

Faith & Fellowship

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Editor In Chief/
Graphic Designer: Troy Tysdal
tysdal@clba.org

Contributing Editor: Brent Juliot
bjuliot@clba.org

Copy Editor: Tim Mathiesen
tmathiesen@clba.org

Copy Editor: Aaron Juliot

Cover Photo:
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Quiet Moments

Email prayer requests to: pray@clba.org

Glory in God

H.E. WISLØFF



Have you seen a dewdrop as it comes pure and sparkling out of the beauty of the sunrise? It has so much to teach you.

First of all, it is so little. We are like the dewdrop in this. Our downfall lies in our self-exaltation. As long as we glory in that, we are lost.

The pharisee was so lifted up when he stood in the temple sunning himself in his own deeds. But his big self-estimation kept him away from entering the Kingdom of God. The narrow gate is too small for those who imagine they are great.

The tax collector was so small that he stood at a distance and

did not even dare to lift his eyes to heaven. He was condemned and helpless. He had nothing of which to boast. His hands were empty when they were lifted towards

heaven. But he went home—justified.

Humble yourself as the tax collector did. All our self-exaltation is only window dressing which the eye of God penetrates. All is open and naked to his eye.

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.

Unexpected Grace

TROY TYSDAL

After graduating high school in 1997, I planned to attend a four-year college and pursue a communication art and design degree. It just so happened that my mother's cousin was the owner of a successful graphic design firm a few hours from us, and she arranged for me to spend the day with him. He was encouraging but told me, "If you are serious about a career in graphic design, you go to Alex Tech." Alex Tech was a two-year program, but it had a reputation in the industry for producing great graphic designers. At the heart of the program was an instructor named Craig Bjerke, better known to us as Mr. Bjerke.

Mr. Bjerke was a no-nonsense kind of guy. On the first day of class, he told us, "Look at the person sitting next to you..." My eyes fixed on the young man I was sharing a table with, and his eyes fixed on me. Then Mr. Bjerke said, "This course has a 50% dropout rate; one of you will not be here at graduation." I was terrified. I didn't like the odds, and to make matters worse, computers were central to the program, and I'd never worked on a computer before.

A few days later, the course load increased, and I was still struggling to learn the software. About four hours into my first big project, I was starting to feel good, and that's when it happened. The lights in the computer lab flickered, and all the screens went black. You guessed it; I had yet to hit *save*. My project was lost. I was defeated. I was destroyed. I went to my locker, convinced I was done, but I was so flustered I could not remember my combination. So, I just sat down. I could feel the tears welling up in my eyes, and then all of a sudden, out of nowhere, my tormentor appeared. Mr. Bjerke was standing over me. As I sat on the floor, my back against my locker, I expected no mercy. I expected to hear him say, "Get



up, and get out! This program is not for you."

Life is full of challenges and trouble, computer crashes and chaos. We bring much of it upon ourselves, and much of it seems to come upon us without warning. We are both Eve in the Garden of Eden—who could not resist the devil's temptation, and Job in the land of Uz—who was righteous and blameless before God. In the chaos of life, it can be tempting to think that God is a big tyrant who enjoys our suffering. That he watches from a distance in judgment, believing we are getting what our sins deserve. But that could not be further from the truth.

HEBREWS 4:15

We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

As I looked up and saw Mr. Bjerke standing over me, I felt small. But then the unexpected happened. Mr. Bjerke

left his position of power and, right in the middle of the hallway, he sat down. At that moment, the bell rang. I was embarrassed and wanted to stand up, but Mr. Bjerke didn't move. He didn't stand up. He just sat there amid the chaos (students coming and going), and he said this: "You're going to be all right." And over the next two years, he made sure that I was.

God has every right to show us no mercy, but instead he does the unexpected. He sent his Son. Jesus left his position of power, and he became like us, for a little while, that he might say to us, "You're going to be all right."

Do you feel lost and defeated? It is not true that you are. In Jesus Christ, we have a God who understands the chaos. He is with you amid the trouble, and he has given his life to ensure that you will make it through.

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.



Alex Sava/Stock

The Humility of Christ

RANDY MORTENSON



The humblest man...

Who was the humblest person to ever live? If you've read Numbers 12:3, then you may recall that Moses was "more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." (And yes, I smile when I read that, because you know who wrote it? Moses!)

Moses was very humble, astoundingly so. Yet the depth of his humility was measured by comparison to other people—everyone else on earth, in fact. I am humbled by Moses' humility. I also find myself humbled by people who are kinder, wiser, more patient, more loving, and less complaining than myself.

The humility of Moses was a precursor and foreshadowing of an even greater humility to come, a humility that was beyond measure and beyond compare. I

am talking about the humility of Christ: Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God.

The go-to text for describing Jesus' humility is found in Philippians 2:6-8.

Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

In very nature God...

Right up front—at the very top—Jesus is beyond compare. Moses was close to God, in that he enjoyed a unique relationship

with God, speaking to him face to face (Exodus 33:11; Deuteronomy 34:10). But Moses was not "in very nature God"! So when we talk about Jesus, we are talking about God. And when we talk about the humility of Jesus, we are talking about the humility of God. The humility... of God!

Before continuing with Paul's descriptive summary, let's journey back to the beginning, to the beginning of time. It starts at Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Now let's go back another step or two, or perhaps *outside* the realm of time, to God's eternal existence. In this *place* (for lack of a better word), God was already humble in his heart. He had perfect humility within himself, beyond measure and beyond compare.

The Apostle Paul writes of Jesus, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

Philippians 2:6-8

This means Jesus—the eternally existent Son—did not *become* humble when he let go of his equality-with-God status and “made himself nothing.” Rather, he enacted his divine descent because of who he is and how completely humble he is. To connect back to Paul’s description, God had the cross already in mind before he ever created the cosmos.

Martin Luther’s symbolic seal (Luther’s rose) beautifully captures this theological truth. The outer circumference is a gold ring, representing eternity. And at the very center of the seal is a cross—the cross—as the central point of eternity! And around the cross? God’s heart. What a wonderful picture of the humility of Christ!

Now, all this was before time, before creation, before the beginning, before Genesis 1:1. A person unfamiliar with God and his Word may at this point ask, “Why? Why would God think about something as awful as a cross before he had even made anything?” To that question I would add two more: “What did God know?” And more to the heart of it all, “What did God want when he created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them?”

