us, as he did his children Israel in Exodus 14:14, "[I] will fight for you; you need only to be still."

For us, facing life on this earth confident in Jesus' glorious victory, few words ring truer than these: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing... As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love" (John 15:5,9, ESV).

So when tragedy clouds joy, be still; for love often turns us to stillness. In that stillness, we abide with our Lord.

Hans Holzner is a senior at Hillcrest Lutheran Academy in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.



Call to Action

Hillcrest Lutheran Academy's Class of 2017 invites you to get to know Hayley through testimony videos posted on Hillcrest's website. They also invite you to join them in honoring Hayley's memory by supporting her named endowment.



Visit: www.ffhillcrest.org/hayley

Sending Single Women

MATTHEW ROGNESS

Historically, there have been many single women who have faithfully served as missionaries on Lutheran Brethren International Mission's Africa fields. These women served primarily in specific roles as LBIM partnered with our African sister Churches in their development.

LBIM continues to value the role that single women can have on our Chad field for the following reasons:

- Single women are not focused on family responsibilities. Thus they are able to focus on targeted ministry and statistically persevere well into long-term productive service.
- A traditional missionary family on the Chad field today typically involves the man engaging in ministry among men, while the woman is, by necessity and choice, at home, caring for the everyday tasks of keeping a home, preparing food, primary parenting, and schooling children. A single woman on the field is able to focus on ministry to women and children, a ministry that is not culturally appropriate or accessible for male missionaries.
- LBIM desires to focus evangelism on families and communities, not individuals. Single women on the field allow us to more effectively target the wives, mothers and children of the people groups among whom we are seeking to engage.
- Holistic mission methodology focusing on families and communities is key in terms of passing the gospel on through children and extended families, which will in turn serve as a catalyst for the growth of the Church among an ethnolinguistic group of people. It is therefore vital that we have both men and women engaging them in ministry.

In light of the ministry benefits described above, LBIM is seeking to

recruit and support single missionary women on our Chad field. Potential ministry platforms that we feel will be effective and culturally appropriate include but are not limited to:

- Working with community women to identify felt needs, both economically and socially, and facilitating cooperative strategies to meet those needs.
- Teaching women and children could take place in conjunction with literacy and translation ministries. The majority of rural individuals that LBIM is engaging in mission are illiterate. Many express a felt need of providing education for their children so that they can read/write and otherwise advance socio-economically. A single woman could be very effective in serving as a teacher for both children and women.
- Community and preventative health care. Child mortality in Chad is very high (40–50%). Much of this mortality is due to easily preventable diseases such as malnutrition, malaria, intestinal parasites and water-borne diseases. Mothers are the primary care providers for children in Chad. A single woman trained in health care could do much to reduce child mortality.

Due to the nature of our current ministry in Chad, that of pioneering ministry among unreached Muslim people groups, we acknowledge that there are some concerns regarding single women serving in this mission context:

- In a Muslim society, where the rights and privileges of men are typically valued more than those of women, a single missionary woman may have reduced influence or platform from which ministry can take place.
- In a Muslim society, where polygamy is commonplace, there are no

religious hurdles for a Muslim man to have another wife. Furthermore, it is acceptable for a Muslim man to have a non-Muslim wife with the reasoning that this will lead to a conversion to Islam. This cultural and religious mindset will likely mean proposals and even pressure on a single woman to accept marriage proposals.

- In a Muslim society, where women's rights are often not regarded or protected, physical safety and the security of a woman and possessions are a concern.

In view of the above, when LBIM places single women in such ministry locations, we will endeavor to take the following precautions:

- Single women will ideally be partnered together in teams of two for the purpose of support, accountability, protection and fellowship. The exception to this may be a mature woman of strong character who may live alone, with the condition that she is in close geographic proximity to team members.
- Single women will have a mission advocate (male), who will go to the village chief and elders to explain and gain their agreement to proactively address the issue of marriage proposals.
- Single women will be placed in close proximity to a team of LBIM/EFLT missionaries, for the purpose of support, accountability, protection and fellowship. (EFLT is the CLB of Chad.)
- Single women will have adequate security measures in place at their residence.

Rev. Matthew Rogness is the Director of International Mission for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.



Kay Asche in fellowship with the Bagirmi women of Chad.

