

Faith & Fellowship

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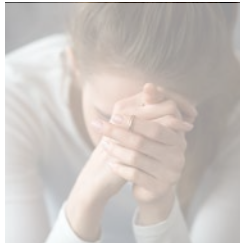
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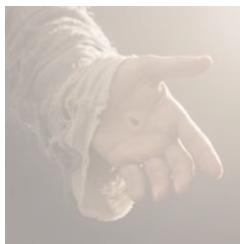
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Quiet Moments

Email prayer requests to: pray@clba.org

Leap for Joy

TROY TYSDAL



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A few years ago, I was approached by a couple considering an abortion. They wanted a pastor’s opinion, so I gave them one. I told them that God values life—so much so that he sent his one and only Son to be crucified for the sins of the world. The young couple seemed conflicted. “But, it’s legal!” replied the young man.

About a year later, the governor of my state vetoed a bill requiring doctors to ask women seeking an abortion if they would first like to see an ultrasound. I watched on social media as several friends rejoiced over the veto—with one friend writing, “I’ve never been so proud to live in this state!”

These comments came from intelligent people, but intelligent people who have been deceived. The Scriptures

tell us that it is God who knits a child together (Psalm 139:13), and even that the infant John the Baptist leapt for joy in his mother’s womb when he first heard the voice of Mary—the mother of his Lord (Luke 1:44).

As the Church, we are created to stand against evil. We are created to speak truth... and forgiveness. The truth is that abortion ends the life of a human being, and we should be unwavering in our opposition to it. But that is not the end of the story. We have been given the gift of Christ, and the power of Christ can wash our sins away.

Perhaps that is the message you need to hear today—it is the message that all sinners need. Whatever your sin, no matter how big or how small, the blood of Jesus is enough.

May your soul leap for joy—for your Savior has come.

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.

His Mercy is Great

RICH IVERSON

I was standing outside the abortion clinic in the fall of the year. It was Wednesday, abortion day, which meant about twenty women would enter the clinic and end the lives of their unborn children. We were a group of fifteen people, standing in protest outside this clinic, and praying against the injustice of what was happening inside. Some of us were urging these young women to change their minds, offering to help them make a life-affirming choice.

One young woman approached the clinic, her head down, her hands covering her ears, as she walked toward a decision that she would live with for the rest of her life. I felt such sorrow for this young woman. What voices does she hear as she lies down at night? Does she understand that the Lover of her soul has nothing but grace for her? I know the destroyer of souls longs for her to remain in bondage to lies of death and shame.

In a different venue, I listened as six post-abortive women shared their stories of loss and healing. They told how God had freed them from the lies that kept them in shame for years. It was raw, painful, and beautiful, as these women told how the good news had set them free. Jesus forgives sinners!

One woman told how she had bought the lie that an abortion would solve her problems—that she would be able to continue on with her life as though nothing had happened. Satan was the deceiver, telling her that abortion was nothing to worry about, that she could get on with her life as it was before, if she would just end her pregnancy. She remembers hearing



Andrii Yalanskyi/Stock

that voice of deception as she was in the abortion clinic before she ended the life of her unborn child. Then immediately after the abortion, while recovering in the clinic, Satan switched tactics, and began to accuse her. She heard lies like, “You have done what is unforgivable” and “No one will ever love you.”

Never before had I heard someone describe the work of our enemy with such clarity and pain. It is what Satan does. First he deceives us into sin, and then he continues with his lies, accusing us afterwards. He has come to kill and destroy, while Jesus has come to give us life.

We speak against the lies of the deceiver because we love people. We refuse to buy the lie that to be pro-life means you are anti-women. We speak against the lies of the deceiver who says that the cross

of Christ is not enough for our sin. His mercy is great and his love is relentless. He loves us with passion—the passion of One dying for his lost children. We have the privilege of walking with others and telling them this freeing message of grace and truth.

Rev. Rich Iverson is the Associate Pastor for Faith @ Home at Bethel Lutheran Church in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.



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Living with Abortion

ANONYMOUS

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 when 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 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.

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 saw 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

Help and Healing

MELINDA GARDNER

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.”

Psalm 139:13

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.

This article was originally printed in identity magazine issue #002, summer 2018.

It was called *Whatever Happened to the Human Race*. Back in 1980, it changed my life. Bethesda Lutheran Brethren Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin showed this five-part film series that brought to light crucial issues of human dignity and what happens to a culture when we don’t value human life. The series consisted of education on abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia.

The part educating us on abortion was particularly life-changing for me. I had just had my first child, which is perhaps why the information about abortion was even more distressing for me. How can we live in a world where we intentionally get rid of an unborn child?

The authors of *Whatever Happened to the Human Race*, Dr. Francis Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, wrote this: “We stand today on the edge of a great abyss. At this crucial moment, choices are being made and thrust on us that will for many years to come affect the way people are treated. We want to try and help tip the scales on the side of those who believe that individuals are unique and special and have great dignity.”

If I believe abortion is wrong—that it is the taking of a life—I need to do more than just say that. I need to compassionately educate and support people considering that choice. I need to be there through a pregnancy and for as long as that parent needs me. I need to provide help and hope. I need to share the love of Jesus with those he puts in my path. I need to help women who have chosen abortion find healing and forgiveness and understanding.

I’ve now been involved in a pregnancy center for nearly 38 years. It has brought incredible opportunities. We continue to serve and make a difference in our community. We provide pregnancy testing, education, long-term support, and mentoring. We provide post-abortion counseling. Our “Earn While You Learn” program teaches about pregnancy, parenting, life skills, and more. Our clients earn points to purchase diapers, baby clothing, car seats, cribs, and much more.

