

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!

November, A.D. 2023

LAY LEADERS TRAINING PROGRAM IN UGANDA

The Lutheran Lay Leaders Training program in the Eastern Deanery of the Lutheran Church of Uganda, funded by Lutheran Lay Renewal of America, is continuing with a new group of trainees. This program trains men to be evangelists, as well as to lead worship and preach for congregations that do not have an ordained pastor. We have been funding this program for the last several years and it has produced many outstanding church leaders, some of whom have gone on to the Lutheran seminary.



Rev. Peter Maganda (2nd from left) and other Eastern Deanery clergy teaching at a training session in Kawete

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LLRA PRESENTS AT OCTOBER LUTHERAN CONVOCATIONS

Lutheran Lay Renewal was invited to be a special guest at the Annual Convocation of the Atlantic Mission Region of the North American Lutheran Church, October 13-14. The convocation was held at St. Paul Lutheran Church, York, PA. Our Executive Director attended, along with our good friend Rev. Raymond Kaija, Dean of the Midwestern Deanery, Lutheran Church of Uganda. They had an opportunity to give a joint presentation on our ministry here in the U.S., as well as the partnership between LLRA and the Lutheran Church of Uganda. Bill led a Bible study on 7 Lessons for Living the Spiritual Life on Friday morning of the convocation as well.

We are very grateful to the Atlantic Mission Region for designating half of the convocation offerings to the ministry of Lutheran Lay Renewal, which we have forwarded to the LCU Midwestern Deanery. In addition, Messiah Lutheran Church, Lebanon, PA made a substantial donation, which also has gone to support the LCU Midwestern Deanery.



Rev. Raymond Kaija and Bill Oehlschlager present on our partnership with the LCU

MID NORTHEAST MISSION DISTRICT CONVOCATION

Our Executive Director also had the opportunity to give a presentation at the Annual Convocation of the NALC Mid Northeast Mission District on October 21 at Trinity Lutheran Church, Bedford, PA. Bill talked about our ministry both here in the U.S. and in Uganda, and we also had a display table with information about our ministry.

Lutheran Lay Renewal has been invited to lead many renewal weekends, retreats and workshops in congregations in both of these regions/districts and we wish to express our thanks to all of the church leaders and congregations in this part of the country who have been so supportive of our ministry.



Rev. Raymond Kaija at our display table at St. Paul Lutheran Church, York, PA

THE IMPORTANCE OF NAMING THE SPIRIT WORKING IN OUR LIVES

Founder of the modern discipline of Psychology, William James, gave the classic descriptions of religious experiences. He used such phrases as “an incomparable feeling of happiness which is connected with the near presence of God’s Spirit,” and “a sense of presence, strong and at the same time soothing, which hovers over me.”

Add to these descriptions from my own survey research of prayer among 500 ordinary Lutherans. About half said they regularly experience a deep sense of peace and the strong presence of God during prayer. Striking was that about half agreed that “Prayer is the most satisfying experience of my life.” Those are experiences of the Holy Spirit. We Lutherans just don’t name them. Fundamentally, spontaneous prayer comes at the initiative of the Spirit.

What are some other appropriate phrases for describing the Spirit at work? One is “Spirit encounter.” “Spiritual experience” is another, but be sure to capitalize the S. Other good phrases are “a God moment” or “a Spirit sighting.”

An “Awakening” is a helpful word for those very special and rare times when one’s Christian faith takes on significantly more meaning—when God becomes more real and personal in a new way. It is like an “aha” moment when a light bulb goes on and life in Christ takes on a whole new dimension. “Awakening” vocabulary was embedded in Lutheran vocabulary in earlier centuries.

Awakening and Conversion

Such an Awakening is comparable to the Evangelical word “conversion.” Evangelicals are taught to recognize such a peak moment and get good at telling their personal conversion

story. Sharing these stories helps others review their own conversion and give thanks for God's movement in their lives. One of the limitations of conversion theology, however, is that this special experience happens only once in a lifetime. Often because of a lack of emphasis on the Holy Spirit, those participants are typically not taught to experience additional Spirit-aroused changes on their journey to becoming more like Christ.

In contrast to once-a-lifetime conversion, Luther advocated daily conversion of drowning out the old sinful nature and letting the new nature in Christ emerge. Confession and Absolution are a routine part of Lutheran worship. Each time is a conversion with a commitment to change that person's mind and amend their life. Both special Evangelical conversion and Lutheran routine conversion are a story of before and after. As such, they are backwards looking. Indeed, it is good to celebrate renewal that the Spirit has brought in the past. But also important is to look forward to what the Spirit will do in the future. The ministry challenge is to highlight such expectation of fresh movement and more profound conversion to come.

The classical one-time conversion of someone who was not a Christian is a favorite research topic for psychologists. H. Newton Malony concluded that, first, human beings are so constructed that decisions made individually will not last, and second, the confirmation and support of others may be necessary for a conversion to be effective. The first step of naming the Spirit is basic. But it should be followed by sharing the experience not only to confirm it but to describe to others what such an encounter with the Spirit is like, so they can anticipate such movement in their own personal lives.

Gradual Conversion

More recent psychological research on conversion recognizes there is a gradual conversion in addition to the classic sudden and even dramatic conversion. J. T. Richardson suggests this second type is more relational than emotional; it flows from a compassionate rather than stern theology; and it emerges from a search for meaning and purpose. Life-changing conversion to Christian faith does happen to some people at a specific time and place. But for most, it is a process of growth in grace, with perhaps several memorable awakenings along the way.

