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Church of the Lutheran Brethren DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH

2022 Biennial Convention

CALL
to Follow

PARTNER
in Mission

UNLEASH
New Leaders

MULTIPLY
New Disciples

On June 11-14, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren (CLB) held its 2022 Biennial Convention in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Nearly 300 people were in attendance for the launch of the CLB’s new Mission Advancement Initiative—*Disciple-Making Church*. The new initiative identifies four Senior Objectives—*Call, Partner, Unleash, and Multiply*. These four objectives shape and guide our ministry goals. As we move forward in training pastors, revitalizing churches, planting

churches, and sending missionaries, we must ask ourselves if we are intentionally *calling* people to return to the Word; facilitating and building *partnerships* with individuals, congregations, and regions; *unleashing*—empowering and supporting young men and women to lead; and *multiplying*—seeing people come to faith in Jesus Christ. These objectives are central to our identity. We are the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, a *Disciple-Making Church*.

Let it Rain

TROY TYSDAL

There are many famous stories of droughts recorded in the Bible. God used a drought to elevate Joseph to the right hand of Pharaoh and reunite the children of Israel. God gave Pharaoh a dream. Pharaoh saw seven healthy cows devoured by seven sleek cows, and God gave Joseph the ability to interpret that dream. Joseph saw that the cows represented years, and there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. In the story of the Prophet Elijah, God used a drought once again. He told Elijah to tell the King that the land would not see rain until the Prophet commanded it, and for three years the Prophet was silent, and so was the sky.

In the summer of 2021, much of the United States was experiencing a severe drought. Near my home, swamps were disappearing, creeks were drying up, lakes were shrinking, lawns had turned brown. When I walked outside, I could hear the grass crunch under my feet. The land was thirsty.

One night in the midst of the drought, my wife and I woke to the sound of thunder. I went back to bed, because that's what I do, but my wife grabbed her phone and checked the weather. She saw that we were in the path of a severe thunderstorm. The next thing I knew we were outside in the wind gathering cushions and securing furniture. It was eerie. With every strike of lightning, we could see an ominous wall of clouds moving closer. They looked angry, and full of rain. I thought to myself, "Good, we need it!" As my wife and I went back inside, we heard more thunder, but not a drop of rain.

PROVERBS 25:14

Like clouds and wind without rain is one who boasts of gifts never given.

In the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have been given a priceless gift. It is the gift of water for those who thirst. It is the gift of healing for the brokenhearted. It is liberty for the captive. It is comfort for



Pres. Paul Larson, Dr. David Veum (LBS), Directors Dan Venberg (LBIM), Nick Mundis (NAM), and Troy Tysdal (Communication).

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those who mourn. It is the promise of a day when the dead will rise and all eyes, even the eyes of those who pierced him, will see the Son of Man—Jesus—coming on the clouds in glory. We have a gift.

We are *called to follow* this Son of Man, this Savior who sits at the right hand of the Father, whose hands have been pierced for our transgressions, whose blood has washed away our sins. This Savior calls us to place our failures at the foot of his cross. At his cross, we find family, new brothers and sisters—a community of those whose thirst has been quenched by living water. We worship together in hope. We pray together in expectancy. We persevere in trial. We rejoice in triumph. We *partner in mission*, encouraging one another all the more as we see the day of Christ's redemption drawing near.

This new family is united by gift and also a gift in itself. Each one of us has been equipped with a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good of the whole. To one is given wisdom, to another faith, to another healing, to another discernment... prophecy... the working of miracles. If we are to live out our calling as the body of Christ in this unforgiving land, we must not suppress the gifts among us. We must learn to *unleash*

new leaders—young who dream dreams and old who see visions. We are called, partnered, and unleashed to *multiply new disciples*.

The people are thirsty, and all creation waits in anticipation.

Let the waters spring forth, and open the floodgates—for whoever drinks the water we have will never thirst again (John 4:14). We have a gift, and we are not those who boast of gifts never given. We are not clouds without rain.

Let it rain.

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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Call

CALL TO FOLLOW

We are a people called, shaped, and sent under the Word. We must hear this Word again to repent, trust, and follow Christ in sacrificially loving, serving, reconciling, and connecting our neighbors with Jesus, his community, and his mission.

CHRIS PRIESTAF

Things come and things go. Consider, for example, stonewashed jeans. Or parachute pants. Or man-perms. Things come and things go. Sometimes thankfully.

People come and go as well. Anyone who has been involved with them knows it is true. From co-workers to church attenders to children, people come and people go. And sometimes thankfully.

But what about disciples? Can or should the same be said about them, or about us? As puzzling and perhaps counterintuitive as it may first seem, I want to argue with a resounding, yet nuanced, “Yes!”, that disciples come and disciples go, and hopefully thankfully.

If time allows, commit to reading through a rather lengthy portion of the book of Isaiah. Start in chapter 51 and keep reading all the way through chapter 55. As you read, remember that Isaiah’s words are being delivered to God’s people living their lives in exile. They have been separated from their homes and in many ways, feel separated from God. They wonder what the future holds. They wonder if they even have one.

In the midst of such wonder, God powerfully and purposefully speaks words of hope and promise. He speaks words of redemption and mercy and grace. Perhaps most importantly, he speaks words of freedom and a future.

Words like that can have a profound effect on people. While difficult to quantify, we know that a desirable picture for the future can create a deep longing in the moment. I remember when a young woman of only 19 sat opposite me, a day or two removed from her last encounter with heroin. She had witnessed first-hand the transformative power of God in her sister, a power that had produced a joy and gladness completely foreign to her. She wanted the same. More, however, she wanted freedom—not just from the drug, but from the guilt and shame that came along with it. The gospel provided such hope. She heard words of freedom and a future. She longed for it to be hers.

This young woman’s story is not that different from so many of our own. There is a locus of control somewhere in our worlds that can both limit and discourage; it can fashion questions and arouse

fear. We can find ourselves desperately longing for freedom and a future.

Out of this exact state, in Isaiah 55:1-3, God speaks to his people. Here, God meets Israel’s longing with a profound yet characteristically consistent invitation:

ISAIAH 55:1-3

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

The intensity of the invitation is unmistakable, and though this particular offer is contextualized to the people of God relegated to Babylonian exile, a similar invitation is echoed throughout Scripture’s pages to all sorts of different people in all sorts of different contexts

Day of Equipping

On June 11, 2022, the CLB Biennial Convention began with the Women's Ministries (WMCLB) Biennial Convention—featuring Gretchen Ronnevik and WMCLB Co-Director Karen Stenberg. The Day of Equipping featured a presentation from Greg Finke on joining Jesus in mission, and guidance from Jonathan McKee on parenting and youth ministry.