Grace Alone God's Call to the Bagirmi

KAY ASCHE

I first sensed God's call to go to the Bagirmi people in Chad while working at Hope Lutheran Brethren Church in Barnesville, Minnesota. My six children were leaving home and marrying at an alarming rate, and I realized my role as a homeschooling mom for the past twenty years was fading away. I spent time fasting and praying, seeking God's direction regarding my role going forward.

When I was working in the office at Hope, our congregation agreed to partner with Bethel Lutheran Church in Fergus Falls, Minnesota to adopt the Bagirmi people in Africa. My heart was stirred, and I felt God calling me to go to the Bagirmi. I had no idea how I would do this or what was involved in becoming a missionary to the Bagirmi. All I knew

was that God directed me in his Word to "study to show yourself approved" (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV 2000).

While stocking the brochure rack at Hope, I read in a Lutheran Brethren Seminary (LBS) brochure that they offered a Certificate of Theological Studies (CTS), suitable for people who desired a second career in missions. Again there was the verse, "Study to show yourself approved." I also learned that if I completed the CTS, I could apply to Lutheran Brethren International Mission (LBIM) to be a missionary to the Bagirmi.

Four years later, while employed full time as an Office Administrator at a small school in North Dakota, I could no longer ignore the call to "study to show yourself approved." God opened the

door for me to start the undergraduate requirements online through Minnesota State Community and Technical College. The next year I felt God leading me to commit to one year as a full-time student to complete my credits and start classes at LBS in Fergus Falls, MN.

Attending LBS was an amazing experience of saturation in God's Word and the richness of establishing life-long friendships with our future pastors, missionaries, and their wives and children. During one of the classes Dan Venberg, Mission Mobilizer for LBIM, spoke of the growing need for workers in the mission to the Muslims of Chad. Again, the call was strong and I wondered how God would fulfill the call in me to the Bagirmi.

During my second semester at LBS, I

Reaching the Unreached



Kay Asche on a 2016 Mission Trip to Chad.

Trusting the Lord to Provide

LBIM and Kay Asche are trusting the Lord to provide those who will support this ministry to Bagirmi women and children. Kay needs our prayer and financial support. The prayer of God's people is unquestionably the greatest need. Please send us your email address if you would like to receive specific prayer requests for Kay and our other missionaries in Asia and Africa.

Kay's first year of ministry, language study in France, will cost approximately \$48,000. That number will be updated as, Lord willing, Kay arrives in Chad to begin ministry among the Bagirmi people.

To help support this effort contact: LBIM@CLBA.org

accepted the call to work with the team at the Church of the Lutheran Brethren synodical offices. There I had the privilege of seeing how our dedicated, solid, denominational staff faithfully performs their daily tasks behind the scenes to support our churches, pastors, and missionaries.

I also was impressed with how God has used LBIM to establish a solid base of his Word in a very dark part of the world—known as the *10/40 window*. The 10/40 window is a rectangular area of our globe which has been identified to hold the majority of the world's unreached people. This is the least evangelized part of the earth, and LBIM's three mission fields, Chad, Japan, and Taiwan, are all located within it.

I found myself thinking that perhaps this was it; working in the CLB offices was my part in the Bagirmi mission. However, I could not shake the call I felt to go and live among the Bagirmi, and while working at the CLB offices, I was surprised to learn that the LBIM team saw a need for a "mature" woman to minister among the Muslim women in Chad. Our missionaries in Chad were starting to have an impact for the gospel on the men in the Muslim villages, but there was a lack of ministry to Muslim women.

I had discussed God's call on my life with LBIM. In January 2016, I had the opportunity to go with a short-term team

to Chad. I found myself sitting on a mat in a small Muslim village hearing the leaders of villages in the 10/40 window inviting LBIM to come live among them and teach them from our "Book." When I returned from Africa, I talked with leadership about what would be involved in serving in Africa with LBIM and began assembling the items that I would need to live there.

I graduated from LBS in May 2016, and in December I resigned from my job at the CLB offices. After praying, I decided to sell my house and possessions and continue to seek training toward working in end-of-life care, possibly in Arizona near relatives, until the door to Africa was open.

My house sold within hours and my possessions were sold or given away to family and friends. Everything that remained would fit in my car except for the three large tubs that I had assembled for ministry in Africa. At this point, I asked God to show me if I should liquidate the contents of the tubs, or else how to transport the tubs to Arizona.

The next day LBIM called and asked if I could meet with them. Unexpectedly, the door to Africa appeared to be opening, and I agreed to pursue the next steps towards applying for acceptance as a missionary to the Bagirmi in Chad.

