

Faith & Fellowship

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Transformed



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2022 Biennial Convention
DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH

June 11-14

Fergus Falls, MN



CHRIS PRIESTAF



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CALL

SATURDAY — JUNE 11

PARTNER

SUNDAY — JUNE 12

UNLEASH

MONDAY AM — JUNE 13

MULTIPLY

MONDAY PM — JUNE 13

Turn Back the Clock

TROY TYSDAL

Several years ago, my wife and I were having a morning cup of coffee on our porch, discussing a future landscape project. I was standing near the edge of the porch and hardly noticed the five-year-old pushing against me with all his might. He was trying to test his strength—trying to push his old man off the porch. When I finally realized what he was attempting to do, I decided to give him the victory. I pretended to lose my balance and took the eighteen-inch step off the porch into the yard. I turned around just in time to see my son, surprised by his sudden victory, stumbling forward—first to his knees and then headfirst into the yard. I watched in horror as he extended his arms to try and catch himself. I heard a snap as his left arm bent behind him and broke just above the elbow.

As I rushed to his aid, the usual dad rhetoric—“Get up, you’re OK.”—did not come out of my mouth. Yet, the words were still spoken. As I lifted my son to his feet, through tears, he repeated the phrase, “I’m OK! I’m OK!” The bone in his arm had snapped back straight, like a stick trying to hold its shape after being broken. As I assessed the damage, there was no noticeable problem, and I began to doubt what my ears had heard and my eyes had seen. My son insisted that he was OK and did not want to go to the hospital. My wife and I laid him down for a nap. But when he awoke three hours later, we still could not touch his arm without him wincing in pain. An hour later a doctor’s x-ray confirmed what I thought I had heard and what I thought I had seen. I was stunned. I felt guilty, and I desperately wanted the moment back. I wanted to fix the wrong, but I was powerless to turn back the clock.

God told Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He said, “For when you eat from it you will certainly die” (Genesis 2:17). They did not listen. Eve was deceived by the devil, and Adam chose his wife over God. In that moment, Adam picked

death over life. As he aged, I wonder how many times he wished he could have the moment back. I wonder if he joined the search party when his second son Abel did not return from the field. I wonder if he watched in horror as humankind grew violent, and wickedness increased on the earth before the flood. I wonder if, as he grew old and his body began to fail, he returned to the Garden of Eden and watched with regret as the cherubim, with the flaming sword, stood watch over the entrance hiding the tree of life.

Oh, how Adam must have longed for a second chance to fix the wrong—to choose life! But he was powerless to turn back the clock. So, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, and from the time of Moses to the time of Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:47-49, 54-57

The first man [Adam] was of the dust of the earth; the second man [Jesus] is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man....

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are all descendants of the first Adam, and as such we inherit his sin and carry his curse—our bodies were formed from dust and to dust they shall return. But we have a second inheritance, one that is not from the first Adam. The Apostle Paul tells us that Jesus followed Adam, as a second Adam, to displace him in the course of human history—so that sin no



longer defines us and death no longer can hold us. What Adam was powerless to change, Jesus changed. What Adam was powerless to fix, Jesus fixed. The victory of death was overturned in Christ at the cross—the head of Satan crushed.

In Jesus we have an inheritance that is heavenly—eternal. Though we still experience death, though we still feel the rage of Satan, he is powerless to turn back the clock. Jesus said, “The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die” (John 11:25-26).

As Jesus rose from the dead victorious, so we who believe in him will also rise victorious. The promise is true! It is written and can not be changed—passed down by those who did not doubt what their ears had heard or their eyes had seen (1 John 1:1).

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.



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We Have a Death Problem

MICHAEL NATALE

What is the common theme in the news today? No matter the day, time, or channel, the news is always about some problem(s) or issue(s). This causes me to wonder, is there any earthly thing that can't be corrupted because of sin? Take a moment to think about that. The answer is no. No matter where we go or what we do, we can't get away from sin on this earth. In fact, people have made a living exploiting these problems and some even paint these sins in a positive light.

As we identify our issue with sin, a related problem arises, one that many people don't like to talk about: death. Death is everyone's problem, and it is a byproduct of sin. Death doesn't care who we are (our job, our physical condition, our family responsibilities, and the number of people who depend

on us). Death is a problem all of us must face, regardless of who we are. So let me ask you a question: What is the death percentage in the United States, compared to say, Chad? It's the same... 100%.

Now, we can pretend that death doesn't exist, or that it will never happen to us, but it does and eventually it will. Rather than living in denial, let's face this problem head on. Let's look to the Bible for a solution to our death problem.

Romans 5 acknowledges this problem. In verse 12, we read that "death came to all people." In verse 14, we learn that death reigns. But the Bible also tells us the cause of death. Perhaps if we knew the cause, we could find the solution? In verse 12, it says, "[S]in entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people,

because all sinned." Sin is ultimately the cause of death, and it all began with one man—Adam.

Imagine being at your home, hosting a big get-together. You receive a package, labeled with the words: CONTAGIOUS VIRUS—DO NOT OPEN. But you decide to open it anyway. As you struggle to tear the tape off, the package bursts open, and the virus spreads everywhere! All your family and all your friends inhale the virus and are now infected. Eventually they will die because of it. Ultimately, whose fault was that? Yours, right?

When Adam sinned, thousands of years ago, it was as though he had opened a package he shouldn't have opened. When he disobeyed God, sin entered his body, entered the world, and infected everything and everyone. Billions of

For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!
Romans 5:15

people (along with all of God's creation) have been affected by that one moment in the Garden of Eden. Because of Adam's disobedience a spiritual virus, called sin, entered the world and it is lethal. When Adam ate fruit of the tree God specifically told him not to, our world became one big spiritual quarantine zone, in God's eyes. From that moment on, people were born with the problem of sin.

Don't believe me? There is a test we can perform on ourselves to see if we've been infected. Do you want to take the test? Here it is: Ask yourself, "Have I been selfish, even for a moment? Have I had any unkind thoughts? Have I lied? Have I cheated anyone out of anything? Have I miss used God's name? Have I elevated anything in my life above God?" If we honestly answered *yes* to any (or all) of these questions, then we have been infected with the deadly disease of sin. And if you answered *no* to any of them, other than being a liar, here is the final nail in the coffin: "Were you conceived by a man and a woman?" Psalm 51:5 says, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." No one is safe from sin; we have all been infected by it.

This problem of death and eternal condemnation because of sin is huge, and it envelops all the struggles we have (financial, personal, social, health). So what is the solution?

By God's grace, the solution can also be found in Romans 5. Verse 15 says,

"But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!" God identifies the problem and then he intervenes, as he always does. I must pause here and point out how amazing it is that God comes to us in our moments of need. He doesn't wait for us to stumble back to him. He comes and gets us.

He comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ (the second Adam). He sees our problems and offers us a solution for them. He loves us too much to let us suffer eternal death. So Jesus left heaven and stepped into this world as a human being. He left his perfectly healthy Paradise and invaded the quarantined area of earth. He did this in order to visit and save sinners, including you and me. He sees how we all have been infected and affected by Adam's sin and he offers us a cure, a solution, a way out, a way for us to escape.

Adam's sin was the worst mistake in human history, but Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the grave was the response needed to right the wrong once and for all. That's why Paul writes in Ephesians 2:4-10,

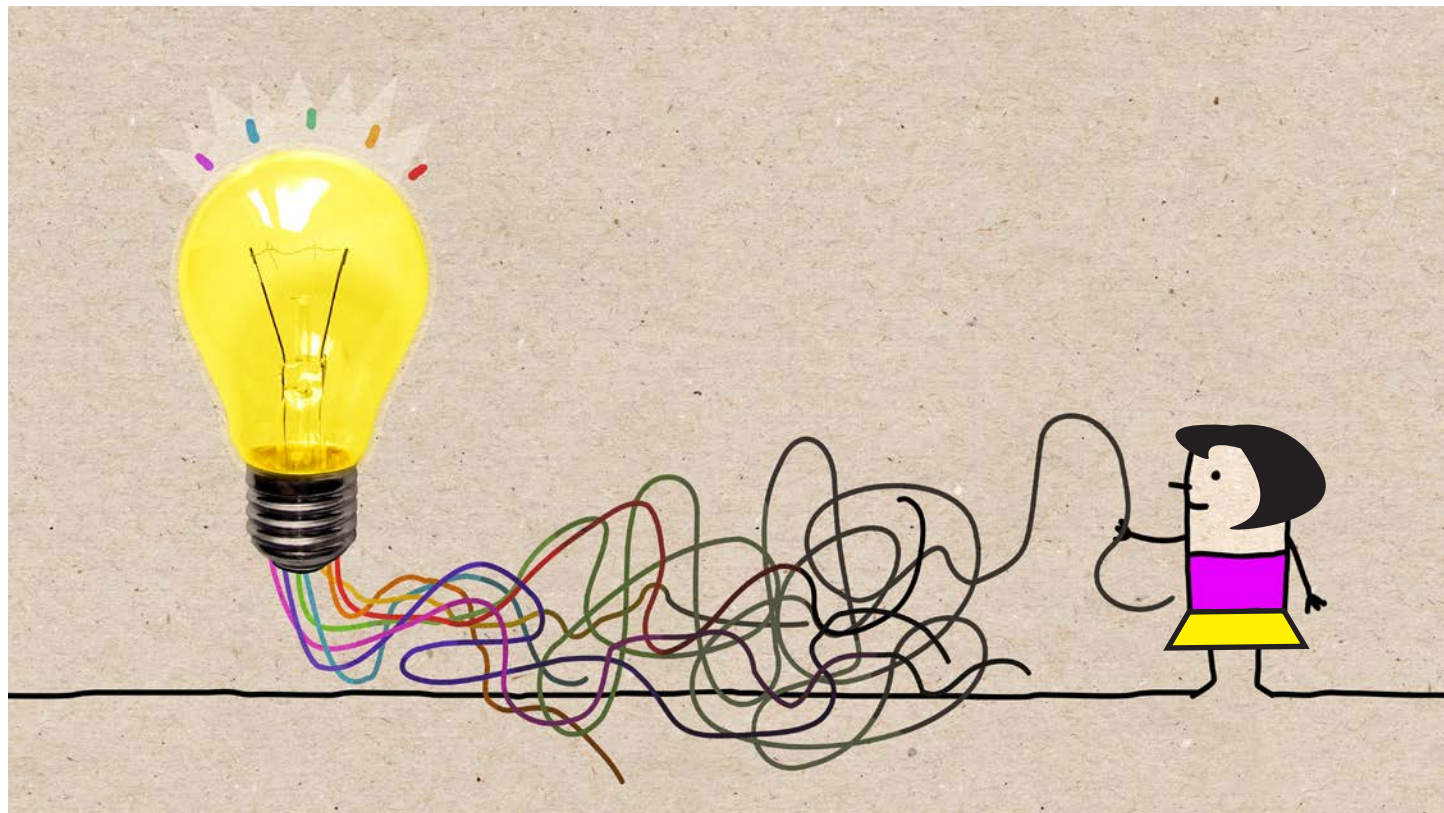
But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace

you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Amen!



Rev. Michael Natale is pastor of Faith Chapel Lutheran Brethren Church in Cranston, Rhode Island.



NLshop/Stock

How Much More...

BETH LANGLOIS

Call me crazy, but I get a little excited when my ten-year-old daughter approaches me with a necklace she has found hiding in her coat pocket for the past month. More than once this has happened over the years. She gives me a sheepish look and hands over the long, thin chain, which now looks more like a solid ball bearing. “Mom, can you fix it?” she asks. My excitement comes from the challenge: Can this intricate puzzle of knots be undone, or will I ultimately be the one who is undone?

When reading Romans 5, the image of my daughter holding her impossibly tangled necklace comes to mind. Paul writes here about Adam in such a way that I can almost imagine him, after the Fall, reluctantly approaching God with that same sheepish look. He reaches into his “fig leaf pocket” and pulls out a knotted-up chain. This chain, given to him by God at creation, is no longer the perfect piece that it once was.

Through Adam’s disobedience in the Garden of Eden “sin entered the world...

and death through sin” (Romans 5:12). This world, created in perfection and declared “good” by God, was changed in just a moment. The one man’s disobedience to God’s command brought about brokenness and death, which “came to all people, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). That sinful nature has been passed on from Adam, generation to generation, and it creates a divide between us and God. The knotted-up necklace has become our heirloom and the original knot has only become compounded by our own sin. I think of myself holding that same chain, passed down to me from Adam. I see those links hopelessly tangled by the sin of all mankind. With that familiar sheepish expression on my face, I ask, “God, can you fix it?”

Paul refers to Jesus as the second Adam—an Adam who restores what was lost through the first Adam. Jesus Christ, in perfect obedient righteousness, willingly takes our guilt, our sin, and death to the cross. Three days later, he rises again, with complete victory over all three, and he reconciles us to God. “Nor can the

gift of God be compared with the result of one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification” (Romans 5:16). As sons and daughters of Adam, we inherit only death. As sons and daughters of Christ, we now inherit eternal life. He alone has the power to restore the chain that was first tangled in the Garden.

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). I have sympathetically fixed several of my daughter’s necklaces that have been tangled by accident or thoughtlessness. But what if I were to discover that she had been sulkily sitting in her room, willfully tying knot after knot in this perfect, beautiful necklace—out of defiance, spite, or disrespect? My reaction would be quite different! Paul tells us that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This one verse holds significant meaning for us—after all, *we are sinners who willfully disobey*.

