

Faith & Fellowship

Vol. 90, No. 5

September/October 2023
Let the Children
Come to Me



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FAITH & FELLOWSHIP

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Editor In Chief: Troy Tysdal
tysdal@clba.org

Contributing Editor: Brent Juliot

Media Relations Specialist:
Tim Mathiesen

Copy Editor: Aaron Juliot

Cover Photo:
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Church of the Lutheran Brethren
DISCIPLE-MAKING CHURCH
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CALL
to Follow

Most of us have heard the Great Commission from Matthew 28 many, many times. Many of us can recite it from memory. It can, then, cause us to feel guilty that we're not doing enough, and sometimes we dismiss it because the work is too overwhelming. Making one disciple is difficult enough. Making disciples of all nations? It's too much.

However, as I slow down and think about each phrase with fresh eyes and ears, I find myself growing excited and feeling empowered to do the work that Jesus calls us to do.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Did you hear that? "All authority." The invitation and command is spoken by the one with all the power to complete this commission. He invites us, sinners saved by grace, to join him on *his* mission to CALL people of all nations to himself.

PARTNER
in Mission

UNLEASH
New Leaders

MULTIPLY
New Disciples

"Therefore go..." Jesus doesn't expect me to wait, but to serve him as I go. And is he speaking to me, alone? No, he is calling *all* of us, his global Church, to PARTNER in mission.

"...and make disciples of all nations..." All nations. This includes the United States, along with international mission. Our neighbors are part of "all nations." We are invited to UNLEASH new leaders in his global Church and MULTIPLY new disciples in our own communities and around the world!

And how is this even possible? Jesus says, "I am with you always..." For how long? "...to the very end of the age." He will do the seemingly impossible...and we get to join him.

Tim Mathiesen is Media Relations Coordinator for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

Little Ears

TROY TYSDAL

Last fall, my boys decided to set up a lemonade stand to make some extra money. I liked the initiative but reminded them that we live in the country on a dead-end road. The young entrepreneurs saw the wisdom in my observation and returned to the drawing board. If they were going to make some quick cash, they would need a better idea. That evening, after a long day working in the garage, I entered the house to find a swear jar with my name on it. As a minister of the gospel, I was offended. I protested to my wife, “I do not swear!” She smiled and said, “Then the swear jar will not be a problem.” Over the next few days, the jar began to fill. Here is what I learned: I might not use the Lord’s name in vain or say any of the big four-letter words, but I do say things I would not say in public or allow my children to say. I am a hypocrite, and I am not alone.

On August 30, 2022, Preply.com published the results of a survey they conducted, looking for the American city that swears the most (Columbus, Ohio, if you are wondering).¹ The survey included over 1,500 residents from thirty major U.S. cities. Here is what they found: the average respondent swears twenty-one times per day. Here’s what is troubling: the article states that most people believe swearing is inappropriate, yet reports that 55% of people are most likely to swear when they are at home. Here’s the point: over half of the people surveyed are most likely to swear when they think no one is listening. The problem is: someone is listening. Our children are listening.

MATTHEW 18:1-6

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a little child to him and placed the child among them. And he said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the



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greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”

The words of Jesus are a stark reminder of how impressionable children are. They watch, learn, and mimic all that they see. This is why Jesus warns us against causing them to stumble. It is also why he praises them for their faith. When Jesus called, the child came. In arguing over who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, the disciples could not have been less Christ-like. Jesus challenged them to return to the lowly position of a child. Here we find the key to following Christ. The greater humility and trust, the more we reflect the one who came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45).

Jesus has entrusted us with a great responsibility, our children. Perhaps you are reading this, and your children are adults who have walked away from the faith. It’s not too late. How many times has your adult child called and asked for advice? Your opinion still matters! Or, maybe you are reading this, and you’ve never had children of your own; you can still be a role model, and that’s what we’re talking about.

Modeling Christ in our lives is not easy.

Allow yourself some grace. When you mess up, ask for forgiveness, from God and from those he has brought into your care. In doing so, you will demonstrate marks of the faith—humility and trust. Mark Holman, the author of *Church + Home*, writes, “Our children are watching us to see if our behaviors reflect the faith we proclaim.”²

So, let us reflect Christ, but also, let us rest in Christ. Remember, where you fail, he has been victorious. Never hold yourself up as the perfect example; instead, point to Jesus. If that’s all you do, you will have done enough.

Rev. Troy Tysdal, D.Min. is President of Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

Sources

1. Matt Zajechowski, “Study: The Cities that Swear the Most in the U.S.,” Preply (blog), last modified October 14, 2022, <https://preply.com/en/blog/cities-that-swear-most/>.
2. Mark Holman, *Church + Home: The Proven Formula for Building Lifelong Faith* (Ventura, CA: Regal House Publishing, 2010), 43.