God, who is humble in heart, wanted fellowship with the crowning achievement of his creation: the creatures he created unlike any others, so close to his heart that they were fashioned and formed in his very image, in the image of God. In other words, God created the universe for us! And he created us—for himself.

So, what did he know? God knew that a serpent—the serpent—would slither

into the garden he had made for Adam and Eve. He knew they would listen to the serpent’s lies about him. He knew they would willingly choose the one forbidden fruit over the countless perfect and delicious fruits he had provided for them. He knew the apples of his eyes would break fellowship with him and destroy their own lives. He knew they would destroy their lives and the lives of all humanity forever, unless he had a plan to save them.

That makes the humility of God all the more stunning, doesn’t it? He knew all that. He knew how sinful we would be. That we would rebel against him, willingly, willfully, stubbornly. Pridefully. And still he created us! What kind of God would do that? Only a God who is humble beyond measure. And only a God who had a plan to achieve his desire in creation, despite mankind’s sin. To appreciate God’s humility from another perspective, imagine with me for one terrifying moment a god who is not humble.

A prideful god, knowing his special creatures would rebel, would have filled their original garden not with luscious trees for them to eat from but with torturous crosses for them to suffer on—interminably—for dismissing his word, despising his gifts, and disrespecting him. Or, a little-less-knowing god might have simply crushed Adam and Eve as soon as they had taken that fateful bite of forbidden fruit. Back to the ribcage and to the dirt with them! Be gone, ungrateful creatures!

But a God who is humble in heart, our God? He spoke to Adam and Eve. He

sewed leather garments for them to cover their own nakedness and shame. He promised not to crush them, but to crush two others in their stead: the serpent who had deceived them, and the Christ—God’s very own Son—who would save them (Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 53:5).

Before God ever created the cosmos, the cross was already part of his plan. And his Son—the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8)—was ready and waiting in the wings of eternity.

And so, when the fullness of time had come (Galatians 4:4), God’s perfect humility was manifested to the world in the form of his Son—

Who, being in very nature God... made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness... he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Jesus Christ did that... for you.



Rev. Randy Mortenson is Pastor of Bethel Lutheran Brethren Church in Ottawa, Illinois.



Kamonwan Wankaew/Stock

Freedom and Submission

GRETCHEN RONNEVIK

It can be a nagging question: if we all have the same Holy Spirit in us, shouldn't we have the exact same convictions on everything? If we are all reading the same Bible, and we all have been baptized into the same Spirit, then why don't we agree about things more often? As we know, truth isn't a fluid thing. We often rush to figure out who is right, and who is wrong. Those who are right feel superior, and those who are wrong feel jaded. But perhaps we are asking the wrong question.

"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1, ESV).

Taking this verse by itself, we can list all the Christ-like things Paul did, and then try to do all these things ourselves. However, Paul was referencing something very specific here. In context, he is talking about believers having different views on meat sacrificed to idols—whether or not one should eat meat that was somehow tainted by the evil spirits surrounding those dark places.

On one hand, we should have nothing to do with idol worship. On the other hand,

when you are poor, you take the meat you can get. Beggars can't be choosers. On one hand, if you have past trauma from idol worship, and have been rescued from that world, eating that meat could spiral you down to memories you have tried hard to forget. On the other hand, if you have no such memories, eating certain kinds of meat will not overcome the salvation that Christ's blood has purchased for you. God's grace isn't that fragile.

Is it wrong to eat meat sacrificed to idols? Well, *it depends*. And that's not the answer we expect, considering we all have the same Holy Spirit, who shows us what is right and wrong.

A few verses before this, Paul writes, "'All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful' but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor" (1 Corinthians 10:23-24, ESV). In other words, we need to understand the roles of freedom and submission in the Christian life. We are free in Christ. There is no condemnation for those who are in

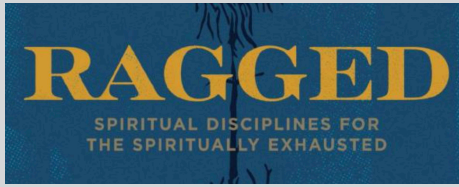
Christ. And yet, we are called to submit to one another.

Submission, at its root, is an act of humility. Submission is only possible within freedom, otherwise it's oppression. Oppression is an act done against you, and submission is an act of humility that you do for someone else. In other words, don't just humble yourself in the sight of the Lord. Humble yourself in the sight of your neighbors, and serve them.

Serve others freely. Know the place of the law in your Christian walk. It's not about being oppressive. The law 1) accuses us, 2) restrains us, 3) instructs us. Notice, the law never saves us or redeems us. That's not its job. It's not restoring us to God—that's the work of Christ, not the law. It is, though, a healthy guide for loving your neighbor. Don't steal, don't lie. Put the best construction on what they say and do. Give others the benefit of the doubt. Don't hurt others. Look after them. Love generously—with humility. The gospel doesn't abolish the law; it tells us Jesus fulfilled it.

Our temptation with the law—

Ragged



When we mistake spiritual disciplines for to-dos, time slots on our schedule, or Instagram-able moments, we miss the benefits of Christ's continual and constant work for us. In *Ragged*, Gretchen Ronnevik aims to reclaim spiritual disciplines as

good gifts given by our good Father instead of heavy burdens of performance carried by the Christian. Gretchen uses Law and Gospel, presented throughout Scripture, to guide readers through spiritual disciplines including prayer, meditation, Scripture reading, and discipleship, among others. Spiritual disciplines have less to do with what we bring before God and are more about who Christ is for us, as the Perfecter of our faith.

Available at: [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

our constant temptation—is to make ourselves feel superior when we keep it. In fact, lording the law over people with arrogance communicates that the weight of our righteousness is on us, not on Christ. It's a twisting of the law. This is why Paul says to imitate him, as he imitates Christ. Christ lived a perfect life on our behalf. And yet, he lowered himself for the sake of restoring others.

Martin Luther wrote, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all" (On the Freedom of the Christian, 1520). We live within that tension—a paradox.

Freedom and submission actually go hand in hand. Freedom is not scary, because we can hide in Christ-like submission, and submission is not scary, because we do it out of freedom. Freedom and submission are the nuts and bolts—the practical pieces—of how we live together in peace.

