

Faith & Fellowship

Vol. 87, No. 2

March/April 2020
Forsaken for You



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FAITH & FELLOWSHIP
Volume 87 - Number 2

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Ecce Homo by Lattanzio Gambarà
"Behold the Man"/Sedmak/iStock

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Quiet Moments

Email prayer requests to: pray@clba.org

At Jesus' Feet

H.E. WISLØFF



AntonioGuillem/iStock

At Jesus' feet people discover themselves. A person loses one's self in the grind, unrest and strife of life. There also the faith of childhood and peace of mind may be lost.

At Jesus' feet people discover themselves not as saints, but as sinners. The person deploras what he or she sees, not only because of certain sins committed, but also because of one's fallen nature. And one sees one's self as a slave in chains, bound as to ability and comprehension. People who really discover themselves become very needy.

But at Jesus' feet we may change garments. He takes our filthy garments and clothes those who believe, in a robe of

righteousness which he gained for us when he died on the cross for our sins. At Jesus' feet you have nothing to give, but you receive everything—by grace alone.

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

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

The Prophet in the Pit

TROY TYSDAL

Joseph woke early, and for a moment forgot he was in a dungeon. He pictured himself back at his father's side, wearing his royal coat—the coat his father had given him as a gift. The false reality was comforting, and for a second Joseph felt peace, but the damp cool air of the dungeon quickly stole the fantasy away.

As Joseph's confusion left him, he began to reflect on his descent from life at his father's side to life in a pit. He thought back to the coat again. It wasn't the cause of his descent, but a trigger—a reminder to his brothers that he was their father's favorite son. A truth that unleashed their jealousy. They desired evil. They wanted his death, but instead stripped him of his status, destroyed his coat, and sold him into slavery. If that weren't enough, in slavery he thrived, but that too had been taken from him. He had caught the eye of his master's wife, but when she tried to seduce him, he resisted. She took his cloak and used it to change his status again—this time from servant in Potiphar's house to prisoner in a dungeon—a metaphorical realm of the dead.

In the midst of his humiliation, Joseph was tempted to believe that God had forsaken him, yet even here in the cold damp pit, hungry and deprived of light, Joseph could not deny the Lord's provision. He had found favor with the warden and had been given responsibility and authority over the other inmates.

As Joseph made his morning rounds, his mind still filled with memories of the past, he found two of his fellow prisoners deeply disturbed by their dreams from the night before. Pharaoh's former cupbearer had seen a tree with three branches, and he had pictured himself squeezing grapes into Pharaoh's cup. Likewise, Pharaoh's former baker dreamt that three baskets of bread balanced on his head while the birds of the air feasted from them. As Joseph listened, the Lord revealed the meaning of the dreams, and Joseph relayed the message to the two men. He said to the cupbearer, "In three days your head will be lifted up, and Pharaoh will restore you to your place in the palace."



Mike Storm/Stock

But to the baker, he said, "In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a tree." Joseph's prophecies came true. The cupbearer was restored and the baker executed. But the cupbearer forgot Joseph when he returned to Pharaoh's side.

Christians have long recognized the parallel between the stories of Joseph and Jesus. Joseph's life was a steady descent from miracle-child born to his father's barren wife, to supervisor of fellow inmates in a dungeon. There he stayed for two years, until the Pharaoh was troubled by a dream, and the cupbearer finally remembered the prophet in the pit. Joseph was given a change of clothes, shaved, and brought before Pharaoh, where he interpreted the king's dream and became savior of Egypt. He was elevated to the right hand of Pharaoh, and even the brothers who betrayed him would soon bow down at his feet.

Though the similarities between the stories of Joseph and Jesus are striking, the contrast is equally so. Joseph's descent was unwilling, and who can blame him? Who would submit to such a fall from grace?

JOHN 6:37-40

Jesus said, "All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life."

The Bible tells us that Jesus submitted himself to his Father's will. It tells us

that Jesus gave up his status, that he was made lower than the angels, so that by his suffering he might restore those held captive to Satan, sin, and death. Jesus left his place of privilege to become human, a miracle-child born of a virgin, but born into poverty. He was not radiating glory as he lay in the manger. There was nothing majestic to attract us to him as he grew into a man. No halo hovered over his head as he entered Jerusalem. He could have saved himself from the fate in front of him. He could have silenced his accusers, but instead he allowed himself to be stripped and mocked—clothed in purple (the color of a king), stripped again, beaten, and crucified.

By the time his body was removed from the cross, and placed in a cold damp tomb, his spirit had already departed—into the realm of the dead. But unlike Joseph, Jesus did not descend into the pit a prisoner. He entered in triumph—given authority to judge the living and the dead. Abraham, and all those gathered to his bosom, rejoiced—while the faithless wept and gnashed their teeth.

As Joseph was lifted up from the dungeon, so Jesus rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again, and every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord.

Do not forget him!

He has not forgotten you. Believe in him, and he will not let your body go down to the pit. He will lift you up, clothe you in a robe white as snow, and restore you to the warmth of your Father's side.

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.



Photo by Giff Habeshaw on Unsplash

In Our Place

ANDY OLSEN

“I will never become jaded like them.” I had just started working as a part-time tutor for an after-school program in the largest public housing project in New York City. I was filled with idealism and dreams of transforming the lives of the inner-city youth in the program. But as I got to know some of the other staff in the program, I was discouraged to find that most of them did not share my optimism.

Some of the staff had grown up in the projects themselves and had seen too many examples of kids who showed promise, but for a variety of reasons, fell into the same negative patterns as their peers. I vowed that I would never become jaded like them. I would retain my optimism and hope.

Six months later, I found myself dreading going into work and doubting whether our program was making any difference in the lives of the youth we

served. Later that year, a new program director was hired, who brought new ideas and the same optimism I had started with. I joked with the other staff about the new director’s idealism, and how long it would take for her to lose it. And suddenly, I realized that I was now one of the jaded staff I had vowed I would never become. My earlier judgment against the staff now applied to me as well.

Reading the Gospel accounts leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion, it might be easy for us to judge the actions and attitudes of many of the key players. The chief priests and religious leaders in Jerusalem are filled with jealousy and threatened by the exalted claims of Jesus. Judas is willing to betray his rabbi for thirty pieces of silver. The crowd is easily swayed to demand the release of Barabbas and call for Jesus to be crucified. Pilate caves to the demands of the crowd, although he

knows he is sentencing an innocent man to death.