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Filling Their Backpacks

ASHLEY KROG

Expertly sandwiched in Mark 10—between a teaching on divorce and a rich, young man’s naïveté—there stands a lesson on the littlest among us. Parents and caregivers bring their children to Jesus, just to have him touch them, and the disciples nearby rebuke them for doing so. How does Jesus react? He is indignant! As in, *showing anger or annoyance at what is perceived as unfair treatment*. Like a hen fluttering over chicks, he descends upon the children to defend them. The disciples may have grown up under the adage “children are to be seen and not heard,” but Jesus reveals that children were created to *be* seen and to *be* heard. Jesus welcomes people as they are, and children are not the exception. It doesn’t matter if they have never heard of him, or they grew up on the wrong (or right) side of the tracks, or they smell funny because their mom uses their bathtub

as a kitty litter box. Jesus takes them in his arms and blesses them. He lays his hands on them.

Our local Early Childhood teacher, Ms. Stacie, shares the illustration that each parent has a backpack in which we place our tools for parenting. Tools begin to be placed inside our backpacks when we are still children. We instinctively pull them out later as we make parenting decisions. In any given parenting situation, we reach behind us into our backpacks to grab the appropriate tool for the job. Toddler hitting the baby? Time-out. Preschooler throwing food? Mealtime is over. Talking back to mom? A spoonful of vinegar. As we continue into our Christian walk, we keep adding more tools to our backpacks that are knee-jerk methods we learned from childhood, tricks we’ve learned from our parents, or methods we’ve gleaned from reading parenting hacks.

At this moment, our children’s backpacks are filling up.

Some tools are placed inside their backpacks for them, such as their baptism. Psalm 51:5 shares King David’s wisdom, in that, “Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” So we bring our children to the baptismal font knowing that it isn’t “one and done” to get to heaven—but God will work through each baptism according to his will. Each baptism is a precious gift, but whether or not the gift is used will vary with the individual. Other tools for their backpacks include family traditions; what flavor of church they attend (or not); whether their parents lean crunchy, silky, or scrunchy (look it up); and, the value placed on holy communion or the sanctity of marriage.

Other tools are picked up by the child and placed inside their backpacks for future use, such as their integrity, work ethic, and education. And as they watch us parent,

“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.”

Psalms 51:5-6

they pick up on discipline techniques and positive reinforcement strategies, not to mention their Christian influences such as their Confirmation and views on prayer—that is, is prayer just for church, or used every day in life?

When children leave our homes, are they equipped for their Christian walk? Were they given access to every kind of useful tool? Did we let the children go to Jesus, or did we place dead weight in their backpacks and hinder them? In the end, all we can do is our best to provide our children with every opportunity to fill their backpacks with good tools for Christian living. If only it were as simple as the sprinkling of baptism to guarantee their eternal salvation—who wouldn’t agree to that? But it’s not that simple. At the moment, I know of Christian parents who grieve for their unsaved children. Of a father who grieves his son’s alt religious group. Some parents pray that their

children will have good jobs and faithful spouses, but they end up unemployed and divorced. Did those parents pray for their children the wrong way, or not enough?

Well, how did Jesus teach us to pray? A tool he provided for us is found in the Lord’s Prayer. Let us pray that over our children and entrust them to the Creator.

For he said, “Let the children come to me.” Give them chances, opportunities, and submerge them in him. Don’t wait for them to “behave” to bring them to him, or to be “old enough to understand,” lest you risk Jesus’ indignation. And parents, do not beat yourself up over your child’s behavior in church. Getting through a Sunday service can quite literally feel like a marathon. Church services are exhausting. Oftentimes, I wonder why I even bother going at all, when I am constantly prevented from listening. But it’s not just about me. It’s about them, so they can have an opportunity to hear about the kingdom of heaven.

And I know that many of you seasoned parents can attest to this better than I. Almost overnight, it seems like they go from picking their noses and doing push-ups on a pew bench during closing prayers (this may have happened to me last week) to praying the most honest, heartfelt prayers to their Heavenly Father at bedtime. Provide them with the tools. Yes, bring them to Jesus as they are; for he takes them as they are, hugs them in his arms, and blesses them.



Ashley Krog is a member and pastor’s wife at Elim Lutheran Brethren Church in Clearbrook, MN. She and her husband Adam are blessed with four children.



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The Faith of a Child

NICK JOYAL

We've all likely heard about "having child-like faith." While you won't find that phrase in the Bible, it's a popular phrase for a reason. Consider Mark 10:15, and the context:

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them, and blessed them.

Mark 10:15 is one of the main "child-like faith" verses, if you want to call it that. It may not be apparent, but you can understand this verse in two ways. Jesus could be talking about someone receiving God's kingdom the way a child would

receive it, or about someone receiving God's kingdom the way they would receive a child. Which one is it? Well, Jesus was, indeed, receiving children in this very moment—something the disciples tried to prevent.

Children appear small, weak, and unimportant in many ways. Maybe the disciples thought, "Why welcome children? What's the benefit of receiving them?" God's kingdom—even Jesus himself—can also appear to be small, weak, and unimportant. If Jesus wants his disciples to receive the kingdom like they would receive a child, perhaps the disciples don't understand what God's kingdom is really like. If they can't welcome someone like a small child, how can they themselves be welcomed into God's kingdom? This is one way to understand Jesus' words.

