

THE VOICE OF RENEWAL

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

JULY, 2020

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LLR'S MINISTRY CONTINUES DURING THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Due to the severity of the Covid-19 pandemic in the United States, churches in the U.S. at this time are not scheduling any renewal weekends, retreats, workshops or conferences here. While some doors to ministry have been temporarily closed in this country, however, God has been opening other doors to our ministry. After being postponed twice, our mission trip to Uganda and Rwanda now is tentatively scheduled for early December. We're hoping Americans will be allowed to enter both countries by then but this is still far from certain. Only one passenger flight has been allowed to fly into Uganda from the U.S. in recent months (July 14) and that was only to repatriate Ugandan citizens who had been stranded in North America.

The primary purpose of our mission will be to lead three-day renewal conferences, in order to introduce our renewal weekend program to pastors, evangelists, teachers and other church leaders, so they then will be equipped to lead these renewal weekends in congregations all over their countries. An additional part of each conference is a one-day retreat on Seven Lessons for Living the Spiritual Life. Of course, our Executive Director also will be visiting congregations in each country to build stronger relationships with church leaders.

In the meantime, we have been working with our partners, the Lutheran Church of Uganda and the Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda, to provide some of the critical support they need. Uganda and Rwanda, like the U.S., have been shut down and churches there also have been closed. As a result, the Lutheran Church of Uganda started a weekly radio ministry to reach those people who have not been able to attend church and Lutheran Lay Renewal has provided much needed funding for these broadcasts in Eastern Uganda.

In addition, with both countries having been shut down, LLR has been providing funds to these churches to provide food for needy people who have not been able to work, including pastors, evangelists and their families. We have never before considered Lutheran Lay Renewal to be a mission agency but we feel called to respond to these requests to help our brother and sister Lutherans during these most difficult times.

REPORT FROM THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF UGANDA

The following is excerpted from Rev. Peter Maganda's June report to Bishop Charles Bameka, Bishop of the LCU. Rev. Peter is Pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Magamaga, Dean of the Eastern District of the Lutheran Church of Uganda and also Dean of Students at the Lutheran Theological College. A copy of this report also was sent to the Lutheran Lay Renewal office:

"Greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I am once again happy to report to you about the progress of the church operating within this continuing lockdown due to COVID 19 for the month of June, which has been full of different activities, achievements and challenges but, all paving ways for growth within the Deanery with help of our Father in heaven."

WORD AND SACRAMENT MINISTRY IN EASTERN UGANDA

“The Lord has been so gracious to us in the deanery in that the servants were in position to preach the Word in and out of season to most of our parishioners within the Deanery. The pastors, evangelists and vicars, with the help of the continuing seminarians currently in their homes and communities, have organized visits to Christian homes for prayers, counselling to the distressed and some have even conducted Bible studies but when observing the health precautions or directives in regard to COVID 19 in the country.

The Radio Ministry in the Deanery continues to be of great help in facilitating the proclamation of God's Word to the Public in Eastern Uganda and, as reported last month, many Christian homes have tuned in at Kiira FM and worshiped from their homes. This has been possible as a result of the support from Lutheran Lay Renewal of America supporting the ministry in Eastern Uganda. In many communities church leaders and their pastors have organized home cell preaching which has helped so much in retaining the Christians in touch with one another while still observing the health precautions.” – Rev. Peter Maganda

FROM THE REFORMED LUTHERAN CHURCH OF RWANDA

Dear Brother Bill,

God's peace be with you!

We would like to thank you for your good heart, full of love, which is a compassion. We have seen and know well who is (Lutheran Lay Renewal). You did not meet me and even at least one of our Pastors. But when you heard us crying to God's help, you obeyed God's voice. And helped us and sent food to us.

In the meeting, I shared all about you, how we get connected and we were very wondered. To have connection with you people of God, it was amazing grace from God. How can this be possible? None of us could understand this. We found out that it is God who made this connection.

Even though we still need this help/support of food, we give thanks to God for what he has done for us through you. We appreciate you very much, God bless you and God bless your families and God bless your country of USA.

