

THE VOICE OF RENEWAL

*The Newsletter of Lutheran Lay Renewal of America
Serving all Lutheran churches since 1971*

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RENEWAL WEEKEND IN NAWANKOMPE, UGANDA, NOVEMBER 17-18

By the Rev. Peter Maganda, Dean, Eastern District, Lutheran Church of Uganda: "I am happy to send you a report about the LLR Weekend in Nawankompe community. I was not able to attend the Saturday program in the community, but I delegated a vicar who is serving the church there and he used the LLR materials. I joined them on Sunday for a worship service and later Christians continued to discuss their spiritual growth in church, at home and in their communities. This event was meaningful to me as I witnessed Christians sharing their faith with one another. This was such an event that enabled Christians to share their hardships in marriages, widows would as well share their challenges as in the photo below:



The widow standing in the photo above was invited by her daughter for the LLR weekend in Nawankompe. She walked on foot crossing two big communities to the church. It is in this event in Nawankompe that I also continued to realize the impact of LLR Weekends in the lives of the people. For after service, Christians shared their spiritual affairs in their homes, church and community. Here below was Sarah who moved tears to the church but who as well became an encouragement to the church:



Sarah is living in a second marriage after the first husband's death. Her current husband is a Muslim who does not allow her to attend church, she only escapes with her six children to attend Nawankompe Lutheran Church. Sarah full of tears said that her husband does not allow her to attend any church and yet himself does not even attend any mosque. The husband before was a Christian and she would have not married him if she had known his intention to change to Islam.

She however encouraged the fellow women who would be in the same situation to remain strong in faith, professing the name of Christ Jesus right from their homes. But Sarah was not having any platform where she would freely share such challenges until the LLR Weekend in Nawankompe.

In the photo above she had finished sharing and we moved in groups of two and three people to pray for each other. I was much humbled as well when she asked me what I wanted to be prayed for, and indeed she did pray for me, something that is very rare from Christians in my Deanery. There are some more photos of members meeting and praying for each other below:



Evangelist Ivan (Left) and Vicar Edson (Right) in sharing above

Children were also part of the program. They were much involved in singing, Bible storytelling, playing, cleaning the church compound and sharing what they learn at school.



The photo above shows Sunday school children in class after worship.

Christians asked me to pray for them in the service as seen in photos below:



Photo during worship below and a group photo after the event:



I am grateful for the work God is doing through LLR Weekends, especially reaching out to many with his Word, giving the hope and life in Jesus Christ. The problem Nawankompe has, just like many communities, is lacking land and a built church which they requested we should pray for.”

Rev. Peter M. Maganda
Dean, Eastern Deanery, Lutheran Church of Uganda

FUNDS NEEDED FOR MISSION IN UGANDA

At the invitation of Bishop Charles Bameka and Dean Peter Maganda, our Executive Director, Bill Oehlschlager, will be traveling to Uganda January 11-21. Rev. Peter has invited the pastors/evangelists and heads of laity from 40 congregations in the Eastern District deanery to attend three days of training on Lutheran Lay Renewal’s weekend program, to be held at the Lutheran Theological College in Magamaga. Three very successful Lutheran Lay Renewal weekends were held in the Eastern District in the fall and Rev. Peter is convinced that these renewal weekends will be very helpful in growing congregations and building Christian community in his deanery. Bill also has been invited to meet with Bishop Charles Bameka and the Eastern District Deanery Council, as well as visit some of the congregations in the deanery.

This is a very exciting opportunity for LLR, one of the most exciting in our 47-year history, but it also creates a need for additional funding, as we will be paying for most of the cost of the three-day training session, as well as Bill’s travel expenses. Additional funds are greatly needed. Please pray about you and/or your congregation offering financial support to help our Christian brothers and sisters grow the Lutheran Church of Uganda, and please also pray for Our Lord’s blessings on the LCU and on our mission there in January. Your prayers and financial support are greatly needed and appreciated!

“Dear Pastor Peter, Allow me to extend my appreciation to you for introducing this program which has changed my life as the choir leader. More so last time when you taught me how to sing the hymn songs which has made me forget the worldly music. Then pastor when you conducted prayers with us in the Lay Renewal Weekend Program which has brought a great change in my life, especially when I requested you to pray for me, has made me to behave now days like a Christian who believes in Jesus Christ. I had never got such an opportunity in my life when I am taught how to lead people in the church, how to read the Bible before a big congregation. Glory be to the almighty God who sent Pastor Peter to our school with such information and opportunity to serve in the church as a youth.” – Leonard, Trinity Lutheran Church, Iganga

