



# CLB

*A Disciple-Making Movement*

## Church of the Lutheran Brethren

PRES. PAUL LARSON



Welcome to the 2022 Church of the Lutheran Brethren Biennial Convention; I am so glad you are here! Thank you for the investment of your time and other resources to come engage and advance the mission of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren! It has been four testing and proving years since we last had this great privilege of joining together to consider and interact regarding God’s mission entrusted to the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, and to fellowship together as His people. I am so grateful to God for sustaining and supporting you, our congregational pastors and lay leaders, during this dark season. While stretched in many ways, and still being tested—by a worldwide devastating pandemic, by the polarizing divisions and distractions of political and social strife, by the growing

challenge of post-Christendom in which the Church as in its earliest days must learn to speak and live the gospel as a missionary people from the alien fringe of culture and society—you, the Church, have not shrunk back, but have risen and advanced the cause of Christ’s coming kingdom. I am thankful to God for you, and honored to share in His mission in partnership with you.

Please indulge a brief devotional thought at this rejoining of our Convention after such trying season. At the most recent gathering of our Council of Directors, I invited them to recall with me all the images of darkness as Jesus goes to the cross. As evening falls and Jesus hosts his last supper, the scene darkens further with the prediction of betrayal and the shameful scuffle of his followers over petty posturing. The plot yet dims with the prediction of Judas’ rejection of Christ by treason and Peter’s rejection by denial. Next we see the Savior praying in the dark, surrounded by sleeping bodies, but truly quite alone on that olive-treed mount. Under the cover of deep night, a mob of soldiers and priests, temple officers and elders come out against him, in conclusive rejection of the Savior Messiah. Stare with me into the cavity; the abject void of light. Perceive our own participation in the shadows of that black hour of sin and faithlessness. I am here too. Recall what Jesus says at the anticlimax of this night, His words to this baneful axis of enemies

against him—world, devil, flesh; priests, soldiers, disciples (Luke 22:53):

*“this is your hour—when darkness reigns”*

We know that hour. It may seem we’ve been living in that hour for years. We sense ourselves in that hour. In the flesh, we belong to, even are, that hour. It has now been two thousand and twenty-two years as we count time since the hour of Christ’s arrival and departure from this earth. It has been two years since our world has lived under the pallor of a virus so sinister one has to pause and wonder if its greater destruction will be of physical human lives or just the sheer destruction of humanity. It’s been two years also of struggle for the Church—well, it’s always been a struggle, hasn’t it? In recent months we’ve grieved loss of beloved ones and been gnawed with concern and prayer for others; we have witnessed abominable bloody aggression, as part of our world (and the Church) has been shred by war. This has been a time when we might bow our heads and nod agreeing, “this is your hour—when darkness reigns.”

But now we remember that there, in the garden and on the cross: it is, only, an hour. The dark hour of humanity’s rejection of Christ is depicted so poignantly and devastatingly in the sixth to ninth hours of Jesus’ suffering under sin’s deathly weight on the cross. Each of the synoptic Gospels mention this phenomenon, but

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Luke adds plainly the inarguable cause: “For the sun stopped shining” (Luke 23:45). Just, and only, that. But, it was only an hour—that darkness reigned.

The Father’s sending the Son to humanity’s impossible Sin need is so meaningfully depicted as a matter of darkness and light. When Jesus entered this dark world, He came as Light. The Star shone. “Glories stream from heaven above...” we sang a season ago. Jesus’ own self-claim was, “I am the light of the world!” (John 8:12). This is true even while we see plenty a dark thing surrounding; to our eye it surely seems the hour of darkness yet reigns. But, see Jesus on the cross—He who came as Light to our world. See Him bearing all of Sin and righteous judgment against it. Watch Him know, beyond the evil rejection of soldiers and world and friends, now also the righteous rejection of His Father (ironically, the repair for the rejection of all the others). Time and universe come to this moment: “[And at] three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’) ...And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit” (Matthew 27:46, 50). See concurrently the temple curtain tearing in two, tombs broken open, dead saints come alive pushing up through dust, stand erect and walk out, appearing to a stunned audience. And... (I don’t know

I’d ever contemplated this a hundred times through this scene before) ...with each of the synoptic Gospels deeming it so vital to point out that darkness reigned from noon till 3 pm when Jesus gives up His Spirit—this must mean that at that moment as Jesus dies and Sin’s debt payment is Finished!..., what else? What must have happened at 3:01 pm!

### *The sun turned back on.*

There and then when sin’s debt was paid; then when the beloved Son of the Father, willed and sent to die, had accomplished his mission for the salvation of humanity: the Father flipped the switch. The sun shone. And, the hour of darkness reigned no more.

Well, there are still dark hours for sure. Scripture affirms the same: the adversary, god of this age, ruler of this world, prince of darkness—he still prowls, deceives, masquerades, and is yet grim. The Church remains a militant one, with militant mission. Its honest theology is not one of glory but of the cross. Still, at the accomplishment of the cross, the reign of darkness was hemmed to a time—just an hour. Then the sun turned brilliantly back on to signal the everlasting triumph of the Christ! And the Cross’ light, his light (“I am the light of the world”), now our light (“Let your light so shine before men”), will not, cannot be extinguished; it remains and shines forever, time without

end. This is our confidence and surety as we both gather in Convention, and live and bring the gospel of our Savior and Maker of disciples in our neighborhoods and congregations back home.

