

Faith & Fellowship

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Joining Jesus
on His Mission



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FAITH & FELLOWSHIP
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Church of the Lutheran Brethren
DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH
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CALL
to Follow

PARTNER
in Mission

UNLEASH
New Leaders

MULTIPLY
New Disciples

Someone has said that eternity is the echo of time. The echo will be as the cry was.

God called through his Word, but you said, "No." One day you will stand knocking at the door of heaven. That day you will hear the echo of your own "no." God called but you did not answer. You did not say "yes," nor did you say "no." On that day you will meet the great silence. No one will answer.

God called and you whispered a "yes," and opened the door for Jesus. That day you will hear the echo of your "yes" resounding through heaven and the door is opened for you.

Let this serious thought find place in your heart. How often

God has called. What have you answered? What shall be the echo that answers you? We need to let the thought of eternity take possession of us. What we sow, we shall reap.

Eternity is the echo of time.

Hans Edvard Wisløff (1902—1969) was a Norwegian theologian and writer. He was also the Bishop of the Diocese of Sør-Hålogaland from 1959 until his death in 1969.

H. E. Wisløff, *Quiet Moments on the Way Home* (Fergus Falls, MN: Faith & Fellowship Press, 1993), 235.

Treasured Prayers

JASON ROGNESS

I just returned home from a weeklong mission trip to northern Mexico. It's the first time since 2019 that we've been able to do this. Borderless Mexico Mission is a collaboration of Lutheran Brethren Churches. The group travels to Mezquital, Mexico, ministering to sister churches in nearby farming communities.

When we first began the partnership, we adopted Mezquital's neighboring community of Janitzio with the intent to plant a new congregation there. Janitzio locals currently drive over to Mezquital for worship. Their prayer is that someday they will have a pastor who will set roots in their community and lead the church plant there.

One of my favorite things to do when we're there is to pray with the Janitzio locals. We always spend a few hours sharing requests and praying together, even if it's in different languages. On this visit, I was struck with the content of each person's request. Every single prayer was for a family member, friend, or local in the community—for unsaved people. There were no requests for their own personal needs; no health requests; no prayer for safety; no wish for comfort.

That experience reminded me of my friend Lucas...

When we began ministry here in Parker, Colorado, one of the first couples we connected with were Lucas and Amanda. My wife Savanna coached volleyball with Amanda, which made a natural connection for relationship. In the five years since, we've spent a lot of time together sharing meals and enjoying having kids the same age. They have become our closest friends.

When the relationship first began, Lucas was a new Christian and recovering addict looking for safe people to be with. As we grew in friendship, our conversation moved toward his burden for unsaved friends... especially his friend Aaron.



pearlman in prayer/LightStock

Lucas has a group of friends with whom he's been close since his youth. The biggest issue was that many of them were still struggling in their drug and alcohol addictions, and didn't have time for Lucas' newfound faith.

We spent many nights praying for Aaron, and talking about how Lucas could continue to speak truth into his life. While Aaron would listen, it seemed that the addiction cycle kept him at arm's length from the freedom he desperately needed. Nevertheless, Lucas continued to live in his newfound grace, boldly proclaiming freedom through Jesus' death and resurrection, and praying for Aaron's salvation. Our prayer together wasn't about comfort, or our needs. It was for Aaron's greatest need.

We were with Lucas and Amanda again recently, but this time the conversation was different. Lucas was excited to share that something was different about Aaron. He had come to Lucas and expressed he was ready to change his life. While it wasn't a proclamation of faith, it was the first step toward coming to grips with his addiction, and finding a new trajectory in life.

After Jesus' teaching on prayer and fasting in Matthew 6, he then discusses what we value the most: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where

moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (6:19-21).

As I listened to our friends in Janitzio pray, and as I heard Lucas share about Aaron's growth, I was reminded that our prayer life is a good indication of what we treasure. How much of our prayer life is for those who are spiritually lost? I must admit, my prayers are far too often only about me. My treasure is in my self-centeredness and need for comfort and ease. These selfish needs are treasures on earth. But the greatest heavenly treasure, that the thief cannot take away, is Jesus himself, who died and rose again for the salvation of lost souls.

We get to pray for the lost around us. Who is that in your life? Who needs the treasure of Jesus? Pray for them, treasure them. Jesus treasured people. We get to do likewise. And as you do, watch the Holy Spirit work!

Rev. Jason Rogness is the church planting pastor of New Hope Church in Parker, Colorado.



Brimstone Creative/Two Men Discussing Scripture/LightStock

Sharing the Word of Christ

CLINT KNUTSON

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

— Romans 10:14-17, ESV

Paul’s heartfelt desire in the context of this passage is that his fellow Israelites, the people of his home, would come to faith and be saved. Trying to understand why they haven’t come to faith, Paul, earlier in the chapter, says that though the people of his home were zealous, they were ignorant of the righteousness from God and had sought to establish their own, based on the law (Rom. 10:2-4). Paul then moves

on in the chapter to explain how the righteousness of faith is different and distinct from the righteousness of the law. The righteousness of faith does not need to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven?” or, “Who will descend into the abyss?” (Rom. 10:6-7). That is, who will go searching for the righteousness of Christ to bring it to us? Paul says it is not like that, because the righteousness of faith is a righteousness that comes through believing the Word. And that Word is near you, through the proclamation of his Church (Rom. 10:8).

Paul describes faith and calling together in this chapter. Calling means calling out to someone who can help you. There is a sense where we understand “calling on him” to be faith speaking out. That is the goal Paul has for the people of his home, that while believing, they would call out to the Lord for help, that they would confess him as Lord, because he writes,

For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put

to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him (Rom. 10:11-12).