There's a reason that patience is listed as a fruit of the Spirit, but arrogance is not. Perfection is not a fruit of the Spirit, but kindness is. It's often an uncomfortable tension.

Paul writes about this same tension in regard to circumcision. Paul had someone circumcised so that he could preach the gospel, but later held his ground to not have another man circumcised. Why? Did he change his mind on the issue? Did he simply grow in his faith and no longer saw it as the issue?

The only hill that Paul was willing to die on, the fight he was willing to have, was, "How do I get the gospel of Christ to my neighbor? How do I help them understand?" Paul wasn't wringing his hands over whether he was fulfilling the law to perfection. He knew it was fulfilled to perfection in Christ. The law has its place in communicating the depths of the gospel—but not always in the way we think it does.

After his conversion, all of Paul's previous personal accomplishments—all his accolades through the law, all his status—didn't matter anymore. He considered them rubbish. Every good work he did after his conversion was for the purpose of preaching Christ crucified. Every person he loved was so that they might know the love of Christ. Every argument in which he engaged was to make sure everyone had access to hearing the gospel, that no one would be impeded from hearing the gospel. He wrote about the freedom we have in Christ, and how we should use that freedom to love others.

So, is meat sacrificed to idols good? Is it bad? To paraphrase, Paul said that Jesus took care of all of that, so the real question is, will eating meat help or hurt your neighbor's understanding of the gospel and what Christ did? Through which approach to meat will you love your neighbor better?

We often think these difficult judgment calls would be easier if we just had more laws, or even guidelines. What we have

instead is a Shepherd—a person. The Holy Spirit points us to the work of Christ, training us in humility and submission, that we might point others to the work of Christ.

In the Corinthian passage, Paul was talking about communicating the gospel to believers and unbelievers. This was an issue within the church as much as it was outside. The community of believers is to live in a gracious way with each other because that is how we remind each other of the sustaining nature of God's grace. We don't want anything to get in the way of communicating the gospel.



Gretchen Ronnevik is an author, farmwife, mother, and teacher of six children. Her course on Gospel Mentoring can be found at www.gospelmentoring.com.

The Death to Self

BRIAN QUADE

My dad is a career blood donor. I've lost count of the number of gallons of his blood he's donated, one pint at a time, to help others in crisis. It costs him time, and each donation takes about a tenth of his blood out of his body. My dad needs his blood, but by offering his life-sustaining blood in small doses, he provides life-giving gifts to others. It's a gift of sacrifice. It's also a helpful picture of our biblical call to die to ourselves.

Through the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 12:1, God calls us into a mystery. Throughout Scripture we see the power and significance of sacrifice for our relationship with God. Those sacrificial offerings were final. Blood was shed. They ended in death. In Romans 12, we learn of a new kind of sacrifice: daily, repeatedly, offering ourselves as *living sacrifices*. This is worshipfully giving ourselves—not to death—but to God and to others, in service to God. As living sacrifices, we become "spiritual blood donors." Jesus explained that one mark of our relationship with him is that "whoever wants to be [his] disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow [him]" (Luke 9:23).

I'm convinced that taking up our cross is less about the weighty burden or the sense of martyrdom that grabs our attention, and much more about the resolve to give our lives, our rights, our talents, our moments, and our days to love God and love others for God's mission and glory, often in simple ways.

In fact, dying to self happens most profoundly in small ways, rather than in grand displays of sacrifice, as we learn to live like spiritual blood donors. In Philippians 2:3-4, just prior to the description of Jesus, the Apostle Paul clearly explains our call as living sacrifices, with instructions that are dramatically countercultural: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

Jesus also reminded us of what God declared in Hosea 6:6, "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings." Our life of faith is demonstrated less in our being right or following the rules, and more in giving ourselves to others lovingly and graciously, letting go of ourselves, so that



pamela_d_mcadams/Stock

others can experience how precious they are to us and to God.

My dad needs his blood, and he deserves to keep it. But he knows that it can help others, too, and he gives what he needs, what is rightfully his, as a living sacrifice to bless others.

What does it look like to apply this truth in our lives? What does it look like to be spiritual blood donors, to deny ourselves and take up our cross, to be living sacrifices, who offer ourselves again and again, so that God's grace, love, and glory may shine?

As a parent of small children, one significant concern for me was time. I tend to get stressed about schedules, and my oldest daughter has always lived at her own pace. I would often be frustrated that she didn't "listen" and help me keep my schedule. But then one day, while I was frustrated with her because we were later than I'd planned to go to church for Wednesday night programming, I realized it wasn't her fault that I was stressed. It wasn't her responsibility, as a kid, to make my adult priorities fall into place. Most importantly, as I put my stress on her, it wasn't going to help her experience church as the positive, rich,



and life-giving experience I wanted it to be for her. That realization didn't shut off my stress, but I did start learning to be a spiritual blood donor for her, by not putting the burden of my stress on her.

As a parent now of teens and emerging adults, I find that being a spiritual blood donor means having open and honest conversations with my kids without trying to manipulate them to do what I think is best. It means talking honestly about the positive and negative consequences of our decisions and the truth of God's Word, but then allowing them the freedom of their own journey with Jesus. Their journey may not always look like mine or include the decisions I would make, but I will find ways to remind them that I love them and will work through things with them.

These days, people in our society have very little tolerance for those who think differently than they do. In addition, as followers of Jesus, we feel so much pressure to influence our society for good or to hold onto any influence or power we have. But as spiritual blood donors, we can model the kind of love that Jesus gave us and offers them—"while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans

5:8b). As spiritual blood donors, we can relearn the art of graciously disagreeing, working to maintain relationships with people who think differently than we do, even those whose convictions seem opposed to our own. As spiritual blood donors, as living sacrifices, we put aside our rights and our demands, humbly valuing others above ourselves and looking out for their interests.

More and more, we experience the challenges of cross-cultural ministry in our own society. As spiritual blood donors, we need to learn and implement the skills of cross-cultural ministry, entering into conversations and relationships first as learners, then as servants, and ultimately as God's storytellers.

Dying to self, in this life of worshipful generosity, is rarely about taking an actual bullet for someone or putting our physical lives on the line. While our day-to-day spiritual blood donations can be emotionally challenging, most of the time our resolve to take up our cross and follow Jesus is lived out in mundane moments of grace and kindness.

