

THE VOICE OF RENEWAL

*The Newsletter of Lutheran Lay Renewal of America
Serving all Lutheran churches since 1971*

MAY, 2019

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LLRA'S ANNUAL SUMMER RENEWAL CONFERENCE SATURDAY, JUNE 22, 2019, 8:30 AM TO 4:00 PM ST. LUKE'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, SAXONBURG, PA

Speaker: Bill Oehlschlager, Executive Director, Lutheran Lay Renewal of America, will lead two 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. Luke's Lutheran Church is located about 22 miles North of Pittsburgh at 310 W. Main St., Saxonburg, PA.

Registration fee is \$15.00 and includes breakfast and lunch. Continental breakfast is at 8:30, lunch at 12:00.

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 renewal conference was just what we needed. I highly recommend it to everyone seeking to help people grow in relationship with God and in discovering God's mission for their church. Bill Oehlschlager provided solid biblical/practical application insights and his own personal witness that engaged all of us in seeing God at work in our own lives. The balance between presentation, questions, answers and sharing in the group was especially rich and helpful. For individuals and congregations who want to grow in their spiritual life and in learning to share and witness Christ, Lutheran Lay Renewal is a 'not to miss opportunity.'"

– The Rev. Dr. Alden W. Towberman, Senior Pastor, St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Butler, PA

RENEWAL WEEKEND AT NAIGOBYA LUTHERAN CHURCH, UGANDA, MARCH 11-12

“The Lutheran Lay Renewal Weekend in Naigobya was started on Saturday at 10 am with a devotion led by the congregational head of laity, Patrick Nabangi. He asked the participants to embrace the event as he was convinced it would create change in the congregation.

He also said the LLR Weekend finds the congregation at a time when they require its support as the church had in the past suffered fighting among leaders. He said it was time for renewal among Christians as they would redirect their focus onto being a mission church that reaches others with the Word of God.

The first day members were getting more involved in discussions about their spiritual growth as they serve the Lord in their homes, church and community. As they were guided by Betty Kampi, who participated in the renewal conference at Magamaga in January, the members shared how the Lord uses them to reach out to the communities, they shared challenges. I am happy to report that when the event was going on, the members were able to share what those who participated in the January renewal conference taught them and among these included:

1. Seven lessons of living a spiritual life.
2. Praying for one another
3. Spiritual transformation, etc.

On Sunday at 10 we had a worship service in which I preached. The church after service met and discussed the way forward after the event and the following were resolved:

1. Having an evangelism team that would look for the de-churched and the unchurched, specifically for adults.
2. Evangelism for the youth. This would be conducted by the youth reaching the youths.
3. Visitation teams with the aim of encouraging and praying for people.
4. Setting up of a choir for both youth and adults.

However, their main challenges which they ask we pray for, first is lack of a worship leader/pastor. For they share the seminary student Grace Kalamu with Naikiri Church, who sometimes fails to attend due to lack of transport means. And second is their school, which is struggling due to lack of funds to pay the teachers; it has temporary structures. The school supports most children who are vulnerable, some are orphans, others pay for themselves, some live with their parents who cannot afford to meet school demands. And yet they see this to be the only school where faith is taught to the children in the community.” - The Rev. Peter Maganda, Dean of the Eastern District, Lutheran Church of Uganda



The school at Naigobya Lutheran Church. Funds are desperately needed to pay the teachers.

RENEWAL WEEKEND AT BUZIBIRIRA LUTHERAN CHURCH, UGANDA, MARCH 23-24

“Exciting news from Buzibirira Lutheran Church. It is one of the congregations that sent participants to the Lutheran Lay Renewal Conference at Magamaga in January this year. The participants learned a lot, which they shared with the rest of the congregation. I was impressed when an event for a Lutheran Lay Renewal Weekend was organized March 23-24, in which the members first shared how the program has changed their life in church. The members shared how after the conference they started church programs like evangelism, they started a visitation team and between the conference time and the event in Buzibirira the church had visited 10 homes, something they said was a result of the conference.

