

# Faith & Fellowship

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Powerful God



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**Quiet Moments**

Email prayer requests to: [pray@clba.org](mailto:pray@clba.org)

**Do Not Give Up**

H.E. WISLØFF



TM, 1993/iStock

Do not give up! There are times when one is tempted to do that. But that means death!

You are seeking God, but it seems he is far away. Does he dwell behind an iron door with double bars? You pray, but it seems he does not hear. You read, but you do not understand. Is there any purpose in keeping on?

Yes there is. The one who seeks finds; the one who prays shall receive; and all who knock, for them the door will open.

Perhaps you are stalled in your sanctification? There is no growth. No fruit. You have been converted, but where is the

fruit? You are to be holy, but where is your holiness? You should be meek and lowly of heart, but where is the evidence?

Dear friend, all that you need is to fasten your eyes on Jesus. Turn your eyes away from all that which would discourage you and look to him! All that for which you are seeking is found in him.

*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 Ogre

TROY TYSDAL

There are moments in our lives, when we are tempted to believe that we have arrived—that we’ve reached the top. Coming to faith can feel like one such moment. It is freeing, liberating, empowering, when you realize that Jesus Christ has taken your sin to the cross and restored you to the family of God. It is a mountaintop moment, the world finally makes sense, but there is more to be said.

In 1977, Doug Scott, Chris Bonington, Mo Anthoine, Clive Rowland, Nick Estcourt, and Tut Braithwaite set out to climb Baintha Brakk, an infamous peak in the Karakoram mountain range in Northern Pakistan. Baintha Brakk is better known to mountain climbers by its nickname—“the Ogre.” A hideous man-eating giant, the Ogre is one of the deadliest mountains in the world. It is steep, covered in crags, loaded with sharp rocks, and boasts one of the most difficult peaks to summit in all the world. In fact, until 1977 Baintha Brakk had never been summited, and after this expedition it would be another 24 years before someone would do it again.

Shortly after the attempt began, Braithwaite was injured by falling rock. Anthoine, Rowland, and Estcourt all reached the lower west summit but made the decision not to go on, while Scott and Bonington pushed forward. They navigated the crags by driving in anchors, and maneuvering from the left and to the right, until finally, they reached the summit. They were the first two men to see the world from the top of the Ogre—the man-eater. But this is where Scott says he made a critical error. As he looked out over the world, he says, “I lost respect for the mountain.” He forgot how dangerous it could be.

Christian, do not lose respect for the mountain. Do not forget how dangerous the world can be.

## JOHN 15:16-19

Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will



Marcus Millo/Stock

last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.”

It is common for believers to become discouraged in their walk of faith. They have been to the mountain top, but now see the chaos raging in our world. They have felt the love of Christ, but now see the evil that dwells in humankind. They stand at a distance, judging God for his silence, but forgetting he has already spoken. The Lord said, “I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.”

You see, Christian, you are the hands and feet of God, sent to bear fruit that will last. You speak the Word of God, but it isn’t easy, because the Word of God is something the world doesn’t want to hear.

As Doug Scott and Chris Bonington began to descend Baintha Brakk—the man-eater, tragedy struck. Scott lost his footing and went tumbling across the face of the mountain—breaking both of his legs above the ankles. That night he and Bonington slept on a ledge on the face of the mountain. The following day, they lowered themselves down to the rest of the group and began the long hike back to base camp. The high altitude and low oxygen made it impossible for Bonington and the others to carry Scott, so he had to crawl. For twelve days, he crawled over rocks, through snow, and on ice, until finally he reached the camp.

When asked how he made it off the

mountain, Scott said, “One feature at a time.” To think of the whole journey, all that lay before him, was overwhelming. So Scott would pick one feature—one rock, and he would crawl to it. When he reached that rock, he would do it again, over and over, until he was off the mountain.

Christian, if you are to continue in your journey of faith, if you are to make it off the mountain, it will be because you have kept your focus on the Rock—Jesus Christ. When you see chaos raging in our world, crawl to the Rock. When you are persecuted for speaking truth to those who are lost in darkness, crawl to the Rock. When you have failed to be the light that you were created to be, crawl to the Rock. There is forgiveness at the Rock, for you, and for the world. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:17).

When Doug Scott crawled off Baintha Brakk, his name was written in the record books, and his story continues to be told today. Christian, that is probably not how your story will end. The world will most likely not remember your name, nor would you want it to, for you do not belong to the world. You were chosen by the One who did not come to condemn, but to save, and he’s the One who will remember your name. So hear his command: “Love each other.” Love the Lord your God with all your heart, love your neighbor as yourself, and whatever comes your way, crawl to the Rock.

*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.*

# The God Who Sees Me

CRAIG JENNINGS

**T**he story is told of an elderly grandfather who was very wealthy. He was in fairly good health for his age, except that his hearing was failing him. So he decided to purchase hearing aids. Two weeks later he returned to the audiologist so that she could make final adjustments. “How do you like the hearing aids?” she asked.

“I like them very much,” he answered. “Why, I now can pick up conversations quite easily, even in the next room.”

The audiologist was delighted. “Your family members must be happy to know that you can hear so much better.”

The old man smiled. “Oh, I haven’t told them yet. I’ve just been sitting around listening—and do you know what? I’ve changed my will twice.”

God sees and hears and knows all things! In fact, according to Psalm 139, God knows what you do, he knows what you think, he knows where you go, and he knows what you say. There is no place you can go in which his all-knowing presence is not there. So here’s the question: Is that reality a threat or a comfort to you?

Ah, if you are running from God, his omniscience (his “all-knowingness”) is a threat. Indeed, it stirs up fear—fear because despite your pious outward appearances, God knows that inwardly you are merely playing religious games—fear because God knows the twisted motives and hidden agendas behind all you do—fear because God knows every secret sin and every evil desire—fear because all is open to *the eyes of him to whom we must give account* (Hebrews 4:13)—fear because one day you will stand in judgment before the great white throne, and your whole miserable life will be judged on the basis of what is infallibly recorded in the books.

But if you are a child of God, purchased by the blood of his Son, God’s

omniscience is a source of great comfort and joy—comfort and joy because God knows you (and your needs) better than you do—comfort and joy because his strength will not allow you to sink in a sea of troubles.

Do you remember the story of Hagar, told in Genesis 16? It is the story of a young woman who is pregnant and on the run from some very difficult and painful circumstances. As you may recall, Abraham and Sarah were unable to have children, so Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham as a second wife. If Hagar were to become pregnant and bear a child, then according to custom, Sarah could claim and adopt the child as her own.

