

THE VOICE OF RENEWAL

The Newsletter of Lutheran Lay Renewal of America

Our mission: To promote spiritual renewal and spiritual growth of people and congregations through our renewal weekends, retreats, workshops and conferences.

JANUARY, A.D. 2022

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NEWS FROM THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF UGANDA

Kyabazaala Lutheran Church and School, Mukono District – Thanks to a very generous \$10,000 donation by a Lutheran couple in the Pittsburgh area, Lutheran Lay Renewal was able to provide the funding for the construction of a new church, which also will house the community school. We recently received the following news from our good friend, Pastor Erifazi Buluba: “I hope the new year is moving on well. I am grateful that roofing is finished and we are now working on plastering. Attached are the photos.” Pastor Erifazi expects the building project will be completed soon.



Kyabazaala Lutheran Church and School on January 7– The school will have seven grades and serve the entire community. Note also that there is a well on the church property, a huge blessing to the people of Kyabazaala.



Front entrance of Kyabazaala Lutheran Church and School on January 7

ONGOING NEEDS IN THE EASTERN DEANERY OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF UGANDA

Rev. Peter Maganda, Dean of the Eastern District, has asked us to fund several projects in the deanery this year. We are committed to funding the Naigobya Medical Clinic (\$3,600 per year) and hopefully also the Lutheran Lay Leaders Training program (\$10,000 per year). The Deanery Council also is requesting funds for the following:

1. Dean's pastoral visits for Word and Sacrament Ministry - \$2,000
2. Purchase of a motorcycle for Naigobya Lutheran Church, School and Medical Clinic, to be used by Vicar Charles Hamiduh - \$2,058
3. Land purchase for the Lutheran congregation at Serere - \$2,700
4. Translating and printing of a Lusoga language hymnal - \$10,000

LLR also has been asked to return to lead a Renewal Conference this year, which would cost us several thousand dollars, as we pay the expenses for food, and other expenses associated with the conference, as well as out travel expenses. Would you or your congregation be willing to donate toward one of these projects?

DIOCESE OF NORTHWEST ANKOLE, (ANGLICAN) CHURCH OF UGANDA

Our good friend, Rev. Kuruka Amutuhaire, who was ordained a deacon in December and is Youth Coordinator for the diocese, reports that the diocese held a Youth and Children's Convention in late December.

“Thank you all for your prayer, even amidst the COVID situation we were able to have our annual Youth and Children's convention from 28th to 31st December, 2021, under the theme Hope Beyond Affliction, Lamentations 3:22. Our convention was successful and we had a great time with the youth and children in the diocese, which also gave us a chance to again meet with them since we have been in lockdown for now two years. As the diocese every year we have an annual Youth and Children's convention, this is meant to strengthen youth and children in their faith and to grow in the love of God. We were able to host over 700 youth and children between 7 years to 30 years of age. It was great meeting youth and children after a long time of lock down. The topics that were covered in the convention are financial independence, boy and girl child, patience and endurance, and decision making.”



Bishop Amos Magezi speaks to the youth of the diocese



Lutheran Lay Renewal is a partner of the Diocese of Northwest Ankole, which is the newest diocese in the Church of Uganda, and is in need of funding for many projects. Would you or your congregation be willing to help? Contact our office for more details.

OUR PARTNERS ARE PARTNERING

On December 6, leaders of the Lutheran Church of Uganda met in Ibanda with Bishop Amos Magezi, Bishop of the Diocese of Northwest Ankole, Church of Uganda. As a result of that meeting, the two churches are partnering in a two-day agricultural training program for 150 people called “Seeds for Souls,” to be held in February. The two churches also will be holding a joint one-week Pastoral Leadership Institute training in July.

Rev. Raymond Kaija writes: “This morning we had a two-hour pastoral visit and meeting with the Bishop of the Northwest Ankole Diocese, Rt. Rev. Amos Magezi, discussing how best we can partner in the ministry to glorify God! Present were Bishop of the Lutheran Church of Uganda, Bishop Charles I. Bameka; Head of Laity Mr. Fred Magezi and Dean for Midwestern Deanery, Rev. Raymond Kaija, who also serves as Chairman of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations in the LCU!”



