

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

In 2014, I made my first trip to Chad, Africa. After a few days in N’Djamena, we set out for a remote village along the Chari River. Due to poor road conditions and a broken-down barge, the trip took longer than expected. It was late when we reached our destination, yet we were greeted with fresh fish and a bowl of millet: no plates or utensils. I watched as the Chadian man next to me dug in with his bare hands. I followed suit. After my first bite, I was left with bone and scale in my hand. Once again, I looked to my Chadian friend for guidance. I watched as he dropped his scraps on the ground for the dog.

In Matthew 15:21-28, a Canaanite woman asks Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus tells the woman, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel... It is not right to take the

children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” The woman agrees, and responds, “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” Jesus replies, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that very moment.

Do you feel like a dog without a seat at the table? Have the world and the devil had their way with you? Wait patiently. Your master has not forgotten you. He is preparing a great feast for those who believe, and even the dogs will get their fill.

Rev. Dr. Troy Tysdal, D.Min. is Director of Communications and Prayer for the CLB and serves as editor in chief of F&F magazine.

Is It Faith, or Not?

BRENT JULIOT

I've been wrestling with Jacob's wrestling with God, in chapter 32 of Genesis. Is that an act of faith, or is it the antithesis of faith?

Likewise Gideon's fleece—faith, or lack of faith? Gideon had previously asked God to prove his identity (Judg. 6:17). Then in 6:36-40, Gideon requires God on two consecutive days to alternate the morning dew between a wool fleece and the ground surrounding it. Is this faith in God or is it putting God to the test? Christians today often point to that fleece as a time-honored method for discovering God's will. Yet if you read Judges 6 carefully, God had already provided Gideon with crystal clear instructions and ample proof of his identity. Gideon already knows it is God speaking to him, already knows God's will, and now he is stalling, hoping to avoid it.

Wrestling with God? We all do it! But, as Jacob's experience reveals, this isn't always a bad thing. In what sense might our own wrestling with the Lord be a genuine display of our faith?

Hebrews 11 recounts so many of the Old Testament heroes of faith. The list includes both Jacob and Gideon, although the specific events I just associated with them—the wrestling and the fleece—are not mentioned in Hebrews 11. When we read of these heroes, we usually stop and think about each one individually. But what can we learn from this heroic group as a whole, regarding our own wrestling with God?

A myriad of insights into the nature of faith is provided for us in Hebrews 11, but here are just a few:

Hebrews 11 reveals to us people who have their sights set on the bigger picture—more than what they can perceive with their physical senses. Things revealed through God's Word, by his Spirit. Because of this, though these heroes walk through great uncertainty in



kirstypargeter/Stock

this life, yet they persevere. Because God says so, they are confident in things not seen. Consider a few illustrations from Hebrews 11...

When God first calls him, Abraham doesn't know where he is going. But he still goes.

Noah obeys God and builds an ark. This is pure foolishness, if based only on Noah's life experience to that point. Yet he builds it because God says to.

Abraham lives in tents, though God has promised him a city and a great nation. Abraham never sees the city or the nation in his earthly life, but we see that God has been accurately faithful to his Word of promise to Abraham.

Moses turns his back on an Egyptian throne and spends 40 years in the wilderness—twice! His motivation? "He persevered because he saw him who is invisible..." (Heb. 11:27b).

And Joseph chooses slavery and imprisonment over disobeying God's Word.

Before we put them on a pedestal, remember that our heroes of faith were far from perfect. Some of them, like Jacob, Moses, Rahab (and maybe Joseph), were rejected by their family or their culture through their own faulty choices. Many of those who seemingly made all "the

right" choices also found their lives to be harder paths because they accepted the Word of God as true, and they applied it in their lives, even when it was far from easy or convenient.

Try reading through Hebrews 11 yourself. Doesn't every faith hero wrestle with God in some way or other? And God—graciously allowing his people to do this—proves himself faithful to his Word, to his promises, and to his people—every single time.

What is your faith, if not the response of your heart, mind, and body to the faithfulness of your God?

Hebrews 11:4 says, "By faith Abel still speaks..." And so do all the rest of these heroes. The message they speak? They are telling us that our own wrestling with God *certainly* is true faith... when we—like Jacob—by the grace of God, refuse to let go of him.

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



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Ivan-96/Jacob wrestles with the angel/Stock

Wrestling with God

JOHN LEE

What do we mean by “wrestling with God”? This is the situation when a person becomes contentious with God, desperate for help, yet unsure of actually getting it. The story of Jacob demonstrates this struggling. This is precisely how he got his new name, Israel, which means, “He who contends with God.”

What was the story? Jacob was running for his life (Gen. 32). He had conspired with his mother to steal the treasured birthright and blessing from his brother Esau. In return, Esau hated Jacob and was out for blood. Jacob fled and spent many years far from home. There he was free from any threat of attack, but eventually his desire to return home overcame any sense of risk. So here is Jacob, homeward bound, hoping for peace with Esau. What will he find, near the journey’s end?

Esau, somehow aware that Jacob is returning, has come down the road to meet his younger brother. Esau is accompanied by a large contingent of people. They are capable of doing serious harm to Jacob, who now has a growing family, including

little children. The night before the two groups will meet on the road, Jacob tosses and turns, trying to sleep. God comes to him, somehow in tangible form, as an angel. Jacob grabs hold of God. It sounds pretty strange, but maybe you know the feeling. We often struggle with each other for dominance or advantage. But what exactly was going on, that a man should struggle with God?

This wasn’t about proving who was stronger. Jacob knew God held all the cards. He trusted God, generally speaking. But this is no generic situation. The feeling of danger is palpable. The longing for peace is real. He wrestles with God saying, “I won’t let you go, until you bless me.” Jacob is shaken to the core, uncertain of any good outcome.