Paul describes in our passage how the people of his home can call on Jesus. To summarize his point, they can call on the Lord, that is, they can believe and call on him, when someone brings the Word of Christ to them.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Rom. 10:14-15a, 17).

When Paul gets right down to brass tacks, the Word of Christ lies at the center of the Church’s mission to the world and to our own homes. Paul, early in this

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

Romans 10:14

letter to the Romans, delivers a powerful statement, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Rom. 1:16-17). For Paul, it was through the gospel itself that God worked for salvation to everyone who believes. The gospel itself was the engine behind God’s mission of salvation.

That the Word of God, the gospel of Christ, would be the engine for God’s mission of salvation is not something new. Rather we understand God’s Word to be the very engine behind creation itself. Behind every breath we take, every bite we eat and every drop we drink, we encounter the power of God’s Word. God speaks and it is. In Hebrews, the author describes Jesus, saying, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Heb. 1:3). In Genesis 1, we see God speaking creation into existence. In Romans 4, Paul describes God as the One “who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist” (Rom. 4:17).

When we study our Bible, when we read it quietly to ourselves, when we share the message of Christ with our friends and neighbors, when we either preach or hear preaching—in all these ways we handle, hear, and see the very words of God. They are the words of eternal life, they

are the words of power, the promise of forgiveness, the promise of resurrection, the promise of creation. It is through hearing these promises that faith comes, newness of life, that calls upon the Lord. God is at work bringing his gospel to the world, and in the mystery of God, he does so through his Church.

Paul was wrestling with why so few of his people were saved. I described them as the people of his home to help us think of our own homes. We can no longer take for granted that the people of our homes, our communities, those most familiar to us, have heard. Now that is no new insight, but consider the neighbors you have right next door. They may be a few houses down, but you know who they are. Perhaps they are even in your own house.


I have had many conversations with fellow Christians, in which they express that they just don’t know how people can face life and death, without faith. We should ruminate on that a bit. It is the reality for many of our neighbors and friends here at home. They have no one to turn to, no place to seek shelter in the storm, no ultimate help. So, we must ask, how will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching or proclaiming to them? And how are they to proclaim unless they are sent?

Let us realize we are the ones sent. God has sent us to bring the word of

Christ, the message of Christ, to those people right next door. He has placed us, as the Church, in our homes and our communities for that very purpose. He has placed us where we are to share the word of Christ. As people hear that word, God grants faith. He gives new life, new hope—Someone to turn to—for those who live in this place we call home.



Rev. Clint Knutson serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as Professor of Systematic Theology at Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.


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Jesus is on a Mission

GREG FINKE

Jesus is on a mission. He was sent by his Father on a grand adventure to redeem and restore all things to his Father's kingdom. And he invites you to join him, "Come, follow me."

And, for many Christians, therein lies the mystery: What does it look like to "follow Jesus" in everyday life and join him on his mission?

Does it look like following the rules? Does it look like following religious rituals? Does it look like convincing people of Jesus? Selling people on Jesus? Saving people for Jesus?

No.

The Bible says, "following Jesus" looks like "loving people."

For instance, in John 13:34 Jesus says, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Ephesians 5:2 says "...live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ" (NLT). In fact, "loving people" is how Jesus says everyone will recognize that we have been trained by

him. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

So, if you want to follow Jesus and join him on his mission, it really is this simple: look for people who need a little of the abundant love you have from the Father, and offer it to them. Or, as the Bible puts it, "Love your neighbor."

Because we are baptized into Jesus (Rom. 6:3), we have Jesus living in us and through us. That means, to the people with whom we live, work, or hang out, you and I are literally the body of Christ. We are Jesus with skin on. We are the way people experience his love in the material world where they live. The love comes from Jesus, but it is experienced through us. From him, to us, through us, to the people around us who need him and his love so badly (1 John 4:19).

That means you get to have fun being the neighbor, co-worker, or fellow student people enjoy having in their life.

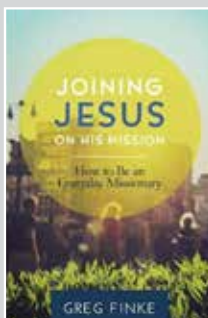
You get to be the one who smiles and waves, notices and helps, listens and understands. You get to be the one who is quick to listen, slow to become angry, and the first to apologize. You get to be the one who practices hospitality, generosity, and humility. You get to be the reason someone receives some joy, experiences some kindness, or has an advocate.

Dear friends, living a life of love is the best way to live. It is a full, rich, abundant way to live. It is how we join Jesus on his mission. And it works.

What's next?

I am often asked, "I know the Bible says to love my neighbor, but when do I tell my neighbor about Jesus?" That's easy: When they ask. At least, that's Peter's advice. "Always be prepared to give an answer to *everyone who asks you...*" (1 Pet. 3:15).

Let me tell you a story. About a year ago, a couple who attended one of our "Joining Jesus" trainings decided



Joining Jesus on His Mission

Joining Jesus on His Mission will alter the way you see your life as a follower of Jesus and take you beyond living your life for Jesus to living life with Jesus. Simple, powerful and applicable insights show you how to be on mission and recognize where Jesus is already at work in your neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools. You will feel both relief and hope. You may even hear yourself say, “I can do this!” as you start responding to the everyday opportunities Jesus is placing in your path.

Available at: **Amazon.com**

they were going to be more intentional about meeting and getting to know their neighbors so that they could do a better job of loving their neighbors.

They began smiling and waving more. They noticed and helped more. They teamed up with other neighbors and started having more cookouts, more game nights, and more birthday parties. And with all this, there came something else. Conversations. The small talk among strangers turned into conversations among friends.

