



The Voice of Renewal

NEWSLETTER OF LUTHERAN LAY RENEWAL OF AMERICA

*Renewing faith and promoting spiritual growth in individuals and congregations
with renewal weekends, retreats, workshops, and conferences*

Celebrating 50+ years!

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MARCH, A.D. 2022

RETREAT AT HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, IRWIN, PA



Lutheran Lay Renewal led a retreat for the church council and other members of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Irwin, PA on Saturday, February 26. There were two sessions: 7 Lessons for Living the Spiritual Life and 10 Stops on the Road to Spiritual Transformation, with lots of good discussion among those who attended. Comments about the retreat from one of those who attended are below:

“In February, 2022, Lutheran Lay Renewal graciously provided Holy Trinity Lutheran Church members a spiritual retreat day focused on two compelling topics. The first half of the one-day workshop walked us through "Seven Lessons for Living the Spiritual Life." We walked through various lessons which all built on each other and emphasized God's love for us and the power of letting go of our own desires for "control" and putting our faith in

Him. The concepts weren't necessarily new individually, but when packaged together provided an organized and powerful message. The presenter offered his own wonderfully captivating spiritual journey and the group as a whole was able to actively participate by sharing our own perspectives and stories. This open dialogue helped us work through some of the lessons we each find harder to overcome.

The second half of the workshop focused on "Ten Steps on the Road to Spiritual Transformation" and laid a great foundation for different places we all may find ourselves on the journey to growing in our own faith and relationship with God and Jesus.

The workshop used a number of great quotes which spurred interest in further reading (I myself went and purchased two of the referenced books to learn more) and, as noted above, invited a great dialogue amongst the members in attendance.

Having an opportunity to spend several hours in a guided workshop devoted to Spiritual Life and Transforming in our own Spiritual Journey was invaluable. I appreciated the candid discussions, appreciated hearing different perspectives on areas such as forgiveness and gratitude, and gained a more empathetic appreciation towards others (and myself) in terms of each of us working through our individual spiritual journeys. It reinforced to me the importance of being a part of a congregation where I can lean on others and in turn, hopefully offer similar support. Thank you, Lutheran Lay Renewal, for offering these opportunities to take a step back to recenter ourselves and remember the beauty that is faith.” – Angela Brittingham

FROM OUR PARTNERS IN THE EASTERN DEANERY, LUTHERAN CHURCH OF UGANDA

“Greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. I am grateful to inform you that construction of Kyabazaala Lutheran Church building is continuing and we hope to get it completed soon. We are now fixing doors and even though the building is not complete, we are using it for pupils to learn as construction work goes ahead, as shown in the photos attached. However, we send our sincere thanks for the support you render towards our church building, may God bless you and reward you abundantly.” – Rev. Erifazi Buluba, Pastor, Kyabazaala Lutheran Church



Although construction is not quite complete, the church/school building is already being put to good use. A very generous donation to LLR by a Lutheran couple in the Pittsburgh area paid for this building project.

HAVE YOU HIT THE WALL YET?

For Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich each, the wall was a failed marriage that took them by surprise. Successful in everything else they had done, each had to process this new reality. Each came out of it a better person, closer to God.

They describe that process in their book *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith* (1989). Add their stages to Luther's intuitive three stages, pioneer developmental psychologist James Fowler's stage theory of faith development, and the one I described in *How to Spot the Spirit's Work in Your Life*, based on Fowler (moving from "I believe what the church teaches" to "This is what I believe.") Common to all is a similar description of Stage Three and of Stage Four. Hagberg and Guelich name the critical transition from Three to Four. It is hitting "the wall." Luther called it *tentatio*, struggle.

Here is the Hagberg and Guelich description of what can happen when we get on the other side of whatever Wall we personally have run into:

"A crisis can knock us off balance, making us afraid, vulnerable and ripe for change. This also happens in our spiritual journey. We have a crisis in our faith that causes us to reconsider. It might frighten us, at least make us vulnerable. If we become bitter or too resistant, we can get stuck. But if we let the change or crisis touch us, if we live with it and embrace it, we are more likely to grow and to move eventually to another stage or spiral in our journey. When we are most vulnerable, we have the best chance to learn and move along the way. In the midst of pain there is promise."

Many believers get stuck in a Stage Two or Three, as I described that in Column 11. Here is what Hagberg and Guelich observe:

"It is easy to mislead people into thinking that they can move themselves to the next stage by just doing the things listed, talking to the right people, or setting their mind to it. Nothing could be further from the truth. The journey of faith is our personal journey, and movement on the journey is the place of mystery, holy ground."

They observe what I personally have observed. Moving on requires the help of others. We can glibly say Read the Word. But we need others beyond the preacher to interpret and reflect its practical meaning personally. In Luther's Large Catechism explanation of the third article of the creed (I believe in the Holy Spirit), he notes that the next phrase is "the communion of saints." He writes, "Until the last day the Holy Spirit remains with the holy community of Christian people. Through it (the community) he gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word. By it he creates and increases sanctification, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and in the fruits of the Spirit."