Can you identify with him? Sometimes storms rip through our lives. We feel defenseless. We mutter to ourselves, “Does God understand my problem? Does he even care?” We are like Jacob, grappling with the Almighty, desperate for a promise of protection and care.

You don’t have to be exactly like

Jacob to wrestle with God. Sadly, some people conclude, as storms tear through their lives, that there is no God. Others, holding to a thread of hope, blurt out short prayers: “God, you’ve got to help me. I don’t know what to do. Are you even there?” They wrestle with God, angling for leverage.

What is the Big Issue?

What’s the central issue here? As Christians, our center of gravity is the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have nothing without him. But when things are radically shaken up and out of our control, what do we tend to do? One of these two things: We either start talking to God or we start listening more carefully to him.

It seems that Jacob defaulted to the first. At least his wrestling indicates a lot of talking and inner struggle. I don’t blame him. Don’t we all mutter and plead with God when besieged with problems? He knew about the second choice, which is listening to God. Had he forgotten what God had spoken? He could have

“The man said to Jacob, ‘Let me go, for it is daybreak.’ But Jacob replied, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’ The man asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘Jacob,’ he answered. Then the man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.’”

Genesis 32:26-28

“listened” by recalling God’s promises: land, descendants, and blessing. God had on several occasions spoken to Jacob this *great* promise, as he had to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac.

I can’t stand in judgment over Jacob here, but I know that when I pray, the only power I have is to remember God’s promise. When I insert his promise into my prayer, that is precisely when I find comfort and assurance. Scripture says, “All the promises of God find their ‘yes’ in Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 1:20, ESV). This isn’t a magical practice, nor is it a formula for manipulating God to favor me. Rather, it simply lays my needs and worries into his arms. Babbling on and on with my worries or my self-pity doesn’t help. My point is this: prayer without reference to God’s wonderful promises in Christ is ultimately fruitless.

Bring the Gospel into Your Prayers!

This is what the Canaanite woman did. We read (Matt. 15) that she was desperate for Jesus to heal her daughter. She had heard excited reports of a Jewish rabbi

with healing powers, and to her, these reports were *good news*. And now, this man was actually in her neighborhood! She was intent on getting his help, and she wasn’t about to let go until she got it. But it sure didn’t happen automatically.

She bumped up hard against an icy reception. But this woman was a bulldog. She wouldn’t let go. She grappled with the Rabbi. He needled her: “I just came for the Jews. You’re not one of us.” She punched back, landing like a pesky fly on the forehead. She was ready with any argument that would do the trick.

What then? Jesus was not just impressed with her persistence. He was amazed by it. “O woman, your faith is great! Let it be done for you!” Aha! He spoke the words she needed.

For you, a storm may be swirling. But God’s gentle voice is at the same time his all-powerful voice. He speaks, “I love you. I will never let you go. I’ve got your back.” And so, we persist, and such wrestling is not in vain. There is much at stake.

Yet through it all, God keeps his Word.

Jesus is that *Word*—in the flesh. My prayers, if not in response to this Word, bounce off the ceiling. But when they are a response to Christ, the living *Word*, they have eternal consequence. This kind of prayer, and the life of faith and obedience linked with it, pleases God. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

Listen. Then pray.



Rev. John Lee is a member of Grace Lutheran Brethren Church in Bismarck, North Dakota, where he serves on the worship team.



VividaPhotoPC/Detail of feet of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ/iStock

Great Faith

RYAN DITTMANN

As Christians, we desire to be faithful, to have great faith. We begin looking for examples to emulate. We often look at the giants of the faith, such as Abraham, Moses, or the disciples. We consider their testimony and persistence to trust God, to trust Jesus, as something worthy of the title “great faith.” We hope to be inspired by reading about the faith of Jesus’ disciples. For example, in Luke 24, after seeing Jesus ascend into heaven, his disciples faithfully went into the heart of the city to the temple, where they praised and worshiped Jesus without fear.

Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God (Luke 24:52-53).

If only we could be so bold!

Some look to the words of Jesus to build a better understanding of what great faith is. Consider what Jesus said in Matthew

15:25-28 to the Canaanite woman who persisted to receive even the scraps from Jesus’ table to heal her daughter.

The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

While these are good examples of great faith, this approach does little to inspire us and often burdens us. We may try to manufacture greatness from within, and then we are crushed when our trust wavers, our perseverance fails, and the great faith we hoped to attain remains far out of reach.

On November 11, 2006, seven days after my 19th birthday, my mother passed

away suddenly from a staph infection. I was utterly lost. I had never been one to ask or think about the important questions of life: Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? What happens when you die?

My mother’s death changed all of that. Soon after her passing, through what I can only call divine providence, I ended up as a junior leader at a Bible study. I had never really studied the Bible before. I had been confirmed and we did go to church at Easter and Christmas, but I was not someone you would have chosen to help lead youth in a Bible study.

As I opened God’s Word to prepare the lessons, I had no trust, no faith, in God. If you had asked me then if I had faith in God, I would have answered, “I do not know.” The first lesson that really shook me was Mark 7.

For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,

Jesus said, “For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”

Mark 7:21-23

greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person (Mark 7:21-23).

Jesus was telling me the opposite of what the world had told me. I thought the heart was the place where all my love, joy, and peace came from. I remember taking very seriously what Jesus said in Mark.

That night I sat in my room alone and considered honestly the thoughts and feelings that were coming out of my heart. I found myself confronted with my sinful thoughts and desires. I had to admit that Jesus was right, and if he was right about this, what else was he right about?

God had placed a desire within my heart to know him. At that time, I had no idea where that desire would lead me. Within nine months the desire to know God led me to quit my heavy-duty mechanic apprenticeship, which disappointed my father. I took the money I had planned to use to pay off my car loan, and used it to go to Bible school instead. I still was not sure if God was real or who Jesus exactly was and what it all meant, but I desired to know so badly I was willing to risk it all.