All these years later, much of what the

film series predicted has become reality. Our culture has changed. The issue used to be, “Is it a baby?” With current medical technology we can see the baby in the womb. The issue now is about women’s rights.

Pro-life apologist 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.

The abortion debate is an important issue that affects everyone in some way. It has to do with our sexual behavior and the way we treat one another. It has to do with the value of human life. It has to do with our relationships with each other. It has to do with how we treat disabled people, elderly, sick and dying people, and so much more.

I recently learned of two more women asking for post-abortion help from us. They are part of the reason that I continue to show up after all these years. I get to be part of helping women through a healing process and finding forgiveness and joy. I know these women and their stories. I know there is forgiveness and peace in Jesus.

How can you make a difference? Are you able to articulate your beliefs about this issue to your children? Do they know what you believe, and why? Do they know you’ll support and love them no matter what? Have you considered volunteering or financially supporting your local Pregnancy Care Center? Let’s make abortion unthinkable.

Melinda Gardner lives in Eau Claire, Wisconsin and is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Brethren Church. She is the Executive Director of Apple Pregnancy Care Center.

*Pregnant? Need Help? Visit:
www.care-net.org/find-a-pregnancy-center*



Adrienne, Willow, and Will Droogsma.

Walking Home

ADRIENNE DROOGSMA

“I’m sorry, your daughter has no brain or skull. She is not compatible with life outside the womb. She will likely pass in utero, during birth, or minutes to hours after she is born.”

Time stopped. My body went numb and I struggled to take a breath with what felt like collapsed lungs. I sank down next to our bed and wrapped my arms around my swollen belly. I felt a kick, kick, and a roll. There was life growing there. How could they say she was going to die?

All I could do was sit and cry. Family was called and in minutes they were by our sides. No words were spoken; it was a silence I won’t soon forget.

Peace.

It was not a voice that spoke to me next. Peace washed over my broken soul—

peace that could only have come from a loving God. A name soon entered my empty mind. Aunt Koren, my aunt who had walked the road of childhood cancer and death with her son. One quick phone call and the lives of two broken mothers collided. She shared with me a poem that had been shared with her—*A Child of Mine*, by Edgar Guest. Little did I know that this poem would set the stage for our daughter’s walk *Home*.

Thirty-six hours later my husband and I walked out of the specialist’s office with our daughter’s fatal diagnosis: Anencephaly. No words will ever describe the feeling of carrying life and impending death. We decided to name our daughter Willow Marie.

By worldly standards our daughter was

broken, her life terminal. At 20 weeks pregnant we were presented with two options; termination (abortion), or carry to term with the knowledge that she could die at any time.

The Bible is where we went for answers. It was there that our beliefs were solidified. Our daughter’s life was important, no matter how long or short. God knew Willow before she was even formed, and her days were set before she was even a thought in our minds (Psalm 139:13-16, Jeremiah 1:5). God created her. Her life was a gift. Her life had purpose. She was our heavenly warrior. Ending her life was not our choice to make.

Now what? What do we do now with this life we were gifted? What do we do

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me...”

Psalm 23:4

with the knowledge of impending death? The last part of *A Child of Mine* says this:

Now will you give her all your love,
Nor think the labor vain,
Nor hate me when I come
To take her home again.

I fancied that I heard them say,
‘Dear Lord, Thy will be done!’
For all the joys Thy child shall bring,
The risk of grief we’ll run.

We’ll shelter her with tenderness,
We’ll love her while we may,
And for the happiness we’ve known,
Forever grateful stay.

But should the angels call for her,
Much sooner than we’ve planned.
We’ll brave the bitter grief that comes,
And try to understand.

If there was a choice to be made, it was not life or death, but love. To be grateful for the time given and not bitter for the time that would be taken.

“And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me’” (Matthew 25:40). Helpless, defenseless, and deemed non-compatible with life, our daughter was “the least of these.”

Earlier in the summer I had set a walking challenge for my kids and me. From that, God grew a journey greater than I could have ever imagined. We could do nothing for Willow’s physical body; we could only love her and cherish her and live life with her. However, we serve an almighty God, and even though we could do nothing physically for Willow, we could ask people to do something spiritually.

We created a group on Facebook,¹ not

only to share our daughter’s unique story, but also to ask others to join us in helping our daughter live a full life in the short time she would have by remembering Willow in prayer as they experienced life. With that, “Walking with Willow” was born.

We stated: “Please join us in celebrating Willow Marie’s life by ‘Walking with Willow.’ Share your miles, stories, adventures, and pray for Willow as you go. Each step, each mile, and each adventure is our way of walking by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).”

In five months, over 2,000 people joined to help walk our Willow Home. As they remembered Willow through prayer, she walked—in a sense—in every US state and in several other countries. She climbed mountains, and swam in oceans. She walked through parks on evening strolls, and ran a Triathlon. She walked dozens of beaches while the sun slowly set, and watched the sun rise on the morning commute. She packaged meals for starving children, and handed out meals to the homeless. She went to camp, and walked the streets as part of a marching band. All this, as people lived and served God with thoughts and prayers for our daughter in their hearts.

Not every day was extraordinary, but as my husband wrote: “The mundane is what binds our days, years, minutes and moments... God calls us to embrace these things, and to pursue godliness with contentment (1 Timothy 6:6), and count it as gain. Maybe he does that because he knows there are more good days than great days. More sad days than devastating ones. More days filled with the mundane, than the extraordinary. In either case, our joy is complete in Christ and in his love and sacrifice for us.”