Disciple-Making Church is the theme of our 2022 CLB Biennial Convention. The Church of the Lutheran Brethren is a unique and vital part of the Bride of Christ. We have been entrusted as stewards of a great gift: an intersection of gospel truth by which we are saved and summoned to rest in gracious freedom; and a glad and expectant call to be joined to God’s Mission in bringing that gospel of Christ to our neighbors near and among the nations. Indeed, we are a people restful in grace and restless in mission. Together with all of you we follow Christ in one solitary calling: to be and make his disciples. The CLB has always been this. And in this new day of challenge and opportunity, I ask you to join me as we seek more to be, and renewed as, a Disciple-Making Church.

We are eager and expectant of what God will do among us in these days of Convention. Saturday’s “Day of Equipping” begins with the Opening Business Session of our Convention, followed by a full day of teaching and training for men and women, pastors and lay people. Sunday is our sabbath “Day of Community.” We invite all delegates to gather for an outdoor service (10:30) at the site of the recently purchased land

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for the future campus of Bethel Battle Lake. (Worship and prayer resources will be available as well as the prerecorded sermon. We invite all CLB congregations to join in our Convention and mission partnership by sharing in this CLB Sunday.) Following lunch (12:00) and a prayer walk (1:30), our CLB Jubilee continues (2:30) with a Kubb tourney, other activities, food, and the time to connect with old friends and to meet new ones. A CLB Forge podcast is planned in Fergus Falls on Sunday evening.

Monday's "Day of Ownership" includes business sessions, discussion over the formation of a CLB position paper update on Human Sexuality, a CLB Mission Team Directors panel discussion regarding the new Disciple-Making Church mission advancement initiative, convention committees and reports, elections, and workshops. Tuesday morning's "Day of Resolve" will conclude our Convention with business sessions including consideration of constitutional amendments. Our Convention will close shortly after noon with prayer and the celebration of our Lord's Supper.

You will hear much about the mission advancement initiative we are introducing at this convention, and sharing its name:

Disciple-Making Church (DMC). I believe DMC will be a uniting focus of our mission at both the congregational and synodical levels for the coming years. While targeted goals for DMC ministry and support are stated for the five-year window of 2022-2026, undoubtedly the greater fundamental objectives of DMC will involve CLB cultural shifts, sacrifice, and integration in personal, congregational, and synodical life for the next decade, and longer. This mission advancement initiative does not replace departmental strategic plans, but it is already becoming a focusing lens by which our departments and congregations will make prioritizing decisions and investment of energies. Already, as I have interacted with many congregational leaders from our regions in forum feedback, with our Council of Directors who have endorsed and summoned this initiative, and with our departmental Mission Team directors, I am encouraged by a solidarity and clarity of mission. Please pray with me, and seek with me, for the CLB to be renewed as a Disciple-Making Church.

Elsewhere in this convention booklet, you will find departmental reports, the CLB Parochial Report, and a wealth

of information regarding CLB mission accomplished and plans moving forward.

Some of the high priorities we have set for this convention are: the presentation of and engagement of CLB congregational leadership with the Disciple-Making Church mission advancement initiative, the reunion and fellowship of CLB pastors and lay delegates, increased opportunity for delegate interaction and voice with departmental and synodical mission, training and equipping in our Saturday sessions and our Monday workshops related to the objectives of DMC, constitution and by-law amendments, draft position paper presentation and discussion, regional and national leader elections, corporate worship, the overall encouragement and uniting vision of the Church.

Our synodical leadership team and I are here to serve you during this Convention and beyond. If you have a need or question or concern or prayer request, please stop any of us, or connect with our support team at the resource table in the foyer. It is a humbling privilege and inspiring challenge to serve in this call as denominational president. Of the various ways I explain my role to people, my favorite is to say just this: "I am an



associate pastor of a very large extensive multi-site Church.” I believe this, and do not take the privilege and responsibility of that calling lightly.

Since our last convention we have said good-bye for now to these colleagues and friends:

Omar Gjerness	1922-2019
James Olson	1925-2019
Arve Christofferson	1927-2019
Harold Hosch	1929-2019
Gordon Solheim	1929-2020
Curtis Atneosen	1938-2020
Ingolf Kronstad	1940-2020
James Johnson	1933-2021
Alvin Hagerott	1940-2021
David Rinden	1941-2021
Willy Gundersen	1942-2021
Elroy Erickson	1944-2021
Thomas Hjembo	1946-2021
Dan Tennefos	1954-2021
David Christenson	1926-2022
Kevin Foss	1967-2022

Let me add these words of gratitude: I am supremely thankful for the leadership team I am blessed to lead and serve. We have built and value a culture of trust and collaboration among our Mission Team directors and departments, with

our LBS administration and faculty, with our administrative assistant support staff, our NAM church-planting pastors, and LBIM missionary team, and the affiliate ministries—all who are joined in mission together. I am also so very sincerely appreciative and humbly proud of our pastors, lay leaders, and congregations who have given themselves to mission and ministry in such taxing and stretching seasons. Neither the pandemic nor the polarizing forces of culture have quelled the mission of the CLB. Along with sobering challenges, there are also numerous encouraging signs of mission advance. Pardon some alliteration, but I perceive the season we are coming through, while a pruning time, has also been one of prioritizing (I believe the Church knows more clearly what is important and worth sacrificing for). Also, I believe this season has opened doors and receptivity of a greater partnering and sharing of knowledge, resources, and support than I have witnessed in my few decades of ministry. Congregations and pastors need not stand alone, and we can share and benefit much from greater alliances. And finally, I believe this season has postured the Church to consider and see itself not solely or largely as the

gathered campus entity, but the months of limitations on our gathering and other forces have helped us consider who we the Church are, as we are dispersed in our neighborhoods and in our neighbors’ lives. Again, I am grateful for this Church body, and believe the CLB is and has a gift to share with the world.

Grace and Peace to the Church,

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