

THE VOICE OF RENEWAL

The Newsletter of Lutheran Lay Renewal of America

Serving all Lutheran churches since 1971

SEPTEMBER, 2020

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REPORT FROM THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF UGANDA

Greetings to you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. I am happy sending you this report about the radio Ministry which you have generously supported since our country went into lockdown due to COVID-19.

By God's Grace the Lutheran Church of Uganda Eastern Deanery has successfully reached to her members throughout the last six months of lockdown. We have managed to reach all the eleven districts that make up Eastern region and some other districts across River Nile in central Uganda.

People have always tuned in on 88.6 Kiira FM, one of the famous radio stations in Eastern. With the support from Lutheran Lay Renewal we have held English and Lusoga service every Sunday between 9:00 - 10:00 am and 10:00-11:00 am respectively.

To God's honor and glory The Lutheran Church is emerging number one in reaching out to the people with the Gospel of Christ in a COVID-19 period, more than any other denomination in Eastern according to respondent Olivia Ndikoberani from Luuka District.



Our great fear however is that the number of COVID cases for both the infected and the dead are increasing daily and therefore churches and schools may not be opened up until December or January next year. So this still calls up for more support towards this endeavor as it keeps the ministry of proclaiming Christ.

Thank you once again for the support towards LCU and this endeavor. Amen.

Rev. Peter. M. Maganda
Dean Eastern Uganda- LCU

Editor's note: It takes \$600.00 per month to fund these weekly radio broadcasts to reach Christians all over Eastern and parts of Central Uganda, and Lutheran Lay Renewal is requesting funds to continue our support. You can support this ministry by sending funds to us or, if you prefer, directly to the Lutheran Church of Uganda. Just contact our office for wire transfer instructions.



(L to R) Rev. Benard Mwesigwa, Rev. Peter Maganda and Bishop Charles Bameka in the radio studio

CONTINUING SUPPORT FOR THE REFORMED LUTHERAN CHURCH OF RWANDA

Lutheran Lay Renewal also has been continuing food support for the Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda. We received the following e-mail in August from Pastor Jean Claude Maniragaba:

God's grace be with you all the time! People of God, our Pastors, and Lay leaders and Christians of RLCR are in need of food. The government is requesting people that they should not travel. People do not have food and family's need. And today, I called Pastors on telephone and everyone is crying for the need of their families. When I heard from them, the food is the first need. What they need is the same to church members. And among the believers, we have many widows and orphans. We need God's help. As you pray, remember this prayer request in your prayers before God. We are praying to God that He can feed His people. People of God may God bless you as you pray and God bless your country of the United States of America. In His Services!

Pastor Jean Claude Maniragaba
Church President
Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda

Editor's note: Lutheran Lay Renewal has responded to this request for food but, due to the global pandemic, the needs are ongoing. Please contact our office if you are willing and able to help!

CONSIDER A VIRTUAL WORKSHOP OR RETREAT FOR YOUR CONGREGATION

It's been a difficult year and your congregation probably needs a spiritual boost right now, like our Sharing Your Faith workshop or Seven Lessons for Living the Spiritual Life retreat. Perhaps your congregation is not yet ready for or comfortable with an in-person workshop or retreat and, if so, how about a virtual workshop or retreat? The technology is available and people can participate from home, while still being able to have discussions and ask questions. These workshops and retreats have been praised by pastors and lay leaders all across the U.S. for many years. Interested? Contact our office!

"Last month I attended a workshop entitled, "Sharing Your Faith" led by (Lutheran Lay Renewal). It was fantastic. Not only was the workshop well prepared and spiritually informative, it was also extremely inspirational. In our current culture of information overload, it was refreshing to hear someone speak intimately and genuinely about their experience with the living God and His Son. Bill's presentation was so natural and Spirit led, that I can confidently recommend it to anyone looking to further their confidence in sharing their own faith experience and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thank you all for the work you are doing as ambassadors for Christ in this world. Please keep it up!" – Pastor Steven Krogh, Grace American Lutheran Church, Rancho Cordova, CA

"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, Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church, Nazareth, PA