(see, e.g., Matthew 4:19; 11:28; 14:29; 19:14; 19:21; 22:3ff; 25:21). In fact, the invitation is so regularly extended that it is right to see it as the catalyst of true discipleship.

But the invitation can be hard to accept, can't it? It is hard to accept because it can be hard to believe. As the young woman I mentioned above would later share in her baptismal testimony, "...I was embarrassed by who I was. Why would I want to show my face in God's house? I had a hard enough time showing it in my own." Sometimes the knowledge of our fallen, broken selves keeps us from embracing God's invitation to come, and we are not alone. Try to hear the voice of the woman at the well (John 4) or Isaiah at his call (Isaiah 6). Countless are the individuals who have questioned their own worthiness to actually come, despite God's bidding.

But God knows our thoughts even before they are formed; he answers our questions even before they are asked. Accordingly, God's invitation to come is immediately followed by his poignantly preconfigured declaration, "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah

55:8-9). In two short verses, God pushes back against our pushback. He out-argues our arguments. His invitation to come is with full knowledge of who we are and what we have done (see Ephesians 1:7–8).

This then is how the disciple of Christ comes—at the call of God himself! When the follower of Christ understands such a gift, the response is significant. Isaiah again captures it in 55:12, as he declares, "You will go out in joy and be led forth with peace." His call initiates a present action and a subsequent, future response. In other words, the disciple comes, and the disciple goes, and he goes with joy and thanksgiving.

The concept is subtle and profound at the same time: Disciples come and disciples go. We come at God's invitation, given with his full wisdom and knowledge, and as we are filled with the wonder of his love and grace, we then go. To be sure, it is a different kind of going than is associated with passing fads and teenage trends, but it is a definitive going all the same. Disciples come and disciples go, and they do so joyfully and thankfully.

Such a pattern serves as a powerful reminder for the Church—locally and denominationally. We come into God's presence only at his invitation,

as his disciples. But as we continue to grow in his knowledge and his grace, experiencing the wonder of his gift in increasing measure, we go out with joy and thanksgiving. The cycle repeats itself again and again.

Things come and things go. We know that. People do the same. May God give his Church the wisdom to see that such is our call as well, particularly as his disciples. We come and we go, and hopefully we do so thankfully.



Rev. Chris Priestaf is Pastor of Mount Bethel Church in Mount Bethel, Pennsylvania.



② Partner

PARTNER IN MISSION

Foster the interdependence of individuals, congregations, regions, and synod in disciple making to achieve these objectives.

PAUL LARSON

If you watch the overhead video of the most recent Kentucky Derby race, you will marvel! “Rich Strike,” a surely also-ran horse, just entered into the race the day prior after a more worthy horse was scratched, starts from the farthest lane away from the rail—in last place. Then little by little, turn by turn, he threads a needle from the back of the pack, working his way forward. And then, down the stretch, he finds this extra gear that not even he knew he had, makes this stunning “run for the roses,” and wins!

I’m no horse-lover, but watching the run of Rich Strike, at the end I was choking back emotion. Perhaps tucked deep down inside, I wanted to believe that race and story could somehow be my story and the story of my Church.

I have been dwelling in Hebrews 10:32-39, a Scripture that speaks of a great contest, and partnership, and resolve.

HEBREWS 10:32-39

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great contest full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting

possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For, “In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.” But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

CLB Disciple-Making Church: We are *Partners in Mission* because of a Great Struggle, and *Partners in Mission* because of a Great Hope.

The writer of Hebrews reminds the Church of their history, their personal conversion, their persistence through hardship—and refers to it all as a “great contest.” Our challenges have been hard, but oh, they are nothing new!

I’ve learned that in horse racing the simple word “trip” refers to the course followed by a horse and rider during the running of a race, including the trouble encountered. A “good trip” means the horse does not encounter unusual difficulty. A “bad trip” might involve racing wide or being boxed in by other horses. Well, Church of the Lutheran Brethren, these past four years—this has been quite the “trip,” hasn’t it? I know it’s been a hard trip.

We are *Partners in Mission* because of

a Great Struggle! We remember our own history as a Church movement, and our own personal history, when many others and we ourselves “received the light” of the gospel (v. 32): “Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering.”

We remember the historical challenges the CLB and your congregation have had! Many questions. Tensions. Struggles. Dreams and higher hopes often than leaders or resources we could see. Difficult decisions, sacrifices, casualties. Those who left the church, those who left the faith, those who gave their lives to extend the gospel.

Remember also your trials since receiving the light. Perhaps not least in the contest is that light seems sometimes more a flickering wick than the bright light you wish or remember—in your community, congregation, or in yourself.

“A great contest in the face of suffering.” The four years since our 2018 Convention seem more like a century of change and trial the Church has faced: pandemic and polarity, tensions and questions, mask and mandate, race and sexuality, authority and freedom, war and sanctity and safety, etc.

In verse 33, the Hebrews writer says, “Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution...” Those who identify with Christ may be shamed by the very people and society they are sent

Day of Community

On June 12, the CLB Biennial Convention met in Battle Lake, Minnesota for worship with Bethel Battle Lake, a Kubb tournament, picnic, and prayer walk. Bethel Battle Lake is a satellite campus of Bethel Lutheran Church of Fergus Falls. It was planted in partnership with the CLB's North American Mission in 2015. Bethel recently purchased a ten acre parcel of land with the intent to build a permanent facility serving the community of Battle Lake and its surrounding area.



to with the Gospel. And why should we think that the world has so progressed and refined that all this will necessarily bypass us; that we might not also face what saints faced then, and in other parts of the world do today?

The writer goes on, "...and at other times you stood side by side with those so treated." This is key! What was the resilience of these believers in their struggle? They did not face this great contest alone! They faced these challenges, questions, tensions, deficits, rejections, even shame—side by side, partners in the struggle!

It is the opportunity and great necessity of our time and our Church that we stand side by side in our mission; that greater partnerships among us be forged! Greater symbiotic partnerships of congregations, pastors, CLB departments, of congregations with denomination, of Regions and Regional leaders, of denomination with affiliate ministries, with our international sister Churches, and in collaboration with other like-minded Lutheran entities.

With courageous creative partnership in mission we must advance women serving together with men in the full scope of their giftings, gaining a fuller blessing of perspective and leadership, in roles that may be creative and new, yet in keeping with the complementary callings of God's design in creation and his Church. And with that also, exciting and necessary, the partnership of younger

and older. The voice, gifts, insight, energies of younger leaders welcomed to the table. May these partnerships, forged in struggle, flourish among the CLB, a disciple-making people!