The timing of Jesus' next interaction should also be considered, though. A man comes up to Jesus and asks, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" This is

an odd question, because an inheritance isn't typically earned, yet the man asks what he can *do*. People may inherit a gift of some kind from their family, but not as hired workers earning a wage. We may inherit things as adults when our parents have passed, while being capable of working and earning what we have. Yet an inheritance is still received, not earned. What does this mean? There is, quite literally, nothing you can do to *inherit* eternal life.

Here we remember the little children that Jesus was welcoming. Little children, too, can receive an inheritance, but even if it were possible that it could be earned, they would be unable. Children are dependent. They have everything given to them and cannot offer anything in exchange. This is where Jesus said, "the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." It is the second way to understand Jesus' words: receive the kingdom of God freely, with nothing to offer in exchange, the way a child would receive it.

“Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

Mark 10:15

Here’s how it comes together. God’s kingdom appears small, weak, and unimportant, like a child. God’s kingdom belongs to and is received by those with nothing to offer, like a child.

That may seem like an odd way of describing God’s gift to us, but it truly is wonderful!

The Kingdom of God, as the disciples had heard already (ironically), appears as small as a mustard seed, but grows to put out branches large enough for the birds of the air to build nests and rest in (Mark 4:30-32). Jesus appears weak, emptying himself and becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8). Yet his death and resurrection are far from unimportant; they are of *first* importance (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). For by his wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:5); by the gospel of Jesus Christ we are saved (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Little children have no works—nothing in which to boast. It is in this way, like little children, that we receive God’s kingdom—forgiveness, redemption, new life—as a completely free gift, like an inheritance, by means of faith.

So, where does “child-like” faith come in?

We could probably say that true faith is always child-like. We don’t *need* to describe faith as child-like, but there is a great metaphor in that description. My children trust me. They tend to believe me when I say something. They know that I will be there when they call on my name. When I say, “I love you,” my kids believe that I love them, and the ones who can speak repeat after me, “I love you, too.” Our youngest cannot yet speak, but when I say something like, “Can you put that over there?”—he believes “over there” is exactly where “that” should go, and he does it. The trust (faith) of a child is very simple and yet profound.

Even when they choose to rebel, they are always invited to trust again. Inevitably, going their own way leads to unforeseen consequences (even though they were warned about them). When that happens, who do they run to? Who do they trust to save them from their own way? When they encounter the harsh realities of sin that go beyond their choices, who do they trust to comfort them, to be with them, to help them understand?

Mom and dad.

They can’t articulate it all the time. They can’t explain the intricacies or the reasoning behind my love for them, or their trust in me. They just believe. They

believe that we will give them whatever they need, all the way from food to forgiveness.

This is your relationship to the heavenly Father.

You have nothing to offer God, and God offers you everything. His kingdom appears small, and yet is a place of true rest for you. Jesus seems weak, and yet he conquered sin, death, and the devil for you. He warns you about your sin and is there when you call on his name. He saves you from your own way. He is with you. He comforts you. He provides for your every need, all the way from food to forgiveness. You are his child. So trust in Jesus. Stop striving for an inheritance you cannot earn. God loves you. He forgives you. He has good work for you to do. He will be faithful to you. Believe him and cling to his Word!

Amen.



Rev. Nick Joyal is Pastor at Living Hope Lutheran Brethren Church in Beaumont, Alberta.



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Parenting a Prodigal

ANONYMOUS

You know the verse: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6, KJV). Then in Ephesians 6:4, Paul wrote, “bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” We Christian parents understand that our love for our children includes passing along that which we treasure most: a living faith grounded in God’s Word. We want them to know and serve their Heavenly Father, who cares for them more than we do and protects them from Satan’s schemes.

So, what are we to think when we’ve tried our best—when we’ve read and followed all the books, articles, and sermons—but our best seems not to have been good enough? We’ve eaten our meals together, had devotional times with our children, modeled the faith before them, brought them up in the church. And yet as they grow older, they appear to reject what we most wanted to give.

We’ve been there; it’s a crushingly

painful reality. It feels much like Kubler-Ross’ Five Stages of Grief: Denial; Anger; Bargaining; Depression; Acceptance. At the first signs of trouble, we want to believe it’s just a phase they are going through. They tell us everything is fine, and we hope it’s true. But it isn’t fine. Instead, we see growing expressions of resentment when we can’t approve of their choices, and in turn we too might lash out in hurtful ways.

Then, in desperation, we might resort to bargaining and manipulation. But this is counterproductive, and so the pain only increases. Why is God allowing this to happen to our child, and to us? We did the right things the best we knew how. Where did we go wrong? About this time a friend wisely reminded us, “If you take the blame for what has gone wrong with your child, you should also be able to take credit for the things that went right.” True, we mustn’t do that. In the Bible we see that God did everything right, and yet he often wrestled with his wayward

children. Why should it be any different for us? God doesn’t force himself on us, and we can’t force our will on our children either. They must choose for themselves the path they will walk and live with the outcomes. Each of us does battle with an old sinful nature, and it’s only by his grace that any of us are walking in faith.