And then one evening it happened. As everyone was enjoying a fire in the backyard, one of the neighbors said to the couple, “We really enjoy hanging out with you and your family. There is just something about you... we always feel good after being with you. You’re Christians, aren’t you?”

And just like that, they were having a conversation about Jesus.

Neither the husband nor wife were theological experts, but they could tell the neighbors why they trusted and followed Jesus. To the neighbors, what the couple

shared rang true because of how they had seen them live. The couple wasn’t perfect like Jesus, but they had offered love like Jesus. And the experience of that love made all the difference.

Last May, the children of those neighbors were baptized. Last fall, the whole family joined the church. It’s a cool story. But don’t forget, it all started with a couple becoming more intentional about getting to know their neighbors so they could do a better job of loving their neighbors.

The couple wrapped up their story with this important observation: “We think our neighbors wanted to ask us about Jesus that night because we first took the time to show them Jesus in how we lived.”

Yes. The Bible says that’s how it works. Show them Jesus’ love so they can experience Jesus’ love. And then, when they ask, be ready to tell them why you trust and follow Jesus. When people experience Jesus’ love through you, it opens up their intake valve to be more curious about Jesus’ truth as well. They *want* to hear more because of what they have seen and experienced with you.

From Jesus, to you, through you, to the neighbors around you who need his love so badly.

Joining Jesus on his mission: It’s simpler than you think and a lot more fun!



Rev. Greg Finke and his wife Susan are the founders of Dwelling 1:14. Dwelling 1:14 was created to come alongside Christians who are ready to gain clarity and simplicity about two things: how to join Jesus on his mission as part of their everyday lives and how to disciple more people to do the same. Greg and Susan offer consulting and training experiences for congregations and their leaders.

Visit: www.dwelling114.org



Pixel Creative/Super Powers/LightStock

The Superpower of God's Love

SUSAN FINKE

A few years ago, the school where I taught gave all the teachers a bright blue T-shirt, with a flowing red cape in the back. On the front was a bold Superman logo and the words, "I'm a Teacher. What's your Superpower?" We had fun wearing the shirts and flexing our muscles in our classes that day. Lots of laughter and smiles filled the school! Together we were proud of, and confident in, our identity and value as those who love and teach kids. And the kids felt loved and valued as well!

From childhood on, humans wrestle with identity and value. "Who am I?" "What value, if any, do I have to offer others?" These are huge questions because what we believe about who we are deeply affects what we believe about the value we have to offer others. Many of us are not proud of or confident in who we are. We listen to the lies of the devil. We think our identity is determined by what job we have, how much money we make, what kind of home we live in,

or what size clothes we wear. Perhaps we grew up in an atmosphere lacking affirmation, or where we were constantly being compared to others. (And we seemed to always come up lacking.)

If we believe the lie that our identity and value is found in how others see us or what others have said about us, it can be hard for us to freely pass on love, laughter, and value to others—even to our own kids, who need it so much.

But God has something to say about that, not on a T-shirt, but in his Word.

We ask, "Who am I?" God answers in his Word, "You are my beloved child!"

In the movie, *A Little Princess*, Sarah tells all the girls that they are princesses. When the mean Miss Minchen refutes that, Sarah cries out, "Yes, they *are* princesses! All girls are princesses! Didn't your father tell you that?!"

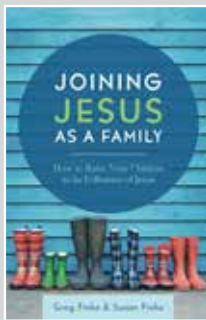
Your heavenly Father tells *you* that. You are a beloved child of the heavenly King! Your Father God wants you to be sure of that. The kids around you are princesses

and princes of the heavenly King! God wants them to be sure of that as well. They need to hear it from you often.

How can we be *sure* we are so loved by the Father? How can we *know* that our true identity is a lavishly loved child of the heavenly King? God tells us so in his Word, in many ways and in many places, such as 1 John 3:1, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

God accomplishes and confirms this relationship with him through water and Word in baptism. In Romans 6:3-4, Paul explains that when we are baptized, we are baptized *into* Christ Jesus. "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized *into Christ Jesus* were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, *we too may live a new life.*"

At Jesus' own baptism, the Father



Joining Jesus as a Family

Joining Jesus as a family is simpler than you think and a lot more fun! Christian parents want to raise their children to be life-long followers of Jesus. But many parents watch their children grow up, leave home, and then walk away from the faith. What went wrong, and how can a new generation of parents avoid the same result? Greg and Susan Finke identify what Jesus shows us in the Gospels to help parents become more intentional and practical in raising Jesus-followers.

Available at: **Amazon.com**

declares Jesus' true identity: "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17, ESV). The Father pours out his unconditional love and approval on his Son!

The Father also declares what your family's true identity is now in Christ: beloved children with whom he is well pleased. In his unconditional love, God accomplished everything needed for your salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection. When we are baptized into Christ Jesus, the Father pours out his unconditional love and approval on us—before we can do anything or earn anything. And the Father does this so each of us can now confidently live our lives out of the abundance and strength of our true identity.

When our daughter was a toddler, we began teaching her to confidently live out her identity as a child of God, with his strength. When she was afraid of monsters in the dark, we reminded her of who she was, a child of the King. Then we would sometimes hear her yelling from her dark room, "Go away, monsters! I'm baptized!" And she was off to sleep.

So, because we are beloved children of the heavenly King, what do we have of value to offer others? Jesus says we have the things of the kingdom. Paul explains it this way, "...love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control"

(Gal. 5:22-23). In other words, we have the superpower of God's love!

So, if this is who we are and this is what we have of value to offer others, what do we do with it? What is our purpose? We get to generously offer his abundant love to those around us who need it so badly. "Freely you have received; freely give" (Matt. 10:8).