Fast forward almost 10 years and I

answered God’s calling on my life to enter the pastoral ministry. Some look at my life and hear my story of abandoning it all for Jesus as an example of great faith, of something they are striving for but cannot attain. However, when looking at examples of great faith we are always seeing the end result, not the faith itself. We all love the look of a great garden, but none of us would expect a seed once planted to instantly bear fruit. This is true of the disciples and of all the great saints of the Bible.

The question we need to ask is, “Where did it start, what was the source of that great faith?” The answer is the Holy Spirit. Faith starts with the Holy Spirit placing a desire for God in someone’s heart. My act of great faith did not come out of my ability or my knowledge, but out of a desire to know God, to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8).

Do you desire to know God? To know who he is and what he has done for you? Do you desire to hear more about Jesus’ love for you that drove him to die for you? You already have what the Canaanite woman had! She did not have her theology all figured out. She did not know Jesus as well as those who had been traveling with him for three years. She

simply had a Holy Spirit driven desire to know and experience Jesus’ love. This drove her to his feet, and Jesus declared her faith great!

Come to the feet of Jesus. Believe and know he is God, for this act alone is great faith!



Rev. Ryan Dittmann is Lead Pastor at Faith Lutheran Brethren Church in Estevan, Saskatchewan.

Pastor Dittmann started this new call on July 1, 2023. Please pray God’s blessing over Ryan and his family as he enters his first lead pastor position.



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Seasons in Life

LINDSAY NATALE

We walk through different seasons, both literal seasons (Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall) and seasons that encompass a specific period in our lives. These seasons can change with a new job, the birth of a child, or even as we age. Sometimes the seasons change subtly, like following a conversation with a friend or after reading a book. Other times they change more dramatically, like after the death of a loved one or after receiving a difficult medical diagnosis.

Three years ago, I was brought into a season riddled with chronic pain brought on by an autoimmune disease called ankylosing spondylitis (an inflammatory arthritis of the spine). It forced me to relearn how to live life in a more slowed down, gentler version than I was used to. There were times during those years when having my devotions and even praying were hard. This created a feeling of distance in my relationship with God. However, in the midst of that, I had a few

key verses that I kept repeating to myself, so that I was regularly reminded of God's faithfulness. One is Deuteronomy 31:6 (ESV), "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."

During this season I learned to take things moment by moment, and God continually revealed to me how intricate and complex his creation of our bodies is—how they can heal, how they process the world around us, and how they can hold onto emotions and feelings that have not been fully processed. These unprocessed emotions can wreak havoc on how we feel and how we view other life experiences. These emotions can cause our pain receptors to fire randomly and tempt us to stop listening and paying attention to what we need to hear and do. This was part of my issue with chronic pain. While I have physical pain, I am also dealing with the emotional baggage attached to it. What I've found is that

once these emotions get trapped, they can start altering the way I feel, think, and process what is happening around me day to day.

We as humans rely on our feelings to help us understand, process, and react to what we experience in our lives each day. Feelings can help protect us from danger, form a connection with someone else, and even help us decide the next steps to take in a decision we are working through. But feelings can also sometimes lead us astray and leave us questioning the choices or decisions we need to make or have made. Feelings aren't always honest and trustworthy. Feelings can give us a false sense of security if we spend too much time ignoring them, and they can completely immobilize us if we allow them to inundate us.

What I've realized through this journey is that if I use my human sense of feelings to judge my attachment to God, it places God in a box and limits my view of what he is capable of doing in my life. God

“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”

Deuteronomy 31:6, ESV

does not work solely in the realm of our human understanding. He is all powerful, all knowing, and ever present. We can only understand how he works as far as he gives us the understanding to do so, and that’s a good thing.

Another truth this season of life has brought to the surface for me is that sin separates us from God. That means that any unprocessed guilt—guilt that hasn’t been brought to the Lord—will give us the feeling that God isn’t close to us. But that is the enemy sowing seeds of doubt. The more we dig into God’s Word, the more we are reminded that he is ever present regardless of what we are feeling. He is constantly pursuing us and reminding us of his love, his grace, and his mercy. He tells us in 1 John 1:9, that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” The Holy Spirit uses passages like this to encourage us to unburden ourselves and leave those feelings of guilt, doubt, and shame at the cross, where they were crucified.

Sometimes when we are in a season where we are feeling distant from God, we can benefit from “changing the tape” (a phrase my mother used a lot). This can

mean slowing down and taking in only a verse or two at a time when we do our devotions and then concentrating more on spending time in prayer. We might need to listen to the Bible being read to us while we sit and meditate on what is being spoken over us. Other times, instead of using prewritten Bible or book studies, we may find benefit in just digging through Scripture itself, verse by verse, chapter by chapter. All these ideas remind us of God’s promises and help us stay connected to him.

Each one of us, at one time or another, will feel distant from God, but that does not mean that God is far away. He promises numerous times throughout Scripture to be near to us. Psalm 113:5-6 encourages us by asking, “Who is like the Lord our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?”

What a fantastic reminder that God cares so much about us that he stoops down to be a part of every season of our lives. Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is proof of that. So, no matter what you are going through, take comfort in knowing that God is near to you, he is listening to you, he is hearing

your prayers, and he is responding in his perfect timing. These truths are what empower me to echo what is written in Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”



Lindsay Natale is Secretary of the Eastern Region of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and a member of Faith Chapel in Cranston, Rhode Island.

CLB Shared Ministry: Contribution Report

\$3,200,000

2023-24 Fiscal Year Goal

144,832

Received Through 5/31/23

The CLB Fiscal Year ends April 30, 2024.