It is easy for us to distance ourselves from these people, to think that we would have acted differently. Like Peter objecting to Jesus’ prediction of his denial, we often see ourselves as the exception to the rule. We criticize those on the other side of the political spectrum, while turning a blind eye to the faults of those we agree with. We rail against certain societal sins, while defending our personal idols when they are threatened. We boil with anger against the faults of our spouse, children, parents, or siblings, while downplaying our own failures. Self-righteous indignation and outrage feel so good because our sinful hearts want to play God by condemning others and justifying ourselves.

But then there are moments when our judgment ricochets back at ourselves.

“What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.”

Romans 6:21-22

The classic biblical example is from 2 Samuel 12, when the prophet Nathan tells King David about a rich man who took the one lamb of a poor man. David burns with anger at this injustice, until Nathan delivers the zinger: “You are the man!” Suddenly David’s eyes are opened, and he responds, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

When I realized that I had become just as jaded as the staff I had earlier condemned, and then recognized I was again passing judgment, but this time on the optimistic new director, I had a King David moment. My self-righteousness was exposed. Like the crowing rooster that revealed Peter’s failure to live up to his promise of complete devotion to Jesus, God’s Law pronounced the verdict against me, “There is no one righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:10).

What did I deserve for my hypocrisy and contemptuous attitude? I certainly didn’t deserve to continue working as a tutor in a program that I didn’t believe in, under a director I had dismissed. I deserved to be replaced, to be removed

from my position. Peter deserved to lose his place as a disciple of Jesus because of his denial. King David deserved the judgment he had pronounced upon the rich man in Nathan’s parable—death. And the Apostle Paul declares to sinners, including you and me, “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

But right in the heart of the crucifixion account, Jesus—as he is surrounded by deniers, betrayers, fickle crowds, spineless rulers, and jealous priests—cries out, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Jesus speaks a word of mercy to a world of unrighteous sinners desperately trying to justify ourselves. And as he speaks that word from the cross, we see him securing our justification by taking our place.

Despite my cynical attitude, the new director of the after-school program extended a hand of mercy to me. She invited me and the other staff to help shape her new ideas. She patiently listened to our frustrations and doubts. She bore the weight of our pessimism and

discouragement. And as she continually extended grace to us, it melted our cynicism. Hope was rekindled in our hearts as she absorbed our hopelessness.

Jesus reinstated a hopeless Peter, calling him to shepherd his sheep, despite his failure. Nathan declared that King David would not die, because the Lord had taken away his sin. And we, who have earned the deathly wage of our sin, are instead given the free gift of eternal life, for our Savior has taken the wage we deserved in our place.



Rev. Andy Olsen is Pastor of 59th Street Lutheran Brethren Church in Brooklyn, New York.

Bad Intention

JEREMY WILSON

“How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn!”

—Isaiah 14:12a

“I’ve won.” The whisper escaped from the mouth of The Accuser. The plans he had set in motion so long ago had finally been completed. With those deliciously painful words, “Father, why have you forsaken me?” still ringing in his ears, Satan knew it was finished. As he took a glowering look over the world he had claimed, he was proud.

How long had it been since he first realized the truth? God had created him to rule over this universe of his. He was rightfully the firstborn of creation. Why else was he eternal? Why else would he have been created long before these fragile bags of dust he calls “people”? A smile spread across Satan’s face as he recalled the time when he first shared *his* “good news” with Adam and Eve. They had to know that they, too, were created to be like God; to ascend to the highest places and rule over creation. But God—cruel, unloving, pernicious God—was withholding from them their rightful place. “The earth, and everything in it, is mine,” thought Satan as he invited this weak, subservient woman to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God had kept his precious humans from the knowledge they needed, but Satan knew better. This was what they truly needed. They needed their eyes opened to become like God, just as he himself desired.

But oh, the arrogance! Just for wanting to take their rightful place as gods, this Creator calls Adam and Eve sinners and pronounces the judgment of death on them. Well, what of it? Even in death I will rule over them. As condemned

sinners, God has turned his back to them and left them to die. “But I am still their lord,” Satan said to himself, grinning as the pathetic disciples pulled Jesus’ lifeless body off the cross.

“Was this how the seed of Eve was going to crush my head?” God’s promises never looked so contemptible. For millennia the prophets had been harping about this Messiah who was supposed to set everything right, bring God’s forgiveness to the world, and lead his children out of bondage to sin and death. Such lofty and ambitious claims, when all Satan needed to do was whisper in the ear of Judas, and Jesus would stand before a seething crowd calling for his death. As they laid him in the tomb, Satan laughed, “Well, I’m still here, and you’re not, you ‘eternal’ Son of God!”

Satan looked proudly on his people as they rushed to get Jesus buried. They were all working so hard to follow the laws of God, and the Sabbath was approaching quickly. After all, you can’t become like God if you don’t behave like God, so he had further taught these people *his* “gospel”—you can become like God and avoid his wrath if you just follow the rules. It is as simple as that. God claims to be the only one who is perfect, but Satan was sure that, with the law, they too could become perfect.

Now, Satan had to admit, this Jesus had done better than anyone before him. He’d stood toe-to-toe with Satan and resisted all his best temptations. Satan’s brow furrowed as he thought back on the life this Jesus had lived. He couldn’t now recall a time when Jesus had actually broken one of God’s commands. Something didn’t add up here. Why, then, had God punished Jesus so severely? Satan had never seen such wrath poured

out on a single person before. It was as if, after millennia of patience with sinners, God had had enough. He’d loosed all his judgment—and then some—on this pitiful man. Satan shook his head. “What does it matter? These fools thought this man would reverse the curse of death, and now he’s as dead as anyone.”

But oh, how some of them loved this man! The men were beside themselves with grief over losing their beloved Christ, and the women were wringing their hands waiting for the time when they could go and properly finish the burial. Not a very restful Sabbath for them. Truthfully, it was not a very restful Sabbath for Satan either. He just couldn’t shake the feeling that something was wrong.

Looking for reassurance, Satan thought again of Jesus. “How ridiculous that they’re watching over a dead man!” Satan chuckled nervously. Already he could sense the icy grip of death reaching for Jesus, longing to pull him into an eternity away from God. Sense it, but not see it. What is going on here? This has never happened before. This Jesus is dead, but death hasn’t claimed him. How can this be? Death was reaching out to this man, but it couldn’t hold him. Impossible! With mounting terror, Satan could feel death’s grip, reaching, reaching but never grabbing. Frantically, impotently grasping for something it could not hold, as if it were a man trying to grab hold of the last light of day. Satan’s eyes widened in shock as he saw glorious life return to the body of Jesus, flooding his vision as he beheld the only begotten from the Father.

