



The Voice of Renewal

NEWSLETTER OF LUTHERAN LAY RENEWAL OF AMERICA

*Renewing faith and promoting spiritual growth in individuals and congregations
with renewal weekends, retreats, workshops, and conferences*

Celebrating 51 years!

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January, A.D. 2023

FROM THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF UGANDA

Greetings. It is all good news. For God is good all the time and all the time God is good and that's His nature. On 18th December at Our Saviour, Magamaga we ordained 6 men: Anthony, Grace, Ronald, David, Peter, and Samuel were ordained. The first two (Anthony and Grace) graduated from Lutheran Theological College Uganda (LTCU) and the last four were trained from Iganga Mission Training Center (Kawete).

We are so grateful for the support from Lutheran Lay Renewal, it is because of such great support that we are enabled to register such an achievement. Glory be to God. We pray that that there is continued support towards leadership training. I'm attaching some photos for you. We first commissioned three men as evangelists. These trained from Kawete. – Rev. Peter Maganda, Dean of Students at the LTCU and Dean of the Eastern Deanery, Lutheran Church of Uganda (*Editor's note: Lutheran Lay Renewal has been funding the Lay Leaders Training Program in Kawete.*)



The three evangelists commissioned at the Lutheran Theological College on December 18

FROM THE REFORMED LUTHERAN CHURCH OF RWANDA

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR 2023!! ON THIS CHRISTMAS, WE BAPTIZED 78 CHILDREN AND 4 ADULTS.

On Saturday, a day before Christmas Day, we RECEIVED or WELCOMED 33 New Believers. Since August up to November 29th, 2022 these 33 believers met every Tuesday; everyone was supposed to attend a training: to study the Small Catechism, to study the Liturgy and to study the Word of God in regarding of our Lutheran Faith. On Saturday December 24th, in front of the congregation we received the 33 New Believers. On Christmas we had the Baptism of 78 children and 4 adult baptisms. That was a total of 82 baptisms.

These below attached pictures are the Baptism of 78 Children and 4 Adults. (*Editor's note: We received over 50 photos!*)

Thanks be to God! Thank you for your prayers to the work of God in Rwanda.

In Jesus Christ,

Pastor Jean Claude MANIRAGABA
The Church President
Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda

Founder & President
Harvest of Friends and Compassion



GO TO GOD IN PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Almost all (85%) Christians talk to God in their own words. This finding is from a major research project I did years ago on the prayer practices of ordinary Christians. What they do can be called conversational prayer. One respondent explained that while he does have time set aside for prayer, he enjoys spontaneity. “I try to talk with God when the thought or feeling strikes me. Some days I pray quite a bit, others not such much. I have some special times with God but usually, prayer and contemplation come at random.”

We tend to admire those who spend a long time in prayer. They must be especially devout. The rest of us without the gift of intercession usually feel guilty in comparison.

Yet highly admired Christian leaders taught otherwise. Augustine of Hippo (5th century) preferred “very brief, quickly dispatched prayers.” Thomas Aquinas (13th century) held that frequency, not length, is the important issue in prayer. Frequent short prayers are of more worth than a few lengthy prayers.

Martin Luther (16th century) recommended prayers to be numerous but short in duration. The fewer the words the better the prayer. Few words and much meaning is Christian. Many words and little meaning is pagan. Jacob Boehme (17th century) advised that “many words are not needed, but only a believing, repentant soul.”

Dwight Moody (19th century) carried this view over to public prayer. “A man who prays much in private will make short prayers in public.” He regarded lengthy public prayers as something akin to religious pretension.

Donald Bloesch (20th century) concluded that what characterized the great saints was not so much involvement in one single protracted or endless repetition of prayer formulas, but rather the practice of constantly waiting on the Lord, of praying inwardly even when outwardly occupied in daily tasks.

Going to God in Prayer and Worship is the most fundamental practice for being drawn closer to God in everyday living. Prayer is done alone or in small groups. Worship is done in larger assemblies. It is the same relationship as practicing your relationship with God.

What Prayer Accomplishes

The central questions are what these practices do for you and what they do for others. For you, prayer turns your thoughts God-ward. “Draw near to God and he will draw near to you” (James 4:8). When biblical truths shape those thoughts, they expose you to the Holy Spirit’s work on your inner being. From such heart-work come the love, joy, peace, and trust that deliver to you more of the abundant life Jesus came to bring.

What your prayers and worship don’t do is earn you more credit in God’s eyes. For centuries church life was approached as a duty we owe to God. The goal would be to build up a more virtuous, God-pleasing life that earns God’s favor.

Rather than just duty, prayer and worship are opportunities to experience more of God’s blessings in this life on the way to heaven. In Christ’s redeeming work we already have the salvation that God promises for the next life. He also promises to send his Holy Spirit and the fruit he can produce for a better life now. We daily have the opportunity to draw upon his potential for life-changing power. The Lord’s Prayer is the ultimate expression of the prayer relationship. Recognize that this prayer is in the context of a lengthier teaching, which Jesus ends with the promise: “How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:14). Prayer is asking for this special power that changes lives.

Church teachings with little appreciation of the Spirit’s work inevitably approach our routine relationship with God as something we do. This approach too often becomes a guilt-inducing burden for many believers. Better to approach prayer as a refreshing opportunity.

Intercessory Prayer

Intercessory prayer is done for others. What it accomplishes is more difficult to answer. This is because of a teaching that God has already made up his mind about what will happen in your life and that of others. Such is the message, especially in John Calvin's doctrine of double predestination—some are predestined to salvation and others are predestined to damnation. God is sovereign and determines all human affairs. This understanding leaves little room for prayer requests for others. Yet even Calvin himself regularly participated in congregational prayers and petitions. Logic in relating to God has its limits.

