

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.

November, A.D. 2021

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COPING WITH ACEDIA

The last two years have been very difficult for all of us here in the U.S., as well as for people in many countries all over the world. This writer recently came across a term that describes what many people have been feeling as a result of quarantines, social distancing, mask wearing and all the other inconveniences and annoyances of COVID-19 - and worse, actually contracting and surviving the disease, or having a loved one die from it.

From an article in *The Conversation* by Jonathon Zecher, Research Fellow, Australian Catholic Univ.: “John Cassian, a monk and theologian wrote in the early 5th century about an ancient Greek emotion called *acedia*. A mind “seized” by this emotion is ‘horrified at where he is, disgusted with his room ... It does not allow him to stay still in his cell or to devote any effort to reading.’ He feels: ‘...*such bodily listlessness and yawning hunger as though he were worn by a long journey or a prolonged fast.*’ ‘... *Next he glances about and sighs that no one is coming to see him. Constantly in and out of his cell, he looks at the sun as if it were too slow in setting.*’

“Acedia arose directly out of the spatial and social constrictions that a solitary monastic life necessitates. These conditions generate a strange combination of listlessness, undirected anxiety, and inability to concentrate. Together these make up the paradoxical emotion of acedia. Evagrius of Pontus included acedia among the eight trains of thought that needed to be overcome by devout Christians. Among these, acedia was considered the most insidious.”

“Now, the pandemic and governmental responses to it create social conditions that approximate those of desert monks. Social distancing limits physical contact. Lockdown constricts physical space and movement. Working from home or having lost work entirely both upend routines and habits. In these conditions, perhaps it’s time to bring back the term.”

“Reviving the language of acedia is important to our experience in two ways. First, it distinguishes the complex of emotions brought on by enforced isolation, constant uncertainty and the barrage of bad news from clinical terms like ‘depression’ or ‘anxiety.’ Saying, ‘I’m feeling acedia’ could legitimize feelings of listlessness and anxiety as valid emotions in our current context without inducing guilt that others have things worse. Second, and more importantly, the feelings associated with physical isolation are exacerbated by emotional isolation – that terrible sense that this thing I feel is mine alone. When an experience can be named, it can be communicated and even shared.” Link to full article: <https://theconversation.com/acedia-the-lost-name-for-the-emotion-were-all-feeling-right-now-144058>

Who among us has not experienced at least some acedia over the last two years? And after dealing with all these feelings, we’re guessing your congregation probably needs a spiritual boost right now. As more and more people are receiving the vaccinations each week, and new case counts are in decline, perhaps now is the time to start thinking about scheduling one or more of our events at your church for some time next year.

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. Some of these also make good community outreach events. More information on all of these options 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 at 724-287-5151.

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 for 2022:

"Great thanks to the program of Lutheran Lay Renewal of America through the executive director. It's my pleasure to write to you for your efforts to continue having such programs with us in Uganda. I do appreciate you for that program that we conducted at the Lutheran Theological College, Magamaga in Iganga District. It has always inspired me to have such programs in life. I pray may you always be with us when you come again. Thanks so much." – Joseph Akol, youth leader, St. John's Lutheran Church, Bukedea District, Uganda

"This is to give you a thanks for your teachings of previous retreat, about the 7 Lessons for Living the Spiritual Life. I personally was touched by these lessons, especially that God works through our weakness, from Jeremiah 29:11-13, 2 Corinthians 12:9. It has really helped me in my work with the church that the real God knows us, all we need is to give ourselves to him. I appreciate Bill for your teaching because the Seven Lessons for Living the Spiritual Life have changed me and it has helped me in the ministry, and I pray you can come back for another retreat next year." - Nampira Elias, lay leader at Sigiriya, Church of Uganda, in Nyabuhikye Archdeaconry

"Firstly, I would like to thank our dear Bishop Amos for inviting Bill, for I have never been in any retreat before like this. Thank you Bill for teaching about the 7 Lessons of Spiritual Living, I have been honoured to learn on having a forgiving heart, that was lesson five. You taught us that "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you." This has helped me know the importance of forgiving those that wrong us and this has helped me personally to forgive, which was always difficult for me. I pray that these lessons can be taught to other leaders too." - Babrah Niwagaba, children's teacher, All Saints Parish, Kakinga Archdeaconry, Church of Uganda

"I would also like to thank Bill for the retreat we had with him, it has really been a changing point in my life, especially the four lessons why we need to give thanks to God. I learnt that when we give thanks to God, it brings us into God's presence, it reminds us of the goodness of God and also it's an opportunity to us to give thanks." - Ruth Rukondo, youth leader of Nyakatooky Parish, Bigera Archdeaconry, Church of Uganda