We are *Partners in Mission* because of a Great Hope! The writer of Hebrews tells us in verses 34-37, the best is yet to come, to keep our joy and to persevere, because in "just a little while he is coming..."

Undoubtedly Rich Strike will be turned into an epic equestrian film. And like every great horse movie before, from Phar Lap to Flicka, Secretariat to Seabiscuit, Black Beauty to Black Stallion... *we know how the movie ends, right!?*

And do we somehow know less how the story of the Church and our Partnership in God's Mission ends?! What is it that quickens our pulse, inspires our mind, and steels our resolve?! While the story of a horse's surge to the finish line may move us, surely not more than:

- the *Proclamation* of the gospel of Jesus' cross,
- the *Power* of his resurrection,
- the *Promise* of heaven,
- and the eternal *Predicament* of our neighbor in desperate need of these.

No! What steels our resolve, inspires our minds, and quickens our hearts and hands is our partnership in this mission as a Disciple-Making Church!

In verse 38 we hear a sober interruption, a warning label of sorts paraphrased from

Isaiah and Habakkuk: "But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But following comes God's sure confidence in this contest—a "holy wager" of sorts by the Savior on the darkest horse, with the longest odds: "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved."

The great race has already been won by Jesus; the results are posted and paid off. And in this certainty, we simply run. We *Call* ourselves and others by the Word to Follow. We *Partner* in Mission. We *Unleash* New Leaders, and *Multiply* New Disciples and New Congregations.

We know how the race and the movie ends. We are not of those who shrink back, but those who believe and are saved.



Rev. Paul Larson is President of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

GREG ANDERSON

In Paul's last letter, 2 Timothy, Paul was coming to the end of his life, and there's a sense as we read it that the end is near.

For people at that last stage of life, there often becomes an incredible drive to pass on certain ideas or thoughts, things they want to endure. It's not a stretch to think, that as Paul was nearing the end of his life, he was doing the same thing. He was saying, "Timothy, remember, remember."

2 TIMOTHY 2:8-13 (ESV)

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

Among the Senior Objectives of our Church body is this one: *Unleash*—call, empower, and support young men and women to lead in making disciples and forming disciple-making communities. The word "unleash" brings to mind an intensity or a force that changes the landscape.

Paul's letter is chock-full of statements regarding his current situation. Remember this? Remember me? In the middle of it stand these words: "Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead."

Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead. It's the truth of the resurrection that unleashes us; the resurrection of Christ is our motivation. We're told that the very power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in you and in me. It's in the lives of every believer. And because of that unleashing power, we go and we make disciples.

As we think about unleashing new leaders, the imagery that comes to mind is a baton pass in a relay race. I especially love the 4 x 100 relay. There's nothing like it when it's done well. It looks easy, but it's not. Passing the baton can be a challenging endeavor. Sometimes the runner hangs on too long and won't let it go. Sometimes the receiving runner doesn't grab the baton at all, and it gets dropped. Sometimes the runners come in too fast or too slow. When done poorly, it's a hard race to watch; but when it's done well, it's beautiful.

We see this play out in organizations too. Even in our churches, when passing the baton, people can move so fast that it causes problems, or so slow, or they get out of their lane, or they don't show up. The fact is, the runners aren't perfect in this mission that God has given us. We move forward in his grace.

So how about Timothy? People might have wondered, should he really be the baton receiver? He had some things going against him. Not only was he young, it seems he was also somewhat frail, and timid or fearful. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul mentioned concern for Timothy's stomach issues and his frequent illnesses. We sometimes think, can somebody like that be unleashed?

When Paul was commending Timothy to the church in Corinth, he didn't say, "Hey, Timothy's coming. You're gonna love him. He's a great guy. He's got a wonderful sense of humor." That's not what he said. He said, "See to it he has nothing to fear, for he's carrying on the work of the Lord." (See 1 Corinthians 16:10-11.) As we seek to unleash new leaders, remember that it's less about a leader's style, their smile, the way they like to do things. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "Respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work" (1 Thess. 5:12-13).

That's the question. Is he or she doing the Lord's work? Does that person

remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead?

Church, here are some things that young leaders unleashed need from us: They need to know the wonders that God has done, his praiseworthy deeds, the stories of when it looked bleak and there was no way out, but God came through. They need partners and role models who are honest and transparent and caring and examples of what a faithful Christian life looks like. Not a perfect one, but a faithful one, a life that endures in Christ, that doesn't give up.

Timothy was young. I think he needed help completing tasks, or planning and leading wisely. I believe he needed accountability. Paul knew Timothy. I think he understood him. He knew his shortcomings. He knew the challenges he would face, but he recognized how God had gifted him. He showed confidence in him. In his letters, he seems to be saying, "Timothy, God has given you something. You can do this."

Young people: Don't let the enemy tell you you're too young, and don't let him discourage you, telling you you're too frail. Don't be so timid that you don't try anything. God has put things inside of you that your church needs.

So we listen, we teach, and we proclaim. We trust the Lord for the results. There are seasons when there's no fruit, it's true. But Christ tells us, "I'm the vine. You're the branches. Apart from me, you can do nothing." (See John 15.) We as branches, stand between the vine and the fruit. My tendency is to look for fruit all the time, and when I don't see fruit, I get frustrated. I look and look, but the more my eyes are on the fruit, the more they're off the vine. I can't have my eyes on the fruit and the vine at the same time. Church, our call is to remember the origin of our ministry, more than the fruit that comes from it. Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead. That's what unleashes.

The durability of God's Word is without end, and it produces all the Lord desires. Isaiah 40:8 says, "The grass withers and

the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.” In Isaiah 55:11, we read “My word... will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” Our call is simply to steward the opportunities we have and to be generous in scattering the seed of God’s Word, like that farmer in Mark 4. He is not a very good farmer! He doesn’t plant in just the rich soil. He throws seed everywhere! Our call is to share and to spread God’s Word, generously, liberally, trusting him for the results. God’s unleashing Word accomplishes all that he wants it to do.

We enter a world that increasingly understands what Bob Dylan wrote in his song *Broken*: “Broken lines, broken strings, broken threads, broken springs, broken idols, broken heads, people sleeping in broken beds. Ain’t no use jiving. Ain’t no use joking. Everything’s broken.”

That’s a world that needs the gospel unleashed, with an intensity that changes the landscape. We praise God that we serve a transforming, renewing, restoring, reintegrating King, whose resurrection from the dead unleashes disciple-making lives, and disciple-making churches. There was no program or skill set for the fledgling Church, but the power of the resurrection transformed the disciples from hiding and fear into preaching and giving their very lives. As we go forward in grace, may God find us faithful, remembering Jesus Christ raised from the dead, standing on the durable Word of God, and relying on the strength of the Holy Spirit each day.



