

THE VOICE OF RENEWAL

The Newsletter of Lutheran Lay Renewal of America

Our mission: To promote spiritual renewal and spiritual growth of people and congregations through our renewal weekends, retreats, workshops and conferences.

March, 2021

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IS IT TIME FOR A SPIRITUAL BOOST FOR YOUR CONGREGATION?

It's been a difficult time this past year and your congregation probably needs a spiritual boost right now. As more and more people are receiving the vaccinations every week, and new case counts are in steep decline, perhaps now is the time to start thinking about scheduling one or more of our events at your church for some time later this year. Our first event in the U.S. in over a year, a Sharing Your Faith workshop, is scheduled for March 23 and we are ready and willing to start scheduling more.

LLR offers a one hour Sharing Your Faith workshop, a half day retreat on the topic of Spiritual Transformation, a one day Spot the Spirit workshop and a Renewal Weekend program, all of which can be held at your church or whatever facility you choose. More information on all of these events is available on our web site at www.lutheranrenewal.com.

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. Our workshops and retreats have been praised by pastors and lay leaders all across the U.S. for many years. Interested? Contact our office!

WE RETURN TO UGANDA IN MAY!

Our Executive Director will be returning to Uganda in May, after having to postpone a trip there three times in 2020 due to the worldwide pandemic. Rev. Peter Maganda, Dean of Students at the Lutheran Theological College in Magamaga and Dean of the Eastern Deanery, has scheduled a Renewal Conference at the seminary for the week of May 10-14 and has asked Bill Oehlschlager to lead it. Participants will be pastors, evangelists, seminarians and lay leaders from all over the Eastern and Far Eastern Deaneries of the Lutheran Church of Uganda. Bill also is looking forward to meeting and speaking to the students in the Lutheran Lay Leadership Training program, which is being funded by Lutheran Lay Renewal.

After the first Renewal Conference at the seminary in 2019, Dean Peter Maganda wrote: "I would like to say that it was such a conference that left the Deanery changed, especially with how they are to minister to one another in prayer in small groups. I have been able to receive feedback from those who attended the training, reporting how they are teaching their congregations using the materials given to them. I will be sending you written messages from the congregations expressing their gratitude for the training."

At a Deanery level, all the leaders are very grateful for the training as well. It's through these trainings that they see the growth of Christ's body in the Deanery. They asked that this partnership should not stop but be solidified so that all churches benefit."

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE LCU AND RLCR IS NEEDED

Lutheran Lay Renewal provided much needed financial support for both the Lutheran Church of Uganda and the Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda in 2020 and is continuing this support in 2021. These two church bodies are doing lots of amazing ministry with very limited resources but there is a lot more that can be accomplished with more financial support.

At Lutheran Lay Renewal we believe that every congregation should be supporting at least one foreign mission! If you or your congregation would like to join with us in supporting either the Lutheran Church of Uganda or the Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda please get in touch with us. Contributions can be made directly to Lutheran Lay Renewal (we are a 501 (c) (3) non-profit ministry) or, if you prefer to work directly with either church body, please contact our office and we'll put you in touch with church leaders in either or both countries.

JOIN US IN ISRAEL, JANUARY, 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.

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, or download them from the Scheduled Events page on our web site.



MORNING SKY OVER JERUSALEM

imagine
TOURS & TRAVEL

COME TO ISRAEL AND LEARN ABOUT THE BIBLE

On our tour of Israel last year, our Israeli tour guide asked our group of Lutheran pastors and spouses a question: "Israel was called a land of milk and honey; does anyone know what that means?" No one in our group had an answer so our guide said, "There were flocks of sheep and goats here, and herds of cattle – that's the milk. But what about the honey? The honey is dates." He then explained that dates are not only eaten as fruit but also pressed into a syrup that resembles honey, and date honey (or syrup) is widely used in Middle Eastern cooking to this day. We saw date honey for sale in many of the stores we visited in Israel. Interested in trying some? Date honey is sold in many Middle Eastern stores here in the U.S. and also can be purchased on E-Bay.

CAN YOU TELL HOW WELL THE SPIRIT IS WORKING IN YOUR CONGREGATION?

Classical theology has much to say about the means by which the Gospel is conveyed to those who need to hear it. Martin Luther listed these five means of grace: the Word, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Confession of Sins, and Mutual Encouragement of the Brethren. Consider those to be input through which the Holy Spirit can work.

But classical theology has nothing to say about the Spirit's output—what happens when the Spirit is at work in an individual or congregation. What differences does the Spirit make in lives that know the Gospel of redemption in Christ? How can you tell if the Spirit is allowed to work more effectively in one congregation compared to another? Churches do differ in how open they are to the Spirit's work in their midst.

Since Reformation theology did not provide answers for a question never asked, I can feel free to offer some answers to my question. That question, again, is **how well the Spirit is touching and changing lives in a congregation?**

In his Small Catechism, Luther taught that the Holy Spirit, "...called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified me, and kept me in the true faith, even as he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth."

To recognize how well the Spirit is able to work in a church, look especially for how well Christ's Spirit is enlightening and sanctifying the people who make up the congregation. Do most see themselves in a closer relationship with God than ten years earlier? Are most more sanctified than they were five years ago?

That last question about the degree of sanctification is very difficult for Lutherans to pursue. After I had preached on a Sunday, I received a note the next day from a visitor accusing me of preaching sanctification, and Lutherans don't do that. I understood where he was coming from. The key issue of the Reformation was the distinction between justification and sanctification, between being made just and doing good works. Never confuse the two. Good works do not make you righteous before God. Such righteousness is a gift from God.

