

The Voice of Renewal

The Newsletter of Lutheran Lay Renewal of America



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE / DICK BROWN

For the past year I have been calling out to all who have been a part of our ministry for many years as well as those who are relatively new. Many of you have responded to this call by agreeing to financially support LLRA; to serve on Renewal teams; and to continue to pray that God's will be done.

We are able to begin 2012 with a spirit of optimism for what the future holds. We are able to retain the services of our Outreach Director. The Board was able to pass a "lean budget," but one that is balanced and will be able to carry us forward. We had a larger "carry-over" balance than seen in many recent years. Churches and pastors are welcoming us as Bill Oehlschlager is being asked to make numerous presentations regarding our ministry. We have an article in the January issue of CORE Connection, the newsletter of Lutheran CORE. The article can be found online at www.lutherancore.org. To date we have Renewal weekends scheduled at St. Paul in Bolivar, Ohio the last weekend in April and at First Evangelical Lutheran in New Kensington, PA the weekend of November 9-11. Every week or so I have an inquiry from a pastor about our ministry as the result of our website and their interest in bringing "renewal" to the congregations they serve. I also receive gifts of financial support almost weekly with a note saying things like "God bless the work you people do – you are a blessing to many."

God is touching the hearts of many and I feel blessed to serve as your President.

Everything is not all "peaches and cream." The Board will be faced with some challenges and also the need to make a number of changes in our policies and procedures. During the next two years new leaders will have to emerge as terms of office expire and some of us "retire." We are anticipating the need for many team members and new coordinators as the call for Renewal weekends increases.

I sincerely believe that the Lord wants us to survive and grow, and that people truly believe in the power of the Holy Spirit through this ministry. I continue to pray daily that more people will listen to God's call for them to step forward to help us realize our dream and His will for the future of LLRA.

**FROM THE OUTREACH DIRECTOR**

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” - Romans 12:2

Researcher George Barna came out with a new book in 2011 entitled *Maximum Faith: Live Like Jesus*. Looking at transformation as the process that enables us to gradually die to sin, self and society in order to fully and profoundly love God and people, Barna explained that Jesus Himself defined the destination of the journey when He taught His followers that the most important exhortations from God were to love God and people with all of their heart, mind, strength, and soul (Mark 12:30-31). Of course, we cannot do this on our own, we must first be transformed to a holy life by fully submitting to God and consistently pursuing His will.

Knowing the purpose of the journey is critical. “You’re not likely to experience full transformation if you don’t know what it is and are not devoted to its pursuit,” Barna cautioned. “Most Christians mirror cultural goals, desiring happiness, comfort, security, belonging, and popularity. Surprisingly few are focused on completely cooperating with God to experience the kind of whole-life transformation described in the Bible and made possible only through a partnership with God. The lack of understanding of the goals of a truly Christian life prevents people from making the extraordinary life transitions that are possible.”

In his research for this book Barna found that most people who consider themselves to be Christian, regardless of their level of spiritual maturity, are entangled in more of a circular journey than a consistently progressive route. By a circular journey I mean one that keeps coming back to the same place, rather than continuing to grow deeper in faith and closer to God. While the journey orchestrated by God is not always strictly linear, it has discernible destination points along the way, and a clearly identifiable end point that followers of Christ may partner with the Holy Spirit to reach before they die.

“While God-driven transformation is more common among people who are engaged in church life than among those who are not, neither the length of time involved with churches nor the amount of hours devoted to church-oriented activities bears much of a correlation to transformational progress. Barna stated, “you can be the Church Lady and yet be no farther along the journey than Richard Dawkins. Simply attending church activities and classes does not guarantee or necessarily enhance one’s transformational experience. Wholeness requires more than simply showing up and gorging on the religious-activities menu.” The study found that some people reach the ultimate stages of wholeness and maturity within just a couple of decades while others failed to achieve such maturity after more than five decades of consistent religious activity and positive intent.”