"The sincere personal testimonies of Jesus working in the lives of the LLR team members touched hearts and inspired each of us in a closer walk with the Lord. Your genuine love and praise for our Savior was contagious! You have our heartfelt appreciation for bringing new life and energy back into our church. As a whole, the LLR weekend left the participants feeling renewed and strengthened to serve God better. Thank you for responding to God's call to provide Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church with a Spirit-filled and faith-strengthening weekend." - Pastor Fred Schenker, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Wexford, PA

BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTIONS

Our Board of Directors met by conference call on October 17. During the meeting annual elections were held and the following people were elected to the board:

Judy Moser, MS, President: Judy has been a member of our board since 2019, when she was elected Secretary. In her professional career Judy served as Register of Wills & Clerk of Orphans' Court of Butler County, PA. Judy now serves her congregation as church council secretary, member of the Executive and Personnel committees: member of the Pastor's weekly Prayer Circle, the monthly community prayer team, altar guild, funeral dinner ministry team, and church choir at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Saxonburg, PA.



Elaine Schomaker: Elaine's involvement with LLR goes all the way back to 1985. Since that time, she has been a Music Leader on many LLR weekends, as well as a Weekend Coordinator and Assistant Weekend Coordinator. Elaine also has served on our board for many years, including terms as President and Vice President. She is a member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Fresno, CA, where she has served terms as Vice President and Treasurer.



Michael Grube: Michael is President of Grube Brothers, Inc., masonry contractors. He also is an ordained deacon at Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church in Nazareth, PA. Michael and his loving wife, Kathleen, live in Wind Gap, PA. They have been married for 47 years, have two sons, and five grandchildren.



Jerry Kuhn: "My family has been members of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Irwin, PA for 22 years. My experience with LLR is a renewal weekend 8 years ago and several workshops that followed. From the LLR weekend, a Men's Group was started at our church which I have been a part of for almost 8 years. My other ministry is a prison ministry called Kairos. I started in this ministry 5 years ago at SCI Greene and then moved to help start up SCI Fayette a couple years later."



THANK YOU FRED SCHNEIDER

Fred Schneider of Cincinnati, OH, who served on our board from 2013 to 2021, including the last two years as President, decided to retire from the board at the end of his term this year. Fred and his late wife Karen were active in this ministry beginning in 2010, as well as in the Kairos prison ministry for many years. Fred was a Professor of Law at Northern Kentucky University before retiring a few years ago. His leadership in this ministry has been invaluable and we will miss him on the board!

Karen and Fred Schneider (top row center)



with some of our team members at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Sewickley, PA in 2012

HOPE FOR POST-MODERNS LOST IN TODAY'S WORLD

Psychologist Phil McGraw, "Dr. Phil," made a name for himself in television interviews with advice seekers. His famous question was, "So how's that working for you?" The usual answer is not very well. Hence the need for advice.

"How's it working for you" is the major touchpoint for relating to others in our modern American culture. An increasingly large proportion of Americans don't walk around thinking about their relationship with a God who is seldom talked about seriously in daily life. Our culture shouts that what really counts is what can be counted in dollars and possessions. The purpose in life is to have More. Yet studies repeatedly show that getting "More" does not bring lasting satisfaction. So how's that working for people who have more possessions and accomplishments than were ever had by any nation in world history? Not very well. Most still feel something is missing.

Traditional Christian preaching was good at addressing people who felt a sense of guilt toward God. We lived under a sacred canopy where life could be integrated around responsibilities to God and to others. But that sacred canopy is gone for many and shaky for many more. Without that canopy, guilt is not a widespread condition. Most hearing the message would conclude that "sin and salvation" are for somebody else, but not me.

So what is the touchpoint for presenting the Gospel to people who don't have a sense of guilt?

"Malaise" is a fancy word academics use to describe a general feeling of discomfort, illness, or uneasiness whose exact cause is difficult to identify. Lack of fulfillment is a good description. Feeling lost and alone is another angle. The lead issue for many is "There's got to be more to life than what I am experiencing." The word "spirituality" can describe the search for something beyond the material world. For Bible-based Christians, some approaches to that elusive spirituality are bizarre. But recognize the underlying condition of hunger for a better life. That current hunger is the touchpoint for Christian witness today.

If the hunger today is for "spirituality," then answer it with true Spirituality, the quality of life believers can have under the power of Christ's Spirit.