Greg Anderson is President of Inspiration Point Christian Camp and Retreat Center.



Day of Ownership

On June 13, the Biennial Convention started with Sawyer and Solveig Brunkow greeting attendees, reading Scripture, and introducing our morning session. The day was filled with workshops from missionaries, church planters, LBS professors, and lay leaders. The Convention received committee reports and held elections.





4.

Multiply

MULTIPLY NEW DISCIPLES

Mobilize our people and our congregations to disciple neighbors, near and among the nations, so new churches are planted and established congregations are revitalized.

BRANDON PANGMAN

Imagine that you are sitting across from Jesus, and he asks you this question: “Do you love me?” How would you respond?

There is an awkwardness to being asked a simple question that I know the answer to, when the person who’s asking me the question also knows the answer. I sit back and wonder, “Why are they asking me this? Are they trying to trick me? Is there more to the question?” My heart begins to race. My mind starts to wander, starts to go through all the possibilities, because I don’t want to get something wrong. I don’t like to get answers wrong, especially if it might be embarrassing to me.

Jesus liked to ask a lot of questions. And not only that, when someone asked him a question, he would answer with another question!

According to Google, the Gospels record Jesus asking 307 questions. He’s looking to see the heart of human beings. He’s looking to see what they’re thinking, and how people will respond to him.

We’re looking at the same question that Jesus asked Peter three times, and we’re going to see Peter’s response. But more important than Peter’s response is Jesus’ reply to Peter’s words.

JOHN 21:15-19 (ESV)

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of

John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”

Jesus simplifies something that we make so complicated. Most people would link *multiplication* to people coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

But how does a church grow? Starbucks coffee and donuts are cool, and you can get me to come to events by offering me free food. But that’s not multiplication. Multiplication is giving person after person, neighbor, friend, family member,

and stranger, something that you already have and believe. That’s the gospel. In this text, we see Jesus simplify multiplication.

They had finished having breakfast. Jesus looks over at Simon Peter and says, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” It’s a familiar text, but imagine that you swap Peter out of the text and allow yourself to be sitting across from Jesus. How would you answer?

We see Jesus looking at a friend, a brother, someone Jesus loves. And Jesus says, “Do you love me more than these?” Notice the word “these.” Who or what are “these” that Jesus is talking about? Some people think that he refers to the other disciples. Some say that “these” means these things—this moment, being with the disciples, the fishing, the eating, breaking the bread. But I think there is an even bigger picture here. Just a few verses earlier, Peter was fishing with six other disciples, and they’d caught nothing. Then Jesus delivered them a haul, as Peter and the others were blessed with 153 large fish.

This is where my sinful heart imagines being back on the boat. You’re on the water, surrounded by buddies, doing what you’ve grown up doing. You just crush the morning catch. Then it’s off to the market to sell these fish, to make some good money. And in my mind, this is “these.” It’s the simpler life. It’s the opposite of multiplication. When

Day of Resolve

On June 14, President Paul Larson led a presentation on the Theological Council's (TC) work toward updating the CLB's position paper on human sexuality. Members of the TC presented the Council's progress and received feedback. The presentation was followed by an interview with Army Chaplain Gregory Solberg. The convention concluded with a Communion service.



you're in the boat, there are only six other people. "These" is less people. And that means less problems in life.

People who go fishing enjoy catching fish, but ask them how they're doing, even on a day without a catch, and they'll still say, "It's okay. Because I got away." Peter is coming off some hurts in life. His Savior didn't do things the way he wanted. His Savior was beaten before his eyes. Then Peter denied his Savior. His Savior was crucified. And now Jesus is about to call Peter to go and tend his sheep.

I'm not saying he's abandoning his call, but Peter's in a place where he's hurting. And life on the boat seems just a little bit easier.

Jesus is calling Peter to get off the boat again. "Peter, do you love me more than these?" Jesus goes on to ask this of Peter two more times. Each time Peter confesses his love for Jesus, and Jesus responds, "Feed my lambs; tend my sheep; feed my sheep." Jesus is calling Peter into mission, to partner in the gospel. He's telling Peter that the qualification has been met. "Do you love me?" "Yes." "Great, feed my sheep." That's it. That's the qualification.

This doesn't mean, "You say you love me, so prove it." It's simply, "You say you love me. Now go and proclaim it." We are called to proclaim the good news,

to tell the world of the saving grace that Jesus Christ has poured out onto us. Jesus is calling people to come and be fishers of men all over again.

My favorite parable is the Sower and the Seed. The man scatters seed—he's just throwing it everywhere. He's giving it away. And that's what Christ is calling us to, to proclaim the gospel to a lost world, to our neighbors, our loved ones, our coworkers, the lady in the grocery store, the boy walking down the street.

As Christians, we are called to proclaim Jesus Christ through the darkness, through the sin of the heart of mankind. And when we preach those words, they permeate the heart and the mind and the soul of that person. And then we leave it up to the Holy Spirit. And we pray, "Lord, make that seed grow in them."

Jesus redeemed us from the darkest of all places. Do you believe that? Through the preaching of the gospel, hearts and minds and souls are changed because of the Savior.

We don't naturally love the adulterer. We don't naturally love the drunkard. We don't naturally love the person who wears baggy pants and listens to rap music too loud, or who steals from us, or lives next to us and doesn't cut their grass, or has three dead cars parked in their driveway.

We don't love the gay person, the

Democrat, the Republican, the racist, the person who had an abortion. Do you want me to go on? All these labels are ways to excuse ourselves from loving people. And we put up this blockade against them. But God loves them, and God loves us. That is the heart of God. He has a heart for the broken, because we are his children.

Look at the three questions that Jesus asked Peter. Nowhere does it say "Simon, son of John, do you love *them*?" This is a hard calling, but Jesus is saying, "Out of the love that you have for me, go and tend my sheep."

Church of the Lutheran Brethren, do you love Jesus?

Then tend his sheep.



Rev. Brandon Pangman is Pastor of Emmaus Road Church in DeWitt, Iowa.

\$3,100,000

2022-23 Fiscal Year Goal

CLB Shared Ministry: Contribution Report

\$264,573

Received Through 6/25/22

The CLB Fiscal Year ends April 30, 2023.

Immensely Grateful

ALYSSA JERMIASON

Alan and I were married during our final years of college. We were both music education majors, developing our passions for the standard repertoire of our respective instruments, authentic performance practice, tonal analysis, and attempting to persuade children to clap quarter notes without picking their noses. As full-time students, money was, of course, tight. However, as our time at the university was wrapping up, we both felt called to further our studies and continue developing the skills and knowledge of God’s gift of music. First Alan, then I, entered graduate programs which resulted in a move to Minneapolis, Minnesota, in fall 2017.