The days passed, then weeks, then

months. Willow continued to grow. Through the prayers of many and by the grace of God we walked into our hospital at 40 weeks to start the induction process.² It was time to see the face of our heavenly warrior. To see the feet that had walked so many miles without ever touching the ground. To see the hands that had touched so many hearts.

We were blessed to have nearly 16 hours with Willow before God took her hand from ours. We had walked as far as we could. Willow passed peacefully in the arms of her earthly father. In nine months and 16 hours our daughter had lived an extraordinary life. She is forever in our hearts and because of God’s gift of eternal life she is forever *Home*. We have no regrets. We will be together again.

“God is good. God is faithful. We say in unison and in truth ‘praise God from whom all blessings flow!’ Willow was and is our blessing, and we praise God for her life. Rest easy, my sweet, sweet girl. You are treasured. You are loved. You are forever *Home*.”

—Will Droogsma

Adrienne Droogsma was raised in Menomonie, Wisconsin and grew up attending Oak Ridge Lutheran Brethren Church. Adrienne currently lives in River Falls, WI. She is the blessed mother of three beautiful children and wife of a worship leader.

Sources

1. www.facebook.com/groups/1129206037254973/
2. See <http://www.anencephaly.info/e/report.php> for a study on anencephaly births.



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Resurrection

DANIEL BERGE

“Christians believe in reincarnation... they confess it whenever they say their creeds.” As my World Religions professor spoke these words to our university class almost 20 years ago, I was a bit dumbfounded. My first reaction was to think, “No, we don’t! That’s crazy.”

But in a way, he was right. In the Apostles’ Creed we say we believe “in the resurrection of the dead.” In the Nicene Creed we confess, “We look for the resurrection of the dead.” The Athanasian Creed expands on this even more! Even though I’d said these words many times, I never realized what I was saying.

Now, I don’t think it’s best to use the term *reincarnation* to describe this, as that professor did. But as I continue to study God’s Word, I am surprised how

little I’ve recognized and appreciated this important truth in my life.

I presently teach New Testament at Lutheran Brethren Seminary, and I encourage my students to pay attention to how the New Testament authors speak about our future hope. This semester I have a student who’s writing a paper on this topic. As he works through each New Testament book, he’s consistently finding that we are not really told that our Christian hope is to die and go to heaven. Have you noticed this? Although we often speak in those terms, the Word actually tells us to look forward to the resurrection from the dead. Our hope isn’t an escape into death; our hope is bodily life! Unfortunately, I think there are many Christians like me, who have (unintentionally) shrunk the gospel by

missing out on the importance of our hope of resurrection.

This truth gives much more depth to our understanding of life now, and our future hope. At creation, God called it all good. Yet in Romans 8:18–23, Paul tells us that all creation is actually waiting for our physical redemption as well! Our hope isn’t just an escape from this creation, it’s tied to the hope of God’s entire creation—his “good” creation that’s been “subjected to futility” because of our sin. Too often I’ve been able to separate my spiritual life from the way I live in this creation, because I was planning on escaping it. But biblically, I see that my spiritual life is intertwined with my physical body as well as the rest of God’s physical creation. All of my life, in all its aspects, should reflect God’s care for all

***“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”***

Revelation 22:20

creation. There’s a comprehensiveness to our life of faith that I had missed before when I had separated “spirituality” too far from “physicality.”

Likewise, I find that I now have greater hope for the future than I had realized before—although it often comes through pain. As I’ve seen the physical bodies of loved ones wither from their prime—even failing to the point of death—I have a hope for physical restoration to life that’s based on the sure Word of God! Honestly, this gives me the freedom to mourn a bit more deeply at death. I don’t need to quickly flee to the “he’s in a better place” platitude, as if I should deny the sting of death. Rather, my Christian faith confirms my mourning heart—death is an enemy, not an escape.

That deep mourning is not the end, though. It’s the point from which my hope expands! Jesus is no longer on the cross. His grave is no longer sealed. He has conquered death! Therefore, the mourning of death is overcome by Christ’s victory over death! We really do have a message that’s relevant to every single part of this creation. Our Lord is the Lord of Life—the giver of life. He’s also the one who will restore his creation to the eternal, abundant life we deeply long for.

This is the business of our God, to bring

the hope of life into the broken creation that longs for it. And he works through us. He works through the church planter who goes to bring God’s life to hurting people in new places. He works through those who have grieved, yet found hope in Christ. As they share their stories, we are pointed to our true hope. And God works in and through you. You live in a world that’s “subjected to futility.” You live in a world that groans to be set free from its bondage to corruption. You live among people who face death, and many don’t have true hope in the face of that death.


So live your life accordingly. Celebrate life where it’s found. Marvel at God’s creation. Care for his creation. And especially, as you live with the people of his creation, care for them. Spiritually, yes. Physically, of course! And as you find them struggling with the pain of death, the pain of deterioration, the pain of corruption—remember you’ve got the hope of life to share with them! Tell them about the apostles who no longer feared death because they had seen the crucified Jesus risen from the grave! Tell them that the fear of death within them is well-founded, but has an answer in Christ. There is hope in the risen Lord who’s coming again. Tell them—in the words of the Nicene Creed—that you

“look forward to the resurrection from the dead,” and they can share in that hope too.

“Christians believe in reincarnation?” I wouldn’t say it that way, but I should thank that professor for pointing me to something I had missed in my faith. We don’t believe in reincarnation in a cyclical way, as if we return again and again to cycles of life and death. Instead, our hope is linear, it’s going somewhere. We look forward to the return of our Lord in glory, where he will restore all creation, and resurrect our corruptible earthly bodies to glorious bodies for eternal life. As Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:18, “... encourage one another with these words.”

