



# *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 51 years!*

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**November, A.D. 2022**

## RETREAT AT MID-MON VALLEY LUTHERAN PARISH, WEST NEWTON, PA

“I didn’t know what to expect for a half day Spiritual Transformation Retreat on November 5, 2022. Since it was the ministry of Lutheran Lay Renewal of America, I figured it had something to do with renewal. The other thing that caught my eye was the first sentence of the publicity blurb: “Lay people expect the ordained clergy to live spiritual lives but do they realize the importance of a deep spirituality in their own lives.” I figured, therefore, that the half day retreat would be about a deeper and fuller discipline of Bible reading, meditation, and prayer, and how the laity needs to avail themselves in a deeper and disciplined way to these things.

Was I in for a surprise. No, our leader said, he was not going to present anything on what I call the staples of Christian piety. Rather, he presented a set of what I call building blocks for spiritual transformation and renewal. Of course, I was aware of a number of these “building blocks” individually, but not as part of a comprehensive whole.

For instance, the first building block is that God works through our weakness. Alright, St. Paul had something to say about this.

The second building block is humility. Since I came from a dysfunctional family, I spent much time over six decades coming to terms with what made me tick. My healing with the help of a number of counselors helped me secure necessary self-knowledge.

The third building block is trust and obedience. If we trust Jesus as our Savior for the forgiveness of our sins, is he also our Lord? If he is our Lord then he calls us to obedience.

The fourth building block is a sense of calling. It is not just the clergy who have a calling from the Lord, but each Christian does in the venue in which he or she lives.

The fifth building block is to have a forgiving heart. This one can be difficult, especially if one has experienced abuse of one kind or another from others, especially from one’s family. Forgiving from the heart is absolutely necessary.

The sixth building block is solitude. One needs to intentionally seek a quiet time and place to commune with the Lord, free of the many distractions our world has.

The seventh building block is gratitude.

Now I've given a bare bones outline of the first part of the retreat that was most meaningful and helpful for me. You will need to experience the retreat in order to have it impact you. Also, I take it that all of these building blocks need to be taken together as a package. One cannot pick and choose as one does at a salad bar. If you will, these building blocks are constitutive for a fuller, deeper spiritual life. In light of these seven building blocks, Bible reading, meditation, and prayer take on take new relevance for how we relate to our Savior and Lord."

- Pastor Frank L. Zeman, Mid-Mon Valley Lutheran Parish

"Thank you for leading our retreat last Saturday. Those I spoke with afterwards felt it was interesting and inspiring." – Roberta Blair

"Enjoyed the presentation very much. I think it would be helpful to continue these discussions too. Thanks for your insights" - Dee Taylor



Attendees of the retreat at Christ Lutheran Church, West Newton, PA

## **LUTHERAN CHURCH OF UGANDA PARTNERS CONFERENCE**

Leaders of the Lutheran Church of Uganda met with the LCU's U.S. partners September 21-23 at Concordia Lutheran Church in Kirkwood, Missouri. Since Lutheran Lay Renewal is a partner of the LCU, our Executive Director was there to represent us. Because of the world wide COVID-19 pandemic, it has been three years since we have been able to meet.

The U.S. partners were briefed on the LCU's annual report by Presiding Bishop Charles Bameka and were also given reports on education, urban ministry and the LCU's strategic development plan. There are 156 congregations and 6 preaching stations in the LCU, being served by 33 pastors (and many vicars), as well as 33 primary schools, 2 secondary schools, 8 vocational training centers, 8 mission training centers and a theological college/seminary. Currently 36 students are studying at the seminary. Of course, there also was lots of time in the conference schedule for worship and fellowship.

Lutheran Lay Renewal has been providing financial support for the LCU for 4 years. If you or your congregation are interested in any of these reports or partnering with the LCU, please contact our office for more information.



**(L to R) LCU Presiding Bishop Charles Bameka, LLRA Executive Director Bill Oehlschlager; Fred Magezi, LCU Head of Laity; Rev. James Odo, National Synod Board of Trustees and Rev. Raymond Kaija, Dean of the Mid-Western Deanery**

### **RENEWAL WEEKEND AT GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH, ISHONGORORO, UGANDA**

“Grace and peace to you all in Jesus' name! I would like to introduce our weekend renewal at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church as successful and good; to the board of directors, Lutheran Lay Renewal, and all our beloved brothers and sisters engaged. Our renewal weekend was held from 30th September to 02nd October.

