

Faith & Fellowship

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Quiet Moments

Email prayer requests to: pray@clba.org

Poor Christian

H.E. WISLØFF



Christians are poor in themselves. The more the light of the Spirit of God shines in upon the soul, the clearer this becomes.

But a Christian is rich anyway. From heaven it is heralded, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Those who are helpless, God can help. It is the ones who are bound whom God can loose.

Christians are forced to their knees when they see their poverty. But on their knees they learn to thank God for the riches they have in him.

In Christ Jesus, children of God have all that they need. “Child,”

says God, “all mine is yours.” The child is therefore as wealthy as the Father, for he or she has everything in him.

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

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

Peace for Your Soul

TROY TYSDAL

Before entering the ministry, I was a salesman. I worked for a company that sold home décor to little “mom and pop” shops across the Midwest. We sold figurines, clocks, and Christmas ornaments. I continued in that job part-time while at Seminary. I would travel the country and do a few trade shows here and there to help pay the bills.

At a show in Atlanta, I had been working with a customer for several hours when we entered a section of the showroom dedicated to Christian ornaments. In disgust the customer turned to me and told me, in no uncertain terms, exactly what she thought of Christianity. She wasn't a fan, and I felt judged. But, in the face of her verbal attack, I was silent. I wasn't sure what to say. I enjoyed her company. I told myself, “This isn't the place, and if I offend her I could lose my job.”

After she finished her rant, she turned back to the wall, reached out and took hold of a small plastic cross. With confusion in her voice, she said rhetorically, “...but it sure sells.” There was a short moment of silence that followed, another opportunity for me to say something, but again, I said nothing.

Many of you have had experiences like that, experiences where you feel like you should have said something, but you let the moment pass. You might be thinking, “It's OK. Don't worry about it. It happens to all of us. Even the great Simon Peter denied Christ!”

It is true that we all fail, but it is also true that it is never OK to deny Jesus or to stand in silence. Silence and denial are one and the same.

MATTHEW 10:32-34

Jesus said, “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven. Do not



suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

The words of Jesus are clear and direct. We are at war, and there is no middle ground. Fortunately for us, Jesus has provided the battle plan. If it were up to us, we would grab literal swords and try to convert the world by force, but that is not God's plan. On the morning of Jesus' crucifixion, Simon Peter pulled a sword in defense of Jesus. He cut off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest. Jesus told Peter, “Put your sword away.” He said, “All who draw the sword will die by the sword.”

You see, we are at war, but the battle is not against flesh and blood, and violence is not the plan. Instead Jesus tells us, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you.” That's the plan, and we are given a sword to accomplish the task. The Apostle Paul tells us to take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and boldly proclaim the mystery of the gospel.

When that lady at the trade show said, “but it sure sells,” what if I had asked, in

love, “Why do you think it sells?” What do you think might have happened? You never know how the Holy Spirit is going to work. Perhaps I could have led her to faith, or perhaps the Holy Spirit would have sown the seed for someone else to lead her to faith. I don't know. But I do know this: challenging her in love would have brought her no harm. That day I was tested, and I failed, but I have practiced my response in hope that I will not fail again.

As Christians, we must not fear consequences that result from speaking the truth in love. We must only see reward. For those who acknowledge Jesus before others, he has promised to acknowledge them before his father in heaven. And to be acknowledged by Jesus, the judge of both the living and the dead, is to find peace for your soul.

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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Peace that Divides

DANIEL STENBERG

On Christmas Day 1863, poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, sitting before a table in Cambridge, Massachusetts, took up his pen and paper. His heart was filled with despair. A few years earlier, his wife of eighteen years had tragically died in an accidental fire, and he would never truly recover from her loss. His country was divided and waging war against itself. His son, who had joined the army against his father's wishes, had been severely wounded in the Battle of New Hope Church. As Longfellow sat there on Christmas morning, nursing his son down the long road of recovery, he heard the church bells pealing. He struggled with their message of "peace on earth, good will towards men." Taking up his pen, he put down on paper a poem. The first verse is familiar to those who know the hymn. Longfellow's poem eventually came to be: "I heard the bells on Christmas day, their old familiar carols play, and wild and sweet, the words repeat of peace on earth, good will to men."

As I sit here in 2021, it's surprisingly

easy to relate to this man who lived in 1863. Longfellow was a conflicted individual. He lived in a time of conflict, yet yearned for peace, wishing that the promise of the bells rang true. How often we find ourselves joining the poet in this wish! For though our country is not technically at war with itself, we too live in a time of conflict. Personal struggles, politics, the varied responses to COVID, and a world that is rabidly embracing the secular have made the words of Longfellow incredibly relatable. He expressed our frustration as he wrote the third verse: "And in despair I bowed my head: 'There is no peace on earth,' I said, 'For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.'"

"Where is the peace?" we wonder. Why is there so much conflict? Isn't the promise of the bells real? Isn't Jesus, the Christ child, the one we celebrate on Christmas morning? Isn't he the heralded Prince of Peace? He has come! Why has peace not come with him?