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Dr. Daniel Berge Ph.D. serves Lutheran Brethren Seminary as its professor of New Testament.



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CLB Shared Ministry: Contribution Report

88%

\$2,500,019

Received Through 4/25/19

\$2,825,000

2018-19 Contribution Goal

The CLB Fiscal Year Ends April 30, 2019

Abortion is a Symptom

ROY HEGGLAND

Outrage! Anger! Murder! We may struggle with these and many other thoughts as we see the reports of the laws that have been proposed, and even passed, by state legislatures allowing the killing of babies up to and even after the moment of birth! The brutality and brazen evil across our country demonstrated by abortion may at times overwhelm us. But should we be surprised that so many people condone it?

The culture of death we see permeating our world is not new. In fact, our first parents, Adam and Eve, when faced with the choice between life and death, chose death! Just like those today who excuse abortion on the grounds that other “rights” are more important than the right to life, Adam and Eve chose to believe a lie from the mouth of Satan that their “right” to be like God was more important than their right to life. And they indeed had the right to life in the real sense of what life is. Ever since their choice to give up the right to life, we have all been under the curse of death. By nature, we all choose death over life.

What we see being played out in our world regarding abortion is a symptom of the underlying issue: the old Adam loves darkness rather than light. The Apostle John wrote, “Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil” (3:19).

Adam and Eve believed the lie that they were the center of life and deserved to be equal to the One who created them. They chose to disbelieve that God is the light and life of the world. Ever since, we have all been blinded by that same lie. “We” are the most important. Our “rights” trump everything else.

It is only when we understand that life comes from the *One* who is life, that we start to see the grotesque nature of abortion. When we see that physical life is a precious gift from God, we will place an extremely high value on the life of the yet-to-be-born. All the other so-called “rights” that are held in such high esteem by our society and are used to justify abortion—they fade into insignificance when the true nature of life is understood.

Life is extremely important to God! He

is life! Not only has God given us our physical life, he desires to give us eternal life... forever in Christ. God desires that no one perish.

We possess the gift that transforms people and transports them from the culture of death into everlasting life. That gift is the gospel, “...the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...” (Romans 1:16, ESV). All who have received the gift of physical life desperately need the gift of eternal life in Christ.

Will you bring that message to those near you? Will you give to our shared ministries so that Jesus Christ, the Word of Life, can be brought to people all over the world?

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

Support the CLB:

www.clba.org/giving

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Birch Hills, SK S0J 0G0



Changes Proposed in Women's Ministries

See changes at:
www.CLBA.org/WMCLB-2019-bylaws

CHERYL OLSEN

Change is good! Change is exciting! Or, change is hard... and bad! Realistically, change is inevitable—it's our attitudes or responses that make it bad. Life *is* change! It's growth, maturing, learning, adapting. Yet we need stability, and we treasure the fact that God never changes! He helps us to survive and grow in the midst of change.

This is also true for our national women's organization. The WMCLB Constitution states that we will have an Annual Convention. We integrate this event with the CLB Biennial Convention. However, on alternate years, it is more difficult to integrate with Regional Biennial Conventions. This, at times results in squeezing a speaker, updates, and annual meeting into a brief noon luncheon. Should we change our WMCLB Convention to correspond to our synod's Convention schedule?

This is just one of the proposed Bylaws changes that will be voted on at this year's convention, June 1, 2019, held at a noon luncheon during the Pacific Region Biennial, at Peace Lutheran Brethren Church, Olympia, Washington. You are invited to be there! Read the complete proposed Bylaws changes at www.wmclb.org or www.clba.org/wmclb-2019-bylaws or email questions to wmclbcontact@gmail.com.

We were presented with planned changes in a VISION 2020 presentation at last year's convention. Here's an update from the Women's Ministry Team on how far things have come since then.

VISION 2020: UPDATE

Seven key goals were identified on the current (interim) Strategic Plan for the WMCLB which covered a two-year time period June 2018–June 2020. Four of those goals are well ahead of schedule.



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1. Virtual Bible studies (2) are currently being set up. We have a number of women who are interested (from a variety of age groups and stages of life). Some are excited they can wear pajama pants and enjoy tea while attending. Some are thrilled they don't have to worry about getting a sitter. Some are glad they don't have to brave snow and ice to attend.
2. We have successfully tested and begun the process of meeting missionaries through technology. All involved so far have enjoyed these new connections.
3. The WMCLB Team has now met several times through the use of technology. A few bumps at the beginning were expected, but we are managing to find our way through those.
4. There is a proposed restructure of WMCLB that is completed. The proposed new Bylaws will be voted on at the upcoming 2019 WMCLB Convention. Proposed changes to the

Constitution will also be presented, to be voted on at the WMCLB Convention in 2020.

Two future goals are not yet scheduled: assessment of all our resources and an update to the strategic plan. One goal ("get women in the Word") is ongoing.

"One in Christ" is the theme of the June 1, 2019 WMCLB Convention Luncheon. It's based on Jesus' prayer, "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one" (John 17:22).

May we work united, through change, to more effectively grow in Christ, and reach others for Christ at home and around the world!

Cheryl Olsen is the Faith & Fellowship correspondent for WMCLB.



Visit: www.WMCLB.org



Regional Pastors (L to R): Phil Heiser, Gary Witkop, Warren Geraghty, Stan Olsen, and Roger Olson.

NAM Restructure

PRESIDENT PAUL LARSON

One sure trait of living things is the *desire to live*; it envelops a host of urges consciously pursued and subconsciously automatic—from eating to working to breathing. At its most poignant expression this desire to live, particularly when threatened, manifests itself as something called the *fight for survival*.

