



identity

A PUBLICATION OF THE
CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN BRETHREN



LUTHERAN BRETHREN LAUNCHES ARROW CORPS

LINDY GJERNES GARDNER UNPACKS HOPE AFTER ABORTION

THEOLOGY

Discerning a
Jesus-based path
towards identity

TESTIMONY

Life after
attempting
suicide

MISSION

Understanding
God's story in
building cultural
identity

CHRISTIAN LIVING

Finding a God-
honoring path to
gender identity



**EDITOR IN CHIEF
TROY TYSDAL**

I was 28 years old when I came to faith in Jesus Christ. It's not the path I would choose if I could do it all again. I would prefer to live my entire life as a follower of Christ, yet I can see how coming to faith as an adult has given me a unique perspective on my own transformation. Faith in Christ has changed me. I am no longer the person I was. The change was not immediate, nor is it complete. It's messy, ongoing, and gradual, but the change has been profound nonetheless.

At first I realized my own value—"How important must I be to God that he would send his Son to be crucified for me? How deep and powerful must his love be?" The answer was beyond my ability to comprehend. Then I wrestled with my view of our world, and of those around me. I thought to myself, "If I am so important to God, then others must be as well." You see, I began to look at the world through a lens of Scripture, and Scripture reveals the heart of God.

Make no mistake, God is love. Now that does not mean that he accepts all that we are. If that were true, there would have been no need for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. But it does mean that God gave himself for us. The Scriptures tell us, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

Love has changed me. Love has changed the way I see others. I understand that this is not my love, but the love of God shining through me.

In this issue of *identity* magazine you will be challenged to see humankind, yourself and others, through the lens of Scripture—through the eyes of God. It is my prayer that your eyes will be opened to see God's desire for you—a being created in his image, a person transformed by his love.



CLB

A Disciple-Making Movement

Church of the Lutheran Brethren

identity magazine is a publication of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren (CLB). The CLB is a family of 116 congregations in North America, with 1,500 daughter congregations in Cameroon, Chad, Japan and Taiwan, which are organized into four national church bodies.

As a denomination, the CLB exists to serve congregations in obedience to the Great Commission—making disciples for Christ locally, nationally, and internationally.



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Called Into The Light



LIFE AFTER ATTEMPTING SUICIDE SHANE NEWMAN

I vividly remember the night I made an attempt on my own life. My mind flashes back to March, three years ago. I had just gulped down several bottles of cough syrup and taken a wide array of painkillers straight up my nose. I was numb. I was bored with life, and concluded that it was, quite simply, not even worth living. "It's time to go," I said to myself, and then proceeded.

I had searched for years, and never found happiness. I didn't have a clue who I was, and I couldn't care less whether there was or wasn't a god. I was my own god. I lived only for the next high, and that's the way it had been for years. I was hopeless, and as my body slowly shut down and my lungs ceased to function, I was sure it was the end. Everything faded into terrifying darkness. I heard strange voices,

beckoning me into the thick, black void.

"WAIT!"

My eyes shot open and I gasped desperately for air, choking and sputtering like a baby just born. "If there truly is darkness," I thought to myself, "there has to be light." At the time I didn't know who or what that light might be, and I wouldn't meet God until over a year later, but there began my frantic search for truth.

Suicide. In my opinion, it's one of the most ominous and taboo words in the English dictionary. Honestly, I can't help but cringe at the sight or sound of it. We often see news headlines and social media posts about our favorite celebrities that have fallen victim to this nasty word, yet we often overlook the

signs and possibilities that the temptation of suicide might be creeping through the doors of our churches and wrapping its cold, mangled fingers around the hearts of the people sitting right next to us. Grim, I know, but it IS a problem, and we NEED to talk about it.

It might seem like an oxymoron, but when we address suicide, we must realize that the real issue is not actually suicide. The same goes for drugs, alcohol, anxiety, self-righteousness, etc. It is not just the fruit of the problem that we must face, but the root of it.

Across the board, every sin fruit is rooted in some type of unbelief in Jesus Christ, his Word, and his work. Galatians 5:22-23 shows us the fruits of the Spirit. I'm sure you've heard of them: Love, joy,

peace, patience, and the list goes on. Are you walking by the Spirit, overflowing with the loving goodness that our wonderful Father freely gives to us? If not, I think it's safe to say that you, quite simply, aren't wholly trusting in him and who he says you are. Just like everyone in existence—ever—you are struggling with unbelief.

I vividly remember the night I attempted to take my own life. I hadn't a clue who God might be or what the Gospel meant for me. Hopeless, broken, and lost, I found myself drowning in prescription drugs. Then I was gripped by an intense revelation that would shock me back to life. I knew nothing but darkness and lies, yet I realized that darkness cannot exist without Light, and lies cannot exist without Truth. I wasn't sure Who or what that Truth might be, but it had to be out there somewhere, and I had to find it. My eyes shot open, I desperately gasped for air, and the rest is history.

I don't believe all who try to kill themselves really want to die, but I do think that many of us just don't know what it's like to truly live.

Flash forward to almost three years later, and here I sit, currently two weeks into Discipleship Training School at YWAM in Salem, Oregon. It's been a year-and-a-half since I found truth and hope in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and I've been daily growing in relationship with him ever since.

What a beautifully difficult journey it's been! See, as the enemy does his best to deceive and to crush us, our Father stands closely by, watching and waiting for us to turn away from ourselves and look to him.

To put it bluntly, you can't beat suicide. You can't resist the temptations of this world or the powers of deception. You are weak. Without the Gospel, you are hopeless. You're not even your own.

Thankfully, though, you are his. A child of The All-Powerful Fabricator of Reality Himself. The King of the Greater Kingdom, the Giver of All Things Good and Loving. He's your Dad.

What power, then, does suicide have against you, with him at your side? He spits in the face of death because he already beat it. He laughs at temptation because he already resisted it. His gaze burns through the curtains of deception and lies, because he himself is the one and only Truth. Do you know him? Do you trust him? Is he your identity, your affirmation, your hope, and your purpose?