The Bible tells us, however, that in

The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.

Romans 5:16

the midst of our defiance, spite, and disrespect, Christ gave up everything in order to make us right with God. He untangled our knots while we were still tying them! Who, but God alone, can love and forgive so perfectly?

“But the gift is not like the trespass” (Romans 5:15a).

To “untangle” can simply mean to “separate the various strands,” but it can also mean “to set free from entanglement or difficulty” (Webster). What Christ achieved for us on the cross is even more than an untying of knots. That gnarled chain of ours is not just hiding in our pocket, but it binds our hands and our feet, and it renders us powerless. The gift Jesus gives us is freedom—freedom from death and “the sin that so easily entangles” (Hebrews 12:1). He not only unties the knots, but he throws off the chains as well to give us new life.

“The gift is not like the trespass.”

When my daughter comes to me asking for help, she comes with some uncertainty. I will admit, much to my frustration, that I have not always been able to fix her

necklaces. Some of them have ended up in a drawer of “things to do,” while others ended up in the trash. If we try to fix our own problem of sin, we will fall short. We cannot untangle the knots and we cannot loosen our own bonds. Paul repeatedly uses the phrase “how much more” when referring to Christ and his finished work. He is Almighty God. He is so much more and is capable of so much more! There is nothing too big for him to handle—no sins too numerous, no sin too great.

We have turned a beautiful necklace into a ball bearing, but God does not see this as an impossible problem. We have taken a perfect chain and used it to imprison ourselves, but God does not see hopelessness. “For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37, ESV). There is only One who can restore what we lost in the Garden. It is Christ Jesus alone, the second Adam, who has defeated sin and death. Through this gift of grace we can now share in his victory! He gives generously the faith needed to trust him to bring forth beauty from ashes—a beautiful necklace from tangled

knots. Praise be to God, “who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine!” (Ephesians 3:20).

“The gift is not like the trespass.” How much more!



Beth Langlois is a member of Praise Christian Fellowship in Barkhamsted, Connecticut.



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Fruit of the Spirit

HAROLD PETERSEN

On our farm in Wisconsin, we had apple trees, and a variety of other fruit. Each produced fruit according to its kind. Each had its own flavor. Each variety was fruit that we as a family enjoyed.

In John 15 Jesus shares a parable. He says, “I am the vine; you are the branches” (15:5a, ESV). He tells us that the branch must remain in the vine if it is to produce fruit. He adds, “Abide in me, and I in you” (15:4a). You cannot bear fruit “unless you abide in me... Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (15:4b, 5b). Fruit in ministry is the fruit of remaining, or abiding, in Christ. I have seen some of that fruit in my ministry. “By this my Father

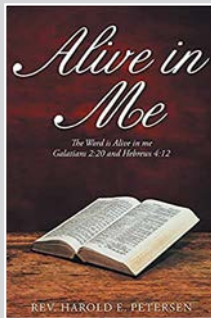
is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (15:8).

That abiding relationship is what causes us to be caring, to be where we are needed. What does it mean to abide? To abide in the Lord is to have faith. It is to strongly desire to have time with him, to talk to him in prayer, to hear him through his Word. It is feasting with him in Holy Communion and worship, to hunger and thirst after him. To abide with him is to desire that he walk with us everywhere we go. To abide with him is to so prepare ourselves by letting go of our wishes, that our Lord may work through us.

Abiding: letting the Word of God soak through every pore of our being, letting its rich fragrance permeate every facet of life for us. Abiding: letting the wealth of the

Word of God influence every discussion, every relationship, every event of our life, individually and as a congregation. When the Word is abiding in us, when we seek such a close relationship with our Lord, we show ourselves to be his disciples, his students, learning his way of life. When we abide, we bear much fruit, which is bringing glory to the Father. When we abide—that is, let Christ control our lives—we can ask for what we wish, and it will be given us.

Some of the fruit that comes from abiding in Christ is the fruit of the Spirit as found in Galatians 5. Jesus, in John 16 (KJV), calls the Holy Spirit the “comforter” and the “Spirit of truth.” He will transform us from one degree of glory to another until we all



Alive in Me

Rev. Harold E. Petersen first read the Bible through in one year when he was in high school. It's a process he continues to this day. While at Seminary, Rev. Petersen began to mark a special verse in each chapter of the Bible. *Alive in Me* is a collection of Rev. Petersen's favorite verses and his commentary on them.

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

reach maturity in Christ. Martin Luther writes, in the explanation to the third article of the Apostles' Creed, "...the Holy Spirit calls me through the gospel, enlightens me with his gifts, sanctifies and preserves me in the one true faith."

"...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23a). To bear these as the fruit of a life in Christ is a tall order in a world that promotes self-centeredness. Yet he is willing and able to transform us. Love comes first in the list, and is the basis of all the other fruit. Love is what gives each of the fruits its flavor. The word "love" in the Greek is "agape"—self-giving love. Paul speaks of this love in 1 Corinthians 13 and John writes of love in his first letter. This love considers others' needs before one's own needs.

When we love as Jesus loved us, there is joy in our lives that defies logic; there is peace in our hearts that the world cannot understand; we are willing to wait on others, put their needs ahead of ours. All these fruits are intensified in the person who not only lives by the Spirit but keeps in step with him. As we do this, we grow in our understanding of the biblical worldview.

In chapter 12 of Paul's letter to the Romans, he gives us the path to fruitful living. We are to offer our bodies to God as a living sacrifice. We have died with Christ, and the life we now live is by faith. Then we are to be changed

from the way the world does things and let the Spirit renew our minds to follow the precepts of the Scripture.

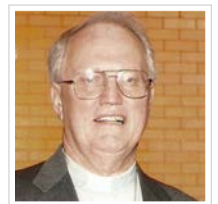
For me, I see the Holy Spirit changing my life mainly through daily reading the Bible, the Word of God. It is in the Word that the Spirit teaches us about God, his plan of salvation, and how he desires to work through our lives. He clarifies what is written. He teaches us about grace, mercy, and justice, for example. The Word of God is the only source of truth, the only basis for the teaching of the Church. The Word of God is the manual on how to live a life of faith in Christ. I have been shown gems of truth in every chapter. I have known the Spirit to show me new insights that I had not seen previously.

A second way that I see the Spirit at work in my life is through prayer. Prayer is like having a conversation with a good friend. Prayer is sharing the concerns of our hearts with the Lord and listening to what he has to say. The Holy Spirit can even pray for us with groans that words cannot express when we don't know what to pray for (Romans 8:26).