“No!” Satan screamed. “This is impossible!” Eyes clamped shut against the radiance of Christ, Satan raged at the divine flesh and blood that now

stood before him. “I watched you die! I have defeated you and all your Father’s plans to bring humanity back under your lordship. Why won’t you stay dead?”

Calmly, Jesus turned to Satan. “You have never been more wrong. Because of your unbelief, you never saw the obvious answer right in front of you.”

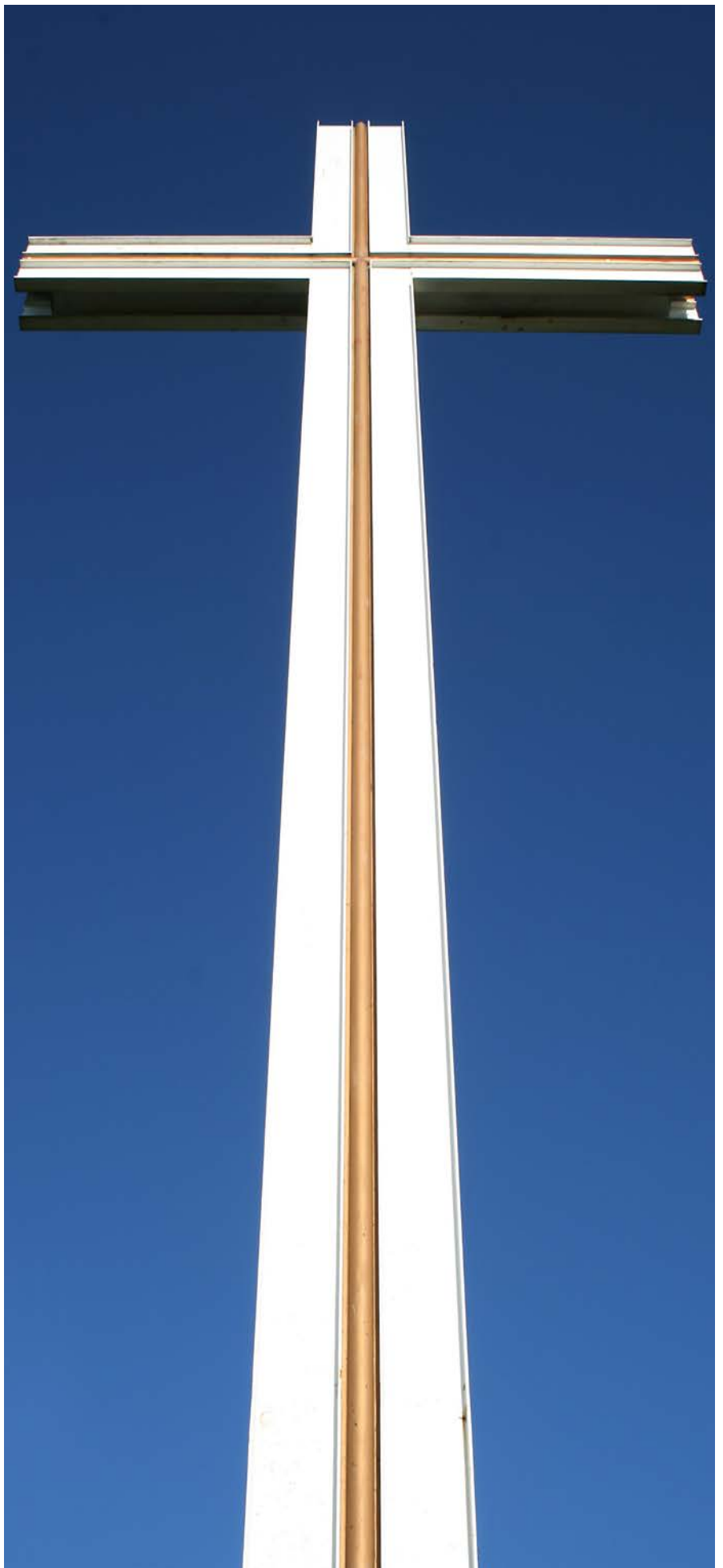
“What answer?”

“The answer that reconciles my Father’s judgment for sin and his great love for humanity. I am the answer. You have done nothing but try to rule this world and keep people away from God, but I was never yours. I never sinned, and therefore death couldn’t hold me. And when I died the death of a sinner, I took from every person—every person who will ever live—the sin that separates them from God. My Father executed perfect judgment at the cross. It fell on me, for I became sin. You think you won the victory when I died, just as you think you won the victory when you plunged mankind into sin and death in Eden. But now you know that I have power over death. All who believe in me will live, just as I now live. And now, you are finished—for I have swallowed up death in victory,” said Jesus.

“I’ve won.”



Rev. Jeremy Wilson is Pastor of Lutheran Brethren Church of Nampa in Nampa, Idaho.



dtugoska/Stock



SyYates/iStock

King David playing a harp.

Crazy Promise

NATHANAEL S.

I would love to sit down and chat with King David. Particularly, I would ask him about Psalm 16. Because in verse 10 (ESV) he makes this earth-shattering statement: *You will not let your holy one see corruption.*

If you don't see what I'm getting at, try the New Living Translation: "You will not allow your holy one to rot in the grave." I know that you know that Jesus rose from the dead, but David didn't know that story yet. This is the Old Testament. David, what were you thinking!

When David and I sit down for our tête-à-tête, he will probably remind me of some equally incredible statements that God himself has made. For example, when God made a covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7, he gave him this astounding promise (verses 12-16):

"I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is

the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever... Your throne will be established forever."

To you and me this might sound like God is promising a continuous dynasty, from father to son, for the rest of history. But in Psalm 16 David gives us a hint that he understands this promise even more radically than that: God has promised him a descendant who will *live forever!*

This sounds crazy, but God has a history of making seemingly crazy promises. He told Noah that he would cover the whole earth with a flood but save Noah's family—and he did it. He told Abraham that Sarah would have a son in her old age—and she did. Then he told Abraham that he would liberate his descendants from slavery and bring them to the land he had promised him. He did that too.