Well, Hagar became pregnant and began to look with contempt on Sarah—after all, she was able to bear a child, whereas Sarah could not. Sarah responded with anger and bitterness. In essence she said to herself, “I am a woman of wealth and standing, whereas Hagar is only an Egyptian slave girl. Who does she think she is?”

Conditions quickly deteriorated. Sarah blamed Abraham for the whole mess (even though the entire scheme had been her idea to begin with). And Abraham, in response to his wife’s anger, basically said to Sarah, “Hagar is your servant. Do whatever you think is best.” Then, the Bible says, Sarah *dealt harshly with her* (16:6)—the same word later used to describe how the Egyptian taskmasters treated the people of Israel.

What is Hagar to do? The only viable solution she could see was to run from her intolerable circumstances and return to her home country of Egypt. And run she did, finally arriving at a spring of water near the Egyptian border. And while she rested at that place, feeling very much alone and overwhelmed, the angel of the Lord *found her* (16:7).

What good news! In times of distress

and fear and great need, you and I (like Hagar) discover that God is never far from any one of us. More than that, we discover (or perhaps, rediscover) that he knows all about our past, our present journey, and what lies ahead of us. And based upon his perfect, all-encompassing, eternal knowledge, God acts—for his glory and for our good.

In Hagar’s case, the angel of the Lord (the second person of the Trinity) gave her an amazing promise: “Not only will you give birth to a son,” said the angel, “but I will multiply your son’s descendants to such an extent that no one will be able to count them. Oh, and in remembrance of this event,” he said, “you are to name him Ishmael, which means *God hears*.”

And what was Hagar’s instructive response? She rejoiced. But the Genesis account makes it clear that she did not rejoice primarily in the great prophecies regarding her son (although she undoubtedly was both amazed and thankful). Instead Hagar rejoiced in the presence of a gracious, omniscient God. Indeed, at the end of the passage she celebrated God’s omniscience by giving this name to the Lord who had spoken to her: *the God who sees me* (16:13). “Can you believe it?” she shouts with joy. “I have actually seen *him who looks after me*.” (And that, by the way, is the name she gave to the well where the encounter took place.)

Child of God, rejoice in God’s omniscience. Think about it. If God is indeed all-knowing, that means, for example, that he will never discover anything new about you, nor will he ever be surprised by anything you do. God’s omniscience means that he knows the absolute worst about you but loves you eternally and fully through Jesus Christ. He has saved you by his grace. You belong to him.

Further, God’s omniscience means that

as a Christian you can live your life in gospel freedom. No character flaw can suddenly come to light that God doesn't already know about. No long-forgotten skeleton stored away for years in some back closet of your life can suddenly tumble out and startle God. No one—no, not even Satan himself—can make any accusation against you that will cause God to have second thoughts about you.

God perfectly knows what you and I are really like—*he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust* (Psalm 103:14). Why, God knows you so well that *even the hairs of your head are all numbered* (Matthew 10:30). So take heart! His grace is always sufficient, his supply is always abundant, his timing is always perfect, and his faithfulness and mercies—for you—are new every morning.

*Frail children of dust,  
And feeble as frail,  
In thee do we trust,  
Nor find thee to fail.  
Thy mercies, how tender,  
How firm to the end,  
Our Maker, Defender,  
Redeemer, and Friend.*

*[Robert Grant, 1833]*



Rev. Craig Jennings is Pastor at Grace Lutheran Brethren Church in Bottineau, North Dakota.



Hagar and Ishmael/duncan1890/Stock



Photo by Joshua Hanks on Unsplash

# The God Who Knows Me

ELROY VESTA

“I know you... but from where, and who are you?” Those were my thoughts as I sat waiting for some friends to join us for coffee and fellowship in December. I listened and responded to the questions and interacted as best I could. I came to realize that he knew us well. Questions were asked concerning our family. In my mind I was seeking to process in a manner that would allow me to ask intelligent questions concerning his family. The conversation continued for at least five minutes. I began to think that he thought I knew him even though I never once used his name. It was because I listened and reflected on his interest.

Later in the day, his name and identity came to us, and then I thought of so many things we could have discussed. Our friend knew us, and it reminded me in a small way how God knows us. Since that conversation, I have reflected on many

things I could have said and done to open the door for us to truly connect.

This event brought Psalm 139 to mind. We see in this life a God who knows us even before our birth. Not only does he have his eye on us, but there are many truths in his Word that remind us of the great lengths to which he goes to know us. In that process, it seems to me that God is calling us to pay attention to the Scripture so that our relationship with him will deepen and become more intimate.

We often neglect to acknowledge the characteristics of the omniscient God. From Psalm 139:4, *he knows what we say*. I am discovering that in tumultuous times I do not know what to say. So, should I not take note and seek the Lord to guide my words? In the previous verses, *he knows where we go*. This is good news. At times in my life, I have wondered, “Why am I here?” Then in that moment

my all-knowing God has me there for just the right connection. I am awakened to the way he puts us in places to provide for someone who needs a word of hope, a message of comfort or a word that gives direction. HE KNEW!

In these days of confusion and desperation this all-knowing God *knows what we need*. Think about the words from Psalm 139:5-6. In the New Century Version we read: “You are all around me—in front and in back—and have put your hand on me. Your knowledge is amazing to me; it is more than I can understand.” The Scripture reminds us that God protects us from what may come in the future and what has happened in the past.

Thinking on this Psalm, I noted that not only does he know what I say but this omniscient Father *knows what I think*. Ponder that thought. Does it guide us to

***“You are all around me—in front and in back—and have put your hand on me. Your knowledge is amazing to me; it is more than I can understand.”***

***Psalm 139:5-6, NCV***

acknowledge that we need to bring into subjection even the ideas and words which ought not to be spoken? Get in touch with the truth that we need to have our mind subjected to God’s truth. Paul, writing in Philippians, admonishes us to “let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus.” When that becomes our pattern, then what we do is more likely to be in harmony with the will of our all-knowing God.

When Christians say God is omniscient, they mean that God knows all things—past, present, and future. God is the source of all knowledge. He knows all the potential words and actions in any situation. God knows every person’s thoughts—even before they think. A.W. Tozer wrote, in *The Pursuit of God*, “He is omniscient, which means that he knows in one free and effortless act all matter, all spirit, all relationships, all events.”

As we recognize the omnipotent God, we discover he has power over wind, water, gravity, physics, and all that impacts our lives. God’s power is infinite and limitless. There is a personal side to this. God has changed everything in my life. Because of this we are led to peace. We are able to understand and love. He shows us the way and causes us to be more understanding. As we seek to allow his action upon our lives, we learn forgiveness in ways that bring him glory.

Since he knows all things, remember that he also knows the end. Consider what this means for us.