There's another miracle in this. So many things in life threaten us, wound us, and leave us as victims. But dying to

self as living sacrifices doesn't reduce us to victimhood; it mobilizes us as donors. We may grieve some of these experiences or wonder what might have been. But rather than feel that life is drained from us, we turn to God, the source of life and the master of mercy, and we're restored in him; his grace is sufficient for us. As we take up our cross in this merciful exchange, "we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body" (2 Corinthians 4:11).



Rev. Brian Quade is Executive Pastor at Bethesda Lutheran Brethren Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

CLB Shared Ministry: Contribution Report

\$1,823,411

Received Through 12/31/21

\$2,900,000

2021-22 Fiscal Year Goal

The CLB Fiscal Year ends April 30, 2022.

Humility

ROY HEGGLAND

People are often known primarily for what they have done. In fact, we tend to define who people are by what they have accomplished in life. Someone may be described as a pro football player, a scratch golfer, the CEO of a large company, a doctor, a pastor, a teacher, a dental hygienist (you can fill in your own description). These labels tell us some things about a person: how much education they have, what their interests are, their level of dedication, their skills, etc. Most people enjoy being known for their accomplishments. The issue with this way of identifying each other is that it only gives us a surface view of who someone is. A person is so much more than what they have accomplished or the positions they have held.

When is the last time you heard someone described as being humble? What comes to mind if someone is described as humble? Maybe your first thought is that the person is “limited,” that is, a person of “humble means.” Or perhaps you are thinking that the person really hasn’t accomplished much, so humble is a good way to describe them.

The Bible mentions the word humility or being humble many times and always in the context of this being a good thing. In fact, humility is a trait that God wants for us. Why would God want us to be humble? One answer is that humility changes the way we see ourselves and others. Humility is a recognition of who

I am in relation to God and to other people. I am someone no more deserving of God’s mercy and grace than anyone else—which is to say that I don’t deserve it at all.

But I am not saying that being humble means that I am nothing, or that I don’t matter, or that I am somehow inferior to other people. You and I were created in the image of God, and although we have been corrupted by sin, God attributes infinite worth to us. The proof of this is that God sent his own Son, Jesus, to live, suffer, and die for us. We are valuable to him. So why is humility so highly valued by God? Here is the perfect picture of humility (Philippians 2:3-11, ESV):

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that

at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Our very salvation depended on Jesus humbling himself and becoming obedient to death on the cross. And our salvation depends on us recognizing our completely lost state (being humbled) so that we are willing to receive his mercy and grace and be brought to life in Christ. In a recent sermon, my pastor said, regarding a person who had passed into glory, that he was someone who had allowed others and God to minister to him. Could this be the most important thing that could ever be said about any of us? And as we humble ourselves, we recognize the value that God places on all people.

Will you in humility remember others, pray for their salvation, and give—so that many more may hear the Good News?

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

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

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P.O. Box 739
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New WMCLB Co-Director

KAREN STENBERG

H! My name is Karen Stenberg. I have been on the WMCLB Leadership team as the Secretary and am now excited to move into the role of Co-Director of Women's Ministries with Barbara Hegglund! I just want to share with you a little bit about myself and my heart for women.

I currently live in Bergenfield, New Jersey, where my husband pastors Calvary Church. Daniel and I have six boys ranging in age from twelve to one year old. Yes! Our house is busy and loud! But it is also a lot of fun, and on the days when it gets overwhelming, it's just another reminder that God's grace is sufficient for me!

I'm originally from Olympia, Washington, but I have lived in a few different places including North Tonawanda, New York; Calgary, Alberta; Fergus Falls, Minnesota; and now Bergenfield, New Jersey.

My heart's desire is to see women connecting with each other, through meaningful relationship, God's Word, and prayer.

Women in community with each other and the Lord is something God continues to put on my heart. The women in my life have been such an encouragement to me. Women have prayed, laughed, cried, brought meals, listened, shared Scripture with, and challenged me. When I faced the difficulties of being a young newlywed, when I struggled at a new job, when I was a lonely young mom with babies, and more times than I can count, the encouragement from women in the church communities has been such a blessing to me. We all have our



vadimguzhva/iStock

own unique struggles, challenges, and victories in each stage of life. Being vulnerable with each other and being able to share how God is working in those places in our lives is so valuable.

I'm excited about the training up of women leaders. Women are vital in supporting, volunteering, and leading. But even if we have a passion for volunteering in our community, leading a small group, or opening our homes to share a meal, we may not know where to get started. Maybe our insecurities keep us from believing God can use us. I've been there! Sometimes I am still there! But this is another area where I know God is at work, and I am excited to see where God leads as we seek to encourage women in their gifts.

I also long to see women connect with God's Word in their everyday life. Whether life seems a monotonous trudge or you find yourself in deep hurt, God's Word is for you. There are times when it can feel dry or confusing, or we don't know where to begin. I long for women to

see how God's love and grace are written for them throughout Scripture. When our worlds seem to be going off the rails, God's Word is the truth that we stand on.

I could share more with you, and I will, as we focus on connecting women through the Word, and just doing life together, here in the CLB!

Karen Stenberg is Co-Director of Women's Ministries of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.



Visit WMCLB online: www.WMCLB.org
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Pres. Paul Larson

Presidential Candidates THE **INTERVIEW**

PART ONE



Dr. Ryan Nilsen

President Paul Larson was raised in the faith at Elim Lutheran Brethren Church in Clearbrook, MN. He has served CLB congregations in MT, CO, CA, and WI in youth ministry, church planting, and as pastor. He is blessed to be husband to Bee; and father to Gabe (Mikelle), Gracia, Nick (Tessa), Karina, and Nate (Julia). On December 23, 2021, he welcomed his first grandchild (Eleanor), and is eagerly awaiting the arrival of a second in early 2022. He has served as CLB President since 2014.

Greetings, CLB family! It is the honor of a lifetime to have received this nomination from the Council of Directors to serve you as a candidate for President. I'm a fourth-generation member of this movement. My faith and life have been shaped by the people of the CLB. I'm looking forward to sharing my vision for the CLB in future communications like this, and to hearing your thoughts and dreams for our Church body. I seek to be a servant of the Church and I am excited to be a choice for this role in God's work. Please pray that, as we consider together where the Lord is leading the CLB, he will guide us in our dialogue now, as well as in our voting this summer.