Yet alongside this meta-trait of *living things* is a second, equal in potency: the *desire to proliferate*. Whether biologically or by influence or legacy, an essential part of *living* is to seek to leave behind *more life*. Especially in the higher orders of created life, this urge of the living goes beyond having offspring, and swells with

the unremitting, even wanton devotion to both protect and nurture one's offspring until that progeny are launched into their own fruitfulness. Creatures and cultures, organisms and organizations, are judged by which urge, especially under great strain, takes precedence.

In the summer of 2017 our Regional Pastors and I gathered for our annual summit in Minot, North Dakota. During that summit we discussed the state of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren (CLB), the priority needs and opportunities before us in North American Mission, and also the role of Regional Pastor to engage those priorities. It had been nearly a decade since our Home Missions

department had been restructured into the department of North American Mission (NAM), with five regional pastor positions serving its mission, with a strong focus on facilitating pastoral health at its core.

At our summit we discussed how the needs of our congregations and the challenges of our mission context had morphed since that initial restructuring and sharpened in clarity to us. We noted that we no longer were hearing the same level of concern we once heard regarding the isolation and needs of our pastors. We believed that to be a positive sign about the work which our Regional Pastors have engaged, but we also sensed that it

Then Jesus came to them and said, “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.”

Matthew 28:18-20

was a time to reevaluate the best structure of the department. We desired to address the changing mission opportunities in our communities and culture, and we asked the question, “Does our current structure best facilitate our desire to be a disciple-making movement?”

These initial conversations led to a series of meetings with the CLB Mission Team, Council of Directors, CLB clergy, other ministry leaders, and regional leadership of the CLB. In those meetings mission priorities were discussed, organizational restructure drafts were presented, and much engagement over feedback was processed. All of this culminated in the CLB Council of Directors voting at its Spring 2019 meeting (April 11-12) to restructure our NAM department from five regional pastor positions into two full-time positions—Director of NAM and an Associate Director (Mission Mobilizer).

These would be focused on two central mission-advancing priorities: congregational vitality and congregational reproduction (church planting). Also, in this restructure, an Associate Director for Congregational and Pastoral Support would be added in the Office of the President to serve the current needs and transitions of CLB congregations and pastors. This re-staffing allows us to prioritize personnel and financial resources more decidedly on proactive initiatives that will help shape us into the disciple-making movement we believe the Lord is calling us to be.

Because these structural and staffing shifts also entail constitutional changes, the COD’s action was to vacate the five regional pastor positions effective June

30, 2019, and to provisionally call a Director of NAM and Associate Director to serve the CLB until constitutional amendments can be debated and acted upon at the 2020 biennial convention. This would follow the reading of proposed amendments at this summer’s regional conventions (and the CLB–Canada’s convention next spring).

There is a high calling inherently instilled with God’s gift of life. I suspect that most every one of us—if pressed by circumstance between the *desire to survive* and the *desire to proliferate*; if faced with the choice to sustain our own life, or to give and protect the life of our child or many children—would give ourselves without hesitation to the latter.

Please join me in prayer and gratefulness for our Regional Pastors and their wives: Warren and Cindy Geraghty, Roger and Carol Olson, Stan and Cheryl Olsen, Gary and Deb Witkop, and Phil and Wendy Heiser. Their ministry past and current, and their selfless devotion to the CLB, with vision and commitment to advance our North American Mission, is greatly esteemed and appreciated by myself and the rest of your Council. They are to be affirmed by the Church. Our RPs have selflessly given themselves to this restructuring plan at the cost of their own positions because their desire for the CLB is to see it proliferate, unto the will and glory of God.

I am both invigorated and a bit intimidated by this great shift before us. Please be in prayer for your synodical leadership in these coming months as roles end and beloved colleagues shift into the next seasons of life and ministry God has before them. Pray for new

leaders who will be summoned to lead. And, pray for a wisdom to see, and a tenacity to pursue, the mission priorities that are to be shaped and followed.

As the Old Testament rites of circumcision and Passover pre-echo the new covenant in Christ birthed in baptism and nurtured in the Lord’s Supper, so the earliest repeated commission heard at creation to “be fruitful and multiply” is also forerunner to the commission for God’s people in the re-creation mission of the new covenant: “Go make disciples.” The Church is a living thing. Christ’s body has Christ’s heart. Jesus’ disciples, called to both follow him and make others his disciples, know which *trait of the living* pulsed in the heart of the *One* we follow. Jesus’ gospel for us and through us is sourced in his *desire to proliferate* even more than his *desire to live*. This we see at the cross, and from his cross we see the path forward for the CLB.

Grace and Peace,



Rev. Paul M. Larson, President
Church of the Lutheran Brethren



KisakaMedia/iStock

Cultivate New England

MICHAEL NATALE

Centuries ago, European settlers arrived on the shores of the Northeast United States with the hope of finding religious freedom and liberty rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. As settlers left their homes abroad and settled in North America, this message of liberty in Christ became their theme. All through New England, settlers built communities with the notion that God should be at the center of life in this new land. The sign of the importance of the Church can be seen even today in little white church buildings still standing at the center of our oldest communities.

However, while those beautiful church buildings tell of a time when the message

of Christ was central to life in New England, the sad truth is that many of those churches have closed, and some of those remaining pulpits proclaim ideas other than Christ and Christ crucified. Institutions like Harvard, Yale and Brown—which first existed to train gospel preachers—now seek to silence those who would proclaim the name of Christ. And today, the end result is that New England has become the least religious region in this nation. All six New England states rank in the top 10 least religious states in the US. For Christians who call New England home, this is a sobering fact.

