

Faith & Fellowship

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Quiet Moments

Email prayer requests to: pray@clba.org

Faith Alone

MARTIN LUTHER



I have often said that the Christian life has two dimensions: the first is faith, and the second is good works. A believer should live a devout life and always do what is right. But the first dimension of the Christian life—faith—is more essential. The second dimension—good works—is never as valuable as faith. People of the world, however, adore good works. They regard them to be far higher than faith.

Good works have always been valued more highly than faith. Of course, it's true that we should do good works and respect the importance of them. But we should be careful that we don't elevate good works to such an extent that faith and Christ become secondary. If we esteem them too highly,

good works can become the greatest idolatry. This has occurred both inside and outside of Christianity. Some people value good works so much that they overlook faith in Christ. They preach about and praise their own works instead of God's works.

Faith should be first. After faith is preached, then we should teach good works. It is faith—without good works and prior to good works—that takes us to heaven. We come to God through *faith alone*.

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.

Deep Water

TROY TYSDAL

Mark Twain said, “Faith is believing what one knows is not true.” He was wrong—at least as it pertains to Christian faith. Faith is not believing in something we know is not true. That definition ignores and denies the experience of Christ’s apostles, whose faith was rooted in their eyewitness accounts of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

1 JOHN 1:1-4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Last winter my wife and I took our boys to visit their grandparents in Arizona. Having just endured five months of Minnesota winter, the boys were excited about the fact that grandpa and grandma had a swimming pool in their housing development—and they desired to get in the water right away.

At the time, our youngest son, Gavin, was a few months away from his fourth birthday. He stood about 35” tall—just under three feet, which was the water depth at the shallow end of the pool. It did not take long for him to realize the water was over his head. After swallowing an uncomfortable amount of it, he also had to admit that he didn’t know how to swim.

A few days later, we were back at the pool. In spite of his previous experience,



Katie Tysdal/2017

Gavin at Pebble Lake in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

when Gavin saw me standing in the deep end... he ran to the edge and jumped in!

Why? Why would he *do* that?

He knew the water was over his head. He knew he couldn’t swim. So, why jump in?

The answer is simple: he knew the one in the pool. He had faith, and not some unsupported feeling that everything would work out. He had three years of life experience, evidence, telling him that his father would catch him. His father would not let him drown.

The disciples were not asked to believe in something that was not supported by fact... and neither are we.

The New Testament is a series of letters and stories put together by those who were eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Together, along with the Old Testament, these documents are the most scrutinized documents in the history of the world... and yet they have proven themselves trustworthy time and time again.

Faith is not believing that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. That is a fact. Faith

is believing that the benefits of his resurrection have been transferred to you. That the victory over Satan, sin, and death belong to you. Faith is receiving that truth, and acknowledging that you can add nothing to it. Romans 3:28 states, “We maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”

It is *faith alone*, in the work of Jesus Christ, that justifies us before God... and that brings us into fellowship with God.

The water is deep. It is over your head. But fear not. You know the One in the pool. He will catch you with hands that have been pierced for your transgressions.

Believe in him.

He will not let you drown.

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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Faith Alone Rock Bottom

SCOTT SKONES

When you do that, it makes Jesus sad.” That phrase, or your own personal variant, is a sure indication that you’ve hit “rock bottom” as a parent. All of the traditional tricks, tactics, and manipulative techniques that parents through the ages have used to manage their children’s behavior have failed, leaving you with no other choice.

Now do not get me wrong, our sin grieves God. However, in a desperate attempt to control our children, we end up reinforcing the theology to which we are all naturally already inclined: A theology that sees God as oscillating from happy and pleased to angry and wrathful multiple times a day as our behavior changes. A theology in which we begin to actually believe that we can satisfy God on our own if we can only “turn the corner” in a couple of areas.

I vividly remember driving down the highway as a teenager, and narrowly missing a head-on collision with another vehicle. I came face-to-face with the reality of life and death, and in that instant came to the realization that I had very little assurance of my standing before God. I was a baptized, confirmed, youth group-attending, Summer Servant Team-trained, well-behaved church kid who even co-hosted a weekly evangelistic radio show. Yet, I had absolutely no sense of assurance as to where the eternal chips would fall if I died.

Everything inside and outside of me subscribed to an economy of merit. I intrinsically desired to justify myself, or at the very least, to feel like I deserved salvation. What is worse is that the Church had served to reinforce that. Salvation was advertised as a free gift

to be received by *faith alone*, but the unwritten (yet clearly implied) source of assurance was my behavior and progress. My assurance was in *feeling* rather than *fact*—which is actually no assurance at all. It hinged on my level of personal dedication and spiritual surrender. It dangled by the thin thread of my ability to maintain my status as a “good Christian.”

Are you exhausted yet?

When the Holy Spirit illuminated the words “a righteousness that is by faith from first to last” (Romans 1:17) in the mind and heart of Martin Luther, a wave of spiritual peace and assurance swept far and wide. This *Sola Fide* (Faith Alone) runs contrary to human nature and understanding, but breathes objective assurance into the troubled soul that finds weakness and frailty in the strongest resolve it is able to muster.

Meet Your Council of Directors



Scott and Angela visiting Wrigley Field in Chicago (2017).

Scott has been married to Angela since 2004 and they have two daughters: Maycee (7) and Lailoni (3).



Scott Skones

Scott Skones serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as an ordained layperson representative on the Council of Directors, where he currently serves on the Finance Subcommittee as well as the Theological Council.

Scott has been on staff at Our Redeemer's Lutheran Brethren Church and Christian School in Minot, ND, for over 13 years, and currently has the title of Technology Director and Lay Pastor.

He is a graduate of Minot State University with a BSE in Social Science. Scott focuses most of his energy on leveraging technology to further the mission of the church and school. He also loves teaching, preaching, and helping people become more grounded in God's Word.

As we spend this 500th anniversary of the dawn of the Protestant Reformation reflecting upon the significance and contribution of the Reformers and their work, let us consider two Reformation themes that are worthy of the time and attention of the Church and the Christian.

FAITH IS GOD'S WORK

The Reformation gave us the tremendous gift of an emphasis on God's work in our salvation. The author of Hebrews reminds us that God is the *author* of our faith (12:2). The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the church in Philippi emphasizes that it is God who began a good work in us (1:6). Finally, in the Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism we confess 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..."

J.A. Motyer said, "The human will offers no security of tenure."

