

Faith & Fellowship

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Revitalize



KING me

CLB Biennial Convention 2018
June 9-12
Fergus Falls, Minnesota
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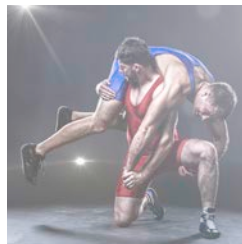
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Quiet Moments

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Wrestle with God

H.E. WISLØFF



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No one lives in such solitude that God has not entrusted to him or her the responsibility for someone else.

He leads people into our lives. One day we will have to give an account for them. Many try to isolate themselves so that they may evade responsibility for others. But the responsibility remains.

You are responsible for those in your home, your circle of friends, your county, state, nation, and the millions of unbelievers. God has placed you as a watchman for these.

This responsibility should drive you to God. It will give you a part in the fellowship of his suffering so that one day you may also have a part in his glory.

The responsibility will drive you to your knees. He who assumes the responsibility will wrestle with God in prayer. Are you one who will shine the light of Christ in this world? Pray that God might make you an instrument he can use.

Hans Edvard Wisløff (1902—1969) was a Norwegian theologian and writer. He was also the Bishop of the Diocese of Sør-Hålogaland from 1959 until his death in 1969.

Wisløff, H.E., Quiet Moments on the Way Home. Fergus Falls, MN: Faith & Fellowship Press, 1993.

Rebuild It

TROY TYSDAL

My oldest son loves playing with Lego blocks. He likes to build airplanes, cars, castles, and homes. He constructs small cities and develops complex story lines in which each Lego character plays an important role. It seems there is no end to his creativity.

My youngest son also enjoys Legos. But instead of building cities, he usually takes them apart. The destruction is not intentional. He does not set out to dismantle his brother's work. It's just the usual outcome of a four-year-old left alone with a Lego creation.

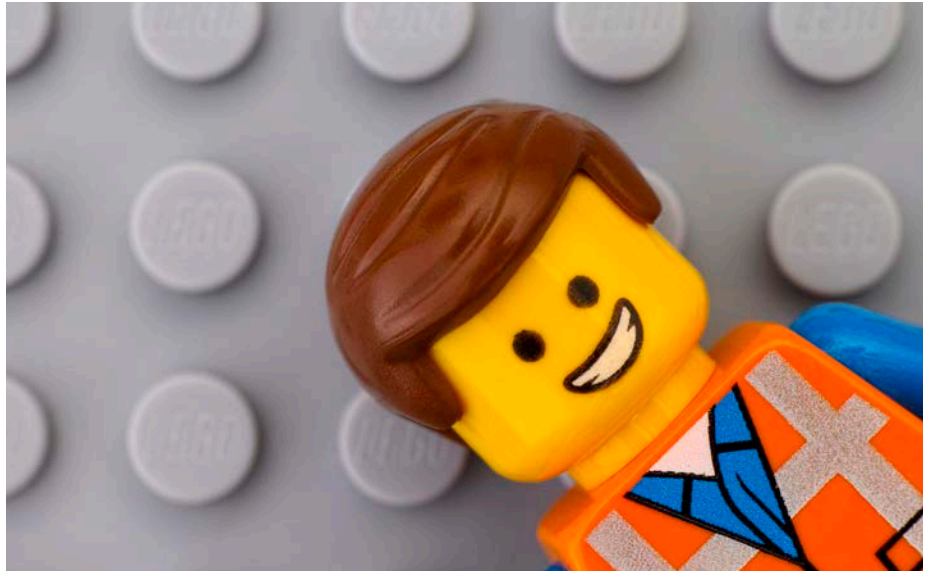
The cycle has played out in our home time and time again. The older brother builds it.... the younger brother destroys it. Understandably, this is very upsetting to our oldest son. He laments the destruction of his beloved creation, wishing the clock could be turned back. He demands justice against the perpetrator—suggesting a stint in time-out, or perhaps a life-time ban from Legos. Self-pity and cries for revenge rule the day, but none of it is helpful. His behavior usually continues until his mother makes a simple suggestion: *rebuild it*.

It is no secret that the Church in North America is in decline. Studies show a growing number of Americans giving up on organized religion, the Church's influence on culture is waning, and those connected with the Church are less consistent in their attendance than previous generations. The signs of decline are real, and they are undeniable.

That truth can have an adverse effect on those of us left behind. Like an older brother we long for the good old days, wallow in self-pity, look for someone to blame, but none of this is helpful. In fact, all of it is contrary to who we were created to be.

1 PETER 2:9-10

The Apostle Peter writes, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you



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may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

The days of seekers walking into our sanctuaries on Sunday morning to hear us *declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light* are over. But that does not change our calling. As a royal priesthood, a chosen people of God, we are charged with proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ to those who do not know him.

If lost people will no longer come to us... then we must go to them. We must be willing to change the way we *do church*. Perhaps that sounds like blasphemy. Perhaps it sounds like I am suggesting that we kick down the walls of our beloved churches and scatter the pieces. Perhaps I am.

You see, the Church is not an altar, not a sanctuary, not a fellowship hall. *We* are the Church. We are the Church at work. We are the Church at play. We are the Church at rest. We are God's chosen means to reach the lost with the good

news of Jesus Christ... and each one of us has an important role to play.

That does *not* mean that we give up meeting together. It *does* mean that our faith cannot be confined to a building or an event on Sunday morning. We are *God's special possession* created to engage the lost, to find them wherever they are—that they might be added to our number, built upon the chief Cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

It's time for the Church to be *rebuilt*, and that means some things will need to change. Each block might not be placed back exactly where it once was... and that's ok. The Church can change. The Cornerstone cannot. Jesus Christ and his Word remain the same yesterday, today, and forever—relentlessly building, and occasionally rebuilding—pursuing the lost through those who have received his mercy.

It's time to *rebuild* the Church. It's time to become the *sent* missionary people we were always created to be.

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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Revitalize You Can't Go to Church



LBS J-Term Speaker: RYAN NILSEN

www.LBS.edu/JTerm

The world is changing. I'm sure you've noticed this. School is different for your kids than it was for you. The political environment is unlike anything you've seen before. Societal values have shifted radically. And something about your church is different, too.