A more biblical teaching is that God can indeed change his mind in response to prayers. Evidence is in Abraham's bargaining with God to spare those in Sodom, and God agreed. Two of Jesus' parables endorse persistence in prayer. One is the man who repeatedly knocks on his neighbor's door for bread for an unexpected guest. The other is the widow who nagged the judge with her petitions. In both cases, their persistence brought a favorable result. Won't such prayer make a difference when addressed not to a grouchy neighbor but to the loving Father?

How much difference does the number of words make in our prayers? Are they even necessary? Will many words bring a better result? Not really. Thinking that many words will persuade God is a form of works righteousness. What's important is the underlying attitude of dependence on God, who loves and responds like a parent.

Are words even necessary? No. Words are a means of expressing thoughts. It's the thoughts about God and others that count. Words without thought are empty. Humility and dependence are the keys to exercising the basic relationship with God.

In my randomly sampled prayer research, about half reported a deep sense of peace and a strong presence of God in their prayers. One young woman reported that "I am often moved to tears during prayer, either with joy or fear, I guess." A young mother relayed that "Sometimes I am able to set aside time to play the piano and sing my prayers to God. I think I feel closest to God in prayer when it is through a song." A recovering alcoholic wrote, "If I stop just moments to pray and make amends, I can enjoy a 'peace of mind' that is mind-boggling."

Improving Prayer Life

One of the surprises in the research was that four out of five (80%) felt they should improve their prayer life. That's valuable information for church leaders wanting to better connect with participants. Churches become more effective as they find spiritual needs and fill them. Give high priority to helping church participants grow in their personal prayer relationship with God. The response will be very good.

The biggest surprise in the research was that fully half of these ordinary believers declared that prayer is the most satisfying experience in their life!! That's an extreme statement. Who would have guessed?

How can you improve your prayer life? The starting point is finding the personal benefits of peace and power in your practice. Don't just do what somebody else finds satisfying. If you don't experience benefits, you probably won't do it long. Learn conversational prayer. Enjoy spontaneity. Find times and places that work for you, like talking with God on your drive to work. Try participating in a prayer group.

What you are looking for is the feeling of the presence of God with the peace and power the Spirit can bring. Those who regularly experience the benefits of prayer find themselves praying more often. Those who pray often are the ones who find prayer the most satisfying experience in their lives. Try it! – Rev. Dave Luecke, Ph.D.
Pastor Luecke is a member of our Board of Directors

When do you find time to pray? How has prayer made a difference in your life? When do you find it difficult to pray?

FROM VICAR JAMES ALINAITWE, MID WEST DEANERY, LCU

“Happy New Year my friend and a brother in Christ. I thank God for the grace given to us all so that we may live as a light to this sinful world. Secondly, me as a servant of Christ, I thank you for your great help and support towards my ministry and my family but also my neighbors. I also thank you for the love and care which you have given to Kyamujwara Lutheran Church.

This night, we had a great number of people watching Jesus Christ film - The Life of Christ. There have been over 200 people gathered at the church.”

NAIGOBYA HEALTH CENTER

For the past three years Lutheran Lay Renewal has provided the funding for the Health Center on the grounds of Naigobya Lutheran Church in the Eastern Deanery of the Lutheran Church of Uganda. We are committed to keeping this Health Center open, as the next closest medical care is about 15 miles away from this remote village of about 5,000 people. We can do this for about \$4,000 per year but we need your help!



Elizabeth Maganda, one of two nurses at the Naigobya Health Center

OUR PARTNERS IN AFRICA NEED OUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The financial needs of our partners in Africa are great, as Uganda and Rwanda are two of the 20 poorest countries in the world. Below is a wish list of current financial needs. Would you or your congregation be willing to help?

Lutheran Church of Uganda

\$100 will pay the salary of a nurse at the Niagobya Medical Clinic for one month.

\$200 will buy a three-month supply of medicines at the clinic.

\$2,500 will pay for a student to attend the Lutheran seminary for a year.

Funds are needed to buy uniforms, lunch and Bibles for school children.

Funds are needed to support the Lutheran Lay Leaders Training program.

\$1,500 will buy a motorcycle for a pastor or vicar. At least three motorcycles are needed. Pastors and vicars serving rural congregations must walk long distances every week to visit parishioners and still are not able to reach all of them.

Anglican Diocese of Northwest Ankole, Uganda

\$90 per year will pay for school fees, scholastic materials, a uniform and school bag for a child in a rural school. \$211 per year will pay for school fees, scholastic materials, a uniform and a school bag for a student in a rural secondary school. Funds also are needed to support the growing youth ministry of the diocese.

Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda

This year our highest priorities for funding for the Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda have been the purchase of Kinyarwanda language Bibles and funds for the Lay Leaders Training Program. Pastor Jean Claude Maniragaba, President of the RLCR, writes that funds are needed to purchase Kinyarwanda language Bibles for new believers, so they can read the Word of God in their own language. \$70 will pay for 10 Bibles.

The Lay Leaders Training Program is training men, women and youth in Biblical studies, and to be leaders in their congregations. The RLCR also is training Lutheran adults to be deacons and deaconesses. Thanks to generous donations, we have been able to provide funds to help with both of these needs but more funds are needed.

Pastor Jean Claude also is requesting funds to purchase land and to build church buildings. "Our RLCR needs to build the Church building for the Congregation of Rwempasha and the Congregation of Ntoma. And the church does not have funds to do this hard work. And the believers of these congregations are poor. We need God's grace."

One hundred percent of any donations to Lutheran Lay Renewal will go to the need designated by the donor or, if you prefer to work directly with a church in Africa, please contact our office and we will put you in touch with church leaders there.

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 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 in Uganda and Rwanda!

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