Give an account of how God brought you to assurance of salvation and how the Lord is currently shaping your relationship with him.

REV. PAUL LARSON

I was baptized into Christ only a few days old in early October 1962 during the brewing of the Cuban missile crisis. This may seem extraneous ancient history, but it confirms to me a pair of realities that shaped me early, and still are shaping me today. First, this new season of uncertainty our world and Church has been enduring is not all so new. I believe

REV. RYAN NILSEN

I was raised in the faith at Bethany Lutheran Brethren Church in Hartland, CT. My family joined a nearby CLB church plant, Praise Christian Fellowship, when I was 11. I attended a CLB Bible camp at Tuscarora, and during a message I experienced conviction of sin for the first time and received assurance of salvation. Though I grew up believing, it was the first time

my parents requested Pastor Andy Monsen to travel the ten miles to our rural home that day in great part because of the vulnerable uncertainty of the time. Unsettling circumstances, tense divisiveness, and a fearful precarious future have been faced by every generation. Yet the Church's hope and her faith in Christ endure till his reappearing. Second, I have always appreciated that my early baptism was the priority of my parents and pastor. It grounded me in faith (literally) then, and grounds me in trust still, to know that the answer to my frail need within and danger without, is a top-down move of God. It is the act and answer solely of his doing, solely of his grace. It has never relied on my qualification or ability or understanding.

God used many seasons and people in shaping my early faith. I was blessed by "catechesis by mom"—a mother who actively disciplined me; relatives, role models in the church, teachers, preachers, evangelists, professors, mentors; Bible club/camp/college—each nurturing and summoning me to a greater resting and identity in Christ, and a flexing expression of my gifts and service and voice. My life is still being shaped by relationships, by reading and study, even by this position in which I presently serve. It seems I rise earlier and find more necessity for quietude, meditation, and prayer. Repentance and faith seem less remarkable, and more a blessedly mundane respiration. The Word still slays and resurrects. I believe I am still being shaped to rely on and rest more in the top-down move of God. And, in that respect, I am never more, nor much different, than the infant brought to Christ.

Q ■ As a leader, with what unique spiritual gifts has God equipped you?

REV. PAUL LARSON

I believe I have primary spiritual gifts of leadership, preaching, administration, and shepherding. I have been affirmed that I am a person of vision, wisdom, creativity, industry, and organization. I have a growing fluency and familiarity with the people, congregations, and ministries of the CLB; and have the ability and heart to engage a wide diversity of people, settings, and colleagues. I love the Church more than when I began in ministry, and in my time serving as President my appreciation for our Church body and its leaders has continued to deepen. I consider the CLB as a steward of a great gift, entrusted with a unique marriage of theology and calling—we indeed are a people restful in grace and restless in mission! I believe in the theology and mission of the CLB, every part of it; and I am eager and expectant in our calling to be a disciple-making Church multiplying new believers and congregations.

I understood what it meant that Jesus died for my sins. God birthed a love and gratitude in my heart. Growing up I was disciplined and mentored by my pastor. He taught me what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus, how to share my faith, and how we can be assured of salvation: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:23). This verse is an anchor of hope for me through the kinds of doubt and hardship that we all face.

God continues to shape my relationship with him through my quiet time, through my family as we journey together as disciples, through ministry mentors and friends, and through my church and small group. It has been good for me as a synod employee to keep active in a local congregation. This is where the community of discipleship exists, and God is continually growing and changing me through it.

Q ■ As a leader, with what unique spiritual gifts has God equipped you?

REV. RYAN NILSEN

I have learned from those who mentor me that God has given me spiritual gifts that include leadership, teaching, and apostleship.

Leadership: God has designed me to love helping others fulfill their God-given calling by collaborating with other people and bringing different viewpoints to the table. Over the past two years I have built new ministry teams and learning communities that involve over fifty pastors and ministry leaders.

Teaching: I am a lifelong learner. My desire to grow and work with others helps me listen when I've made a mistake or need to apologize. I've earned a doctorate and I continue to attend training events, as you may have seen me post on social media. I get excited about sharing with others what I am learning. Connecting people with the training, knowledge, and skills they need is energizing for me.

Apostleship: I believe that God has created me to think about the future of his Church and where he is calling us to join him on his mission. Over the past decade I've studied the challenges facing the CLB and how God is calling us to start new churches and new ministries, reach new mission fields, and adapt established ministries to serve effectively.

During the first year of the pandemic these giftings worked together as I worked alongside our pastors and congregations to navigate rapidly changing ministry conditions. I'm excited to be a part of leading our Church family through the coming years. I believe that unknown challenges lie ahead for the Church, but God is at work all around us! He is calling us to be a part of his mission to redeem a broken and hurting world.



DanBrandenburg/Stock

The Joy of the Journey Down

“This joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.”

— *John the Baptist (John 3:29b-10)*

DAVID VEUM

Drew seemed to have it all. A degree in finance. A job in the business world that could make him wealthy. But one day he walked away from that world and enrolled in Lutheran Brethren Seminary to prepare for ministry. What happened? What happened is this: Drew was returning to “the journey down,” the journey to humble service as a pastor.

That journey began for Drew when he was a young boy. He told his grandma that he wanted to be a pastor. In fifth grade he reasoned, “If Jesus Christ is all that really matters, then I want my

profession and life to be all about him and his people.” In eighth grade, he told his confirmation pastor that he wanted to enter the ministry.

Then his journey took a detour. “That calling stayed with me for several years until my sophomore year of high school. I allowed myself to believe the lie that my sinfulness and mistakes had tarnished my calling to the point that I no longer deserved to be a pastor someday. I struggled with those thoughts throughout the rest of high school. I ended up deciding to pursue a degree in theology and philosophy before going to

law school. I really struggled with what I wanted to do with my life, and just didn’t feel like I was a good enough person to answer God’s call.”

Instead of studying to become an attorney, he graduated with a degree in finance. He landed a job in business and thought he was doing well and on his way to making money. Maybe he would answer the call to ministry later in life when he was more worthy of being a pastor.