Things are changing for the Church in North America. Estimates are that around 80% of churches in North America are plateaued or declining. For many churches, it seems things don't work like they used to: attendance is down, volunteers are harder to come by, programs don't succeed like they once did, and the church is not as important to the rest of the community as it used to be.

And if that wasn't challenging enough, some of the solutions we try just make matters worse. There are some common

responses to these struggles that actually hurt more than help. One of them is to blame the pastor: "Things would be *better* if we had a *better pastor*." Another reaction is to say, "We'd be growing and healthy if we had the programs that we did thirty years ago." Still other responses might be to blame a lack of effort in current ministries: "This isn't working because we're not trying hard enough." Chances are those aren't the solutions that will make a difference for your church.

Maybe you're reading this and thinking, "Wow, that's depressing," or "What a relief!—It's not just our church that is facing this challenge." Please keep reading! There's good news.

You're not alone in facing these challenges—others have been facing them and have been figuring out their

cause and how to address the situation. There are strategies and solutions that have started to work for other churches and it may be that they can work for yours as well. It may mean letting go of some long-held viewpoints about how ministry should be done, but it won't mean changing your theology or your high view of Scripture.

What is the answer? Well, first of all we should ask, "What is the problem?"

Many churches are realizing that, given how much our world has changed—the Church hasn't. I'm not talking about changing what we believe. The problem is that our culture is no longer able to understand the way the Church communicates the gospel message. Many churches are set up to draw people into a worship service and expect the visitor to figure out how everything works. But

“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 2:4-5

today most people do not go looking for a church on their own. Most people don't know much about Jesus, the gospel, or the Church. In fact, they probably don't trust the Church. Most churches are still geared to draw in people who already know something about the Bible, Jesus, the gospel—people who are on the lookout for a church. That really narrows down the number of people that will ever be likely to join that church. And on top of that, most churches commit the bulk of their finances, programming, and energy to minister to people who are already attending, involved, and saved.

We have become distanced from part of our mission to make disciples. In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus told his followers, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Some churches are good at helping disciples mature. But many churches forget to, or struggle to, make *new* disciples. The more a church is disconnected from God's mission of making disciples (both in quantity and in vitality), the more likely it is facing visible symptoms of decline.

What do we do about that? According to missiologist Reggie McNeal, churches are discovering that Christians need to think of themselves less as “club members” entitled to services and privileges from their church staff, and more as “missionaries” called to personally share the *good news* in their workplace, community, and network of relationships in a way that people can understand.

When we think of missionaries, we think of the dedicated church planters

who travel across the world to share the gospel overseas. But they aren't supposed to be the only missionaries. You and I are living in North America, the third-largest mission field in the world—only behind China and India. We are called to join God in his mission. That makes us missionaries.

Does your church need to make this “club member” to “missionary” shift? To go from being internally-focused to being outwardly-focused? William Temple famously said, “The Church is the only institution that exists primarily for the benefit of those who are not its members.” Can we be churches like that without sacrificing our beliefs? Yes, we can.

We can look to Scripture for guidance on how to navigate the times we live in today. In some ways, we have more in common with the Church of the New Testament than the Church of 50 years ago. The New Testament Church was a minority group, outsized by other religions, and seen as an illegal sect of Judaism. Christians had to face persecution and misconceptions about Christ and their faith. They learned how to proclaim and live the gospel together, going out into their world, joining God in his mission. In so doing, God used them to change the world.

In 1 Peter 2:5, Peter says to us, “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Scripture tells us that we are, together, the Church. It's not our building or property, or our programs. It's the people of the Church. Because of that, we can change our focus from *going to church to being the Church*. From going *into* our buildings to going *out to* our communities.

This shift of focus doesn't take away

from our core practices of Word and Sacrament. Rather, it gives us a new and wonderful perspective on what it means to come together for worship. Lutheran scholar Dean Nadasdy points to the role of worship and God's Word for such a church: “A congregation as the body of Christ in a given location moves intentionally outside its building to serve others... The church sends its members out as invited, equipped, and encouraged everyday disciples of Jesus Christ. They return again and again for the training and motivation that come with Word and Sacrament ministry.”¹

As we begin to see ourselves as missionaries to our community, and act accordingly, this can open the door to other transformational discoveries that bring life to our churches: engaging worship, empowering new leaders, changing ineffective structures, spiritual vitality, and more. I challenge you to take this journey to recover God's mission for your church—let's all go!



Rev. Ryan Nilsen, D.Min., serves as pastor of Praise Christian Fellowship in Barkhamsted, Connecticut and as director of Fifth Act Church Planting.

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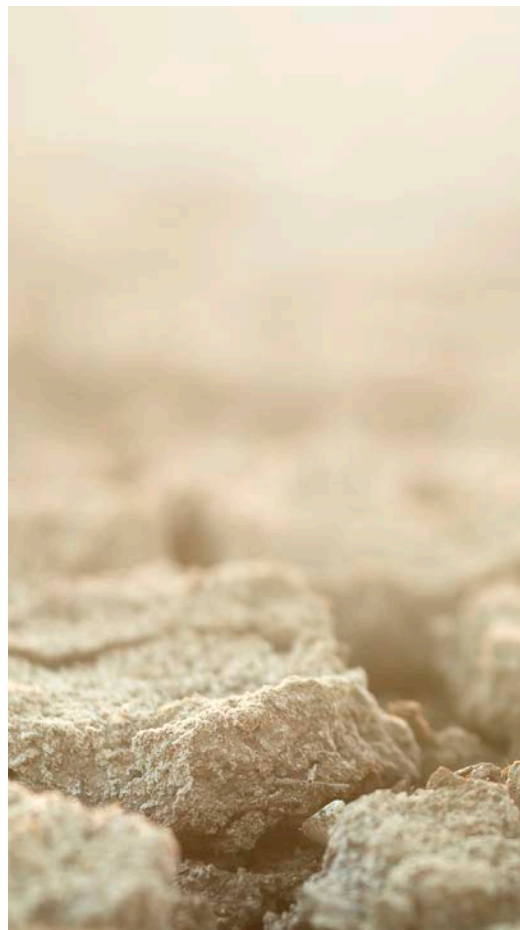
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Transformational Church

by Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer

Based on the most comprehensive study of its kind, *Transformational Church* takes us to thriving congregations where truly changing lives is the norm.