It was also reported that the women had started an income generating program of making charcoal, something they learned from their fellow women during the Renewal Conference as they were meeting as women in their group. The members also entered into a discussion concerning how they see God using them to do His work in the community but also in their homes. This was such an excellent topic as each freely discussed and the following were listed:

1. Evangelism in the community
2. Praying for one another, something they said was learned from the conference. For before they were thinking pastors are only the ones to pray.
3. Individuals like the worship leader Fred Waako said he was very much committed to mobilizing and teaching the people the faith.

The youths were also part of the event. In their group they shared how God was using them to support the church, especially through music, dance and drama (choir). With this they were found to be much interested in singing in their local language, which many find to be difficult. The youths were so amazing with the way they looked committed. They shared also how the Lord used them to construct their temporary structure, which they say it's still their responsibility to take care of.

The members also shared the challenges they face individually which needed to be prayed for. In their groups still everyone presented a prayer request for a particular concern and they prayed for each other. It was such a good event for the church as they willingly contributed food and money to organize the LLR Weekend in their church. Day one ended at 6:00 pm and Christians were still invited to have a Divine Service the next day in which members were able to share with the rest who didn't attend.”

- The Rev. Peter Maganda, Dean of the Eastern District, Lutheran Church of Uganda



Rev. Peter Maganda (top right) with members of Buzibirira Lutheran Church

REPORT FROM BUBAGO LUTHERAN CHURCH'S RENEWAL WEEKEND, APRIL 6-7

“Lutheran Lay Renewal Weekend events continue to be organized in LCU Eastern Deanery. Here Bubago Lutheran Church members were closing the event on 7th which had started late the previous day, Saturday 6th April. A lot of encouragement, sharing of challenges and praying for one another took place.

The members who had attended the January LLR Conference taught their friends in church what they had learned. Bubago Lutheran Church is a new church that has lasted for only a year and LLR has found her at a time when all members need to be encouraged to grow strong in faith. The event started late at 2pm, there was much singing and praying for one another and the two who had attended the January conference continued to share experiences they had, especially her first time to meet many Lutheran women who shared with others how they serve the Lord in their communities. It was a short day on the 6th but meaningful to those who attended.

The next day was a worship service which was attended by over two hundred members both children and adults. They could not fit in the structure. Some were seated under coffee plants near the banana leaves-thatched church. There was baptism of 11 children and 4 adults.

Some of the challenges they expressed included:

Lack of a church structure. They asked me to identify sources for funds so that they can roof their temporary structures which can be used for at least ten years.

Lack of support for their poultry project. They have a poultry project which they use to support themselves to earn a living. Their challenge is that they have no chicken house to keep the chickens inside. Instead they keep them on a free-range system. They keep local breeds which take long to mature as well. It was so interesting to hear that they started the poultry project after attending the conference in Magamaga in which the women in their group shared how they support the church.

The members however are very proud of their church because they are taught the Word, and Sacraments are administered without charging them money. They said in their former churches they were forced to pay for the sacrament of baptism for every child, something they said had stayed many back without getting baptized. As Dean I also saw the need for Sunday school materials, as there are many children in church. I therefore appeal to all friends to support the church, to support the poultry project, and Sunday school materials like children's Bibles. God's blessings to you all in the Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.” – The Rev. Peter Maganda, Dean of the Eastern District, Lutheran Church of Uganda



Congregation of Bubago Lutheran Church at their renewal weekend

HOW MOTIVATIONS FOR CHURCH LIFE HAVE CHANGED

Most of the New Testament after the Gospels is written about the church life of the first several generations of Christians. What prompted them to come together? Roman cities offered many hundreds of clubs and mystery cults to join, not unlike American cities today. Easiest to understand are the Jews already used to synagogue life who accepted Jesus as the Messiah and moved on to a Christian house church. They acted on conviction. But Luke tells us there were many non-Jewish God fearers, too. What motivated them?

They probably had the same kind of mixed motives found among church-goers today. Some gathered out of conviction. Others were probably neighbors who liked the fellowship. A few knew they could get a meal. Others sought the protection of the influential leader and enjoyed the status that went with this patronage. We do know in the earliest years that they shared a meal, during which they usually also remembered the Lord's last supper. We know they were expected to help each other out, because Paul scolded the Corinthians for not taking care of the hungry in their midst.