As we, with Longfellow, wrestle with these questions, it is important for us to

remember what Jesus himself said about his mission, his purpose here on earth. I am reminded of his shocking declaration in Matthew 10:34-36, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'"

How could these words come from the mouth of the Prince of Peace?

As we try to make sense of these words of Jesus, it is important for us to understand what he means by "peace." The peace the Messiah brings is much more than the absence of fighting. It was not Jesus' intent and purpose to have everyone join hands and sing "Kumbaya." Rather, he came to restore our relationship with God. This is true peace. Our world is broken by sin; its natural state is one of conflict. The only means to true peace, the peace that is promised by the ringing bells that echo the declaration of the angels in the night sky over Bethlehem,

Jesus said, “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’”

Matthew 10:34-36

is through relationship with God. And in the bringing of this kind of peace, conflict is inevitable, for not all will accept it. As R.T. France put it: “Jesus did not come to poison family relationships, but rather he brings a division, regrettable, but inevitable, between those who respond to his mission, and those who reject it.”

Peace with the world is not our purpose. Peace with God is, and that peace can only be found through Jesus Christ. As I read through the verses in Matthew 10, I found myself incredibly thankful for one particular Son whose Father turned against him. The Bible tells us that God made Jesus to be sin for us while he hung on the cross. Jesus took all that separates us from God to that cursed tree, and there he felt the Father’s wrath against our sin, as he called out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And there, for our sin, he died. But three days later he rose from the grave, defeating sin and death. In this way, Jesus reconciled us to the Father. For through faith in Christ, we are clothed in Christ. So when God sees us, he does not see our sinful rags,

but instead sees the righteous garments of Jesus.

This is the promise of the bells. And we are called to proclaim it, for we are Christ’s ambassadors, and God makes his appeal through us. Let us not feel so comfortable in the peace we have with God that we are unwilling to face conflict in the world in order to share the message of true peace with our neighbor.

Every Christmas morning at my church we sing “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day,” and I never cease to get chills when we proclaim the fourth verse. As a Christian I do not have to imagine the peace Longfellow felt as he penned the words: “Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: ‘God is not dead, nor doth he sleep; the wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, good will to men.’”

Though our world is one of conflict, there is peace for the Christian. Our God does not lose. As Christians, we rest in the finished work of Christ on the cross, and we yearn for our neighbor to be reconciled to God, to know the peace

in which we rest. So, let us be the bells in our communities, loudly pealing the message of a peace that divides.



Rev. Daniel Stenberg is Pastor of Calvary Lutheran Church in Bergenfield, New Jersey.

Light in the World

ZACH MATTHYS

Let me tell you about Derrick Hayes. While in the Oakland-San Francisco area on a youth mission trip with Atonement Lutheran Church of Fargo, North Dakota, our group decided to go out for ice cream after a long day of helping the homeless. Little did we know that a homeless man was about to help us! There was an ice cream shop close to the church where we were staying in Oakland, so we decided this would be a great place to go. All eight of us hopped into our oversized van, drove to the shop, and began our search for a parking spot. It didn't take long to realize that we weren't going to find a place to park, which forced us to drive back to the church and make the hike by foot to satisfy our palates. We enjoyed our ice cream, and as we were about to start walking back, a voice cried out, "Is anyone willing to help a homeless man?!" This voice cried out to the crowd multiple times until one of us asked, "What do you need?" None of us

were expecting what happened next, but our soul palates would become satisfied.

When the crowd heard the voice of John the Baptist crying from the wilderness, some responded, "What should we do?" What made them ask such a question? This voice crying out from the wilderness was not a voice of comfort, joy, or delight. Instead, this voice called out, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Luke 3:7). In his Gospel, Luke does not say if John was calling all his listeners a brood of vipers, or just a certain group. But this exhortation could only do two things—move the listeners to anger or send a chill down their spines. Luke does not record anger from the crowd, but rather fear. Is this what the people were expecting to hear and feel, in their anticipation of the coming Messiah? How should we think and feel as Advent approaches us this year?

Advent reminds me of preparing for

gatherings with family, friends, and at times new faces—sharing moments that continue to give comfort, joy, and excitement. While I have always enjoyed being with family and friends, and sharing each other's company, never have I experienced a family member calling me a viper or warning me of coming wrath. Instead, I always hear encouragement and thankfulness.

Is there any encouragement from John the Baptist? No, the voice crying out about the Anointed One, Jesus Christ, comes with a frightful message for his hearers. How could this be? Are not the people waiting to be free from their oppressors? Even before the prophet Isaiah spoke this prophecy, God asked Isaiah to comfort his people. "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God" (Isaiah 40:1). Does John the Baptist comfort God's people? Instead, this voice screams out the Law of God and the consequences that await the people who claim to know the Law.

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“The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Luke 3:9).

In their fear, the people in the crowd—including tax collectors and soldiers—asked John, “Teacher, what should we do?” They were told, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same... Don’t collect any more [taxes] than you are required to... Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely...” (Luke 3:10-14).

This voice preparing the way does not tell the crowd to give to the ones who already have, but to the ones who have nothing. What if, as we prepare our hearts during this Advent, we hear this message and act on it? Year after year we prepare ourselves to enjoy each other’s company and to share moments that will be remembered for years to come. But what if those moments were stories that

brought hope, love, and joy to families who have little to nothing?