In John 16, Jesus explains that the Spirit will teach us all that Jesus has for us. I suppose we could say we are in the school of the Spirit. Think of each fruit as a lesson. The Spirit shows us what the Bible says about that particular fruit and how we could live it out. As we learn to love as Jesus loved, we move on to the lesson on joy. Sometimes I need to ask him to love a person through me, even

when that person rubs me the wrong way. Sometimes he must repeat the lesson until I am able to apply it in my life.

A key lesson for us to learn is that the Lord is in charge and that he seeks followers through whom he can bring blessings to the world. There are at least three groups where we can share the fruit of the Spirit. The first group is our family. Do the members of our family experience our expressions of love? A second group is the body of believers we are part of, and the whole Christian Church. The third group is people in the world around us. Paul reminds us that we are ambassadors for Christ, sharing God's message of reconciliation. This message cannot be shared clearly unless the fruit of the Spirit is apparent in our lives.



Rev. Harold E. Petersen is a member of Bethel Lutheran Church in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. He was raised in a farming family in Wisconsin. He attended Waldorf and Concordia Colleges. After graduating from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, he spent six years in Ethiopia as a missionary. He has served six Lutheran parishes in the United States.

CLB Shared Ministry: Contribution Report

\$2,900,000

2021-22 Fiscal Year Goal

\$2,806,940

Received Through 3/31/22

The CLB Fiscal Year ends April 30, 2022.

What a Mess

ROY HEGGLAND

What a mess! What a disaster! Many years ago, my nephew called his dad to ask for help. My nephew and his wife had been at a family gathering with my brother and me and the rest of our families, and had returned home to find that their home was beyond description! He had two dogs, in the house for the night, that had been able to get into their pantry and eaten a few chocolate bars before continuing their roaming throughout the rest of the house. If you do not own a dog, you may not know this, but chocolate and dogs do not mix well. In fact, chocolate is somewhat toxic to dogs. The house now bore the results of two large German Shepherds running throughout the house in extreme intestinal distress. You can imagine the unbelievable sight and smell that greeted my brother and me (yes, he begged me to go with him!) when we entered this foul MESS!

It is a funny story now because the dogs recovered and we managed to clean and repair the house so that it was livable again. But the story reminds me of how messy, broken, and ugly this world is. I chose to share a somewhat funny story as an example rather than one that would make you (and me) cry, so that we would not dwell on the terrible condition we are in, but rather ask the question, “Why?” Why has God chosen to leave us in such

a broken, messy world when he could have taken us home to himself when we first believed? Could there be something else important that God has in mind by leaving us in place after our conversion?

Colossians 2:13-15 may give us a glimpse of a part of the answer. When God gave Jesus to be sacrificed for us on the cross, this passage says in verse 15, “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” The powers and authorities spoken of here are rulers in the spiritual realm. When Jesus sacrificed himself for us, he not only redeemed us, but he disarmed the spiritual forces aligned against him (and against us as his children) and triumphed over them! And, he put them to shame.

This leads me to a thought from Romans 12:2, where we read, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Later in the same chapter, we discover that as we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, we overcome evil with good, letting Jesus live his life through us. Just as God, through the sacrifice of Jesus, triumphed over the spiritual power that was instrumental in *Adam choosing* evil over good and

brought sin and death into the world, so God now continues to triumph over those spiritual forces as we, who inherited sin, death, and condemnation through Adam, *overcome evil with good as we become more and more like Jesus!*

One day when Jesus returns, not only will we be completely transformed, but we will live in a creation that is transformed by the same power that gave us life—the power of his resurrection.

What a wonderful future lies ahead! Will you pray and give so that God will continue to use our Church family, the CLB, to bring the life-giving good news to this messy world, a world for which there is no other help or hope? Thank you.

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

Support the CLB:

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Fergus Falls, MN 56538

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Continue to Connect

CHERYL OLSEN

Whether women in your church have weekly Bible studies, monthly meetings, quarterly events, or annual retreats, we all welcome more ideas of ways to connect with each other and our communities. Here are a few we've gleaned:

Are you up for some exercise? It's not only a good outreach idea, but it is also good for our bodies. Sponsor an exercise class at the church, or just take a short walk together from your church to a favorite destination. As much as many don't like to exercise, misery often loves company. And it's an excellent way to encourage each other toward healthy habits.

Baby picture night. Ask everyone to bring a baby or child-era photo of themselves (name on the back). Then mix them up, and guess who's who. Share some favorite Scripture verses from your childhood, or a devotional about God's love for us, his children.

Craft night. Women and teens can choose from a variety of crafts, in a workshop format intended to teach a new skill, or in one-to-one instruction. Or else, have a general "bring your own project night," with plenty of snacks to share. Talk about God's creativity expressed in nature, and in us, his creation.

Decorate seasonal baskets or bags, and deliver

them to shut-ins, hospitals, or nursing homes. Fill each with a small devotional, something that smells good, and something that tastes good. A treat for mind, body, and spirit!

Everyone likes to eat, so how about meeting at a local restaurant for lunch, dinner, or just dessert? (Contact the restaurant ahead of time, so there's plenty of room.) Or meet for ice cream and conversation! Provide some fun questions or suggested topics to help foster connections and more easily include women who are new to the group.

Fun with fund-raising. Hold a silent auction of hand-made items, "white elephant" items, gift certificates for local events and restaurants, or services provided (pie of the month, a lesson on baking bread, or other specialty talent). Donate the proceeds to WMCLB projects.

Garage sale or give-away event. Have fun donating gently used items that don't spark joy for you anymore. Then organize an event designed to either 1) raise funds for projects, or 2) serve your community by giving your items away at a church-sponsored event.

Have a Ladies Night Out. Go to a concert, movie, play, or go bowling! The goal is getting to know each other better, and inviting friends who might not come to an event held at a church building.

Indoor picnic in the winter. Decorate as if it were summer. Serve ice cream, with each person bringing their favorite topping. Share stories of favorite summer activities, and the enduring love of God in every season.

Just remember: Women's ministry is about women, not just programs or events. Invest in building relationships—relationships with other women, and most importantly, with God.

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

WOMEN TOGETHER

BIENNIAL '22

Women's Ministries
Church of the Lutheran Brethren

JUNE 11, 2022
GOOD SHEPHERD CHURCH
FERGUS FALLS, MN

IN THE WORD, IN LIFE, IN MISSION



2022 Biennial Convention DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH

Fergus Falls, MN

June 11-14

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Pres. Paul Larson

Rev. Paul Larson has served as CLB President since 2014. He has served congregations in MT, CO, CA, and WI in youth ministry, church planting, and as pastor.

Presidential Candidates THE INTERVIEW

PART THREE



Dr. Ryan Nilsen

Rev. Ryan Nilsen has served as the Associate Director of NAM since 2019. He has served congregations in MN, IA, and CT, and as director of Fifth Act Church Planting.