In Scripture, we read that “nothing

is impossible with God.” 1 Peter 2:10 testifies that God takes people who were once not his people and far from him and now he calls them his own. The message of the gospel is that his grace extends to those who have rejected him and to those who have forgotten him! And his call to the Church is to “ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matthew 9:38)—workers who will proclaim the message of sin and grace to those who desperately need to hear it!

This is why Cultivate New England was formed and is seeking to plant churches in New England: New England is one of the most un-churched and de-churched

“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.”

1 Peter 2:10

regions of the US. But in our eyes, this makes it a major mission field in North America! The ground is hard and dry, but we believe that God is able to till the soil of New England and prepare it to receive the seed of the gospel that it might grow and bear much fruit!

OUR STORY:

In 2016, five pastors (Wes Asheim, Evan Langlois, Michael Natale, Ryan Nilsen, and Roger Viksnes) serving the three New England Lutheran Brethren Churches (Bethany Lutheran Brethren Church, Faith Chapel: A Church of the Lutheran Brethren, and Praise Christian Fellowship) began meeting to pray and brainstorm about a possible group ministry venture.

Those pastors then shared this vision with their elder boards, who then agreed to meet together and discuss this opportunity further. The elder boards affirmed the idea and commissioned the pastors to continue working together as a formal Planning Team to explore a potential ministry partnership.

Cultivate New England was born as a ministry initiative of the three churches. It is a partnership between the New England CLB churches that gives us a framework for working together. Our name comes from an agricultural concept: Before you can plant something, you must prepare the soil.

The Planning Team has spent the last three years praying, meeting potential ministry partners, and visiting possible church planting locations. As we met, we visited different towns located between our churches as possible sites, but in the end we felt led by the Holy Spirit to plant the first church in Boston, Massachusetts.

WHY BOSTON?

Boston is a remarkable, growing city—the largest in New England. The

population of Boston is about 675,000, making it the 23rd largest city in the US. There are eight major residential development projects being developed in Boston. The population of the city itself is expected to increase from 675,000 at present to 780,000 by 2020. The greater Boston area has a total population of 4.8 million—the tenth largest metropolitan area in the US. As host to some 250,000 college students, Boston is one of the most intellectually vibrant places in the world, including Harvard University, MIT, and Boston University within its boundaries. Millennials, young families, and immigrants are moving to Boston, all for different reasons.

Given all this, one thing is clear: Boston needs churches. It is estimated that Boston has one 150-member church for every 6,000 people in the city, which is a remarkably low number for the US. Some experts estimate that less than 3% of the population has heard an authentic representation of the gospel. We believe that the CLB, with our New England churches as the vanguard, ought to have a presence in one of the biggest, most densely-populated mission fields in North America. Boston was the epicenter of the spiritual awakenings in the 18th and 19th centuries, and we believe that it can once again influence our entire region through the gospel.

NEXT STEPS & HOW YOU CAN PRAY:

In the coming months, we will build a launch team of excited and energetic individuals who will work together to prepare for this potential church plant in the Boston area. We will also be teaming up with Fifth Act Church Planting. They will help us identify and recruit a planter, and line up training and coaching for him. Once we've called a planter, he will assist us in picking a specific location in the Boston area. It's essential that each step

moving forward be bathed in purposeful prayer, so we are asking each one of you to join us in our efforts by praying for this endeavor. But then again, not only for this endeavor.

Our hope and prayer is that, with this new church plant, the *four* New England CLB churches will plant a fifth church, and then a sixth—and so on until Jesus comes again.

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT:

We at Cultivate New England are specifically focused on seeing churches planted in New England and seeing the Kingdom of God expand throughout Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. However, one of our prayers is that we'll begin seeing other churches, in different regions in the US and Canada, gathering together and doing the same thing we have begun to do: meeting together, encouraging one another, and praying that you might see the Kingdom of God furthered in your area by teaming up and planting new churches.

Rev. Michael Natale is Pastor of Faith Chapel: A Church of the Lutheran Brethren in Cranston, Rhode Island, and serves as chair of Cultivate New England—a partnership of congregations in the Northeast United States working together to plant more Lutheran Brethren churches in New England.



Lutheran Brethren International Mission: Reaching the Unreached.

Reaching the Unreached

ETHAN CHRISTOFFERSON

I wear a blue band on my left wrist that is quite meaningful to me. The words “Reaching the Unreached” are facing me, constantly reminding me of the goal that I desire will shape everything I do. These words guide and challenge me as I set both my daily schedule and my long-term ministry priorities/strategies. I show this slogan to other Christians when they wonder why I choose to tackle some projects and not others.

This phrase raises two questions. First, “Who are the unreached?” One concept is of people living in geographical locations where there are few, if any, Christians and churches. Based on this thinking, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren first sent missionaries to Taiwan in the 1950s, and also currently has missionaries in Chad and Japan. Another understanding of the unreached is ethnic/social/linguistic/cultural groups with very few members

identifying as “Christian.” Based on this, our Lutheran Brethren International Mission team in Taiwan focused ministry solely on the Hakka Chinese for a period of time (1981-2011). In the same vein, LBIM missionaries are currently focusing their efforts on unreached people groups in Chad, and the Japanese have also been identified as an unreached people group.

A second question: “What does ‘reaching’ the unreached look like?” When taking up this task in a particular context, Christians will call, equip, send, and then support people from their midst to go and make disciples. The sent ones relocate to those contexts, learning local languages to share the gospel and make disciples. The senders continue to pray, give, and engage to make these efforts possible.