Yet I believe sanctification is almost as important as justification. Translate sanctification as becoming more like Christ. A legitimate question is how a believer or a church has become more like Christ over the last ten years or so. That is a measure of how well the Spirit has been allowed to work in their midst.

The Holy Spirit changes lives. Is there any evidence of such change? Specifically, is there evidence of growth in the fruit the Spirit produces, like love, joy, peace and patience? Is congregational life more loving and joyful? Do participants have more patience with each other? If not, why not?

At a minimum, a congregation can and should do a better job of cultivating the Holy Spirit's presence in their life together. Leaders can equip those participants to do ministries that help fellow participants become more like Christ.

To invite the Spirit's greater presence, the pastor and church leaders can promote more Spiritual disciplines that put us in the Spirit's workshop. The acronym **GROWTH** offers a good framework: **G**o to God in worship and prayer. **R**eceive his Word for you. **O**pt for self-denial. Give **W**itness to your faith. **T**rust God in a new venture. **H**umble yourself before God.

Congregations can have two kinds of growth. One is *quantitative*, growing in numbers. When that happens, such growth is a special gift and beyond the church's direct control. The other is growth in the *quality* of Christian life together. That's something leaders can do by providing more Spiritual growth opportunities.

Pastors might start with themselves. Does their thinking have greater depth than years ago? Have they been growing in love, joy, peace and patience? If not, will they be willing to pursue one or more of the Spiritual disciplines that more deliberately and effectively open themselves to the Spirit's empowerment?

The Rev. Dave Luecke, Ph.D., Dr. Luecke is a member of our Board of Directors

WE'RE CELEBRATING OUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY!

2021 marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of Lutheran Lay Renewal and one way we want to celebrate is by sharing stories and quotes from pastors, and parishioners of churches, about what this ministry has meant to them and their congregations. Do you have a story or quote to share with us about what the Lord has done in your life or in the life of your congregation through one of our renewal weekends, retreats, workshops or conferences? Please send it to our office and we'll share it in an upcoming issue of this newsletter. Perhaps these quotes will encourage your congregation to schedule an LLR event this year:

"My hopes and expectations for our LLR weekend were greatly surpassed! It was truly a challenging, faith-strengthening, Spirit-filled event. The positive effects are already being realized, including definite plans for a monthly "church night" which will include fellowship, faith sharing, and Bible study (on the book of The Revelation to John, no less). We pray for God's blessings upon LLR's continued ministry and upon all of our visiting team members." - Pastor Tom Moog, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Sewickley, PA

"I watched as God brought healing and renewal to individuals and a deeper sense of cohesion to the congregation." - Pastor Bob Quaintance, Good Hope Lutheran Church, Boardman, OH

"Thank you for a wonderful retreat time with our council! Everyone has commented saying 'it was the best retreat in a long time' or something similar. One person told me she was given a lot to think about with regard to some issues in her life and felt the material you presented is going to help her come to some resolution. Another said it was a 'very spiritual morning' and he was reluctant to leave the setting. And as I mentioned that day, the material you presented was exactly what I'd hoped for and will help set the tone for some big next steps in the life of this congregation. You may have gathered from the conversation regarding our opportunity for renewal and 85th anniversary year that we do have some deep thinking, spiritual growing, and meaningful work ahead of us. Thank you for sharing your notes - they will be most useful as we move ahead and help those who missed the retreat to catch up. Again, thank you for blessing our council retreat & we look forward to working with you in the future." - God's peace, Pastor Lyn Crase, Emanuel Lutheran Church, Modesto, CA

"I want to thank you for not only sharing your personal testimony with us, but also your deep knowledge of the Christian faith. Annapolis Lutheran is striving to be discipleship oriented and your presentation will help to launch that mind set. Please accept the enclosed donation as a token of our deep appreciation for your ministry." - Pastor Mark Metze, Annapolis Lutheran Church, Annapolis, MD

"The weekend gave the members opportunities to share their faith stories with one another. This has greatly strengthened our community and our resolve to share that faith with others. We are more excited and aware about how God is present and active among us." - Pastor Scott Hall, Nativity Lutheran Church, Allison Park, PA

"The LLR weekend that the team presented was a wonderful spiritual catalyst for our members. We are seeing more evidence of the fruit of the Spirit at work among us, and many individuals have testified that their prayer lives have been considerably deepened because of this experience. Thank you for the important work you are doing for Lutheran congregations across the country. God is evident when we see congregations renewed through the faith-building activities of your core teams. It is our hope that the Holy Spirit continues to enable your valuable ministry among our churches." - Dr. Janet Montelaro, Director of Ministries at Trinity Lutheran Church, Wexford, PA

PHOTOS FROM SOME OF OUR PAST EVENTS



Praying before a meal on a renewal weekend at Ikumbya Lutheran Church, Uganda



LLR Team members at Martin Luther Lutheran Church, Charleston, SC



Summer Renewal Conference at St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Butler, PA

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“Christ is the only means, and as you might say, the mirror in which we can see God and by whom we can also know His will, for in Christ, we see that God is no cruel and demanding judge but a Father of extremely goodwill, loving and merciful. In order to bless us—that is, to deliver us from the law, sin, death, all evil, and to grant us grace, righteousness, and eternal life—He “did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.” This is the true knowledge of God, the divine persuasion that does not deceive us but paints us a trustworthy picture of God, other than this there is no God.” - Martin Luther

SCHEDULED EVENTS

- March 23 Sharing Your Faith Workshop
Zion Lutheran Church
Chicora, PA
The Rev. Karl Schoch, Pastor
- January 10-19, 2022 Tour Israel With Us!
Call or e-mail our office for a brochure and registration form, or download them from the Scheduled Events page on our web site.

“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 Elaine Schomaker, Alexis Gurnard, 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 peace, 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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