When God makes such bold promises, it leads his people to do and say incredible

things. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son because he trusted that God would *raise him from the dead*. Because of God's promises, and because of his track record of keeping them, Moses left shepherding to go challenge the most powerful dictator in the world and lead God's people out of Egypt by *walking through the Red Sea*; Joshua brought down the walls of Jericho by *blowing trumpets and shouting*; David concludes with absolute confidence that his descendant *will be immortal!*

These aren't isolated cases involving super-spiritual prophets; this is just God being himself. He makes promises that change the course of your life. He keeps them. If you're serving a God that does not make specific, life-changing promises, then you're not serving the true God. God goes out on a limb. He puts his reputation on the line. He says things that are either going to prove delusional, or prove that he is the true, and truly radical, loving God.

“Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.”

Psalm 16:5-6

My good friend and Bible student, Adam, followed his ancestral religion faithfully. Then one day he heard that Jesus promises his Holy Spirit to those who follow him. He hasn't looked back—and hasn't been the same—ever since. Through his promises, God obligates himself to you, to come through for you in a huge way.

I've ministered on three continents and engaged many religions, but there is only one God who makes promises to his people. Even religions like Islam, that trace their origins back to so-called “Abrahamic faith,” essentially ignore and erase God's promises to his people. God, to them, is *sovereign*, but he is no longer *faithful* to anything or anyone in particular. Our God, on the other hand, makes big promises—to us.

As Mary sang in the Magnificat before Jesus' birth, “He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, *just as he promised our ancestors*” (Luke 1:54-55). Never before, and never again since, was a virgin pregnant. But the angel told her that her child would be given “the throne of his father David” (1:32). So this child is the One referred to in Psalm 16:10. It was unprecedented, unbelievable, impossible, strange, ridiculous, scandalous—and Mary sang, “This is God's promise.”

There's something else in Psalm 16

(ESV) that makes me squirm. In verse 9, David says:

“Therefore my heart is glad, And my whole being rejoices; My flesh also dwells secure...”

“My *flesh* dwells secure...” I can handle spirituality that stays on the metaphysical plane, but this is intimate, literal, *molecular*. He proceeds with verse 10:

“For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.”

It's as if David is looking at his hand as it guides his reed pen across the calfskin, and he knows that it's the same blood, muscle and bone, designed with the same DNA in his descendant, that will not decay, but reign forever. The closer we look, the crazier it looks! Shall we look some more?

It's the same thing that makes me squirm when I read Luke 22:19, and when I hear the words read at Communion:

“And [Jesus] took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’”

It just feels so intimate, literal, *molecular*... I don't even have a category

for it! Is it a coincidence that both David and Jesus seem to fixate on their physical bodies to express God's faithfulness? I don't think so. This is not just one more crazy promise from an eccentric God. This is the *fulfillment* of God's promises that were all specific and physical: “*your descendant...!*” All those promises are summarized in the last two words of Jesus' statement: “This is my body given *for you*.”

He doesn't give you a dead body. He gives you a particular, promised, risen body, every single time you come to his table. So now you are alive, in every single one of his amazing promises.



Nathanael S. serves with his wife Carrie on behalf of Lutheran Brethren International Mission and the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as a missionary in Chad, Africa.

SAVE THE DATE



DISCIPLE-MAKING
GOD

BC20

CLB Biennial Convention

June 13-16, 2020

Fergus Falls, Minnesota



A Disciple-Making Movement

www.CLBA.org/BC20

BC20 SPEAKERS



NAM

www.CLBA.org/BC20

SATURDAY pm - JUN 13
GATHERED IN CHRIST
Rev. Jeff Seaver
Triumph LBC,
Moorhead, MN and Fargo, ND



SATURDAY am - JUN 13
YOUTH LEADERS EVENT
Jonathan McKee
Summit Ministries



SAT

SATURDAY am - JUN 13
WOMEN'S EVENT
Our Disciple-Making God
Working Through Women



SUNDAY am - JUN 14
**DISCIPLE-MAKING
BY WAY OF GIFT**
Rev. Andrew Foss
Emmaus Road Church,
De Witt, IA



MONDAY am - JUN 15
AS YOU ARE GOING... GO!
Rev. Nick Mundis
North American Mission,
Church of the Lutheran Brethren



MONDAY pm - JUN 15
**THE PROLIFERATING GOAL
OF THE GOSPEL**
Pres. Paul Larson
Church of the Lutheran Brethren



TUESDAY am - JUN 16
**DISCIPLE-MAKING BY
MEANS OF GRACE**
Dr. Eugene Boe
Lutheran Brethren Seminary



Becoming A DISCIPLE-MAKING CONGREGATION

JUNE 13



There is nothing more thrilling for the family of God than to see new and growing followers of Jesus Christ in our churches. It is truly an amazing gift that our God calls us to be a part of building his Kingdom. Jesus called, taught and walked with his disciples. As the Body of Christ, we are to be a part of this process today. Jesus invites us and commands us to "Go and make disciples."

One of the tracks for this year's Day of Equipping will give you the opportunity to refresh your perspective on Disciple-Making. Each congregation has its own unique set of gifts, but there has been a missionary DNA in the Lutheran Brethren since our inception. We see it in Africa and Asia, but do we see it in North America?

It is from this vital component of our identity that we will consider being a Disciple-Making congregation.

- Strategy – What is the current state of things?
- System – How can this be lived out congregationally?
- Substance – What are some current CLB examples?
- Sharing – What more is there for us right now?

No matter what the current state of your congregation regarding Disciple-Making, whether it is going well or struggling, this track will offer something for you. It may be an affirmation of God's working in your congregation, or it may be an exciting call to new possibilities. We invite you to join us.

Rev. Nick Mundis
Director of North American Mission

Information and resources available at
www.CLBA.org/BC20

CLB Shared Ministry: Contribution Report

\$1,919,034
Received Through 1/31/2020

\$2,900,000
2019-20 Contribution Goal

\$1,933,243
Anticipated Through 1/31/2020

The CLB Fiscal Year Ends April 30, 2020.

CLB Fiscal Year End = April 30

LaWAYNE ROGNESS

Greetings to you, the readers of *Faith & Fellowship*. It is indeed an honor to be able to give you an update on the finances of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren (CLB). The end of January 2020 marked the completion of three-fourths of our 2019-20 fiscal year (the CLB fiscal year ends April 30). We rely on churches and individuals for \$2.9M for the fiscal year out of the \$4.0M budget. We seek to raise the \$2.9M through contributions, raising an additional \$350K through the operations of our Seminary and the Communication department's (Faith & Fellowship's) sale of written materials. The balance of the dollars come through special estate gifts and investment earnings through our financial portfolios.