What is your vision for the Shared Ministries of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren?

REV. PAUL LARSON

I believe the vision for the mission of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren is sourced in the gift God has entrusted to the CLB—the intersection of a restful gospel truth, and a restless gospel call to bring Christ to our neighbors near and among the nations.

The three overt departmental arms of CLB mission are Lutheran Brethren Seminary (LBS), North American Mission (NAM), and Lutheran Brethren International Mission (LBIM). To best summarize my vision for these departments, I must first express a foundational conviction:

First, while indeed we have these three departmental entities to accomplish our mission, the CLB is *one Church* based in North America with the departmental foci of: a) training and equipping leaders for God's mission among our national and international neighbors, b) resourcing the gospel

REV. RYAN NILSEN

Throughout our history the CLB has rarely been characterized by who was serving as president. What defines us is our shared ministry—especially our three primary ministry arms: North American Mission (NAM), International Mission (LBIM), and Lutheran Brethren Seminary (LBS). We always recognize that our ministry together is the sending and equipping of workers for the harvest. From early years, that included World Missions and Lutheran Brethren Schools. Over the decades, we've handled North American Mission (Home Missions) in many different ways—sometimes guided by denominational leadership, sometimes left to the grassroots efforts of our congregations. When it comes to the future ministry of these three ministry arms, these are the ideas I would bring to the table with the Council of Directors and our staff team.

vitality of congregations, and the multiplication of believers and congregations in North America, and similarly c) gospeling and multiplying believers and congregations internationally. That said, it is not toward individual departmental ends that our Seminary trains and raises up pastors and missionaries, that our North American Mission plants churches, nor that our International Mission sends missionaries. Rather, it is that together with all the CLB we follow Christ in this singular calling: to be and make his disciples.

Furthermore, related but beyond this solidarity of our CLB departmental mission, I believe it is also important to perceive the inter-dependent vitality of Lutheran Brethren Seminary (LBS), North American Mission (NAM), and Lutheran Brethren International Mission (LBIM). Theirs is a symbiotic vitality. None of them grow stronger unless they all grow stronger; none of them exist if any of them do not. *Jerusalem* is no longer so far from the *ends of the earth*; and the advancing of the gospel in Judea or in Samaria are not only in no competition with each other, but we see both in Scripture. And in our time, we see how much each mission benefits and is blessed by the other. *It is not only that one sends witness to the other, but that one also receives it back.* Similarly, without our LB Seminary, in short time we would have no NAM, no LBIM, and no CLB. While the delivery forms and creative stretch of our Seminary have and will continue to flex, still here resides the heartbeat of our theology of the cross that permeates the mission of the whole.

Vision for Lutheran Brethren Seminary:

My vision for LBS is that stronger partnerships would be formed with congregations and pastors, and with young men and women, for encouraging, raising up, summoning, and supporting of new leaders. As part of our new Ministry Advancement Initiative, “Disciple-Making Church,” I am expectant for how this vision is already being served through the new addition of *Ministry Call Mentors*. Ministry Call Mentors serve the CLB by helping potential seminary students recognize God’s call. The Mentors encourage them to test, be affirmed, and pursue their ministry gifts. It is my belief that the greatest need for the advance of mission in the CLB presently is not for the resource of funds (albeit its own significant challenge), but even more so the resource of new generations of leaders to be unleashed in their gifts and callings, and to be welcomed in their voice and ownership of our theology and our mission.

My vision for LBS is that as it has admirably stretched in its growth in distance learning and in continued expansion of the lay learner Lutheran Brethren Discipleship Institute, it will continue to stretch and flex in how to shape learning and spiritual formation environments in response to the greater complexities and diversity of the lives of students entrusted to us. I believe our Seminary must continue to discern how distance and part-time students, and a smaller percentage of campus students, might gain the benefit of learning in community with both faculty and fellow students, and in continued education (during seminary and following) while engaged in congregational ministry. I envision a partnership of LBS, the Office of the President, and regional and congregational leadership, in forming a gracious

Vision for Lutheran Brethren International Mission:

International Mission has been at the heart of the CLB for over 120 years. Our Church body first united around shared theological convictions, but it grew around a passion for mission. I am excited to see our work in global mission continue in Asia and Africa. I love the partnership that we have with our sister denominations in Taiwan, Japan, Chad, and Cameroon, and desire to see those relationships continue to grow. We have focused on a unique calling to hard-to-reach places in the world. In Asia, our mission work is centered in Taiwan, where less than 4% of the population are Christian, and in Japan, where less than 1% are Christian. I see our ministry to the Bagirmi, Bilala, and Fulbe people groups in Chad as multi-generational work that we should continue and pass along to our children and grandchildren. To best support our long-term goals, we need to expand our teams, from one or two missionary families among each group presently, to three or four families serving with each group. I would like to see us double the number of missionary families we deploy over the next 30 years, from 10 at present, to 20-24. This would allow us to increase the size of our current teams in Chad, as well as bolster our work in Asia, and/or venture into new mission fields.

Our greatest need as a denomination is to engage all our mission fields, both here in North America and to all nations, to make disciples. I believe the key to that is leveraging our missionary heart that has traversed the globe toward the communities we live in. The gifted leaders and missionaries of International Mission will play a crucial role in helping us understand how to do that.

Vision for Lutheran Brethren Seminary:

I’m an LBS graduate and I’m grateful for the education I received, the lifelong friendships I made, and the mentoring I experienced. I’ve gone back to my seminary professors for advice countless times over the years. I’d like to work with our faculty and board to facilitate what I think would be some helpful changes to meet our challenges and vision. With that in mind, here are some ideas that I would present to our LBS leadership teams:

1. Review and adapt the current Master of Divinity (MDiv) program to provide more ministry skills relevant for our rapidly changing mission field. The demands placed on pastors have changed significantly in the past generation. Our mission field is changing, and our congregations’ needs have changed. We need to identify ways to allow for an increased focus in areas such as disciple making and ministry leadership.
2. Create new ministry preparation pathways. Right now, there is one main pathway to ordination as a pastor—the MDiv. This is a time-honored pathway for ministry preparation that will always be important for our Church body. Knowledge of original languages, extensive theological preparation, and biblical training—this adds up to a tremendous blessing for pastors and the churches they serve. The time

and wise plan to help seminary graduates and pastors both in personal development and health, and in continuing education.

My vision for LBS is that Certificate learning programs are created for specialized or supplemental learning to be provided for men and women on various ministry paths, including international mission, North American church planting, bivocational or tentmaking callings, and in specialized areas of ministry. It is also my vision that LBS would be a significant contributor to an instructional core for young adult discipleship, leveraging Seminary expertise for Bible College-level training in optional models under consideration by NAM leadership for discipling and mobilizing a new generation of CLB young adults.

