

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.

May, 2021

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WE RETURN TO UGANDA IN MAY

Our Executive Director will be leaving for Uganda on May 5, after having to postpone trips 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 Christ Community Lutheran Church and School in Kawete, Iganga District, May 12-14, and asked LLR 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 preaching at Kyabazaala Lutheran Church on May 9, meeting with Bishop Charles Bameka and other Lutheran Church of Uganda leaders, visiting congregations in the Eastern and Far Eastern Deaneries, and meeting and speaking to the students in the Lutheran Lay Leadership Training Program at the LCU's Lutheran Theological College in Magamaga. This program is being funded by Lutheran Lay Renewal in order to raise up and train young men to serve as lay ministers in congregations that do not yet have a pastor.

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."

WE'LL ALSO BE MINISTERING WITH THE (ANGLICAN) CHURCH OF UGANDA!

At the invitation of Bishop Amos Magezi, Diocese of Northwest Ankole, Bill also will be travelling to Ibanda in Western Uganda to lead three retreats for diocesan lay leaders at St. Paul's Cathedral, as well as visit with Diocesan Youth Coordinator Kuruka Amutahaire and congregational youth leaders. Attending the retreats will be:

May 18 – Lay Leaders

May 19 – Mother's Union and Father's Union Leaders, as well as Mission Coordinators

May 20 – School Chaplains, Youth and Children Leaders

LLR PROVIDES FUNDS FOR FOOD TO THE REFORMED LUTHERAN CHURCH OF RWANDA

Rwanda still has very restrictive policies in place for commerce and travel, making it difficult for many people to earn a living. As a result, Lutheran Lay Renewal was asked to provide more funds to the Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda to purchase food for its people. The following e-mail was sent to us in late March:

Dear Bill
Executive Director
Lutheran Lay Renewal of America.

Glory be to God in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Since this last Monday, I was sick and I could not send to you this report. I was supposed to send it on that day of Monday but it wasn't possible. Today we are giving glory that I am able to prepare this report to you servant of God. God bless everyone who donated so that God's people in our congregations could receive food in this difficult time of COVID-19. God bless your families and God bless your country of USA.

In His Services!

Pastor Jean Claude MANIRAGABA
Church President
Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda



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 be happy to put you in touch with church leaders in either or both countries.



Food distribution by the Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda

JOIN US IN ISRAEL, JANUARY, 2022!

The dates for our Israel tour 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 Beatitudes, Caesarea Philippi, and enjoy a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee. We'll also visit Masada, Qumran, 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



If you live in the Pittsburgh area, listen to the BizBurgh program on WORD-FM 101.5 from 6:30 to 7:00 PM on May 26. This program will be devoted to our 2022 Israel tour, with Bill Oehlschlager and Lou McKibben sharing the details. The program also can be heard through the WORD-FM website.

THE SPIRIT IS THE ANSWER FOR POST-MODERNS STUCK IN THEIR OLD NATURE

Christianity has a long history of reference to the Ten Commandments to identify sins that need to be exposed, confessed, and repented of. This is basic to a biblical view of sin and salvation.

But in the new post-modern culture, holding unbelievers to this standard does not work so well as a starting point. Better is to work with Paul's distinction between our old nature and our new nature in the Spirit. His biblical word is according to the "flesh" (old nature). Luther picked up this distinction. He writes that baptizing with water "signifies that the Old Adam should be daily drowned and die with all sins and evil lust and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and unity forever."

Paul contrasts the two natures in Romans 8:13: "For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13). To the Galatians, he wrote, "Live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature."

Now pour into the natural life all that comes from being self-centered without a relationship with God. In our old nature without God, we have no sense of purpose in our lives and we experience loneliness and lack of fulfillment. That sense of community and fulfillment comes from living the purpose God created us for. The Spirit brings such purpose into our living and strengthens our feeling of love, joy and peace. You live fulfilled by keeping in step with the Spirit.

The contact with post-moderns is to ask, "How's your current life working for you? I gather not well. Let me tell you a better way to live." Shaming post-moderns for not living according to God's standards will not accomplish much. That approach makes sense only after the Spirit motivates them to become more like Christ. Then with such motivation, the relevant question becomes, What Would Jesus Do?

A basic discussion format could begin with your question, "When people ask who you are, how do you answer? Do you identify yourself by stating your job, or by your relationships with family or friends, or by your hobbies, or by some other identity? Does that identity bring you full life satisfaction? Or are you still looking for something more?"