“The transformation journey has ten stops en route to wholeness and freedom. Most Americans, according to the research, never get beyond stop three (awareness and concern about sin and its effects, but not cooperating with Christ to alleviate that problem). Among those who become “born again Christians,” most never move past stop five (i.e., having invited Christ to be their savior and then engaging in a lot of religious activity). In other words, a majority of the American public never reaches the second half of the stops on the journey to wholeness. Barna also determined that most church programs are designed to help people get to stop five of the journey but not to move farther down the road to Christ-likeness.”



“Barna indicated that in order to move closer to completion of the journey, a person must be broken of three things: sin, self, and society. He noted that America’s culture serves as a strong barrier to people being willing to completely abandon themselves and the world in favor of listening to, obeying and enjoying God. Armed with numerous insights from the research, Barna mentioned a few of the statistics included in the book that place some of these perspectives in context. For instance, while more than two-thirds of Americans say they are either “religious” or “spiritual,” they admit to not being deeply committed to faith matters.” Furthermore:

Only 18% claim to be “totally committed” to engaging in personal spiritual development.

Among adults who claim to be Christian, only 14% say that their faith in and relationship with God is the highest priority in their life.

While four out of five adults say they are Christian, only 20% contend that the single, most important decision they have ever made was to invite Jesus Christ to forgive them and become their savior.

Driven by social mores, few adults who believe they are Christian are willing to abandon worldly objectives in favor of seeking godliness. Only 22% stated that they live in a way which makes them completely dependent upon God – and follow up research, according to Barna, indicates that such dependence emerges only in times of crisis or suffering.

The *Maximum Faith* research not only described the ten stops on the transformation journey, but also the percentage of adults parked at each stop. Less than two percent of the public has reached either of the final two stops on the journey according to the research.

“Barna noted that transformed individuals are those who have aligned their intellect, emotions, behavior, and spirit with the call and ways of God. In other words, genuine, Christ-driven transformation is four-dimensional. Noting that most adults interact with the world primarily through one of those four dimensions, the reluctance or failure to allow God to master them in the other three dimensions often retards faster development and greater spiritual depth. The research also showed that people are transformed through a combination of experiences, knowledge, and relationships. The absence of any one of those components can also inhibit a person’s growth.”

For those of us who are pastors or lay leaders this is important information to know. How does what we do and what we have learned at Lutheran Lay Renewal relate to what George Barna has learned? First, we at LLRA already knew that attending church and being involved in church related activities does not necessarily lead to major spiritual growth and development. That’s why our renewal weekends are so needed and important! Second, knowing that Christians are transformed by experiences, knowledge and relationships is a great affirmation of what we do on our renewal weekends. A lot of what we do is community building, helping to build deeper, more spiritual relationships among church members. An LLR weekend also gives a church a common experience of God’s love, joy and peace, and people come away with the knowledge that God is working in wonderful ways in the lives of their fellow Christians. In addition, when people hear personal testimonies they realize that Christianity is not only a historic religion based on historic facts but also a personal relationship with a living Savior. Sounds to me as if a lot more churches should be utilizing our ministry!

Bill Oehlschlager, Outreach Director





PRAYERS NEEDED

Please pray for our country and its leaders. Pray for those seeking high office to set high standards for themselves and for those they desire to lead. Open the eyes and hearts of all to discern the wisdom set forth by our forefathers so that we may once again return to our roots enabling all to live in freedom, peace, and the pursuit of happiness.

Continued prayers for Bill and Virginia Gorham. Bill continues to make good progress in dealing with his health issues and Virginia is right by his side.

Continued prayers for Bev Brown as she deals with her health issues and rehabilitation after being in the hospital and rehabilitation center twice since last November.

We ask your prayers for Del Metcalf, Dale Nolen, and Frances Emmons who all lost their spouses last year. Help them in their grief knowing that the Lord wanted them by His side.

Prayers for Doris Thompson in Spanaway, Washington who just got out of the hospital after falling down her outside front steps and breaking several bones in her hands and wrists. Prayer for continued healing.

Pray for Joanne Oehlschlager and her mother Dottie Bevil. Dottie is in the last months of her earthly life. Help them to deal with this final journey until the Lord calls her home.