I am offering these descriptions to illustrate motives within the categories of motivational psychology. People are motivated into action by opportunities to satisfy needs they see as basic to a better life. Christian churches in America used to be seen as such a way to a better life. Increasingly they are now being ignored. What changed? Look for a shift in needs that motivate behaviors, especially for newer generations.

The basic categories are needs to satisfy bodily requirements (like food and shelter), and for security, affiliation, status and self-actualization. Needs already satisfied do not motivate much new behavior. Over the centuries Christian churches at one time or another proved effective in satisfying all those kinds of needs. Meeting bodily needs, the first generations pooled their resources to feed widows in their community. Medical missions have been a basic form of outreach in poorly developed countries.

Church life that satisfies the need for security is most evident among immigrants, who seek out opportunities for comfort and security with others of like mind and language. The Apostle Peter addressed his first letter to aliens living in strange lands and encouraged them to find their new home among God's chosen people.

Churches have always served as social centers. For my farm-raised parents, their village churches were the only social center available. In the 1950s migrants from center cities to the suburbs sought out congregations to fill their personal social needs, and new churches blossomed. Millennials today use social media to satisfy that need. Most of them see churches as irrelevant.

The human need to feel different from and superior to others should not be a factor in church life. But it is, and status can be powerful in selecting a church. Early in the 20th century Pentecostals were looked at as low-class "holy rollers." But as they became more middle-class, they toned down their exuberance, and became more accessible. I can recall discussions with Lutherans who congratulated themselves on being different from (and superior to) Baptists.

The fifth need is for self-actualization. What that means is hard to define in business motivation. But it should be clear for churches. We can focus on helping participants grow closer to God. Only churches that appeal to self-actualization needs will do well in the future. Raised on evolutionary theory, many in the newest generations no longer know who they are and why they are here. Their suicide rate is rising. The biblical message has the answer. But it will have to be presented more directly and winsomely in ways that call for a response.

Traditional church culture developed to address basic needs that are no longer compelling for most Americans. To be effective, churches will have to clarify their purpose and work out new and different church cultures.

The Rev. Dave Luecke, Ph.D., LLRA Board Member

FROM THE PRESIDENT

What a glorious Easter rejoicing in the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ! Holy week was very meaningful to me and very humbling. Our church gave a tremendous gift to our congregation and to all who entered our fellowship hall throughout that week. The hall was set up with the Stations of the Cross. Starting the day after Palm Sunday people could come at any time between 12 Noon and 5:00 PM most days, and until 7:30 PM on Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

All had the privilege of walking through the Stations of the Cross, with appropriate soft music, dim lighting, but well-lit when one came to the written words that Christ spoke that fatal day that was to become the day the salvation of all believers rested on the crucified body of our beloved Lord. Throughout this unbelievable walk, there were opportunities to kneel and pray. Near the end of the walk was the "Sinner's Prayer." As I read those words, tears flowed and I felt such movement in my heart, as grace and love just flowed over my whole being.

I share my experience because it was so life-giving continuing the week and receiving the sacrament on Maundy Thursday, then gathering on Good Friday. The Trilogy was complete with the Easter Vigil on Saturday. That service was very moving, but especially the gift of the Vigil where there was time for personal confession, prayer and being anointed. It was an epiphany moment.

The following day, all awoke to the words "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!" What followed was triumphant music from voices, the organ, the piano and multiple instruments, all praising God in song. I write this article, as the LLRA President, and rejoice in the privilege and experience of worshiping in God's house this whole Easter season beginning with Lent.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." – John 3:16 KJV

We continue to have the gift of thought-provoking articles from one of our board members, Pastor Dave Luecke. Please take time to read his article and catch him on his weekly blog.

Our Executive Director, Bill Oehlschlager, continues to make his contacts from the East Coast to the West Coast and plans to return to California in August. Bill has shared and will continue to share reports of the ministry in Uganda, a country that has blossomed with LLR materials.

Thank you to all of you who continue to support LLR, financially and in prayer. Your support is invaluable. Please pray for our nation and the Christians, around the world, who are being persecuted.