Take the steps necessary to rest in God’s love. Trust in his care. Live in God’s plan. This means that when we don’t, then what we think and what we do is needless worry. God knows and is working. That provides assurance that everything will be okay. Live in what God has called us to do.

During these recent months, I am learning greater dependence on the heavenly Father. I am devoted to the Scripture and in that journey am learning the value of prayer. I have pondered the prayers in Scripture, listened to the prayers of others and sought out prayers that have been written down.

Pray this prayer, as a way to come into the presence of God:

*Dear God, you are the Creator. Your knowledge is infinite, complete, and perfect. You are omniscient. You know everything about me—seen and unseen. You know when I sit and when I rise, you have numbered the hairs of my head. Forgive me for my unspoken thoughts and the things I did that I tried to hide from everyone—they were not hidden from you. Teach me the way that I should go, give me the words to speak, and provide me with understanding beyond*

*my human knowledge and ability. Take care of my loved ones—you see their hearts, you know their every action—nothing is hidden from you. Protect and guide them according to your will. Help me depend on your omniscience rather than my knowledge. May your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.*



*Rev. Elroy Vesta is Pastor at Liberty Lutheran Brethren Church in Fargo, North Dakota.*



Photo by Greg Rakozny on Unsplash

# The God Who Knows Tomorrow

ZACHARY SMITH

**W**hen I was in high school, I helped chaperone a trip for some of the kids of the church to go out at night to Hoffman Hills, a hiking trail and recreational area near Menomonie, Wisconsin. Much of the trail went through wooded areas that mostly covered up the night sky. But once we stepped into the open, we were met with one of the most amazing sights I have witnessed. A vast river of stars illuminated the night sky. What seemed like millions of stars dazzled overhead. We could see the Milky Way clearly stretched out above us, and the full moon allowed us to see the awed reactions of everyone in the group.

In moments like this you feel very small as you compare yourself to the vastness of the universe around you. God's creation is an incredible testament to the power of the God we serve. I often ponder how it is possible that anyone could have created such a majestic sight,

much less keep it running in perfect order for millennia. And yet, that is the God we have. King David said, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?" (Psalm 8:3-4). He describes God hanging the stars as if they were Christmas ornaments. It was that easy for him! What a powerful God!

This God who hung all those magnificent stars in their place is the same God who molded each one of us in his own image! The problem with us is that, unlike the stars, we rebel against God. As I am writing this, we are in the midst of riots that have spread nationwide after the killing of George Floyd. It has been a horrible testimony to the depths of the wretchedness of our human nature. We watched the senseless killing of a man, which then turned into protests that escalated in many places to

the point of full-force riots. And through the last couple of weeks there have been multiple shootings and many more have died. Along with the arson, looting, and vandalism, it paints a grim picture of the human race.

It has been hard to watch or read the news through all of this. It seems every story published is just another story about someone treating someone else horrifically. We simply don't have the decency to treat our fellow humans as inherently valuable. We fail to recognize that they too are made in the image of the Creator. And all this comes on the heels of the coronavirus pandemic that has given us several months of worry and unrest throughout the world. Worry, unrest, and violence have been the themes of the year.

My mind goes back to that question David asked: "What is mankind that you are mindful of them?" Who are we that God should care? Why should he look



***“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?”***

***Psalm 8:3-4***

upon us at all? When he looks down at this world and sees our violence toward one another, our hatred toward one another, the utter disregard we have for him and his perfect will and commands—why doesn't God just wipe us off the map and be rid of us? Taking God's perspective for a moment, if your creation hated you and hated your other creations, would you keep them around? Would you have any interest in them? I am not sure that I would. I would probably destroy those creations or leave them to destroy each other in a hopeless mess.

But that is not the way that God deals with us. Instead, the Almighty God, who hung the stars in the sky and created all things—he stepped into Creation and became a man. He took our place to pay the penalty for all our sins. He died so that we might live. He died so that all our sins might be washed away. He died so that we might be completely forgiven. Forgiven of everything. There is no sin so great that Jesus' death did not atone for it.

Then, incredibly, the grave could not hold him. He rose from the dead three days later, so that we too might be raised to life through him. We receive forgiveness and eternal life. We have a hope that is sure. We have the hope that, where he is, we will be too.

This whole year has felt like the world is unraveling at the seams and every month seems to bring a new and greater challenge and hardship. But the One who

created all things—the One who created you—is still working all things for his eternal glory. If God loved us enough to see us in the midst of our wretchedness and sinfulness and rebellion, yet still was willing to die for us, don't you think he would not let that death be in vain? He is the One who will bring us through all of this. He has not left. He is still the One in control.

We do not know what tomorrow brings or how all of this will turn out, but we can know for sure that we have a Savior who loved us enough to conquer sin and death, and who is still the almighty God who hung the stars and created all things. Nothing can change that. The last verse of a gospel hymn sums it up well:

*I don't know about tomorrow,  
It may bring me poverty;  
But the one who feeds the sparrow,  
Is the One who stands by me.  
And the path that be my portion,  
May be through the flame or flood,  
But his presence goes before me,  
And I'm covered in his blood.  
Many things about tomorrow,  
I don't seem to understand;  
But I know who holds tomorrow  
And I know who holds my hand.*

*[Ira Stanphill, 1950]*

It is my sincere prayer for you that you know and believe that the God who fashioned all those magnificent stars is

the One who has conquered sin and death for you. May you rest in the hope that he is still in control in all of this, ever reaching out to you with his great love.



*Rev. Zachary Smith is Pastor at Bethany Lutheran Church in West Union, Iowa.*

## CLB Shared Ministry: Contribution Report

→ **\$251,050**

Received Through 6/23/20

**\$2,650,000**

2020-21 Contribution Goal

--- \$246,426 Anticipated Through 6/30/2020

The CLB Fiscal Year Ends April 30, 2021.

# Applying Proverbs

LaWAYNE ROGNESS

*The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.*

*Proverbs 21:5*

**H**ow would you apply the proverb above to the Church of the Lutheran Brethren? Annually, we count the cost before setting plans in motion. If we are diligent it leads to profit; carelessness results in the opposite. Luke 14:28 says, “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?” Applied to us: “The CLB desires to do ministry. Shouldn’t we first estimate the cost to see if we have the money to complete the ministry goal?” Annually, we do exactly that. Many hours are spent in budget preparations. Here is the basic budgeting timeline:

- February: Tentative plans presented for what we want to accomplish in each ministry.
  - International Mission (work in Chad, Africa; Taiwan; Japan)
  - North American Mission (church planting and revitalization)
  - Lutheran Brethren Seminary (equipping people to serve in God’s mission)
- Early April: rough draft of the budget sent to the Council of Directors.
- End of April: we have fiscal year-end numbers from the previous year.