Derrick Hayes brought this message to us. As we thought we were going to be the good news for him, the unexpected happened and he brought the good news to us. You see, Derrick had lived a life full of sin, but as time went on God’s voice changed his ways. Even though, at the time we met Derrick, he was living in a tent in Oakland, he still had a heart to help others. He shared with us that our giving was not going to be used in vain; instead he was going to use it to help other homeless people around him. Derrick encouraged us and exhorted us to continue to be lights in this world, and work to be a difference in a sad and lost generation. We later found a three-story mural of Derrick Hayes in Oakland, and the smile on this mural filled us with joy—not because we gave to him, but rather because of the hope he shared with us.

As we prepare our hearts for Advent, remember the voice crying out in the wilderness. While you wait to share moments of joy, comfort, and excitement with your loved ones, keep your eyes open to the ones who have nothing, and give to those who may not have the same opportunity.



Zachariah Matthys is a second-year seminarian at Lutheran Brethren Seminary. Zach graduated from MSUM with a Bachelor’s degree in Exercise Science. He lives in Fargo, North Dakota, and is married to Kelsey. They have a baby girl named Sophia.



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Undeserved Mercy

JORDAN HERRICK

When I was introduced to him, John was only one bad “fix” away from death. John had been actively using drugs since the age of nine. His father introduced him to drugs and alcohol to calm him down when he was acting up or just trying to be a kid. As you can imagine, John’s life was quickly thrown into a chaotic whirlwind of crime, addiction, bad decisions, and broken relationships. In his mind, there was no hope of ever being released from this storm that had tossed him around day after day, year after year. When I met John, he looked tired, scared, and worn down. He’d spent so many years attempting to earn others’ love, trying to get clean, and trying to rebuild relationships with those who at one time said they loved him. In the eyes of those around him, John was not worth the time or the effort to help or forgive him. For years people told him he would never get his life together, leaving him in a pit of self-doubt and hardening him to the point that he just couldn’t trust anyone anymore. He didn’t believe there was anyone who cared enough about him

to help him, much less show him any kind of compassion or mercy.

The world we live in today seems to have the same pattern of walking away from people as did John’s family and friends. When someone messes up, it is easier to point out their sins and turn our backs on the messiness they have created, than it is to roll up our sleeves and get messy with them. Turn on the news or open your favorite social media app and you will quickly find compassion lacking, which then only leads to more suffering. There are stories of families divided and broken over differing opinions, communities torn apart by poverty and homelessness, political parties unable to have civil discussions, talk of war, and so many more stories of suffering. We see a lack of true love and compassion for others.

Our society today is more merciless than merciful. Mercy is a way for us to make space for others. Mercy is a gift given to someone who is suffering by someone acting with compassion.

Christ-like compassion gives us hope.

Jesus tells us in Luke 6:36, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” As Christians, we are shown extreme mercy by God. We are all sinners and fall short of what we were created to be, but God in his great love has extended his mercy to us so that we can be reunited with him. Mercy is God’s gift to us, and it is freely given to us at the time of our salvation. We in no way deserve this gift, but out of his loving kindness and grace he extends it to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

We all know how impatient we are, but God is patient, and he transfers that patience to broken and sinful humans even when we don’t deserve it.

My friend John is not a patient man, but God in his mercy loves him and cares about him in ways that are unimaginable. John told me stories about his life and all the terrible things he has done to himself and to others. As he shared these stories, he often broke down in tears of shame and deep regret for his past. In our time together I was able to share the gospel with him, and together we prayed for his salvation. John had times of great joy and

“The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”

James 3:17

hope, knowing that he accepted Christ as his savior, and yet he still struggled with accepting the idea that anyone could love him after all the awful things he had done. How could anyone possibly show him any kind of mercy?

This is a common thought for us, and especially for people who don't follow Jesus. At times we feel compassion or take pity on someone who is truly down and out, but Jesus is the true example and expression of God's mercy. If we want to show the world around us mercy, we would do well to follow the ways Jesus shows us throughout Scripture. Jesus was always filled with compassion for those who were suffering, and then he acted on it. Jesus always offered his grace to those who were undesirable in the eyes of the culture around them. Jesus ate with despised tax collectors, cleansed lepers, healed the sick, fed the hungry, gave sight to the blind, made the lame walk, and raised the dead.

Mercy is essential in the ministry of Jesus and his Father, and it should be essential in our own lives as believers.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7). God has given us gifts and created us to share these gifts with the world in which we live. As followers of Jesus Christ, we can show each other and others around us compassion in action in the form of mercy. Imagine our communities working together out of compassion for each other! The Bible tells us “...the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere” (James 3:17).

John is a man who never imagined feeling the love of Jesus, much less love from anyone else in his personal life. What John experienced is unconditional love from the Father! He experienced a transformation of heart and of mind. He personally experienced the love of others walking with him through his addiction. He has been given a second chance with his daughter, and he now has a glimpse of hope. All of this became possible as he confessed his sins and trusted in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

May we all look to Jesus on the cross as mercy in its greatest form!



