

THE VOICE OF RENEWAL

The Newsletter of Lutheran Lay Renewal of America
Serving all Lutheran churches since 1971
MAY, 2018

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OUR ANNUAL SUMMER RENEWAL CONFERENCE WILL BE JUNE 23 AT ST. MARK'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, BUTLER, PA. SEE PAGE TWO FOR DETAILS!

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Our Easter season, in the church year, is nearly over. I remember, as a young girl, wanting to understand the various church festivals and why were they so important and why did we observe them? Now, as an adult, their importance has become very clear to me. We are approaching the day when Christ gave us the eternal promise before he left this earth and ascended to heaven, that his Spirit would always be with us. We were commissioned to love one another and to go out and preach the good news to the world. Christ returned home, in all his Glory, to be with his Father.

In Luke 24:50-51, it is written:

*When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany,
He lifted up his hands and blessed them.
While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken
Up into heaven. (NIV)*

Ascension Day, the 40th Day of Easter, which is the Thursday 39 days after Easter Sunday, will be May 10th. I remember, as a little girl, it was thought you cannot plant anything in the ground on Ascension Day or it would not be a fruitful crop. Possibly, just a superstition, but the reality, hope, promise and importance of the Ascension cannot be denied.

Page through this newsletter and take a look at the articles from two of our Board members, Dave Luecke and Lori Sardiga. Lutheran Lay Renewal of America has the reality of hope for the future of our Christian faith in America. Our Executive Director, Bill Oehlschlager, is very diligent in his outreach efforts to familiarize as many churches as possible about the "good news" of the ministries of LLRA.

Elaine Schomaker, LLRA President



LUTHERAN LAY RENEWAL OF AMERICA
SUMMER RENEWAL CONFERENCE
SATURDAY, JUNE 23, 2018, 8:30 AM TO 4:00 PM
ST. MARK'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, BUTLER, PA

Speakers: The Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin, President, North American Lutheran Seminary, will lead two afternoon sessions: Singing Our Faith and Praying the Psalter

Bill Oehlschlager, Executive Director, Lutheran Lay Renewal of America, will lead two morning sessions: 7 Lessons for Living the Spiritual Life and 10 Stops on the Road to Spiritual Transformation

Join us for a spiritually uplifting and fun day of learning, small group discussion and Christian fellowship! St. Mark's Lutheran Church is located about 30 miles North of Pittsburgh at 201 W. Jefferson St., Butler, PA. Registration fee is \$15.00 and includes breakfast and lunch. Continental breakfast is at 8:30, lunch at 12:30.

Please register in advance but walk-ins will be welcome (space permitting). Register by phone, e-mail or mail:

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

"The team that led the spiritual transformation workshops at Holy Cross was first-class. They knew their material well, demonstrating not only an academic knowledge of the subject, but an experiential acquaintance with the spiritual life in the deep Christian tradition to buttress it. Their passion for Christ, Lutheran grounding in the dynamics of Law and Gospel, and familiarity with the tradition catholic gave their presentations (particularly the question and answer sessions) a profundity often lacking in the slickly produced offerings of ministries promoted by major publishing houses. I would highly recommend them as an integrated part of your congregation's catechetical and Christian formation ministries." - Rev. Brett Jenkins, STS, Pastor, Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church, Nazareth, PA

A Pure, Free, Cheerful, Glad and Loving Heart

“When the Spirit comes, he makes a pure, free, cheerful, glad and loving heart—a conscience made righteous by grace, seeking no reward, fearing no punishment, doing everything with joy.”

These are the words of Martin Luther in a sermon he preached in 1521. The Spirit was very much in the center of his thinking in those early years of the Reformation. He was not a systematic theologian. But what he presents in this off-hand illustration happens to fit the stages of faith in developmental psychology.

Luther describes three kinds of conscience. A churchyard conscience concentrates on getting the external rules of church life right. A nave (pew section) conscience characterizes those who are living faithfully but out of guilt with no joy. Progressing forward, those who are living with a heart changed by the Spirit have a chancel-conscience. “Conscience” in classical theology describes what I call motivation.