May you continue to pray for us to these following needs:

- We still need the support of food to our Pastors and Evangelists and believers.
 - We need funds to build the church building of Rwempasha congregation, and of Gishororo congregation, and of Ntoma congregation, and of Rukomo congregation and of Kagitumba congregation.
- If we can have the funds, we can begin first with the church building of Rwempasha congregation and the following can be the congregation of Gishororo. We need this help very much.

God bless you and God bless the USA.

In Christ,

Pastor Jean Claude MANIRAGABA
Church President
Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda

Pastor Jean Claude later wrote: “Yesterday (July 15) the Government approved to allow churches to have services, but they gave us restrictions to follow.”

FUNDS NEEDED TO SUPPORT OUR PARTNERS IN UGANDA AND RWANDA

After months of financial hardships, due to their economies being shut down and people being out of work, our Lutheran brothers and sisters in Uganda and Rwanda have been suffering due to lack of money and food. In addition, funds are always needed to purchase land and build churches, as well as fund our conferences in these countries. Lutheran Lay Renewal wants to continue our support of these churches and we are asking for your help.

Every Lutheran congregation should be supporting at least one foreign mission! Let us say that again. Every Lutheran congregation should be supporting at least one foreign mission! You are welcome to do so through the ministry of Lutheran Lay Renewal or, if you prefer, we can put you in direct contact with Lutheran church leaders in either Uganda, Rwanda – or both! Lutheran Lay Renewal is a 501 (c) (3) charitable organization and contributions to us are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.



Pastor Jonathan Ngaboyisonga of Rwempasha Lutheran Church, Rwanda distributing food purchased with funds provided by Lutheran Lay Renewal of America



Pastor Francis Nsengimana of Rukomo Lutheran Church, Rwanda distributing food purchased with funds provided by LLRA

JOIN US IN ISRAEL IN 2021!

Our 2021 Israel tour is still scheduled for January 11-20 and we are accepting registrations. We have 52 exciting Old and New Testament sites on the tour that will greatly expand your knowledge of Christianity, Judaism, biblical history and archeology. Walk in the footsteps of Jesus in Nazareth, Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, Bethlehem, Bethany, the Jordan, Capernaum, Magdala, Mt. Tabor (the Mount of Transfiguration), the Mount of Beatitudes, Caesarea Philippi, and enjoy a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee. We'll also visit Masada, Qumran, where the Dead Sea scrolls were found, Herodian, Jericho, Caesarea Maritima and many other historic sites.



The Garden of Gethsemane (above) and evening skies over Jerusalem (left)



A tour of Israel truly is an experience you will treasure for the rest of your life. Tour arrangements are being handled by Imagine Tours and Travel, a company that has led hundreds of tours to Israel for over 30 years. Call or e-mail our office for a brochure and registration form, which we can send you either by mail or e-mail.

REFLECTIONS BY OUR PRESIDENT

We live in “interesting times.” The current Covid 19/coronavirus has changed our lives in many ways. The effects on LLRA are startling and profound.

We all know about the various shutdowns which vary from state to state and in some places from county to county. We cannot get into hospitals and care facilities. Conventions, meetings, etc. are conducted “virtually” using Zoom and other digital platforms. And more. Clearly Bill Oehlschlager cannot do his usual work.

All of this impairs our ability to do the work and projects for which LLRA was created. No weekends, no teaching sessions, no mission work.

I live in a county in Ohio where Covid 19 cases have suddenly spiked, a clear danger to me and everyone here. And yet Bill has plans to go to two countries in Africa where there is intense interest and success in weekends and other teaching gatherings. He has postponed the trip a couple of times because he would not be allowed to enter the countries there who are both in the midst of their own pandemics of Covid 19 and they want to protect their own people from important illness imported from the United States and other countries. Yet Bill needs to be ready when the opportunity to go arises.

Please join me in continued financial support for LLRA. There will be a time when we return to “normal” and we need to be ready to do God's work then.

Take care of yourselves. Be safe. Masks. Social distancing. Etc.