- Early May: work goes from “pencil” to “ink.”
- Mid-May: plans are presented; Mission Team signs off.
- Budget is presented to the Finance Committee of the Council of Directors for approval.
- Lastly, the Council of Directors approves the new Fiscal Year Budget.

As we work through the budget the financial plan is a three-step process:

### 1. Identify Goals:

- a. LBIM: continue in our three fields of ministry.
- b. NAM: Dollars are budgeted to continue exploring new church plant opportunities in Boston, MA and Lincoln, ND. (As the year progresses, plan will be re-evaluated.)
- c. LBS: Continuation of LB Discipleship Institute promotion and growth (online training modules).

### 2. Evaluate the Situation:

- a. During COVID-19, we are being more conservative.
- b. With the downward trend in giving, we have lowered our contribution goal and adjusted our plans accordingly.

### 3. Finalize the Plan:

- a. The budget for Fiscal Year 2020-21 is set at \$3,762,000.

- b. A study was done on how COVID-19 is affecting giving. We were careful not to expect too much, but not to expect too little. We set our contribution goal at \$2,650,000, a \$250,000 reduction from last year.
- c. In operations, our budget is \$327,000. These dollars are raised through LBS tuition and generated in Communications through sales of *Faith & Fellowship* publications.
- d. The balance is raised through endowment funds, special one-time estate gifts and deferred revenues.

I trust this exercise gives you a better idea of how our budget is set annually. This budget is \$272,749 less than the previous Fiscal Year Budget. (Youth Conventions are not budgeted in even years—subtracting the Youth Convention, our budget is \$42,750 less than the previous fiscal year.)

As the year progresses, we ask for your prayers. As a Mission Team, we consistently pray for your pastors and churches, and for your finances.

May the Lord bless the work of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, remembering, without you, the CLB does not exist!

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

Support the CLB:

ONLINE:  
www.clba.org/giving

BY MAIL (USA):  
P.O. Box 655  
Fergus Falls, MN 56538

BY MAIL (CANADA):  
P.O. Box 739  
Birch Hills, SK S0J 0G0



# Anxiety Antidotes: an Acrostic

CHERYL OLSEN

**Ask** and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

**But** he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

**Come** to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

**Do** not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

**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.

**Fear** not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

**Give** your burdens to the Lord and he will take care of you.

**He** gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

**I** called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit, you heard my plea: "Do not close your ear to my cry for help!" You came near when I called on you, and you said, "Do not fear!"

**Jesus** wept.

**Keep** me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.

**Let** us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

**May** the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Now** faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

**One** thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

**Peace** I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

**Quenched** the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength ... These were all commended for their faith...

**Rejoice** not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.

**So** we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

**The** steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end.

**Unless** the Lord had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death.

**Very** truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life.

**What**, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

**(Xaris = Grace, in Greek)** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

**You** will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.

**Zion** hears and is glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice, because of your judgments, O Lord. For you, O Lord, are most high over all the earth.

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



Visit: [www.WMCLB.org](http://www.WMCLB.org)

## Bible References:

Matthew 7:7, ESV; 2 Corinthians 12:9a, NIV; Matthew 11:28, NIV; Philippians 4:6, NIV; Psalm 23:4, NIV; Isaiah 41:10, ESV; Psalm 55:22, NCV; Isaiah 40:29, NIV; Lamentations 3:55-57, ESV; John 11:35, KJV; Psalm 17:8, ESV; Hebrews 10:23, NIV; Romans 15:13, NIV; Hebrews 11:1, NIV; Psalm 27:4, ESV; John 14:27, NIV; Hebrews 11:34a,39a, NIV; Micah 7:8, ESV; 2 Corinthians 4:16, ESV; Lamentations 3:22, ESV; Psalm 94:17, NIV; John 6:47, NIV; Romans 8:31, NIV; Philemon 1:25, KJV; Isaiah 26:3, NKJV; Psalm 97:8-9a, ESV



L to R: Dr. David Veum, Dr. Gaylan Mathiesen, Professor Nathan Oldenkamp, Matthew Rieniets, Dr. Brad Pribbenow, Isaiah Bai, Dr. Daniel Berge, and Dr. Eugene Boe.  
Not Pictured: Christopher Nab and David Olson.

# LBS Commencement Service

WHAT COMES AFTER TABOR? - MARK 9:14-29

PAUL SZOBODY

**W**hat comes after Tabor? Tabor is the traditional name of the Mount of Transfiguration. There Peter, James and John encountered Moses—the voice of the Law, Elijah—representing the Prophets, and Jesus—the final Word of God. It was glorious!

Seminary is like Tabor. Like the three disciples, you graduates studied Moses—the Pentateuch and Hebrew, Elijah—the message of the Prophets, and Jesus—theology and the New Testament. It was wonderful!

But Tabor ends. So does seminary. As the disciples come down the mountain, they find human need and... *failed ministry!* The nine left behind, though also educated by Christ, couldn't cast out the demon. When Peter, James and John show up, they don't rise to the occasion. *Jesus alone responds to the cry of need!*

Why has Jesus allowed this failure? What was he wanting to teach his disciples—even after Tabor?

Evidently, biblical studies weren't enough. Doctrine wasn't enough. Not even a beatific vision was enough! That day all the disciples met their personal insufficiency for ministry. So, they ask Jesus: Why can't we do it? And Jesus responds: "This kind of spirit—this kind of raw evil, this kind of pastoral or missionary problem—*only comes out by prayer.*"

In fact, what was Jesus—the human being, the preacher, the missionary—doing on Tabor? Luke tells us (9:29): *praying*. What was he doing as he began public ministry, at his baptism, when the Spirit came down? Again, Luke says (3:21): *praying*. Jesus spent his first month of ministry where? In a pulpit? With people? No, in a desert, praying. And when ministry left him too busy to eat, what did he do? Sent the crowd home

and stole away *to pray*. Shouldn't that tell you something?

So how do you pray like Jesus?

Lady Wisdom says she will pour her spirit on those who listen (Proverbs 1:23). This spirit, Zechariah says, is one of "grace and supplication" (12:10). You have him, Paul says, to help you pray, to even make groanings in a way only God understands (Romans 8:26-27). The New Testament exhorts you to pray *in, with,* or (as in my French Bible) *under the propulsion* of the Spirit. This Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7).

Yes, theology is for prayer. What good is it to gain the whole world of theological science and lose its soul?

Paul prays in Ephesians (1:18; 3:17-19) that the eyes of the heart receive spiritual vision to know what is, in fact, unknowable: the geometry of grace—the height, depth, breadth, and width of the love of Christ. And that *by that* kind of knowledge—beyond books or commentaries—you might be filled with the *fullness* of God's presence!