Pastor Jordan Herrick serves Bethany Lutheran Brethren Church in Colfax, Wisconsin.

CLB Shared Ministry: Contribution Report

\$2,900,000

2021-22 Fiscal Year Goal

\$811,407

Received Through 10/19/21

The CLB Fiscal Year Ends April 30, 2022.

The Prince of Completeness and Perfection

ROY HEGGLAND

We are all familiar with Isaiah 9:6, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

While each of these attributes of Jesus could fill books and provide the basis for thousands of sermons, the title I would like to focus on is “Prince of Peace.”

The word “peace” in this passage comes from the Hebrew word “shalom.” Although peace is one part of the definition of shalom, for most of us, peace conveys the sense of absence, as in the absence of war, or the absence of conflict or strife or agitation or discord. While these are all good things, especially peace with God, there are other English words that can help us understand the full meaning of shalom.

Two such words are *completeness* and *perfection*. Here is John 14:27 from the New Living Translation, but I’ve replaced the word *peace* with *completeness*: “I am leaving you with a gift, completeness of mind and heart. And the completeness I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.”

Completeness is so different from

our natural state of brokenness. Even as Christians, we struggle against our own brokenness and imperfection. Sometimes we can’t imagine that God can actually love us and accept us because we are so far from the perfection he requires. We might even think that if other people really knew us, they could never love us. If other imperfect people couldn’t love us, then how can the perfect God love us? And the answer to that question lies at the very core of the gospel message: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21, ESV).

Someone who is righteous, as God is righteous, is perfect and complete in every way. That righteousness is given to us by God because of Jesus, so we know it is the completeness and perfection that he requires. While we live in these bodies of sickness, brokenness, sin and death, there is the greater reality that God has already accomplished our completeness and perfection—because God has “... raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6, ESV).

Next time you greet each other with the peace of Christ after partaking in the

Lord’s Supper, remember that we are also reminding each other of our completeness and perfection in Christ.

As we remember that we are complete in Christ, remember also that your transformation from death to life did not come without the intervention of other people who brought the Word—which brought faith—to you. Will you join us as one of those who bring that Word to others through our actions, through prayer, and through your gifts to the CLB? What an opportunity we have to bring life to a dying world!

Shalom!

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

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Preparing to Share God's Peace

CHERYL OLSEN

The SWEET retreat has been a tradition for Lutheran Brethren Seminary (LBS) women students, and wives of Seminarians and faculty, since 2003, when WMCLB sponsored the first SWEET retreat (Seminary Women's Equipping, Encouraging, and Training). It has blessed scores of women preparing to share the peace found in Jesus, both here and overseas.

This fall, twenty women gathered at Inspiration Point at Twin Oaks, near Vining, Minnesota, with "Women in Ministry" as the theme. Three speakers from various places of ministry shared the Word, and what God has taught them at home and abroad. Several Seminary faculty wives joined to welcome and bond with these women preparing to serve in the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

In this group, there were women who grew up on the east coast, the west coast, and the midwest. Some of them moved to Fergus Falls, MN and are attending classes, or their spouse is attending classes, in person at the LB Seminary building. Others are taking classes online, some even while serving a church. Several traveled hours to meet each other—some for the first time at this SWEET retreat. They are each unique: some single, some married, some with children, some in their twenties, others older. Several are preparing for overseas ministry, others for ministry in U.S. or



Canadian churches. All love Jesus, and are gifted by God in various ways for ministry—maybe in your congregation!

What were the highlights? "Spending time with others who are in the same life stage or experience while at Seminary." "Time in community, getting to know each woman and her story—the experience of those who've 'gone before' on this Seminary journey."

Other comments? "Worship together was fantastic!" "I enjoyed hearing from the different women who serve in ministry here and abroad—how God taught them, grew them, and preserved them." "I appreciate the realness of their stories." "The individual stories and time, plus the collective experience of each speaker, definitely helped with the triple goal to encourage, equip, and train."

Join me in praying for these women as they continue to form bonds of community in Christ with each other, and learn during their years at Seminary. Thank YOU for supporting this ministry through your gifts to WMCLB!

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



Visit WMCLB online: www.WMCLB.org
Email: WMCLBcontact@gmail.com

Women's Ministries
Church of the Lutheran Brethren

Find out more: www.wmclb.org wmclbcontact@gmail.com

Giving Opportunity | Fall 2021

Your generous gifts help support our FOCUS Project, SWEET retreat (annual retreat for Seminary women), Missionary gifts, and other ministry needs. For a full list of all WMCLB projects, please visit our website at www.wmclb.org/projects.

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FOCUS Project 2021
House of Hope Playground

Called by the Prince of Peace

DAVID VEUM

Isaiah prophesied that the Prince of Peace would reign over his kingdom. In the New Testament we discover that this Prince would not establish his rule with armies and weapons but through followers and the gospel. Jesus Christ has been calling disciples to carry his message ever since.

At LBS, we are privileged to meet and facilitate the preparation of these messengers. Here are the stories of two students called by the Prince of Peace to begin their studies this fall.



