



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!

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Judy Moser, *President*
Lou McKibben, *Vice President*
Karen Ferrari, *Secretary-Treasurer*
William Oehlschlager, *Executive Director*
Elaine Schomaker, *President Emerita*

David Fugate
Deacon Michael Grube
Jerry Kuhn
Rev. David Luecke, Ph.D.

May, A.D. 2023

GROWING IN THE BENEFITS THE HOLY SPIRIT OFFERS US

By The Rev. David Luecke, Ph.D.

The Great Passion by James Runcie is a novel about the family and work of J.S. Bach set in the 1730s. He was the hard-working organist and music director at St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, Germany, and is now recognized as one of the greatest composers of all time. Striking in the novel was his busy household of 20 children, nine of which died in childhood.

I read the novel as a reflection of the German Lutheran church culture of the 18th century, a culture that continued well into the 20th century. In one's personal life, the emphasis was on work and discipline, and the solution to most problems was to work harder. Suffering was a constant, especially with illness and death so near at hand. With suffering came an emphasis on heaven; relief will come in the next life. Individuality was to be resisted. Identity was to be determined through church life and routines. Overall, life was somber.

I approached understanding this older culture with a distinction in mind between a static view of church life and a dynamic approach that is replacing it. Static is like a flat line. You did your growing as a child. As an adult, you do your work until you are called home. Your church life supported you over the years as you tried to live a virtuous, disciplined life. The opposite of static is dynamic—frequently changing.

Personal life has its downturns, but more important is change upward through the growth of some sort. Personal growth in our current culture is increasingly seen as a life-long process. This distinction between static and dynamic is oversimplified to make the point that personal spiritual growth toward closeness to God was not emphasized in earlier centuries of church life. More important was maintaining the faith you were taught while you encountered difficulties in your life.

The six Reflections that follow assume a Spirit-stimulated personal drive to become more like Christ. You become different over time. What does such growth look like? What can you do to better position yourself so the Spirit can change your life?

Growing in Faith

My first effort as a spiritual director was with a student who wanted to grow in his faith. I did not know how to respond and help. That's because I was coming out of a static church culture. My understanding of faith was a set of beliefs that I held as I went through my family and work life. Any growth would be in knowledge about God

and what he expects of those who follow him.

Since that encounter, I have grown into a broader understanding of faith in a believer's life. It can be either a noun or a verb. My assumption was that faith is a noun, something I believe. I have learned to see it more as a verb, something I do. The same biblical word can mean both. The action verb is to trust. The challenge in Christian living is to grow in trusting God in a relationship that deepens and brings more benefits in the abundant life Jesus came to offer.

To appreciate that abundant life, you have to think like Paul and recognize the Spirit as the giver of benefits as we experience more of his fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The Spirit is dynamic. He wants to bring change to those who follow Christ. The question I will address in the next six Reflections is, what can we ourselves do to let the Spirit draw us closer to him?

Growing in Grace

The Apostle Peter challenged his readers to “grow in grace and knowledge” (2 Peter 3:18). I know how to grow in knowledge. I have been doing that all my life. But how do you grow in grace? The problem goes back to the static view of life with God. Your faith in the Gospel of Christ puts you in a new saved relationship with God. You live that life as best you can until you are with God in eternal life. By grace are you saved by faith; it is the gift of God.

But this static approach of new standing before God misses the dynamic view of grace that Paul developed. The whole concept of grace is unique to Paul, picked up then by Peter. The parallel term in the Gospels is mercy, to which Paul adds more. We can speculate that Paul developed the basics of his new theology during his fourteen silent years (Galatians 2: 1) while he witnessed to his Greek neighbors around Tarsus. They were steeped in the mythology of major and minor gods.

Among the minor ones were the Charity Sisters, who were viewed as muses, or the source of ideas for poetry and dance. What they inspired was a gift, and we get the English word “charity” as the giving of gifts or other support to others. Paul emphasized the word *charis* to describe the gift of our new status before God. But the Greeks would have heard it also in the dynamic terms of new powers we receive from God. That is described with the word charisma, from which we get the word charismatic.

For clarity between the static view of *charis* and the dynamic understanding of charisma, I suggest the labels Grace 1 and Grace 2. These modern terms can be helpful to highlight the subtle distinction Paul made in describing two kinds of gifts from God. Grace 1 (*charis*) is the status of salvation in Christ. Grace 2 (charisma) is best described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, where he clarifies spiritual giftings to do ministry.

For Paul, everyone is given a dynamic manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. Ministry is done by all. This is a radical shift in perspective that is fundamental to the view of congregational ministry I am trying to highlight. It is so Scriptural and so powerful.

The Greater Gifts

But perhaps even more significant and powerful is the last verse of that chapter where Paul introduces “the greater gifts.” The first example is love, so eloquently described in 1 Corinthians 13 and then combined with faith and hope. He expands that listing in Galatian 5 to include joy, peace, patience, and five other qualities. He calls these “fruit” of the Spirit—what the Spirit produces in the lives where he is active.

What are these fruit of the Spirit? For centuries they were regarded as virtues, qualities that describe a life well lived. The understanding from ancient times is that an individual should strive to achieve these virtues. Church life and preaching too often held up this understanding of a standard that we should aim to attain. To pursue virtues is to submit to a stern taskmaster.

What if, however, these qualities are the product of the Spirit's work? What if they are Grace 2 given freely? Paul's fruit of the Spirit is all personal qualities everyone would like to have more of in their lives. Being closer to God is not something we are left on our own to achieve. As Jesus told his disciples, he is not going to leave us as orphans. He is going to send his Spirit to give us new powers.

Read the following six Reflections on what we can do to better prepare ourselves for the Spirit's work. These practices are organized around the acronym **GROWTH**:

Go to God in Prayer and Worship
Read God's Word for You
Obey the Challenge to Deny Yourself
Witness Through Servant Behavior
Trust God in a New Venture
Humble Yourself With a Discipline

What are some of the benefits the Spirit offers? How do you grow in the fruit the Spirit produces?

RENEWAL WEEKEND AT KEMENZU LUTHERAN CHURCH, UGANDA

“Greetings from our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. I thank God for the Lutheran Lay Renewal weekend program which I had at my church, thank you Lord. We had 35 participants, including 13 non-Lutherans; it was wonderful and the youth and even the non-Lutherans enjoyed the program, even I too really enjoyed it, because it's my first time to do this program, and I appreciate another opportunity. My humble appreciation goes to LLR, thanks for everything, mostly your notes you entrusted to me and your prayers, thank you so much, may God bless you.” – Vicar Edison Abigaba



Vicar Edison Abigaba and some of the youth who attended the renewal weekend in Kemezuz

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 25 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.

\$5,000 per year is needed to support the Lutheran Lay Leaders Training program in the Eastern Deanery.

\$1,500 will buy a motorcycle for a pastor or vicar. At least three motorcycles are needed. Many pastors and vicars serving rural congregations must walk long distances every week to minister to their congregations.

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

Funds are needed for the Lay Leaders Training Program, which 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.

The Marianne Foundation – Ibanda, Uganda

Funds are needed to support all of the programs to train young women in job and life skills.

Triangular Communities – Iganga, Uganda

Vision: To see all children and girls enter adulthood with holistic skills and abilities necessary to contribute effectively to the development of Uganda.

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 or ministry 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
-

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.LLRA.org**