Depending on your background, you may either read this statement as a tremendous relief, or as "fighting words." Whatever your feelings, one thing remains true: If we look to ourselves for assurance, there is little to be found.

We can rest in the fact that God is the initiator of our faith. This does not detract from the personal and living nature of saving faith in Christ. The Reformers unquestionably believed and taught that living and saving faith in Jesus Christ bears fruit in our lives and relationships. But we find rest in the scriptural hope that our faith depends upon God's

promise and God's resolve. We would all agree that the promise of God is a much stronger anchor for assurance than any measure of resolve that we can muster up from within ourselves.

IN SOLA FIDE, WE FIND CHRIST HIMSELF

Martin Luther said, "*Faith alone* is the means or instrument whereby we lay hold of Christ..."

In Philippians 3, the Apostle Paul pens a beautiful and moving testimony of his desire to "consider everything a loss" that he might "gain Christ and be found in him." As he develops this grand thought, Paul emphasizes that all of this is both *conceived* and *received* through faith alone in Jesus Christ. All that it means to "gain Christ," Paul says, "comes from God on the basis of faith." In other words, in *Faith Alone* we find the Savior, Jesus Christ.

That assertion collides with the typical human understanding of religion and how we relate and interact with God or whatever divine presence one might affirm. Our nature is to view faith as an on-ramp to the freeway. It is what got us pointed in the right direction. It was our initiation, our starting point for the Christian life. But now that you're on, you need to perform. You need to achieve. You need to become holy, useful, qualified, mature, and sanctified. You need to give, sacrifice, confess, and worship properly in order to keep your god happy.

The hope of the Gospel, as rediscovered during the Protestant Reformation, is

that in faith we don't find an on-ramp to the freeway. Instead, we find Christ himself! *Sola Fide* is not an initiation into a hamster-wheel life of trying to please God, but rather a vessel in which we receive the One who secured God's pleasure for us for all eternity.

We can rest in the promise that faith, which we receive as a gracious gift from God, is the basis for our standing with God. God provides exactly what he requires.

I pray that, as we commemorate 500 years of Reformation, you find that rest. The rest that frees your heart and mind from fear of a God who oscillates from happy and pleased to angry and wrathful. The rest that anchors your assurance in Christ's work on your behalf rather than in human will or resolve.

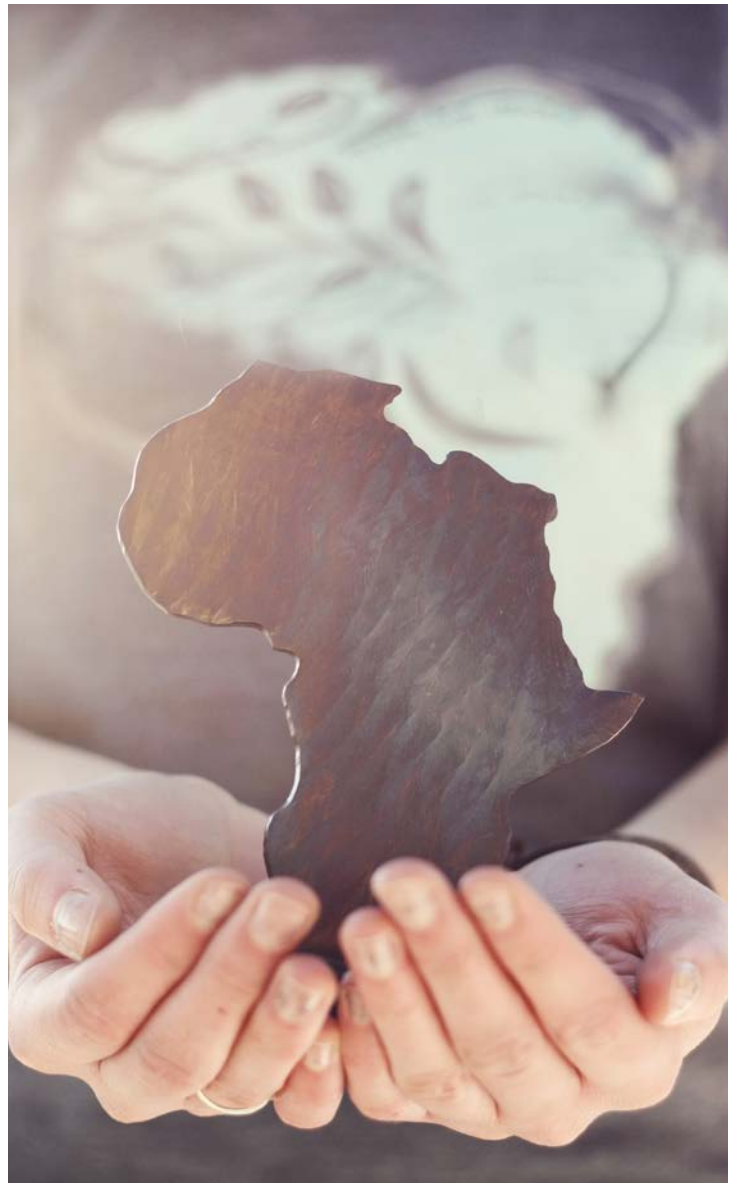
I pray that we also rediscover urgency. Our world is every bit as much in need of the liberating and saving message of *Sola Fide* now as it was 500 years ago. I pray that God awakens within us an understanding of the theological gift that we have to share with a dark and perishing world.

May the liberating Reformation message that we are saved by *grace alone* through *faith alone* in *Christ alone* find its way into this world through the CLB as we rediscover it for ourselves.

Scott Skones is Technology Director and Lay Pastor at Our Redeemer's Lutheran Brethren Church in Minot, North Dakota. He serves as a representative from the Western Region on the Church of the Lutheran Brethren's Council of Directors.

Faith Alone **Trust in Jesus**

MANDY B.



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What's our evacuation plan?" That question at our recent Chad team meeting is important given how many of us are new to the country. Missionaries here often refer to the importance of having a "Go Bag" ready for your entire family in case of an emergency, whether medical or because of unrest, where you have less than 10 minutes to evacuate. With the help of veteran missionaries from our team and from other missions we have been compiling our list. It includes a sling shot in case we meet baboons or monkeys while stopped along the road!

But somehow, trying to get prepared has me feeling slightly overwhelmed, very fearful, and very unprepared as a mother. How do I stay motivated to reach the lost with the Gospel of Christ even amidst any fear I feel as a mother raising my children in Chad?