Ephesians 2 says we are literally made alive in Christ, saved by grace through faith. We were once dead in our sins and unbelief, now alive and made whole because of Jesus' perfect display of love on the cross. There's no room for anxiety, depression, sadness, and lies anymore. We are called to be free. We are no longer slaves to the brokenness of this earth. Satan has sold us many lies, but in the end, those lies will only help us to better understand the Truth. The hate we've felt will only help us to better grasp his love. The rejection we've felt will only help us better appreciate his affirmation. Satan tries to make a move, but God redeems it for his own glory. Redemption is his thing.

I don't believe all who try to kill themselves really want to die, but I do think that many of us just don't know what it's like to truly live. I encourage you to let him be your life, your hope, your everything. He is knocking, he always has been, and he will continue to do so for as long as there is a door to knock on. I pray that the chaos of this world and the lies you're living will all drop to the ground, leaving nothing in sight but him, arms wide open, beckoning you into new, purposeful, wholesome, peaceful, joy-filled life.

Research suggests that up to 5% of the population (1 of every 20 people) may at least be thinking about the possibility of suicide.

The good news: For most, suicidal thoughts ease as their situation changes, as they learn to cope, or as they develop new ways to see their challenges. But some will actually attempt suicide, and some who attempt will die.

Active religious participation is actually a protective factor against suicide. But there are likely people in our churches right now who have the possibility of suicide in mind. Obviously, that's the best time for caring people to intervene—when people are only thinking about suicide.

It is idealistic to think people who truly know God will never feel so alone or so despondent that they would want to die. Sometimes they do. Even the prophet Elijah was so paralyzed by fear at one point in his life that he wanted to die:

And he [Elijah] was afraid and arose and ran for his life... and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life..." (1 Kings 19:3-4, NASB).

The passage doesn't mention suicide, but Elijah's wish to die is clear. Importantly, as the story continues, God doesn't condemn Elijah for any lack of faith or trust related to his wish to die. On the contrary, God treats Elijah with patience and kindness, meets his needs, sends an angel to help him, and shows Elijah that he still has thousands of human allies and is not as alone as he thinks.

**STORY CONTINUES ON
 PAGE 19**

FOR YOU CREATED MY INMOST BEING;
YOU KNIT ME TOGETHER
IN MY MOTHER'S WOMB.

PSALM 139:13



LIVING WITH ABORTION
ANONYMOUS

CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN BRETHREN

I had an abortion nine years ago. It still haunts me to this day.

The abortion providers convinced me that abortion would fix my situation. They convinced me that it would open up doors to great opportunities. But really, it tore me apart to my core.

Before that day that I sat in the clinic with a positive pregnancy test, I had never heard the word abortion. Surely, I had no idea what it meant. They portrayed it in such an elegant way—as if it wasn't something that involves death, but will give you back the life you want. This is absolutely positively wrong.

I chose abortion out of fear. I was so focused on the fear of having a child that I never feared what I would feel after aborting my child. I made this decision very quickly.

It was scheduled for two days before my eighteenth birthday. I was not legally an adult and was still under my parents' guardianship. I went as far as presenting myself before a judge and making my claim of why I needed to

be emancipated from my parents in order to have this process accelerated. We discussed my dream to go to college after high school and how that would not be possible with a child.

I wish I had known then what I know now. Abortion can and will destroy a woman's soul. It destroyed my soul.

I was on a mission. I was so distracted by the process to abort that I never

took the time to acknowledge the pregnancy as a human growing inside of my womb. I refused to look at it this way and I was not told otherwise.

HEALING THE ABORTION HEART

LINDY GJERNES GARDNER

I made a decision prior to arriving at the abortion clinic that I would NOT look at the ultrasound. I wouldn't admit it at the time, but I knew that if I saw the baby that was growing inside me I would NOT be able to proceed. I thought I had outsmarted the truth.

As a woman, I have been designed to procreate. This involves my anatomy, but also my heart and mind. I left that clinic empty, alone, and hopeless. The choice to kill my child in the womb should have been unthinkable. I wish I had known then what I know now. Abortion can and will destroy a woman's soul. It destroyed my soul.

I never went on to college after high school. Instead, I became a drug addict my senior year of high school. I had lost all hope. I used everything I could get my hands on to numb the pain. My life completely spiraled downhill following my abortion.

It took a lot of time, a great amount of courage, and some pretty amazing people to help me come to terms with the truth. All I have seen for years, when I looked in the mirror, was a murderer. Five years after my abortion, I finally confessed my sin to God.

I believe God has taken my baby to heaven, but it has been four years since then and I am still struggling to truly feel his forgiveness. Before my abortion I never knew who Jesus was. But through desperation I finally accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior of my life and for that I am forever thankful.

The Lord takes broken things and makes them beautiful. If there is one thing that I am sure of to this day, it is that women should be encouraged to choose life. Choosing life will empower women more than abortion ever will.

Young people who grow up in a church are at risk for abortion. A recent Lifeway Research survey found that nearly 4 out of 10 women who have had abortions were attending church at least once a month.

Another survey by the Guttmacher Institute shows that 54% of women who have abortions identify as Christian. Perhaps they thought, "What will people say if they find out I'm pregnant outside of marriage? My parents will be so disappointed. I can't show up in my church pregnant and unmarried."

We pray that this won't be your story, but pregnancy isn't the end of the world. It's the start of a new life. Scripture tells us that children are always called a blessing and a reward. Children are a heritage. God the Creator made each one of us as unique individuals and our lives are in his hands.

Our churches must be a place of grace, mercy, compassion and support for young women (and men) in this position. We need to be THE people who love them and offer hope and healing. We need to help post-abortive women find peace and forgiveness, rather than shame and condemnation. Isn't that who Jesus is? Isn't that who he calls us to be?