Sharing God's Blessings

DALLAS RODGERS

Greetings and peace to you from Pilgrim Lutheran Brethren Church in Mentor, Ohio. My name is Dallas Rodgers. My wife, Mary, and I have been blessed to be members at Pilgrim since 1989, when we moved into northeast Ohio from Chicago. Although we had some preconceived notions about where we might find our future church home, God lovingly led us to what was then a simple little church building in Mentor, with a white bungalow house next door. It was there that God used a young Pastor Bob and Jan Heggstad, and other faithful members, to reach out to us and help us to realize what commitment to Jesus Christ's presence in our lives really meant. We are so thankful to Jesus first, and then to all of these faithful people for helping us grow in our faith relationship to Christ, and in serving him. Over the years, God has blessed us in so many ways at Pilgrim Lutheran Brethren Church, and we are excited to serve him in support of our congregation and outreach to our community.

That's how we came to know the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as a denomination and its total commitment

to clearly and boldly pronouncing the gospel of Jesus Christ from Scripture... *sola Scriptura*. That's why we love our local church at Pilgrim, and why we also love our CLB denomination overall. Over the years we have been honored to come to know so many of the devoted and humble servant leaders in our local churches and in our Synodical offices and Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, MN. They set a living example for us of total commitment in serving our Lord both here in the U.S. and overseas in mission.

This is a big year for my wife Mary and me. We have just celebrated our Golden Anniversary together. Thinking back fifty years, who would have thought what it would be like to be here now, or even that we are here now? God would have, that's who. And he is the One who has been abundantly loving and providing for us and for our now-adult son, Jon, these many years. We have come to more clearly understand how God has provided for us abundantly, through his many blessings, through close friendships, and material provision as well. We have also come to understand that all God has provided

for us is really his (1 Chr. 29:14). He has entrusted us with the responsibility of wisely using our resources in support of his mission and kingdom here on earth.

That is why we are committed to giving first to our local church, and then to support the Church of the Lutheran Brethren's many strategic initiatives. That is why we want to encourage each of you to give prayerfully, joyfully, and sacrificially to support the Church of the Lutheran Brethren (2 Cor. 9:7). May all that we do be done in a manner that brings honor, glory, and praise to our risen Lord and Savior!

Dallas Rodgers is an elder at Pilgrim Lutheran Brethren Church in Mentor, Ohio.

Support the CLB:

ONLINE:
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BY MAIL (USA):
P.O. Box 655
Fergus Falls, MN 56538

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Birch Hills, SK S0J 0G0



On the Wings of a Prayer

KATHLEEN KJOLHAUG

It's Wednesday morning. Glancing at the spiral bound planner before me, the word "PRAY" is penciled in for today. As 10:30 nears, I lift the magnet holding a piece of paper upon the fridge, grab the iPad and head on over to the kitchen table. Pressing the Zoom icon, I type in the eleven numbers written upon the tattered paper. You'd think I'd be able to remember it by now—but for some reason, I can't.

The person monitoring the group lets me in and as I watch, the squares jump to life—smiles upon the faces of those who have entered in, bring life. A cat walks across the screen of one, a little boy sits upon the lap of another, while one square is completely blank with only a name under it. It is blank because this one among us is at work and must remain silent while listening in.

The tender crew greets one another and an opening prayer is requested from a volunteer. Within the boxes of Zoom we are represented but not contained. *Au contraire*—we press in, embracing the needs of the world far and wide. Details of these needs are brought forth in prayer for all the Lutheran Brethren missionaries and those who work with them.

These meetings began when the need for an airstrip in Chad was made known. The wisdom behind the weekly Zoom meeting was to help lay a foundation firmly rooted in prayer. The gatherings were focused, but as time went on whispers of prayer far beyond the airstrip were also placed on the radar.

Japan, Taiwan, Chad, France, church plants, the Welcome Center, and those yet to be called into positions needing to be filled—all are upheld in weekly prayer. Sick children here, safe travels there, funding for projects, conferences held, and the list grows. The burdens carried are no burden at all as each request is placed upon the shoulders of the only One who can do anything about it anyway.



Pixabay

To date there is no air strip. However, this does not dismay us as we “worship him, pleading again, ‘Lord, help...’” (Matt. 15:25, NLT). It’s perseverance at its finest, for “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7, ESV). As we move together as one—one in him—he holds fast.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV) is a dandy. It brings clarity as to what he asks of us and why we gather to pray: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

As we boldly approach the throne—I am going to boldly ask that you join us. It’s a community from across the United States and Canada. Do we all show up each week? We do not, and when we do not, we know our sisters are covering our absence in prayer and covering the needs of our missionaries. Come as you are—just come.

Kathleen Kjolhaug lives on the family homestead with her husband Peter. They attend Elim Lutheran Brethren Church in Clearbrook, Minnesota and have six adult children and twelve grandchildren.



If you would like to join the WMCLB prayer meeting, contact WMCLB at: WMCLBContact@gmail.com



Photo Credit: Sarah Larson

The Tysdal Family, L to R: Gavin, Katie, Troy, and Brycen.

LBS Announces New President

INTERVIEW WITH TROY TYSDAL

In May 2023, the Board of Lutheran Brethren Seminary (LBS) concluded its search for a new seminary president. As Chairman of the Board of LBS, I am very pleased to announce that Rev. Troy Tysdal will be the next LBS president, effective August 1, 2023. Rev. Tysdal is well-known to many readers of Faith & Fellowship, having been content manager since September 2010 and editor in chief since June 2014.

— David Burfeind

Introduce yourself and share with us your passion for LBS.

Troy Tysdal: My passion for the ministry of LBS started shortly after my conversion. In 2006, I began working

in sales for Doug and Sherri Thorson, a couple from Bethel Lutheran Church in Fergus Falls, MN. Doug and I would travel to trade shows together, and we would talk about Jesus. I had been baptized and raised in a Christian home but walked away from the faith as a child. I still identified as a Christian but did not need the Church. The truth is, I did not understand the cross or believe that someone could rise from the dead. After several months of Doug inviting me to his church, my wife and I started attending a different church, Stavanger Lutheran Church.

