

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!

January, A.D. 2024

LAND PURCHASE FOR HANGA CONGREGATION IN UGANDA

Thanks to funding from Lutheran Lay Renewal, the Midwestern Deanery of the Lutheran Church of Uganda was able to purchase an acre of land for their congregation in Hanga. Our Executive Director visited this congregation with Revs. Raymond Kaija and Peter Maganda last February to find out more about their needs. Many of the people in this village are refugees from fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo and other areas. Dean Kaija writes: "We are organizing a grand fundraising on the 28th of this month for raising \$25,000 to construct a church building and latrine on the new land. Please keep us in your prayers and any support is highly welcome and appreciated."



Dean Raymond Kaija (R) meets with congregational leaders at the completion of the purchase

OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Judy Moser, President

Lou McKibben, Vice President

Karen Ferrari, Secretary-Treasurer

William Oehlschlager, Executive Director

Elaine Schomaker, President. Emerita

Rev. Kuruka Amutuhaire

David Fugate

Deacon Michael Grube

Jerry Kuhn

Rev. David Luecke, Ph.D.

Rev. Peter Maganda



Dean Raymond Kaija (right of center, flowered shirt), Rev. Robert Wabyoona, Midwestern Deanery Coordinator (L-green shirt) with congregational leaders on their newly acquired land in Hanga

NAIGOBYA LUTHERAN CHURCH, SCHOOL AND HEALTH CLINIC

Lutheran Lay Renewal is once again funding the Naigobya Health Clinic this year, which we have been funding since 2019. This clinic is now serving people from five remote villages in eastern Uganda. We also have been providing funding to pay the teachers at Naigobya Lutheran Primary School when we are able, as the village is too poor for the parents to be able to pay school fees. In addition, we have been providing funds, when we are able, to pay the teachers at Kyabazaala Lutheran Nursery and Primary School.



Rev. Anthony Otesa and teachers blessing some of the students at their December graduation at Naigobya Lutheran Primary School



December graduation ceremony at Naigobya Lutheran Nursery and Primary School

LUTHERAN LAY RENEWAL CHANNEL ON YOUTUBE

Thanks to generous funding by one of our board members, we now have some short videos on YouTube. Just click on the links below to watch and find out more about our ministry, and please give us a "Like":

LLRA in the U.S. - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RfXq0HuerI&t=79s>

Lutheran Lay Renewal in Uganda- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVU2uNsJPek>

Teaching Lutherans to Fish - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7bKT0eFsLY&t=5s>

Yesu Angonza (Jesus Loves Me) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCuIkqo1IqM>

Thank you to Nate Kelly of Blue Heron Media Group (nate@blueheronmedia.group), Pittsburgh, PA for his excellent filming and production work. A new video will be coming soon on the Lutheran Lay Renewal of America Channel.

WITNESS THROUGH SERVANT BEHAVIOR

Are you an evangelist? Probably not. We hear stories of someone on an airplane talking with a seatmate and leading them to Christ. Most of us feel guilty when we are challenged to do such ministry. It is one of those "shoulds" that are often laid on us but really don't change our behavior. By one estimate, much less than 10% of churchgoers are natural evangelists.

But look at giving witness of your faith to others as a basic step in growing closer to God. It can push you out of your comfort zone and increase your dependence on God. It stretches you, like doing regular exercise to keep your body healthy. Give witness to others in order to stay fit in your spiritual health and even to grow in your faith.

Peter and John were ordinary men—illiterate, we are told. True, they had been with Jesus for three years, absorbing his fresh teaching, just like many ordinary Christians have been in church for years, absorbing biblical teachings. Witnessing in the temple, they were put on the spot. By what power are you teaching in the temple the authorities demanded. Peter gave his testimony. Luke starts this story with the phrase that Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit.” Luke uses that phrase in at least eight different settings in his Gospel and the book of Acts. Someone was filled with the Spirit and did something with special conviction or wisdom.

You Will Be Filled With the Holy Spirit

What “filled with the Holy Spirit” means is very controversial in our times. Pentecostals use it to describe a special outpouring of the Spirit that enables a believer to speak in strange tongues. In fact, in many Pentecostal congregations, you can’t become a member without demonstrating what is called this second baptism of the Spirit. Most of the growth of Christianity in our times is in Pentecostal forms. If you are going to become a follower of Jesus, why not seek such peak special emotional experiences? The opportunity to “feel” the Spirit is attractive.