After a short blissful time of both parties working and living free of the constraints of student expenses, we resumed the reality of tuition payments, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and the frequently used phrase, “Sorry, it’s not in the budget.” But throughout all the years of stretched finances, the Lord was faithful to provide through generous gifts and circumstances that left our reason and spreadsheets in bewildered thankfulness. And along with this provision was an invitation to experience his faithfulness and respond in sacrificial giving.

As previously alluded to, Alan began his graduate studies before I did. After an incredibly disappointing journey

of preparing, auditioning, and finally receiving three rejection letters, God held my hand through a season of lush growth that only comes from the painful tilling of hard, stubborn soil and watered by tears at the funeral of the Old Adam. The result was a deeper understanding of my desperate need for the gospel, for in the stripping away of all the things I was clinging to for hope, validation, and security, I was left with nothing to stand on but this Good News: that while I was still a sinner, while I was chasing after all the lesser things in my life to save me, Christ died for me, the ungodly (Romans 5:6-8). And what’s more, his righteousness is my righteousness through faith (Philippians 3:8-9). There is no better news than this!

Alan and I are immensely grateful to belong to a Church denomination where this Good News is the reason for its existence. It fills us with joy to know that the heart of this synod is to faithfully train pastors and missionaries and unite churches for the sending and proclaiming of God’s message of reconciliation both domestically and internationally. A key way we’ve gotten to better know the mission and needs of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren has been through my dad, Steve Tonneson, as he’s served as the Associate for Advancement Ministry during these past several years.

Though our bank account was modest

during those years of school, we were immensely blessed by the invitation to see how the Lord works with what seems to be insignificant means. And with our deepest need already provided for in the person and work of Christ, the question then shifts from “Why should we give?” to “Why would we not give?” As we continue to serve in our vocations and relationships within the Twin Cities music community, we are energized to be partnering with the CLB in reaching more people with the Good News.

Alyssa Jermiason and her husband Alan are members of Oak Hill Church in Bloomington, Minnesota.

Support the CLB:

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P.O. Box 655
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Birch Hills, SK S0J 0G0



Women Together

CHERYL OLSEN

It was so good to be women together! Women from as far away as Washington, California, Connecticut, and Saskatchewan enjoyed a wonderful Saturday, June 11, together in Minnesota. It was great to greet those we hadn't seen for four years, and meet others for the first time.

Our theme of the day followed our new Vision statement, *Women Together*, and the new Values statement, *Together in the Word – Together in Life – Together in Mission*. What a great description of Women's Ministries!

Together in the Word. Gretchen Ronnevik, our first speaker, shared her love of the Word with us. We're in this together, receiving God's grace individually, but also in community. Jesus, the Word, came in the flesh, and we are on mission to give others the Word. But we can get caught up in a self-improvement checklist to gauge our spirituality, and forget that "It is finished!" We are so anemic for the gospel that we need a blood transfusion—directly from the Cross. The gospel is the power!

Together in Mission was fleshed out by a panel of four women after our luncheon, representing overseas mission, mission through church planting, and mission through everyday life. Kjirsti Nilsen moderated questions, with panelists Liz Christenson, Joyce Rust, Ashley Fauquet, and Mary Anderson. Takeaways included listening, and truly loving those in our lives. To avoid burn-out and allow for a sustained ministry, partner with other Christians in areas of mutual interest, and have fun together instead of being burdened by "adding one more thing" to an already busy life. Live life together, not considering someone who hasn't believed yet as a "project," but waiting for natural opportunities to authentically share Jesus.

Together in Life was the afternoon topic of WMCLB Co-Director Karen Stenberg. Acts 2:41-47 describes the early Church, who devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, meals together, and prayer—as an example for us. The centrality of Jesus is the Why—the Rock of our togetherness. People crave to be truly known by others, so sharing even the messy parts of our lives enables a deeper fellowship. Walls break down over shared food, bringing people



WMCLB Co-Director Karen Stenberg.



Author and Speaker Gretchen Ronnevik.