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jmbatti/Stock

Revitalize Church Planting and the Mission of God

LBS J-Term Speaker: ED STETZER

For some, the word *planting* comes across as insider language. In the sub-culture of the church planting world there is an entire language mostly unknown to the outside. We've all heard planters talk about "doing a parachute drop church plant," or "starting with a launch team." What do these words even mean? More importantly, what is church planting about?

That's an essential question, really.

CHURCH PLANTING OR CHURCH STARTING?

When we talk about church planting it can be a little different than church starting. What's the difference? Well, I think church starting happens a lot of ways. The most popular church starting strategy involves a group of people getting mad, leaving their home church, and starting another church. In most cases I wouldn't advise this strategy.

Church planting, on the other hand, involves an individual, mother church, and/or a group of people going out to start a church for the purpose of engaging a community through gospel proclamation and demonstration.

Church planting, unlike church starting, should/must be mission driven.

Church planting grows in the soil of lostness (hence "planting") where men and women far from God are challenged with the claims of the gospel of Jesus Christ by a group of intentional believers.

CHURCH PLANTING AND GOSPEL MOVEMENTS

Church planting is about planting the gospel. And growth in church planting comes from making disciples.

As such, any movement of churches that's going to be serious about reaching the lost world is going to be involved in church planting. In fact, most of us who write in the field of mission believe that any movement or denomination desiring to grow through conversion should aim for at least a three percent rate of church planting every year. (Take a look—most growing groups and denominations have over that percent and most declining ones have under that percent.)

Think of it this way, if a movement has a hundred churches one year they need to plant three the next year—at the very least.

Church planting is essential to the growth of the Kingdom and the work of Christ through his Church. The networks, movements, and denominations that are

thriving are thriving because they're planting new churches. The key thing to remember here is that church planting is reaching lost people through the making of disciples who then gather into congregations.

PLANTING AND THE MISSION OF GOD

How does church planting relate to the mission of God? The mission of God is bigger than church planting, but it certainly includes church planting. Why? You can't love Jesus and despise his wife. The Church is the bride of Christ, and if you love the work of Christ you love the Church.

Now, you and I both know that the Church is a mess sometimes. While the Church is the stunning bride of Christ, she sometimes looks more like Shrek than she does beautiful. But again, you can't love Jesus and hate his wife.

Ultimately if you're going to love the mission of God, you have to love the Church of God which is sent out for the mission of God. Ephesians 3:10 tells us God has chosen the Church to make known his manifold wisdom. Therefore the Church is the tool or instrument of his Kingdom agenda.



If you want to change the world, and if you want to see God at work in the world, plant change-agent churches. I think anyone who loves Jesus and his Church would, by extension, love and be about the mission of God proclaiming the gospel of Christ—and that is done effectively through church planting.

CONCLUSION

So is the mission more than planting?

Yes, it certainly is more than that. Is every church that's planted necessarily a good thing? No, there are always exceptions, but as a whole, I think church planting is integral to the advance of the Kingdom. And more church plants doing more of what God wants us to do is a good thing.

For this reason I think church planting and multiplication is so essential to the mission of God.

None of our churches should be a cul-de-sac on the Great Commission highway.

Instead, as we plant churches that plant churches, the Kingdom advances. The gospel is preached, men and women become believers, churches are formed, and those churches become agents of gospel transformation.

So, want to be missional? Great—just don't forget church planting.



Dr. Ed Stetzer, Ph.D., holds the Billy Graham Distinguished Chair for Church, Mission, and Evangelism at Wheaton College. Dr. Stetzer also serves as the Executive Director of the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism at Wheaton, and as chair of the Evangelism and Leadership Program in the Graduate School. He has planted, revitalized and pastored churches, trained pastors and church planters on six continents, and has written a dozen books and hundreds of articles. Dr. Stetzer is a contributing editor for Christianity Today, a columnist for Outreach Magazine, and is frequently cited or interviewed in news outlets such as USA Today and CNN.

Article

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J-Term 2018

Transformational Church
God's Church in God's Mission

Jan. 24-26

Transformational Church
Dr. Ed Stetzer

Mission in North America
Dr. Ryan Nilsen

Resilience in Ministry
Dr. Mark Sundby

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Resilience in Ministry: Three Action Steps



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LBS J-Term Speaker: MARK SUNDBY

Pastor Jacob looked at the email, grimaced, and thought, “Not another one.” His heart sank a bit. Another individual was contacting him after visiting the church on Sunday and asking for a pastoral visit, ending his email, “And my wife and I are very interested in the possibility of joining your vibrant congregation!” Pastor Jacob realized the irony of his gut reaction. When he had started in ministry twelve years ago, he was “on fire” for reaching people with the Word of God, but now he mostly just felt tired. His church of ninety-five members was understaffed, yet they asked him to cut back to three-quarters time to save money and make budget. Despite this cost-saving move, expectations remained high, hoping that he would work just as hard, continue to offer Bible studies, attend meetings,

create new programs, and actively evangelize the community. Mostly, though, Pastor Jacob just felt tired.

Pastor Jacob is not alone. At LeaderWise, which is a ministry development center, we see about 750 people in ministry each year. His story follows a familiar trajectory. When we meet with individuals as seminarians and candidates for ministry, there is a high level of idealism and optimism, as people feel deeply called to ministry and enthusiastically envision the possibilities. Then, when meeting them after several years of congregational ministry, many are tired, even a bit burnt out. Still, most haven’t given up. It’s upon that thread of hope and commitment, no matter how slim, that we begin to help clergy build their energy and resilience.

An initial read of the statistics can

be staggering. According to a recent national survey of clergy in one large denomination: 80% of clergy are overweight or obese, 45% report significant work stress on a regular basis, 28% experience work impairment due to depressive symptoms, and 13% receive ongoing treatment for clinical depression (United Methodist Church, 2017). The number of clergy who are clinically depressed is twice the rate of the national average (New York Times, 2010). The toll is profound for clergy spouses, too, with 73% describing their health as merely “fair” or “poor” (Carroll, 2006).

And, yet, there is hope to build on. Ministry can be immensely rewarding in spite of the costs. One national survey finds that 87% of clergy are satisfied with their calling to ministry (University of Chicago News, 2007), and another that

“We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”

2 Corinthians 4:7-9

98% view their work as “meaningful,” which is the highest of all jobs and professions (PayScale, 2014).