Elaine Schomaker, LLRA President

MERCY

A couple times when preaching a sermon, I have asked the question, "What is the one thing you think this world needs more than anything else? Of course, there is no right or wrong answer. Some may think more love, others more tolerance, and others more food, more medicine, more health care, more natural resources or more care for the environment. The possibilities are almost endless. But my own opinion as to what this world needs more than anything else is - more mercy.

Recently I came across an interesting quote on this topic from Alan Jacobs: "When a society rejects the Christian account of who we are, it doesn't become less moralistic but far more so, because it retains an inchoate sense of justice but has no means of offering and receiving forgiveness." Jacobs goes on to say that vindictiveness is the great moral crisis of our time and: "Social media serve as crack for moralists: there's no

high like the high you get from punishing malefactors. But like every addiction, this one suffers from the inexorable law of diminishing returns. The mania for punishment will therefore get worse before it gets better."

Just this week I read a report from the Barna Group that shows that Christians too are susceptible to withholding mercy and forgiveness. Although "Having a Forgiving Heart" has been one of the 7 Lessons for Living the Spiritual Life in LLR's Spiritual Transformation retreat for several years, Barna's latest study added some new insights on this topic and how it is a problem for many Christians:

Reports of Giving Forgiveness Exceed Reports of Receiving Forgiveness

"Though these statistics primarily describe respondents' subjective reports or perceptions of these concepts, they at least offer a glimpse of Christians' experiences with radical forgiveness. So it's encouraging to know that a majority of practicing Christians (76%) believes they have offered unconditional, joyful forgiveness to another person who had hurt, upset or sinned against them (or someone they love). Nearly one in six (15%) says they have never offered this level of forgiveness, and 9 percent admit they are unsure.

Reports of receiving such radical forgiveness, however, are a bit more modest. Just over half of practicing Christians (55%) remembers another person being merciful to them in this way, with another 38 percent who say this has not happened and 7 percent who don't know. This stark disparity suggests the perceptions of giving versus receiving unconditional forgiveness may sometimes vary dramatically—meaning, while someone may feel they have extended unconditional forgiveness, the supposed recipient of that forgiveness may not feel the same way. Further, not all Christians find themselves ready or capable of accepting forgiveness; more than one-fifth of practicing Christians (22%) reports struggling with receiving forgiveness for something they have personally done wrong."

Hang-ups in Offering Forgiveness

"Although most Christians recall a point at which they gave no-strings-attached forgiveness, some express reluctance in specific cases. Around one in four practicing Christians (23%) has a person in their life who 'they just can't forgive.'

Among practicing Christians who claim there is an individual in their lives they can't forgive, more than one-quarter (28%) admits they wish they could do so."

The church has a lot to do in teaching on the topic of mercy and forgiveness. Too many Christians view mercy and forgiveness as optional, without realizing that their lack of forgiveness and mercy does great damage to themselves, not just to the people they refuse to forgive. At our Summer Renewal Conference next month, we're going to spend some extra time on the topic. The fact that 28% of practicing Christians who claim there is an individual in their lives they can't forgive but wish they could, means that this is a serious topic of concern for the church and many people need help. I hope you can join us on Saturday, June 22 at St. Luke's, Saxonburg, PA. – Bill Oehlschlager, Executive Director

SCHEDULED EVENTS

May 11-12	Renewal Weekend Itakaibolu Lutheran Church Itakaibolu, Uganda Moses Kyaterekera, Vicar
May 25-26	Renewal Weekend Nalukero Lutheran Church Nalukero, Uganda Emmanuel Waiswa, Vicar

June 22	Summer Renewal Conference St. Luke's Lutheran Church Saxonburg, PA The Rev. Roger Keller, Pastor
August 17	Men's Retreat Oakhurst Lutheran Church Oakhurst, CA The Rev. Jason Johnsen, Pastor
August 24	Spiritual Transformation Retreat Emanuel Lutheran Church Modesto, CA The Rev. Lynette Crase, Pastor
September 14	Spiritual Transformation Retreat St. Luke's Lutheran Church Monroe, NC The Rev. Christopher Metze, 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 healing for Dan and Kathie Klueg, and Kathie's father
- 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 the Lord's blessings on our ministry in Uganda
- For wisdom and guidance for the LLRA Board of Directors, as we seek to grow and expand this 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 to Uganda!

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