As we plan for the year, we earnestly seek the Lord to lead us. When making our budgets, we are praying well in advance, and we continue to pray even after our budgets are completed. We thank the Lord who owns all, and pray that he will move us, his people, to give to this great work. In setting the budget, we use past history and current economics to anticipate what we should expect for the coming year. As the year progresses, we measure our income in relation to what we anticipated.

We have just finished the books for the month of January. As already noted, January marks the ninth month of the fiscal year, so we are 75% through the year. Through the month of January our receipts were \$1,919,034, compared to an anticipated \$1,933,243. Thus we are short only \$14,209 of what we anticipated. We are so thankful for those who gave.

Our work is not yet done. If you do the quick math, you will see that we still need to raise \$980,966 in the next three months.

One more bright item regarding our finances: We track our expenses very closely, so at 75% of our fiscal year, we would like to see our expenses at 75% also. We do not receive our contributions and gifts on an equal monthly basis (the larger portion of giving comes later in the fiscal year), but we do see our expenditures on an equal monthly basis throughout the year. For that reason, for eleven months of the year we find ourselves borrowing or using reserves to keep our ministries afloat. The good news this year is that, through the end of January, we found that our spending was under our receipts by 4.3%, approximately. You may say, that's not much, but when you put 4.3% toward a 4.0M plus budget it equates to approximately \$132K. That is significant.

Again, we are grateful for your gifts and support.

Just a short update on our Lutheran Brethren International Mission: From late February into March, CLB President Paul Larson and LBIM Mission Mobilizer Dan Venberg will be in Chad, Africa to celebrate the Centennial of our mission work in Chad. Think of it, 100 years in Africa! We are so thankful for the pioneer missionaries who paved the way for so many men, women, and children to hear the good news of the gospel of Christ. Their hard work was not in vain.

Also, we presently have Matt and Christina and their children, in France doing language training in preparation for going to Chad later this year.

Praise the Lord! He has blessed the work of our hands. May he continue to bless the work of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren!

LaWayne Rogness is Director of Finance and Personnel for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

Support the CLB:

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www.clba.org/giving

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Fergus Falls, MN 56538

BY MAIL (CANADA):
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Birch Hills, SK S0J 0G0



Spring is Coming

CHERYL OLSEN

When I awoke this morning, the temperature was minus twenty-four degrees Fahrenheit, and snow many feet deep. Spring seems very far away. Yet I have hope, for the sun is shining brightly, and daylight hours are steadily increasing. Spring will come! This hope is based on fact, on experience, on the promise.

Hope was gone for the women trudging to the tomb of Jesus that first spring Resurrection morning long ago. Visualize with me their hopes for a conquering delivering Messiah being trampled by the brutal Romans, the betraying Judas, a “crucify”-crying crowd, and Pilate’s pronouncement of death. Even their hope for continuing a genuine friendship with this man who would eat with sinners was gone. All they could do was carry on, doing what they knew how to do. They knew how to anoint their friend’s broken body, so they planned to carefully complete Friday’s hastily finished task due to the approaching Sabbath. They could mourn together at his grave. They knew how to do that. Numb that they wouldn’t hear his teaching again, see his tender treatment of children, or marvel at his miracles. No more chances to ask him about his often-mysterious sayings like, “Your brother will rise again.” “I am the resurrection and the life.” Or “I go to prepare a place for you...” Life had changed; bewilderment had replaced hope. But they trudged on.

Death often produces helpless, hopeless feelings. I still feel a little numb myself, though it has been a couple of months since my Mom died. She passed away three days before Christmas. I understand



Sedmaki/Stock

Women Visit the Empty Tomb by C. Secchi.

that she lived a full life, and isn’t in pain anymore. But I still miss her. I needed those people who just carried on, doing what they knew how to do: women who brought food, friends who braved a blizzard to sit and share stories at the funeral home, women who decorated church tables and served caramel rolls—just like Mom would have done mid-afternoon, and the concerned friends who asked, “How are you doing?”

Perhaps her death makes me particularly aware of others recently touched by someone’s death: a child, a parent, a friend, a grandparent, a baby. Death is so final. No more chances for words or a touch. Grief hovers, covers, overwhelms, paralyzes. Memories crowd in, painful at first, then gradually becoming sweet remembrances of time spent together, if there is hope of seeing that loved one again. Is there hope?

Back to the women at the tomb... You

know the story. This was no anointing the body, no mourning at his tomb: Jesus was alive! His mysterious statements about being the resurrection and the life now made sense! He really was providing a place and a hope for our lives beyond the grave. And that hope is based on the fact of his resurrection, on witnesses’ accounts of their experiences, and on the promises he made to those who believe in him. Oh yes, there is hope!

More than spring is coming! Life eternal is ahead—and the exciting privilege of spreading that news!

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



Visit: www.WMCLB.org

SPRING INTO GIVING

Each year, the WMCLB supports projects that bring the message of Jesus to women in our local communities and throughout the world. Your giving helps support projects and spread the good news of Jesus Christ. Together, we can make a difference.

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pcss609/istock

LBDI: Ready to Use

ALLAN BJERKAAS

At last, the Lutheran Brethren Discipleship Institute (LBDI) is online. After three and a half years in development, LBDI now provides Bible and ministry resources. Many more courses will become available as they are developed. The first courses are now online for you to investigate.

The mission of LBDI is “To serve the Church and the world by equipping members of the body of Christ to be disciples of Christ who are carrying out His Great Commission.”

The primary objectives for the students participating in LBDI are to:

- Apply Scriptural precepts in their daily lives based on a working knowledge of the Bible
- Develop the skills to do ministry in the body of Christ and in the world they interact with on a daily basis
- Develop biblically-based convictions of the truths of Scripture

- Exhibit the character traits of a follower of Christ as the Holy Spirit produces growth in their lives

LBDI offers online courses that can be self-paced. The student can take them quickly or slowly. In order to make the learning experience as effective as possible each student is strongly encouraged to identify a local mentor who will help them integrate the learning into their lives. This mentor will be chosen by the student with the help of the student’s pastor or elder.