Pray for all our men and women in our armed forces as they fight for our continued freedom and against aggression by those who would like to harm us.

Pray for the LLRA ministry that the Lord will open doors for us to minister to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Continued prayers of thanksgiving and blessing for our Outreach Director, Bill Oehlschlager, as he continues his work in this Christian ministry.

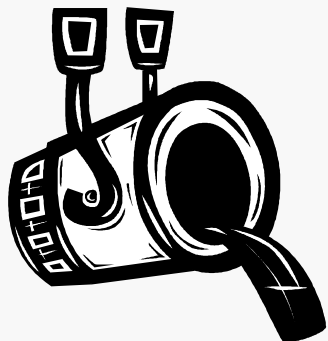


THE WORDS "PRAY FOR ME" signal a person in need. And when someone is in need — because of illness, a broken relationship, loss of work, a spiritual crisis, or grief, it is as if he or she is carrying a heavy bucket — a bucket filled with emotion, filled with grief, filled with confusion, filled with disappointment. ...

A person in need or in grief is carrying around this bucket of emotion. An *intercessor* is one who comes alongside that individual with an empty bucket. The person in need gives his or her agenda to the intercessor, and the intercessor receives that agenda as the work of God, namely prayer. Intercession is carried out by those with enough space in their lives to include the needs of others: family, friends, congregations, communities, and the world.



Trusting the Refiner



This anonymous reflection reminds us that, as we pass through the trials and fires of life, we must have faith that God is in charge and that he knows what he is doing.

He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.

Malachi 3:3

A group of women were deep into a study of the book of Malachi. While studying chapter three, they were struck by this phrase at the beginning of verse three: *"He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver . . ."*

Puzzled as to what this statement meant with regard to the character and nature of God, one of the women offered to find out more about the process of refining silver and report back to the group at the next meeting. That week, the woman called a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him at work. She didn't mention the reason for her interest, except to say that she was curious about the process of refining silver. As the woman watched the silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up.

He explained, "In refining silver, one needs to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames are hottest. This helps to burn away all the impurities."

The woman thought about how God sometimes holds each of us in such hot spots, and she thought again about the verse that had inspired her visit: *"He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver . . ."*

She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined.

The man answered, "Yes, I not only have to sit here holding the silver, but I must keep my eyes on it the entire time it is in the fire. If the silver is left even a second too long in the flames, it will be destroyed."

The woman was silent for moment. Then she asked, "How do you know when the silver is fully refined?"

He smiled at her and answered, "Oh, that's the easy part--when I see my image reflected in it."

If today you are feeling the heat of the fire, remember that God has His eye on you and will keep His hand on you and watch over you until He sees His image reflected in you. Rejoice that the great Refiner loves you enough to do this, and trust that He will leave you in the fire no longer than is absolutely necessary.

O Lord, though I do not always understand the reason for the trials in my life, help me to remember that there is a reason, that you have everything under control and are with me, even in the midst of the hottest flames. Use these trials, Lord, to make me more and more like you, so that through my suffering, I will come to reflect you more clearly and that I may, through your grace, show forth more brightly the face of your Son Jesus Christ, in whose holy name I pray. Amen.



What are you missing?

Have you every heard someone say: I have been a Christian for twenty-eight years when what they really mean is that they have been a one year old Christian twenty-eight times? They just kept doing the same things over and over and over again.

As Peter Scazzero, senior pastor of the New Life Fellowship Church in Queens, New York, says you can't be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature. He did what most people do:

Avoid conflict in the name of Christianity
Ignore your anger, sadness, and fear
Use God to run from God
Live without boundaries

He goes on to say that it took him awhile to be awakened to a Biblical integration of emotional health, a relationship with Jesus, and the classic practices of contemplative spirituality. This resulted in a spiritual revolution that transformed him and his church.

In his book "*Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*" he talks about his journey and provides reality-tested ways to break through to the revolutionary life Christ meant for you. One of his church members who had not attended for over five years asked him the following question: "Why is it that so may Christians make such lousy human beings?"