Let's make abortion unthinkable. Susanne Maynes, who works at a pregnancy center in Idaho, writes this:

I'm not fighting to save babies, but people. Those infant boys and girls will grow into toddlers, grammar school kids, teens. They'll be adults one day. We'll see them on the job, in the grocery store, at church. And when we see them, we might ask ourselves, "When did the sacred value of their life begin?" From the "first stitch" that God knit together in the womb. That's when.

That means a lot to me. A year ago I went out to the lobby after I had spoken at a local church. A lovely young woman approached me and said, "I'm one of the babies you saved." We hugged and cried together and I asked who her mom was. I remembered her mother. That woman chose life and placed her child for adoption. That child's life mattered—and she was now in ministry.

That's what happens when you choose life. Babies are born, and they grow into little kids, and teens, and adults.

Scott Klusendorf writes, in *The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture*:

In the past, we used to discriminate on the basis of skin color and gender (and still do at times), but now with elective abortion, we discriminate on the basis of size, level of development, location, and degree of dependency. We've simply swapped one form of bigotry for another.

To go deeper and learn more about defending the sanctity of human life, see Scott's article, *How to Defend Your Pro-Life Views in Five Minutes or Less* (<https://prolifetraining.com/resources/five-minute-1/>).

It's well worth your time.

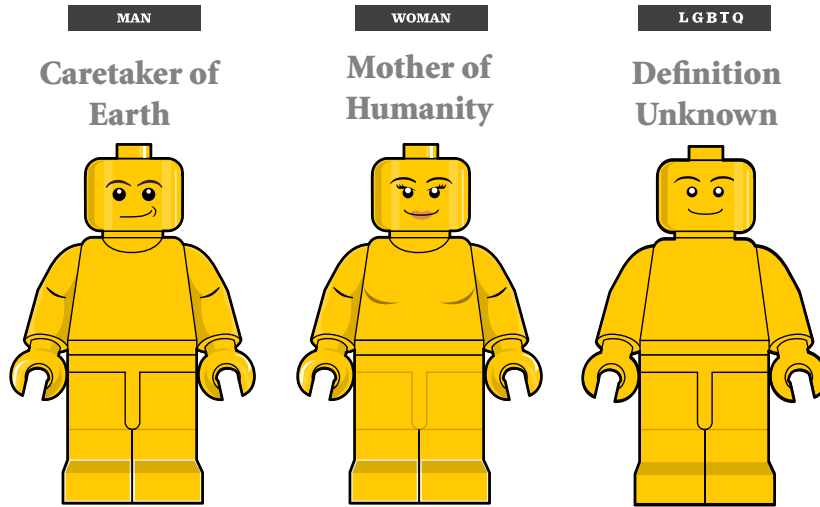
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Pregnant? Need Help? Visit:
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BUILDING WHERE EVERYTHING IS



BUILDING IDENTITY WAYNE STENDER

One of my kids may struggle with their sexual identity. I have six kids, and it's very possible that one of them, or one of their friends, will experience gender dysphoria—*anxiety and confusion about their gender.*

I've started talking to my kids about how they build their understanding of gender. One of the areas we have yet to tackle is sexual attraction. Is it best to follow attractions? What if their attractions don't line up with the gender norms, their physical body, or God's design? I'm working to resolve how to have these conversations, especially if their attractions don't fit the cultural norm.

I started piecing together my Lego man of sexuality after a summer shopping trip to H&M with my two oldest sons. I picked up suspenders, a pair of skinny-shorts, and some socks. Classic dad apparel. As we plopped my findings down at the checkout

my nine-year-old pulled on my shirt. My ten-year-old caught my eye and nodded toward our cashier, who was wearing eye liner and sported a Marilyn Monroe piercing next to their lip. There were at least six piercings that wrapped around their left ear and—at six-foot-three—they were tall. I say "they" because I'm not totally sure if the person self-identified as a boy or girl. In fact, I couldn't tell their biological gender from their appearance. It was clear that they were transitioning.

After some cordial conversation, the cashier laughed with me at my plans to drive through the night on the Fourth of July, and then said a parting farewell. Walking down the hallway of the mall, one of my kids asked if the person we talked to was a boy or girl. I told them it mattered, but not in the way they thought it did.

Gender is desperately important, and it has more significance than just as a self-defining box to check on an application questionnaire. Defining gender is a very real and significant process of wrestling out our identity. With so many different people telling us what gender is and isn't, our growth in purpose, hope, and who we are can feel shunted inside the gender debate. It is incredibly valuable for us to think about how we build an affirming identity in relation to our gender. Are we male, female, or can we self-identify and build our own identity—as the world tells us we can?

Many scientists who work with people who struggle with their gender identity say it is important to align gender with reality—meaning the sexual organs a person is born with should dictate how we build our gender identity. Many in the world say that a person's identity and gender preference can go against the

IDENTITY

NOT AWESOME

physical reality, but scientists say this is problematic.

Dr. Paul McHugh from Johns Hopkins notes that changing a person's sexual organs doesn't solve the issue of their gender identity. "Sex change' is biologically impossible. People who undergo sex-reassignment surgery do not change from men to women or vice versa. Rather, they become feminized men or masculinized women."

Changing reality to match a desire or passion doesn't solve the heart of the issue. Walt Heyer discovered this. He was a husband and father of two children before he followed his heart and desires and transitioned to a woman. He later transitioned back to a man and said, "Changing genders is short-term gain with long-term pain... Instead of encouraging them to undergo unnecessary and destructive surgery, let's affirm and love our young people."

Sometimes people find more enjoyment in same-sex friendships, and they may even be same-sex attracted. However, these feelings do not define a person, even if the person acts on these feelings a few times. A person's gender identity is defined by much more than their gender attraction or gender leanings.

The Bible gives one of the most comprehensive answers to how

we should build our identity. God created man and woman in his image. That means that our identity is not bound up in how we feel or who we're attracted to, but is instead bound to the character of God. As we study and understand God, looking into his Word for wisdom and understanding and seeking out Christian adult mentors, we find a better understanding of who we are and who we're made to be.