God has been faithful to prepare and guide me, but what do I really have to

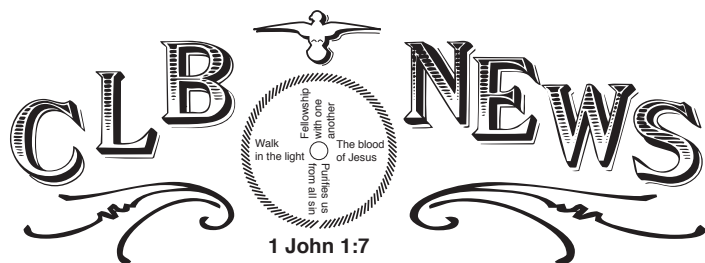
offer the women and children of Chad? I have what I know to be true: God's Word of assurance that we are friends of God through Jesus Christ.

What's a 57-year-old woman to do? The idea of leaving my circle of loving, supportive co-workers, friends and relatives to live in primitive surroundings brings to the surface many questions and fears. But as a wise friend said to me, "God will provide." The opportunity seems to have opened up overnight, but in reality, it has been ten years since I began to fast and pray for God's direction for my life. He has made it possible for me to "study to show yourself approved." He will continue to be faithful and true to his Word.

Kay Asche is a 2016 graduate of Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, and has been called by the Church of the Lutheran Brethren to serve as a missionary to the Bagirmi people of Chad, Africa.

**WHO'S
NEXT?**

*Is God calling you to international mission?
Contact: LBIM@CLBA.org*



Council of Directors



On March 22-23, 2017, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren Council of Directors met at Living Word Community Church in Phoenix, Arizona in conjunction with the Pacific Region Biennial Convention.

COD Minutes: www.clba.org/church-leadership

Solberg Installed



L to R: Stan Lindblom, Rev. Gary Witkop, Leif Halvorson, Rev. Gregory Solberg, Kirby Dasinger, Rev. Mike Hussey, Wade VanEvery, and Gordon Torgerson.

On February 26, 2017, Gregory Solberg was installed as associate pastor at Sidney LBC in Sidney, Montana. Regional Pastor Gary Witkop officiated the service.

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He Comes to Us

There's a couple who live in the environs of Bergen, Norway. Anders and Anne Elisabeth. Last fall, they came to see Ruth and me at our home in Menomonie, Wisconsin. A couple of years previous, they had come to our house in Fergus Falls, Minnesota for an evening with Hillcrest Lutheran Academy faculty. Elisabeth is a math teacher at a school in Bergen that sends a whole class of students to Hillcrest each year. I served as her counterpart at Hillcrest, and was privileged to "adopt" her students for a year, and then send them back home in exchange for the next group.

So we talked regularly about the students and about math. But when we visited as couples in our homes, we talked about life and each other's cultures. It was a wonderful gift. Reflecting on it now, it strikes me that the gift was so easy for us to receive because they came to us, *and they spoke English!* All the effort was theirs, and we reaped the benefits without the discomfort of leaving our culture and adjusting to another—and without learning a single word of Norwegian.

In ten years of teaching math to hundreds of students from all over the world, it was easy to think I was doing something really good for them—giving them a gift. But they did the work, and they came to me. I would have been as helpless as a baby, with absolutely nothing to offer them in most of their countries, if I had gone to them.

This is grace: All these friends coming to us and gifting us with their presence—only by great personal effort.

R.C.H. Lenski quotes Martin Luther, regarding Jesus and grace. "Jesus is a peculiar King. You do not seek him. He seeks you. You do not find him. He finds you. For the preachers come from him, not from you. Their preaching comes from him, not from you. Your faith comes from him, not from you. And all that your faith works in you, comes from him, not from you." Lenski adds, "The subjects of other kings humbly come to them. This King comes to his subjects. Other kings draw all that they have from their people. This King gives all that he has to his people."

Eventually, as a second gift—because the relationship was already established—Ruth and I were privileged to go and enjoy the hospitality of Anne Elisabeth and Anders' home and family in Norway. We counted ourselves blessed.

The Savior-King gave himself to us in the ultimate sacrifice. Someday he will also invite us home, only by his grace.

Rev. Brent Juliot serves as pastor of Oak Ridge Lutheran Brethren Church in Menomonie, Wisconsin.

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