Most traditional Protestants can’t go there. We value the priority of reason over emotions and rightly resist “irrational” expressions of God’s presence in a person’s life. But we can appreciate that the Holy Spirit will empower us when the time comes to give a witness to our faith. We can be filled with the Spirit in a special way when an occasion puts us on the spot to explain who we are and what we believe. We can trust God to send his Spirit to give us special bravery or wisdom when the occasion presents an opportunity. After all, this is his promise.

Two Versions of Motivation for Witnessing

In their Gospels, Matthew and Luke give us two different versions of why and how to give witness. Matthew’s version is the familiar “Go and make disciples of all nations.” Jesus started that commission with the declaration that he has all authority in heaven and on earth. This Great Commission comes across as a military command. You have your orders. You must obey. Now go do it. The problem is that this version does not work well today. In my experience, it doesn’t motivate much new behavior.

The motivation is better addressed in Luke’s version. He simply predicts that you will be my witnesses. God is going to give you power from on high to do that. The Holy Spirit is going to empower you in ways that will surprise you. My Spirit, Jesus promises, will enable you to be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Witness is the fourth practice of the GROWTH scheme for positioning yourself to grow closer to God. Grow by responding to opportunities to explain who you are and what you believe. Witness to the Gospel wherever possible, whether in word or deed.

Confronting An Avalanche of Words

But how do you make your witness when we are all buried under an avalanche of words every day? We have all learned to fend off the advertisements we daily encounter by the

dozens and hundreds. Ads themselves are now getting simplified to a quick succession of graphic images because words mean so little.

We in mainline churches are at an even greater disadvantage because we have a specialized church vocabulary developed over the centuries. For us, key biblical phrases can pack a powerful punch, like redemption, salvation, and Jesus the Christ. But biblical literacy is fast receding in our current culture. Basic Bible stories draw a blank stare from so many young adults.

How do we break through the maze of words that surrounds everyone? It is hardly going to be by adding more words—at least not at the outset. The best witness today is the quality of life we Christians live day by day. Check out 2 Peter 2:12. Actions do speak louder than words. That's how the earliest Christians had their biggest impact. Observers were struck by how they loved each other.

What we can do today is let our acts of service and kindness make an impact that draws attention to our church of believers who are intent on serving our community and demonstrating that our church is a “loving” place. Call that Servant Evangelism.

Servant Evangelism

Servant Evangelism is a term that reached prominence through the ministry of Steve Sjogren when he was pastor of the Vineyard Community Church in Columbus, Ohio. His classic example was showing up at a local business with a mop and bucket in hand and asking permission to clean their toilets—something that is clearly servant behavior. It becomes a witness when leaving a calling card to identify the congregation on behalf of which this act was done. Other examples are giving away free coffee to those standing in line somewhere, or to do free gift-wrapping at Christmas, or giving away popsicles on a hot day.

Our church twice a year does a Servant Saturday event. It is surprisingly popular, with about three hundred showing up. Many make it a family affair. We work with the city to identify those in need, typically elderly residents who can't keep up with cleaning and yard work. I remember pulling weeds in a Catholic widow's yard and asking myself why I was doing so when I had lots of weeds in my own yard. The answer came, that's what Christians do; we serve others. These events are faith-affirming experiences for me personally. They become a faith witness when we identify ourselves as members of our congregation.

Part of the challenge traditional churches face today is to be known for doing what churches are supposed to do—be centers for offering spiritual growth in Christ and for ministering to those in need. Look for ways to do that through Servant Behavior.

Have you ever been “filled with the Holy Spirit”? Were you aware of Luke’s version of the Great Commission? Have you had experience with Servant Evangelism?

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.

SCHEDULED EVENTS

January 30 7 Lessons for Living the Spiritual Life Retreat
Kemenzu Lutheran Church,
Kemenzu, Uganda
Vicar Edison Abigaba, Retreat Leader

IS IT TIME TO SCHEDULE A RETREAT OR RENEWAL WEEKEND AT YOUR CHURCH?

"The team that led the spiritual transformation workshops at Holy Cross was first-class. They knew their material well, demonstrating not only an academic knowledge of the subject, but an experiential acquaintance with the spiritual life in the deep Christian tradition to buttress it. Their passion for Christ, Lutheran grounding in the dynamics of Law and Gospel, and familiarity with the tradition catholic gave their presentations (particularly the question and answer sessions) a profundity often lacking in the slickly produced offerings of ministries promoted by major publishing houses. I would highly recommend them as an integrated part of your congregation's catechetical and Christian formation ministries." - Rev. Brett Jenkins, STS, Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church, Nazareth, PA

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!

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