It's a breathtaking prayer. It's theology prayed. And—most importantly—its content is so necessary for life, for ministry, for mission.

In academic terms: Exegetical, biblical, dogmatic, moral, historical, and practical theology exists for... *spiritual* theology. Certainly, our pietist forefathers would agree with that! That sums up their program. It should sum up ours.

Can I introduce you to a friend? His name is Randy. He was my seminary dean. He had a Ph.D. from the prestigious University of Edinburgh, he grew our student body to about 200, and he was honored by the State Legislature for his many contributions to education and society in South Carolina.

He was also our pastor. He took me

under his wings and mentored me in pastoral visitation. One day, after our rounds, he pulled out the Westminster Confession and asked me: "Paul, why don't you become a Presbyterian minister?" "I want to be a Lutheran," I told him.

After graduation, while loading a rental truck to move to Minnesota for studies at the Lutheran Brethren Seminary, Randy showed up. He climbed up in the truck, tied our children's bicycles up on the sideboards, and then went into the house, took the vacuum from my wife, and said: "I'll finish the sweeping." The next day at church came a bigger surprise. He announced in the service: "We're taking an offering to help the Szobodys get to Fergus Falls."

What no one knew was that we did not have enough money to get to Minnesota! I did two architectural jobs to pay for the trip, and one of them never paid. Nevertheless, the offering came in around the very amount we lacked!

Not long ago we stopped to visit Randy and his wife Molly. Now aged, hardly able to walk, Randy made his way to a chair. I asked, "Pastor, I watched you over the years. You were always putting out fires and solving problems in people's lives, in the seminary, in your synod, but you never seemed discouraged, you kept your spiritual vitality. How did you do it?"

What I was really asking was this: "After Tabor, how did you do effective ministry?"

He lifted his head and spoke softly: "I talk to God a lot."

*Dr. Paul Szobody serves Lutheran Brethren International Mission with his wife Teresa as missionaries in Chad, Africa.*

## ISAIAH BAI - MASTER OF DIVINITY DEGREE

Isaiah was born and raised in Shanghai, China. At the age of 18, he attended the University of Oregon. Sensing the call to Christian ministry, he transferred to New Hope Christian College and earned the Bachelor of Science in Pastoral Ministry. He served in Immanuel Lutheran Church of Eugene as a pastoral intern under Dr. Daniel Berge. Dr. Berge introduced LBS President Dr. Veum to Isaiah. Isaiah decided to pursue the Master of Divinity degree from LBS in 2017. He studied online for his first year, then moved to Fergus Falls, Minnesota in 2018 to attend seminary onsite.

Isaiah says of LBS, “I appreciate that I’ve gotten to know the CLB family and the seminary. As a student, I never felt alone on my journey to be a pastor because I am trained and taught by professors who went through the very same stages as us students. I also owe a debt to my fellow classmates with whom I share the yoke of ministry. Attending LBS is not just getting a degree, but also building fellowship among the future laborers of the harvest.”

Isaiah married Kaitlin in 2015 and they have two daughters: Hannah and Samantha. Currently Isaiah is in the call process and looks forward to full-time ministry.

## CHRISTOPHER NAB - CERTIFICATE OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Christopher was born in Greeley, Colorado, and moved to Texas 20 years later in 2003. He has been married to his wonderful wife Heather for the past 12-1/2 years, and currently lives in Buda, Texas.

Even from a young age, Chris heard the call to service of the Lord Jesus, and his command to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” rings loud and clear to Chris. When Chris first heard the gospel, he says, “It was like a veil was lifted and I was set on the path to bring the Good News, the gospel, to other sinful people.” Chris sees the plan of God over his life—whether from a pulpit, street corner, or social media—to proclaim the gospel in word and deed.

To this end, Chris has plans in place to go abroad—first a seven-day revival in Nigeria, then Mexico, while also remaining passionate to witness to his neighbors at home. Chris is currently working on starting up III Lions Evangelistic Organization, to carry out the evangelistic vision given to him at a young age, which still drives him today.

## DAVID OLSON - MASTER OF DIVINITY DEGREE

David attended the Free Lutheran Bible College in Plymouth, Minnesota for two years, spent a year in independent study while working as Youth Director for an AFLC church in Illinois, moved to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where he finished his B.A. at Augustana University, and subsequently completed his M.Div. from LBS by working part-time for five years via distance education.

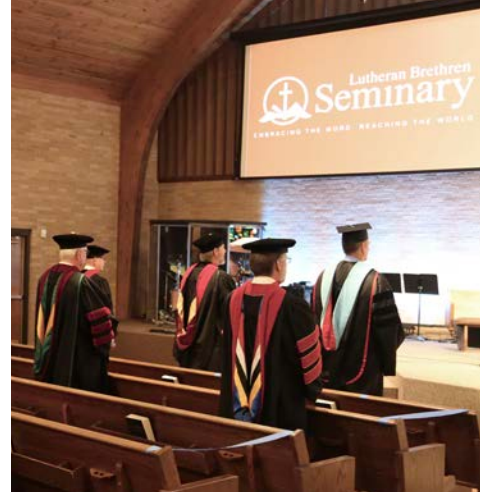
David is appreciative of his education at LBS: “I was given a profound humility through seminary as I learned from professors far smarter than I, while being pushed to remain curious and dogged in pursuit of truth in Christ. But also, while I would have described my interest in theology as more academic when I entered seminary, I find my views to be much more pastoral and richly Christ-centered leaving seminary.”

David is married with two daughters and continues to live in Sioux Falls where he and his wife operate a photography business. David is praying and discussing the possibility of church-planting in the Sioux Falls community in the coming years.

## MATTHEW RIENIETS - MASTER OF DIVINITY DEGREE

Matthew grew up in Tioga, North Dakota, where he was home schooled in a Christian family. He has been married to wife Julia for the last six years and they have two children: Thor and Phoebe.

After high school, Matt moved to Plymouth, Minnesota where he attended the Association Free Lutheran Bible School (now Free Lutheran Bible College) earning diplomas in biblical studies (2009) and Christian ministry (2010). He also earned a Bachelor of Science in Christian Ministry (2016) and a Master of Arts in Christian Studies (2017) from Crown College while he served as a youth/associate pastor in Tioga, North Dakota (2010-2017). Since beginning seminary Matt has served at Stavanger Lutheran Church in Fergus Falls, Minnesota as associate pastor. Matt is currently looking forward to serving a church full-time in a pastoral role this fall.



The 2020 LBS graduation was held on June 13.