At the time, Stavanger was pastored by Professor Brad Soenksen of LBS, and two of his students, Gary Kitchin and Adam Jensen. At Stavanger, I heard the

gospel faithfully proclaimed week after week, and Pastor Gary began pressuring me to attend seminary. The only problem was... I still didn't believe. I saw Jesus as a great moral example and felt Christians were called to imitate him. Of course, I didn't tell pastor Gary that.

The following Spring, Doug invited me to attend the Alpha program at Bethel. Bethel uses a modified (Lutheranized) version of Alpha as an introductory course for those outside the Church. Doug thought it would be good for me, and he was right.

At first I was reluctant to go, but after the first two or three evenings, I realized I did not know as much about Christianity as I thought I did. On the final night of the course, May 7, 2007, I came home and

“Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.”

Romans 4:7

couldn't sleep. My mind was processing all the things I had heard. I got out of bed, grabbed a Bible, and entered the living room. I sat down on an old couch and began reading the book of Romans. There I read the words, “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one” (Rom. 3:10-12). At that moment, my theology of morality was destroyed. It was as if my eyes were opened, and I understood the saving work of Christ on the cross for the first time. I was humbled and relieved all at once. I got off the couch and knelt to pray, but I didn't know how, so I just said, “Thank you.”

The following morning, I couldn't believe how good I felt. I thought to myself, “I need to tell people about this... I need to go to seminary.” I discussed it with my wife, and with her blessing, I applied that week and started at LBS in the fall.

Since coming to faith, I have heard many Christians express how their pastor shaped them. I was shaped at LBS. I arrived at LBS believing I knew nothing except Christ crucified for my sins. I was blessed to study under David Veum, Eugene Boe, Brad Soenksen, Gaylan Mathiesen, John Kilde, Mark Erickson, Tony Rogness, Jeff Seaver, Nate Larsen, and Tim Ystebøe. In my time at LBS, these men answered all my questions with another: “What does Scripture say?”

That is what the Church of the Lutheran Brethren offers the world. We are a people grounded in the Word of God. The first article of our Statement of Faith reads, “The Bible, including both Old and New Testaments as originally given, is the verbally and plenary inspired Word of God and is free from error in the whole and in the part, and is therefore the final authoritative guide for faith and conduct.”

I love that, and the world needs more of it. The CLB has something special. We have the Word of God, and LBS is where the DNA of the CLB is passed on to future pastors, missionaries, and church leaders. I am humbled and privileged to be a part of this mission.

Tell us about your family, your education, and your ministry background.

Troy Tysdal: Katie and I were married on November 15, 2001. She is a fantastic mother to our two boys, Brycen (born September 5, 2010) and Gavin (born June 7, 2013). She is a rock. She played the role of breadwinner when I left my career in sales to enter seminary; encourager when I returned to school to complete a Master of Divinity degree; and did more than her fair share of parenting as I completed my Doctorate. She has been a theological sounding board, a tremendous partner in life, and I am so blessed to be her husband.

I have an Associate of Applied Science degree in Communication Art and Design from Alexandria Technical College in Alexandria, MN; a Bachelor of Arts in Religion from Faith International University in Tacoma, WA; a Master of Divinity from Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, MN; and a Doctorate in Strategic Christian Ministry from Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA.

After graduating from LBS in 2010, I accepted a call to serve the CLB in its Communications and Prayer department. In 2015, I became the CLB's Director of Communications and Prayer, serving on both the CLB's Mission Team and Council of Directors. Over the past fifteen years, I have had the privilege to serve two rural Minnesota congregations as pastor and a third as president. My family and I are currently members of

Bethel Lutheran Church in Fergus Falls and Battle Lake, MN, and most often attend the Battle Lake campus.

What is one area you would like to focus on as LBS president that would enhance the way LBS prepares pastors, missionaries, and church leaders?

Troy Tysdal: LBS does an excellent job of training people in the Word of God. That is first and foremost, and it must remain so. With that said, in the information booklet for the CLB's 2020 Biennial Convention (numbers pre-pandemic), 86 of the CLB's 110 congregations reported a plateau or decline in worship attendance. Our Church is shrinking. I would like to support an even greater focus on reaching the lost, preparing pastors, missionaries, and church leaders to engage their communities, seeing themselves as God's sent missionary people wherever he has placed them. This is not for preservation's sake, but because our neighbors need what we have, the good news of Jesus Christ crucified and risen, triumphant over Satan, sin, and death.

How can we pray for you in the weeks and months ahead?

Troy Tysdal: I pray that the Lord equips me to serve and represent LBS well. I ask you to pray the same. I believe the LBS president's job is to ensure that faculty and staff have what they need to do their jobs well, including recruiting students and building relationships with donors. Pray that the Lord will provide both.

Rev. Dr. Troy Tysdal, D.Min. is Director of Communications and Prayer for the CLB and serves as editor in chief of F&F magazine. He will begin his call as President of Lutheran Brethren Seminary on August 1, 2023.



The Pangman Family, L to R: Mya, Brandon, Ian, Jennifer, Eli.

Pangman Called as New Director of NAM

BRANDON PANGMAN

On March 31, 2023, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren's Council of Directors voted to approve President Paul Larson's recommendation to call Rev. Brandon Pangman as the next Director of North American Mission. Rev. Pangman will begin his call on September 18, 2023.

It was a 90-degree day, and I was sitting by a fire, minding my own business. For some reason, this guy walked up to me and started small talking me. At first it was sports, but then he asked me, "If you were to die tonight, would you go to heaven or hell?" I was caught off guard, but I wasn't stupid enough to pick hell, so I said, "Heaven!" He asked me another question, "Why do you desire to go to heaven?" During his interrogation, I found myself answering questions I'd

never thought about before. No one I ever met in my whole life had cared enough to talk to me about God. I quickly found out that my best effort was a dirty rag to God, that no one can earn salvation on their own, that God in heaven loved me so much that he sent his Son to pay for my sins, that Jesus died for me, that all the horrible things that I had done were not just forgiven, but forgotten. From that day forward, my life would never be the same.