Sometimes our attractions and desires don't match up to God's design in the Bible. There are countless examples of this in the Scriptures, too. Adam and Eve wanted to form their own reality of good and evil. There were significant consequences to this. But this is one of many examples where humankind follows their heart away from the design of God, trying to make reality match their desires.

If we're looking to build an understanding of who we are, we need to understand that our identity is not built by our feelings, desires, or our own work. Our identity is established in the fact that we bear God's image.

With this established, our gender identity is likewise defined not by our feelings about gender, which may change continually throughout our lives. These feelings are a result of the Fall into sin. Satan is working to confuse and disorient us. It is our challenge to align our hearts

and minds to Jesus while living in a distorted culture.

While we may have varied attractions, and may struggle to have love and security in opposite sex relationships, the fact of the matter is that God has designed humankind with two genders to glorify him in a complementary relationship. Our identity has little to do with us building a sense of self or finding purpose in life. Identity is most firmly built in submitting to the revealed design God has established.

So, while it's possible my kids may struggle with their gender, that doesn't mean that they are LGBTQ+. That is a definition the world wants to place on those who are struggling with reality. We all battle with reality, in very real and often different ways. The beauty is that our identity is not tied to our struggle. Our identity has been built for us in the design and purpose God displays for us in Scripture and through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Wayne Stender is Director of Admissions at Hillcrest Lutheran Academy, the Lutheran Brethren's boarding high school. Wayne speaks and writes frequently on topics related to culture and worldview.

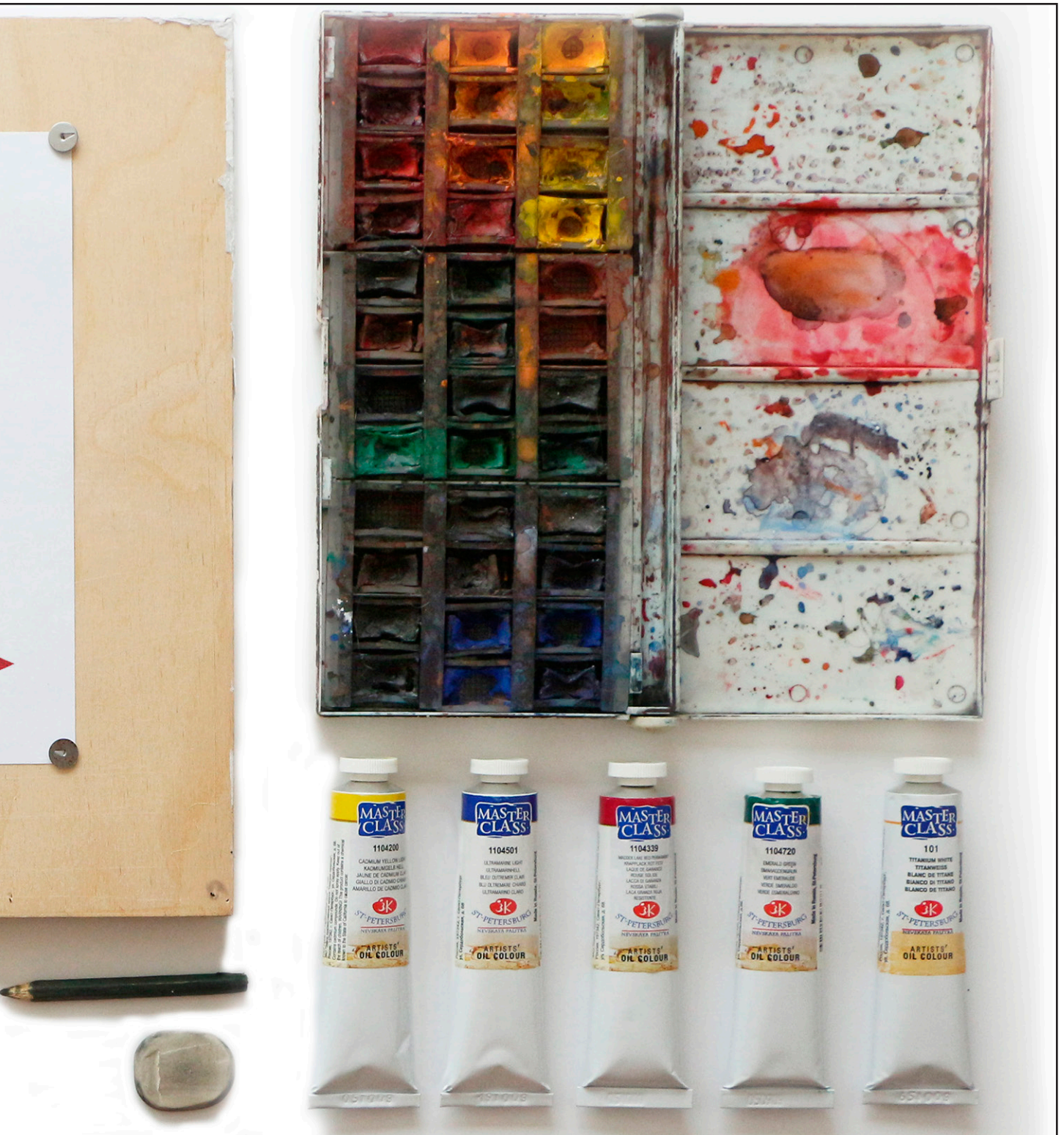


ARROW CORPS
REV. STAN OLSEN

The concept of Arrow Corps started a couple of years ago. As the CLB Mission Team worked through a strategic planning process, we recognized two significant needs in our denomination: 1) We have many churches that are in plateau

or decline and 2) we do not have any denomination-sponsored ministry opportunities designed especially for either young adults or for active retirees. Considering both needs at once, a picture began to emerge for addressing them.