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Christmas is always a time for reflection of the miraculous birth of our Lord and Savior. People celebrate the miracle in many ways. To some, Christmas Day is all there is to Christmas. But there are twelve days of Christmas and the first day begins on Christmas day. Twelve days to contemplate what the birth of Christ means to each of us individually, to our families and to our nation. If we travel on to the twelfth day of Christmas, Epiphany awaits us on January 6th which is the manifestation of Christ's birth to the gentiles and represented by the visit of the three Wise Men who came to see the Christ child, who would have been, nearly, two years old. As it is written in Matthew:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." Matthew 2:1-2 NIV

So it is that Christ's birth follows us right into the New Year and we are refreshed by the beloved story with the knowledge that by accepting Christ into our heart, he will always be there throughout our life through every laugh, every tear, every sorrow, every happiness and whatever else may befall us.

In LLRA, that assurance of Christ's presence and enduring love, in our lives and in our ministry, is the very substance that motivates, energizes and creates much thankfulness and gratitude among our LLRA Board and teams, for the opportunity to spread "the good news."

You will read more about the ministry that is happening in Uganda. Our Executive Director, Bill Oehlschlager, will be leaving for Uganda in a couple of weeks to share and teach more about our ministry with the Ugandan people.

Later in this newsletter, don't miss the article, from one of our Board members, Dave Luecke, as he gives more insight and thought-provoking commentary about our role, as Christians, in the church community. We look forward to 2019 and more growth in our ministry.

To all of you who have supported LLRA, financially and prayerfully, thank you for your steadfastness. Please keep our ministry in your prayers and pray for our nation that there can be peace and understanding around the world.

Elaine Schomaker, LLRA President

"There is a sense in which we may say that the teaching ministry of Jesus had proved a failure. Several times he had urged his disciples to humble themselves like a little child, but Simon Peter remained proud and self-confident. Often he had told them to love one another, but even John seems to have deserved his nickname 'son of thunder' to the end. Yet when you read Peter's first letter you cannot fail to notice its references to humility, and John's letters are full of love. What made the difference? The Holy Spirit. Jesus taught them to be humble and loving; but neither quality appeared in their lives until the Holy Spirit entered their personality and began to change them from within." - From "Basic Christianity" John R. W. Stott

THE CHURCH TAKES AN UNFORTUNATE TURN

In the fourth century the Christian church took a turn that still handicaps traditional churches today. The Roman emperor made Christianity the official religion of the Empire. Most consider this a good development. Christianity then took on explosive growth. I consider it an unfortunate turn. We old-line churches carry a legacy that weakens our effectiveness in the 21st century.

As the Roman Empire grew, so did the number of officials needed to administer it. Before the fourth century Christians were mostly excluded from the bureaucracy. Once the Emperor gave preference to Christianity, then joining the state church was the smart move for citizens with ambition. Much of that explosive growth was made up of people who were Christians for convenience rather than by conviction. Pastors and bishops were exempted from tax obligations. The temptation to seek this status without conviction must have been great.

Mainline churches today had state-church backgrounds before they expanded into North America. If you lived in a geographic area, you were Anglican, or Lutheran, or Presbyterian/Reformed (but mostly Catholic). The only alternative was to renounce that faith, which was often considered an act of treason. This approach produced many passive Christians who did just enough to meet their minimum obligation.

I read once of a Lutheran pastor in a German village who decided that fathers really should show up for the baptism of their child. So he would send out a policeman to drag the father to church for that occasion. Imagine what that state church arrangement did for the attitudes of those pastors? If you can compel, why bother to attract? With attendance expected, why bother to figure out how to make the biblical word relevant to the hearers?

Reported numbers are an interesting reflection of differing ways to organize church life. For old-line churches 1,000 members usually means an average worship attendance of about 300. For many Evangelical and Pentecostal churches 1,000 attendance means membership of perhaps 300. Which way of reporting do you think reflects a more dynamic congregation?

Since the fourth century Christian churches have had to deal with at least two tiers of members: those who are passively meeting social expectations and those who are convicted and even passionate about living out the Christian life. Traditional churches don't have a vocabulary to sort out the difference.

Whether someone lives the faith passively or passionately does not affect their eternal status before God. By his grace God accepts all who confess Jesus Christ as their Savior. God does not look for evidence that someone really, really, really believes or has exactly the right details of doctrinal understanding. In fact, Jesus says that unless you have the faith of a child you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

When I planted a church twenty-five years ago, I tried out a distinction between participants and partners. Anybody who came with some regularity was listed in our directory as a participant. Anybody who accepted responsibility to support and lead the congregation was a partner. Most participants were passive. Most partners were passionate. Partnership did not imply the others were not true Christians.