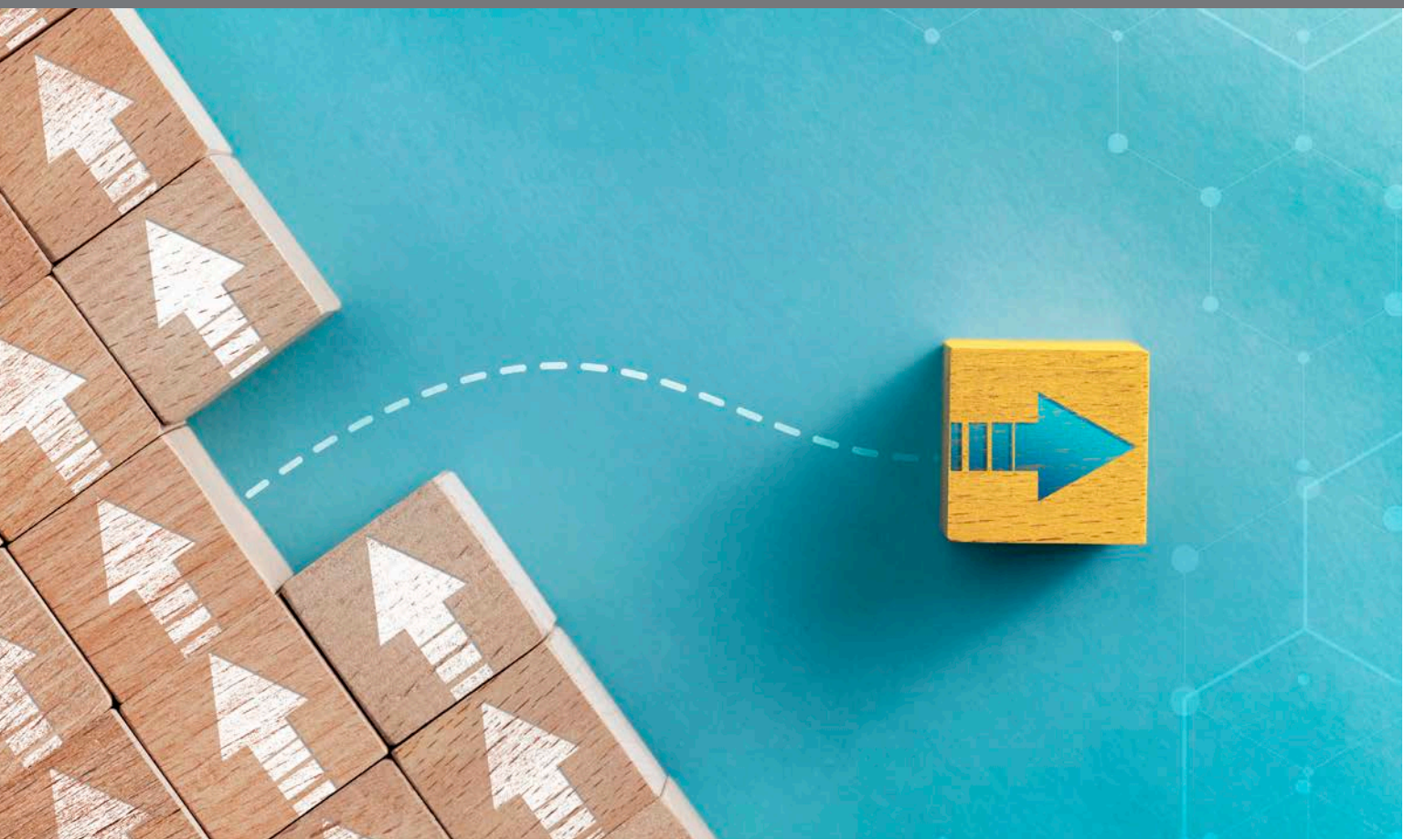


Dr. Paul Szobody addressing the graduates.



Above: Matt Rieniets receiving his hood from LBS faculty.  
Below: Isaiah Bai holding his degree.





Leadership/sefa ozeel/Stock

# Transforming the Church

KRISTIAN ANDERSON

**C**ommunity is important. The community you find yourself in has a great impact on who you are. When I first gave my life to Christ, I had almost no Christian friends. I took a look around at my community, at who I spent my time with, and realized that if I was going to continue to grow in my newfound relationship with God, I would have to put myself around people who would encourage me in that, instead of spending most of my time with those who would love me, but not support my faith walk.

When I read the gospel of Matthew for the first time, I was struck by Matthew 12:46-50:

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood

outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.” He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

This passage impacted me because it meant that my family just got a whole lot bigger. I didn’t come from a family that followed Jesus, so it was meaningful that I had inherited this whole new family that could support me in my faith.

Even though Jesus has expanded the definition of what family means in his kingdom, for many years in the Church

we have primarily disciplined through our genetic families. Parents disciple their kids, and those kids grow up and disciple their own. Church elders have often been the patriarchs of the larger families in a congregation. For decades, this has mostly worked, but it has functioned for two reasons. First, most churches have not been large churches like we see today; they’ve been smaller and built around their immediate community. Second, for generations, North America has been culturally Christian. It was expected that you belonged to a church, so people would come to faith or a deeper understanding as they grew up in that church.

We all know that this is no longer the case. We now live in a post-Christian culture, where many people have never

***“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”***

***Isaiah 52:7***

even stepped foot in a church, let alone had their parents bring them to weekly Sunday services and youth group. Yet we recognize that our community shapes our understanding, our identity, and spurs us on in our beliefs. So, we have a problem. If the people in our churches only disciple their children, entire communities of people may never come to faith; we will isolate ourselves and fail at evangelism.

The people around us impact who we are, for good or bad. I learned early in my Christian life that if I didn't surround myself with those who knew Christ as their Savior, my life in Christ would be difficult to pursue. Yet at the same time, I also recognized that if all I did was spend time with Christians, I wouldn't be able to form relationships that would give me the opportunity to share my faith.

This past fall at Triumph Lutheran Brethren Church in Moorhead, Minnesota, I started to ask our staff questions to help us build an initiative and strategy that could have a large impact on our church and our community. I asked, “What do we excel at? What can we improve on? If you were lead pastor for a day, what would you do? And how would you go about accomplishing that?” We compiled our answers and looked for commonalities. We then surveyed people who had come to our campus in the last 18 months regarding their experience with us.

After compiling that information, two things stood out: people were looking for a sense of belonging and had a desire for real community. I believe my church is not unique in this; it's probably the

experience for most people who attend our churches. How do we create a sense of belonging and a place where people can be in a community that helps build them up in their relationship with God?