Given that ministry comes with both great joy and cost, and it likely always will, how do we build resilience to maximize the joy, and, more importantly, to serve out our calling to ministry? At LeaderWise, we strive to help our clients go beyond words to action. Your effectiveness in ministry extends only to the degree to which you remain physically, emotionally, and spiritually fit. We rarely see ministers washing out because of poor knowledge of theology. Much more common to our experience, clergy quit because they’ve seriously overextended themselves at the expense of personal health, and often at a cost to their family relationships and friendships, too.

We recommend three specific action-step strategies to jumpstart your journey to resilience.

1. **The X then Y Strategy.** You know what you need to do, such as exercise or eat better, but consistently neglect to do so. What’s the best way to actually begin a healthy behavior? Dr. Peter Gollwitzer, a health psychologist, researched different strategies and found the simplest is most effective. He refers to it as setting an “implementation intention.” It’s as straightforward as “x then y.” When I’m in x situation then I’ll do y behavior. For instance, when heart attack survivors were asked to exercise twenty minutes per day, only 29% did it. When presented with the dire consequences if they didn’t, such as premature death, the compliance rate increased to 39%. And, most significantly, when they were asked to set a clear implementation

intention (e.g., when it’s 4 pm, I’ll exercise for twenty minutes on the elliptical), compliance skyrocketed to 91% (Gollwitzer, 1999). As you think about your personal well-being, what’s one behavior for which you could set an implementation intention? Be specific, “if x then y.”

2. **The Premack Principle Strategy.** Named for Dr. David Premack, this strategy is familiar to most parents. A common refrain in households across the globe, “When you complete your homework, you can go out and play.” The strategy is to take a frequently occurring behavior, such as play for children, to reward a less frequently occurring behavior like homework completion. As adults, it can be something like, “I won’t eat breakfast until I exercise for thirty minutes” or “I’ll drink a cup of coffee to reward myself only after I spend fifteen minutes in prayer.”

3. **The Relationships Strategy.** A recurrent theme we hear from clergy and their spouses is how lonely they feel. We frequently have them complete a loneliness survey at workshops, and, on average, they score significantly higher than the general population for loneliness. In a recent national survey, about 30% report feeling “isolated and lonely” as their typical state (United Methodist Church, 2017). Research on the effects of loneliness links it to premature death, immediately behind cigarette smoking and untreated hypertension, and at a rate that is twice the risk of obesity (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2012). On the flip side, a longitudinal study of men from the 1930s to the 2000s finds social connections to be the number one predictor of physical and emotional health (Vaillant, 2002). If you could

do one thing today to enhance your overall well-being, pick up the phone and call a friend.

Ministry is both highly rewarding and challenging, and it’s a privilege to be called and serve. In order to remain viable for many years, and to lead others to Christ, use these three action-step strategies to transform your well-being.



Dr. Mark Sundby, Ph.D., is a 1996 graduate of the University of Minnesota with over 20 years experience as a psychologist. He serves as Director of LeaderWise in New Brighton, Minnesota. LeaderWise develops leaders through coaching and consulting and offers a state-of-the-art assessment process.

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God Provides

ROY HEGGLAND

“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19, ESV).

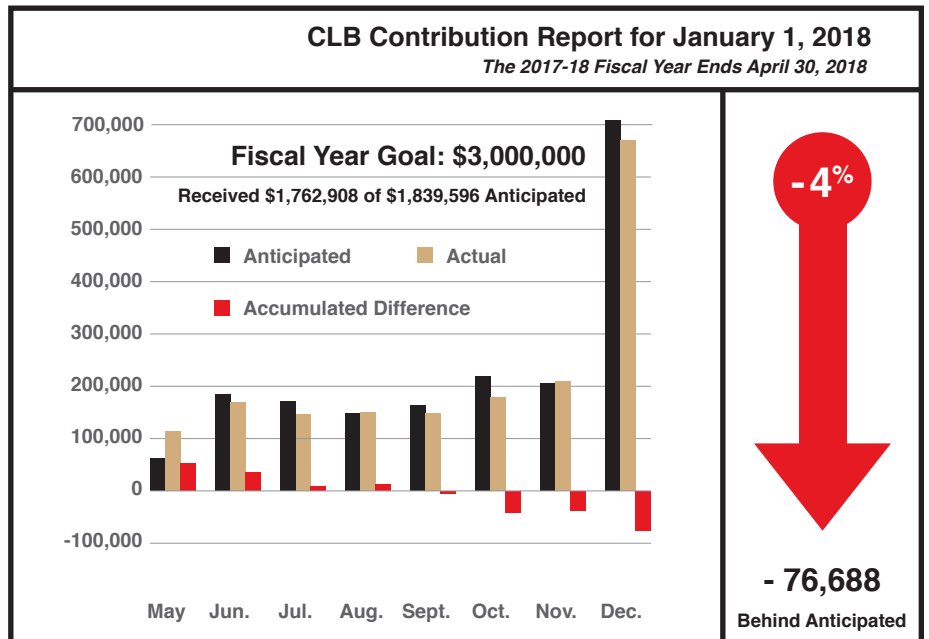
Imagine with me what our churches would look like if we actually lived out the truth of this verse. Of course, we confess that it is, in fact, true—it’s the Word of God! The tricky thing, though, is allowing this truth to permeate our hearts and minds so that it is thoroughly reflected in our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. This verse, and the earlier verse, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (4:13), are “popular” verses. My wife calls them “coffee mug verses.” We like to be reminded of these positive messages: “God will supply all your needs”; “I can do all things...” But what is the context?

In the previous verses, Paul is telling the Philippian church that he himself has learned how to face “plenty and hunger, abundance and need” and how “in whatever circumstance... to be content,” facing all living situations (doing “all things”) “through him (Christ).” Then he commends the Philippians for their kindness in sharing with him when he was in need, their partnership with him in giving. He recognizes their gifts as a “fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.” And now that he is “well supplied” by their gifts, he tells them, “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ.” Imagine their reaction!

The act of selfless and generous giving revitalizes us to understand those words, “My God will supply all your needs.”

How would living by these words change our priorities and commitments? Would we still be striving for the biggest house, the fastest car, or the fanciest boat? What would that look like?