Imagine being a child growing up with parents, grandparents, mentors, teachers, coaches, and others pouring this truth into you, and you being convinced of it in your heart. God's truth about your identity in Christ frees you to be confident in pouring his love and life into all those around you. What the Father says, and you believe, about your true identity, literally sets off a chain reaction in your inner being that affects everything and everyone around you. What ripples of love, laughter, smiles, and confidence in Christ! We will be more like Sarah than Miss Minchen... and even better, more like Jesus!

Your identity is a beloved child of the heavenly King. The identity of each of your kids is a beloved child of the heavenly King too. Remind them often... God loves us. He forgives us. We have all we need from him. He frees us from the lies. He frees us to confidently live life—bringing love, laughter, smiles, and value to the people around us.

Yes, I do believe teachers have

superpowers. So do kids, parents, grandparents, coaches, mentors, doctors, nurses, first responders, postal workers, garbage collectors, servers, scientists, astronauts... and YOU! We may not have the T-shirt and cape, but God has lavished on us the superpower of his LOVE!

How will you use your superpower of God's love today?



Susan Finke and her husband Greg are the founders of Dwelling 1:14. Dwelling 1:14 was created to come alongside Christians who are ready to gain clarity and simplicity about two things: how to join Jesus on his mission as part of their everyday lives and how to disciple more people to do the same. Greg and Susan offer consulting and training experiences for congregations and their leaders.

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CLB Shared Ministry: Contribution Report

\$3,100,000

2022-23 Fiscal Year Goal

\$2,710,346

Received Through 4/18/23

The CLB Fiscal Year ends April 30, 2023.

Perform or Provide

BRIAN KIEFAT

My name is Brian S. Kiefert. I am one of your Lutheran Brethren pastors who has answered the call to provide pastoral care to the armed forces. I am currently serving as a military Chaplain. As an Army National Guard Chaplain, the Army and the Church of the Lutheran Brethren have charged me with the responsibility and duty to “perform or provide” for the faith-based needs of America’s soldiers and their family members.

The Army adage to “perform or provide” implies that if you as an individual are unable to “perform” the ministry directly—the service, sacrament, ceremony, etc.—then you have the absolute obligation to “provide” resources for that ministry to take place. In doing so, you assure that many can still come to know the awesome power of the Lord God Almighty.

Matthew 28:19 tells us that we are to make disciples. How does one become a disciple? Put simply, those who are introduced to Christ Jesus and receive him as Savior and Lord become his disciples. These people are bound for eternal glory when they leave this world. Conversely, those who do not receive Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord will not become his disciples. Heartbreakingly, when these

people leave this world, they are bound for eternal damnation. Not only is this a big deal, this is THE big deal!

My family and I consider ourselves truly privileged to be part of a disciple-making Church—a Church that raises up competent and qualified pastors ready for the service of ministry, a Church that fervently plants new congregations, and a Church that valiantly delivers the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ to the very ends of the earth.

Because of the real and raw passion that the Church of the Lutheran Brethren has for the lost, and the equally audacious passion that it has to strengthen the faith of existing believers, my family and I give financially to the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, and we do so generously because we want to be part of a true and genuine disciple-making movement. We’re proud to say that we’ve made giving to the Lutheran Brethren part of our family DNA. Not only has this become a defining part of who we are, but it’s also become a defining part of how we worship, how we serve, and how we take part in the great commission given in Matthew 28:19-20.

I fully understand that not everyone has been called to an official ministry where they are expected to “perform” as

a pastor, missionary, etc. That being said, I believe we all have a part in “providing” for those who have been called to do so.

As your brother in Christ, I ask that you join me and the many others who are financially providing for the numerous ministries of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. The disciple-making ministries that the Lutheran Brethren is engaged in are vital beyond all measure. It literally is a matter of heaven or hell. I ask you to give generously. I ask you to provide, and remember that God is the greatest giver of all. As the Apostle Paul writes, “You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God” (2 Cor. 9:11).

Chaplain (MAJ) Brian Kiefert serves the Army National Guard where he is endorsed by the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

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LBS Class of 2023



LUTHERAN BRETHREN SEMINARY

MARCUS GOODMAN, MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

When I first felt confirmed in a call to attend Lutheran Brethren Seminary, I thought I'd learn to know and love God more through the experience, so that Kim and I could join God on his mission to evangelize the world. Now, as I complete a Master of Theological Studies, I can say that has happened, and so much more. I've learned to be completely dependent on the Word of God for all aspects of faith and life. I've learned to be dependent on the community of believers where we are placed. I've learned it's OK to need and totally depend on Jesus. As Kim and I transition into the next season, we will continue to rely on God's Word to lead, encourage, and shape our journey of faith together. Right now, we sense our call is to disciple others in the everyday stuff of life. We thank you all greatly for your prayers.



JOSH GRABER, MASTER OF DIVINITY

Those the Lord calls, he also equips. This is certainly true for me. After God called me to attend Seminary, I was unsure how his calling would come to fruition, considering our family's very limited financial situation. Yet God made a way where there seemingly was no way. He moved me, my wife Susie, and our four young children from Washington state to North Dakota, where I had received and accepted a call to serve as pastor at Zion Lutheran Church in Cooperstown. It was during this time that I also began attending Lutheran Brethren Seminary as a half-time student. Along this journey I have come to a greater understanding of God's infinite power and unending goodness to supply our every need and, by his grace, to fully satisfy his perfect plan and purpose in us and through us. It is my joy and privilege to continue serving him in pastoral ministry, now more sufficiently equipped than ever before as a result of the biblical training provided by LBS.

