

Faith & Fellowship

Vol. 91, No. 2

IDENTITY in CHRIST

THEOLOGY

p. 4

The Human Person
by Rev. Clint Knutson

TESTIMONY

p. 8

**Heartache, Hope,
and the Gospel**
by an anonymous parent

DISCIPLESHIP

p. 16

**Making Disciples Among
Youth and Young Adults**
by Daniel Stenberg

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4 **The Human Person**
Clint Knutson

8 **Heartache, Hope, and the Gospel**
an anonymous parent

12 **Biennial Convention Information**

14 **A Disciple-Making Camp Ministry**
Greg Anderson

18 **Arriving in the Village of Doh**
Claire Rose

6 **Our Heart Behind the Statement Paper**
Scott Skones

10 **Study of Genesis 1-3**
Free Bible study resource!
Created by Luke Kjolhaug

13 **The River: FOCUS Project Update**
Harold Rust

16 **Making Disciples Among Youth and Young Adults**
Daniel Stenberg

20 **CLB News**



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Identity in Christ and God's Mission

TIM MATHIESEN

As we approach the upcoming CLB Biennial Convention (June 8-11), one item of business is presenting for approval the "Statement on Human Persons and Sexuality," a draft of which was presented and discussed at the 2022 Biennial Convention. The final paper that will be brought before this convention was refined by feedback from that 2022 discussion, along with feedback from the Fall Conference at Lutheran Brethren Seminary and private conversations with key individuals.

It is always worthwhile to study and reflect on why we believe what we believe, especially in consideration of our relationships with family members and neighbors. From time to time we ought to test our approach to church ministry, identifying weaknesses in areas where we may have fallen short. This hopefully leads to the adjustment of some policies, improving the quality of our ministry and the health of our relationships. But in a broader sense, as we hope to share the good news of the cross with those who are hurting, feeling alone, or weighed down by this broken world, we want to ask how we can renew that commitment in our hearts to reach those who don't know Jesus.

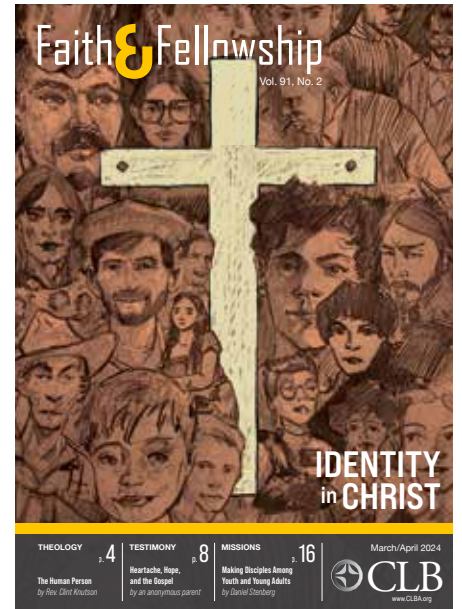
That is the purpose of all this work and why a team was commissioned to study and assess our culture, our relationships, and our philosophy of ministry. All this has been filtered through God's Word and our theology as the Church of the Lutheran Brethren in order to produce a handful of written pages. This "Statement on Human Persons and Sexuality" has been so carefully crafted for several reasons.

First, we recognize our cultural shift towards championing individual choice

in the matter of human identity, including sexuality and gender identity. This complicates much of our understood biology and puts many Bible-believing Christians in a challenging position. The Statement paper reads as "an invitation to hear and trust God's design for sexuality as revealed in his Word where he instructs us and guides us toward healthy and joyful human flourishing." We pray that this paper will help each of us, as we have been called to serve those around us, to find clarity in what we believe and where we find our identity.