Perhaps, if we lived this verse, we



would realize that even the things we need should not consume all our thoughts, energy, time, and resources; that we don’t need to be concerned with hoarding our wealth at the expense of those around us and the needs of ministry.

One of the needs we overlook—because it seems counter-intuitive—is that we *need* to be generous and sacrificial in our giving. What? You never heard anyone tell you that you *need* to be generous and give? If all of our needs are met in Christ, and Christ is the very definition of generosity and sacrifice, how can generosity and sacrifice not be things that God knows we need? Would we still think that giving to and serving in ministry is a burden, or would we see it as something that revitalizes us? Would we understand that Christ himself lives out his life through us as we minister to others with the gifts he has given?

One key to revitalization of our congregations is the revitalization of each of us. If we each lived out the truth of

Philippians 4:19, not striving for things, but truly satisfied with God’s provisions, if we were generous and sacrificial in giving of our resources and our time for others, trusting in God to supply our needs, do you think our congregations might be healthier and more fruitful? I do.

God wants us to be like Christ so that the world may know him and the power of his resurrection by seeing Christ in us. Do we do this perfectly? No. Will we ever in this life do it perfectly? No. But when the lives we live reflect Christ now, even a little bit more than last week—this is what others need to see, so that in the gospel they may come to know the one who can actually meet all of their needs.

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



You are Making a Difference!

CHERYL OLSEN

Each New Year causes us to reflect: What happened last year? Did I make a difference in my home, in the community I'm a part of, or in the world? Here's a look at what God has done through you, as part of Women's Ministries (WMCLB) this past year.

SWEET Retreat: Picture a young couple, leaving home, jobs, and friendship connections to follow the tug of God's call on their lives to serve him in pastoral ministry. Every year, this happens at Lutheran Brethren Seminary. Some couples arrive as newlyweds, some come with lay-ministry experience, and others are stepping into a second career—maybe bringing a carload of children. Some seminary students are single. What do they all have in common? They want to serve the Lord!

How can we help them? Women's Ministries has sponsored a SWEET retreat in the fall for over ten years. This provides Seminary Women with Encouragement, Equipping, and Training, and has proved to be an excellent kick-off to the year, helping them to bond together as a group.

This year the SWEET Retreat Speaker was Betsy Mortenson, pastor's wife from Mayville, North Dakota, who spoke from Psalm 84. "The women really liked her—her teaching and also her gentle ways—lots of Scripture and lots of stories," wrote one of the SWEET coordinators this year.

"The women loved being out there at Inspiration Point: some of their favorite things were time getting to know each other and time to just visit. This year we were able to meet with the Central Region pastors' wives too, and that was a special time... worship time with Michele Foss is always a favorite. Of course they love the accommodations and the food. All are very grateful to have the opportunity to come out and get away."

Beyond Suffering: This Focus Project, for the second year in a row, through



SWEET Retreat

you, has been making a difference halfway around the world in East Asia. Beyond Suffering includes developing materials to train leaders and churches to assist families who have children with disabilities.

Crisis Care Fund: Many have contributed to this special fund set up for emergencies faced by pastoral families. Several pastors' families have been assisted this year as they faced a variety of urgent challenges. This confidential help is received with great gratitude to you!

HELP Fund: It's the Household Equipment and Linen Project. This fund has benefitted missionaries for several generations, from quilts given in the 1950s, to Tupperware in the '60s, to current monetary gifts given to missionaries on home assignment, or—as they return overseas—to help equip their households.

Heart-to-Heart: Ruth Vallevik is the director of our national organization, WMCLB. Her excellent Bible teaching, passionate speaking, perceptive encouragement, wise advice in personal counsel, and leadership of the National

Women's Ministries Team has benefitted many churches and countless individuals. Through your monetary gifts, she has been able to travel and utilize her God-given gifts throughout our denomination.

You are making a difference beyond your own home, and around the world, through Women's Ministries of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren!

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



Visit: www.WMCLB.com



Addressing a Crucial Need

STAN OLSEN

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

— *Hebrews 13:8*

What a comfort to know that Jesus is always the same, that he never changes and that we can always depend on him to love us and forgive us! We have many such blessings because of his unchanging nature. However, in this fallen world, change is inevitable and always occurring. Some changes are positive and helpful, but other changes are harmful and even destructive. Change is always hard.

Our culture in North America has gone

through tremendous change in the last two or three generations. Technological change has been breathtaking. One small example is that we now carry our phones, cameras, and computers in our pockets in one small device—a change that has occurred in just a little over ten years. Even more significant are the changes that have occurred culturally, morally, and spiritually in the US and Canada. These changes have certainly impacted our churches in a number of ways, particularly in their ongoing health and growth.

At the risk of oversimplification, let me illustrate how these changes have

impacted churches: In the past, a small or medium-sized church could maintain and grow by doing effective ministry primarily directed inwardly. If the church had a good pastor who preached the Word, along with other effective ministries such as Sunday School, youth group, home Bible studies, women’s ministry, adult education, etc., then the church would likely maintain its size or even experience growth. Today this is generally not the case. In the past, the small or medium-sized church that ministered effectively could recover from the inevitable departures of people because there was usually a continuing

CLB Regional Pastors



Gary Witkop
Western Regional Pastor



Warren Geraghty
Eastern Regional Pastor



Roger Olson
CLB Canada Regional Pastor



Phil Heiser
Pacific Regional Pastor



Stan Olsen
Central Regional Pastor

The Regional Pastors of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren support local churches through resourcing, coaching, and mentoring pastors and leaders. They

encourage and facilitate churches to form clusters and partnerships to more effectively minister the gospel to people in their communities.

For more information contact: nam@CLBA.org

inflow of visitors who were likely to replace them. But today, for most small to medium-sized churches, there are far fewer visitors—fewer people looking to be a part of the church.

There are many specific reasons for this, but generally speaking, the North American culture's view of the Church has diminished dramatically. Typically, people in the broader culture don't see the Church as relevant to their lives and needs. Churches are not the place to go to address the big questions, if they even ever ask those questions. People are extremely busy and their lives are so full of work, family involvements and recreation that they have little time for anything else, much less church involvement. So the inevitable losses of people from churches—through death, moving to other locations, normal attrition, discontentment, etc.—are not being recouped as they were in the past.