While the above answers are helpful, they can be nuanced to better guide

ministry to the unreached in today’s complex globalized world.

WHO ARE THE UNREACHED?

Regarding the unreached in our context of Taiwan, we don’t focus as much as we have in the past on: 1) whether unbelievers have Christians and/or churches located in their proximity; or 2) if they belong to certain unreached people groups (e.g., Hakka).

Why not? First, while the lack of a Christian witness in one’s community is a huge barrier, a witness close-at-hand often encounters different barriers that are just as restricting and even harder to isolate/understand/remove. Second, while treating individual non-Christians as members of a “people group” can be useful, such reasoning often leads to assumptions about them that unhelpfully shape ministry efforts to reach them.

Instead, when strategizing outreach in our context, we focus on dealing with barriers to the flow of the gospel. A barrier prevents something from spreading naturally from one point to another. One example of a typical barrier is an existing understanding/belief that keeps an intended recipient from engaging something new. For example, an email from an unknown sender with the subject line “Important Information for You!” may be deleted without opening because the recipient assumes the message to be spam. This assumption is a barrier that keeps the intended receiver from interacting with the email, even if it contains truly critical knowledge.

In addition, we differentiate between “accessible” and “unreached” unbelievers.

1. Accessible unbelievers are those who live behind barriers to the gospel that can be undermined or removed using existing resources, understandings, and methods of outreach. In this vein, email users located behind the “deleting spam” barrier (above) are accessible (rather than unreached) because the barrier blocking messages from getting through to them has already been isolated and understood, and helpful tools/strategies for dealing with this way of thinking (e.g., changing the subject line) are available. It is important to keep in mind though, that just because an email user is accessible, it doesn’t necessarily follow that all important messages sent her way will be received. The developed tools/strategies still need to be activated to breach this barrier so messages can get through.
2. Unreached unbelievers are those who live behind barriers that have not yet been adequately identified and understood, and/or there is a lack of strategies/tools for weakening/removing them.

One such barrier in Taiwan is the perception that conversion to Christianity

means committing social suicide. A convert may be viewed by family/peers as disloyal or shameful, someone to be avoided or cut off. This fear leads many to keep anything connected to Christianity at a distance. Barriers like this prevent the Bible’s powerful words of challenge and of comfort from engaging and shaping the hearts of these unreached.

WHAT DOES “REACHING”

THE UNREACHED LOOK LIKE?

The Holy Spirit uses the Word to help people recognize their sin and come to him. So our primary goal is giving the unreached person opportunities to interact with God’s Word. We work to embed ourselves in communities in Taiwan, where voices speaking for God are weak, unclear, or non-existent and where unaddressed barriers are evident. We live and speak in these contexts in ways that build trust and credibility, and articulate and embody God’s Word.

Planting ourselves in these communities enables us to be more than just armchair evangelists who, despite good intentions, speak in ways that do not connect with unbelievers. Intentionally experiencing life with neighbors in these communities, we seek to learn what the world feels like for them and their strategies for surviving and thriving. We endeavor to build relationships, credibility, and understandings that will enable us to relevantly share God’s perspective within these contexts. When barriers surface, we use the strategies, tools, methods, and understandings we possess to chip away at them.

As we interact with non-Christians, we keep alert for barriers that have gone under the radar. What is causing the person to be unengaged with or unthinkingly critical of our message, even when that message is very well-informed? We work to better understand these barriers and then proactively develop ways to weaken or remove them so that God’s Word can truly get a hearing.

I have been working to better understand this barrier of “conversion to Christianity

equals social suicide.” People have said that Christianity in Taiwan is perceived to have rules that make social relationships too complicated or even impossible. So I’ve been exploring these “rules” and their cultural and biblical contexts. As insights emerge, I share them with others. For example, I recently initiated a conversation among Christians in my circles by preaching a sermon challenging the rule held by some of them that food that has been offered to idols can never be eaten. I have also had discussions on this topic with several unreached friends who live behind the social suicide barrier.

Is God calling you to be more intimately involved in reaching the unreached living around you and at the ends of the earth? Understanding that the voices speaking for God in communities in Chad, Japan, and Taiwan are critically weak and that unaddressed barriers to the gospel are sadly numerous, LBIM is choosing to focus its efforts on reaching the unreached in these places. More voices are urgently needed! Please continue to pray for and join us in this important endeavor.

Dr. Ethan Christofferson Ph.D. and his wife, Sandy, are LBIM missionaries in Taiwan. During his Ph.D. studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Ethan’s understanding of “reaching the unreached” changed significantly. Ethan and Sandy speak both Mandarin and Hakka Chinese and work in the outreach ministries of a local church close to their home in Qionglin. Ethan also works as a researcher in the Research Center for Traditional Chinese Religions & New Religious Movements at China Lutheran Seminary in Hsinchu. He can be contacted at: echristofferson@clba.org.



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



The B. Boys (L to R): Theo, Samuel, Boaz, Zeke, Jonah, and Moses.

Missionary Update

DANNY B.

It was a map on the wall of the LB International Mission office that caught my attention—a map of Chad. I looked at it for a few moments and then started asking questions. Where did the LB mission in Chad first start? Where are the current missionaries working? This was in the early 2000s as the work of our Church was shifting to unreached people groups in northern Chad. Having grown up outside the US, I started thinking that God was calling me to this new area for the gospel.

The idea grew as I finished my undergraduate work until I was fairly convinced I would one day end up in Chad. As Mandy and I talked about marriage and whether God had a plan for us together, we saw that we both felt led to mission work in Chad. Through seminary and a few years after, we continued moving in that direction until we were finally on the way to help bring the gospel to the people of Chad. Even with a medical detour a few years ago for our fourth son, we were still able to eventually move to a town in Chad. Fifteen years of preparation and planning for me, and eleven for both of us together, and we were living and learning among an unreached people group.