But knowing this doesn’t make the journey easier. There were days when we unexpectedly burst into tears in front of others or had to pull out of traffic until we could regain control. There was the time when the thought surfaced, “If only I didn’t believe.” In a way, it was our beliefs that made this so hard. Our children’s choices were outside of God’s will for them, while our heart’s desire was to see them faithfully walking in his way. Without a strong faith and strong belief in a lifestyle rooted in God’s Word, we still could have been disappointed, but it wouldn’t have been as painful as having to choose between God and our child. Our convictions were being tested.

“His works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.”

Deuteronomy 32:4

Another wise friend counseled us that we needed to not waver in our biblical faith and convictions. Then, if we were so blessed to see our children turn back to the Lord (and to us), they would see us as the “strong rock that never moved.”

We also discovered that a child’s rebellion often results in conflict between the parents. We each grieved differently and on a different timeline. As a mother, it may have been more difficult to face the hard facts. It was crucial that we didn’t blame each other (though we still did sometimes). We needed to stay on the same page in responding to our child’s choices. We set aside regular times as a couple to talk through the issues together and listen to each other.

On the positive side, we saw other Christian parents with similar experiences open up to us. This is a topic we don’t often talk about in church, and so parents can feel like failures when they find themselves unable to keep their child growing in the faith. And then there are those families where all the children grow up blossoming in their faith; why is that? How do we respond without envy when God blesses other families this way? (And similarly, how do families so blessed respond in humble compassion

toward families living through the pain of a child’s rebellion?)

And what about forgiveness? We would hear from others, “You just have to love and accept them.” But instead, we found forgiveness looked more like avoiding getting stuck in bitterness and anger as we tried to carry on with daily life. It amazed us that while our Christian convictions required us to say, “No, we cannot approve of, let alone celebrate these choices you are making,” it was this same Christian faith that gave us the strength and power to love and forgive while working toward reconciliation with our children.

We also learned that if there are other children in the family, we need to be sure we don’t let our grief over the one child become the “elephant in the room” when we’re with other family members. Our family times and decisions mustn’t be governed by the actions and decisions of the rebellious child. To let that happen is to penalize the others unfairly.

What kept us sane? For one of us, it was lots of crying, but it was also seeing we weren’t alone—others, too, were in hard situations. Our small group from church surrounded us with loving encouragement and prayer. We enjoyed

mentoring relationships with other young adults the same ages as our children and saw them grow and mature in their faith with Jesus. And we were reminded by God that he loves our children more than we do, that in fact he loves everyone as much as he loves our children.

Above all, we need to remember that our God of forgiveness and mercy knows the end from the beginning, and we do not. The last chapter on our family is not yet written. We continue to pray daily for our children and grandchildren and strive to be a loving and positive witness in our interactions with them. We have seen God answer prayer and bless our family in ways we could not foresee. But even if that were not so, we remember that while we strive to disciple our children as best we can, it is not in our power to determine our children’s lives for them. Proverbs 22:6 is a general observation, not a promise of God. We leave all things in his hands.

“His works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he” (Deuteronomy 32:4).

Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, the author has requested to stay anonymous.

CLB Shared Ministry: Contribution Report

\$3,200,000

2023-24 Fiscal Year Goal

782,878

Received Through 8/31/23

The CLB Fiscal Year ends April 30, 2024.

Making a Difference, Together

AUGUST WIRKUS

Over the many years I have been attending Bethesda Lutheran Brethren Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, I have appreciated our ministry in overseas missions. I was delighted that every year, it seemed, one or two missionaries came to share their experiences with our congregation. Serving as an elder for ten years, my “official” time was divided with many things that were brought to the board’s attention. What always whet my interest was discussion about the church’s missionaries and the concerns they had with culture, language learning, disease, weather, and various other challenges, as well as the politics where they were ministering.

During that time I came to know some younger couples who were going overseas to serve our Lord far from home. One couple was Brent and Sandi Wiebe who were heading to Papua New Guinea. They spent 18 years there translating the Bible into the Bola language. Brent had been a high school biology student of mine, and Sandi’s name is well-known to many of you. It was her grandparents, Berge and

Herborg Revne, who pioneered African missionary activities for our Synod.

Dan and Rachel Venberg left for Doh in Chad, close to where Dan grew up, and where his parents had spent 30 years as Lutheran Brethren missionaries. A third couple left to serve with Mission Aviation Fellowship, the organization that may have saved the life of Dan and Rachel’s daughter when they flew her out of an isolated rural African setting to a modern medical facility.

For me, it is relaxing to write letters to people and to share feelings. For 18 years, I sent a letter once a month to Papua New Guinea, and for 10 years a monthly letter was directed to Doh. Through correspondence with these two missionary families, it soon became quite evident that there were many times of frustration, discouragement, and debilitating fatigue. Because I was privileged to be a sounding board to these families, I was able to pray for their specific concerns.

Christ asked that little children be allowed to come to him, but in the U.S. a teacher has to be careful how he/she does

that. Then, I learned that a school was being built in Chad that would provide much knowledge and many skills to African children. This would enable them to obtain a better life, but while this was being taught, they would also be learning of the love Jesus Christ has for them.

This was a prospect that excited me. As a teacher who values education, I realize that education gives students hope. I could see doors opening, not only opening to a better physical life for the students, but also for them to learn of a better life eternally through Jesus Christ.