Ellie Bourque in class at Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

Ellie Bourque is from East Hartland, Connecticut. She has been interested in international missions since she first went on a mission trip with her home congregation to Guatemala when she was in eighth grade. As a young adult she spent three years with YWAM in Costa Rica (2013-2016). There she learned about a certain unreached people group in East Asia and committed to trying to bring the gospel to them. She pursued a nursing education with the goal of going to that nation.

Ellie lived in East Hartland for about three years after coming back from Costa Rica and enjoyed being involved as an adult in church life and local ministry with Bethany Lutheran Brethren Church. She especially loved being part of the prayer team and being involved in the deacon/deaconess ministry. When she first moved to New York in the summer of 2019, she had the opportunity to be a summer intern at 59th Street Lutheran

Brethren Church in Brooklyn, mainly helping with worship.

That fall she moved from Brooklyn to Queens, having taken a job where she could live near a community of people from East Asia, who were of the unreached people group she had learned about in Costa Rica. Eventually she began attending a house church with friends who also had a heart for that people group. They prayed for them regularly and also found ways to interact with persons from that East Asian country.

Ellie settled on living out the gospel as a nurse in the City. Still, she found herself thinking about the medical opportunities in Chad, opportunities that LBIM director Dan Venberg had mentioned to her a few years before. She reached out to LBIM, and Dan invited her to consider a vision trip. Last winter, Ellie was able to go to Chad for a few weeks, primarily staying with Nathanael and Carrie Szobody. And she loved it.

After much thought and prayer, she believes that the Lord is leading her to medical mission work in Chad. Her trusted friends, the leadership of LBIM, and the leadership of her home congregation have affirmed her in this calling. She moved to Fergus Falls, Minnesota this summer, and has begun study at Lutheran Brethren Seminary to earn a Certificate of Theological Studies in Missions.



LBS is a place to explore the gifts God has given you and develop skills that bring the gospel to a world in need. Whether you're thinking about seminary for the first time, or have thought about it for years, we invite you to consider the next step.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Isaiah 9:6

“My name is Ben Osenbach and I am a sinner redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, my God and my personal Lord and Savior.”

So begins his application letter. Ben is from Utica, NY. He found LBS online.



Ben Osenbach during a student breakout session at Lutheran Brethren Seminary.

Ben was raised outside of the CLB in a church with a more liberal persuasion, a persuasion that he bought into from a young age. By the time he became the president of his high school youth group, he had developed quite a hatred toward evangelical thinking and even preached a few heretical sermons. He thought he understood the gospel but was ignorant of his need to follow Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior.

Then during his freshman year at the University at Buffalo he became involved with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and in a congregation that preached the gospel. In a college seminar on Christian spirituality, God showed him that he did not understand as much as he thought. Ben also noticed that evangelical Christians were much more secure and joyous in their faith than he had ever been. As he walked into class one day it finally dawned on him that he was not saved. That's when he surrendered to Jesus and his salvation.

Ben became passionate about sharing the gospel. He served as a men's small group leader and as new ministries planter with InterVarsity. He led an outreach to arts students and even began attending

meetings of the campus LGBTQA group so that he could witness to them. Within a year he was leading a weekly Bible study with seven persons from that group.

He then began to wonder where he fit theologically. He read the Bible, books on apologetics, and writings from various theological perspectives. As he read the summary of Lutheran theology in the Book of Concord, he found the connections to the person and work of Jesus Christ which he had begun to learn through InterVarsity. "I took great comfort and assurance of my salvation in the objective work of Jesus Christ, even when my emotions wavered."

After spending two years in a PhD program at Penn State, he began his current position as an economics lecturer at SUNY Polytechnic Institute. As he became involved in church ministry, first doing children's sermons and then leading evangelism and outreach, he was encouraged to become a pastor.

At first, he resisted that idea. Then God began to soften his heart toward a pastoral role. He wondered if his hesitation was wise or even disobedient. He had become increasingly aware that many Christians are "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" and need someone to point them to Jesus. After praying through this with Kelsie, they felt that accepting the calling to pastoral ministry would be to obey God.

We are so grateful for disciples like Ellie and Ben who have been called by the Prince of Peace to carry the gospel message.

Dr. David Veum serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as president of Lutheran Brethren Seminary.