Stage Two in developmental psychology represents focusing on fairness and learning the rules. Stage Three is belief in and living according to what the church teaches—passive faith. Stage Four is Convicted Life in God. Luther’s chancel faith is what I would call the fifth stage of Living Closer to God. A reasonable goal in ministry is to help believers live Closer to God. This stage is what the Apostle Paul described when he urged the Thessalonians to “be joyful always; pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances.”

All five stages represent a Christian faith that brings eternal life. The first stage is that of a toddler who thinks in literal terms and cannot distinguish a heavenly Father from earthly fathers. Jesus taught that unless you have the faith of a child you cannot enter the kingdom of God. Paul taught that all who call on the name of Jesus Christ will have eternal life. We can add, whatever stage of faith they are in.

For most believers over the centuries of the Christian era, living in this world was to have lots of pain and insecurity. Just think, Luther and Calvin didn’t even have aspirin. Seeking better life in the *next* world was a very strong motivator. In contrast, current life in America is very comfortable for most. Current motivators have to do with finding a better life in *this* world—daily living with more meaning and more love, joy and peace now.

Daily living is where the Third Person of the Trinity operates. The Second, Jesus Christ, ascended into heaven where he sits at the right hand of the First Person, God the Father, to return only at the final judgment. The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to be their advocates to unbelievers but especially to those who say Jesus is Lord, as Paul writes. Using the image of the dove at Jesus’ baptism, I think of the Spirit sitting as a dove on my shoulder whispering godly thoughts as my day goes along. It is the Spirit who stimulates our faith to grow.

Our challenge as traditional Christians in the 21st century is to present the Good News as it applies to living daily life *now*, not just in the *next* world. The Gospel of eternal salvation in Jesus Christ by grace remains basic. The second part of the Good News is what Paul calls “spiritual gifts,” flowing from the grace gift of the Spirit that God sends to work in our hearts now. Life in the Spirit amounts to an additional Gospel.

The biblical word for “save” can also be translated “heal.” The ultimate healing is in heaven. But healing in the kingdom of God starts now, especially spiritual healing of the unfulfilling life so many have who are far from God.

Are you willing to advocate the additional Gospel appropriate for those in the 21st century living far from God?

By the Rev. David Luecke, Ph.D.
(Pastor Luecke is a member of our Board of Directors)

National Day of Prayer, May 3, 2018 - UNITY
A Prayer for the Churches/Pastors

I hope you had the opportunity to attend a National Day of Prayer Event. This observance began under President Regan, who signed it into law on May 5, 1988, designating the first Thursday in May as National Day of Prayer. This year's theme was Unity. Usually the event, sponsored by my church, is held on the city green. But typical of spring in Cleveland - it poured - so we moved indoors. At least it didn't snow! Volunteers prayed for each of the seven centers of influence: Government, Military, Media Arts, Business, Education, Church and Family. I had the privilege of praying for the church and pastors. The following is the prayer I offered. Please feel free to use it in your community. Although the official day has passed, it is never too late to pray for our church. God Bless America.

Lori Sardiga VP LLRA

Heavenly Father,

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in **unity**! (Ps. 133:1) Here in [*insert your city's name*], we are a city with many churches with various styles of worship but **all** are **united** through the blood of Christ. Col. 1:18 states, "Christ is also the head of the church which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over **all** who rise from the dead. So, **he** is first in everything." All praise we give to you, Lord. It is your plan, Father, that **all** who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children (Eph. 3:6). We are one *united* church under the authority of Jesus, to whom we submit. So today, we pray for our churches and ask your blessings upon them, Lord. Fill them with Spirit and truth. May your Word flourish in them. Preserve our churches as holy places of worship, dedicated only to you, God the Father, and to your son, Jesus and to the Holy Spirit. We also pray, Father, that our churches be places of refuge, healing and help for the lost. For broken people come in all races, ages, denominations, and economic status. Show us how to welcome **all** in the name of Christ. And we pray for those who find their way through the church doors, that their hearts be softened and their minds be opened to Jesus and the life He has to offer. Guide our congregations in brotherly love to help those in need to provide food, clothing and helping hands. We thank you, Lord, for the privilege to be those hands and feet of Christ to the community. The words Paul spoke to the Romans apply to us today, "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with **one mind** and **one voice** you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ro. 15: 5-6)

And Lord, we pray for revival. That our churches be filled with people who hunger for Jesus. We pray too for your protection as Satan is always looking to destroy either from the outside or from within. So please keep dissension out of our churches. And prevent violence from coming in. Lord, this should not be. Your house is a place of prayer and worship. Consequently, we ask for healing of those who have been affected by such violence and please change the hearts of those who seek to senselessly harm others.