How did I even end up here in Chad

with my husband Danny and five boys aged nine and under? Growing up in Montana, and later attending college in Pittsburgh, I had several short-term mission experiences which were foundational for me. Following college, I was able to travel with a professor and some classmates to Tanzania for one month. Later, for five months, I joined Mercy Ships, on a hospital ship that serves people in Africa. Several years later in Montana, as Danny and I got to know each other, we immediately talked about a common desire to serve in Africa. A month after our marriage, we moved to Fergus Falls, Minnesota so he could begin seminary, and we began conversations with LBIM regarding missions in our future.

Now I am so much more aware of how naive I was both in that desire and in picturing my life as a missionary. And I was not yet a mother as we began talking

and praying about moving to Africa. Later, as Danny and I shared with others about moving to Africa, people would often ask about our children. Sometimes I wondered if those people thought that I hadn't even considered the impact of moving our children. In fact, that was almost all I thought, cried, sought advice, prayed, and spent time in the Word about. If I knew then what I know now about the painful, heart-wrenching goodbyes to family, the grief associated with each transition and goodbye, the constant transition and packing, the loss of a physical place called "home," how truly difficult and humbling it is to attempt to learn a new language, and the many health questions and concerns I can think of daily for my boys here in Chad, I wonder if I would have continued down this path. But still, the call was there.

So is all fear gone simply because I'm called to be here? That would be a

Update: Danny and Mandy



Danny and Mandy's future home.

Construction on Danny and Mandy's new home is expected to be completed by mid-November.



A New Home

We are moving forward with building our new home in our new village. While we wait in N'Djamena for construction to be completed, I continue my Arabic study and Mandy is preparing for a new school year with the kids.

We covet your prayers:

Praise Item: Praise God for continued good health.

Prayer Concern: Pray for clear progress in language learning and creating connections in our new village.

Rev. Danny B.
Lutheran Brethren International Mission

resounding NO! Sometimes when Danny is traveling, I will feel suddenly fearful when I go to lock our door in the dark African night. As we get closer to moving out into the bush, I wonder, will I actually have the courage at night to go outside our home to use the bathroom, or will I be too fearful of the scorpions or other creepy crawly creatures here? I may think I go to sleep without fear, but when I hear the baby cry out in the night due to illness and consider the few medical resources available here, I can feel the fear and anxiety bubble up and try to overwhelm me. What might we be asked to give? What might I be asked to sacrifice?

But I am here in Chad, Africa, and some days just taking the next step is enough. And God has used a few words to encourage me:

- *Abide.* This word intrigues me as I hear it throughout the letter of 1 John. It basically means to remain or sojourn, which is not always easy for me when I prefer to make a plan of action. We remain linked to Christ in all areas of life, and depend on him for grace and power to obey. Jesus Christ is the source and sustainer of our lives.
- *One thing.* When I'm exhausted, overwhelmed, fearful, and it's VERY hot, just do one thing, even if I can't get the 30-minute quiet time I want. Today, I will open my Bible and read one word. Today, I will look at the Scripture I had written on the wall.

Today, I will play worship music. Today, I will pray with a child when they come to me over the "owie" on their knee.

- *Scripture.* Some days, fear can almost paralyze me, but God's Word brings victory over it. The verses I know well are what carry me through. Fear isn't reality, God's promises are, and they are found in his Word.
- *Prayer.* Talking to God about my fears. Daily giving my children to God and realizing he loves them more than I ever could. Now as we are preparing to move out of the capital into a small town where we'll get to know and live among the Bilala people, there are SO many new things I could fear. But I am reminded and grateful that we can go to him in prayer.
- *Even if.* As a mom, I can often find myself saying, "What if...?" What if something happens to my children or my husband or to my family back home? I have been encouraged instead to say, "Even if..." Even if something happens to my children, or to my husband, or to my family back home, God is still good, constant, and that's enough.
- *It is Well.* As I sit here listening to the amazing hymn "It is Well," blaring loudly over the noise of my boys, I am thankful for the reminders within

its words: "Whatever my lot, he has taught me to say, 'It is well with my soul.'"

God's Word and the prayers of those who have sent us here are what truly uphold and sustain us on the days when we can do no more.

Your life may not seem as intense as this, or maybe it does. As Christians, we are often called to situations we do not control, as much as we might want to try. In those moments when fear and uncertainty threaten to overwhelm you, remember who really is in control. It is God who has called each of us to our position in life. Through his Word, and the encouragement of his people, he will sustain you.

"When I am afraid, I put my trust in you" (Psalm 56:3).



Mandy B. serves Lutheran Brethren International Mission with her husband Danny and five children as missionaries to the unreached people of Chad, Africa.



Duncan Walker/Stock

Faith Alone Death Itself Will Be Undone

JORDAN SPINA

In Genesis, there is a picture of a father walking with his son up a hill. The son does not know what awaits at the top. He of course knows there will be a rope, a knife, and an altar. He knows there will be death, but he does not foresee that the death would be his own.

Is God in this?

“By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice” (Hebrews 11:17a).

Albert Camus once said, “In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or hope of a promised land. The divorce between man and life, the actor and his setting is properly a feeling of absurdity.” Camus speaks of the painful knowledge that comes upon a person when hope is gone,

when a world, once explained, seems explained away.

From one’s youth, life is chock-full of expectation, a hopeful exuberance exuding possibility; sun and trees, birthdays and music. But the truth comes upon us in pieces, like the time you first learn the meaning of *divorce*, or realize that cancer is more real than rabbit holes leading to Wonderland.

For me, it was when the ambulance arrived at the hospital and I saw the paramedics pull out the stretcher, the wheels clanging and clacking against the sidewalk. No one was allowed to go into the emergency room except a stream of trauma doctors and nurses. When our family was allowed in, we found my brother strapped to a table—arms, legs, and neck all stuck stone still. We were stunned. My mother cried. I held my

brother’s arms and my dad tried to talk. We all tried...but there were too few words and not enough strength. I got close to his face. I let my forehead touch his. I cried.

I cried because you cannot fix broken vertebrae with charisma and soothing words, because you cannot take back the bad decisions of a stupid kid, because split seconds in life cannot be undone... because paralysis is permanent and sometimes death seems close.

I had been taught and believed in a God who is love, but as I walked outside that night I did not see him. I saw the stars and I felt their indifference. They hung on nothing, unabashedly distant, billions of miles away draped in nothing but cold and silence.