Second, we know that this paper reaches beyond being an academic exercise. This paper is built on God's Word and layered with what the committee learned through careful study of our culture with the intention of shaping the way we share the gospel through our words and our actions. We have heard from many pastors, church leaders, and individuals who have sat with hurting people and have themselves wrestled with the reality of our sinful world. We desire that this study and the words in this paper make an impact on the way we see our neighbors and the way we see ourselves. We recognize that we are all sinful beings, holding onto Jesus as our only hope. God calls us to live out our identity, true to God's Word, in a loving and redeeming way within our communities and around the world.

Third, we want this paper to grow and expand into resources that can be used in each of our congregations. Many recommended resources already exist, some of which were used as part of the study and research for this paper. We look forward to finding ways for us, as a family of churches, to come alongside each other to partner in the mission of the gospel, growing as a Disciple-Making



Church, pointing to Jesus. In him we find our identity as his creation, his children, and his Church.

This issue of *Faith & Fellowship* will explore this topic theologically, practically, and relationally. After the three articles, you will find a four-week Bible Study by Pastor Luke Kjolhaug to help us process this further and offer a meaningful way to live it out.



Tim Mathiesen serves as Director of Communications & Prayer for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

**VIEW & DOWNLOAD
THE STATEMENT**



To view and read the "Statement on Human Persons and Sexuality," which will be presented for approval at the 2024 Biennial Convention, visit the URL below.

GO TO: www.CLBA.org/bc24

The Human Person

CLINT KNUTSON



David Pierce / Taken from the cover art

What Does it Mean to Be a Human Person?

What does it mean to be human? Looking at that question, you might suggest that perhaps I'm biting off more than I can chew in a short article. A question like that falls into the same category as, "What is the meaning of life?" or "How do I know who I am?" I can't even figure out how to use all the apps on my phone, let alone find explanations for the vast mysteries of life! Scripture teaches us that we cannot really know our own hearts (Jer 17:9, Ps 19:12, Rom 1:21). "Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning" (Eccl 8:17b).

Yet it is precisely this type of question that we try to answer every day. The answers to these questions are tremendously important for us. They cut to the core of who we see when we look in the mirror. They give us reason to get up in the morning and motivation to do whatever it is we do. We see our neighbors, friends, family members, all struggling to answer the same questions. It moves me to consider the grace of God in a different way. Grace in his forgiveness of our sins, but also gracious guidance in our questioning through

his Word. It is in God's eyes that we discover our human identity.

Who We Were Created to Be

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." —Genesis 1:26 (ESV)

When the Bible begins to describe humans, it describes them as the deliberate creation of God. We are God's creatures, totally dependent on him, down to our very existence. Each day, as my body continues to function, as there is food in my pantry, as the sun continues to shine, I recognize that these things are gifts from my loving Father.

We see from the text that God makes us different from the other creatures. "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). Being made "in his own image" distinguishes humanity from the rest of creation, establishing in this image a likeness to God. In Colossians, the image is described as consisting of knowledge

(Col 3:9-10), and in Ephesians, of true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:22-24). Genesis 9:6 points to the protection and value that God gives to humanity because of that unique relationship that we have with him.

Humanity was given purposes as a result of being made in God's image. They were called to fill the earth and subdue it, to have dominion over everything (Gen 1:28). In Genesis 2:15 that dominion is further described as working the garden and keeping or guarding it. Humanity was originally called into marriage (Gen 2:24) and family life. To the roles of father and mother, husband and wife. To worship and the ministry of the Word (Gen 2:16-17).

Humanity was never a burden to God. He delighted in humanity and his creation. He delighted in Adam and Eve, in their rule over his world, in their marriage and family, in human sexuality, children, and work. All of these things were very good (Gen 1:31). All of these things were received as gifts from God by our first parents. Their relationship to God, their Creator, was entirely determinative of who they were, what they did, and what everything meant.

“ *And in a way, what we receive in the gospel is restoration to what we were before, but in another way it’s the promise of something better.*

— Rev. Clint Knutson

”

He provided those answers to them. Fellowship with him was itself the answer. And so they delighted in him, and he in them.