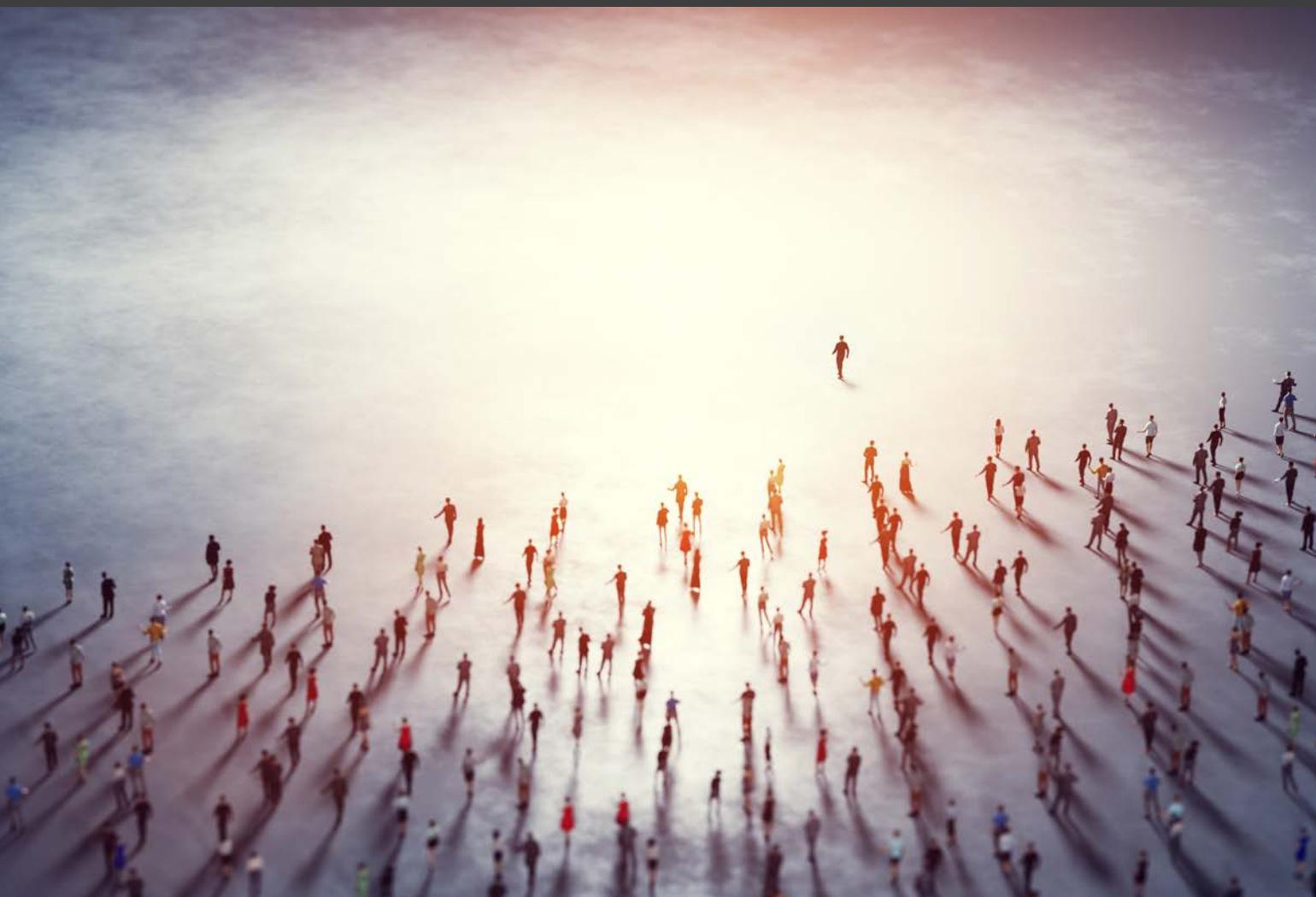


together. When someone is hurting, to actually stop and pray with them in the moment demonstrates that Jesus is always by our side.

Other highlights:

- Kathleen Kjolhaug presented "Wading into the Deep," a devotional book inspired by Jean Wilsdon, WMCLB Co-Chairman, who passed away in 2021.
- Our budget was surpassed! Next year's Focus Project was presented. "The Joseph Project" will help a women's agricultural cooperative in Chad. Additional projects include help for Grace Hill, our new church plant in Boston; the Seminary SWEET Retreat; H.E.L.P. missionary fund; and Crisis Care Fund for ministry families.
- We enjoyed video greetings from missionaries overseas, and greetings in person from missionaries Sandy Christofferson, Sara Hosch, and Christina Smith.
- Sessions were livestreamed, and you can enjoy recorded videos at our Facebook page *Women's Ministries of the CLB*.

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



Nisen/NI/Stock

Unleashing the Next Generation

DAVID VEUM

God’s call on my life is to encourage the call. It’s a call that came one December night in 1984 as I was walking alone on a deserted street in Urbana, Illinois. I had just attended the last session of the day at the InterVarsity missionary conference. Despite having just worshiped with 18,000 persons, I was discouraged and I felt completely alone.

I had spent the afternoon talking with mission agencies looking for a path toward ministry. Could I work in agriculture? After all, I knew a lot about milking cows. I was particularly

interested in going to China. Although I was serving as an assistant pastor in my home church, attending seminary seemed an impossible dream. So I went looking for an alternative to being a pastor.

Except every recruiter responded to my inquiries with: “You’re too old.” I was 35. Or, “You’re too married.” (Translation: We only take single people.) Or, “You need more education.” That’s the very issue I was trying to circumvent. I didn’t think it was possible to ever get to seminary.

Then a window opened. It was not an audible voice, but it was an impression so

strong, it’s as though I heard God speak. The message was this: “You may not go yourself, but you can spend the rest of your life encouraging others to go.” That set me free.

A few years later God miraculously opened the door for me to attend seminary. My home congregation, Bethesda Lutheran Brethren Church in Eau Claire, WI, sent me to seminary and paid my tuition. As a pastor, I still followed God’s call that came on that December night. I must have asked 250 confirmation students the question, “Have you considered being a pastor or a

“Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning.”

Proverbs 9:9

missionary?” I kept a prayer list of those who said “yes.”

In my current role at Lutheran Brethren Seminary, I still ask the same question when visiting our congregations. We have a database of more than 100 people from across North America who have said “yes,” or whose names have come to us from church leaders or website inquiries.

But answering “yes” does not mean they are ready. Most need mentoring and encouragement. They need someone who affirms their gifts and helps them find a path forward into ministry.

Last fall I realized that I needed others to help with encouraging those being called. So LBS asked Rev. Mike Natale of Rhode Island and Rev. Mike Hussey of Montana to each spend a few hours a week as Ministry Call Mentors, staying connected with some of the contacts in their regions. Pastor Jeremy Osterwalder of Camrose, Alberta has just joined their ranks. What follows is a summary of a conversation with Pastor Mike Hussey.

What made you decide to serve as a Ministry Call Mentor?

When I reflect on my call to ministry, I think of all the people in my life who gave me opportunities to do ministry, whether it was teaching a Bible study or even preaching a sermon when the pastor was out of town. When I had those opportunities, there were always members of the congregation who would give bits of encouragement. “I think you might be called to this,” or “you might be gifted in this way.” Without those people encouraging me, I don’t think I ever would have ended up at the seminary or in the ministry. I would have done something else.

Why? Because when I look at myself, I mostly see my sin and I don’t see a

person who is gifted for ministry. To hear the call encouraged from outside of myself is really important. As a Ministry Call Mentor I get to step in and be one of those people for someone else. I get to say, “Hey, maybe God is calling you to this. Let me pray with you about it.”

Was there someone who stood out as an encourager?

Ray Qualley. When I was called to be the youth pastor in Sidney, Montana, I was this weird young guy with gauged earrings and sporting a Mohawk part of the time. My appearance didn’t stop Ray. Every time I got to preach, this senior citizen would pull me aside between the same two pews and tell me what a blessing it was to hear me and that I needed to go to seminary. I do not believe I would ever have gone if it were not for Ray.

Share an example of a conversation you have had as a Ministry Call Mentor.

There was a guy named Mitch on the database of contacts that you sent me. I introduced myself to him in a text and told him that I would love to set up a time and have a conversation about what God was doing in his life. Mitch remembered me from the Western Region Convention, and I remembered him too, though not until I heard his voice later. One of the first things he asked me about was my handlebar mustache which I had let grow specifically for Convention that year, and that question served to verify to him that I really was who I said I was.

Once he was sure it was me, he just started opening up. He had been struggling for a very long time about whether or not he was called to ministry. He was going through the same emotions that I had experienced. “Was I really called? How

could I really know what God wanted me to do? Was I good enough to enter the ministry?”

We had this wonderful back and forth text conversation until things got really serious. Then he gave me a phone call. We chatted through what God was doing in his life and what God was laying on his heart. It was amazing to be able to connect in that moment. Who knows if he will ever end up at seminary? But I got to share in that moment when he was wrestling with the call of God. I got to be the person who could encourage him, bear the burden with him, help him process it, and pray with him.