With God's blessings and guidance and all your prayers, I was able to conduct that renewal with the congregants, who were impressed to hold such program and learnt more concerning spiritual understanding of God's way. More so, they learnt how to live a godly life, in terms of renewing their life before God and how it looks like to our neighbors.” – Vicar Nicholus Ayebazibwe



**Vicar Nicholus Ayebazibwe with some of the congregation of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Ishongororo**

## RENEWAL WEEKEND AT PRINCE OF PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH, MIYOORA

“I was also able to conduct a renewal weekend at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Miyoora village, Kamwengye District. I traveled with Rev. Earnest Ndungutse, area pastor for this congregation and he's parish leader for Prince of Peace Parish. Not only did I love being with him but also together with the Youth Coordinator Peter Barande. We opened up our renewal on 21st-23rd October.

Firstly, the congregants were impressed by this program that introduced and compiled all their life to be committed to God, serving Him and showing love to all as Christ taught. They got to understand being united with one another as one body of Christ, prayerful and committed to be a gospel outreach church to reach many around.”

Some comments from the congregation:

“I expected to learn about God, His love as we're being renewed while following Jesus' recipe.”

“This program has helped me to love others, neglect jealousy, be in unity as we become one person (united). As of now, we're going to inform others to do likewise as being one body of Christ. I will also try to share with my husband about how renewal looks in our families as a couple and our children, to continue in the body of Christ.”

“As the Youth Coordinator taught the youth, they were impressed that it has helped them in getting their life renewed through the Word of God and precious blood of our Savior Jesus Christ, and they will continue serving God. They learnt perseverance, loving one another, being exemplary (as they follow Christ's recipe) as well as knowing God being above all.

I pray that all goes well for everyone as we continue to serve God, being witnesses. May the peace of God, that surpasses the understanding of humankind, keep your body, spirit and soul until He comes, Amen.” – Vicar Nicholus Ayebazibwe



**Congregation of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Miyoora**

*“I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess.” - Martin Luther*

## **CALLING TO A CULTURE OR TO A RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST?**

Martin Luther divided the work of the Holy Spirit into the four functions of calling, gathering, enlightening and sanctifying followers of Christ. These next reflections address ministries of calling.

A calling to follow Christ seemed so simple at first. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the expected Lamb of God. Two of John's disciples turned to Jesus, who asked what they wanted. To see where you are staying, they replied, curious about what differences he makes in life. Jesus challenged them to come and see. Andrew, Peter, then Phillip, and Nathanael responded. Thus began the momentum for calling others to follow Christ.

After Pentecost, the momentum of call and response brought moderate growth for the first three hundred years of the spread of Christianity. Then Emperor Constantine recognized Christianity as the preferred religion of the Roman Empire, and growth was explosive. Now there were social advantages to being a Christian. Calling became easier.

For most of Christian church history, there remained social advantages to being a follower of Christ. Such were the pressures in the Reformation churches. The ministry of calling stayed simple. Christianity was something you were born into. Almost all lived in villages and small towns, so there were social pressures to conform. Among Christian immigrants to America, the ministry of calling remained simplified. Previous immigrants met the new ones and gathered them into church communities that shared the same language. The social pressures to conform were strong.

### **Calling into a Culture**

In my home neighborhood in Cleveland, the story is told of how in the 1880s the pastor from the new Immanuel Lutheran and the priest of the new St. Michael Catholic would join together and knock on doors along newly developed streets, one on each side. They asked whether each family was Lutheran or Catholic. At the end of the street, they swapped names. The challenge then was for each to gather those families into the appropriate flock. Calling ministries could not get much simpler.

What made the process so easy is that these mostly German immigrants self-identified with their home culture, which typically was either Catholic or Lutheran. The attraction was to rebuild the community they left behind. For many, central to that old community was the church. But the church they and their leaders had in mind was mostly the culture of values and behaviors they associated with the church. A culture is the set of beliefs, values, and behaviors a community passes on to a new generation. In traditional German church culture, the beliefs were left to the pastor to define and explain. Members were taught the Catechism, which mostly passes on head knowledge without much provision for heart conviction.

### **Called Into a Personal Relationship with Christ**

Church bodies that had their roots in European cultures never had to develop strong ministries of calling others to follow Christ. We could rely on cultural pressures, which are now disappearing among young adults who are several generations removed from their grandparents' immigrant roots. We traditional churches now face the more difficult task of calling people not into a church culture but into a personal relationship with Christ.

There are several problems with church lived out as a social culture. Basic is that this does not square well with the New Testament understanding of the church called together by the work of the Holy Spirit. The second, more practical difficulty is what happens when that culture does not transfer to succeeding generations. Then you are left with congregations of mostly older members that have diminished ability to attract and hold young families.