Psychologist and pastor J. Harold Ellens explains, "The Holy Spirit is always a mystery, an intriguing agent of God, full of intimations of God's nature, truth, and grace. These intimations speak spontaneously to our natures as we hunger for God. One must have the eyes to see and the ears to hear, of course. It is an intriguing and exciting thing indeed to live life always consciously anticipating how the Holy Spirit of God will show up around the next corner. The Spirit always does if we are expecting it."

Look for the Spirit in Changed Motivation

An important skill for a sports coach is to motivate players to a higher level of performance. But strictly speaking, no one can motivate someone else. Motives come from within a person and are what move him or her into action. The best someone else can do is to arrange opportunities for a person to fill a need and thus be moved or motivated into action. The opportunity to play first string will stimulate more energy and drive from a bench sitter.

Many participants in churches remain mostly bench sitters. The challenge of ministry is to get them into the “game” of growing more like Christ. How do you do that? We can describe what the new life *should* look like. Call it discipleship. But this approach inherently relies on guilt as the motivator. But recognize that guilt is a notoriously poor stimulator of lasting new behavior. The missing ingredient is inner drive. The individual’s inner drive has to change. Such a drive to become more like Christ is Holy Spirit work.

The modern psychological concept of motivation revolves around filling felt needs. First comes the need that arises from within. This is the inner drive. It initiates a search for ways to fill that need. When a need-filling object is spotted, then comes the action to obtain it. A late evening craving for a snack arouses someone from the couch to go to the kitchen to find and eat ice cream. This is a simple motivation cycle.

The classic structure was offered by Abraham Maslow, who identified five kinds of basic needs that motivate action. The first is to care for the body, like finding food or sleep. Second is for security and predictability in daily living. When these lower-level needs are satisfied, then the person can focus on the higher-level needs for being drawn closer to others and for distinguishing themselves from others by achieving higher status. The fifth in this scheme is a felt need to actualize one’s potential. A corollary of this theory is that once a need has been satisfied it will not motivate more behavior. If you are still full from supper, you are not going to rummage around in the refrigerator for something more to eat.

Church Motivation

Consider motivation for church behavior. Motivation by guilt is not part of the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ. But in close-knit church communities like those of immigrants, the social pressure could easily become motivation by guilt. For those so motivated, the question too often becomes what is the minimum necessary to do to meet those expectations, rather than how to be drawn closer to God.

Psychologists talk about incentives and how to “incentivize” people. The Gospel presents the best possible incentive to act on filling the fifth, highest level of need. Experience the abundant life Jesus came to offer. Experience the fruit of the love, joy and peace the Spirit wants to produce in those who follow Christ. You don’t earn these. They are a gift from God empowered by grace through his Spirit.

I have encountered elderly Lutherans who talk about “paying their dues,” as if church is a social club. Indeed, without the strong, continuing work of the Spirit, congregations can become little more than social organizations with a veneer of holy words. The pastoral challenge is to present the Word in ways that more effectively engage the hearers. The difference between an apathetic declining congregation and a lively center of Christian ministry is the Holy Spirit.

In our American society today, we live among many people who no longer consider themselves God’s people wanting to be good Christians. Those days are gone, and with them has gone unthinking reliance on guilt to motivate church behavior. The challenge now is to fill felt spiritual needs for greater purpose and more abundant living. – **The Rev. David Luecke, Ph. D (Dr. Luecke is a member of our Board of Directors.)**

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 Niagobya Medical Clinic for one month.

\$355 will pay the salaries of 6 teachers plus the principal at a Lutheran primary school for one month

\$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

Funds are needed to purchase a vehicle for the diocesan youth ministry, so that the Director of Youth Ministry is able to visit remote congregations.

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.

Marianne Foundation

"Marianne Foundation for Youth Development, your friends in Uganda, is EXPLODING! Our programming is growing; our reach in the communities is spreading. We invite you to learn more about us, our current programming and future plans.

Our previous location could no longer suit the growing needs of the organization. Therefore, our Executive Director and Founder, Justus Ahimbisibwe, has sought out a new location in which more women and girls can have the opportunity to learn valuable life skills and contribute back to the community. More photos are on our Facebook page."

REFORMED LUTHERAN CHURCH OF RWANDA

Dear People of God, God's peace!

Servants of God, our local congregation in Ntoma is using a rental house. It is not our own building. Please, we need to build our own church building in Ntoma. Your prayers for the work of God in Rwanda will continue to be a blessing. Adult members are 120, and the total believers including youth and children are over 300.

It is a problem to me as the church president once the government local leaders say that they need this house for other use because we rented it from them. Please share this prayer request to all brothers and sisters in Christ so that they too can remember the church in Rwanda in their daily prayers. God bless you and God bless your family and God bless your country of the United States of America (USA).

In His Services!

Pastor Jean Claude Maniragaba,
President, Reformed Lutheran Church of Rwanda

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.

LUTHERAN LAY RENEWAL IS NOW ON YOUTUBE!

Thanks to generous funding by one of our board members, we now have four short videos on YouTube and another that should be up soon. Just search for the Lutheran Lay Renewal of America channel and be sure to subscribe and give us a "Like."

SCHEDULED EVENTS

November 4 7 Lessons for Living the Spiritual Life Retreat
Zion Lutheran Church
Chicora, PA
Bill Oehlschlager, Retreat Leader

PRAYER REQUESTS

- Healing for Elaine Schomaker, Julie, Dan and Kathie Klueg
- 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

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!

Lutheran Lay Renewal of America 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 also in Uganda and Rwanda!

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