We recognized that most of our congregations in plateau or decline have been unable to make the changes that might enable them to experience greater health and growth. These necessary changes would not likely occur apart from “changing the



DNA”—the culture of the church. But such a transformation would most likely require the local presence of a group of people who were modeling and incarnating the needed changes. That’s when the idea “clicked” of a team of people joining into the life of the congregation. And what if this team was large enough to provide support and fellowship for the team

members, while making an impact on the receiving congregation? And what if this team included older adults to provide mentorship and stability for the young adults? And what if this team were in place for a longer time—two years—to insure the needed changes would be effectively integrated into the congregation? These questions shaped the now-

developing ministry called *Arrow Corps*.

Let’s consider the name of this developing ministry first. The dictionary defines the word *corps* as “a group of persons associated or acting together,” such as the diplomatic corps, the press corps, or the American Peace Corps. The

word *corps* captures the essence of the teams that we will be sending out, especially the “together” part.

In this concept of teams primarily composed of young adults, we noted similarities between today’s generation of young adults and that generation who first joined the Peace Corps. Both generations are activist; both desire to make a difference and change the world; both are willing to act, not just talk. When the Peace Corps began, thousands upon thousands of young adults dedicated two years of their lives to spread goodwill around the world. We’re now asking your generation to do the same—only we want you to dedicate yourself to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ by entering churches and communities as missionaries sent to make disciples. It’s a bit like the CLB version of the Peace Corps, only the peace that Arrow Corps will be spreading is eternal.

The *Arrow* part of the name? It communicates movement, direction and purpose—hitting the target. These teams will be purposeful with a clear direction.

Next let’s consider the composition and size of these teams. They will be primarily composed of young adults with some older adults (possibly active retirees). These teams will be larger than teams sent out by the CLB in the past. The goal is 8-12 people, because a larger team will have a better chance of impacting the DNA of the churches where they will be sent. A larger team will also provide the support and fellowship the team members need in this crucial, but difficult ministry. The intention is for a two-year term of service for team members, with a minimum commitment of one year. The main ministry will be to make disciples,

who then go on to make disciples of others, who make disciples of others...

Making disciples is the process of building relationships with people who are not Christians to help them understand their need of a Savior so that they will receive Christ and then begin to live and grow in him. To accomplish this, the teams will engage in both the congregation and the local community.

The bar for team members is set very high. You will be asked to support

called to personal engagement in evangelism, outreach and disciple-making—through the encouragement and coaching of Arrow Corps team members.

We see this developing ministry as essential to the health of churches in plateau or decline, and as such, to the overall health of our denomination. Arrow Corps is in the initial stages of development, with systems and structure being built as you read this. We’re dependent on the Lord to provide all that is needed, and we are asking for your help.

Please pray that the Lord will raise up team members—young and old. Please consider this calling for yourself, or for others you believe could participate.

May God be glorified and may his kingdom be enlarged as the Arrow Corps teams are sent out to engage with our churches in making new disciples of Jesus Christ.

When the Peace Corps began, thousands upon thousands of young adults dedicated two years of their lives to spread goodwill around the world. We’re now asking your generation to do the same—only we want you to dedicate yourself to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ by entering churches and communities as missionaries sent to make disciples.

yourself with a part-time job and to secure your own lodging, while you engage in the community and make disciples, and work with church members to make disciples.

After an initial training period, each team will receive continuing training and support throughout their ministry time. To serve in this way, Arrow Corps clearly has to be a definite calling from the Lord.

Is he calling you?

Churches requesting and receiving Arrow Corps teams will be thoroughly vetted. When churches plateau or decline, it is often due to losing touch with their local community and becoming inward-focused. So churches hosting Arrow Corps teams will need to embrace change, learn how to reach out to their communities, and enter into disciple-making relationships with people outside of their congregation. They will not be passive recipients of Arrow Corps teams, but will be

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



YOUTH

ROM 1:17

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WHO BUILDS YOUR VALUE

I have a small but functional collection of hand tools on the work bench in my basement. The tool I most prize is probably my cordless drill. It's the one that gets used all the time. Its many nicks and scuffs tell the stories of numerous projects throughout the years.

I have other tools, too—a stripped pliers, an old copper-pipe cutter, a worn out flat-head screwdriver, a dull saw—but these are not as prominent in my collection. They were useful at one time, and certainly hold some potential for use (or else I'd throw them away), but they're not...well, they just aren't my prized multi-functional, time-saving cordless drill/driver.

Many of us think that God looks at us the same way that I look at the tools on my workbench. We assume he has a special place for the “superstars” who have the greatest potential and who make the greatest contributions to the Kingdom of God. At the same time, we assume that he puts up with the rest of us, keeping us around even though we don't contribute much.

While this assumption is common in today's world, the teaching of Scripture gives us a completely different picture.

The Scriptures teach that every person has value and meaning.

What we contribute to God or to others has no bearing on how God views our worth. I base this claim on two sources—the Bible itself and Luther's Small Catechism, which is a summary of the Bible's teaching. Let me first talk about the Bible.

and others less well-known (Psalm 103:17; Isaiah 54:10; 1 Corinthians 1:4–9; 2 Timothy 1:9), all support this claim. Take, as another example, Deuteronomy 7:7–8, “The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” In short, God loves you not because of you, but because of him. He delights in you and is for you because that's the kind of Creator and Savior that he is.

A second source that supports this claim is Luther's Small Catechism. The first sentences in this book ask the question, “What are God's thoughts about you?” This goes to the heart of the issue, doesn't it? The answer: “God's thoughts about me are thoughts of love and blessing.” So simple; so penetrating; so encouraging. And then, with this knowledge, the Catechism invites us into a study of God's Word.

Why do we have such a hard time understanding and accepting this simple truth—that “God's thoughts

about me are thoughts of love and blessing”? There are many reasons, I suppose, but certainly prominent among them is the fact that we have bought into the lie that our value is determined by our usefulness. We think that if we're gifted at

The Bible says that value in a human person is not earned but given. You are loved and valued by God. This is proven by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for you—to destroy death and the grave and to unite you with him now and forever.