As a result, many churches are in plateau or decline. If they continue to function as they have in the past, focusing primarily on internally-directed ministries, they are not addressing this issue and will likely continue to decline. We have very real concern for the number of churches that are in plateau or decline in the Church-at-large in North America and particularly in the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. About 80% of CLB churches are in plateau or decline. That is an alarming number!

As the CLB North American Mission

(NAM) has recognized this reality, we have begun to focus more on what our denomination can do to address this concern. At the most basic level—since fewer people are coming into our churches—our churches need to become more effective at connecting with and reaching people outside the walls of our church buildings. And our churches and believers will need to become better at building relationships with people who are not yet trusting Jesus as their Savior. As has always been the case, people are most effectively reached by the gospel through relationships with Christians—by the good news of Jesus spoken and lived out in the lives of believers.

Your Regional Pastors and NAM can offer a number of resources to help churches address these issues. Regional Pastors are available to consult with local churches to help them identify areas that can be strengthened in their efforts to reach people with the gospel. One resource that a number of our congregations have used is a Church Health Survey. This has been developed to help churches identify their areas of strength and their growing edges. Regional Pastors are also available to lead seminars and workshops to train, equip and empower our people to become more effective in evangelism and establishing and deepening relationships with non-Christians. Regional Pastors are also able to connect our churches with other resources that can help churches become more effective in reaching people, such as

books, recommendations of seminars and conventions provided by other groups, and coaching for our pastors and church leaders.

One very simple place for churches to start is with the following three words: Prayer, Profile and People. Prayer is foundational to becoming more effective in reaching people. The profile of most of our churches typically needs to be raised in the communities where they're located, and focusing on people more than on programs is crucial.

NAM is also in the process of developing a longer-term comprehensive strategy to help our churches address this area of revitalization. One element of this broader strategy to help churches in decline is to provide a trained team of 9-12 young adults and active retirees to join the congregation and community. Their goal is to bring energy and training to help the people of the church become more effective at making disciples and reaching their communities.

Please pray with us for our congregations, and please pray for your Regional Pastors as we seek to address this crucial need of revitalization in our churches.

Rev. Stan Olsen is Regional Pastor for the Central Region of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.



Orpha Raun among the joyful Moundang people at the dedication of the Moundang Bible in 1983.

Bible-inspired Teamwork

DAVID THOMPSON

Our witness to the peoples of Chad began with the pioneering ministry of the Revnes and Kaardals among the Moundang people in 1920. It later spread eastward and northward to include the Pévé, Musey and Zimé people groups, not to mention the many people groups in neighboring Cameroon. The goal to catalyze the building of a self-sustaining and propagating Church was achieved in the late 1990s. It was *Bible-inspired*

teamwork in which missionary women, married and single, played crucial roles.

On November 16, 2017 in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, we gathered to remember the life of former LBIM missionary Orpha Raun. Orpha and Don Raun worked with the Église Fraternelle Luthérienne au Tchad, their first thirty years in the Léré area of southern Chad among the Moundang people and their next ten years further north among a Muslim people group known as the Bagirmi. This move

presaged a decision by the CLB Mission Board in 2000 to focus its resources on commissioning teams that included Chadian and American missionaries to bring the Gospel to unreached Muslim people groups. In both regions, the Rauns' main focus was to learn the local language, break it down into written form, and progressively create materials to introduce the message of Jesus. With the help of the Léré church's Chadian translation team, the entire Bible in the

Serving Christ

The women of LBIM serve with incredible resolve, persevering in often difficult cross-cultural contexts for the sake of the mission that our Lord has called them to. They minister in multi-faceted yet vital venues, often behind the scenes. They are mothers, accountants, teachers, wives, evangelists, and co-laborers in the Gospel.

For more information contact:

lbim@CLBA.org



Kay A.
Albertville, France



Linda Bengtson
Ishinomaki, Japan



Mandy B.
Chad, Africa



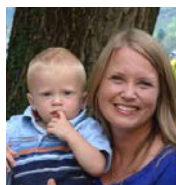
Elizabeth C.
Asia



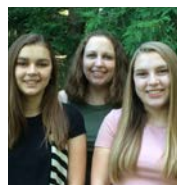
Sandy Christofferson
Hsinchu, Taiwan



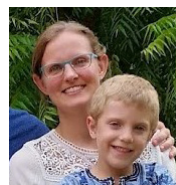
Delores Kittelson
Hsinchu, Taiwan



Sorja N.
Chad, Africa



Sallee S.
Chad, Africa



Carrie S.
Chad, Africa



Teresa S.
Chad, Africa

Moundang language was published in 1983.

The unwritten job description for Don would include teaching, preaching, mentoring, translating, and leading the team that led to the publishing of the Moundang Bible, as well as keeping the car running and changing flat tires (a common occurrence due to ubiquitous thorn branches that tend to congregate on roads and trails). Orpha's unwritten job description would include raising and homeschooling three children, cooking, hosting unexpected travelers, washing clothes and taking care of sick people coming to the door. She also did all the typing and mimeographing for the translation team and managed the bookstore. All of this was done without the benefit of electricity, running water, or the myriad of time- and energy-saving household and business conveniences we take for granted. It also included living in a climate where temperatures could get up into the 115–120 degree Fahrenheit range. She still made time to do recreational things like reading good books (Orpha was an avid reader). This was all done, for the most part, with joy and thankfulness to God for his faithfulness and provisions. As a side note, it should be observed that part of their combined job description was to adjust patiently to the changes and stress brought on by new inexperienced missionaries like us.

As we listened to people sharing memories that November evening, the

crucial role that missionary women played as team members stood out. Their role has traditionally been underestimated and not honored as it should be. In the case of the Rauns, Orpha not only performed the role of mother and wife but also was a key and essential member of the team that ultimately produced the Bible in the Moundang language. This was before the advent of computers. The final copy of the Bible that was sent to the printer had to be perfectly typed, all 1,348 pages of it! Make one error and the page had to be totally redone!

Other missionary women played significant roles in teaching and health care. The legendary Anna Aandal, a single missionary for thirty-seven years, helped build the Church among the Musgum people of Cameroon, led the translation of the Bible into their language and established a much needed clinic that functions to this day.