Though my contributions to LBIM would make little difference alone, combined with contributions from others, they could serve as a means for bringing many children to know the love of Christ Jesus.

August Wirkus is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Brethren Church in Eau Claire, WI.

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Cohort: Women Together

MICHELLE WANG

Last October, the WMCLB launched a cohort of women reading through Gretchen Ronnevik's book *Ragged: Spiritual Disciplines for the Spiritually Exhausted*, and I am grateful to have joined. Every meeting was an opportunity to connect and to celebrate what God has freely given us through the spiritual disciplines.

As a Christian woman, I have felt the need to be pious—prayerful, generous, and constant in my Bible reading. As a young mother and worship leader, I have worried, “How could I teach my son or lead our praise team with a worshipful heart if my own Christian walk feels lacking?” I have often felt I am not doing enough. I’ve even felt angry at the standards that seem to be necessary to be a good Christian. Our cohort consisted of seven women. Although we came from different walks of life and from different places across the country, we all seemed to relate on this point. We all love Christ and want to grow in him; we all want to be good and faithful servants in our families and churches. But as Gretchen described “the pious woman” in *Ragged*’s introduction only to follow with, “That woman is not me,” we all also confessed: that woman is not me.

With this, our meetings had an atmosphere of openness and vulnerability from the very start, one that is rare among new acquaintances. We shared our thoughts on Gretchen’s book, our testimonies, our earnest questions, and our prayer requests. As we did, we reminded each other that the disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, meditation, and others should point us not to ourselves and our abilities, but rather to God’s greatness and our dependence on him. We urged each other to look at the disciplines not as obligations, but as precious gifts—valuable not because of the holiness we can achieve by our discipline, but rather because of what God does



Women's Ministries of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren

in us through them. We reminded each other that God alone is the provider and perfecter of our faith. And as a result, I truly felt like our meetings were filled with a deep sense of humility and joint praise to God.

Our meetings were also a time for us to encourage each other as servants of the Church. As we shared our struggles as women in church leadership—whether as pastors’ wives, youth leaders, missionaries, or teachers—we found others who understood and could lift us up in prayer. I saw women remind each other that our ministries depend on God, not us, just as *Ragged* reminded us that our sanctification is not a result of our own work, but God’s. And every time we closed our conversations, I would come away confident that God is ever faithful to his promises to sanctify us and to work for good in the world around us. Thanks be to God.

Michelle Wang attends Calvary Lutheran Church in Bergenfield, New Jersey.

Please consider joining a cohort this fall! We will be using Greg Finke’s book *Joining Jesus on His Mission: How to be an Everyday Missionary*.

Reach out at: WMCLBContact@gmail.com





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The Biblical Family and the Church

ADAM KOONTZ

If Satan's fiercest warfare on our people over the past half-century had been made directly on one of the Church's doctrines, we might have been better prepared. When there was dissension over the doctrine of Scripture, many churches upheld the inerrancy of the Bible right away and strongly. When there was and is confusion about the ordination of women, many churches have steadfastly maintained that Scripture teaches a male pastorate exclusively. However, since the attacks much more often and much more frequently have been against the family, we were less prepared. These attacks have come through a multitude of channels.

Compared to our grandparents' families, our families today form later, struggle more to stay together, and split up more frequently. We struggle not only

in those areas but also to make a living on two incomes. Our grandparents almost all lived on one income. Our families are perhaps smaller than our grandparents' families and certainly than our great-grandparents' families, yet our children seem to cost more to raise, and they want more things during their raising than our grandparents could have afforded. We now struggle ourselves, or have friends who are struggling, to keep their children in the Church. For some, it's a struggle to accept their own God-created bodies. Surely a plague is in our midst, like the locusts came upon Israel of old (Joel 2:25). This chaos slips into our churches in ways too many to count, and the confusion and sadness bleeds into our interactions with our family and with our congregation.

How could all of this happen? When the Lord teaches on the family and on divorce, he commands that man should not separate what God has joined together (Matthew 19:6, Mark. 10:9). Man and wife should not be put away from each other because God has made the two into one flesh (Genesis 2:24). A divorce is like a death; a life made by God has ended through the wages of sin. Divorce was common enough in that day that the Lord's own teaching sounds impossibly hard to his disciples (Matthew 19:10). How could he expect people to stay together? Because he draws his teaching not from how hard our hearts may be apart from his Word, but from what he intended from the beginning.

The family predates the fall into sin. God brought Eve to Adam before the



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Dr. Adam Koontz

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serpent brought temptation to Eve. God blessed their union and gave the pattern of every wedding since that day: the two shall become one flesh. From that one flesh should come fruit according to his blessing, that people should fill the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1:28). That blessing is still in effect: children are identified as a blessing throughout Holy Scripture (from only one book, see Psalm 113:9, 127:3, 128:3, 6). Children serve as the Lord's example for faith and entry into his kingdom (Mark. 10:14) because within the family they live by another's care and love as we the children of God live by the Father's care for us. The family and its life of blessing serve as the pattern for the Church's life together.

So when the family and its life of blessing are taken apart, the Church suffers, too. When we do not know a loving father, we have trouble knowing the Father above. When we think of children as a problem for our families, we will think of them, and thus of the future, as a problem for our churches. The family's health is the Church's concern, and the family's flourishing in Christ is the Church's special joy.