CARL JUHL, MASTER OF DIVINITY

My time at LBS has been a rich experience and has given me a greater appreciation for the gift of God's Word. I found that the more I studied Scripture, the more I found in it. It is as though I have been looking at a painting my whole life and have admired its beauty. Through my time in Seminary, I have begun to look at this painting through a magnifying lens and come to realize that every brush stroke has purpose and meaning. I do not see my graduation from LBS as a completion of my study of Scripture, but just the beginning. As I continue with this lifelong gift of studying Scripture, my wife and I are excited to be able to share the gift with others. We have accepted the call to be church planters in Lincoln, North Dakota, and are eager to share this gift with everyone we meet here.



ROGER LARSON, CERTIFICATE OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

I am a semi-retired psychologist and have been married to Nancy for 31 years. We are blessed with four sons, one daughter, a son-in-law, two daughters-in-law, one granddaughter, and one grandson. As a child, I was nurtured in the faith at home and in Grace Lutheran Brethren Church in Bottineau, North Dakota. I was blessed to have loving grandparents who helped me develop a caring for older people. I felt called to Seminary to prepare for spiritual care ministry to older adults. I have been challenged and blessed by the classes, professors, and fellow students. I am thankful for growing in ways that will help me provide spiritual care to older adults. I have even preached a few sermons—something I never thought I would do! I am serving as an elder at Grace Lutheran Brethren Church in Bismarck, ND and providing spiritual care to older adults as a volunteer at Benedictine Living Community, as well as through my local church.



NATE NASH, MASTER OF DIVINITY

I've had a very unique seminary experience! I first started at Lutheran Brethren Seminary in 2009. Since then I've had to stop and restart Seminary a number of times, as I walked with my wife Emily through cancer and her passing in 2019. Despite the hardships, God has been gracious and good to me beyond what I deserve. I am blessed to be married again to my incredible wife Cherie, and together we have six children: David, Piper, Emilio, Oliver, Abrielle, and Freyja. Over the last 14 years, I've been chipping away at my Master of Divinity at a distance, while serving churches in North Dakota, Illinois, and currently at Messiah Lutheran in Underwood, Minnesota. LBS has been foundational in shaping my experiences while serving in pastoral ministry. I look forward to wherever God will lead me in the next chapters of life and ministry.

JEREMY OSTERWALDER, MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Since my introduction to the fellowship of the Lutheran Brethren, God has used our denomination to develop my heart for ministry, encourage my spiritual gifts and deepen my understanding of God's Word and its application. The time I have spent at LBS these past years has been influential in furthering my development in each of these areas. By God's grace I am better equipped to serve the body of Christ and share the gospel with those in my life. I have appreciated the kinship (brotherhood) with fellow Ministers of the Gospel and the mutual edification I have experienced. I am blessed to feel at home in our Church body. Completing seminary studies while serving in the role of a shepherd at Resurrection LB Church (Camrose, Alberta, Canada), I have had opportunity to be active in ministry and simultaneously apply classroom learning every day. I am excited to now give full-time focus to ministry work and passing the blessings I have received on to others.



ERIC REESE, MASTER OF DIVINITY

When I was a teenager, I had a general sense that I wanted to work in the tech industry, but in the years following confirmation I discovered a growing passion for theology and biblical study. As my high school graduation approached, I began to receive encouragement to consider pastoral ministry. Seven years and a child later, my family and I moved from Southwest Florida to Fergus Falls to attend Seminary. Studying at LBS has been an enriching experience, where I have been blessed with professors who prioritize proclaiming the Word and instilling the importance of letting Scripture guide one's study. During my time at Seminary, my understanding of my calling to ministry has become more apparent. At present, my family and I have decided to continue living in Fergus Falls, where I serve as an associate pastor at Stavanger Lutheran Church. I am eager to see where God's call to ministry will lead me in the future.



BEAU SIBUMA, CERTIFICATE OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

When I was about 9, I was invited to a Wednesday night church program, and then when I was old enough, to youth group. I went because I heard there were girls and food. But as time went on, I heard more of God's Word and it started making sense, more and more. I started becoming more involved with church activities, V.B.S, Bible Camp, and Human Videos. Bible Camp was very influential, it was a great place to hear God and be in fellowship with other likeminded people. Dr. Veum found me at camp, and wouldn't let up until I came to Seminary. I told him, "Keep bugging me, and one day I'll say yes." After 15 years of meeting with him, I was finally ready. God taught me patience all through this time. I wasn't ready in my younger years. I would have lost interest. As soon as I got into class at Seminary, it was an awakening that I didn't expect. Throughout my time in Seminary, I really learned a lot about missional outreach. I found that I loved it and was already doing it in my own community. A huge thanks to the professors who guided me through, and taught me a different way of reading, learning, teaching, and sharing the news of God's kingdom.

MARK UNDSETH, CERTIFICATE OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

My wife Sarah and I have been married for a little over two years. This past year we were delighted to welcome Diana, our firstborn, into our lives. In addition to parenting my small family, I take care of a larger one at the Hillcrest Academy boys' residence hall, where I have been on staff for the last four years. My family and I are called to international missions. In the coming years, we hope to join the LBIM team in Japan. Before moving to Asia, the three of us will be trekking to Brazil for six months. We hope to adapt to the different environment, tackle a new language, learn from some missionaries there, and embrace the opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.





Bethel-Battle Lake engaging the community of Battle Lake during its 2023 Wenonga Days celebration.

Why are We Here?

NICK LAVEN

If someone were to hear the name of your church, would they know *about* you or would they *know* you? Better yet, would they know Jesus as Savior King? We should reflect on these questions because over the years, especially in the Western culture, the “church” has shifted from its roots and become less missional and more inward focused. Inward focus happens when church becomes “about us” or “what we like.” In our consumer-driven culture, it’s quite easy to slide unknowingly into an attitude that evaluates church life based on our personal comfort levels and preferences. We like our church because we like the worship music/style, or we like the pastor, or we like the kids’

programs, or for a host of other reasons that all center on what we like. The problem is not so much that we like our church, the problem is that we have lost its identity and roots.