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Redeeming Eid al-Adha

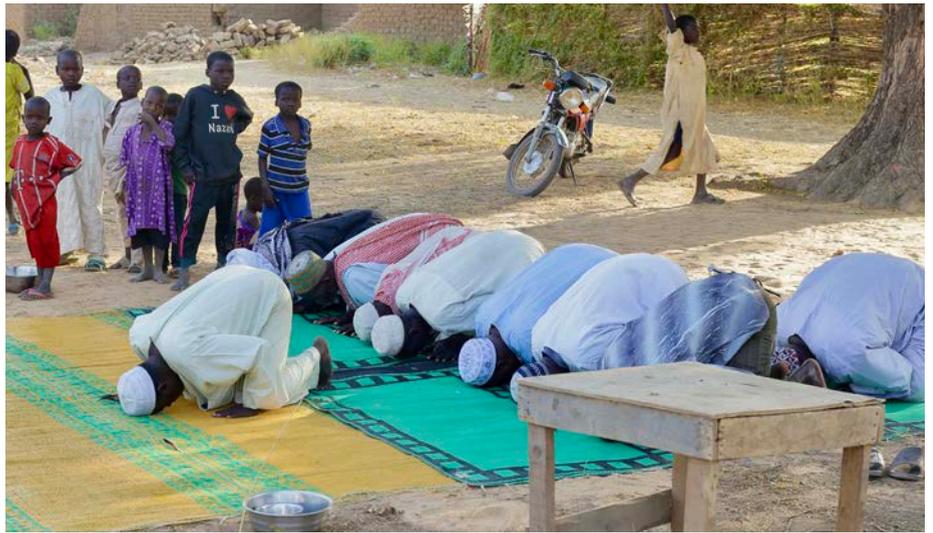
DAN VENBERG

Some of my fondest memories of community life in the Muslim village in Chad that my family lived in for nearly ten years revolve around the holidays—not only Christian holidays, but also Muslim ones.

Perhaps the most popular Muslim holiday of the year is Eid al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice), which takes place on the tenth day of Dhul-Hijjat, one of the twelve months of the Muslim lunar calendar.

The essence of the celebration in the Muslim mind is a commemoration of the Qur’anic story of Abraham’s obedience to God when asked to sacrifice his son, and God’s subsequent provision of a sacrificial ram in the place of the boy. The story (found in Surah As-Saffat 37:99-111) is much shorter than the Genesis account, but the common theme of Abraham’s obedience and God’s provision is clear. The common Qur’anic interpretation of this story places great emphasis on the submission of Abraham and his son to follow through with God’s command, but little significance is given to the biblical understanding of the substitutionary sacrifice.

We found the celebration of this holiday to be a great opportunity to contextually share the gospel with our Muslim friends. When Eid al-Adha came around, every household that could afford it procured and butchered a sheep or a ram in commemoration of Abraham’s submission to God’s command to sacrifice his son, and God’s subsequent provision of the sacrificial ram. On the day of the celebration, everybody would dress up in their finest clothes. They would gather in the morning as a community for a special “Eid” community prayer. And then the party would start. Our Muslim



Muslim men in a Chadian village praying to Allah.

friends would make the rounds, visiting each other’s homes, eating together, and sharing gifts. We were always invited to join in. And we actively participated.

Before the holiday, I would go to the local market and barter for a large ram. We would butcher the ram according to the Islamic “Halal” dietary law and then prepare a feast of rice and mutton stew. We would brew gallons of tea. And we would invite the neighbors into our courtyard for a feast. As we sat around and sipped hot tea, I would pull out the Bible and read the Genesis account of Abraham and the sacrifice. I would emphasize not only the faith of Abraham, but God’s provision of the ram in the place of Abraham’s son, and the significance of Abraham’s naming of the place of sacrifice: “The Lord will Provide” (Genesis 22:14). And I would read the promise of God associated with the event, zeroing in on verse 18, “... and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

Muslims love the idea of being blessed by God! They pray for it all the time. And they wish it on each other. But they predominantly think of godly blessing as merited through one’s good works. So as I shared this story of the provision of God in the place of Abraham’s son, and the accompanying promise of blessing to all nations, it naturally segued into an opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus. Of him, Revelation 5:9 says, “... with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.” Jesus is the true and ultimate “Adha,” and our reason to celebrate this and every season.

Dan Venberg is Director of Lutheran Brethren International Mission.

Lunar New Year

BEN HOSCH

If you were to lump together the sense of family, friends, and feasting of Thanksgiving, the deep well of tradition at Christmas, and the pomp and celebration of New Year's Day, that may get you close to what Lunar New Year is like. It is arguably the oldest and most culturally significant celebration in Asia. It traditionally spans a five-day stretch of visiting family and friends, eating lots of food, and just having fun.

Lunar New Year is a celebration of anticipating a good harvest in the coming year, and a way to break up the monotony of the winter months as crops grow, so there is no real religious significance to this holiday. However, many families will go to a temple to pray for health and prosperity in the new year or offer prayers to the ancestors. People light firecrackers with the thought that the noise will scare away evil spirits. "Spring cleaning" is an important preparation to celebrating the New Year because it involves sweeping out bad luck and inviting good fortune to come in. Families will also hang red banners on their doorframes as requests for blessing in the coming year. Children are allowed to stay up as late as they want, because the longer they are awake reveals how long their parents will live. People eat certain auspicious foods and greet one another with auspicious phrases in order to bring health and prosperity in the coming year. All of this may make one wonder: Can a Christian in Taiwan celebrate Lunar New Year?