What to do? Go back to the beginning, back to what God established, and start anew from there. There is no cause for misery in repentance, only a sadness that we did not turn back sooner to the Lord and to his ways. And there is every cause for joy in repentance, just as the angels rejoice who know the glories and the peace ahead for the penitent sinner.

God established a union of one man and one woman at the family's heart. Make every effort for children to marry well—in the Christian faith and with the blessing of their parents. Marriage affects the whole family, so the wisdom of elders is key in recognizing and blessing two people who will spend the rest of their lives together. That life's foundation will be the Word of God, so the couple must use God's Word in their daily lives, letting it dwell richly in their midst that it might shed its light on all things in their lives.

God established a union that has children who need their father's care and their mother's love. Make every effort to welcome many children into the home and for the home to be a place of security and peace for them. The children can

be educated in the family or in a school at the family's discretion, but the home must be the center of its life, not the school or the softball team or anything else. Being a "homemaker" is a full-time job and must be treated as such (Titus 2:5). It is worth every penny of sacrifice for a family. In that home children find a place for themselves in the midst of the joys and sacrifices that prepares them better than any education or schooling could for what life will bring.

God established the family from the beginning as a blessing. Put other things aside so that the family can be blessed with God's Word each day and with his delights of grace every Sunday. In his ways—even from the beginning—are fullness of peace and fullness of joy.



Rev. Dr. Adam C. Koontz serves as Pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Denver, Colorado.



Youth volunteers often lead and support children in weekly ministries and summer events at Triumph Lutheran Brethren Church.

Learning from Our Children

SHANA BRONSON

I recall, several years ago, loading my kids into our minivan. The kids were still young, and it was always a production to get out of the door. Diaper bag, shoes, snacks, water bottles... Even a routine day trip seemed like a trip to the moon.

Once we were finally on our way, my youngest son called out from his car seat, "Mom? Where are we going?" His words struck me. He had *no* idea where I was taking him. He simply had strapped himself in and trusted that we would eventually end up at the correct destination with everything he needed. My son had complete trust in me.

Trust. When we think of children, words like trust and faith come to mind. That's a beautiful thing.

As the Church, we often talk about how valuable our children are to us and to the body of Christ. As churches, we invest time, energy, and money into the

faith development of our children. This is right. We should do this. We need to guide and shepherd our children as they grow and mature in their faith.

But...has it ever struck you how much we can learn from our children?

As a parent and a children's ministry worker, I tend to focus on what I need to be teaching and modeling for my children. In some of my wisest moments, however, I am struck by what children are teaching me.

In Luke 18:16-17, we read, "But Jesus called the children to him and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.'"

Jesus loves children. He pointed to children as an example of trust, faith, and simply receiving the gift of himself. Jesus

values the children for who they are, not just who they will be *someday*.

Our children and young people are displaying riches of faith, vitality, and encouragement *today*. As churches, we have the privilege of investing in the faith development of our children and young people. We also have the extreme joy of being in fellowship with, and worshiping alongside, our children in our congregations right now.

Just as my son strapped himself in for the drive with complete faith and trust in me, the next generation in our congregations are strapping themselves in and trusting in our loving Father in a way that is profound and encouraging.

As church leaders, we get to disciple and teach them. We also get the privilege of learning from and being blessed by them, while they join us as vital parts of the body of Christ.

How are children a vital part of your



This father and daughter team volunteer regularly to run sound and slides for Sunday worship.



Another student leading children in weekly ministry.

ministries and congregation? Here are some snapshots of what I have witnessed in our church family...

Children are a source of life and energy.

A few months ago, our pastor began his sermon by asking, "Have you ever been struck by lightning?" To which a child in the congregation exclaimed, "Oh, I *have*!" The laughter and smiles that erupted from our congregation was, well, electric.

Another Sunday, we had the joy of seeing three siblings brought to the Lord in baptism. The whole morning was very sweet, but my favorite part was when the pastor extended his hand to pray a blessing over the children. The oldest child saw the extended hand in front of him and, with a huge smile on his face, he responded by giving the pastor a joy-filled "high five." Kids have a way of bringing authentic joy, wonder, and fun to a room. I'm so glad God has placed them in our family!

Children and youth are eager to serve and bless others. Our youth regularly serve in many areas across our congregation. We have a couple dad/daughter teams who regularly run the sound and slides during our worship services. Our worship arts director referred to one of these 6th grade girls as "one of the most powerful people in the

room" on a Sunday. Her role is critical in supporting the worship of our church family, and she serves with joy and faithfulness.

Our youth volunteers are also critical to our ministry to children in our congregation. This last year alone, we had over 40 youth serve in our kids' ministry in some capacity. They regularly pour their hearts into loving and leading the children in our kids' programs. These youth volunteers connect and share the love of Jesus in a meaningful way.

Children model faith and trust. My son showed me trust in our van that day. Our children model trust in much more significant ways, too. The ability of a child to trust and love Jesus astounds me. From the child listening open-mouthed to the stories of Jesus, to the child belting out the words of a favorite worship song, to the child reciting the Lord's Prayer as we gather in worship... these children are engaging in and believing the words of the gospel. They hear the Word and believe it. It's simple. It's beautiful. It's what we are all called to do.