One of the particular feminine gifts is to establish and build relationships. The contribution that missionary women made to the Bible Schools and to the local churches through their teaching and mentoring has been a very powerful and effective component of the overall missionary effort. If you were to attend the women's weekly Bible study in Léré and listen to testimonies of the women, you would especially hear how the Gospel has changed their home life. Their husbands are more gentle, loving and respectful. They're even willing to carry

water or fetch wood, tasks *never* done by husbands in that culture.

Today roughly 222,000 Christians, on average, meet every Sunday for worship in Lutheran Brethren congregations in Cameroon and Chad. That is 18 times the average attendance of our CLB churches in North America. How did this happen and what can we learn from this mission experience, characterized by teamwork, *In the Heart of Africa*?¹ How can the concept of teamwork between husbands and wives be used to create a more powerful and effective Gospel witness in North America?

Thanks be to God for the life and ministry of Orpha Raun and those other saints who preceded her!

Joan and David Thompson live in Minneapolis, Minnesota. They had the privilege of living with the Rauns on the Léré station from 1975 to 1987. In Léré the Thompsons helped develop a community health program.



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

Sources

1. See *In the Heart of Africa*, 1952 & 2016



Garrett Gransee and Rev. Nick Mundis rehearse at Zion Cemetery in Elizabeth, Minnesota.

He Leadeth Me



SARAH LARSON

In the fall of 2008, Caleb Larson and I attended Oak Hill Lutheran Brethren Church in Bloomington, Minnesota for the first time as husband and wife. There we discovered a renewed desire to serve in our church, not just as individuals, but now as a unified couple. Our pastor, Rev. Nick Mundis, encouraged us and came alongside us. We dove headlong into ministry by meeting the theater arts need in the church. We directed, produced, and acted in various productions, and we encouraged others to do the same. Pastor Nick, too, found himself taking to the stage. Two years later, as Caleb and I looked to seminary and an inevitable return to Fergus Falls, I considered pursuing a second phase of involvement with a theater arts ministry already existing in Otter Tail County, MN, called Redeemer's Song Ministries. This ministry was in a process of revitalization, as it needed fresh vision, new goals, and renewed momentum.

Before Caleb's and my transition back

to Fergus Falls, however, I sat in a pew at Oak Hill Church one Sunday listening to Pastor Nick speak about the prodigal son. At that moment, I remembered an experimental project I'd created with Redeemer's Song Ministries years before, a 1932-inspired film adaptation of the parable of the prodigal. As I listened to Pastor Nick, witnessed how carefully and intentionally he engaged his audience, how sincere and devoted a father he was, how intensely and unashamedly he loved his own dad, I realized this truth: here's the man, here's the father, this is the project. Now is the time.

Before Caleb and I left Oak Hill, I proposed the idea to Pastor Nick that he play the role of the prodigal's adoptive father in our adaptation. I was already pounding away at the keyboard developing the first draft of the script and was more excited than I'd ever been about any ministry-related project. Pastor Nick was hesitant about becoming a screen actor, and he transparently said, "I

don't know if I can memorize all of these lines... but I'll try."

That's all I needed to hear. In the summer of 2011, a cast of over thirty-five individuals shot the first official RSM independent film, a story titled *He Leadeth Me*. When it premiered in Fergus Falls on Father's Day, 2012 to a packed theater, more than one individual wept, more than one community member noted that "the father was excellent," and we all walked away remembering how deeply our heavenly Father loves us and to what great lengths he went to adopt us as his children.

Redeemer's Song Ministries, now officially a non-profit organization, will soon celebrate twenty years of theater and film ministry. To highlight this milestone, we will be shooting an updated, revised, anniversary edition of *He Leadeth Me*. In June of 2018, Pastor Nick will return as Judge Ethan Evan Carter and take on a much more intense, defined role. This time we intend to incorporate many new

individuals in the pre-production process: the congregations of our actors, the families of our financial supporters, and the community of Worthington, MN, as we transform their historic George Dayton house into the home of the most important man in our story: the father. But this time, Pastor Nick, now lovingly and respectfully known as “the judge,” has a much bigger job to do.

Since the year 2000, we’ve invited hundreds of individuals to participate both on stage and on screen, behind the curtain and behind the camera. Yet, some of the most vital and needed participants in this ministry have been and always will be our communities’ pastors. Redeemer’s Song Ministries continues to undergo a revitalization of vision and mission. No longer is our primary focus of ministry the audience; it is rather the participants.

We’ve seen an influx of artists who have been disillusioned and disappointed by religion, question the existence and importance of Jesus, and don’t have a church to belong to. When they spend time with other artists, artists who love the Lord, and when they participate in the teaching and preaching of Scripture, eyes are opened. These individuals start asking questions. They begin to engage and wrestle with the truth of God’s Word. They inevitably develop relationships and love for their fellow cast members. Without realizing it, they find themselves surrounded by the Church, the one Body that Jesus Christ calls us to be (Romans 12:1-5). The pastors who become involved directly and indirectly provide biblical wisdom, spiritual guidance, intuitive support, and leadership in prayer. Serving as actors, technical support, producers, and chaplains, pastors have the unique opportunity to bring their ministry-related experience to the table, to support the professional work these actors and crew members are doing.

In 2011, Pastor Nick had little to no experience in screen acting. He now says, “This was a real stretch for me, to not live in the freedom and flexibility of monologue... I grew simply by doing something in God’s Kingdom that went well beyond my comfort zone.” Nick was and is fully equipped to do what he’s been called to do: to minister. He faithfully stepped out of the pulpit and into our creative and artistic lives.

Many pastors since have intimately tied themselves to the arts ministry of Redeemer’s Song and have become some of our most valued sounding boards, prayer warriors, and cheerleaders. We need them. We depend on them. And, we are so very grateful for the calling of these servants and for their obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. Nick adds, “God has always called us to be people who translate the Word of God to other cultures and languages. This is a way that God is delivering his message to our culture today through us.”

Sarah Larson is the Executive Director & Producer for Redeemer’s Song Ministries.

To learn more about Redeemer’s Song Ministries, or to get involved, contact Sarah at: slarsonredeemerssong@gmail.com

Visit Redeemer’s Song Ministries on Facebook or online at: www.redeemerssongministries.org



Redeemer’s Song cast and crew shoot a promotional video for Sacred in 2014.