Vision for North American Mission:

My vision for NAM is that it would increasingly develop in providing leadership and resources to our North American congregations in growing in their disciple-making fruitfulness. CLB disciple making, as a people *under the Word*, must always be shaped by the expectancy that it is the Word of Christ that calls people to repentance, new life, and to follow him in his mission. I believe our new NAM structure and staffing is well-suited and making progress toward providing resources and support in partnership with congregational leadership for serving the vitality of our existing congregations, and for resourcing and raising up church planters for a new wave of CLB church planting. As part of the Disciple-Making Church initiative, our restructured NAM has taken significant steps in this direction. Our NAM Director is actively engaged in an aggressive plan to engage twenty-five CLB congregations in revitalization efforts over the next five years, and our Associate Director has provided significant coaching and guidance to four potential and emerging CLB church plants.

The Disciple-Making Church initiative offers a vision for planting three new CLB congregations each year. This will require of NAM and the CLB a new openness to a diversity of models of church plants, church planters, and creative ways to leverage the training resources of our Seminary and supplemental sources. I envision also that NAM will form and oversee the welcome and unleashing of a new generation of leaders, who will learn and form discipleship in community as they take leadership in church planting and mission in our communities.

My vision for NAM includes that it will continue and grow in resourcing CLB congregations and pastors in our post-Christian setting, to advance in mission from the fringes of culture rather than the privileged center from which the Church is accustomed. As people of the Word, with our unchurched neighbors more hesitant to first be “churched” by entrance to the church building, I envision NAM assisting our congregations in seeing their neighbors “churched” by the love and Word of the local church reaching them as the church dispersed as well as the *gathered church*.

Vision for Lutheran Brethren International Mission:

My vision for LBIM is to raise up, train, and send CLB missionaries in disciple-making mission among unreached people groups in (presently) Taiwan, Japan and Chad. This

has come, however, when we need to reckon with our shortage of pastors and the limited number of seminarians pursuing the MDiv. We need to increase the overall number of pastors on our roster. Creating an additional preparation and credentialing pathway will be an important part of this. Part of the solution lies in making the pastoral vocation accessible to a greater variety of qualified candidates. We have an opportunity to reach new pastoral candidates who might not have the time, resources, passion, or aptitude for a three-year graduate degree. I can envision a shorter up-front ministry preparation, with a longer season of ongoing education, then mentoring—once serving a church. It’s possible that pastors who do not go the MDiv route could be credentialed and supported under the guidance of an MDiv pastor-mentor in a similar way that physician’s assistants operate under the guidance and license of a supervising physician. The point is, we want to find creative ways of meeting our needs without sacrificing quality or undermining the preferred MDiv route.

3. Contribute to the training of multiple levels of congregational leadership. One of the challenges facing the CLB (and many other denominations) is that we have become over-dependent on paid clergy when it comes to training disciples and other aspects of ministry. We need to be able to train elders and other lay leaders within our congregations—in discipleship ministry leadership, biblical knowledge, and our theology. We must find new ways to equip non-pastors, as our Bible School did in the past. The Seminary’s LBDI program is a great example of the potential for training lay people.
4. Support a gap year Bible School/discipleship program. There is a growing grassroots movement in the CLB to launch a new Bible School or gap year program to provide discipleship training and biblical teaching for new generations of young adults, and Gen Z is looking for this. A ministry equipping young adults for a life of discipleship and mission engagement would be a huge blessing to our Church body. Seminary professors, CLB pastors, and other leaders could teach parts of these programs. I can see the acronym “LBS” once again standing for “Lutheran Brethren Schools.”

The history of Lutheran Brethren Schools is marked with continual adjustments for the sake of God’s mission. We would not have a Seminary today if Drs. Veum, Boe, Bjerkaas, and the LBS board and faculty had not introduced the innovations of long-distance education a decade ago. I am fully confident that the Seminary and its skilled leadership and faculty can continue to adapt for our future needs.

Vision for North American Mission:

In my last article I wrote quite a bit about my vision for the CLB and much of it focuses on our ministry here in North America. I believe we need to significantly increase training for disciple making, strengthen established churches, start new churches,

vision includes for us to advance our mission in Taiwan through exciting and stretching transitions as one missionary family has been placed after language training in a local mission setting, and another prepares for retirement. Also, my vision includes ongoing engagement with the LBIM Director and the leadership of the Japanese Church. Here also we seek our harvest Lord for the raising up, supporting, and unleashing of new leaders. Our Disciple-Making Church initiative considers a renewed vision for our partnership with the Japanese Church. One way this renewed vision is evidenced is by the recent calling of a Japanese church planter to work alongside our missionaries to plant a church through the House of Hope in Ishinomaki, Japan. The Lord is opening doors in Japan, and there is reason to be hopeful about our mission there. There are many conversations and decisions that need to be made, but in anticipation of the Lord's call and provision, a young couple is currently learning the Japanese language in hopes to one day serve as missionaries on our behalf in Japan.

This Disciple-Making Church vision, in partnership with our international sister Churches, means ongoing investment in our Chadian mission with international missionary partners, as together we engage unreached Muslim people groups in a mission context that is growing in momentum and expectancy of a Church being born. Serving that vision, we currently have six Chadian missionaries from our southern Chadian Church working alongside our CLB missionaries in Muslim communities. Additionally, in 2021 our sister Church in Taiwan sent its first international missionaries to join this partnership in Chad. The Taiwanese Church hopes to send a second team by the end of 2022.

I believe my vision is in keeping with the history of CLB mission nationally and internationally: that while we set fitting and faithful targets, and plan and pray and proceed, we also respond to God's leading in those whom he has raised up and is calling, and seek and trust him in the support of their training and sending. We desire never to be postured to say "no" to God.

My vision is that LBIM would continue to partner with LBS for primary training of our missionaries, and also seek supplemental partnerships with like-minded ministries for the support and training of our missionaries. I believe there is also merit in further seeking of collaborative efforts with sister Churches internationally, and other sending agencies for the support of our missionary teams.

I also envision, as in my initial thoughts above, that the nature of our disciple-making mission nationally and internationally is becoming more and more similar in terms of how God's people as a missionary people will be the ones to travel, sacrifice, learn the culture and language of their neighbors without Christ, and learn to minister more as an alien people from the fringe of culture and community. I foresee that LBIM and NAM will continue to grow in partnership and shared learning, while our Seminary grows in creative ways to resource that partnership.

And so, we see before us and pursue this vision. The Church of the Lutheran Brethren has always sought to follow Jesus in reaching others to trust and follow him; and in this new day of challenge and opportunity, we seek even more to be: a *Disciple-Making Church*.

and empower young leaders at every level of our denomination. Much of this relates to the ministry of North American Mission. We must focus energy on equipping churches to make disciples. I would dedicate a staff position to training pastors and churches for disciple making. We could provide training and resources to help established churches regularly evaluate and strengthen their ministry. With a new focus on disciple making, combined with continuing our current church planting strategy, we should aim to plant 100 new churches over the next 30 years.