Not long after Jesus chased me down, I began attending the Free Lutheran Bible School. During my second year at FLBS, I started dating Jenny Bjornlie, the granddaughter of Lloyd Bjornlie (former President of Lutheran Brethren Seminary). Jenny asked me to go with her to Ebenezer Lutheran Brethren

Church in Minneapolis, MN to help with the youth group. As time passed, Jenny and I married, and soon after, we moved to Long Island, NY to serve Bethel LB Church in Huntington Station. Bethel is where I fell in love with ministry! Since then, I have served as Hillcrest Lutheran Academy's Head Dean; Associate Pastor at Bethesda LB Church in Eau Claire, WI; Lead Pastor at Rock of Ages LB Church in Seattle, WA; Lead Pastor at Emmaus Road Church in DeWitt, IA; and as Director of Elevate Youth Convention since 2010. I guess you could say Jenny did her part to help serve the CLB by asking me to join her in volunteering.

In March 2023, the CLB Council of Directors (COD) called me to serve as Director of North American Mission. I am so grateful to President Larson and

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

John 3:16-17

the COD for allowing me to serve the Lord in this position. I am thrilled and grateful to be able to come alongside our CLB pastors, elders, and church leaders to assist them in growing disciple-making churches. What excites me the most is that I believe with all my heart, mind, and soul that each of our churches can impact their communities for the kingdom of heaven through the work of the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the gospel.

When we survey the world we live in and are called to serve, it is easy to see the opportunities before us. I hope our CLB leadership can continue working with our local churches in teaching and encouraging them as congregations (and individuals) to engage the lost around us. We can see sin's toll on their lives, and we have the solution. Jesus has called us

to go and proclaim his life, death, and resurrection to this broken world. I look forward to working with you, and I would like to start right now. I want you to think of someone you know who doesn't have a relationship with the Lord. Maybe you have a couple of people who come to mind. Take a minute and start to pray for them. Let's pray that God would use us in their lives to minister the gospel to them in *Word* and *deed* so that they might come to know Jesus and the forgiveness he offers. Let's pray, my friends.

It won't be long until I start in this new position and meet so many of you. Until then, I would appreciate your prayers in several areas. First, you can pray for us as we end our time in DeWitt. Emmaus Road Church has been a true blessing to me and my family. Join me in praying

for them as they look to call a new lead pastor. You can also pray for our family as we move to Fergus Falls, MN. The stresses of packing, moving, saying goodbyes, and looking for a new house are being felt by our family. I also request your prayers for rest. Emmaus Road Church has graciously gifted my family and me some time off before I start this new position. I am praying this time off will be a time of renewal and sabbath.

Rev. Brandon Pangman will begin his call as the Church of the Lutheran Brethren's Director of North American Mission on September 18, 2023.



Matthias Szobody and Ellie Bourque in France.

Szobody and Bourque Engaged... and Called to Chad

MATTHIAS SZOBODY AND ELLIE BOURQUE

In the past five months, we've both finished another semester of theological studies, both made long journeys to other countries to search out the future, both received and responded to a call to serve with Lutheran Brethren International Mission in Chad... and, oh yeah, we also got engaged!

We'll share a little of the beginning of that whirlwind story in writing here. But what we'd really love and hope for is to cross paths with many of you and meet in person during the coming years.

We first met at Lutheran Brethren Seminary, where we were both students in the 2021-2022 school year, along with Ellie's brother Joe. The three of us became

friends in the seminary classrooms, hallways, and in the student lounge. But soon, Matthias graduated from the Master of Divinity program in the spring of 2022 and moved back to France, while Ellie stayed in Fergus Falls, MN for a second year of studies in preparation for ministry in Chad. We weren't in touch that fall, and we each gave ourselves to the people and the work that had been set before us.

Toward the end of December, our names suddenly appeared in each other's chat conversations again. Matthias was preparing to go on a trip to Chad, a trip we both hoped would help clarify whether the Lord was opening the door for him to serve there, too. How exciting to begin

talking again just before this crucial time! After Matthias spent two weeks traveling across Chad in Land Cruisers, canoes, and on motorcycles, and after much prayer, we came to the peaceful realization that our callings really were compatible. And as we continued to talk in the following weeks, with an ocean and seven hours of time difference between us, we grew more certain that we could become companions in the rest of life, too.

Finally, over Easter break in early April, Ellie made a trip to sunny Provence, in southern France, and toward the end of that week, Matthias proposed! It was surreal. As we sat in the cool evening air on a quiet countryside hill, we marveled at

“We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”

2 Corinthians 4:7

the gift we’ve been given in each other—at the way our Father has provided for us in ways we could never have imagined.

Below, we’ve each written a brief reflection, a journal entry, if you will, on this journey and the missionary calling that is ahead. We count it such a privilege to share the beginning of our story with you, our Church, as we prepare to be sent by you to the unreached. We are humbled by the grace we have received, and we’re compelled to share through LBIM the hope we have in the gospel.

May 5, 2023

Matthias

Aix-en-Provence, France

A full moon shines with almost surreal brightness in the night sky as I write this. This reminds me that a month ago was Holy Week. Indeed, every Holy Week is a full moon week, since every Easter is the first Sunday following a full moon.

There’s a wonderful poetry to this, if you ask me. It was discovered that Jesus rose from the tomb at sunrise on the first day of the Week—the same day when our Creator said, “Let there be light!” Now, we celebrate the good news of re-creation, of new light and new life, every year, after the first, bright full moon of spring. The good news is indeed a great light!