(L to R) Fred Magezi, Bishop Charles Bameka, Bishop Amos Magezi and Rev. Raymond Kaija

Rev. Kaija further wrote to our office, “Pastoral Leadership Institute International (PLII) is USA based but working all over the world. Pastoral Leadership Institute International partners with church bodies to train church leaders who are in service in leadership skills. In Africa, Leadership Institute International has a partnership with the Lutheran Church of Uganda (LCU). She has trained Trainers of Trainers (TOT) to train church leaders in Africa region but starting with Uganda. It is currently training church leaders with their wives in seven Deaneries of the Lutheran Church of Uganda.”

“PLII Africa has made a partnership with Northwest Ankole Diocese to train her leaders. It is headed by Bishop Charles Bameka (LCU). The Training emphasizes God’s Vision and Mission for Mankind. God’s Vision being Reestablishing His Kingdom through restoring the relationship between God and Man and between man and man in the shape of the cross. And mission being making disciples who will disciple disciples for discipline in the world.”

“Seeds for Souls East Africa (S4SEA) will facilitate trainers with transport. S4SEA will provide seeds to all participants, who are 150 leaders. Northwest Ankole will provide meals and accommodations. Participants from parishes will be facilitated by their own parishes Where possible, Northwest Ankole Diocese is to look for partners to support the training. S4SEA aims at developing quality seeds that are accessible and available to the general public of all ages, improve nutrition and house hold income through the growing of vegetables, beans and other high yielding crops, using the sustainable farming practices that we are introducing to the communities we train.”

“Seeds for Souls East Africa is also looking for partners who will help raise financial support for her like you of Lay Lutheran Renewal of America, so as to enable her to reach many people in different church bodies as well as serving the refugees. Seeds for Souls is working with Day 3 Seed (D3Seed) based in Missouri, USA that gave birth to S4SEA. I pray and hope you can help S4SEA to raise resources to support her outreach programs to the refugees, Seed Gardens in Schools, Seed Disciples and Widow’s Seeds programs.”

Lutheran Lay Renewal partners with both of these church bodies and we are delighted to hear about their partnership in these ministries.

REFORMED LUTHERAN CHURCH OF RWANDA

Pastor Jean Claude Maniragaba, President of the Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda, sent several reports to us: “On this Christmas Day, 25th December 2021, we baptized 170 children at our congregation of Bufunda. And 8 adults were also baptized, and 2 adults were received because they were baptized in Anglican and Catholic churches.”

“On Sunday 28th November, 2021, we had the services and in it, we received 54 new believers who were baptized in other churches, and turned into our church after they understood well the Lutherans' teachings. We taught them from the 14th May up to the mid-November, where they passed the exam, and the church council agreed to receive them in the church at our congregation of Bufunda.”

“As the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is being preached in the region of Mukama, we found out that the congregation of Bufunda was growing spiritually and find many people coming to our church, repenting of their sins after accepting the Gospel. The church decided to train 22 new deacons and deaconesses who can help us in guiding new believers while they are in their local villages, and also in helping in congregation's activities at the church. We have elected them and we prayed for them. We received them and prayed for them on this work of God on that Sunday of 28th November, 2021 at the congregation of Bufunda. God bless you and God bless your family and God bless all of the leaders of Lutheran Lay Renewal of America and your partners, for your prayers for God's work in this country of Rwanda.”



Christians being received into the Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda in Bufunda

“The Congregation of Ntoma. Our Leader there, is Pastor Jean Paul Nabanganyimana. At this congregation life is hard, and they do not have a church building. I have visited them and one of the prayer requests is that they

need God's grace upon them, which is a need of a church building. They need many things, but this was the priority over others. God bless you. Please, you can again remind or post through your newsletters of LLRA, so that believers in USA can donate the support to the church building for the glory of God.”

WHERE IS YOUR GOD GENE VMAT2 TAKING YOU?