The book *Transformational Church* addresses the need for community. A leadership coach quoted in the book says, “I believe the biggest reason Christians in general experience so little transformation in their lives is that they ignore the Bible's relational mandate for how to effect change. We were never meant to live the Christian life alone. Christianity is an interdependent, community-oriented faith. And yet when we set out to improve our prayer life, or deal with our anger problem, or increase our income, or become a better father, most of the time we work on it completely alone.”

We saw the truth of this in our church, so we started building a system for small groups to once again be part of who we are as a church. However, this wasn't just about setting up a bunch of small group Bible studies. We began to see the mission of groups as *providing a place of authentic community where relationships are grown and faith is deepened*. Groups help facilitate our relationships, create community where each of us live authentically, grow spiritually, develop disciples, serve our community, and help us go beyond our church doors.

This can (and did) feel like a big undertaking, especially if you want to do it well from the beginning, so it was important to establish what some of the essential components for success would be. We created a leadership force,

developed a coaching structure so that our lay leaders had training and ongoing development, and shaped a culture of how our groups run and how to start new ones.

No single initiative will transform our churches or communities. But as we strive to follow Christ's example, seeing our church communities as our families and our broader communities as our mission fields, we pray that God's transformational power will work through our churches so that his culture shapes our communities. It has been a blessing to see people live life together in their homes and in our community and spur each other on in their faith. The family of God goes beyond genetics. Let's embrace that together.



*Rev. Kristian Anderson is East Campus Pastor at Triumph Lutheran Brethren Church in Moorhead, Minnesota.*



*Harriet turned 108 in LB Homes' long term care facility, the Broen Home. She has been cared for during the pandemic through the ministry of LB Homes, supported by the larger vision of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.*

# Pandemic and Disease are Realities in this World

CALEB LARSON

**W**e see the reality of sickness in the world around us. It is in our present and our past. Our history is full of it. The Scriptures tell the story of how God's people faced the reality of sickness and death in the world again and again. All because we live in a world that is broken by sin.

Since the world is broken by sin, death reigns. Since death reigns, sickness and pestilence are prevalent in this world. It is a reality of the life that we live. As Christians, we acknowledge that death is a part of the brokenness of creation. Therefore we acknowledge, and are not surprised that sickness, pandemic, and death arise.

It is natural to fear sickness. We are created to live, and we know that sickness can be painful, debilitating, and even fatal. Discomfort and death are not attractive to us. We want to be healthy, and happy, and live. So we fear sickness, and because we grow afraid, we sometimes struggle to remember what we should do and how we should live as Christians during times of sickness.

The Apostle Paul writes to remind the Church in Romans 12:9-13 how their lives should look:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another

above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Paul's exhortation to the Church does not distinguish between times of sickness and times of good health. This is because Paul's words are grounded in the eternal hope that is found in knowing Jesus Christ. Paul has no reason to be afraid of sickness because Paul is a servant of the Resurrection and the Life. Being free from fear, then, what does life look like? To be sincere in love. To hate evil. To





John Zwiers • CEO

## PROVIDING CHRIST-CENTERED CARE AND SUPPORT

We care for people who have significant vulnerabilities. Some of the loved ones we tend to care for are at the end of their time on earth, cared for by our hospice service. Others are in our care sites. Some live in apartments while others are cared for with 24-7 nursing staff.

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[www.lbhomes.org/covid19](http://www.lbhomes.org/covid19)



practice devotion to one another. To honor one another. To be spiritually fervent. To be joyful in hope. To be patient in times of affliction. To be faithful in prayer. To share with those in need. To be hospitable.

That's a beautiful list, isn't it?

It's all the more important that, as the church, we seek to provide care to one another. In present context, this means caring not only for those who are sick (and sometimes at our own risk), but we also do all that we can to avoid spreading a virus to others.

Although we do not have to fear sickness or death, we do have a responsibility to take these issues seriously. It affects the well-being of ourselves, our families, and our neighbors. We're called to act in a way that is sober-minded and responsible—not flippant about our response to disease and pandemic.

Disease carries great impact on people's lives. We must take it seriously because the effects of disease are serious, and those who are suffering from those effects bear a heavy burden. It is a great disservice to others if we treat lightly and frivolously the things that are burdensome to them.

So we don't willingly expose ourselves to needless risk. We don't

act irresponsibly. For the sake of our neighbors and to avoid testing God, we use sound precautions. Yet we also acknowledge that there may be times when we Christians have to be exposed to the dangers of sickness and disease.

There will be times that the spread of disease is simply unavoidable. There will be times when we will need to step in to provide care for those who are sick and cannot care for themselves, and we must knowingly take that risk and expose ourselves to danger. Not recklessly or motivated by ignorance or strife, but out of love for one another.

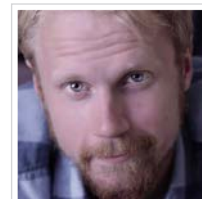
Yet, although we should and do use precautions and best practices when caring for the sick, it's important to remember that as Christians we do not have to live in fear. Even during times of great upheaval and turmoil, we have a confidence that this world cannot shake. We have a confidence and a hope that is found in Jesus Christ. He is a sure foundation during times of pandemic and trouble.

We have a calling as a Church to a unique opportunity during times of sickness and pandemic. The calling is to be ministers of hope. To be hands that care. To be shoulders that people can cry

on and that can bear the loads of others. To be witnesses to the power of the One who is "the Resurrection and the Life." To be able, with confidence, to give a reason for the hope we have to anyone who asks.

That confidence is infectious. The beauty of the hope of the gospel spreads just as easily as sickness. Through the power of Jesus' blood and the word of our testimony, the Church will advance and overcome the forces of sickness, of pestilence, of death.

So hear Paul's encouragement to the Church today. How should we live during times of sickness and disease? The same way we should live every day: joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer, and sincere in our love and care for one another.



Rev. Caleb Larson serves as chaplain at LBHomes in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

# After 34 Years with LBIM, Rogness Retires as Director

CLB PRESIDENTS: PAST AND PRESENT

## ROBERT OVERGAARD, SR:

When I read of Matthew's retirement as Director of Lutheran Brethren International Mission, I thought, "He was chosen of God!" When God sent Samuel to search for a candidate for the highest office in the land (1 Samuel 16), Samuel was directed to the family of Jesse who had eight sons. Jesse brought seven of his sons forward. Samuel asked, "Do you have any more sons?" Jesse answered, "There is still the youngest, but he is out taking care of the sheep."

In LBIM we were looking for a person with management and leadership skills for a particular assignment in missions. We saw the gifts even though there was not the appropriate experience. Now all these years later we generously paraphrase the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 7:8) and report that God saw what we could not have known: The Lord of Hosts has shown us what he has done. He took Matthew Rogness from the parish ministry, tending the flock, and made him an effective leader over a fruitful mission that for a century, together with the newborn Churches, has made the choirs of heaven sing.