Jesus’ idea for his Church was far more about mission. In fact, in his Church, he brings us together to fulfill his purposes in worship of God, loving each other, and impacting the world around us. Jesus’ missional focus would have us “like” our church because of the shared commitment and purpose we find in being a part of something eternal.

Inward-focused churches choose comfort rather than driving purpose. The driving purpose is that we are the Church, and we have what the world

needs. The gospel of grace through Jesus is the driving purpose in our existence as Christ’s bride—his Church. It was the driving force behind the first-century Church. They weren’t comfortable in a building because the building couldn’t contain the mission of Jesus. We need to go back to our roots.

First and foremost, we are outward focused as Christ’s Church because he taught us to be so. In Matthew 22:36-40, Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and the second is to love our neighbor as ourselves. In John 13:34-35, he commands us to love one another as he has loved us, so that the world will know we are his disciples.

Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Matthew 22:37-40

These verses make it clear that loving our neighbor is not optional; it is the DNA of the Church. The Church of the Lutheran Brethren is a “disciple-making movement.” The fabric by which this is revealed in many churches is simply by going out and being the Church.

What does this look like? I have always found this illustration helpful in joining Jesus in his mission as his Church: If Sunday morning worship is inward focused, it is like a bank. You come in with your deposit slip (your attendance record for worship) and leave with your receipt of grace. It becomes a transactional life, Sunday after Sunday.

But what if Sunday worship was mission focused? What would that look like? It would be like a gas station. You come in Sunday with your gauge on empty and get fueled up with the gospel of grace through Word and Sacrament. The needle on your fuel gauge goes from empty to full and you are now ready to go back out into your world to burn the fuel of Jesus. As the week goes on from Sunday, we burn the fuel of Jesus until the tank is on empty and the light comes on. Then, we pull back into the station on Sunday morning to refuel.

I love this view of church. Each of us is a vehicle of God’s grace and each of us is shaped differently. Some have dents, scrapes, and rust. Some are polished and a newer model. But regardless of condition or shape, we all are driven by the head of the Church—Jesus. We are all powered and fueled by the same gospel. That’s getting back to our roots as his Church.

All we need to do is look to Jesus and his life. What did he do? He served, he ate food with others, he listened to stories and shared stories. Jesus lived with and

loved those he encountered. It doesn’t have to be complicated. It can start with something as simple as getting to know your neighbors, offering to help them with a task, or inviting them over for a meal. It means being intentional about building relationships with people around us and looking for opportunities to share the love of Christ with them.

It is being the vehicle of grace to those living around you: at home, at the grocery store, at your workplace, and at school. Anywhere you go, you are with Jesus on mission to share the fuel of the gospel of grace, to love as Jesus loves, and to be his Church in his expanding kingdom.

OK, OK. But practically, what does this look like? In Battle Lake we are seeing God move as we burn his gospel fuel! Every time the local school has parent-teacher conferences, Bethel–Battle Lake provides the teachers and staff with a meal throughout the evening. We’re thanking them for their investment in our children and in the community. It is simple, yes, but it is sharing the love of Christ in a tangible way. The principal came up to me one day and said, “Nick, I just want to say how much we appreciate Bethel’s care for our teachers. It is nice to know we are cared for without strings attached.” This is joining Jesus in his mission.

Another example of burning that fuel with an outward focus: One Sunday, a new couple came to our church. I asked them, “Hey, how’d you hear about us and what brought you here today?” They responded, “Who hasn’t heard about Bethel in Battle Lake! We are here because we want what everyone else has!” As I talked with them some more, it was apparent that the gospel fuel was

being shared (burned, we could say) by vehicles (people) of Bethel–Battle Lake. This couple was receiving the love and grace of God in their everyday lives and wanted to share that too.

Church of the Lutheran Brethren, that’s why we are here. That’s why you are where you are! We are God’s fuel station in our communities to share the fuel of the gospel and watch Jesus transform lives and expand his kingdom.

We are many vehicles, but we are Jesus’ many vehicles. He is behind the wheel; his fuel is our driving purpose. We are called to get back to our roots and GO! That is why we are here. Praise Jesus!



Rev. Nick Laven is Campus Pastor of Bethel-Battle Lake. Bethel is one church in two locations, Battle Lake and Fergus Falls, Minnesota.



Paul Fraser leading during a bilingual service at Rock of Ages, Seattle, WA.

A Faithful Heritage and Renewed Hope for Our Japan Mission

DAN VENBERG

Lutheran Brethren International Mission (LBIM) has a long history in Japan. In 1948, Morris Werdal, son of Marius and Marie Werdal (pioneer CLB missionaries), wanted to go as a missionary to China, the land of his youth. But due to the Communist political climate of the time, China's door was shut tight to missionary activity. Morris prayed for God's direction, and he felt God was speaking to him: "China is closed. Have you considered Japan? This door is now wide open. If I choose to send you to Japan, will you go?"

Initially, Morris was reluctant. Japan had been aggressors and occupiers of China, and had been the enemy in World War II. But Morris overcame his Jonah-like resistance, and ultimately took this call to heart in the spirit of Isaiah: "Here am I... send me!" The very next year, Morris and his wife Marion became the CLB's first missionaries to Japan.

The work began in Sakata, in the north of the country. Soon more missionaries followed the Werdals. The first Lutheran Brethren church of Japan was planted in Sakata in 1951. By 1965, that number grew to nine. In 1969, the Japanese Lutheran Brethren Church was officially founded. Today, in 2023, there are 28 JLBC congregations.