Where was God? Was this his will? Or was it just the crescendo of a myriad of

***Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
Hebrews 11:1 (NASB)***

chance occurrences, dominoes falling until it all ends... a turn in the road, a momentary flight, crushed vertebrae, blinking lights and beeping machines?

There are settings where the all-consuming silence is not one of absent nurses and doctors, but the silence of God—where his commands to faith seem utterly irreconcilable with the cost. In God’s silence we find our own—the silence of our hearts, of our praise, of hope—the silence of our faith.

I met Jesus among a throng of thousands when I was fifteen. I went up the mountain. I saw God. I felt like Moses after coming down, face shining. And yet, most days are not like that. There are days when the fire of Sinai is a distant memory to the present darkness.

To be a Christian “by *faith alone*” is to know Jesus, but not in the way we often think, not in the way Middle School love knows that it is “always and forever.” To know Jesus by *faith alone* is rather to wrestle and rage and dare to trust even in the confusion—in quiet hospital parking lots, on dirt paths, on hills where crosses bear the silence of God.

The doctrine of *Sola Fide* (faith alone) acknowledges that suffering is not a natural good, but that faith often picks up where our logic leaves off. It is the expression of what we cannot always logically justify to the world; faith is often our foolishness on display because “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1, NASB).

For the Christian, suffering and faith

are necessarily tied. They are the opposite sides of the coin called hope. In our inability to find the cure to our deepest heart longings, we are made aware of our true need. And it is precisely this need Christ has come to answer.

Now, it is tempting to tie all this up in a neat package: I could tell you that my brother is a Christian today, and that in certain ways he credits his accident with opening the door to his need so he could see Christ waiting. I would tell you he is married to a wonderful young woman who loves him fiercely, and that he is a worship director at a mega-church. And it would all be true... but not honest.

The significance of *Sola Fide* is not and never has been in the nice resolution we long for. Instead, it is the resolution that lies behind all longing. Remember that this world is not our home. Remember that while God rescued Isaac from sacrifice, Isaac someday would still die. But while God spared Isaac, he did not spare his own Son at Calvary—because Christ’s heart for us is not grounded in this world, but in the next.

For every story like my brother’s, there is another person who is still walking up that hill, still looking for redemption, caught somewhere between the beeping monitors and the resurrection. While suffering will be part of our lives, we can trust that God allows this “...so that we may learn from our own experience that the small, weak, miserable Word is stronger than the devil and the gates of hell”¹ and that “[God] wants to make us conformed to the image of his dear Son,

Christ, so that we may become like him here in suffering and there in that life to come in honor and glory.”²

In the Gospel, we are given the picture of a Father walking with his Son up a hill. The Son knows what awaits at the top. He knows there will be nails, a spear, and a cross. He knows there will be death, and he foresees that the death will be his own.

...but he also knows that death is not the end of the story. He knows God is in this.

In faith, we too can turn to Jesus, who lives in and with us, and know that in death there is life. In that seed dying, there is an everlasting harvest—a resurrection. In this life we are only experiencing the fall, the dying of one’s self. There is yet the hope of spring, when death itself will be undone.



Jordan Spina is Pastor of Rock of Ages Lutheran Brethren Church in Seattle, Washington.

Sources

1. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 51: Sermons I, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 51 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 207.
2. *Ibid*, 206

The Big Lie

ROY HEGGLAND

One of the most devastating results of the fall of Adam and Eve was that their absolute trust in the Creator's goodness and love for them was shattered. Instead of believing that God was their Father who cared for them and always wanted what was best for them, they believed the lie planted in their hearts and minds by Satan—that God had ulterior motives and a secret agenda that was keeping them from achieving their true potential. Instantly, God became their biggest enemy instead of their protector and friend. Everything that God said became suspect in their minds.

That thinking permeates our hearts and minds even today. Many of us learned in Sunday School that when God sent the angels and the flaming sword to keep Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, it was God's punishment for their sin. But Scripture makes it clear that God sent them away from the Garden to prevent them from eating of the Tree of Life and thereafter living in an eternal state of corruption and sin. How could we get this wrong? It's easy. Our natural way of thinking after the fall is to believe the lie rather than the truth. If there is a way to interpret Scripture to make God the bad guy, we will find it.

However, when God breathes life into us through the power of his Word as his Spirit calls us to himself, the scales that blinded our understanding begin to fall away. We now see that what God says has always been good and true, and that he has always been loving and gracious to us. Unfortunately, that doesn't prevent our old nature from thinking wrongly about God and his intentions for us. We are, in a real sense, of two minds, that compete with each other and battle for dominance in our hearts and affection.

The faith that God gives us to believe

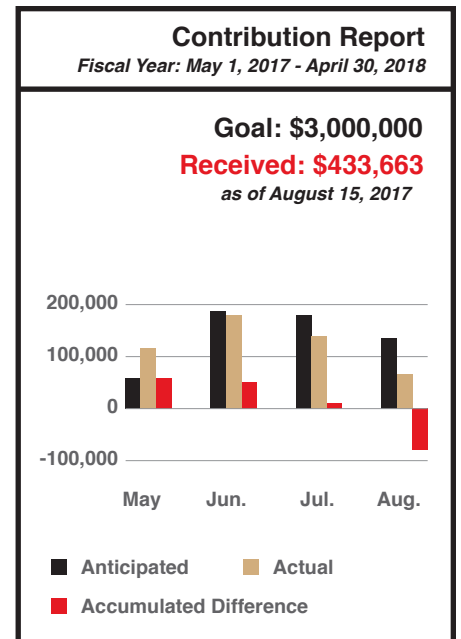


Masaccio, Florence, Italy/ZU_091/Stock

in him as our Savior is also the faith upon which we are to live, breathe and comprehend everything. The world, Satan and our old Adams (and Eves) continue to whisper the lies that Satan whispered to Eve (and Adam) back in the Garden. It is no wonder that it is often so difficult for us to live by faith. Most of what we see and hear around us and the whispers from our old nature constantly tell us, "There is a better way...we deserve more...the one who dies with the most toys wins..."

God invites us to live by faith as good stewards of all that he has provided to us, to give generously and sacrificially. In reaction, the world shouts, "You earned it! It's yours! You'll regret giving it away! You may need that money in ten years! What if...?"

But the Good News is that the "What if...?" has already been answered by Jesus himself. He lived perfectly for us, died our deserved death, and was raised to the right hand of the Father as proof that there is no "What if...?"



We have been freed to live by faith, in a new paradigm not dominated by the "What if...?" of the world, Satan and our old natures. The new word that now prevails is the "It is finished" of the cross. Jesus himself whispers in our ears, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another" John 15:15-17 (ESV).