Thanks be to God for these gifts of grace to the Church and to the world.

*Rev. Robert Overgaard, Sr. served as President of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren from 1986 to 2001.*

## JOEL EGGE:

I was privileged to work alongside Matthew Rogness on several Church Councils and administrative committees. I found "Matt" to be supportive, articulate, experienced, optimistic, and humorous. He came to meetings prepared to address issues, propose ways to proceed, and pledge support of the final decisions. Matthew was a faithful companion in



*Rev. Matthew Rogness served 6 years as a missionary in Cameroon, 2 years as associate director, and 26 years as director.*

private prayer and the public ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ. His wife, Judy, made a powerful contribution to his work. They were/are an excellent team.

As Director of International Mission, Rogness was a strong advocate for our missionaries, an effective communicator with financial partners, and a clear voice for LBIM's goals. The Lord God has blessed our churches and international mission partners through the life, gifts, and vision he has given Matthew Rogness.

*Rev. Joel Egge served as President of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren from 2001 to 2014.*

## PAUL LARSON:

Together with the voices of past CLB presidents, I give thanks to God for our colleague, Rev. Matthew Rogness, whose wise, steady, and fruitful leadership as Director of LBIM has spanned a quarter of a century. I honor my friend Matthew for his faithfulness to the mission God called Judy and him to 26 years ago.

There is a line in Proverbs 18:15, that when I read it, I think of Matthew: "The heart of the discerning acquires

knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out." The heart of the discerning—it sounds like Solomon envisions a unique class of persons who, being sourced in the fear of the Lord, are known for their discernment. The discerning ones, the discerning hearts, are leaders among us whose lives are characterized by this strength, and whose influence upon others and their following of God is borne out through a distinctive measure of the grace of discernment.

That, I believe, has been a forte of Matthew Rogness' ministry among us, his insightful personalized care and direction of our missionaries and mission, as well as his valued influence upon me. Thank you, Matthew. And, may God raise up more of the discerning to gift the Church in her mission of Christ's gospel.

*Rev. Paul Larson has served as President of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren since 2014.*

JULY/AUGUST 2020

## Collins Ordained



(Standing L to R): Elder Troy Turchin, Rev. Stan Synstyeilen, Rev. Adam Krog, Elders Andrew Isaacson, Brent Finseth, Rev. Troy Tysdal, Elders Greg Anderson, Tom Lake, and Rev. Rodney Venberg. Kneeling: Rev. Tim Collins.

On May 24, 2020, at Messiah Lutheran Church in Underwood, Minnesota, Tim Collins was ordained as a pastor. CLB Director of Communications and Prayer Rev. Troy Tysdal officiated.

## Jensen Ordained, McIvor Installed



(L to R): Rev. Dirk McIvor, Rev. Adam Jensen, and Rev. Marty Valder.

On June 14, 2020, Rev. Marty Valder ordained Pastor Adam Jensen at Maple Park Church in Lynnwood, Washington. Immediately following his ordination, Rev. Jensen installed Rev. Dirk McIvor as the new Associate Pastor of Maple Park Church.

## Dan Venberg Named New Director of LBIM



Dan Venberg visiting the CLB mission field in Chad, Africa.

I am happy to introduce to you, my colleague and friend, Dan Venberg as the new Director of Lutheran Brethren International Mission (LBIM). I have had a front row seat in watching his ministry and sensing his heart for the mission of LBIM grow and mature over these years of ministry together.

Dan and Rachel served under my leadership among the Fulbe people of southern Chad. They were called to this discipleship-relational ministry in July of 2002. They served in Chad for ten fruitful years. This has been foundational to our ministry among the Fulbe people of Chad and to Dan's ongoing ministry here in North America.

Dan served with us in a part-time role in our LBIM office until November of 2013, when he was called to be our Mission Mobilizer and Recruiter. In this role, Dan has visited many of our Lutheran Brethren congregations. He has assisted and empowered congregations and individuals to understand the needs and opportunities for ministry in Asia and Africa. He has helped the North American Church embrace and address the international gospel outreach to people who would never hear about Jesus if we did not go to them. In his role as recruiter, Dan has engaged pastors and congregants in praying the Lord of the harvest to raise up workers for our international mission field.

I believe that Dan is well prepared and gifted to lead Lutheran Brethren International Mission into the future. May the Lord richly bless Dan as he leads this vital ministry of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

Rev. Matthew Rogness  
 Director of International Mission (1986-2020)  
 Church of the Lutheran Brethren

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## Texting While Driving

I was texting while driving the other day—something I abhor when others do it. But I told myself it was harmless, in my situation. I was just leaving church to drive home. In fact, I had already put the transmission in DRIVE when it occurred to me that my wife might need something from KwikTrip. So I texted her, steering with my knees as my car rolled around our spacious and completely empty parking lot. I glanced up—don't know why—to find my car heading squarely toward the only structure in the lot, a light tower on a round concrete base. I hit the brakes, stopping within a yard of the obstacle, thus avoiding some extensive damage, and possibly one of the most embarrassing moments of my life.

Ten minutes later, I pulled up to an intersection, first car in line at the stop light. I knew that particular light would be green for exactly 12 seconds. Seriously. So, as a courteous driver, I needed to accelerate quickly to allow a few more cars behind me to make it through. I've done this countless times. But this time—I don't know why—when the light turned green, I hesitated for at least a half second. Only then did the bicyclist roll through the crosswalk right in front of me. He smiled and waved at me, I think, to express that he knew it had almost become *his* most embarrassing moment in life, or something much worse.

I drove the rest of the way home reflecting on this question: Why didn't these bad things happen? And the corollary, how many times each day am I protected from such things without being aware of it?

The answers have to do with God's omniscience. None of us knows what lies around the corner, or what our next moment holds. But God does. He sees what we cannot see, literally, and he knows what we cannot know regarding our future. It is a wonderful thing that God is omniscient, yet even more wonderful that God is personal—that based on his omniscience, he involves himself in our existence.

The omniscient and personal God, thankfully, goes one step further. Oh, how he loves you and me. This great love for us has always been, and will always be, true of God. But the greatest, and the only evidence of this that we need, is God in the flesh coming to our world and giving himself completely for us on the cross in his Son Jesus Christ.

Why *didn't* I foolishly smash my car into a light post? Why *didn't* I bear the guilt—and that bicyclist the pain—of a crosswalk collision? One more question, why *won't* I suffer forever the consequences of my sin? Because God is omniscient; God is personal; God loves me.

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