We rejoice in this heritage. We rejoice in the missionaries faithful to go and the Church faithful to send. We rejoice in the spiritual harvest we have seen in Japan over these last 70 years, by God's grace. And we are also very cognizant of the ongoing spiritual need of this nation. Consider the following facts:

- Only .3% of the Japanese people are Christ followers (Joshua Project, 2021).
- 98% of the population are considered "unreached" (Joshua Project, 2021).

- 85% of religious adherence in Japan falls under a combination of Shinto (the indigenous religion of Japan) and Buddhism (statistica.com, 2022). Globally, there is only one missionary serving per 260,000 Buddhists (thetravelingteam.org, 2022). That is equivalent to one missionary for the entire city of Madison, WI.
- Churches are closing in Japan. The Christian population is aging. Japan's AEG (Annual Evangelical Growth Rate) is -4%, in contrast to a global average of +2.6% (Joshua Project, 2021).

Japan is sometimes referred to as the "graveyard" for missions. There are multi-faceted obstacles (spiritual, cultural, social) that have hindered the gospel in Japan. But we, together with our Japanese sister Church, have

“Only 0.3% of the Japanese people are Christ followers.”

Joshua Project, 2021

renewed hope and vision. While there is an awareness of the challenges, there is a confidence that God does great work in the deadest of places. Consider Sarah’s dead womb; Elijah’s dry bones; Jonah’s death sentence in the belly of the fish; Jesus’ dead body in the tomb. LBIM is a mission committed to serving in unreached places and among unreached people. As such, we are entering into a new partnership with our Japanese brothers and sisters for a renewed mission focus in Japan. Rather than shrinking back from the challenge, we are choosing to lean into it, for the sake of the gospel going forth in Japan, by God’s grace and for his glory.

We are taking the next steps! We are sending new missionaries to Japan! Paul and Alexa Fraser, along with their sons Arthur and Oswald, will be deploying to Japan this summer. They have been prayerfully anticipating this for years. Alexa first sensed a call to mission when she visited China as a teenager. Paul made a visit to Japan with a team of Lutheran Brethren Seminary students while in seminary training, and that experience deeply impacted his sense of calling to mission in Japan. Since graduation from LBS in May 2021, Paul and Alexa have been busy equipping themselves in preparation for this. Paul has been serving as a pastoral intern at Rock of Ages LB Church in Seattle, Washington, where there is a Japanese ministry. Paul and Alexa have been serving alongside Roger and Sue Olson, veteran CLB missionaries to Japan who currently lead “Japanese Ministries,” focused on ministry to Japanese college students in Seattle. The Frasers have been investing in learning the Japanese language and culture. They have attended a month-long “Compass” training by Mission Training

International, that has provided them with tools to learn a new language and to adapt to a new cultural context. And most recently, they have accepted the call of the CLB to serve as LBIM’s newest missionaries to Japan!

Upon arrival in Japan, the Fraser family will initially focus on learning the Japanese language and adapting to Japanese culture. For language learning, they will use a combination of classroom participation, personal tutors, and self-teaching to acquire fluency in Japanese. During this time, they will also be getting to know the JLBC, particularly engaging with the local congregation in their community. The goal is to intentionally serve alongside a JLBC congregation for the purpose of an interdependent partnership in community outreach and evangelism. A key word here is “interdependent.”

The desire is that this partnership in mission between LBIM and the JLBC will identify and leverage the blessing of any healthy partnership, where both partners can contribute toward a common purpose in mission, and they can serve that mission better together than if they were working individually. The Frasers will contribute a joy-filled, grace-centered gospel message and a confident evangelistic spirit. As Americans, they are “neutral”—able to provide a non-threatening and accessible “bridge” that can connect the local church to non-believers. The Japanese partnering congregation will contribute multi-faceted support to the Fraser family, including language help, cultural integration, encouragement, fellowship, outreach planning and coordination, and discipleship of new believers.

While we know what the broad parameters are for this renewed mission

partnership, there is much to process and prayerfully consider regarding the details going forward. This is a new thing. We seek to be bold, contextual, and innovative in our approach. We are also prayerfully anticipating the recruiting, equipping, and calling of more missionaries to join our team in Japan.

We ask you to pray for this mission. We ask you to support this mission. We thank you for your partnership in the gospel. In the words of JLBC Pastor Zeniya Kouki, speaking about this renewed vision: “Thank you for giving us new hope. I am really looking forward to new missionaries coming to Japan, and I am looking forward to seeing the American Church and the Japanese Church working together.”



Dan Venberg serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as its Director of International Mission.

Learn more about the CLB’s renewed vision for Japan and here from Paul and Alexa Fraser:



Visit: www.CLBA.org/LBIM



Joining Jesus... on the Way to Japan

ALEXA FRASER

Our current church had no obligation to bring me into their community as much as they did.

Our family will soon be sent to Japan as missionaries with Lutheran Brethren International Mission. Because opportunities to study Japanese in our home state of Minnesota were limited, Rock of Ages Lutheran Brethren Church in Seattle, Washington called my husband, Paul, to be the pastoral intern for their Japanese congregation. By the time we finally move to Japan we will have been here for nearly two years. We were originally only supposed to be in Seattle from six to eighteen months, while we studied Japanese and got some exposure to Japanese culture.

Our church had no obligation to bring us into their community as they did. They knew we were temporary. They knew that at any given time we could pack up and leave for Japan. Why try to get to know someone who will just be leaving in six months? I even felt this way myself at the beginning of our time here. But quickly it became apparent that the entire church was interested in making us a part of their community and ministry. Day after day they continued to support us and show us the love of Christ in ways we had never expected. They made it so easy to give back and serve alongside them in the community!