A distinction that held up to the Reformation was between religious and others, called laity. Fifty years ago in mainline churches those who claimed to speak in tongues produced considerable church conflict when others in the congregation inferred they were now second-class citizens. Rather than work with the categories of conviction and convenience, I want to promote the category of stages of growth in the faith, with the invitation to all to grow to a more fulfilling stage. We have to look to the Holy Spirit for such growth. All can pray for more of his fruit. – The Rev. David Luecke, Ph. D., LLRA Board Member

Check out Pastor Luecke's new blog at www.WhatHappened.church

RETREAT AND WORKSHOP IN LEBANON, PA, DECEMBER 1-2

Zoar Lutheran Church hosted our Spiritual Transformation retreat, coupled with our Sharing Your Faith workshop, on Saturday and Messiah Lutheran Church hosted a Sharing Your Faith workshop and discussion on Sunday. Comments from the pastors of these two churches are below:

“On Saturday, 1 December, Lutherans from five congregations in the new Central Mission District, Atlantic Mission Region, NALC came together for a one-day *Discipleship and Spiritual Renewal* workshop focusing on personal growth in faith and witness. The workshop/retreat, hosted by Zoar Lutheran Church, was led by Bill Oehlschlager, Executive Director of Lutheran Lay Renewal of America. This was the first joint activity organized for congregations of this Mission District. Our people are still talking about what a powerful, yet down-to-earth and accessible presentation Bill provided. They returned from the workshop feeling both affirmed and challenged, looking forward to exploring their potential as laypersons committed to their own spiritual development and to sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with greater confidence and expanded awareness of the opportunities for effective evangelism which present themselves day by day. We were all thankful for the opportunity and wished for more in the future.” - Pastor Barry Kendall +, Messiah Lutheran Church, Lebanon, PA

“My parish hosted Mr. Bill Oehlschlager on December 1, 2018 for a workshop on discipleship and spiritual renewal. The great thing about this workshop is that it was from a layman's perspective and I think that really resonated with our laity in a way that we pastors are not as good at. Bill gave us all a fresh and new perspective on our faith journey. What he had to say and the way he said it reached all of us, both laity and clergy, where we are. He gave us a vision for ministry that showed us that just being busy with serving on committees and doing other necessary and practical things important to the life of our congregations, is not enough. It should always be a work of faith and an act of faith. He also opened to us very simple ways we can reach out to our communities and do evangelism in day to day activities, like speaking with people in public at the grocery store or the gas station. When we ask people how they are doing to really mean it and take time to show interest in their lives. One thing, in particular that I remember is how Bill told us that when we tell someone we will pray for them to take it one step further and to pray with them right then and there. This workshop really opened our eyes to all the possibilities to practice and deepen our faith in very simple, easy ways that all of us can do.” - Pastor Bennett Harris, Zoar Lutheran Church, Lebanon, PA



SCHEDULED EVENTS

- January 6 Sharing Your Faith Workshop
St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Butler, PA
The Rev. Dr. Alden Towberman, Pastor
- January 14-16 Training Workshop
Lutheran Theological College
Magamaga, Uganda
- March 16 Spiritual Transformation Retreat
Calvary Lutheran Church
Modesto, CA
The Rev. Michael Mechsner, Pastor

More events are in the planning stages so check our web site often, where the calendar is always up to date.

“Like” us on Facebook - Lutheran Lay Renewal of America

We post all of our upcoming events on our Facebook page, as well as a thought for the week every week.

PRAYER REQUESTS

- For Kathie Klueg's father, for the Lord's healing & strength
- For healing for Dan and Kathie Klueg
- Our board member Dan Klueg asks to be lifted up in prayer for wisdom as he deals with degenerative disc disease, Hashimoto's disease, diabetes, neuropathy, a cyst on his brain, and possible pre-Parkinsons; on how God is going to use this in him to bring honor and glory to him. Also, for Kathie and the kids to join in the joy of the Lord he has as he slowly deteriorates.
- For healing for Dick and Bev Brown
- For the Lord's protection over all police officers and firefighters
- For the Lord's protection over all men and women in our armed forces
- For the Lord's blessings on our mission in Uganda, January 12-21
- For wisdom and guidance for the LLRA Board of Directors, as we seek to grow and expand this ministry

Lutheran Lay Renewal of America is eligible to receive Choice Dollars Grant Funds from the Thrivent Financial Choice Dollars program. We are grateful to Thrivent Financial, and those individuals who designate their Choice Dollars to us, for their support of LLRA and its ministry.

LLRA is a 501 (c) (3) tax exempt organization and depends on contributions from churches and individuals who have benefited from our ministry to help us continue to bring this ministry to more and more congregations all across America.

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