Then three factors put him back on the joyful journey down. The first was a lack of satisfaction with his work in



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... and remove your heart of stone."*

Ezekiel 36:26



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the financial world. He found that he was much more anxious than he ever imagined he would be in his job. In contrast he experienced significant joy as a volunteer in youth ministry at Oak Hill Church. The second factor came in the form of a comment from a supervisor who said Drew was resistant feedback. That shocked him into reconsidering the journey.

But it was the third factor that really made the difference. God's people. All along the way, God's people encouraged Drew toward the ministry. His confirmation pastor, Bruce Stumbo, told the church of Drew's calling to ministry. A leader in the congregation, Conrad Fiskness, told me, "You need to talk with Drew Skog about the ministry." That started a conversation. When it came time to apply to seminary, the Oak Hill congregation committed to paying for his tuition. Drew was back on the journey down, the journey down to humble service as a pastor.

It has not always been an easy journey. I recall a conversation with Drew's wife, Holly. We happened to be walking in the same group to a seminar at the youth convention in Colorado in 2019. Holly talked about Drew's anxiety. That led to a dinner conversation back in Minneapolis with the three of us talking about his anxiety. We discussed how anxiety can serve as a thorn in the flesh that humbles us. That thorn is a gift to keep God's servant on the joyful journey down.

But is the journey down really joyful? For John the Baptist, the journey down meant wearing the clothes and eating the food of a prophet. It meant opposition from the religious elite. It meant imprisonment by Herod after speaking to him about God's law against adultery. Then John's journey down ended as he laid down his life in humble service to the One whose coming he had proclaimed. Joyful? Really?

John said it was. For John this calling meant announcing to the world, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." This calling meant hearing the voice of God say, "This is my beloved Son." This calling meant watching the crowds of broken, sinful people leave him and flock to Jesus. And John said, "This is complete joy."

That's the joy that Drew has found as he has been preparing for ministry and serving at Oak Hill. He is so blessed to have his dear, sweet wife Holly to encourage him. He is blessed by a congregation that has watched him grow and affirmed his gifts. Most of all, he is grateful to Christ his Savior for his salvation and for calling him into the ministry.

He wrote recently, "It is humbling to think that all of my fears and failures can be used by God to help encourage others to serve him. I went from being absolutely terrified of being called, to grateful for all of the voices that helped me to where I am today."

In his seminary application letter Drew wrote, "I have never felt more like myself than when I allow the powerful joy and truth of God and his Word to bubble up in my heart and overflow into my life. I have experienced the power of God's grace firsthand and desire nothing more than to help other people experience that same freedom."

The Journey Down. What a strange metaphor. Why would anyone take that path? It's because of the joy—the joy of proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Lamb of God. It's the joy of seeing people set free from their burdens, their fears, and their sins.

The journey down is not attractive, but the joy is. If that joy attracts you, contact Lutheran Brethren Seminary. We would be honored to have a conversation about this joy.



Dr. David Veum is President of Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

In Appreciation of Dr. Mathiesen

BRAD PRIBBENOW

Dr. Gaylan Mathiesen is Professor of Mission and Evangelism at Lutheran Brethren Seminary. He has served in this capacity since the summer of 2005. This summer Gaylan will be retiring, as he completes seventeen years of teaching at LBS. During these years, he has not only strengthened the seminary's passion for international missions, but he has also helped us consider God's gospel-mission in everyday life. How has he done this? To answer that question, I invite you to listen to the words of his own students.



Dr. Gaylan Mathiesen teaching Cross Cultural Communication in Mission.

Ben Hosch, Missionary

I spent many hours with Dr. Mathiesen, not just in the classroom as professor, but in my pastoral ministry as a mentor, and in life as a trusted friend. This is one of the aspects of Dr. Mathiesen's ministry I most admire: the balance of his academic rigor and his desire to be involved in the lives of ordinary, everyday believers. One of his most commonly uttered phrases was, "Be a learner before you presume to be a teacher." And this wise piece of advice has served me well in my short time as a missionary in Taiwan. We continue to share many deep theological conversations, not to mention a mutual love for Asian culture and Japanese theologians. However, Dr. Mathiesen's true love is for Christ's Church and the mission he has for her. Gaylan, God bless you on your retirement from LBS, and your continued ministry in the CLB.

Jeremy Wilson, Pastor

Behind Dr. Mathiesen's humble, unassuming manner lies a burning passion for the spread of the gospel. From his time in overseas missions, he understood that an essential part of loving your neighbors is learning about them, entering into their lives, and genuinely appreciating their language, culture, history, and everything else that makes them who they are. Likewise, loving

your neighbors requires sharing yourself in the exact same way and inviting them to know who you are on a deep and personal level. And as he taught us about evangelism, he showed this applies whether you're on the other side of the world or in your own back yard. When we do this, sharing the gospel becomes natural. I am truly blessed to have been able to call Dr. Mathiesen, "professor." Time spent in his class, conversations after class and in the student lounge, and devotional times with him as leader were all encouraging, enlightening, and useful. Congratulations, Professor, on your retirement, and thank you for all you have done for me, and all of your students.

Ryan Nordlund, Pastor

There's a quiet sort of way about Dr. Mathiesen. He doesn't raise his voice very often. He doesn't jump up and down with excitement. But don't let that fool you. His intensity when it comes to reaching the lost for Jesus Christ is as passionate as it gets. There's a twinkle in his eyes and an urgency in his voice that is unmistakably a hunger and a thirst for the gospel to reach the ends of the earth. In fact, God used that passion to inspire many seminary students, including me. It was sitting in his Mission classes that God stirred up in me the desire to plant a church. I even got to sit in his office and

ask him questions about starting a church. And little did I know, at the time, God would one day use me to do just that. The work that is being done in Lincoln, ND is the work of God, but there is no doubt in my mind that God used Dr. Mathiesen, and his passion for reaching the lost, to motivate and encourage me to start this work. Thank you, Dr. Mathiesen, and thank you, Lord, for raising him up as a professor at Lutheran Brethren Seminary.

We thank God for Dr. Mathiesen and for his faithful, effective, and inspiring ministry at LBS and throughout the CLB. God has used Gaylan to open the eyes of students, faculty, pastors, and lay persons to the heart of God for the nations—those who are far away and those who are near. His example of passionate and loving service to others has inspired a new generation of missionaries who are finding themselves impacted by and engaged in the mission of God (*missio Dei*) for the nations. Thank you, Dr. Mathiesen, for your service! And may God bless you in this new season of life and ministry.