Children remind us of our utter dependence on God. A child starts out completely dependent on parents or caregivers for basic life needs. That, in itself, is a beautiful picture of our complete dependence on our God. But

children have also reminded me of my dependence on God in other ways. Working with children in ministry and as a parent has brought me to a place of joy and panic at the same time. It is challenging and it is an enormous task—completely bigger than I am. Coming alongside our little ones on behalf of our church, I am reminded how much I need Jesus. It brings me to my knees and draws my gaze upwards. It's not my ministry; it's his.

Children truly are a blessing in our lives and our churches. It is my prayer that we not only focus on the *someday* of a child, but on who they are right now. Yes, we give them tools and training so that someday they will grow into adults of faith, character, and integrity. But let us not miss the joy and blessing it is to fellowship, worship, and serve with our children and youth today. These children are the Lord's precious children. Together with them, we are the body of Christ.

Shana Bronson serves as the Triumph Kids Director at Triumph Lutheran Brethren Church's West Campus in West Fargo, North Dakota.



"Gospel Sunday" on Mother's Day at Wenxiu Park.



"Gospel Sunday" on Mother's Day at Wenxiu Park.

Where Are the Children?

BEN HOSCH

The Church Trends and Research Association is an evangelical group in Taiwan that provides statistics on Taiwanese Christians and churches every two years. Since the 1990s, the numbers of Christians in Taiwan had been continually increasing, rapidly approaching a million believers on the island. The Association expressed a goal to reach 2 million Christians into the 21st century. The last investigative report was done in 2017, with little sign that the trend was slowing down. Then COVID happened, and everything ground to a halt. The latest data release was not completed until 2022, and if the statistics hold true, not only has the

number of Christians dropped to less than a million, but it's possible that there are half as many children in Taiwanese churches as there were six years ago.

How does the number of kids involved in Taiwanese churches drop by half? Some pastors are blaming COVID as an excuse for loosely connected attendees to leave and not come back. Others are blaming school and extracurricular activities for taking priority over church. Some are blaming the plummeting birth rate in Taiwan. Others are pointing out that the number of high schoolers transitioning to university students is hard to account for in these church statistics. Truth be told, it's probably a combination of all

these factors, and even more complicated and compounding issues. And yet, the majority of Taiwanese churches are self-reporting a dramatic decrease in church membership, especially children. Where are they?

When we followed God's direction to move to Taichung City and work alongside Taichung Victory Church, our desire was to help a struggling church. Our host church in Zhubei is special compared to many other Taiwanese churches. Their attendance is often over 300 people, the church is full of kids, and it is common for families to have three or four children (which is very uncommon in Taiwan!). By contrast, Taichung Victory



The Hosch Family on Mother's Day at Wenxiu Park.



Crafts during the three-day VBS at Wenxiu Park.



Sara chatting with parents during VBS at Wenxiu Park.

is located by Feng-Jia University, with a ministry focused on university students. We had much experience doing student ministry in the US. However, our initial time at Taichung Victory revealed to us a demographic missing from the church: families with children.

In October, my wife Sara made the decision to take the Sunday School children to nearby Wenxiu Park. What began as just an idea to get the kids outside to burn some energy eventually became a monthly Sunday School activity. Every month the children walked to the park for a story, art activity, and some playtime. But even more than that, families and children in the park became interested in what we were doing and wanted to join. This also became an opportunity to spend some time talking with parents in a laid-back, relaxing atmosphere.

The Wenxiu Park community is new to the Feng-Jia area. There are many newly built row-houses and apartment buildings, with many residential properties still in progress. All of this signaled to us that there are families near our church, families not connected to any church, families in need of a church. We communicated to the Taichung Victory Church coworkers our desire to focus on families in the Feng-Jia/Wenxiu community, and they have also started to feel this need as well.

The church coworkers decided to host a "Gospel Sunday" event at Wenxiu Park on Mother's Day. This was an all-church event, and it was encouraging to see our

church get involved and be excited about community outreach. Everybody had a part to play, whether it was blowing up balloon animals, leading music, or just chatting with parents at the park. It instilled in our church a desire to use Wenxiu Park as a ministry platform. And it helped our church understand that when people are uncomfortable coming into the church, then we can bring the church to them. We should be the church in our community, sharing Jesus in word and deed outside of the sanctuary doors.

Mother's Day just paved the way for another idea we presented to the church: a three-day VBS at Wenxiu Park in July. Of course, when you've never hosted a VBS before it can seem like a daunting task. But it was encouraging to see our church coworkers communicating, sharing ideas about crafts and activities, giving feedback on Bible stories, and just thinking about what it would take to connect with families at Wenxiu Park. VBS was not only a great opportunity to build relationships with the kids in our church, but we made some connections with mothers of the children at the park. We had new families join our activities each day, and even some who returned from previous days. We didn't focus on the numbers, because every new friend made is a success. We used this as an opportunity to learn, to discuss logistics, to think about what we could do differently next year. We came away from VBS tired—but encouraged!