The consistent message of the Bible on this topic is that God loves you with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3). Because he has created you, he has invested you with meaning and worth apart from what you do. Passages as familiar as John 3:16,

something, or if people look to us for advice, or if people think highly of us, or think we're smart, or pretty, or athletic, or techy, or influential, that this means we have greater value than others. At the same time we think that if we are lacking in any of these

qualities, then we must be of lesser worth. We often swing between these poles—sometimes on a daily basis! The Catechism teaches (and the Bible confirms) that all human life is God-given and therefore God-infused with value and meaning. As Psalm 100:3 says, “It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.” Despite what our culture assumes, it’s important for us to remember that no one exists apart from the mind, hand, provision, and graciousness of God. Every discussion of the question of the value and worth of a person should start first with God and his thoughts. God has no varsity and junior-varsity teams. He has no upper-, middle-, and lower-class Christians. He makes no distinction between prized tools and worn-out or useless tools. In the mystery of his abundant love and grace, God delights in each life he has created, no matter what stage and

phase of life it is in, and regardless of what that person is able to contribute to his/her existence.

If we ever doubt God’s love for us, or if we ever wonder how it is that he can think “thoughts of love and blessing” for someone who is so useless and broken, we ought to lift our eyes to Jesus on the cross and hear him say, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1). We who are created by God in his image are also given the “right to become children of God” as we “receive him [and] believe in his name” (John 1:12).

The Bible says that value in a human person is not earned but given (Genesis 1:31; Psalm 8; Ephesians 2:8-9). You are loved and valued by God. This is proven by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for you—to

destroy death and the grave and to unite you with him now and forever.

Thoughts of love and blessing indeed!

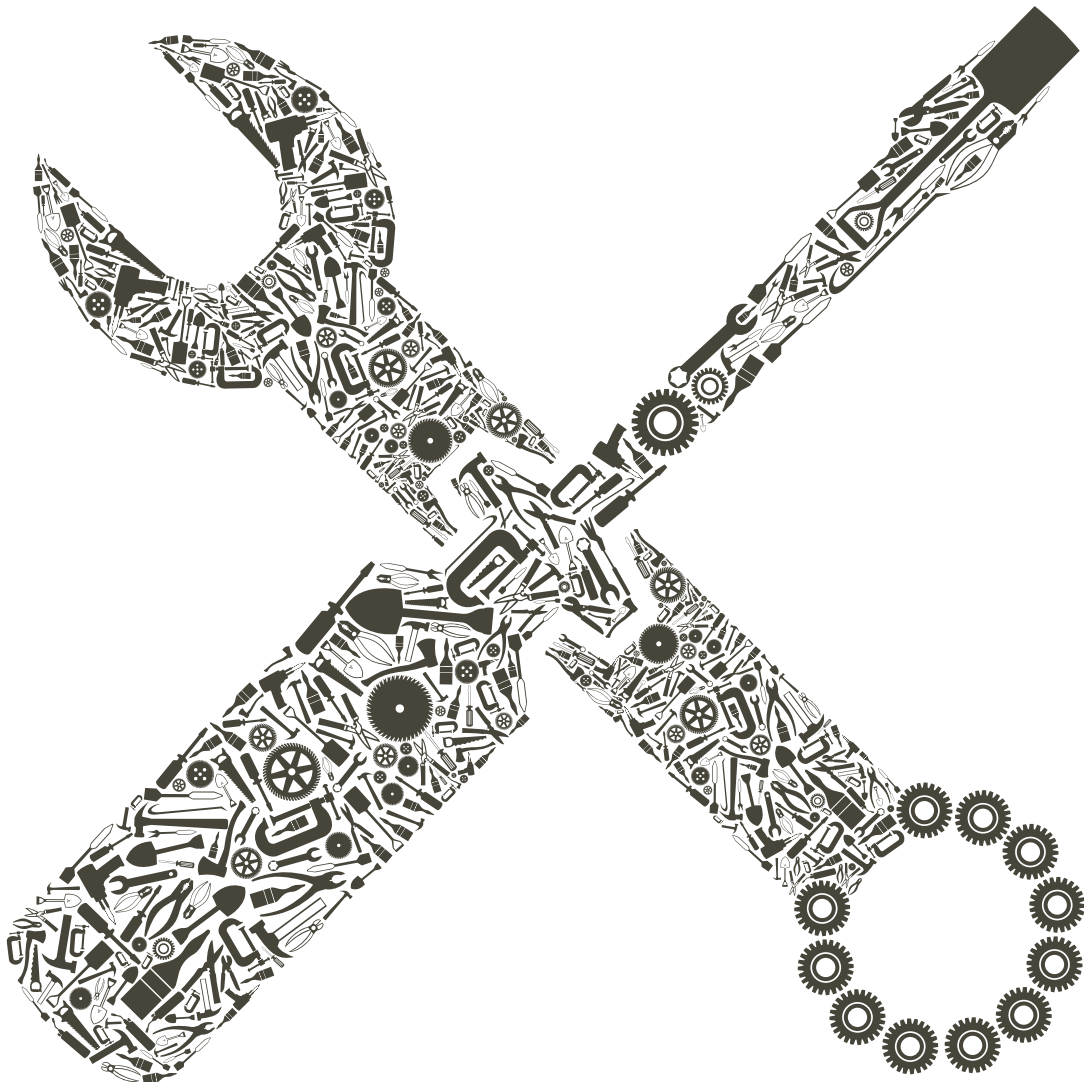
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ON MISSION

LBIM VISION
NATHANAEL S.

One time Jesus' disciple Philip wanted to see God. I would like to see God too. I think it is a very human desire. I see so much that is negative. Every day I see sickness and suffering. I see perversion and hatred. I see death. Sometimes I also see love and joy, but like Philip, I would really love to see God. He would make sense of all the rest.

So Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us" (John 14:8). Wouldn't it be fantastic to know what God looks like? I think this is a good desire. Jesus' answer to this desire is very surprising: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." It must have been incredible to know Jesus...

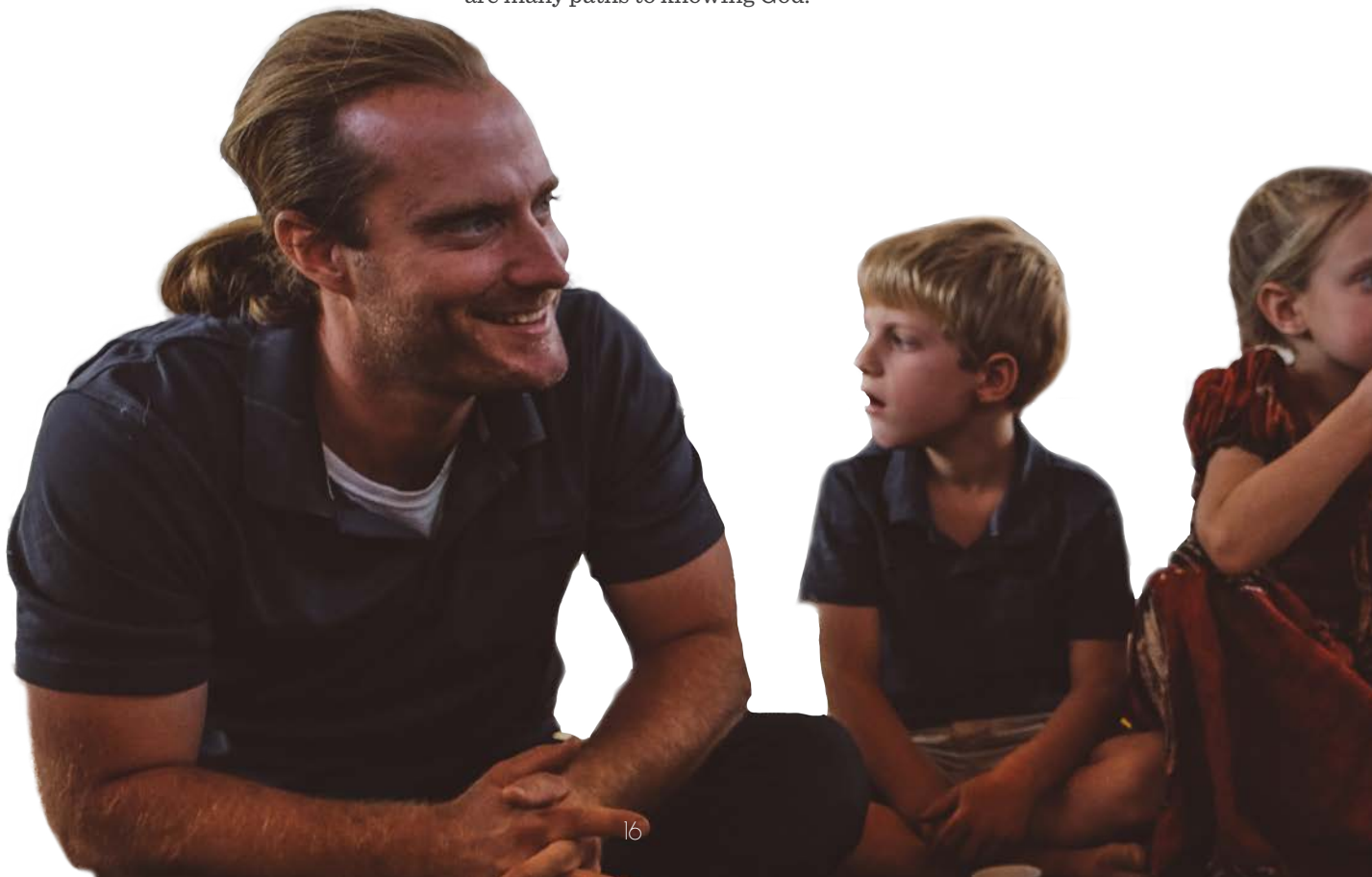
But you and I haven't seen Jesus, so how do we see the Father? The truth is that God likes to show himself, but not just to anyone. Not just any eyes can see the holy God. He shows himself in ways that only the eyes of faith can see. He shows himself in his story. In fact, we do see Jesus—just the way God wants us to—because we have his story. And we do see God, just the way he wants to be seen. That's why Jesus, when he was telling parables (stories!) would say "Whoever has ears, let them hear" (Matthew 13:9). He is saying, "Don't you SEE?"

I work in the country of Chad with my wife and children. We are here to tell Jesus' story so that people can SEE him and know the Father. The people we live among are Muslims. Some people might say that Muslims already know God, because there are many paths to knowing God.

"After all," their argument goes, "who are we to judge someone else's faith? Aren't they just as sincere in their faith as I am in mine?"

There are certainly similarities between Islam and Christianity: We both believe in one God, Creator of all things, and we talk about a lot of the same prophets, like Adam and Noah, Abraham, David, Solomon and, yes, Jesus. So what's the difference? Well, it all depends on what story you're telling.

We are in Chad telling a story of Creation, how God made all things in six days and called it all "very good." There's something in that story that Muslims find very surprising—and in fact, so do I, every time I read it! It's on day six of Creation in Genesis



1:26a. “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image.’” Shocking, isn’t it? Then it’s confirmed in verse 27: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

But I wonder, do you SEE God’s image when you look at yourself? I tell my neighbors, “I have brought you God’s Word in your own language, because God created you with love in his heart, and he wants you to know his story.” Muslims don’t know that they are created in God’s image. And you can’t know, unless you hear the story. So we’re here to tell it. We’ve gone to great lengths to have the Creation story illustrated and translated into the local language and recorded so that everyone—and I mean EVERYONE—can know the story, and SEE God.