The short answer is, "Yes, Christians can and Christians do celebrate Lunar New Year!" It might be helpful for Western Christians to be reminded that such things as Christmas trees and the Easter Bunny are pagan symbols that we



Vladimirovic/Stock

have redeemed and endowed with new meaning. Taiwanese Christians use the words of Holy Scripture as prayers on the red banners on their doorframes (and many Christians see the lamb's blood during the Passover as a background to this tradition). In this way, it's easy for their neighbors to know that Christians live in their communities. Staying up late and lighting firecrackers are just fun activities. And auspicious foods carry no significance, they are just delicious traditional foods! Lunar New Year is a time to pray for health and blessing for one's family—not to the temple gods or ancestors, but to the One True God who gives life, health, and blessing to all.

Lunar New Year is a great opportunity for Christians to celebrate with their non-Christian friends and family, and to share the gospel through hospitality and conversations about how God through Jesus Christ brings true spiritual health and prosperity to those who trust in him. It is just another opportunity for Christians

to pray for their unbelieving family and friends, that God through his Spirit would awaken faith in their hearts and give them new life in the New Year.

Rev. Ben Hosch serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as a missionary for Lutheran Brethren International Mission to the unreached people of Taiwan.



Elizabeth Olstad, Briana Lang, and Julianne Claney.

Peace that Comes from God



JULIANNE CLANEY

I grew up in a non-Christian household, so I never heard God's Word until coming to Hillcrest Academy in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Coming into an environment where God's Word was constantly spoken was a challenge for me. Not only was I confused and didn't fully understand who God was and what it meant to be a Christian, but I also had a lot of bitterness and anger toward God. I had gone through difficulty and adversity that caused me to be very resentful when God was brought up. I was living with my past failures and mistakes and never thought I could be worthy of God's love or qualified for his kingdom. The great love of God and what he did through Jesus shows us there is grace, redemption, and moving forward.

My identity was constantly changing based on how I felt or who I surrounded myself with. I didn't know who I was.

I was lost, confused, and hurt. The last thing I felt would have been peace. Because my heart was filled with so much bitterness toward God and the circumstances in which he'd placed me, I had hardened my heart to his Word and everything Jesus had to offer me.

It took a lot of time, pain, and frustration, but through the love of the community at Hillcrest, God softened my heart and entered my life. I slowly began to feel God's peace and know that despite my failures and mistakes, God can use me. Knowing his peace meant understanding that sometimes God allows you to be broken and have things taken away from you so you can see that he is all you need.

Having peace doesn't necessarily mean feeling it, but it certainly means knowing it. To be at peace is to be complete. I am complete in Christ. I felt at my lowest, but I knew that God was pouring his

love and mercy on me and bringing me a knowledge of his peace. Through his peace, I began to accept the fact that I can't change my past. Our human nature sees truth based on our feelings, which often change; peace that comes from God is based on truth that never changes.

Knowing and accepting that I can't go back and change the past, but I can move on to redemption and restoration, brought me abundant peace. Not only peace with God, but peace with myself and others. Having peace in our situations is so important because then we know that God is in control, and everything will work out for his plan. During your struggles and hard times, the best thing you can do is allow God into them. God will bring peace to your situation and use all your pain, frustration, heartbreak, and broken pieces for something beautiful.

Now that I have peace with myself

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*“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
 Philippians 4:7 (ESV)*

and I know God’s peace, I wouldn’t trade any of the moments when I felt lost, broken, confused, fearful, or hurt for an “easy way out.” Because each obstacle I have faced has led me to Christ, and without them, I don’t know where my faith would stand.



Julianne Claney is from Granby, Colorado. She is a senior at Hillcrest Lutheran Academy in Fergus Falls, MN, where she plays soccer, serves as student body vice-president, and enjoys spending time with family and friends.



Biennial Convention



www.CLBA.org/Presidential-Election-2022

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Pres. Paul Larson

Rev. Paul Larson is husband to Bee, and father to Gabe (& Mikelle), Gracia, Nick (& Tessa), Karina, Nate (& Julia); and granddad to two little grand-Larsons due to be born early next year. Paul was raised in the faith at Elim LBC in Clearbook, MN. He attended Lutheran Brethren Bible College and following was youth director at Yellowstone LBC in Billings, MT (82-85). He is a graduate of LB Seminary (88), and has done subsequent doctoral studies (ABD) at Fuller Theological Seminary. He was the church planter at Word of Life LBC, Fort Collins, CO (88-91). He also pastored CLB congregations in CA and WI: Calvary Community Church, Fullerton, CA (91-02); Bethesda LBC, Eau Claire, WI (02-14). He was elected CLB President in 2014.

The Council of Directors nominates
President Paul Larson and Dr. Ryan Nilsen
as your candidates for the
2022 CLB presidential election.



Dr. Ryan Nilsen

Ryan and his wife Kjirsti live in Connecticut and have five children: Owan, Clara, and Elsie are in high school, Annie is in middle school, and Braaten is in heaven. They attend Bethany LBC, East Hartland, CT. Ryan grew up in two CLB churches and has served three CLB churches; Bethel LC, Fergus Falls, MN; Bethany LBC, West Union, IA; and Praise Christian Fellowship, Barkhamsted, CT. Ryan is a graduate from Hillcrest Lutheran Academy and Lutheran Brethren Seminary. He has a Doctorate of Ministry from Denver Seminary. Ryan has served on the Council of Directors, as an Adjunct Professor of Practical Theology at LBS, as Executive Director of Fifth Act Church Planting, and as Eastern Region Chairman. Ryan is Associate Director of North American Mission.