ISRAEL TOUR POSTPONED UNTIL 2022

Due to the worldwide pandemic, our Israel tour has been postponed until 2022. The new dates are January 10-19 and we are now accepting registrations. We have 52 exciting Old and New Testament sites on the tour that will greatly expand your knowledge of Christianity, Judaism, biblical history and archeology. Walk in the footsteps of Jesus in Nazareth, Bethlehem, Capernaum, Magdala, Bethany, Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Jordan, Mt. Tabor (the Mount of Transfiguration), the Mount of Beatitudes, Caesarea Philippi, and enjoy a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee. We'll also visit Masada, Qumran, where the Dead Sea scrolls were found, Herodian, Jericho, Caesarea Maritima and many other historic sites.



The Garden of Gethsemane (above) and morning sky over Jerusalem (left)

A tour of Israel truly is an experience you will treasure for the rest of your life. Tour arrangements are being handled by Imagine Tours and Travel, a company that has led hundreds of tours to Israel for over 30 years. Call or e-mail our office for a brochure and registration form, which we can send you either by mail or e-mail.

LEARNING WHAT A CONGREGATION VALUES

When I was teaching Organizational Behavior, I used a scheme that focused on how a worker learns expectations for his or her role contributes to the work of that organization. A role is the set of expectations for what the worker will say and do while on the job, like what an actor says and does while on the stage of a play. The original word for the three persons of the Trinity meant “mask,” what an actor in a Greek play put on to identify who he was representing.

Role theory is what Martin Luther had in mind when he described the different ways the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit contribute to our lives today. The Father is the creator, the Son is the Redeemer, and the Spirit is present today empowering God’s people.

What are the different role expectations in a congregation and how are they learned? Consider what happens in a work organization.

Imagine showing up for your first day on a new job. How do you figure out what you are supposed to do? Someone will give you written statements about what the company values and a description of your specific job. Chances are you will not pay much attention. Those formal expectations usually become part of the background wallpaper. You will find other ways to figure out what you should do.

Very important will be the techniques for getting the job done. On an assembly line, the techniques are clear, as the line moves on and you have a short time to add your part to the automobile. In an office, the telephone and computer systems determine much of what gets done. Techniques shape action.

Another very important source of role expectations is the comments and attitudes of fellow workers. These informal messages help you sort out what is important.

Now think about role messages you get when participating in a Christian congregation. Usually many written statements describe what leaders of that congregation believe and value. This is more so now than several generations ago when most mainline congregations just carried on with what they knew how to do. Such statements are now helpful for planning purposes. But most participants don’t pay much attention.

Rather they learn by what they find themselves doing and what they see others saying and doing. Is the congregation mainly about showing up on Sundays for an hour of worship performed by a professional according to a script? Or are many ordinary members also involved, perhaps in singing or praying?

Thinking of a congregation as a fellowship of the Spirit increases the emphasis on the many relationships involved among believers gathered as a congregation. Focusing on the Spirit moving among believers also highlights the changes that are happening in their lives, what they are doing and saying. More so than any written statements, their lives demonstrate what that congregation values.

Paul’s original word for fellowship was *koinonia*—sharing something with somebody. A congregation’s fellowship can be shallow or deep. It is shallow when the sense of community is mostly symbolic. The church life I know has lots of symbols in building, gowns and the “communion” of the Lord’s Supper. It is much easier to talk about symbols. More effective, though, is to talk about and show actual sharing going on between and by participants.

To the Ephesians Paul laid out the purpose for what church leaders should try to accomplish: “They are to prepare God’s people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up to become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4: 12-13). The key verb “to prepare.” It is used in other New Testament passages to mean to align, or to get organized. The task of church leaders is to organize the fellowship for action. Actions speak louder than words.

That passage also highlights that the purpose is for all to become more Christ-like. To be changed by the Spirit is to become more like Christ, to be drawn closer to God, to be sanctified. This happens best when such lives are modeled by others, as they share what the Spirit has done in their lives.