Both the Japanese and English congregations at Rock of Ages have blessed us with lifelong friendships and prayer partners. They have supported our work with Japanese ministries, as they offered prayer, childcare, and emotional support. They took us in, knowing how short our time could be. The church could have easily left us to our studying or encouraged us to be exclusively part of the Japanese events. Yet they took what may be the more painful path of bringing us into many different parts of their community, only to have it hurt when we inevitably leave the country.



The Fraser family.

Because the church here made the decision to welcome us in, they have effectively joined us in ministry in Japan. The daily decisions of both the laypeople and pastoral staff have played a huge part in our story, and in the furthering of the kingdom of God in Japan and here in Seattle. Doing life with them has given us more confidence in the call God has given us, and it has provided us further practical experience in what it looks like to be involved in a neighborhood and community that I hope to be able to imitate someday soon in Japan.

What a blessing is a church willing to take a risk and invest their time and love into those who may be with them only for a short time! I am forever grateful for our experiences here at Rock of Ages and with the other churches, small groups of believers, our families and many more who impacted us and have played a part in God equipping us for what is ahead.

Alexa Fraser and her husband Paul have been called by Lutheran Brethren International Mission to be the CLB's next missionaries to Japan.



Visit: www.WMCLB.org

Bourque Called to Chad



Ellie Bourque studying at Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

On April 6, 2023, Ellie Bourque accepted a call to serve as LBIM's newest missionary to Chad. Ellie has spent the last two years at LBS, obtaining a Certificate of Theological Study in Mission. Ellie will be attending a month-long training in language acquisition and cultural adaptation through MTI (Mission Training International) this summer and will deploy to France in late August for a year of French study. Her tentative arrival in Chad will be the summer of 2024. Thank you for your prayers and support of Ellie.

McIvor Installed as Pastor



Left to Right: Elder Tom McIvor, Hannah McIvor, Abby McIvor, Rev. Vern Baardson, Alyssa McIvor, Rev. Dirk McIvor, Elder Bob Bestian and Elder Emeritus Gary Koslowsky (partially hidden), and Rev. Larry Olson.

On February 26, 2023, Rev. Dirk McIvor was installed as pastor at Calvary Community Church in Fullerton, California. Rev. Larry Olson officiated.

Celebrate Grace



Rev. Ryan Nordlund (right) and the praise band leading the congregation of Grace LBC in worship.

Grace Lutheran Brethren Church in Bismarck, North Dakota, is celebrating 50 years as a church. Grace was started in December, 1972. Although Grace LBC has changed throughout the years, God has remained steadfast. We thank God for his faithfulness through all these years, and look forward to seeing his plans for Grace in the coming years. Grace LBC's 50-year celebration will be held on Sunday, May 21, at Grace Lutheran Brethren Church following the 10:30 service.

Carlson Ordained as Elder



Participants included Nathan Carlson, Pastor Elroy Vesta, Pastor Gunnar Salmonson, Pastor Allan Shaner (Nathan's father-in-law), current elders Joel Torgerson and Bill Totenhagen, Emeritus Elders Ellerd Boe and Michael Haugrud.

On February 26, 2023, Nathan Carlson was ordained as an elder at Liberty Lutheran Church in Fargo, North Dakota. Pastor Elroy Vesta officiated the service.

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What Follows Easter?

Easter has passed, you think? Wrong time of year to write on this subject? No, the topic of the resurrection is always timely. The early Christians worshiped on Sundays as a weekly reminder of Jesus' resurrection. A recent look at Matthew 28 opened my eyes to something new—at least, new to me—in the resurrection story. A pattern is revealed for what follows Easter...

In Matthew 28, there are four heralds of Christ's resurrection. The *first* herald is the angel, who has been sent to tell the two Marys that Jesus has risen (just as he said!). The women themselves then become the *second* herald, as they are commissioned by the angel to carry this news to Jesus' disciples. Then, a *third* herald of the resurrection appears: the soldiers who had been guarding Jesus' tomb! As the women are running to tell the disciples, the soldiers are running to tell the priests that they have seen an angel, and perhaps also heard the announcement of Jesus' resurrection. But the soldiers' perception and message regarding the resurrection soon changes, thanks to the persuasive priests, and they herald a revised story that offers no resurrection—no good news.

But there is a *fourth* herald. The women instruct Jesus' disciples to meet him on a mountain in Galilee. When they meet Jesus there, they worship him. Then Jesus gives them the Great Commission, which makes them—and all followers of Jesus since then—the fourth herald of the resurrection.

Angels; women at the tomb; guards; disciples. One of these things is not like the others. We might think it's the angel. But no, it's the guards. What did the other three have in common that the guards are missing? We know the angels worship God always, so they worshiped the Son, Second Person of the Trinity, from the moment those angels were created. The women? Just after they set off to tell the disciples, Jesus interrupted their journey to allow them to worship him themselves. And Matthew records that immediately after his disciples worshiped Jesus in Galilee, he commissioned them as heralds.

Not all heralds bear good news. Three of the four, those heralds who do bear the good news—the gospel—do so immediately after worshipping the Lord. The guards do not worship Jesus as Lord, and thus have no good news to share.

What does all this say about us, who worship our Lord Jesus Christ every Lord's Day, as if it is resurrection day? Every time we gather to worship the Risen Lord, we are again being equipped and commissioned through the gospel. We are sent. Something to think about as you prepare to worship him this coming Sunday.

What follows Easter? Worship. Always. Inevitably.
And then: Go! Tell!

Rev. Brent Juliot is Contributing Editor of F&F magazine and Pastor of Living Hope Church in Menomonie, Wisconsin.

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