*Above: Leah Drexler studies a wardrobe list on set of The Circle in Rollag, Minnesota (2015).
Below: Alixandra Johnson, associate director and producer, studies a scene from Sacred.*





KING me

BC18

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JUNE 9

SATURDAY DAY of EQUIPPING

Track #1:
Preaching to the Heart

Dr. Eugene Boe

Lutheran Brethren Seminary
Fergus Falls, MN



Eugene Boe is Academic Dean at Lutheran Brethren Seminary (LBS)—which serves the church and the world by preparing servants of Christ to serve in God’s mission.

Dr. Boe is Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at LBS, and serves as pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Wendell, MN. He travels extensively in teaching and sharing the distinct perspective of grace found in Lutheran Brethren Theology.

Track #2:
Tools for Making Disciples

Bob Ransom

Director of Missionary Church, INC
Fort Wayne, IN



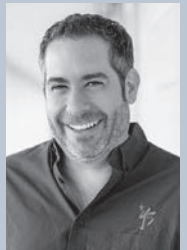
Bob Ransom is the Generate (US Ministries) director for the Missionary Church. He commits a major portion of his ministry to the multiplication of disciples, churches and networks.

During the past 25 years the Missionary Church has grown from a denomination of 300 churches to more than 500 churches. Bob and his wife, Donna, have two children and six grandchildren.

Track #3:
Youth Ministry

Rev. Mark Matlock

Founder of WisdomWorks LLC
Flower Mound, TX



Mark Matlock is founder of WisdomWorks LLC—a company dedicated to helping organizations craft workshops to help leadership reach and generate solutions.

Mark is an author, ordained minister, and youth pastor. He has been working with youth pastors, students, and parents for more than two decades, providing leadership for programs and training events. He is the coauthor of *Dirty Faith* and the author of *Freshman: The College Student’s Guide to Developing Wisdom*.

CLB BIENNIAL CONVENTION

Our God is a missionary God. His primary chosen means for accomplishing that mission—ushering in the fullness of his kingdom—is the Church. God calls us to join him in what he is doing in the world, and we live out our calling as a sign, instrument, and foretaste of his kingdom here on earth.

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Skaret Ordained



L to R: Elder Carlton Moe, Regional Pastor Stan Olsen, Elders Armand Swenson, Randy Erickson, Rev. Kevin Skaret, LBS President Dr. David Veum, and Rev. Mark Johannesen.

On November 26, 2017, Kevin Skaret was ordained at Hope Lutheran Brethren Church in Barnesville, Minnesota. Regional Pastor Stan Olsen led the service.

Raun Called Home

Orpha Beverly Klukken Raun was born on February 5, 1932, in Osakis, Minnesota. She received her R. N. degree from the Lutheran Deaconess Hospital School of Nursing in Minneapolis, Minnesota.



Orpha met her future husband, Donald Raun of Seattle, Washington, in the summer of 1954. They married on September 24, 1955. Donald and Orpha served the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as missionaries among the unreached people of Chad for 40 years. The Rauns were instrumental in the translation of the Bible into the language of the Moundang people of southern Chad (see page 14). Orpha and Don retired from Lutheran Brethren International Mission in the fall of 1999. On October 31, 2017, at the age of 85 years, Orpha met her Savior face to face. Blessed be the memory of Orpha Raun.

Sonnenberg Ordained



L to R: Elders Joachim Poetsch, Gerhard Patzer, Regional Pastor Roger Olson, Rev. Matthew Sonnenberg, Pastor Ryan Dittmann, and Elder Shane Hein.

On November 11, 2017, Matthew Sonnenberg was ordained at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Edmonton, Alberta. Regional Pastor Roger Olson led the service.

Krause Installed



L to R: Regional Pastor Phil Heiser, Pastor Russ Krause, and Pastor Bob Hosmer.

On December 10, 2017, Russ Krause was installed as pastor of Anchor of Hope Community Church in Stanwood, Washington. Regional Pastor Phil Heiser performed the installation. In January 2018, Pastor Krause and his wife Carol will be moving to join the CLB Canada church plant effort in Red Deer, Alberta.

Grateful for Your Service



On January 1, 2018, Chaplain Colonel Michael Heuer retired from 33 years of combined active duty and reserve service in the United States Air Force.

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The Shrinking Pie

Statistics tell us 80% of North American churches have either stopped growing (plateaued) or are actually shrinking. We're talking all churches, including those with a high view of Scripture. Just the other day I heard a pastor of a very conservative Lutheran church say that they used to have 1200 people, but now they have 600.

People in declining smaller churches suspect the "big" churches are growing largely at the expense of the little churches—that we're just relocating people who are already believers and calling it growth. We assume that churches offering the best programming—the best Sunday School, the best youth group, the best fellowship opportunities, the best worship experience—these churches will grow. But stop and consider this: Who is attracted by Christian-oriented programming? People who have no church background and know very little about Jesus? Or people who already know Christ? Could it be that churches are all competing for a slice of the same pie—current Christians—and all the while that pie is shrinking?

Something changed in the way the average person in North America perceives church, and many of us had no clue it was happening.

For me, the change came abruptly. I pastored the CLB church in Grand Forks, North Dakota from 1985-2000. We saw modest growth, but it was actually significant growth. I studied the church records and calculated that we had gained hundreds of people over the years, and hardly anyone left us to attend another church in the area. No "backdoor" problem. However, we lost hundreds in that time frame as our people moved out of town—it was a very transient community for several reasons. But God kept bringing replacements. For many years there was this predictable steady trickle of visitors looking for a church home, and many of them would join us.

Then, somewhere in the late 90s, the trickle just stopped, as if a faucet had been shut off. It was mystifying. Where were the new people? What were we doing wrong?

Many years later I heard the concept from our seminary missions professor, Dr. Gaylan Mathiesen, that "Christendom" is dead. People no longer have that "old world" mindset—that everyone needs to be connected to a church, if only to be baptized, married, and buried. It's just gone.

We're not going to reverse this culture change, but we can adapt to it. This means change for our churches. Churches, even small ones, are like big ships. A small boat can change direction easily. But a big ship turns very, very slowly. Yet change we must, and the first step toward change is acknowledging it's needed.

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

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