In a discipleship program like this it is important to understand that the mentor-student relationship mirrors the way Jesus interacted with his disciples. Learning that results in a changed life does not often come from books alone. As important as books are in transmitting knowledge, discipleship is not only knowledge, but knowledge applied in the crucible of life with a mentor sharing

their life and experience with the student. A student can take a course in one of three ways:

- As an individual student with a local mentor
- As a member of a church cohort with a leader/mentor
- As an independent-study student, without a mentor

The third method is available in circumstances in which it is not possible to find a mentor.

In an educational setting a cohort is a group of learners who are taking a course together. A cohort in LBDI has all the benefits of taking a course with a local mentor plus the additional benefit of also learning from others. The leader of the cohort is a person who not only schedules the meetings, but also functions as a mentor to the cohort. Within each course module, the students will work at their

“The LB Discipleship Institute serves the church and the world by equipping members of the body of Christ to be disciples of Christ who are carrying out His Great Commission.”

LBDI Mission Statement

own pace. But they will complete the module work before the cohort meets with the leader to work through the discussion questions at the end of each module.

These courses could also be used in a small group setting or an adult Sunday School class. In these cases, the teacher could show the video at the beginning of the class and then lead the students through the discussion questions. If the course has a textbook, the students could all get the book and read the assigned sections before each meeting of the class or small group.

LBDI course material is geared toward the community-college learning level, so these courses should be appropriate for anyone from late-teens to senior citizens. In each class the learning outcomes will be clearly stated. The learning resources will consist of videos prepared by the instructors and carefully chosen textbooks. The textbooks will help the students learn now, and also serve as resources for their future ministry. Learning will be reinforced and assessed by discussion questions provided after each course segment, that the student can discuss with their mentor.

Each course will consist of four to eight modules designed for about two to four hours of watching, reading, and discussion question engagement. Each module is expected to be normally completed in a week, although the student can proceed at whatever speed works for them. After a course is completed the mentor will inform LBDI and the student will receive a completion certificate for the course.

As we launch LBDI publicly, we have four courses to offer:

- Reading and Understanding the Bible, prepared by Dr. Pribbenow
- New Testament Survey, prepared by Dr. Berge
- Elder Training, prepared by Dr. Boe and Rev. Egge

- Introduction to Mentoring, prepared by Dr. Bjerkaas

We have been piloting these courses during the past few months. The New Testament Survey course has been used in an adult Sunday School class. The Reading and Understanding the Bible course has been used in a men’s small group. Two churches are using the Elder Training course with their elder boards, and four other churches are planning to do so very soon.

Tim Mathiesen used the Reading and Understanding the Bible course with a small group of men at Bethel Church in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. What follows are Tim’s responses to questions about his experience.

How did you use the LBDI course in your small group?

Three of us from my men’s small group committed to going through Professor Brad Pribbenow’s LBDI class Reading and Understanding the Bible. We used each other in place of the mentor role and processed the questions and exercises together on Wednesday mornings.

How did the members of the group respond to the course?

Since all of us grew up in Christian families, and read our Bibles on a regular basis, we approached the class with a little bit of pride, I guess. But we quickly realized that we had a lot to learn. It was good to learn how to approach God’s Word in a comprehensive way. We learned the basics, from how the books of the Bible are laid out, all the way to best practices on how to lead a Bible study.

What was the overall effect of the course on the small group members? Was it different than you expected?

We expected to walk away from this

course ready to give the seminary helpful feedback on the user experience, the format and the content of the course. We did that, but we also learned much about the beauty of God’s Word and how to effectively study and teach it. That’s the wonderful thing about the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. We hold God’s Word as our highest authority, understanding that it’s a living book, and we are invited by God to daily live in it. The Bible is so much more than words on a page. I think our small group realized that growing up reading the Bible caused us to, in some ways, take it for granted—lose some of the wonder. This course reminded us of the depth and beauty of that wonder.

Courses in the planning stages are:

- Worship Leading
- A three-course Old Testament Survey
- Evangelism
- Preaching

Other courses planned for the future are:

- Disciple-making
- Church History
- CLB History
- Systematic Theology courses
- CLB Statement of Faith
- Ethics
- Youth Ministry
- Sunday School Teaching
- Other Ministry Skill-related courses

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Bjerkaas: abjerkaas@lbs.edu

Dr. Allan Bjerkaas Ph.D. serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as director of distance education at Lutheran Brethren Seminary.



Visit LBDI at: www.lbdiscipleshipinstitute.org

Grace in Lincoln

RYAN NORDLUND

We truly live in a time of transition in North America. The mission field clearly includes our neighbors and their families. Our God has always called us to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to our immediate context. But we may not have felt the urgency. We used to think, "They know the story of Jesus and probably already have a church home." It is obvious today that this just isn't true, and it never really was. Because of this reality, North American Mission is in the process of purchasing land in Lincoln, North Dakota and planting a church in this community. As you read Pastor Ryan Nordlund's exciting and challenging words below, please pray and consider how you can have a part in the CLB's Disciple-Making Movement in North America.

*Rev. Nick Mundis
Director of North American Mission*



max-kegfire/Stock

since it was the Wednesday before Easter, I wanted to teach about that. It became a most memorable lesson for me.

As I began, I simply asked the kids, "What is Easter?" After a short pause, one answered, "It's when we get up on Sunday and get to have an Easter egg hunt." "It's when we go to Grandpa and Grandma's house and have ham," said another.

"But WHY do you do that?" I asked. "Why do we celebrate Easter? What happened the first Easter?"

I waited a long time for a response. And after about fifteen seconds, nearly an eternity for elementary students, I came to a chilling conclusion: They don't know.

I tried to prod them along with a few more questions, but sadly, nothing.

These 25 kids, raised in central North Dakota, had never heard about the real reason we celebrate Easter. These kids had never heard about Jesus dying on a cross and rising from the dead three days later.

Not a single one!

When Kids Club was over, after the kids had all gone home, one of the other volunteers from our church approached me and soberly said, "Can you believe that? Not a single one of them knew."

You don't have to go far to find people who have never heard the wonderful news that Jesus came for sinners. There are people in your own neighborhood who

have never been told that God himself became flesh and dwelt among us, and that he became sin for you, and for me, so we can have eternal life in paradise.

Today, in our fourth year of Kids Club, we have about 70 kids attending. They can now tell you what it means that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. They explain who the three persons of the Trinity are. These kids can tell you what sin is. And now, if you ask them, they will tell you why we celebrate Easter.

Rev. Ryan Nordlund is Pastor of Grace Lutheran Brethren Church in Bismarck, North Dakota.