With his 2004 book *The God Gene: How Faith Is Hardwired into Our Genes* molecular biologist Dean Hamer opened a fresh new perspective on the relationship between humans and God. Not being a biologist, I am going to rely on the Oct 25, 2004 TIME Magazine cover story to understand and explain Hamer’s discovery and its implications.

Chief of gene structure at the National Cancer Institute, Hamer took the test scores of 1,000 men and women on the Temperament and Character Inventory. One of the TCI scales reflects self-transcendence, a feeling of connectedness to a larger universe, an openness to things not literally provable. He compared scores on that variable with the genetic profile of each individual. He hit the jackpot with gene vmat2 (vesicular monoamine transporter). Variations on that gene seemed to be directly related to how volunteers scored on the self-transcendence test. This gene vmat2 has been dubbed the God Gene.

What does the discovery mean for believers? Many non-believers take it to prove there is no God; what we experience as God is just a jumble of chemicals in our brains. I myself see it as evidence for how fearfully and wonderfully God made us (Psalm 139).

Hamer himself says his findings are agnostic on the existence of God. “If there’s a God, there’s a God. Just knowing what brain chemicals are involved in acknowledging that is not going to change the fact.” Hamer is clearly the heir of a millennia-long search for the wellsprings of spirituality. People have been wrestling with the roots of faith since faith itself was codified in Scripture. Ecclesiastics 3:11 declares “God has set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”

A similar conclusion can be found in St. Augustine’s still-read *Confessions* (400 A.D.), his personal story of sinful youth and his conversion to Christianity. His famous observation is that “Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” He may well have been consciously reflecting Paul’s observation that all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.

The God Gene helps explain the human need for each to subject him or herself to some superior authority. That authority for Christians is the God revealed in Scriptures. A true atheist substitutes the scientific method as the superior authority. In America today many give ultimate allegiance to sports. Christians can ask whether those alternate gods are as life-fulling as the biblical God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I want to ask specifically whether those other gods can act like the Holy Spirit in changing us toward the abundant life. It does not follow that just because all humans are wired with the same desire for a transcendent authority, any source of that authority is as good as another. The God of Scriptures more effectively delivers a more abundant life than what people today turn into idols.

The liberal mainline church bodies have left the Spirit out of their understanding of the Triune God, including their view that the Bible is not divinely “in-spirited” and thus not trustworthy. They are all rapidly declining with no end in sight. I sort of backed into my conservative understandings after concluding that the alternative liberal understandings, to paraphrase Dr. Phil, just don’t work. Meanwhile Christianity is growing around the world at its fastest rate ever. Almost all of this growth is in the form of churches that include the Holy Spirit as a vital part of the Gospel.

Perhaps someday a neural biologist will relate scores on the God gene vmat2 with spiritual temperaments, as discussed in Column 7. We would almost certainly have to develop new variations of worship and ministry to

expand our outreach. Maybe there will be another set of genes that incline believers to the different kinds of ministries Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12.

Wouldn't that be confirmation of Paul's understanding that there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men (1 Corinthians 12: 4-6). How does the discovery of the "God" gene affect your relationship with God. – The Rev. Dave Luecke, Ph.D. (Pastor Luecke is a member of our Board of Directors)

SCHEDULED EVENTS

January 18 Seven Lessons for Living the Spiritual Life
Zion Lutheran Church
Chicora, PA
The Rev. Karl Schoch, Pastor
Bill Oehlschlager, Retreat Leader

February 26 Spiritual Transformation Retreat
Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity
Irwin, PA
Rev. Sarah Lee-Faulkner, Pastor
Bill Oehlschlager, Retreat Leader

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PRAYER REQUESTS

- Healing for Elaine Schomaker, Julie, Dan and Kathie Klueg
- 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 peace, 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

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 in Uganda and Rwanda!

Lutheran Lay Renewal of America
209 Thornwood Drive
Butler, PA 16001
724-287-5151
LLRAJ316@gmail.com
www.lutheranrenewal.com