The last full moon was also when I asked Ellie Bourque to marry me. It happened in the limestone hills where I like to take my walks, just outside the small city where I live and study in southern France. It was just before the sun set and the full moon of Holy Week rose in the sky. The air smelled like rosemary and pine.

Our human stories and relationships are so fragile; Ellie’s and my story is no different. There are many ways in which it might not have happened. It followed on the heels of seasons of pain, including moving on from a previous relationship,

in my case. This kind of fragility reminds me that we are no more than creatures, like fading flowers.

And yet, creation also has this dependable quality to it, the returning spring and the regular full moon, and this reminds us of the faithfulness of the One who sustains it all. He who creates is also willing to re-create; the One who makes is also the One who redeems.

Lord willing, Ellie and I will get married on August 5, and then Ellie will join me in France to begin language learning in preparation for the mission field. We’re excited to begin our short lives together by accepting a call to serve with LBIM, so that the good news of Jesus’ resurrection and the coming new creation might be known among unreached people groups in Chad.

When the Church sends us out, we won’t be entering a world where God is absent. He created the Chadian basin as well. His image lives there in our human brothers and sisters who are culturally so different, yet exactly the same in our shared creaturely nature. Our Church’s mission is to take the gospel to unreached people groups, to announce to our fellow fragile creatures the good news of re-creation in Christ. All the works of his hands must know!

June 3, 2023

Ellie

Connecticut, USA

Another full moon hangs in the sky tonight, gently illuminating the rustling leaves of the tall oak trees in the yard of my childhood home in New England. It has been nearly two months now since Matthias Szobody asked me to marry him. And in just over two months more, we will make our vows and begin a new life together, Lord willing. I can hardly describe our joy.

But as we look back at our story, we cannot help but tremble. We tremble as we see how single decisions and events can alter the courses of entire lives. We tremble as we struggle to reconcile what’s beautiful and what’s broken in our own stories and the world in which they take place. We tremble as we recognize all the undeserved good we have been so graciously given, as we wonder how to hold such precious gifts in hands that are so clumsy. We tremble because even in the spring of life, even when we feel invincible, we are not. Our lives and our stories are utterly fragile.

And yet, even as we tremble, we rejoice. Because long before we ever chose to entrust our fleeting lives to God, he chose to entrust his own invincible life to us. Long before we ever gave him our fragile stories, he gave, and gives, and will continue to give us his unshakable gospel, which not even the rage of nations can stand against. He redeems and re-creates us, he masterfully re-writes and weaves together our stories for his good purpose. And so, we rejoice even as we tremble, because we know that “we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Cor. 4:7). This is our testimony, and our mission.

We are so humbled and so excited to begin our lives together and to join in the work of LBIM in Chad. And we trust that the all-surpassing power of God will continue to redeem and transform many lives there, and in all the world. He who made all things in the beginning is making all things new.

Matthias Szobody and Ellie Bourque are engaged to be married on August 5, 2023. They will then travel to France for a year of French language learning for Ellie, before arriving in Chad in 2024.

Viksnes Called to Rooted

ROGER VIKSNES

The Church of the Lutheran Brethren is a Disciple-Making Church (DMC). A key focus of this mission advancement initiative is the vision to unleash new leaders—to call, empower, and support young men and women to lead in making disciples and forming disciple-making communities. A healthy living organism is always expectant of and sacrificial for the generation to follow. The Church, our congregations, and ourselves are not called to mere survival, but proliferation. And this is also the heart and promise of God: to “pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants” (Isa. 44:3).

It is with this expectancy, and in pursuit of this DMC vision to unleash new leaders, that I am pleased to introduce Roger Viksnes as the first Director of Rooted.

— Paul Larson,
President, CLB

We are really excited about the Rooted gap-year ministry, a partnership between Tuscarora Inn & Conference Center and the CLB that will be established at Tuscarora’s Pines Campus, Mount Bethel, PA. Ever since this property was donated to Tuscarora more than 20 years ago, we have preserved it and prayed that a distinct, but complementary, ministry would one day utilize this unique spot. We believe the facilities will provide the perfect place for young adults to grow in servanthood, leadership, and a deeper understanding of God’s Word.

I am looking forward to working alongside Pastor Roger Viksnes in finalizing the plans for Rooted and welcoming young adults in 2024.

— Brian Abrahamsen,
Exec. Director, Tuscarora

It has been 20 years since I graduated seminary, so it has been 23-1/2 years since the day I was driving home from work as a fourth grade teacher, listening to the singer/prophet Keith Green, as God used him to plant a seed in my mind and heart that I should move into full-time ministry. That was a pretty clear calling, made crystal clear a couple hours later



Roger Viksnes and his dog Greta.

when my then-fiancée shared with me how God had put it on her heart that we should consider full-time ministry. I was hooked. I was in. The only question left to answer was, what was I going to do to get there? You see, as with anything in life, there is a need for and a place for training. Be it an accountant, a hairdresser, or an astronaut, there is a need for some specialized training.

This is true, not only for the “profession” of full-time ministry, but also the life of every disciple of Jesus Christ as they come to understand their life through the lens of their title as disciple. For me, there was just one more hurdle that God needed to bring me over.

When I first felt called to full-time ministry and decided to go to seminary to get trained, I carried a misconception of what my time at seminary would be like (or better stated, what God would be doing in me during those three years). I naively felt going in that I would learn facts about the Bible and therefore be a shoo-in to win any Bible Jeopardy game that a church would have. What happened instead was that I was overwhelmed by the gospel. Like an overmatched fighter getting hit from every direction, I was wonderfully hit with the good news of God in every class that I took.

I didn’t so much learn facts about God, rather, I learned who God is and what he has done for me. I thought I knew all that already, but I discovered that there is a height and depth and width to God and his love for me that far exceeds what my mind can comprehend. I also learned how and where to keep on learning. What I mean by that is, the goal was not to make sure to stuff our heads with all the knowledge that they could hold, but rather to help us to continue to think and learn on our own. And that was a good thing, because I ended up doing a whole lot of learning when God called my wife Jenny and me to minister in Brooklyn, NY.