And Father, we lift up the men and women who lead our churches - the shepherds of our congregations. May their preaching be full of wisdom and truth to reveal the hope found only in Christ. Fill them with your Spirit. May they be an example of love and compassion to those they serve. Lord, keep our pastors healthy in mind, body and spirit. Give them times of refreshing. Renew them daily through the Holy Spirit and lead them in righteousness. Strengthen them to resist temptation and pride. Sustain their families and marriages. Also, Lord, provide a support system of other believers to come along side our clergy to encourage and assist them in the ministry.

We thank you too, Lord, for the church workers - secretarial staff, janitors, choir directors, singers, musicians, study group leaders, youth directors, teachers and the many other workers that support and daily make our churches run smoothly. Bless them to be a blessing. Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayers.

To the Only Wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ. Amen! - Ro. 16:27

Church Convocations and Assemblies

Lutheran Lay Renewal will have a display table at some Lutheran convocations and assemblies during the summer. Some church gatherings feature workshops on a variety of topics and our one hour Sharing Your Faith workshop is suitable and has been featured at some of these events. If you would like to have us at your convocation, assembly or convention to lead a workshop, and/or to have a display table, please notify our national office!

The meaning of history: “If we had to sum up in a single brief sentence what life is all about, why Jesus Christ came into this world to live and die and rise, and what God is up to in the long-drawn-out historical process both BC and AD, it would be difficult to find a more succinct explanation than this: God is making human beings more human by making them more like Christ. For God created us in his own image in the first place, which we then spoiled and skewed by our disobedience. Now he is busy restoring it. And he is doing it by making us like Christ, since Christ is both perfect man and perfect image of God (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4).” - John R. W. Stott

“A man does not live for himself alone in this mortal body to work for it alone, but he lives also for all men on earth; rather, he lives only for others and not for himself. To this end he brings his body into subjection that he may the more sincerely and freely serve others.” — Martin Luther, *On Christian Liberty*

“As many academics look at the Scriptures they begin with the assumption that miracle passages must be unhistorical, that is, they never happened. Such a belief is not one they learned from the Scriptures, but one they bring to the Scriptures. They are therefore not true students of the Scriptures but students of the culture. Their own cultural bias is superimposed on the Scriptures. This however is not true biblical scholarship. The authority of those who speak in this way count as nothing for they speak only as men, influenced by and uncritical of the culture in which they have grown up.” – C. S. Lewis, *Fernseed and Elephants*

“Jesus Christ is the object of all things, the center towards which all things tend. Whoever knows him knows the reason for everything.” – Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*

“In helping Christians all over the world resolve their problems, we have found only one common denominator: none of them know who they are in Christ, nor do they understand what it means to be a child of God.” – Neil T. Anderson & Charles Mylander, *Extreme Church Makeover*

“Until we see the gospel convince and persuade, we want to change it as if we could improve upon it. We cannot. Society has rejected an unknown. Our responsibility is to make it known.” - Ron McConnell

“...the deeper a soul has fallen into sin, the more it is bound down by the powers of Hell, the greater should be the kindness of the confessor in order to win it to repentance, to snatch it from the devil, and to bring it to the arms of Jesus Christ.” – St. Alphonsus Liguori

SCHEDULED EVENTS

- May 6, 2018 Sharing Your Faith Workshop
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Grove City, PA
The Rev. Sandy Towberman, Interim Pastor
- June 2, 2018 Sharing Your Faith Workshop
Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly
Hyatt Regency Hotel
Sacramento, CA
- June 23 Summer Renewal Conference
St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Butler, PA
The Rev. Al Towberman, Pastor

More events are in the planning stages so check our web site often, where the calendar is always up to date.

“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

- For Kathy Klueg's father, for the Lord's healing & strength
 - For the Lord's healing for Dan and Kathie Klueg
 - For healing for Dick and Bev Brown
 - For the Lord's protection over all police officers and firefighters
 - For the Lord's protection over all men and women in our armed forces
 - For wisdom and guidance for the LLRA Board of Directors, as we seek to grow and expand this 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.

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