But we’re not stopping with the story of Creation. Because soon after Creation people lost the ability to see God’s image. They disobeyed God, rejecting his loving care for them. As a result, when they looked at themselves, instead of seeing God’s image, they saw nakedness. You can read that story in Genesis 3. And that story, also, we have

translated, illustrated and recorded in this people’s language. Because how do you see the truth about God if you can’t even see the truth about yourself? And because they need to hear the rest of the story.

The rest of the story is what Jesus said to Philip: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” The Muslims know a little bit about Jesus. Their holy book, the Qur’an, says that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. But the rest of their story is not much like the story of Jesus in the Bible. The Qur’an says that Jesus performed a lot of miracles, but that he did not die. It says that God took him straight up into heaven. This might sound pretty cool, but our story of Jesus reveals him as the perfect image of God. It’s a story of his death on a cross of torture in order to destroy the shame of our sin. It’s a story of his resurrection from the dead to create a new humanity in the image of God! Want to hear the best part? He gives to you and me that new, restored, re-created humanity—the very image of God—when we hear the story and embrace its truth.

Don’t you SEE? It ALL depends on what story you tell.

You see God, because you see Jesus in his story. And when you see Jesus,

you see yourself—the new re-created you—in love and peace and joy. This is the story we’ve just got to tell. Muslims don’t know it, Hindus don’t know it, Jews don’t know it, lots and lots of Americans and Canadians don’t know it, and the people of Chad that we live among don’t know it. So they don’t see Jesus, and they don’t see God. Which means they don’t know themselves—as his very image.

So we’re doing our very best to tell that story to people in Chad. But the eyes of faith are kind of funny: most of the time they’re completely blind. Only God’s Spirit can open them. Please pray for the people of Chad. And tell the story!

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Nathanael S. is a Lutheran Brethren Missionary.



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Contact: LBIM@CLBA.org*



IPOINT

Register online: www.ipoint.org

Sr. High Camps at Inspiration Point

SH1 - July 1-5, 2018 | SH2 - July 29 - August 2, 2018
Grades: 9-12

Get ready to go deep. Late-night worship services, adventure course, TAG (time alone with God), and Bible studies on the pontoon provide plenty of opportunities to grow in your faith. Sr. High camp continues to feature all of your camp favorites like the waterfront, campfires, Gaslight Theater, Christ Hike, and Rabbit Hunt. Whether it is your first time at camp or your tenth, you won't want to miss IPoint this summer.



TUSCARORA

Register online: www.tuscarora.org

Identify

June 15-17, 2018
Young Adults-18 or older

Grow in faith and connect with your peers. Speaker - Erick Sorensen.

Teen Week

July 22-28, 2018
Grades: 7-11

High school students are invited for the experience of a lifetime at Teen Week. Focus on God without the distractions of everyday life.

Summer Camp Counseling

For those who are looking to dedicate a week or two of their summer to leading children and teens to the Lord—apply to be a counselor for the Junior Week, July 8-14, or Teen Week, July 22-28.

ON SUICIDE
**WITH USAF CHAPLAIN (RET.)
 — MICHAEL HEUER —**

Young Adults Retreat
 November 9-11, 2018
 College Age to Late 20s

Flag football, good conversations around a cup of coffee, late-night board games and incredible times of worship with other college students and young adults are just a few of the highlights of this event.



We can follow God’s patient example with people who feel so hopeless they want to die. Here are practical ways to intervene:

- Watch for signs that someone could have thoughts of suicide: withdrawing from friends and family, mood swings, talking or texting about not wanting to live or not troubling people anymore, changes in personal grooming, performance, or social activities, and more. Alcohol or drug misuse is another important warning sign. Depressed people may try to self-medicate with alcohol or drugs to lessen their personal pain, but misusing alcohol or drugs can distort judgment and make suicidal acts more likely.

- Ask clearly and directly about suicide. Mention the warning signs you’ve noticed when asking the question. For example, “I’ve noticed you’re not hanging out with people anymore, and you seem quiet and sad all the time. Are you thinking about suicide?” Ask directly; don’t try to soften the question by being vague. When we ask clearly, people thinking about suicide usually feel relieved that we might actually understand and be able to help. But when we’re vague, they may feel it really isn’t safe for them to talk about their thoughts of suicide.

- Listen to their stories. Encourage them to talk about their reasons for considering suicide. Just talking about it, instead of keeping it secret, may relieve some inward stress, helping them feel more hopeful and less suicidal. Do not tell them suicide is a sin, or quote a series of Bible verses. Most believers already know the Bible says God is loving and forgiving, and that suicide is a bad choice. Preaching instead of listening can make them feel even worse. They may perceive this as invalidation; that you really don’t understand their pain or hopelessness. But almost everyone thinking about suicide is

also at the same time uncertain about suicide. Most actually want to find a way to keep living, but don’t know how. They just want to stop the pain they’re feeling, or at least make it manageable.

- Don’t leave them alone; take them to a trained helper as soon as possible. People considering suicide need a network of people who can discreetly help them to stay safe. Take them to a school counselor or other caregiver, a spiritual leader trained in suicide intervention skills, or a hospital emergency room. You can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 24 hours a day at 800-273-TALK (8255) to find assistance for someone you’re helping or even for yourself.

- Learn suicide intervention skills. People who aren’t professionals can learn how to intervene to save someone’s life from emotional and spiritual injuries that could result in suicide. Programs such as “safeTALK” (a four-hour course) and “ASIST” (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, a two-day course) teach people how to intervene to save a life. For more information, view the Living Works website at www.livingworks.net. People thinking about suicide will more likely tell someone they know, rather than seek a professional caregiver on their own. Friends and family are the first line of defense against suicide. If you keep your eyes, ears, and heart open to the cries of people in distress, you may be able to save a life!

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Chaplain, Colonel Michael H. Heuer, USAF (Retired) is a Clinical Fellow of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) and a certified trainer with Living Works Education for the ASIST and safeTALK suicide prevention programs. He holds M.A., M.Ed., and Ph.D. degrees and is an ordained pastor in the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.



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