Peter says that we first must diagnose the problem before any pathway is discussed. In chapter two of his book he lists the top ten symptoms of emotionally unhealthy spirituality. They are:

Using God to run from God
Ignoring the emotions of anger, sadness, and fear
Dying to the wrong things
Denying the past's impact on the present
Dividing our lives into "secular" and "sacred" compartments
Doing for God instead of being with God
Spiritualizing away conflict
Covering over brokenness, weakness, and failure
Living without limits
Judging other people's spiritual journey

Each of these is explained in more depth in chapter two of the book if you would like to learn more.

Are we truly missing something? I hope to find out and learn more within the next seven weeks as our church is involved in a church-wide small group study of Peter Scazzero's book. In the next issue of "*The Voice of Renewal*" I will share some of the things I have learned. You may want to get a copy of this book and read it so that we can compare notes and thoughts. It would be great to have people share their insights with others who read our Newsletter. - Dick Brown



Thrivent Choice

We thank those of you who have stepped forward and designated your "Choice Dollars" to go to the support of Lutheran Lay Renewal. Just recently we received a check from Thrivent in the amount of \$1,060.00.

As you know choice dollars is profit money that comes from Thrivent as the result of its investments. Thrivent members have the opportunity to designate their share to a charitable organization of their choosing. All you have to do is call Thrivent at 1-800-847-4836 or go online at Thrivent.com/thriventchoice.

E-MAIL from Pastor Mark Fischer

"Early in the fall of 2011, 8 wonderful faith-filled people came to our congregations of Berea and Saron Lutheran Churches for our Lay Renewal weekend. The entire weekend was one of great blessing to us all. Stories of faith, of hope in the midst of pain, of love for one another and for Christ were shared so freely and wonderfully. This would not have been possible without the living witness and example of the lay renewal folks who came to lead us. Special thanks to Bill Oehlschlager who coordinated with our congregation and headed the team for the weekend. It was such a boost to our lives in Christ! My folks are still talking about it."

*Pastor Mark Fischer
Berea and Saron Lutheran Churches
Youngsville, PA*

In Loving Memory

During 2011 the Lord called three of our active LLRA team member's home. We will miss them greatly and extend our deepest sympathy to their spouses.

In June 2011 Bill Emmons from Savannah, Georgia went home to be with the Lord. He leaves his dear wife, Frances. Bill and Frances served with us several years ago in Panama City, Florida.

In November 2011 Kitty Nolen from Columbus, Ohio was called home. She leaves her dear husband, Dale. Dale and Kitty were originally from Montoursville, Pa until moving to Ohio to be near their son a few years ago. Dale was the local chairperson at our Renewal in Montoursville back in 2000, and Kitty was there by his side to help. That was a great weekend. They have been faithful supporters of this ministry over the years.

In November 2011 our dear sister, Sylvia Metcalf from Beaverton, Oregon, went home to be with the Lord. She leaves her husband, Del. Sylvia attended many of our summer conferences; served on several teams over the years; was instrumental in getting Our Savior's in Lebanon, Oregon, and Christ the King in Tigard, Oregon to schedule renewal weekends. She was a devoted servant and supporter of this ministry. We are going to miss her very much.



WE'RE ON THE WEB!
[http://
www.lutheranrenewal.com/](http://www.lutheranrenewal.com/)

R E M I N D E R

If you would like to receive the Newsletter in electronic form rather than a hard copy please send your updated e-mail address to llra@comcast.net.

Be sure to include your name.

Once we have your e-mail address,
a hard copy will no longer be sent to you.

Sending the LLRA newsletter via the Internet saves us time and money
(and you may want to share the newsletter with friends and family)!

Thank you.



U P C O M I N G W E E K E N D S

April 27-29, 2012
St. Paul Lutheran Church
Bolivar, OH
The Rev. Michael Pozzuto, Pastor
Harold Tyreman, Coordinator

November 9-11, 2012
First Evangelical Lutheran Church
New Kensington, PA
The Rev. Alfred Petrill, Pastor