If you and your congregation have questions about how you can get involved with CLB church planting, contact Rev. Nick Mundis at: nmundis@CLBA.org

Shared Resources

DEAN HANSEN

I had the privilege of traveling to Chad, Africa with Dean Hansen in January 2019. Dean is a creative entrepreneur who loves the gospel and wants to share it with the world. He has many ventures that are serving the CLB mission work in Chad. God has placed a desire in Dean to see the Lutheran Brethren thrive in North America as well. Dean and I believe it is very important that our congregations connect and share in ways that will require some creative entrepreneurial development. Dean describes below what some of this sharing will look like.

*Rev. Nick Mundis
Director of North American Mission*

I have had the joy to be part of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and the Bethesda congregation of Eau Claire, Wisconsin for over 30 years. I love the CLB and the great treasure that we could call the “faith core” of the Lutheran Brethren. I love the foundational theology of our church body and its emphasis on the grace of God in Christ.

I love the fact that God has brought me into relationship with himself as a gift—at great cost to himself, through the sacrifice of his Son. Another joy I’ve experienced are the ten trips to our mission field in Chad. I have seen firsthand how effective our mission is. I have learned our great history from the very beginning to the current day. I am an enthusiastic supporter of Lutheran Brethren International Mission (LBIM).

In my experience with individuals from local CLB congregations, I see that most of the people have little understanding about what our mission is actually doing. So when I found that Bethesda was moving toward developing our own Vacation Bible School (VBS) curriculum, I thought, “Let’s make this a ministry to both the departments of North American Mission (NAM) and LBIM.”

Our congregation has executed a high quality VBS program for many years, but each year our VBS staff has needed to rewrite some of the curriculum so



Photo by Anna Earl on Unsplash

that it fits better with our core faith. We believed we have the personnel to create our own home-grown material. Why not allow our CLB theology to flow through this curriculum from beginning to end? The missions focus of the pre-packaged VBS materials we have used in the past had nothing to do with the mission work of LBIM. But the people from Bethesda could write material that, at its core, taught from the treasure of CLB theology and highlighted LBIM ministries.

So I proposed to help fund a VBS program based on our LBIM ministry to Chad, Africa, which we want to then share with our sister CLB churches. If all goes well, we hope to produce seven additional VBS programs, highlighting not only our mission in Africa and Asia, but our mission in large cities and our rural congregations alike.

Bethesda has supported LBIM for many years, and it is our hope that these VBS programs will broaden mission passion for the CLB internationally and in North America. The intention is to magnify those twin joys I mentioned at the outset, both our theology and the amazing work that the CLB is doing here in North American and around the world.

I also hope this might spur other congregations to employ their gifts and talents to help put together other programs for all our North American churches. I’m thinking of Sunday School curriculum, Youth and Adult Education materials, and Leadership Training, just to name a few areas. If the Lord is urging you to fund some future ministry-building projects to help the North American churches, please contact Nick Mundis.

We have so much talent in the CLB. I have a passion to work with NAM and other CLB congregations that have ministries to share. I want to help develop the programs that share our effective congregational gifts and ministries across the CLB in North America.

Without the clear vision of our foundational theology, our people may find themselves living their Christian lives out of obligation or even fear, rather than out of joyful thankfulness. That needed vision can come through producing our own materials, such as the VBS curriculum by Bethesda. And because our people often don’t have a clear understanding of LBIM, we may know far more about Wycliffe, World Vision, or Samaritan’s Purse than we do about our own amazing LBIM efforts in Africa and Asia.

I believe this project, as well as others like it, will have five wonderful benefits: (1) Our marvelous theology will undergird the materials, and our LBIM ministries will be clearly highlighted. (2) Our smaller congregations, in particular, will be able to use “home-grown” materials that are faithful to who we are. There will be no need for them to “tweak” a commercially available curriculum. (3) The Synod will be helping our congregations to serve each other. (4) Quality resources will be provided. (5) The “twin joys” of the CLB will be the soul of our VBS.

Dean Hansen is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Brethren Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Email Nick Mundis: nmundis@CLBA.org

Taiwan: Dreaming of Chad

DAN VENBERG

A government official wearing a flowing jellabiya, a long tunic common in Chad, greeted us with these words, “Thank you for coming to visit our country, to see it with your own eyes. A Chadian proverb tells us that what is close to the eyes is close to the heart.” His eyes peered at us through the crack in the white turban that served to protect his face and head from the bright Chadian sun. Those eyes communicated hospitality and sincerity.

I was sitting across from him in the courtyard of the regional government offices. With me were three visitors from the Lutheran Brethren Church of Taiwan: Pastor I Sung Li (Tom), chair of the mission board of the Lutheran Brethren Church of Taiwan, and youth pastor Hsiao En Wen (Daniel) and his wife Hsin Yun Wu (Nancy). We were in the middle of a tour of Lutheran Brethren International Mission’s (LBIM) mission activities in Chad.

My spine tingled with excitement as I reflected on how God had orchestrated his people and his Church in preparation for this. Exactly a century ago, Berge and Herborg Revne arrived in what is current day Chad. They are recognized today as the first ever Christian witness in this part of Africa. God worked through those called to go and those called to send, and the Lutheran Brethren Church is alive and well in Chad. In fact, the Chadian Church is active in sending their own missionaries to the nations, today partnering with LBIM.

In 1951, Arthur and Ruth Nyhus were called as the CLB’s first missionaries to the island nation of Taiwan, and the Lutheran Brethren Church of Taiwan was planted. Now 70 years old, made up of 17 congregations, the Lutheran Brethren Church in Taiwan is increasingly feeling the call to cross-cultural mission.

Daniel and Nancy have specifically felt a strong sense of calling to serve among unreached people groups. Partnering with LBIM’s current work in Chad seemed a great option, so we organized this exploratory trip. While there in Chad we discussed many things, including



L to R: Pastor Tom (The Chair of the CLB Taiwan’s Mission Board), Pastor Daniel, and his wife Nancy.

ministry possibilities, what it takes to raise a family in Chad, practical living realities, and the blessings and challenges of culturally diverse missionary teams.

As the trip ended and we processed our time spent together, Pastor Tom, Pastor Daniel and Nancy unanimously expressed a renewed passion and affirmation in their sense of calling to mission in Chad. They shared how the process of visiting with our field missionaries, combined with a direct engagement with people who are living in spiritual darkness, has given them increased resolve and desire to serve in Chad. Indeed, what they saw with their eyes brought the calling closer to their hearts.