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Women's Annual Event 2017

CHERYL OLSEN

"Here We Stand: on Grace, as the Church, for the World"

The cozy Tuscarora Inn meeting room was packed to the walls for the Annual Meeting of the Women's Ministries of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, June 24, 2017! Many had pre-registered, but so many additional women came for this event, combined with the Eastern Region Biennial Convention, that it looked like the luncheon fare would have to be miraculously multiplied to feed them all! Truly, the "loaves and fishes" amply provided for all, thanks to the intervention of the gracious Tuscarora staff.

Missionary Sandy Christofferson was the featured speaker at the Luncheon. Her presentation, "Musings about Ministry: Stories of missionary life in Taiwan," gave us a glimpse into life in that island nation. We couldn't help but empathize with her joys and sorrows, as she shared how God is impacting people's lives through their ministry.

Sandy and her husband Ethan will have returned to Taiwan before September, this time without either of their children. Both Caleb and Hannah will remain in Bozeman, Montana attending college near relatives. Let us pray for both parents and these young adults as they adjust to family life separated by an ocean. Let us also pray for the people whose stories Sandy shared, that they would have faith and courage to believe the Good News that Sandy and Ethan are sharing with them!

"Bible Study or Book Club?" was a seminar that Barbara Heggland presented as part of the Eastern Region Biennial, that same day. Most Lutheran Brethren churches have women's Bible studies, but not all women in our culture have the deep, rich Bible background that many of us grew up with. She challenged us to prepare to lead well: to know who we are



L to R: Treasurer Kim Goodman, Missionary Sandy Christofferson, Chairman Barbara Heggland, Director Ruth Vallevik, Canada WM President Jean Wilsdon, and Eastern Region President Darci Hakvaag.

as Christians; as Lutherans; as Lutheran Brethren women. She recommended *We Believe* by Tim Ysteboe, *Luther's Small Catechism*, and *Rooted in the Word* by Ruth Vallevik. She stressed the importance of studying whole passages in context, with the goal (whether a study or a book club) to equip each woman to study the Bible for herself, to discover and rely on God's truths.

Business was brief and concise. Elections included: Barbara Heggland for Chairman (a two-year commitment, completing a three-year term); Alison Olson for Secretary (a three-year term); and Kim Goodman for Treasurer (a one-year commitment, completing a three-year term). The 2016-17 budget goal was exceeded! Thanks to God and you, his people, for this blessing! Projects for 2017-18 were presented as follows:

Focus Project

- Beyond Suffering: Equipping the Church in East Asia for Disability Ministry

Continuing Projects

- Heart to Heart: Funding our Director,

Ruth Vallevik, to travel more extensively in two Regions each year

- S.W.E.E.T.: Retreat for Seminary Women to Encourage, Equip, and Train them for ministry
- Crisis Care Fund: Caring for ministry wives and families in crisis (contact Ruth Vallevik for more information, or to contribute to this specific need at ruthalicev@gmail.com)
- H.E.L.P.: Household, Equipment, and Linen Project for missionary needs (send HELP contributions to Joy Mathiesen, 1421 Highway Terrace, Fergus Falls, MN 56537)

Join us in supporting these projects! Send donations to: WMCLB Box 655, Fergus Falls, MN, 56538-0655

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



Visit WMCLB online: www.WMCLB.com



Missionary Nathanael Szobody reading the story of Creation to unreached people in Chad.

The Beginning of Creation

NATHANAEL S.

Jesus tells us that “every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Matthew 13:52, ESV). I am what you might call a modern scribe: I am a translator and publisher of the Scriptures into the language of an unreached people in Chad. It is my job and privilege to handle “what is old,” the ancient and sacred writings passed down for millennia by prophets and priests, scribes and monks, publishers and translators. What a treasure it is! A fount of knowledge, the very words of God, life eternal, kept in the living storehouse of the Church.

Jesus’ words also challenge me to bring out “what is new.” What “new” thing do God’s people have to offer? In Jesus’ day, it was his very body, the incarnate Word of God, little-baby-new Jesus himself. The Word always needs to be communicated to a new generation. Not altered or edited, but communicated afresh so that lost people as well as God’s people can see, touch, feel, and hear the salvation of God for them and receive it with their whole person. “What is new” is a gift to our creativity, as well as an awakening of our hearts to love others—whole persons—as Jesus does.

How do we speak God’s Word to unreached people in a “new” and fresh

way? This can only be answered through real and personal relationships with them. But the question is also relevant for how we go about our scribal work of Bible translation and publication. We have a precious few Christian friends who are working hard with us to produce God’s Word in their native tongue. The modern Chadian state functions in French—the jobs and the money are in French. So very little is written in the heart language of this unreached people. For this reason, we are producing this publication in their native tongue so that the presentation of God’s Word beckons a hearing of it.

As of 2016, we have begun working on an illustrated edition of Genesis 1-3.



Sara Ronnevik, a professional artist and member of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, was hired to provide original artwork for the project.

No expense has been spared in this effort. As an alabaster jar of perfume poured on Jesus’ feet, we pray that this “new” addition would be a pleasant aroma, adorning the “old” and sacred Word.

First, the illustrations are the original work of Sara Ronnevik, a member of the CLB and professional artist from Minnesota. She is as excited as we are to see God’s Word communicated to readers, to the illiterate, and to children in vivid color. Second, bucking a long trend in Bible translation, we have been willing to quadruple our printing costs in order to publish this edition in hardback. An ancient and precious treasure deserves a sturdy chest—especially in hot, humid Chad. This is likely the first and only book people will own; love compels us to give them the best we can. Third, we must consider the context: in this context sacred text is written by hand. So, at least for this first edition of Genesis 1-3, we are writing the text out in an easy-to-read calligraphy hand.

The unreached will gather to hear and

cherish God’s Word. Will they believe it? I don’t know. That is all the more reason to leave a book for the next generation that says “Read me, I contain a treasure.”

But we’re not going to give up on a generation so easily! We have also committed to making this book accessible in as many ways as possible.

We have already printed the text and illustrations of Genesis chapter one in a sturdy banner. It is unrolled like a scroll before an audience of friends as the story of Creation is revealed to them, paragraph by paragraph, one fish, bird and creeping thing at a time. They are transfixed, and I cannot wait to bring the rest of the story to them when it is completed.