Do you ever wonder if God is calling you? One of the LBS Ministry Call Mentors would be very glad to connect with you and pray with you about God’s next steps in his call on your life.



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



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An Instrument for His Glory

DAN R.

By the time you are reading this article my family and I will, Lord willing, be in Chad serving as CLB missionaries to the unreached. God has been very gentle with our family in leading us through preparation for the field these past five years. Now we must grab ever so tightly onto his loving hand and take this big leap of faith to a foreign land, trusting that he will continue to be right there by our side, despite the not-so-gentle feeling of the unknown challenges and obstacles sure to be ahead in this harsh environment. We are reassured by Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV), which says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

It gets cold in France. Not the arctic cold we experienced in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, which is usually accompanied by sunshine. In France, it’s a gray, damp cold. Sometime in March, as we were getting toward the end of that kind of dreary cold winter here in France, I went through a season of fear and doubt about our future in Chad. Are we ready, able, or worthy of doing this? NO. But through the blood of Jesus, who calls us and carries us (Matthew 28:18-20), we go.

What about the kids? A concern of one of the parents at Missionary Training International (MTI) last summer really struck me. She said, “I don’t want my children to lose their joy [by going to the mission field],” and were those kids joyful! And we may at times lose our joy, but I’m hopeful that if we continue to instruct each other in the Lord’s ways and abide in Christ there is no better source of joy, for in his presence is the fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). I was told it was ok to have questions, even doubts and fears, and actually, if I didn’t, it would be worrisome. I have met a group of righteous Christian brothers here in France at language school with whom I could process this. Not wanting to dwell here too long, allowing my emotions and the devil to get a foothold, I got on my knees and laid it all down, giving my burden to God and trusting that this is his will, and in the great hope he has given us in Jesus Christ.



Dan and Claire with their children in France.

When God initially put this call to the mission field in Chad on my heart five years ago, I had one reservation—and it still pops up today. I was newly sober, three months to be exact. Ninety days earlier I had been on my knees crying out to Jesus in repentance, asking for a new life free of the obsession of alcohol, and to be completely filled with his Spirit. “When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:17-18, ESV). (See also Galatians 2:20.) I was finally living the way God intended, as a present, nurturing husband and father, broken free of the chains that were keeping me away from the ones I love most in this world. I was now able to provide for and be fully engaged in their lives. But then came this sudden call to serve him in Africa—to the ends of the earth!

I said, “God, I am now sober and able by your grace to be a great dad. Isn’t that enough for now?” Then God revealed the bigger picture. He revealed that it is not about me and my family and just being a good dad. He wants all of that too. But this is about him, as Abba Father, the Father of all creation, and for him to be known and worshiped among every nation (Revelation 7:9-10).

Claire and I have a heart for and are called to Chad. We have had years to process and prepare for this ministry as a family, and I truly believe that this is God’s plan for each member of our family. Each one of us will be used by him in some way, as an instrument for his glory, during our time in Chad.

What has enabled me to persevere with this calling these past five years is this: I love Claire, Ashley, and Austin so much; I care for and want the best for them; I want to protect them from all the evil in this world. The thing that lets me loosen my grip on them is the fact that God loves them more, God cares for them more, and God sent his Son to die for them, conquering evil.

Dan R. serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and Lutheran Brethren International Mission as a missionary to Chad, Africa.

En ce Moment

CLAIRE R.

En ce moment (“at this time,” in French), we live in a constant tension between the hard and the good. This period of transition from France to Chad, while at times hard and overwhelming, can be at the same time fun and exciting. We are sacrificing much: time we could have spent with our families and friends in the United States; the consistency and seeming stability of living in a single place for an extended period; the relative ease of living in community with like-minded individuals who speak the same language; and basic comforts such as familiar food, climate, and even illnesses that our bodies are used to.

At the same time, there are numerous benefits to what we are doing: offering our children (and ourselves) a bigger picture of the world, including the increased necessity to rely upon Jesus when we are perhaps more frequently uncomfortable and unsure; opportunities to try new foods, visit new places, speak new languages; less technology and more family time; learning more about the body of Christ outside of our United States-oriented concept; but most importantly, following and living in God’s will.

No one said knowing and following Jesus would be easy, but Jesus says himself it is worth it (Matthew 4:19); he is worth it (Philippians 3:7-8). There is worth and there is cost. When sitting at the foot of the cross, and thinking about what Jesus sacrificed for me, there is nothing that I could sacrifice for him that would even come close, except my life. And that is what he asks of us—that we daily deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him (Matthew 16:24-26, Mark 8:34-37, Luke 9:23-25).

God is leading us to Chad, so we are following, and this is why: for others to learn about the saving knowledge of Jesus, they need to hear about him (Romans 10:17). Isaiah 40:28a says, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.” There are those who do not know because they have not heard, and therefore cannot believe.

In the French language there are two verbs that mean “to know.” One is an informative or factual sense: “savoir.” After living in France, I know (savoir) that when the French count on



Claire R. in Chad.

their fingers, they start with their thumb and not their index finger. There is a second verb in French for “to know.” That verb is “connaître.” This is knowing something or someone in a relational sense. This experience and journey are helping me to know (connaître) my family better.

Many Muslims know Jesus in the *savoir* sense. They will agree that he existed and was a prophet who lived a perfect life, but they would have to renounce their Islamic beliefs to know him in the *connaître* sense, because to know Jesus, one must acknowledge and believe that he is the Son of God (Galatians 4:8), which Muslims categorically deny as heresy. For them to have a relationship with Jesus, for them to truly know him for who the Bible says he is, and who we as Christians know him to be, they need to get to the salvific *connaître* level of knowing God.

We are blessed with *connaître* knowledge of Jesus (John 17:3, 1 Corinthians 8:3, 1 John 5:20). But there are those in this world who have not yet understood or known him (1 John 3:1). To be frank, missionaries have already gone to the more beautiful, exotic parts of the world, but to be fair, that is because they generally started on the coast and needed to journey inland—but in the past there weren’t travel options like there are today. That means that the unreached people today remain in the dusty, hot, non-vacation-destination places like Chad. These people are worthy of salvation, and God loves them as much as he loves you and me (Galatians 3:14-21). They, as we, are created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27). When it gets hard, I need to remember that I am privileged enough to really know God and have seen his transformative power in my life. I can’t keep that to myself—that is not what God has called us to. Good News *for* all the world (John 3:16); Good News *to be shared with* all the world (Matthew 28:19). The ends of the earth, which he created—all nations were made by him and are meant to glorify God (Revelation 7:9-10). This is why they must come to know him too.