The Rooted program is a one-year discipleship program (September-May), for people ages 18-25. The kickoff for this program will be September 2024 (with a possible pilot program taking place January-May 2024). My desire for the Rooted program is not that every person who attends ends up going to seminary and/or into full-time professional ministry, but rather that every person ends up understanding that they are disciples first before any other title that they pick up in life, and that they spend the rest of their lives focused on the kingdom of God. The Lutheran Brethren is a disciple-making movement, and it is the heart of this new program to raise up disciples who will spend the rest of their lives making more disciples.

It struck me last year at the CLB convention in Fergus Falls, MN that if you

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LBIM: A Global Gathering

Lutheran Brethren International Mission (LBIM) missionaries serve around the world in contexts that differ greatly from their home cultures. They navigate life in a different language, often in an area with minimal Christian community. For these reasons and more, the life of a cross-cultural missionary family can feel lonely and isolated, leading to discouragement, burn-out, and a myriad of issues that negatively affect ministry. Intentional rest, renewal, and spiritual care are vital for long-term health and productivity.

This is why LBIM has devoted resources and attention to missionary care ministry. This year, we want to take missionary care to a new level. LBIM is planning to facilitate, for the first time, a global LBIM missionary retreat, where all our missionaries will come together for fellowship, worship, and rest. This will be a worthwhile investment into the long-term emotional and spiritual health of our missionary families across the globe.

Plans are in place to host the retreat later this year in Chiang Mai, Thailand. LBIM's missionary care couples (Joel and Liz Christenson, and Chris and Suzanne Priestaf) will provide spiritual care. A children and youth team from Triumph Lutheran Brethren Church (Moorhead, MN and Fargo, ND) will provide ministry for our precious MKs (Missionary Kids). Rachel Roy, worship leader at Mount Bethel LBC (Mount Bethel, PA), will lead worship. Rest and renewal will be the top priority.

There is a cost to making this happen. Several donors have already contributed to this effort. More funds are needed. The cost of this retreat is not factored into the CLBA's contribution budget, so we are asking donors who contribute to this retreat to do so in a way that does not affect what they would normally contribute to the CLBA ministry budget. Would you consider a gift above and beyond your regular giving to help make this retreat happen? Gifts can be made to LBIM, designated "LBIM Global Retreat." If you have any questions, you are welcome to email Dan Venberg, LBIM director, dvenberg@lbim.org, or call the LBIM office at (218) 739-3336.

Larson Installed as Elder



L to R: Rev. Kirk Miltzer, Mikelle Larson, Elder Gabe Larson, Bee Larson, and President Paul Larson.

On May 21, 2023, Gabe Larson was ordained as an elder at Bethesda Lutheran Brethren Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. His father, President Paul Larson, officiated.

NAM Director Installed



L to R Standing: Director of Finance LaWayne Rogness, President Paul Larson, Council of Directors Chairman Mike Swenson, Rev. Mark Nienow, Rev. Troy Tysdal, Rev. Matthew Rogness, Rev. Rich Iverson. Kneeling: Rev. Brandon Pangman.

On June 9, 2023, Rev. Brandon Pangman was installed as the new Director of North American Mission for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. President Paul Larson officiated.

Frasers Commissioned



The commissioning of Paul and Alexa Fraser was held at Rock of Ages Lutheran Brethren Church in Seattle, WA, where Paul has served as the Japanese Ministries Pastor Intern since 2021.

On June 11, 2023, Paul and Alexa Fraser were commissioned as the CLB's next missionaries to Japan. The CLB's Director of International Mission, Dan Venberg officiated.

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start with just two people and they lead just one person each to the Lord, you have now four disciples of Jesus. If each of those four then spend the next year leading someone new to the Lord and discipling them, you have eight people at the end of year two. Doing this same thing for 33 years would lead the whole world to Christ. And all the original couple needs to do is lead just 33 people to Jesus in that time. Now I am not here to say that this new program is going to do that, but it is going to be our focus to be a part of that and to watch our limitless God do more than we can ask or imagine. But it starts, like it started with me, by first being blown away by the gospel and then trained up in how to live it out.

While living in Brooklyn, I had a number of opportunities to speak and serve at homeless shelters around the city. I was always surprised when I would hear a person say, "I used to go to church. I was really into it." And then they would start sharing Bible verses that they had memorized, ministries that they had been part of, or churches and pastors that they had known. And I would eventually ask, "What happened?" The answer inevitably was, "I don't know. I just kind of left it." It is all too possible and common to grow in facts about the faith without growing in the faith, and particularly growing in our identity as children of God saved by grace alone.

I am excited about what the Rooted program will become, but also about who will be coming and what God will be doing in their lives. If you find yourself interested in spending a year diving deep into your identity as a disciple of Jesus Christ, or if you are reading this and are thinking of your child, grandchild, or friend, then I invite you to email us (rooted@tuscarora.org), so that we can get you information as the program is finalized over the next few months. On top of that, if you have been a part of a Bible school or gap-year program yourself at some point in your life and you have some advice, be it something to make sure to include or something to watch out for, I would love to talk with you. You can either email me about it, or email me your phone number and a good time to call. My email address is: roger.viksnes@gmail.com.

Finally, having taken the time to read this, will you pray right now for this program, for the people that God is already preparing to join and for protection from the evil one who is already seeking to try to mess things up? And will you go a step further and write down "Rooted" on a post-it note somewhere? Then, each time you see it, will you remember to pray not only for this new program, but for young people all around you to be "rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Col. 2:7).

Rev. Roger Viksnes serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and Tuscarora as Director of the Rooted gap-year Ministry.

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