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

CRASHING THE GATES

Caesarea Philippi was a small Greco-Roman city close to the Via Maris, the Way of the Sea, the ancient road that went from Egypt to Damascus. It's located at the southern base of Mt. Hermon and is in the far northeastern corner of present-day Israel, very close to the Lebanese border and only about 40 miles from Damascus. Above the town is a tall cliff and at the base of the cliff is a huge cave. Inside this cave is what looks like a bottomless spring; huge quantities of water gushed out of this cave in ancient times, making it the chief source of the Jordan River. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that no one was able to lower enough rope into this spring to find the bottom. The cave and the spring are still there today and our tour group visited this site in January.

In the pagan Greek religion, this cave was believed to be a gateway to Hades, the underworld, where the Greek god Pan lived, who was supposedly half man and half goat. Along with him, it was believed that other gods went into this cave and through the depths of the spring into Hades in the winter and then returned each spring. For this reason, temples were built there for worship and the worship involved horrible and barbaric acts of moral depravity. Because of this, Jewish rabbis forbade Jews from even visiting this pagan city.

The ancient road that Jesus and his disciples were taking from the region of Tyre and Sidon back to the Sea of Galilee did not go through Caesarea Philippi, so Jesus had to take his disciples about eight miles out of their way to visit there. So, the question is why, especially since this was a city of the worst kinds of pagan worship and moral depravity. Why would a good Jewish rabbi bring his disciples here? It doesn't seem to make any sense, does it?

It's important for us to realize that shortly after this time alone with the disciples, Jesus will start his long and final journey to Jerusalem, which will culminate in his crucifixion, death and resurrection. Before this journey begins, however, there are two things that he wants to be very clear in the minds of his disciples: 1. Who Jesus is and 2. What he is going to do in Jerusalem. So, I want you to picture Jesus standing in front of this cliff, the cave and the pagan temples and there he asks his disciples two questions: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" and: "... who do you say that I am?"

I'm sure you remember the story that's recorded in both Mark's and Luke's gospels, where Jesus and his disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee and a great storm blew up, so that their boat was filling up with water and the disciples thought they were going to die. Here's the end of the story from the 4th chapter of Mark:

"And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" That's one of the greatest questions ever asked, isn't it, and the disciples have been thinking about the answer for maybe around three years, and now Jesus is asking them the same question they have been pondering for a long time: "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" And now he wants to know their answer: "Who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven! And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." – Matthew 16:15-18

Now we can understand why Jesus has brought his disciples to this horrible, barbaric and evil place; this is where the so-called gate of Hades is and he's throwing down the gauntlet, he's issuing a challenge, right at the devil's front door. The disciples may not understand it yet but Jesus is telling them that when they build his church, they must take the gospel even to the worst of pagan cultures, even to the worst of morally depraved

people, and the gates of Hades, the gates of the devil, cannot prevent the church from crashing through and liberating these pathetic people from the grip of the devil.

And indeed, that's what happened. Caesarea Philippi no longer exists, only the ruins are left behind. The temples at the base of the cliff are long gone and the depraved religious practices are also long gone. It took a long time but Rome and Greece were gradually converted to Christ and their pagan religions exposed as the frauds they are.

So, the disciples left Caesarea Philippi with a vision of this terrible, evil place seared in their memories but they also learned a lesson about ministry and the church they never forgot, and indeed it's a lesson that no church should ever forget. The gates of Hades are no match for a church that knows what its mission is.

Bill Oehlschlager, Executive Director

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Our Board of Directors will be meeting soon and the election of board members will be on the agenda. If you and your congregation have been blessed by this ministry and you would like to become more involved, please pray about serving on our board. This is a very exciting time in the life of this ministry, as in recent years we have been growing all across the United States and also expanding our outreach into Uganda and Rwanda. In addition, next year we will celebrate our 50th anniversary. Board members serve three-year terms and board meetings are held by conference call, so traveling to meetings is not necessary. Interested? Contact our office for more details.

“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

- Healing for Dick Brown, Elaine Schomaker, Alexis Gurnard, Dan and Kathie Klueg, and Kathie's father
 - 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 racial 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
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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 - and now also to Uganda and Rwanda!

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