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2021

Grothe Ordained as Elder



L to R: Director of North American Mission Rev. Nick Mundis, Elders Matt Grothe, Danyel Rokos, Dena Rokos, and Rev. Andy Larsen.

On September 12, 2021, Matt Grothe was ordained as an elder at Ebenezer Lutheran Brethren Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Director of North American Mission Rev. Nick Mundis officiated.

Scholpp Ordained as Elder



L to R: Elders Garry Lafrentz, Arnold Betzema, Merv Puryk, Rev. Daniel Krauss, and Rev. Nicholas Laven. Kneeling: Ryder Scholpp.

On September 12, 2021, Ryder Scholpp was ordained as an elder at Faith Lutheran Church in Estevan, Saskatchewan. Rev. Nicholas Laven officiated.

Kjolhaug Installed



L to R: Dr. David Veum, Elders Luke Fiskness, Kirk Dilly, Sheldon Larson, and Pete Kjolhaug. Kneeling: Rev. Luke Kjolhaug and his wife Bethannie.

On October 3, 2021, Rev. Luke Kjolhaug was installed as pastor at Elim Lutheran Church in Osakis, Minnesota. LBS President Dr. David Veum officiated.

Wilsdon Called Home



On September 16, 2021, Jean Mary Wilsdon (Long) was called home to the Lord. Jean met her husband Michael Long in 1986. In less than a year they were married. They were blessed with four children. Jean supported her children in all their activities. She was always happy to share advice and wisdom, but encouraged them to make their own way in life. For the past twenty-three years, Michael and Jean's home has been an acreage outside Dalemead, Alberta. Jean could often be found in her favourite chair basking in the views of the outdoors or enjoying a corner of her beautiful garden.

Jean made friends and impacted people everywhere she went. She loved to travel and meet new people. Coming to faith midway through her life, Jean continued to grow in faith right to her last day on earth. She had a passion to inspire others in their walk with the Lord but was always fully accepting of anyone, no matter where they were in their spiritual life. Jean was involved in the leadership team of the Women's Ministry of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren (WMCLB) since 2011. She became co-director of the WMCLB in May 2019.

Blessed be the memory of Jean Wilsdon.

Hjembo Called Home



Rev. Thomas Harold Hjembo, 75, died peacefully at home on October 9, 2021. He was born in Staten Island, New York and at age 7 moved to Flanders, New Jersey. His family attended Hillside Lutheran Brethren Church where he met his wife, Judy. They were married in July of 1970 and moved to Minnesota so Tom could attend Lutheran Brethren Seminary. He earned his Masters of Divinity in 1973 and accepted his first call to ministry at The Mission Church in Paramus, New Jersey. During their time in New Jersey, Tom and Judy were blessed with two children.

After serving The Mission Church from 1973 to 1982, Tom accepted a call to minister at Cape Coral Lutheran Brethren Church in Florida. He ministered in Cape Coral for nine years, and then received a call to return to The Mission Church. He spent the remainder of his ministry there, retiring at age 66.

During his 40 years of ministry, Tom shared the love of God to everyone from children to seniors and served people in times of joy and in times of sorrow. Blessed be his memory.

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Think About It

Years ago, the Minnesota Vikings had a quarterback by the name of Christian Ponder. I always thought his name should have an application in an article or a sermon, but I could never find one... until now.

Now there is a great difference between *ponderous* and *pondering*. To say Christian played football ponderously would be insulting, as it means “clumsy or unpleasantly dull.” To say he *pondered* football is not so bad, as that means “thinking about it carefully before reaching a conclusion.”

What is the purpose of Advent? Why do we “do” Christmas yearly? Warm tradition? Obligations of the Church Year? Or is this the time to “think about it carefully before reaching a conclusion”?

“... and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:18-19). What did she ponder? The message of the angels, delivered through shepherds: “Good news that will cause great joy for all the people... a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord” (2:10-11). Mary was personally involved in this, yet the shepherds’ words shed new light on her experience, something to carefully think about.

Twelve years later, young Jesus stayed behind at the temple following the Passover Festival, leading to his family’s frantic search for him. “Then [Jesus] went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart” (2:51). Just as she had treasured and pondered the shepherds’ words, now Mary certainly pondered this event and Jesus’ explanation: “Didn’t you know I had to be about my Father’s business?” (2:49).

Some eighteen years pass and the whole family is invited to a wedding in Cana, only to encounter a social disaster—no more wine! Because, and only because, Mary had pondered and treasured all these things about Jesus, she now was able to make the simple but telling statement to Jesus, “They have no more wine” (John 2:3). Apparently, Jesus had never performed a miracle in his life, but in her pondering, Mary was convinced of who Jesus was, and she therefore knew that he could. First she pondered, then she knew for certain.

Mary was blessed to receive several revelations from God that caused her to ponder Jesus. But we have received much more! “For to us a child is born... And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

We celebrate Advent and Christmas yearly for exactly this purpose. So, Christian... Ponder!

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

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