Dr. Brad Pribbenow is Dean of Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

Introduction of New LBS Faculty

LUTHERAN BROTHERN SEMINARY

In Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, we find Solomon’s “poem for the seasons.” It reminds us that “for everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven” (3:1). Although it’s not stated explicitly in that poem, one of the seasons the Lord leads us through is transition. Lutheran Brethren Seminary is entering this season right now as we prepare to say goodbye to some faculty and to welcome new faculty. We look back with sincere gratitude and thankfulness for the contributions of long-time professors, even as we look ahead with excitement for the contributions new instructors will make for our pastors, missionaries, and CLB congregations.

Lutheran Brethren Seminary serves the Church and the world by preparing servants of Christ for a life of ministry in God’s mission and for equipping His people to serve in His mission.

DR. NATE LARSEN, PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Dr. Nate Larsen began teaching at LBS in a part-time capacity in January 2021. Nate teaches classes in Spiritual Care, Personal Wellness in Ministry, and Supervised Ministry Education (formerly Field Work). He has an extensive educational and occupational background in psychology and currently works as a full-time licensed psychologist in the mental health field. Nate spent his years as a young child living in Japan where his parents (Morris and Myrtle Larsen) served as missionaries with Lutheran Brethren International Mission. Nate has served as an elder at Triumph LBC in Moorhead, MN and now resides in Fergus Falls, MN with his wife, Debi. Nate is especially gifted in addressing areas of personal and pastoral health.



*Nate has been married to Debi for 44 years.
They have three adult children.*

DR. JOEL CHRISTENSON, MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM

Dr. Joel Christenson is no stranger to the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. Joel and his wife, Liz, have served as missionaries in east Asia since 2001 through a secondment agreement between LBIM and OMF International. Starting August 1, 2022, Joel will fill the full-time role at LBS of Professor of Mission and Evangelism, teaching courses in Mission, Cross Cultural Communication, World Religions, Church History, and Evangelism. Joel holds a PhD in English Literature from Marquette University. He has had vast experience in teaching and in pastoral and administrative leadership within Christian organizations. Joel is currently taking graduate courses in Mission from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL) to more fully prepare for teaching at LBS.



*Joel and Liz have been married for 33 years.
They have three adult sons.*

REV. CLINT KNUTSON, SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Rev. Clint Knutson came to LBS from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan as a student in 2012. He began pastoral ministry in Birch Hills, SK in the summer of 2015, graduating from LBS as a distance education student in the spring of 2016. Clint has continued to serve the two-point parish of Birch Hills Community Church (Birch Hills, SK) and Saron Lutheran Church (Hagen, SK) while also taking PhD courses through Concordia Seminary–St. Louis. In the summer of 2022, Clint will move to Fergus Falls where he will begin a full-time role with LBS. During his first year, he will focus on completing his PhD comprehensive exams and dissertation in Doctrinal Theology, as he simultaneously begins part-time teaching duties. He will incrementally increase his LBS teaching load in the coming semesters, taking on courses in Systematic Theology and Ethics along with some in Church History and Preaching. He will assume the full load of these courses by the fall of 2025.



*Clint and Heather have been married for 11 years.
They have four children between the ages of 7 and 1.*

We Will See the Glory of the Lord

LINDA BENGTSON

Recently I have been studying the story of Elijah, the Old Testament prophet. I often preorder English Bible study materials according to the mood of the day. I like the author of the material. Or... this looks like an interesting topic. Months later, when I actually begin the study, I find that God, in his mercy and compassion, has provided exactly the encouragement I need at that time.

One of my biggest challenges this year has been... waiting. Lots of waiting. Of course, the pandemic and all the anti-infection measures have been a huge part of that. There have been other things too, though. Plans that have moved ahead more slowly than anticipated. Or plans that couldn't even be made—due to weather, ever-changing COVID restrictions, or circumstances beyond our control. Last year, between coronavirus and Dean's stroke, we had to stop almost all the outreach activities we have been doing for years. Instead of concerts, cooking classes, gatherings, and eating together, we have concentrated on prayer and personal evangelism. Those are both very good things! Why do I feel so unsettled?

As I mull over Elijah's life in 1 Kings, I consider all the time he spent sidelined, depending on ravens and a widow for sustenance during a very long famine. Yet as Elijah waited, God was strengthening his faith and preparing him for what was ahead. It's been helpful for me to see this. I'm confident that God has also been using our time "on hold" for his good purposes. One thing is sure. We no longer have any delusions about how much we can accomplish on our own! We continually remind ourselves that House of Hope has been God's ministry from the beginning. He has provided for all our needs since we started, and those provisions have rarely coincided with our original preferred timetables. In spite of that, however, we know God is never too early or too late. He has proven that many times over.

Recently I read, "I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord..." (Psalm 27:13, NASB 1995). Yes, yes, yes. Me too. This is my verse.

During year two of the pandemic, we made a vegetable garden in the House of Hope parking lot and built a playground next door. (The playground project was funded by the CLB



A group gather at the House of Hope in Ishinomaki, Japan for Bible time.

Women's Ministries.) Both projects helped us stay outside more and remain better connected with the neighborhood at a time when many people resigned themselves to just staying home.

We have also been able to continue visiting our neighbors the whole time, talking with them at the front door or outside in the yard. And... this year, except for January, we have been able to continue the monthly Bible time with Pastor Zeniya from our sister church in Sendai. From April through October, we were able to meet outdoors on our backyard deck every month. Several times it rained until an hour before, but the clouds always cleared out in time. April and October can be chilly in our part of Japan, but this year there was enough sun to make it work. In June only one other person was able to come, but in October eight neighbors attended! We've had some first-time attendees this year, and several regulars have invited friends.

We go house to house inviting people to the Bible time, and this has developed into a regular monthly connection. We listen a lot and learn all kinds of interesting and sometimes distressing things about our neighbors' lives. It's sometimes overwhelming to know so much, but we try to encourage them and bring those situations to God in prayer. Often, foreigners are "safe" to talk to, as we aren't part of the same social hierarchy. This year we have also started giving out a Christian publication each month with our Bible time invitation. It's an attractive four-page paper intended for non-believers, that includes a Christian's testimony, a short Bible passage, and neutral topics like cooking or art. Sometimes we bring tea and cookie packs with the paper. "Here is something delicious for your stomach AND your soul." There are many ways to share God's Word!