Some churches here in Taiwan are

still a bit discouraged and still asking the question: "So, where are all the children?" But they haven't looked outside the doors. They haven't walked to the park. Like many churches in America, they are more focused on how to get people into the church instead of bringing Jesus to the people who are uncomfortable walking through the door of a church. In this way, we have been encouraged by our church, that they see Wenxiu Park and the surrounding community as a place that needs Jesus. Jesus is already there, and we can go there and be his hands and feet to the families in that community. We asked the question: "Where are the children?" We received an answer: "They're at Wenxiu Park. Why don't you go and meet them?"

Continue to pray for Taichung Victory Church as they make Wenxiu Park a ministry platform. Pray for the families that we have made connections with through Sunday School at the Park, VBS, and other activities. Pray for our church as we also look for a new ministry space in the Feng-Jia community that is suitable for ministry to families and university students. Pray that we would make Jesus known in our community, and that through the ministry of Taichung Victory Church, others would desire to follow him.

Rev. Ben Hosch and his wife Sara serve as missionaries to the unreached peoples of Taiwan.

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MacArthur Passes Away

Pastor Skip (Maynard) MacArthur went home to his Lord and Saviour, in the early morning hours of May 29, 2023, after a long hard battle with cancer. He had spent the last three and a half months under the care of the wonderful doctors and staff at the Drumheller Hospital. Skip is survived by his loving wife of 54 years, Lorraine.



Skip was born in Melfort, Saskatchewan on July 6, 1943, to Frank and Dorothy MacArthur. He did his schooling and graduation in Pleasantdale, Saskatchewan. He started his career at the Naicam Coop and moved to Saskatoon where he was grocery manager at Saskatoon Coop. He married Lorraine Dolezsar in 1969 and continued his career in retail until retirement.

In the 1980's under the mentorship of Rev. Art Berge, Skip entered the ministry with a position at Lutheran Brethren Church, Morrin, Alberta and he served this church faithfully for 33 years. His last church service was on Christmas Eve, 2022. "What a mighty God we serve."

Victory's Mortgage Burning



Pictured L to R: Elder Doug Bounds, Pastor Shawn Bowman, Elders Dwight Schmidt, Patrick Erickson, Kevin Sortland (Chairman of Congregation) and Mike Woodley.

On June 4, 2023, Victory Lutheran Church, Jamestown, ND, burned the mortgage on their new building. They are grateful to have been able to pay off this debt in six years.

Tysdal Installed as President



Pictured: Rev. Paul Larson (L) and Dr. Troy Tysdal (R).

On Monday, August 27, 2023 Dr. Troy Tysdal was installed as President of Lutheran Brethren Seminary during the Opening Service. CLB President Paul Larson officiated the installation.

New Steeple for Living Faith

Living Faith Lutheran Brethren Church (Cape Coral, FL) experienced significant damage during Hurricane Ian in September 2022. A repaired and re-engineered steeple was installed in August, 2023. Pastor Ed Nugent writes,



The new steeple at Living Faith LB Church.

"We are so grateful to the CLB and everyone around the country who gave so generously." The shingles were replaced in the spring, and the interior repairs have also been completed. In the coming months, work will begin on the damaged and missing gutters and soffit, along with exterior paint and landscaping.

Narvesen Ordained as Elder



Pictured L to R: Pastor Ed Nugent, former Pastor Pat Thurner, new ordained Elder Pete Narvesen, Elder Jim Hanson, Elder Tim Larson

On Sunday, April 2nd, 2023 Mr. Pete Narvesen was ordained as an elder at Living Faith Church in Cape Coral, FL.

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Like a Child

Question: How do you teach a child about child-like faith? Let's try a multiple-choice answer:

- A) You don't teach a child about child-like faith. You don't need to. They understand it intuitively.
- B) You can't teach a child about child-like faith. Their minds are too small to comprehend it.
- C) You teach a child about child-like faith the same way you teach us older people.

For our "Children's Moment" during a recent worship service, I put this Bible verse on the big screen before a group of children, although some of them were too young to read it: "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good" (1 Peter 2:2-3).

I had already shown the children an image of Peter Pan—the boy who didn't want to grow up. I asked if they had ever felt that way themselves. I was surprised to receive a couple of sincerely affirmative responses! That's the honesty of a child.

But how to explain faith to a child? I said to them: "Your body grows; you need milk and other healthy foods. You grow in your mind as you go to school and learn more. But then there's your spirit, that invisible part of you—inside you—the part of you that knows and loves Jesus. Your spirit starts out as a baby too, just like your body and your mind. But you don't want to stay a baby in your spirit, and God doesn't want you to, either. He wants you to grow big and strong."

The Apostle Peter's words indicate that this kind of growth comes by drinking spiritual milk, which we understand to be the Word of God. You come to know Christ as his word enters your life, and your newborn spirit grows in the context of relationship with the good and loving Triune God. Though we can't fully comprehend God, day by day, as we walk with him through life, trusting in his word, we taste that the Lord is good and our faith grows.

So, how do you teach a child about child-like faith? The same way you teach older people. By living with Jesus, trusting in his word, and counting on God to make faith grow.

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



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