The world today is different from the one Paul faced. They worshipped gods, and their gods could get angry and mess up their lives. Theirs was a religion based on guilt and fear of not sufficiently appeasing the gods. Even the educated elite on the Areopagus wanted to be sure they covered all bases by acknowledging an unknown

god. If those pagans did not show enough reverence, especially to the local gods, they believed bad things could happen to them, their families, and their city.

In contrast, Paul offered the God who demonstrated his love by granting his favor through the appeasement his Son earned. This New Testament God offered love, grace, and fellowship in his Spirit.

So, what is our message today when there aren't any gods that moderns fear and when guilt is not a motivator?

When I began my concentrated study of the Third Person of the Trinity about ten years ago, one of the first books I read was *When God Talks Back*, by T. M. Luhrmann from her anthropologist perspective of the social sciences. Anthropologists' favorite research approach is to embed themselves in a culture and participate as an observer. She did this in a Vineyard Christian fellowship for several years at the elite University of Chicago and then in another Vineyard group at the even more elite Stanford University.

This is the question that intrigued her. "How are rational, sensible people of faith able to experience the presence of a powerful yet invisible being and sustain that belief in an environment of overwhelming skepticism?" Here is what she observed: "For those who have trained themselves to concentrate on their inner experiences, God is experienced in the brain as an actual social relationship: his voice was identified, and that identification was trusted and regarded as real and interactive."

Let this new kind of relationship with God and other believers be the touchpoint today. Help lonely moderns, hungering for more in life, learn to experience the empowering presence of the Spirit. Then teach them about the love of the Father and the grace of his Son Jesus Christ. – The Rev. Dave Luecke, Ph.D. (Pastor Luecke is a member of our board of directors)

Do you think many young adults today walk about with a sense of guilt over a Superior Being? How's that working for them?

OUR CHRISTMAS WISH LIST

Lutheran Lay Renewal has a Christmas wish list this year; however, we're not asking for gifts for ourselves but for our partners in Africa. Here are some suggestions for those who care about supporting our brother and sister Christians there:

LUTHERAN CHURCH OF UGANDA

Naigobya Medical Clinic: After our Executive Director's visit to this clinic in May, LLR provided the funds to open the clinic in this remote village of about 5,000 people and we are committed to keeping this clinic open. Prior to the opening of the clinic, the people of Naigobya had to travel about 15 miles to the nearest medical clinic in Kamuli. \$4,000 per year will pay for the salaries of the two nurses, drugs and other medical supplies needed to serve all the people of Naigobya.

Lutheran Lay Leadership Training Program: In the Eastern Deanery of the LCU there are 56 congregations and 12 preaching stations but only 13 ordained pastors. This program trains men to lead worship and preach, so that they are able to serve in congregations that do not have pastors. Some of these men then realize that God is calling them to ordained ministry and go on to the Lutheran Theological College in Magamaga.

Building of Church Schools and Buildings: Funds are always needed to build structures that are used as both schools and churches. Thanks to a very generous donation by a Lutheran couple in the Pittsburgh area, this year we were able to provide the funds to build a church/school for the people of Kyabazaala. Pastor Buluba Erifazi reports that the building should be completed by the end of January.

DIOCESE OF NORTHWEST ANKOLE, UGANDA

Our partner, the Diocese of Northwest Ankole, (Anglican) Church of Uganda, will be hosting a virtual Youth and Children's Convention January 6-9. Funds are needed to pay for the major expenses of the conference, such

as radio airtime, equipment for livestreaming, etc. If you or your congregation are willing to help, please contact our office or Kuruka Amutuhaire, Diocesan Youth Coordinator, at k.amuts2017@gmail.com.

This young diocese also has many other needs and is looking for partners in the U.S. for support. Lutheran Lay Renewal has many Anglican friends in the U.S. and we encourage these friends to contact our office or Bishop Amos Magezi at amosmagezi@gmail.com, to find out how you can help.

REFORMED LUTHERAN CHURCH OF RWANDA

Lutheran Lay Leadership Training Program: The RLCR also is in need of funding to start a program to train men for lay ministry, as well as funds to purchase land and build churches.

Renewal Conferences: Lutheran Lay Renewal also is need of funding to continue visits to our partners in Africa in order to lead renewal conferences and retreats. We pay for the food and other expenses involved with hosting these events.

SCHEDULED EVENTS

February 26, 2022 Spiritual Transformation Retreat
Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity
Irwin, PA
Rev. Sarah Lee-Faulkner, Pastor
Bill Oehlschlager, Retreat Leader

“Like” us on Facebook - Lutheran Lay Renewal of America
We post all of our upcoming events on our Facebook page.

PRAYER REQUESTS

- Healing for Elaine Schomaker, Julie, 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 in Uganda and Rwanda!

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