The issue is, which is more basic to being a Christ follower? Is it the distinct traditions of values and behaviors of a church culture? Or are the personal convictions of those called together to be a church more fundamental? Reaching out to those already in the tradition is easier. The job is much more demanding to call people into a relationship with Christ. That's Holy Spirit work. Thus, our human effort is done better when we recognize the Spirit's ways and let his movement shape our ministries.

### **The Perils of Cultural Superiority**

Lutheran church culture presents a special problem for ministering within the American culture. We come with an air of superiority. That's a common trait among Germans. It shows itself in an unwillingness to learn from the ministries of other churches or in a smug tendency to run down any ministries that other churches are doing. We do so to our loss.

My consistent message over several decades is to visit churches that show evidence of effective ministry today. Check them out. See what you can learn. Some pastors have done so. Most have resisted. For them, if something does not carry the label Lutheran, it does not merit discussion.

Formative for me was the seven years I spent as vice president and faculty member at Fuller Seminary, often considered the flagship of Evangelical seminaries. I learned a lot and absorbed a taste for the pastoral ministry I had not had before. One learning is that conservative Evangelicals find it hard to work with conservative Lutherans, who in their Germanic way want to take over and control whatever the project is. During those years, mission-minded Lutherans expressed interest in what I was learning in that community, which I addressed in the book *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance*. But church officials marginalized what they regarded as insufficiently and indistinctively Lutheran.

### **Where is the Holy Spirit in Our Ministries of Calling?**

Where was the Holy Spirit in these simplified calling ministries of Lutherans? We confess that he was somewhere and somehow in the background, but we had little need to pin down just where and how. Other branches of American Protestantism did develop maps. Revivalists featured human decision as the key component and expected the Spirit to move through the pressure of an altar call to bring the desired results. Pentecostals featured human emotions and relied on highly emotional experiences through which the Spirit was supposed to work. But neither approach does justice to the key Reformation emphasis on God's grace rather than human effort as the basis for our relationship with God.

The Apostle Paul remains the key guide. As central as grace is to his theology, the Holy Spirit is even more central. At least by the numbers, he referred to the Spirit twice as often as he did to grace. For him, the Holy Spirit was basic to any ministry he was doing. This Spirit influences the human spirit and changes hearts. Look for him where motivations are changing.

Spirit-inspired church life is different from what happens in social organizations. For several decades after World War II the Red Cross and fraternal associations were taken as a model for many Protestant churches trying to improve their ministries. But the results were disappointing because those methods depend on just human energy. The challenge for mainline traditional congregations is to learn how to unleash Spirit energy.

Martin Luther was an avid disciple of Paul. We can rediscover Lutheran strengths by developing Pauline ministries that are both grace-focused and Spirit-shaped. – Rev. David Luecke, Ph.D., *Pastor Luecke is a member of our Board of Directors*

**Does the distinction between calling to a culture or to a relationship make sense to you? What happens when a church culture starts to fade away? Do you feel some church cultures have a superiority complex?**

## OUR PARTNERS IN AFRICA NEED OUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The financial needs of our partners in Africa are great, as 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 medicines at the clinic.

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

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

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

\$1,500 will buy a motorcycle for a pastor or vicar. At least three motorcycles are needed. Pastors and vicars serving rural congregations must walk long distances every week to visit parishioners and still are not able to reach all of them.

### **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 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 growing youth ministry of the diocese. Thanks to donations from some of our Anglican friends, we have been able to provide \$3,000 of support to the diocese this year.

### **Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda**

This year our highest priorities for funding for the Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda have been the purchase of Kinyarwanda language Bibles and funds for the Lay Leaders Training Program. Pastor Jean Claude Maniragaba, President of the RLCR, writes that 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.

The Lay Leaders Training Program is training men, women and youth in Biblical studies, and to be leaders in their congregations. The RLCR also is training Lutheran adults to be deacons and deaconesses. Thanks to generous donations, we have been able to provide funds to help with both of these needs but more funds are needed.

Pastor Jean Claude also is requesting funds to purchase land and to build church buildings. "Our RLCR needs to build the Church building for the Congregation of Rwempasha and the Congregation of Ntoma. And the church does not have funds to do this hard work. And the believers of these congregations are poor. We need God's grace."

*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, please contact our office and we will put you in touch with church leaders there.*

### **SCHEDULED EVENTS**

*Please keep these events in your prayers, for all who are making preparations, for good attendance, for God's blessings on all who attend and his protection over everyone involved.*

December 5

Sharing Your Faith Workshop  
Annapolis Evangelical Lutheran  
Annapolis, MD  
Rev. Mark Metze, Pastor

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

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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 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!***

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*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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**A memory from 2019 – our Executive Director with the congregation of Naigobya Lutheran Church, Uganda**