Additionally, we are publishing two editions of Genesis 1-3, one with the Latin alphabet that we all use, and one with the Arabic alphabet.

A final stage in the project is to record an audio reading of the text, and combine it with the illustrations in a sort of video slide show. Cell phones have exploded onto the local Chadian economy. In their

spare time people will sit around listening to any audio material that they can obtain and pass around with Bluetooth. With such a medium, God’s Word will spread all on its own.

Does the effort and expense sound overwhelming? Believe me, to be entrusted with such a treasure is pure joy.

Nathanael S. serves Lutheran Brethren International Mission with his wife Carrie and their four children as missionaries to the unreached people of Chad.



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



Loi at her graduation from Hillcrest Lutheran Academy (2017).

Loi Comes to Hillcrest



ARMIN JAHR

As a science teacher at Hillcrest Academy, I get to know students from all around the world and each has a unique story. I have seen, over and over again, that the process of becoming a Christian isn't an event as much as it is a journey (an adventure, really). So many people and events go into that process. Of course, that is also the Bible—a long history of God revealing himself to fallen humanity, preparing us for that moment in time when God entered time and space through Jesus Christ.

What follows is a Hillcrest story that blossomed before my eyes over the past two years, and I still am in wonderment that it happened.

August 2015: The student would be arriving at Hector International Airport in Fargo, North Dakota. I headed down the highway to Fargo, wondering how I'd spot the new student. Would she be tired, hungry or worn out from the trip? Most importantly, could we communicate in English?

It didn't take long to find Loi, looking cheerful, perhaps a little apprehensive, and excited to start life at Hillcrest Academy. She had come to America from Vietnam. This was her first time in the USA. I asked if she'd like something to eat. She said she was fine, so we loaded the car and headed southeastward to her new home.

During the hour-long ride back to Hillcrest, I asked quite a few questions. My first big surprise was that Loi was fluent in English—as in, there wasn't even an accent. And she had a huge English vocabulary. I never would have guessed that she was an international student. We began a conversation about Jesus. Loi hadn't heard of Jesus, though she was interested to find out more. I asked her about the Bible, she had heard of that, and was interested to learn more.

So I asked her after a bit—did she know that Hillcrest was a Christian school? She was not sure what that meant, but she thought it would be interesting to learn more about what Christians believe.

Hillcrest Centennial Beacon



The Centennial Beacon is a book containing 24 stories about faith and life at Hillcrest Lutheran Academy.

“This is a show and tell celebration of faith journeys. You will find events to make the angels sing.”

— Rev. Robert Overgaard

100 Years of Stories

Award-winning historian Steven R. Hoffbeck writes about student life, first love, and stories of faithful people, inside the halls and outside the walls of the beloved *Castle on a Hill*.

These 24 stirring stories may tug upon your heartstrings, bringing back floods of smiles, tears, and memories.

“Hoffbeck nails it! Friends of Hillcrest will love this book.” — Rev. Rich Iverson

\$34.⁹⁵

Purchase your copy at: www.ffhillcrest.org/centennial or call: 218-737-6413

When school started, I was blessed to have Loi in my biology class. Over the following semesters, she would take biology, chemistry and physics. I appreciated her insightful questions, her boldness and deep thinking. There were only a few Hillcrest students from Vietnam, and Loi seemed to prefer books or studying to spending time with friends. I found myself praying that she would develop deep friendships as the year progressed.

In Loi's second year, a few students joined the student body who would have a profound impact on the lives of many students. One was Ashley, who has an amazing vivaciousness for life and people, and who has a sort of Velcro-stickiness that attracts friends. Loi soon found herself caught up in Ashley's circle of friends.

Another student, Molly, came from Brainerd, Minnesota. She also got caught up in the Ashley Velcro. Molly was a cross-country ski champ, and Hillcrest was blessed to have her on the school's team. Molly is one of those quiet evangelists who is always looking out for others. She brings wisdom to every conversation.

We have circular tables in the dining hall—very handy for conversations. Often faculty and staff join the students for lunch. Loi, Myles, Ashley, Di and others staked out a place in the southeast corner. Di came from China. She's a fantastic artist and engineering student. Sometimes I'd sit with these students and enjoy learning about life. Myles works

at a movie theater and gives intellectual reviews of the latest movies. It's also a great spot to discuss spiritual things.

Things transpired that this “sunshine” group of girls from Hillcrest began attending Fergus Falls' Good Shepherd Lutheran Brethren Church. Ellen, who had also joined the Ashley team, along with Molly, Di and Loi, would sit in the first row at church, absorbing all of the music and preaching. They also joined the youth group. God's spirit was at work, and soon Loi was asking a lot of questions about Jesus. Paula Quam started a Bible study for the girls. As time went on, I noticed that Loi's circle of friends was growing and that she was becoming more and more cheerful.

One day, during Loi's senior year, she and Di brought some really big news: “Mr. Jahr, we're going to be baptized!” I praised the Lord for his powerful work!

And the year continued to unfold with a multitude of requests from Loi to me. “Mr. Jahr, would you like to read my testimony?” “Mr. Jahr, would you write a recommendation? I'm applying to a Christian college.”

And as the year closed, Loi wrote, “Mr. Jahr, thank you for everything in the sciences and about Christ... I am grateful for how you've helped me establish my faith. Don't forget me!”

Loi concluded her testimony with these words: “People will be asking questions about how I became a Christian and why I am a Christian, and I hope that my answers would always lie in how great of a sacrifice Christ has made for me,

and how deeply I need his forgiveness as a sinner and his shepherding as a lost lamb. There's much to be said about my relationship with Christ and I'm confident that my story will continue to evolve and change as my life will itself. I hope that Christ will always be the center of my faith and that I will stay as committed to him, a follower, as I am now.”

Loi's testimony was recorded and featured at the Hillcrest class of 2017 graduation. Hers became another voice testifying to God's grace as her faith was brought to life through Christ's Spirit at Hillcrest.

Loi's life changed because the Lord brought her to Hillcrest from Vietnam—halfway around the world. Her story of faith is another celebration of Hillcrest's centennial.

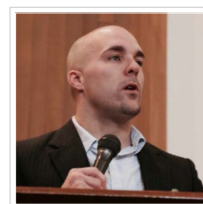
Rev. Armin Jahr is the Science Teacher at Hillcrest Lutheran Academy in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.



Rev. David Foss of Bethel Lutheran Church in Fergus Falls, Minnesota was joined by several hundred students crowding the stage at YC17 desiring prayer for acceptance addiction.