Blessings, Fred Schneider, President

HOW DO YOU ORGANIZE A SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP?

When I was teaching the Doctor of Ministry course on Church Management, a pastor-student for his course project chose to plan a fundraising program for his congregation. He was disappointed and even angry when I gave him a low grade. He had written out an elaborate scheme of boxes representing committees and job descriptions. It was very rational and comprehensive. What he hadn't done is address issues of motivation. Why would individual church members put special energy into filling somebody else's written expectations of what to do?

Jesus taught that the Spirit is like the wind. You can't tell where it is coming from or where it is going. How do you organize something that is unpredictable? Poor church leadership tries to dictate what the Spirit will do in their midst by drawing boxes and giving the Spirit assignments. Sometimes the Spirit will comply. But part of being unpredictable is not staying confined to routines. As many congregations have learned, what worked well enough in the 1960s no longer works with newer generations. What happened to the Spirit of the 1960s? He may well have moved on to newer ways of doing church life.

For centuries mainline church bodies each had their own type of structure for a congregation. It was called polity, a word from the same source that gives us police. Too often the Spirit was not welcome in their routines. Traditional mainline churches were tightly organized to prevent bad things from happening. Heavily institutionalized churches over the centuries simply overlooked the Apostle Paul's revolutionary way to organize the churches around what the Spirit is doing in their midst.

After spending a year and a half with the Corinthians, Paul knew individuals who had their own special contributions to make to the fellowships he initiated in that city. 1 Corinthians 12 and later Romans 12 are his descriptions of what he saw in action. Individual believers had their own special contribution to make to the common good. Some were good at teaching, others at encouraging, yet others at serving and others at leading. Paul witnessed how the Spirit energized them to enrich the fellowship with what they were moved and happy to contribute. I believe there are two lessons to be learned.

Lesson #1: Quit trying to fit church participants into predetermined boxes of tasks they should do. Find what they are good at and help them make their contribution.

Lesson#2: Look for the special energy God the Spirit kindles within individual believers. Institutionalized churches preferred to get along without the passions of believers which could be hard to deal with.

It is hard for me to imagine Christian churches doing well in the future without a greater appreciation for the energy that comes from special empowerment by the Spirit. We are coming out of a period where mainline church leaders thought they could get higher performance out of congregations through management techniques used in other organizations. Their continuing sharp decline should stamp that approach as a failure. They ran out of special church energy.

The chaos of everyone doing their own things is not good either. Stability is important for any grouping of people to survive more than a year or two. Churches can achieve that by distinguishing between two types of structure. One is the governance structure. The other is the ministry structure.

Most congregations have to look after financial offerings and property they own. Assuring good stewardship should be a priority. Set up a small governance structure of respected members for that purpose. Traditional church polity structures served that purpose.

Then add a second structure for stimulating and guiding the ministries of individuals who seem empowered by the Spirit to make their special contribution to this fellowship's life. Informality and flexibility are OK. Follow the special energy the Spirit may well be offering through specific individuals.

Because the Spirit works through empowered individuals, congregations in the same church body often appear very different over time. Institutionalized churches that don't value the Spirit's work might worry about that. Effective churches observe where and how the Spirit is working in your community and learn what they can. Pray for the Spirit's renewed energy in your midst. Then be wise stewards of the Spirit-energized people God sends. - The Rev. Dave Luecke, Ph. D., Dr. Luecke is a member of LLR's Board of Directors



2019 in Uganda

“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

- Healing for Dan and Kathie Klueg, and Kathie’s father
 - Comfort, peace and healing for Dick Brown
 - Healing for Elaine Schomaker and her daughter Alexis Gurnard
 - For the Lord’s protection over all doctors, nurses and other hospital workers, police officers, firefighters and all men and women in our armed forces
 - For racial harmony and reconciliation in the United States
 - For the Lord’s blessings on our ministry in the U.S., Uganda and Rwanda, and for the financial resources that are needed for this ministry
 - For wisdom and guidance for the LLRA Board of Directors, as we seek to grow and expand our ministry
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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 - and now also to Uganda and Rwanda!

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