In the Smalcald Articles, which he personally wrote, Luther describes how the Gospel is communicated through the means of grace. He lists the fifth as "through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren."

It is critical to avoid leaving the impression that believers at earlier stages are somehow inferior. They are simply not enjoying all the benefits available to believers. Moving on happens at the initiative of the Holy Spirit. What all can do is pray Come, Holy Spirit, Come! We can all sing Luther's hymn "Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord, Be all your graces now outpoured, On each believer's mind and heart; Your fervent love to them impart."

I found it interesting to discover that my hero, Danish existentialist philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, mused about the stages of life. He famously described "the leap of faith," based on Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac at God's command, as irrational as God's action seemed. That must have been a Wall experience for him. Have you encountered a significant Wall in your life?

The Rev. David Luecke, Ph.D.

OUR PARTNERS IN AFRICA NEED OUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The financial needs of our partners in Africa are great. Uganda and Rwanda are two of the 20 poorest countries in the world. Below is a wish list of current financial needs. Would you or your congregation be willing to help?

Lutheran Church of Uganda

\$100 will pay the salary of a nurse at the Niagobya Medical Clinic for one month.

\$200 will buy a three-month supply of drugs at the clinic.

\$2,500 will pay for a student to attend the Lutheran seminary for a year.

\$2,700 will purchase land for the Lutheran congregation on Serere, so they can build a church.

Funds are needed to buy uniforms, lunch and Bibles for school children.

Funds are needed to support the Lutheran Lay Leaders Training program.

Anglican Diocese of Northwest Ankole, Uganda

\$90 per year will pay for school fees, scholastic materials, a uniform and school bag for a child in a rural primary school.

\$211 per year will pay for school fees, scholastic materials, a uniform and a school bag for a student in a rural secondary school.

Funds also are needed to support the youth ministry of the diocese.

Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda

Funds are needed to purchase Kinyarwanda language Bibles for new believers, so they can read the Word of God in their own language. \$70 will pay for 10 Bibles.

Funds also are needed to train deacons and deaconesses, to purchase land and build churches.

One hundred percent of any donations to Lutheran Lay Renewal will go to the need designated by the donor or, if you prefer to work directly with a church in Africa, contact our office and we will put you in touch with church leaders there.

LUTHERAN LAY RENEWAL ON THE RADIO

Recently our Executive Director was interviewed twice by WORD-FM 101.5, Pittsburgh, to discuss what our ministry has been doing here in the U.S. and in Africa. The 25-minute interviews were broadcast on a show called Bizburgh. If you're interested in listening, links to the programs are posted below.

First program: <https://omny.fm/shows/biz-burgh/biz-burgh-lutheran-lay-renewal-2>

Second program: <https://omny.fm/shows/biz-burgh/lutheran-lay-renewal>

SOME REFLECTIONS FOR LENT

“He was baptized as man – but he remitted sins as God. ... He was tempted as man but he conquered as God. ... He hungered – but he fed thousands. ... He was wearied, but he is the rest of them that are wearied and heavy-laden. ... He prays, but he hears prayer. He weeps, but he causes tears to cease. He asks where Lazarus was laid, for he was man; but he raises Lazarus, for he was God. He is sold, and very cheap, for it is only for thirty pieces of silver; but he redeems the world, and that at a great price, for the price was his own blood. ... As a sheep he is led to the slaughter, but he is the shepherd of Israel, and now of the whole world also. As a lamb he is silent, yet he is the Word, and is proclaimed by the voice of one crying in the wilderness. He is bruised and wounded, but he heals every disease and every infirmity. ... He dies, but gives life, and by his death destroys death.” – Gregory of Nazianzus, A.D. 329-390, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the dual nature of Christ’s person and actions

“[Pascal] was the first and perhaps is still the most effective voice to be raised in warning of the consequences of the enthronement of the human ego in contradistinction to the cross, symbolizing the ego's immolation. How beautiful it all seemed at the time of the Enlightenment, that man triumphant would bring to pass that earthly paradise whose groves of academe would ensure the realization forever of peace, plenty, and beatitude in practice. But what a nightmare of wars, famines, and folly was to result therefrom.” - Malcolm Muggeridge, The End of Christendom

The soundest and safest Christian reflection consists in “...what you have received, not what you have thought up; a matter not of ingenuity, but of doctrine; not of private acquisition, but of public tradition; a matter brought to you, not put forth by you, in which you must be not the author but the guardian, not the founder but the sharer, not the leader but the follower.” – Vincent of Lerins, died A.D. 445

SCHEDULED EVENTS

March 22 Ten Stops on the Road to Spiritual Transformation
Zion Lutheran Church
Chicora, PA
The Rev. Karl Schoch, Pastor
Bill Oehlschlager, Retreat Leader

“Like” us on Facebook - Lutheran Lay Renewal of America
We post all of our upcoming events on our Facebook page.

PRAYER REQUESTS

- Healing for Elaine Schomaker, Julie, Lou McKibben, 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!

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