YC17: Break Every Chain

BRANDON PANGMAN



I love being part of the CLB Youth Convention. The first day might be my favorite as everyone starts to ascend upon Estes Park, Colorado. Leaders come in and register their students. Group by group, student by student, the chairs start to fill up in the auditorium. You can hear them all talking... and at the same time you can't understand any of it because there is so much going on. So much excitement and anticipation for all that is about to happen: emcees, speakers, seminars, comedians, concerts, worship sets, messages, games and more.

But in the middle of all the hoopla there is something so much more important going on. Each chair is filled with a student. That student represents a set of issues and struggles that is real and difficult. Next to that student is another student who has a whole different list of struggles, some of them are known and some of them are hidden away. Thankfully, we have Jesus who says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). It doesn't matter what the sin is, it doesn't matter the size of the burden—Jesus is there for us. Jesus overcame that sin on the cross and gave us the victory in his resurrection.

YC17 was all about Jesus' ability to break every chain that burdens us. The theme, *Break Every Chain*, relates to each of us because we live in a broken world that is full of the effects of that brokenness. From those seats, our students heard the message for the week that came from Galatians 5:1, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." Over and over again, Pastor Dave Foss and Pastor Chris Priestaf drove home that liberating message... and the hearts, minds and souls of those sitting in the seats were freed. Chains lost their hold, death's sting was taken away, and Christ's victory was on full display as if we were looking into the empty tomb.

It was clear to see Christ's work in the students' lives at YC17 and I hope you hear all about it from the students who were there.

It is also important to hear about something new that happened at YC17. North American Mission gave YC17 a substantial gift to educate our youth leaders. Over 100 youth leaders, youth volunteers, parents, youth pastors and pastors were blessed by six training

sessions. The topics covered were: Law/Gospel Youth Ministry, A Long Lasting Youth Ministry, From Youth Ministry to Youth and Family, Strategic Planning, Developing Youth Leaders, and Talking to Youth on Difficult Subjects. Every leader was also given nine books to help equip them as they continue their ministry to our youth.

Youth Ministry is so crucial. We felt the Lord placed it on our hearts to bless and further equip those who serve in this ministry. It was wonderful to watch youth leaders from all over America and Canada pray with each other, be taught together and be sent out together.

Youth Convention has grown and changed over the years, and it is our prayer that your local church body would consider joining us at Estes Park in 2019. We would love to minister to your students and help equip your leaders.

Rev. Brandon Pangman has been the Youth Convention Director since 2010. He has led four conventions and is working on plans for his fifth, YC19. He is currently transitioning from lead pastor at Rock of Ages Lutheran Brethren Church in Seattle, Washington to associate pastor at Emmaus Road Church in DeWitt, Iowa.

YC17:
We Need It

OLIVIA NORDLUND



There were heavy sighs resounding around me as we learned that once again, there had been a mistake with our hotel rooms. After a twenty-minute wait, we dragged our over-packed suitcases down the hall and flopped onto our beds, dropping our things into a heap on the floor. We were exhausted. But the next day we loaded up again, excited through the early morning grogginess. We were on the final stretch. This story, with maybe a few variations, is the experience for many youth groups across North America. For many of them, it's a long trip. It's tiring for sure, but it may be the highlight, of not only our summers, but our entire youth group experience. The pull is strong. And that's good, because for teens in a secular world, YC is needed now more than ever.

A FEW REASONS WHY

It Proves Christians Can Have Fun Too: Having fun, of course, isn't the biggest part of being a believer. In fact, being a Christian can be really difficult. But I believe it's important for us to show we can have fun without all the things the world tells us will bring us happiness. Most teenagers, me included, tend to be really focused on having fun. The danger is when we look for it in the wrong places. YC17 shows us there's a deeper God-given joy that won't just fade when it's a bad day.

We Don't Feel Alone: I go to a public school, and I often feel as if I'm the only Christian there. I was fortunate enough to find some good friends there who are believers, but many students go through high school without having the support of other Christians. That makes it so easy to slip into living the way the world does. High school years are vital years in which you learn about yourself, and being united with other Christians makes living "in the world and not of the world" easier.

We're Pushed Out of Our Comfort Zone: At points in my life I've settled into "easy Christianity." I get to a point where I think I'm at a good place and my faith stops growing and I settle into this little box of being comfortable. But Jesus never said following him would be easy. YC is one of the experiences that pushes you both personally and spiritually. The sessions often zero-in on tough or uncomfortable topics. While you're growing in your faith, you're also learning about yourself.

God is at Work: There's no question that God does amazing work at Youth Convention. Of course, God can work in people's lives wherever they are, but there's just something about being in a place where you can really see the effects of the Gospel.

At one point during the week, the speaker invited anyone struggling with an *approval addiction* to come to the front and he'd pray for them. The whole room moved. People flooded the aisles. Even if we don't always admit it, our hearts long for a Savior. On top of that, we are all struggling to find our identity. YC is important because it points our hearts to Jesus. I know I need that reminder daily. Now we just have to take that reminder down from the mountaintop and into the world.

Olivia Nordlund is a high school student and member of Grace Lutheran Brethren Church in Bismarck, North Dakota.



The Digital Age led worship and engaged the youth in fellowship.



Pastor Gene Davis, LB Fellowship, Williston, North Dakota, reflecting on the evening's session.



Above: The Skit Guys entertaining the youth with humor. Below: Pastor Allen Aase discussing identity in Christ with students.





The youth at YC17 enjoying a dodgeball tournament.



The Youth Group from LB Fellowship, Williston, North Dakota.



Rev. Chris Priestaf from Mount Bethel Church, Mount Bethel, Pennsylvania, preaching at YC17.



Chris Vall from Bethesda, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, with CLB President Paul Larson.

YC17: Why We Do It

GARY WITKOP

Why do we do it? Why does the Church of the Lutheran Brethren—you!—invest time and money into a national convention for youth? As the Regional Pastor representing the work of North American Mission with the Youth Convention (YC), I needed to answer that. Is it worth your investment?

This year it can be summed up in one word: YES! Friday night of YC17 demonstrated that in a defining way. Pastor Dave Foss was preaching from God's Word to the crowd of some 550 young people and their chaperones. The theme of the week was *Break Every Chain*. The messages from Pastors Dave Foss and Chris Priestaf were designed to help those present see how we are all gripped by the chains of sin in some way. They both presented the Law and showed us our sin and need of Christ. And then they presented the Gospel—how Christ breaks the chains that hold us.