Claire R. serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and Lutheran Brethren International Mission as a missionary to Chad, Africa.

Consider Revitalization

TIM COLLINS

Inspiration Lutheran Brethren Church is nestled on the edge of Breckenridge, Minnesota, just across the river from Wahpeton, North Dakota. Both towns form a community filled with industry, which is surrounded by farmland. For over 50 years Inspiration Church has found their identity amid this hard-working, God-fearing culture. Yes, this is reflective of many other communities in the Midwest and certainly many CLB churches could say the same of their communities. But just as with your community, something about Breckenridge/Wahpeton makes us unique. That something is that other than the local family farmers, many people move here to work, yet retire elsewhere. This causes an ebb and flow in the town's population, which directly affects Inspiration. For most of the 50 years of Inspiration Church there has been a consistent group of leaders who stuck with the church through good times and tough times. However, most of these have now moved away in retirement and we find ourselves a younger church in a cycle to revitalize ourselves in a community that has not changed as much as we have.

Revitalization is a process most churches will attempt as an effort to bring life back into a congregation that seems on the path to fading away. Revitalization at Inspiration looks much different. Inspiration is filled with many young families who love Jesus and want to build their families in Christ-centered living. Doesn't that seem healthy? So why revitalize? As I began serving here at Inspiration in 2020, our church celebrated its 50th anniversary. Looking at the history of Inspiration it was clear to see that there was a group of charter members who had a mission to bring Christ to a couple of towns which found their identity in what they did, rather than in the God who loves them. Now, while the industry in the towns has not changed, our people have. Yet the current generation has this in common with the charter members of Inspiration: a heart for mission, to bring Christ to these towns on the industrial work floor.

Over the past year Inspiration Church and the new generation of leaders have had the privilege to work alongside Pastor Nick Mundis from CLB North American Mission. We are together



setting a pace to bring revitalization to the mission of Inspiration Church with today's generation of "the called in Christ." Revitalization in our church might look different from what is typical, but we still go back to our missional roots of 50 years ago. With the same mission intentionality to love our neighbor, whom we work alongside, this generation will reach this community in the name of Jesus. The revitalization of Inspiration Church means we make vital once again the mission that caused the first members to plant this church: to be representatives of Christ's love to a community of hard-working families.

No matter where your church is planted, no matter what your church's current health status, has your church considered revitalization?

Rev. Tim Collins is Pastor of Inspiration Lutheran Brethren Church in Breckenridge, Minnesota.

JULY/AUGUST 2022

Elders Ordained



(L to R): President of Lutheran Brethren Seminary Dr. David Veum, Elders Brian Inches, Scott Knutson, John Jermiason, Pastor Pete Pederson, and Rev. Jordan Spina.

On April 24, 2022, Dr. David Veum officiated the installation of three Elders at Our Redeemer's Church in Minot, North Dakota: Brian Inches, John Jermiason, and Scott Knutson.

Tjelta Ordained



(L to R): Director of North American Mission Rev. Nick Mundis, Vickie and Terry Tjelta, and Rev. Kirk Millitzer.

On June 5, 2022, Rev. Nick Mundis ordained Terry Tjelta as an elder at Bethesda Lutheran Brethren Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Larson Re-Elected as President of the CLB



President Paul Larson closing the 2022 Biennial Convention with a benediction.

The Church of the Lutheran Brethren met for our 2020 Biennial Convention beginning on Saturday, June 11 through Tuesday, June 14. This was the first time we had met together since 2018, because of the cancellation of our 2020 Convention due to COVID.

We enjoyed good preaching and teaching, we processed the initial stages of a position paper, we launched our new ministry advancement initiative—*Disciple-Making Church*, we agreed to constitutional amendments, and we had an election of the CLB President and Council of Directors members.

Presidential Election Results:

- President Paul Larson was re-elected for a third 4-year term as President of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

Council of Directors Election Results:

- From the Eastern Region:
Pastor Roger Viksnes and Layperson Matthew DeKok
- From the Central Region: Layperson Michael Swenson
- From the Canadian Region: Pastor Harold Rust and Laypersons Dennis Rude and Chris Vandermeer
- From the Western Region:
Laypersons Doug Bounds and Terry Oxendahl
- From the Pacific Region: Pastor Luther Stenberg and Layperson Warren Hall.

Rev. Matthew Rogness
Vice President/Director of Operations
Church of the Lutheran Brethren

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Sent Home to Serve

Twenty-five years ago, I wrote for *Faith and Fellowship* regarding the Grand Forks, North Dakota flood of '97. Our church building was greatly damaged, and the church suffered as well. 50,000 people had been evacuated; the largest evacuation FEMA had dealt with up to that time. My family took refuge in Wisconsin. On a Sunday morning there, after speaking about the disaster, I was approached by other families, people I didn't know, but who had also fled the rising waters. It struck me at the time: it was as though an invisible hand had scattered 50,000 people across the Midwestern US, but they would all in their own time return home.

Our 2022 CLB Convention reminded me of that analogy, only in reverse. People from most of our CLB churches in the US and Canada, as well as several missionary families from great distance, gathered in Fergus Falls, Minnesota for a few days. It was a time of reunion and celebration, particularly after the 2020 Convention's COVID-cancellation. But now it's over, and the invisible hand has scattered us back to our respective homes and ministries.

A second memory from 1997, was that after the physical flood cleanup, the Billy Graham School of Evangelism held a special session in Grand Forks to benefit local and area pastors and spouses. One of their expert speakers, who understood the trauma associated with disaster experiences, made a prediction that shocked the audience: "80% of you will be gone within five years." He was right. One by one, my colleagues moved away. I lasted just over three years. Two of our church's key elders left town at the same time as I did. I'd like to think my moving (and theirs) had nothing to do with the flood, but was instead about opportunities we couldn't refuse. But only the Lord knows. The expert's point was that the emotional and spiritual drain of that disaster and recovery experience, and trying to shepherd a congregation through it, would take such a toll that we would eventually need to go.

Even before the Convention, I had been wondering if the COVID experience, with all its renditions of shutdowns and masking and vaccination controversy, has taken a toll on us, on our churches. It's over, we think. We've been in restart mode for quite some time. But can we simply pick up where we left off in March 2020, as if nothing has changed? Or have we been changed?

This is where the Convention comes in. We need times of refreshing, renewal, and revival. A CLB Convention serves that purpose for the delegates. But our churches need it too. We have a desire to *call, partner, unleash* and *multiply* in mission for our Lord. To begin, we must go to our knees, because we need the Lord more than ever.

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