As we close out this year, we are still doing some waiting, but we have a lot of hope—hope in God and his plans for the future. I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in this place (Psalm 27:13).

I believe this with all my heart.

Linda Bengtson and her husband Dean serve the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as missionaries in Ishinomaki, Japan.

Blessed be the Memory



Ingolf Berge Kronstad went home to be with his Lord and Savior on Feb. 10, 2021. He was 80 years old. Ingolf was born in Canton, SD on Nov. 10, 1940. His family moved to Minneapolis, MN where he attended high school at Minnehaha Academy. He graduated from Augsburg College in 1962 (Magna Cum Laude). On June 26, 1965, he married Rosemary Ann Sheldahl.

As a young boy, Ingolf felt the Lord calling him into Ministry. He attended Luther Seminary and received an M.Th. and M.Div. degree with honors. Rev. Kronstad served in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Montana. In 1980, he and Rosemary settled in Kirkland, WA. It was in Kirkland that Ingolf and Rosie built their ministry and laid roots for their family. Ingolf had a heart for ministry and a love for people that extended far beyond the church in which he was serving. In 1996, Rev. Kronstad transferred his ordination to the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. He served as a chaplain for King County Police and Shoreline Fire Department in Seattle, WA. Ingolf had a great love for adventure and the outdoors. He and Rosie could often be found down at the lake where they would pray, read the Bible, or just have a picnic.

Blessed be the memory of Rev. Ingolf Kronstad.

Elders Ordained



Left to Right: Elder Dennis Hodnefield, Elder Seth Vander Ley, Elder Justin Smith, and Rev. Roger Olson.

On October 3, 2021, Seth Vander Ley and Justin Smith were ordained as elders at Living Faith Church in Watford City, North Dakota. Pastor Roger Olson officiated.

Well Done Faithful Servant!



Wayne Monroe Larson was born on October 15, 1930, in Long Prairie, MN. Wayne joined the United States Army, serving from 1949-1950. He continued serving his country for another four years in the Army Reserves. On September 17, 1955, Wayne married Ina Johnson at Elim

Lutheran Church in Osakis, MN. The couple began their married life working and living in Sauk Centre, MN while Wayne attended St. Cloud State College where he worked on a Business Degree. In 1961 the couple moved to Fergus Falls, MN where Wayne was called to serve as the administrator at Broen Memorial Home, while continuing his education at the Lutheran Brethren Bible College.

Wayne was a visionary. He was instrumental in the development of Lutheran Brethren Homes' increasing span of ministry by adding facilities in Mesa, AZ; Sun City, AZ; and Garland, TX. He retired in November of 1998 after 37 years of Service to LB Homes; a career that began as an administrator transitioning through many titles to President and CEO of LB Homes. After retiring, he served as a consultant for the building of Sheridan House. In June of 2001, Wayne and Ina moved to Ina's century-owned family farm in Osakis, MN. Wayne died Monday, November 8, 2021, at Woodcrest Assisted Living in Alexandria, MN at the age of 91, with his wife Ina by his side.

Tennefos Called Home



Daniel John Tennefos, 67, went to be with Jesus on November 16, 2021. Dan was born in Bismarck, ND. He was adopted by Jeanne Tennefos in 1960. He graduated from Oak Grove High School, Fargo, ND, in 1972. He met Joan (Fedje) at North Dakota State University, where

he graduated with a degree in business. Dan married Joan in 1976, and they made their home in Bismarck, where he worked in sales. In 1982, the family moved to Fargo, where Dan opened a Tidy Car franchise. In 1989, Dan felt called into ministry and began learning Greek on his own. In 1990, Dan began studying at Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, MN. He graduated with a Master of Divinity, and took a call to Living Word Church in Joshua, TX—where he pastored for seven years. In 1999, he returned to Fargo to help manage Tennefos Properties. He served as Triumph Lutheran Brethren's Care Pastor from 2012 until 2018. After retirement, he and Joan began spending winters at Towerpoint Resort in Mesa, AZ, where he served as chaplain.

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Small... Yet Significant

On April 20, 2010, an explosion occurred on the Deepwater Horizon drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico. The explosion, which killed eleven men, eventually resulted in five million gallons of oil leaking into the gulf waters. Carl-Henric Svanberg, the British Petroleum Chairman, declared, “We care about the small people.” And after meeting with President Obama, Svanberg doubled down on the concept: “He is frustrated because he cares about the small people, and we care about the small people.” It is doubtful the President would have used that terminology. Svanberg himself was simply speaking as a European, and he was trying to refer to ordinary citizens.

But it didn’t play well in the US. Even if we lack wealth or social status, we take great offense when someone says we are small. The resulting firestorm led Svanberg eventually to apologize for his “clumsy” apology for the oil spill.

But was he wrong? Here we are, in truth, these tiny human beings set against the backdrop of the vast universe. We feebly protest that we are not small. Incredibly, the Almighty God—who sees just how small we are—still takes intimate interest in the mundane cares and details of our lives!

Our smallness, if understood properly, may be a virtue and a source of great blessing:

“[Jesus] called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven’” (Matthew 18:2-4).

In God’s mind, smallness does not equal insignificance.

Which brings us to the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer... What is the significance of Jesus telling his humble disciples that they should call the Almighty God their Father?

Martin Luther writes in the Small Catechism: “With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that he is our true father and that we are his true children, so that we may pray to him as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father.”

Addressing God as your Father with sincerity of heart and mind assumes several things are true: You love him. You trust him. You serve him gladly. You want him in your life. You know, with all confidence, that he wants you in his life.

Humility, as a harsh reality forced upon us, adds up to a miserable existence. But humility before a loving God? This is acceptance of a blessed reality. For you who live in Christ today, your smallness bears no relation to insignificance. You are just a small child, but you are the daughter or son of the King!

Rev. Brent Juliot is Contributing Editor of F&F magazine and Pastor of Living Hope Church in Menomonie, Wisconsin.

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