Then a convinced believer can profess that his or her basic identity is as a follower of Christ. Explain, then, the satisfaction you find in this identity. That will leave them wondering whether and how they might grow in this life-fulfilling identity. They might very well ask you. Be ready to answer. If you are not sure, check out Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Life*.

So many people out there walking the streets today live with a lot of fear: fear that they will not be successful, or that their inadequacies will be discovered, or that their friends and family might abandon them. Of course, almost everybody fears death. The biblical message offers a powerful answer to the basic fears of life. In Christ, we have forgiveness and God's acceptance. In Christ, we will have a fulfilling next life after this one ends.

Offering tired biblical clichés will not earn you much respect. Just tell your personal story of how you overcame your basic fears and discovered a greater sense of fulfillment. If your story includes discoveries through a growing Christian identity, you will have made a great witness that is most effective in the current post-modern culture. The rest is up to the Holy Spirit.

How helpful to you is the distinction between sins, which can be listed, and sinful nature, our underlying condition. Do you agree that describing our old nature is a better starting point for witnessing to others?

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 are celebrating 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:

"Being a pastor who has led a lot of spiritual retreats, it's rare that I get to experience one that both challenges and nourishes my own spiritual growth. I'm not always optimistic when we bring in an outside speaker. Lutheran Lay Renewal exceeded my expectations. I learned some new things and felt encouraged in my walk with God. The speaker was well read and researched and was able to bring together good theology with contemporary knowledge, while keeping it relatable through sharing personal experiences and testimony. The retreat was for our church's men's club and we had never done a retreat together before... some of the men weren't sure it would be worth giving up 4 hours on a Saturday afternoon. The depth of conversation that opened up during the retreat also surprised me in a good way and I'm looking forward to seeing how the retreat might influence our regular monthly meetings. It's important for churches to bring in new voices sometimes to encourage new kinds of growth and Lutheran Lay Renewal is a really great choice!" - Pastor Jason Johnsen, Oakhurst Lutheran Church, Oakhurst, CA

"St. Luke's Lutheran Church was delighted to host Bill Oehlschlager from Lutheran Lay Renewal. Bill is friendly and energetic. His presentation was spirited, informative, thought-provoking and most certainly edifying for all participants. I wholeheartedly recommend Lutheran Lay Renewal for any Lutheran congregation eager for spiritual renewal and faith formation." - Pastor Christopher Metze, St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Monroe, NC

"I have already been able to put into practice much of what Bill spoke about at our Sharing Your Faith workshop he led at our small church in the foothills of central California last week. I was especially touched by his encouragement to pray for people "on the spot." I was able this week to pray over two people who actually left our church but I have remained friendly with when I have seen them. Each had special family issues and I asked if I could pray for them 'right now.' Each was grateful and we connected through the Holy Spirit. I could feel it. I will continue to be ready to pray for anyone in need and not wait for later. Each of us attending the workshop felt a tugging of our hearts to reach out to those in need and not be afraid to do so. We felt that God brought Bill to us just when we needed a lift. We are without a Pastor right now so Bill was able to infuse in us a new drive and focus for the future of our church, knowing that God is leading us as He wishes. - Lynda Qualls, Sierra Lutheran Church, Auberry, CA, Admin. President

FROM OUR 2019 SUMMER RENEWAL CONFERENCE

"Jesus Christ told those who would follow Him to 'consider the cost' [Luke 14: 28]. This conference was an invitation and exhortation to move from complacency to commitment - from nominal Christianity to authentic discipleship. The break out groups were also a highlight of this conference." - Matthew Kail, Pastor, Muddy Creek and Unionville Evangelical Presbyterian Churches, Butler, PA

"I am certain that one or more of the seven lessons shared on Saturday probably impacted the participants in some excellent and unexpected way. Each was obviously refined from time and experience gained in the crucible of living the Christian life. The final item of gratitude was well placed as it perfectly wraps up the list as our thanksgiving to God for His continuous care and faithfulness." - Dick Smith, St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Saxonburg, PA

SCHEDULED EVENTS

- May 12-14 Renewal Conference for the Eastern and Far Eastern Deaneries of the Lutheran Church of Uganda
Christ Community Lutheran Church and School
Kawete, Iganga District, Uganda
Revs. Peter Maganda and Nicholas Bwire, Deans
Bill Oehlschlager, Conference Speaker
- May 18-20 Retreats for Lay Leaders
St. Paul's Cathedral
Diocese of Northwest Ankole, Church of Uganda
Ibanda, Uganda
The Rt. Rev. Amos Magezi, Bishop
Bill Oehlschlager, Retreat Speaker
- 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

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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