That Friday evening Pastor Foss asked if anyone there needed prayer. A simple request after God's Word had done its work in the hearts of those gathered. Young people, chaperones and pastors came down to the front of the auditorium and received that prayer. After praying, with the area full of people, they all embraced in one huge hug, a hug from one another, but really a hug from the Lord.

Now it is easy to over-emotionalize things and I don't want to do that. But as the group started to break up and leave for the evening's youth group gatherings, I stood by and watched and prayed. It was easy to see, by the tears and other outward signs of emotion, that many were deeply affected by the Word of God working in their hearts and minds. One pastor came to me and

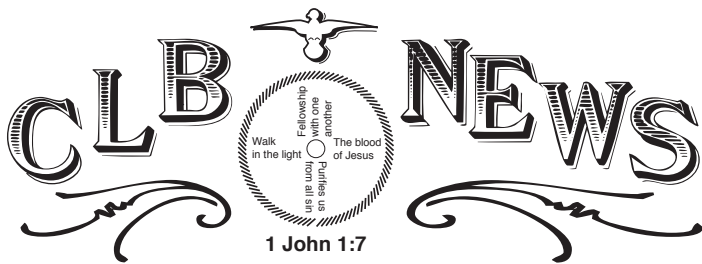
said he was one of the first to go to the front of the auditorium because he needed that prayer, he needed to be set free! Then he added, only Jesus can set us free.

I was not part of any youth group, so I did not experience what happened in each group's evening gatherings, but I walked among them to get a glimpse. What I saw were some of the usual things from young people. Smiles, jokes and teasing. But I also saw heads bowed and prayers being offered to Jesus. It reminded me of my youth, when I was trying to figure out what life was all about and whether there really was a God who created me and died to save me. I am glad for YC. I am glad because God's Word is preached there and young people have the opportunity to meet Jesus through his Word.

Pray for all who went to YC17, that the seed that was planted there will prove to have fallen on good soil and grow in the hearts of those young people, their chaperones and even their pastors. We all need a fresh encounter with God through his Word.



Rev. Gary Witkop serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as Regional Pastor to the Western Region and represents North American Mission on the Youth Convention Planning Committee.



Hosch Ordained



L to R: Dr. Gaylan Mathiesen, Rev. Matthew Rogness, Warren Zuehlsdorff, Faye Baylor, David Aarhus, Rev. Ben Hosch, Rev. John Juhl, and Regional Pastor Stan Olsen.

On June 17, 2017, Pastor Ben Hosch was ordained at Stavanger Lutheran Church in Fergus Falls, MN. Regional Pastor Stan Olsen officiated over the ceremony.

Celebrating 50 Years



Faith LBC, Briarcliff Manor, New York.

On October 13-15, 2017, Faith LBC will be celebrating 50 years of ministry. You are invited to join them in praising God for his love and faithfulness. The church is located at 480 Pleasantville Road, Briarcliff Manor, New York. For more information email: 50thanniversary@faithlbc.com

Werdal Called Home



Morris Arthur Werdal passed into glory July 2, 2017. He was born November 6, 1921 in Chosan, China to missionary parents Marius and Marie Werdal. At six years of age, the family furloughed to the USA, settling on a small farm in Ferndale, Washington. Morris remained there throughout his high school years.

In 1941 he entered Seattle Pacific College. He married Marion Kivley in 1943, and graduated with a B.A. in 1945. He served as pastor of the Lutheran Brethren church in Ballard, Washington and then entered Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Upon graduating, he responded to a call in Staten Island, New York. There, he and Marion began the study of the Chinese language in preparation for missionary work.

In 1948 Communism closed the doors to China, so in 1949 the Werdals sailed to Japan to open work there for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. After thirteen years of service in Japan, the Werdals returned to the United States and Morris served as pastor in Fullerton, California; Eau Claire, Wisconsin; and Seattle, Washington. He also served as chairman for "Italy for Christ" for several years. He finished his full-time pastoral ministry by returning to serve a second time at the church in Fullerton, California.

Upon retiring at 73, Morris served as Interim Pastor in seven different congregations. For the last number of years, he and Marion have lived in Fergus Falls.

God blessed Morris with good health, enabling him to teach Bible classes into his ninety-second year. He is survived by his wife, Marion.

In his memory, Morris' family prefers memorials be given to the Lutheran Brethren International Mission—Japan.

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Baby Easton's Lesson

My church always has a children's message as part of the worship service, so we try to tie it in with the sermon text for the day. One Sunday my text suggested that I speak to the kids about humility. I was stumped. "It would be nice to be able to give them some sort of object lesson..."

"[Jesus] called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven'" (Matthew 18:2-4).

"Of course," I thought, "*humility* is the whole point of Jesus' statement about the little child, isn't it?" So I approached newborn baby Easton's mom, Cassie, and she graciously allowed Easton to be the object lesson that day. The point Easton helped us make with the kids was that, even though we know we are all equally important, valuable, and loved by God, we still choose to treat Easton as if he is more important than we are. Though helpless, he is the center of attention. And this is humility: honoring another ahead of ourselves.

Then again, I realized later, this is still not the humility that Jesus was emphasizing in Matthew 18. The humility of one who is gifted with saving faith in Jesus is a little different. The humility of saving faith is not how we respond to the child; it's from the little child's point of view. It's not about *choosing* the position of a lowly servant to others. It's about recognizing that I really am incapable of doing anything for myself. I'm the baby crying for help, because I am incapable of supplying my own need. It is not a choice; it's an acknowledgement of reality.

In particular, in relation to God, I acknowledge I am incapable of measuring up to his holiness; I fall short of his glory every single day. As a sinner, I need the grace of God. I need the forgiveness freely offered through Jesus' shed blood.

You'd think that acknowledging our actual state of complete *humility* before God as a hopeless sinner would be easier than choosing a position of servanthood humility toward other people. Funny thing is that so many people cannot see the hopelessness of their sin: "I may be a sinner, but I'm not hopeless. I can manage enough good things on my own, to cancel out the bad."

They just can't see it—until God gets hold of their minds, gives them his perspective on their lives, a hunger for his righteousness, and salvation by *faith alone* in Jesus Christ.

Rev. Brent Juliot is Pastor of Oak Ridge Lutheran Brethren Church in Menomonie, Wisconsin.

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... AND ITS REFORMATIONAL THEMES

Speaker: Dr. Reed Lessing

Author and Senior Pastor at
St. Michael Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana

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