Thank you for praying specifically for Daniel and Nancy, and for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren in Taiwan, as they take the next steps in the process. Many details must fall into place to see this dream come to reality. They and their three children are currently enrolled in a mission training program called Radius. Other steps need to be taken, including the mobilization of the Lutheran Brethren congregations in Taiwan to provide support. A sending agency (or the formation of a Taiwan LB mission sending agency) needs to be engaged. Details related to budget, timeline, partnership details and further training need to be finalized.

We are excited about an ethnically diverse Lutheran Brethren Church, united in service to the mission of our Lord. Thank you, CLB, for being a Church sent!

Dan Venberg serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as Mission Mobilizer and Recruiter for Lutheran Brethren International Mission.

Leivestad Ordained



L to R: Elders Gary Koslowsky, Joe Nolan, Jerry Leivestad, Rev. Seth Leivestad, Rev. Larry Olson, Elder Jay Saladino, and President Paul Larson.

On January 19, 2020, Seth Leivestad was ordained as pastor at Calvary Community Church in Fullerton, CA. President Paul Larson officiated.

Elders Ordained



Elder Rick Fuller, Rev. Seth Leivestad, CLB President Paul Larson, and Elder Bob Bestian.

On January 19, 2020, Rick Fuller and Bob Bestian were ordained as elders at Calvary Community Church in Fullerton, CA. President Paul Larson officiated.

Rokos Ordained



L to R: Pastor Ron Chetney, Danyel Rokos, Dena Rokos, Jesslyn Rokos, Colby Rokos, Rev. Greg Rokos, Garrick Rokos, and Pastor Jeremy Osterwalder.

On January 26, 2020, Greg Rokos was ordained as pastor at Resurrection Lutheran Brethren Church in Camrose, Alberta. CLBC President Jon Overland officiated.

Smith Ordained



L to R: Rev. Brent Walker, Elder Mike Boyum, Rev. Jim Erickson, Rev. Zachary Smith, Elders Duane Patterson, Peter Tweed, David Solheim, Rev. Rocky Bronson, and Rev. Danny Bronson.

On January 26, 2020, Zachary Smith was ordained as pastor at Bethany Lutheran Church in West Union, Iowa. Rev. Jim Erickson officiated.

Atneosen Called Home



Curtis Atneosen passed from this life on January 14, 2020 at his home in Lynden, Washington. He was 81 years old. Curtis was born in St. James, Minnesota. He was raised in St. Paul. He was a graduate of the University of Minnesota and Lutheran Brethren Seminary. Curtis served in the United States Army and Army Reserve 1956-1965 with the 6th Army Band and the 103rd Division Army Band. He was ordained as a Lutheran Minister at Stavanger Lutheran Church in Fergus Falls, Minnesota (1976). He loved Jesus and sharing the gospel. He served congregations in Minnesota and Washington state, including: Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, MN; Stavanger Lutheran Church, Fergus Falls, MN; Aurdal Lutheran Church, Fergus Falls, MN; Faith Fellowship LBC, Kelso, WA. Curtis earned his Choice Theory and Reality Therapy Certification through the William Glasser Institute. During retirement years he enjoyed mentoring students through the "Be the One" program. He is survived by his wife Katharine, children, and grandchildren.

Faith & Fellowship is the official publication of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, 1020 W. Alcott Ave., P.O. Box 655, Fergus Falls, MN 56538-0655, issued six times a year (January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, November/December) by Faith and Fellowship Publishing, 1020 W. Alcott Ave., P.O. Box 655, Fergus Falls, MN 56538-0655. Phone (218) 736-7357. The viewpoints expressed in the articles are those of the authors and may or may not necessarily reflect the official position of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA). Periodicals Postage Paid at Fergus Falls, Minnesota 56538.

(USPS 184-600) • (ISSN 10741712)

SUBSCRIPTIONS: *Faith & Fellowship* is offered to its readers at no charge. We would encourage your continued support with a donation, and if you would like to be on our mailing list, please contact our office. Periodicals Postage Paid at Fergus Falls, Minnesota. CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Please give both old and new addresses and allow four weeks.

Direct all correspondence, including submission of articles, to: *Faith & Fellowship*, P.O. Box 655, Fergus Falls, MN 56538-0655; Telephone, (218) 736-7357; e-mail, ffpublishing@clba.org; FAX, (218) 739-5514.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Faith & Fellowship*, P.O. Box 655, Fergus Falls, Minnesota 56538-0655



News in Two Stages

The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples...” So the women hurried away from the tomb... Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.

Matthew 28:5-7a, 8-9

News of death is a two-stage process. Perhaps some of the closest family members are present as their loved one is passing. They are filled with immediate grief as the reality sets in. They know that their loved one is gone, but they feel compelled to share their first-hand knowledge—this sad news—with as many as possible, and as quickly as possible. They make phone calls, send text messages, even post to Facebook.

But for everyone not present, there is the first stage of hearing the sad news, and probably believing it. Then the second stage of traveling to the funeral, experiencing and processing the loss—knowing it personally. The second stage is required, so that the second-hand experience becomes first-hand.

But this Easter story is not about news of death; this is news of life! And it’s a parallel two-stage process...

The women coming to the tomb Easter Sunday morning receive very clear news of Jesus’ resurrection from the angels. Along with it, there is the evidence of the empty tomb. The stone is rolled away. The guards lying on the ground, apparently immobile. Something has happened... but can he really be alive? They *get* death. We all get death; we’ve all encountered it, been touched by it in some way. It feels inevitable. Life, then death—in that order.

But this...! Death, then life? How can this be?

A second stage is necessary. Leaving the tomb, the women suddenly meet Jesus, and what they knew, what they *kind of* believed, is now verified. It’s completely real. Absolutely true. In this second stage, a personal encounter with the living One, there is no longer room for doubt or questioning. They know. They believe. It’s overwhelming. They rejoice, and they worship him.

For us today, there’s this first stage of hearing the Good News: Jesus has died for your sins and risen to life again. You hope it’s true, you want to believe it. And then there’s the second stage, the personal faith encounter with Jesus Christ. Yes, it’s true! It’s no longer just a story; it’s a person who knows you and loves you. It’s a new relationship, that gives you life.

Rev. Brent Juliot is Contributing Editor to Faith & Fellowship magazine, and serves as Pastor of Living Hope Church in Menomonie, Wisconsin.

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