NAM, LBS, and LBIM Working Together:

We were once an immigrant Church, and we are called to be that again. The lines between North American Mission and International Mission are no longer as clear-cut as they once were. God is bringing people from all over the world to Canada and the US, and the number of people with no religious preferences grows every year. As we move into the hard-to-reach places in North America, this work is more and more a missionary effort. I can see a day when LBIM and NAM partner to start new churches in immigrant communities here in North America. I see a time when LBS will be needed to provide new ministry tracks for those emerging leaders.

Our three ministry arms are truly interdependent, and many of our dreams for the CLB are tied to what we do in North America:

- To address our pastor shortages, we should plant churches because many new pastors and leaders in a denomination come from new churches.
- To double the number of international missionaries we send, we should start new churches to expand our sending base.
- To reach and empower young adults, we should plant churches.
- To make disciples, we should train our established churches and start more churches.

My wife Kjirsti and I prayerfully accepted this nomination because we believe the Lord has been preparing me for a role like this—for years I've studied the challenges facing the Western Church and I've spent considerable time with our congregations on the growing edges of the mission field across North America. Now we wait to see if that internal sense of call will be confirmed by the external call of the Convention delegates in June.

Let's take this leap of faith together, always relying on the Holy Spirit as we enter the next chapter of the CLB's ministry. It's time to take action. God is calling us to join him on mission!

Let's never give up answering that call!

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Student Trip: Chad, Africa

ERIC REESE

Over the years, I have seen many Glimpse Project videos detailing Lutheran Brethren International Mission (LBIM) work in Chad. But it was an entirely different experience to stay with and get to know our missionaries and missionary partners by visiting with them in their homes. Their mission to make disciples and “reach the unreached” played out before my eyes. The impact of the intentional relationships that our missionaries have built in their communities was clear.

In January, I had the opportunity to travel to Chad, Africa for a “mission vision trip.” Director of LBIM Dan Venberg led our team of six students and two professors. We traveled to many villages and were hosted by LBIM missionaries or Chadian missionary partners. The purpose of this trip was for

the participants to internalize our Lord’s mission to unreached people groups in Chad, so that we, and the congregations we serve, will be better equipped to pray for, support, promote, and engage with God’s mission to these unreached peoples. Visiting with Chadian people in their context gave us insights into their culture and worldview, which differs from our own in many ways.

When we visited the village of Adere, we stayed at the home of Paul and Teresa Szobody. We arrived on a Sunday, so we worshiped with Paul, two of his students, and their families. I have been going to Sunday morning worship services my entire life, but it was incredible to see and experience a worship service outside of my cultural context. It was different from any other church I have attended, and it was awesome to see God working

through a culture foreign to me. Worship took place outside in a gazebo, and we sat on the ground on mats. Despite the differences, I was encouraged by the realization that this church looks to the same Scripture, has the same confession, and is part of the same body of Christ as our North American churches.

In our culture, religious beliefs are often considered personal and private. Questioning or challenging someone’s beliefs is frequently met with hostility and defensiveness. This was not my experience in Chad. The Muslims we spoke with were delighted to talk about Jesus and the Bible. They were open to our missionaries and to hearing the gospel. While we were there, Dan distributed some audio-Bibles. One Muslim man had listened to two of the Gospels before we saw him the next day! It was amazing



to see how God is softening hearts and opening ears to receive his Word. God is working to evangelize these unreached people groups in Chad, and it was encouraging to see the fruit of his work through these LBIM missions.

As we traveled to each village, I came face to face with those who have much less than I do. I was struck by the generosity of the locals we met in each village. We were always given the best of what our hosts had to offer—the nicest spot in the shade, cushions to sit on, the best bowls and plates, etc. They were eager to share what they had with us, taking every opportunity to invite us to sit down in the shade, offering us tea and pastries.

One of the clear differences between our culture and theirs is the way that they prioritize their concern for the surrounding community rather than the individual. It is assumed that each person will do what they can to financially support their family and community. It is a cultural expectation that money is shared with your family, even with distant relatives. In our thinking, wages belong to the individual who earns it; it is not that simple in the collectivist Chadian culture. It is not uncommon for family members to show up at their relative's place of

work on payday so that they might collect some of the paycheck. Who receives a portion of the paycheck and how much, is determined by need and relationship. This means that even for those who have relatively well-paying jobs, saving money is practically impossible, because there is always a relative in need.

This aspect of their culture made me reflect on the way I care for my family and community with what has been given to me. The gospel is the greatest gift that I have received—am I compelled by it enough to continually share it with my community? All who look in faith to Jesus Christ for their salvation, find it. Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus Christ has made full satisfaction for all our sins. Take a moment to consider that. Complete atonement has been made for our sin, so that, “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). The hope that we have in the gospel is surely the best thing that we have to share with others, and it is given in such abundance that it cannot be reduced to scarcity, no matter how much we share it.

Most mission trips, by nature, present us with a new perception of the daily struggles experienced by those whom we are visiting. I do not deal with the

reality of day-to-day hazards, due to impoverished living conditions. Where I live, I am not plagued daily by worries of water or food-borne illnesses, parasites, breathing in toxic gases from burned rubbish, or my daughter being trampled by elephants. This trip to Chad underlined for me that our faith is the great equalizer. I saw that cultural differences in the practice of Christianity mean very little in the face of that which saves and keeps us. Although there are different styles of worship and different locations in which they are carried out, the gospel is the very same. It is the power of God for salvation, that unfailingly binds us together in one faith, one Lord, one baptism—in Christ.

Eric Reese is a second-year seminarian at Lutheran Brethren Seminary. He serves as associate pastor of Stavanger Lutheran church in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

Growing Smaller

JASON LANG

It's late November 2021. Nick Olson (Youth Director with Word of Life Church, Le Sueur, MN) calls me while he and his family are driving around their town of New Prague looking at Christmas lights. The sounds of joy fill his car in the background, as Nick says, "Hey! You want to buy a church?" And I quickly answered, "Yes." But launching a new church campus is not that quick or that easy. As it turned out, we didn't buy that building. Yet Word of Life Church launched a new church campus in New Prague, Minnesota on March 27.

The leaders of Word of Life Church have been praying for wisdom and direction for years, asking God to lead us into the next chapter for Word of Life's ministry to the communities in the Minnesota River Valley. As people have been inviting their friends to come and hear the gospel and people find themselves believing, lives are being transformed. And the people of Word of Life have continued to look to God for guidance.