Our plan was to return to Chad after our home assignment ended this March and get back to the village to continue in ministry there. However, we have medical concerns again. Our sixth son, Boaz, was diagnosed with Biliary Atresia in January, meaning that his liver is not able to function properly due to problems with the bile ducts. A surgery to attempt to correct the problem seemed to be working at first, and then just wasn't. So, we have relocated to Minneapolis/St. Paul for his medical care. The outlook is that he will need a liver transplant within the next year, probably much sooner.

After so much time preparing and planning and working to live among the unreached people of Chad, why is God allowing this to happen now? We don't know. Is this an attack by Satan, or just the effect of living in a fallen world? We don't know. What will the next year(s) look like? We don't know. So much unknown, but we know that God is with us. We have a heart for the people of Chad, and we know that God does too, so much more than we do.

And they are not left without someone who can bring the gospel to them. Our partners in the Chadian Church are still there, working to share the gospel. We pray that their work will bear fruit. We are also praying that God would work in Boaz's body, giving him health, even a miraculous healing if that's his will. Please pray with us that God would be glorified through Boaz, and that the unreached people of Chad will hear and believe the gospel.

Rev. Danny B. and his wife Mandy serve the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as missionaries in Chad, Africa.



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

Arve Christofferson Called Home



Arve Harold Christofferson, 91, long-time resident of Bozeman, Montana, died April 4, 2019 in Rochester, Minnesota, surrounded by his family. He trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior, loved and prayed for his family. He faithfully served God and the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as a missionary and pastor for many years.

After graduating from Lutheran Brethren Seminary in 1952, and from Seattle Pacific College in 1956, Arve served Bethany Lutheran Church in Staten Island, New York for two years and Rock of Ages Lutheran Church in Seattle, Washington for one. He was united in marriage to Marilyn Elaine Undheim, of Malta, Montana, in September 1956, and was ordained into the ministry in November 1956. He and Marilyn sailed from Seattle to the mission field in Taiwan in September 1957, where they served the Lord until 1970. After returning from Taiwan, they served as church planters, helping establish Yellowstone Lutheran Brethren Church in Billings, Montana and later a Home Mission work in Bozeman, Montana. They moved to Bozeman in 1972, where they were involved in Home Mission outreach until 1987.

Blessed be the memory of Arve Christofferson.

Heggland Ordained as Elder



L to R: Elders John Olsen, Phil Skaret, Jeff Olsen, Andrew Heggland, Rev. Roger Viksnes, Elder Art Anderson, and Rev. Evan Langlois.

On December 2, 2018, Andrew Heggland was ordained as an elder at Bethany Lutheran Brethren Church in East Hartland, Connecticut. Regional Pastor Warren Geraghty officiated.

Rehberg Ordained as Elder



L to R: Regional Pastor Warren Geraghty, Rev. Jeff Olsen, Elders Garth Rehberg, Arnie Nordaas, and Don Cole.

On February 24, 2019, Garth Rehberg was ordained as an elder at Grace Community Church in Wesley Chapel, Florida. Regional Pastor Warren Geraghty officiated.

Thank you Ruth!



L to R: Cheryl Olsen, Ruth Vallevik, and Wendy Heiser.

On April 11, 2019, during the Spring Council of Directors meeting in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, Ruth Vallevik was honored for her thirteen years of service as the Director of Women's Ministries for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. Her final day in that position was April 30, 2019.

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Life Moves You

Recognizing physical life as a wonderful gift is a moving and mobilizing experience:

A young mother saw a documentary film series about where modern culture was heading in its devaluing of human life. She was moved to help organize a crisis pregnancy center. Nearly 40 years later, she's still serving there. A pastor saw the tragedy of on-demand abortion. He was moved to learn more, to get involved, to protest on the front line of the battle. A young couple, excited about their pregnancy, anticipating their third child, learned that the child could not live long beyond birth. As they processed this before the Lord, they were moved to start a Facebook group sharing their family's story, and thousands of lives were touched. Individuals found healing. At least one unborn baby, who could have been aborted, was allowed to live.

To recognize physical life as a wonderful gift from God, and then to see someone lose it, or waste it, or destroy it—this is alarming, disconcerting, moving. It's not only moving, it's mobilizing. It led these people and many others to speak and act, that lives might be preserved. These people are moved to try to save a life... Who's moving them? God, who freely gives this gift of life to all human beings.

Recognizing spiritual life—eternal life—as a wonderful gift, is a moving and mobilizing experience:

A young man, hearing that people were living and dying without ever hearing the name of Jesus, was moved to become a missionary to an unreached people group. Many years later, he continues to serve, now seeking to understand what barriers prevent these unreached people from receiving the message of Christ and how to overcome those barriers. A group of pastors looked at a large metropolitan area with so many people who do not know Jesus, and saw too few churches there proclaiming new life in Christ. The pastors began to pray for those people, and to talk to their own churches. They were moved to form a church-planting effort to reach people—to save people—in that major city.

To recognize spiritual life as a wonderful gift from God, and then to see someone dying without it, missing out on what God has for them—this is alarming, disconcerting, moving. It's not only moving, it's mobilizing. It led these people and many others to speak and act, that lives might be saved for eternity. These people are moved to try to save souls... Who's moving them? God, who longs to freely give this gift of new life in Christ to all human beings.

Does God's gift of physical life move you to action? Does God's gift of spiritual life in Christ mobilize you to action?

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

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