So the leaders of Word of Life toured that church building that was for sale, then we invited everyone who's a part of Word of Life to come and check it out and pray together for God's leading. While most people were excited about the opportunity to minister to the New Prague community, that building just didn't fit Word of Life's philosophy of ministry. But then we heard that a different church had closed in New Prague, and we decided to check it out.

Two phone calls later, we were walking through the building that now hosts Word of Life—New Prague. As many friends and neighbors have noticed, the New Prague building looks like a smaller version of the Le Sueur building, and it has lots of outdoor space for ministry and events. This building fits with Word of Life's values and philosophy of ministry.

As we bought a building in New Prague and talked to friends and neighbors, people continued to ask, "Why are you launching a new campus now?" People have mentioned that attendance hasn't fully recovered to pre-COVID participation, and church income was down due to people's financial situations. The list of reasons not to launch a new campus went on and on. But as we talked to friends and acquaintances in our neighborhoods we continued to hear "need." The



Pastor Jason Lang and his family.



Pastor Nick Olson and his family.



Photos from Word of Life's opening service (3/27/22) in New Prague, Minnesota.



community of New Prague is growing rapidly, and they need to hear God's message of salvation through Jesus Christ. The people need hope; they need to hear they are loved and valued.

Word of Life Church is excited to be living God's mission of sharing the gospel in neighboring towns. Even when people were coming to Jesus and his ministry was growing, he said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent" (Luke 4:43). We are talking to people, inviting neighbors, and living life where people are, seeking opportunities to share the gospel.

Will you please pray with us? Will you pray for the people of New Prague and the surrounding communities? Will you pray for the Launch Team that is getting the word out? Will you pray for Word of Life's New Prague campus? Please pray for courage and boldness as we share Jesus' message of salvation.

Rev. Jason Lang serves as pastor of Word of Life Church in Le Sueur and New Prague, Minnesota.

Blessed be the Memory

David Roald Christenson passed away on March 1, 2022. David was born in a three-bedroom bungalow in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on August 31, 1926 to Sigurd and Anna (nee Holte) Christenson.



David was baptized as an infant at Ebenezer Lutheran Brethren Church, Minneapolis. He came to a living faith in Jesus when, at the age of ten, his mother led him in a prayer for forgiveness and asking Jesus into his life anew.

David graduated from Hillcrest Lutheran Academy in Fergus Falls, Minnesota in 1944. He enlisted in the US Navy in November 1944 and served in Naval medical units on the West Coast until the end of World War II. He received a B.A. degree from Augsburg College (Minneapolis) in pre-medical studies in 1949. Soon after graduation, he began dating a nursing student named Dagney Trettevik. They were married at Rock of Ages Lutheran Brethren Church in Seattle, Washington on June 16, 1951. Over the next decade and a half, they were blessed with six children.

In 1953, David graduated from Lutheran Brethren Seminary with a Master of Divinity degree. Over the next forty years, he became known as “Pastor Dave” to hundreds and hundreds of people in congregations that he served in Washington and Minnesota: Ebenezer LB Church in Ferndale, WA (1953-1958); Ebenezer LB Church in Minneapolis, MN (1961-1968); Maple Park LB Church in Lynnwood, WA (1968-1972, 1979-1993); and Bethel Church in Fergus Falls, MN (1972-1979). He also served for one term overseas with Lutheran Brethren World Missions as the head instructor at Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Akita, Japan (1959-1961), teaching his classes through a Japanese translator.

May the Lord be glorified in and through the life, death, and memory of his beloved son, David Roald Christenson.

Strand Installed as Elder



L to R: Elders Kenneth Roed, Paul Carlson, Pastor Scott Skones, and Elder Charles Strand.

On February 27, 2022, Charles Strand was installed as an elder at Bethel Lutheran Brethren Church in Antler, North Dakota. Western Region Chairman, Pastor Scott Skones, officiated.

Jahr Ordained as Elder



L to R: Lutheran Brethren Seminary President, Dr. David Veum; Rev. Dale Hexum; Elders Knut Ronnevik; Armin Jahr III; Rolf Ronnevik; Gary Wheeler; and Kurt Frustol.

On February 27, 2022, Armin Jahr III was ordained as an elder at Good Shepherd Lutheran Brethren Church in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Lutheran Brethren Seminary President, Dr. David Veum, officiated.

Elders Ordained



L to R: Elders Mike Anderson, Bill Welder, Rev. Tim Collins, Elders Glen Claus, and Derrick Lathrop.

On March 6, 2022, Bill Welder and Glen Claus were ordained at Inspiration Lutheran Brethren Church in Breckenridge, Minnesota. Rev. Tim Collins officiated.

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Trying to Save the World?

I was visited by a Christian, who was a politician. He was seeking my support—and I suppose, by proxy, my church’s support—in a non-partisan election. As we got acquainted, he steered the conversation toward other issues, both moral and social, of great concern to him (and to many Christians). He was involved in a number of projects, and provided me with several informational brochures. As I remarked on the broad range of issues he was tackling, he responded almost apologetically, and with a grin, “I guess I’m just all about saving the world.”

In each of chapters 8, 9, and 10 of Mark’s Gospel, Jesus warns his disciples of his pending death. He has a mission to fulfill in Jerusalem. The disciples’ reactions to his predictions, however, have another focus. First Peter rebukes Jesus, because death is not part of Peter’s Messianic plan. Then Jesus rebukes Peter, because it is. The other disciples give no direct response, probably because Peter’s experience has taught them it’s safer to ignore Jesus “when he gets like that.”

In the context, the disciples are only concerned about “the kingdom” and their place in it. “We want to be seated on your right and left in your kingdom, Lord.” There’s no great contrast between the disciples’ thinking and that of the crowd in John 6:15, who—after the feeding of the 5,000—“intended to come and make [Jesus] king by force.”

Regarding their hope for a Messiah who does not die, Jesus’ disciples will eventually understand: That’s not God’s Messiah. And a political Messianic kingdom in the first century AD is in no way the kingdom of God. Jesus has not come to set up a temporal kingdom, to reform society, to restore the glory days of Israel’s theocracy, or to send us all back to Eden. None of that. He has simply come to suffer and die. And to rise again.

The Apostle Paul stated it precisely, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*—of whom I am the worst” (1 Timothy 1:15). That is all.

We are distracted by worldly thinking. That is, how do we make a better world for ourselves, our families, our nation? We pray for peace on earth. All this is good. That candidate’s efforts to move people toward godly thinking and behavior? Admirable. But while the Holy Spirit may be moving him as an individual to political engagement, this is not Christ’s mission, and not Christ’s mission for his Church. Jesus came not to move the culture closer to godly thinking and behavior, but to bring sinners, in repentance, to God. The Church is called to reach individual souls, change in society and culture flow from that. Many “good missions” can distract from the best. This is why we say with Paul, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

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

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