Who We Are in Our Sin

But humanity fell. Rather than allowing God, and fellowship with God, to be the only answer they needed, explaining “who they were,” “why they got up in the morning,” or “what it all means,” they instead doubted God and trusted the word of the serpent. Although they were made in the image of God, they sought to be “like God, knowing good and evil,” on their own terms (Gen 3:5). And so they took that which had not been given.

As a result humanity lost fellowship with God and that aspect of the image was lost. While it still afforded them protection (Gen 9:6), humanity was no longer like God in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. And their relationships to each other, to the rest of creation, and to themselves, were cursed. Filling the earth was cursed with pain (Gen 3:16). Ruling over the earth was cursed with frustration (Gen 3:19). Humanity, in its sin, went so far as to take on the image of another (John 8:44).

Who We Get to Be in Christ

But even way back in Genesis 3:15, God promised that he would deliver humanity back to the special relationship they had with him, through the work of a Son. He would restore them to that place as God’s children. And in a way, what we receive in the gospel is restoration to what we were before; but in another way, it’s the promise of something better. Through Christ, we are renewed in the likeness of God, which, we discover from Scripture, means ultimately being renewed in the likeness of Christ (2 Cor 3:15-18, 2 Cor 4:4-6).

What Does it Mean to Be Human?

To be human means that you are designed for fellowship with the Triune God. Apart from God, we cannot know God and are in darkness to that truth. We are left trying to find meaning, purpose, and identity from within our own deceitful hearts. We are left wondering where we come from, how we are to live, what is right, and what is wrong.

This is a message for all of us. Hear the good news of Jesus Christ, which is this, “You are not your own; you were bought at a price” (1 Cor. 6:19b-20a). In God’s design we find meaning. In his

will we find purpose. These are his gifts to us in his Word. We were meant for love and fellowship as defined in and by the Triune God who gives us all these answers, commissioning us to share them with our neighbors. We are the children of God.



Rev. Clint Knutson is Professor of Systematic Theology at Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

Our Heart Behind the Statement Paper

SCOTT SKONES



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“In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst.”
—C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*

I sit alone in my office after an emotional and heartbreaking conversation with a mother watching her daughter, in the midst of an identity crisis, make decisions that cannot be easily undone. And then, as if I am having déjà vu, I am transported to a previous conversation with a father. I didn’t know him well, but I was a safe person with whom he could bare his soul and express his heartache over his son’s struggle with Gender Dysphoria and subsequent irreversible medical intervention. There is a cloud that hangs in my office, a certain density to the air that doesn’t leave when the hurting person walks out, that not even our time of prayer calling upon the Lord for his help and care can drive away. Those conversations leave a mark on your soul, even when you don’t know the person at the center.

When in my work as a pastor I have yet another conversation with a parent or grandparent struggling to help their child through the complex, multi-layered maze of human identity and sexuality in our modern world, I find a sense of anger welling up inside my heart. This anger isn’t directed at any individual questioning their identity, but instead at the sin and brokenness that grips our world. Since

the beginning of time, humanity has managed to take the brilliant creation of human identity, expressed as both female and male, and the inestimable gift of sexuality, and make it all into something that bears almost no resemblance to God’s good plan and purpose. How are our children, breathing in the polluted air that is inescapable in our world, to live faithfully to God’s Word and good plan? It seems that so many things are stacked against them.

In contrast to the beauty of God’s original design in Genesis 1, it is easy to feel anger on some level. But, of course, anger in my heart won’t help in any measurable or meaningful way. In fact, on a macro level, there isn’t much that we as individuals can do to change our culture. We can, however, do what God has called us to do. We can, within our individual families, churches, neighborhoods, and vocations, join Jesus in his disciple-making mission.

Several years ago the Theological Council of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren began discussing the need to provide a teaching and discipling resource with clear language that spoke to the questions being asked in our families, churches, and communities. Those discussions resulted in the creation

of a committee that wrote a draft position paper titled, “Statement on Human Persons and Sexuality.”

Once the initial committee presented its work to the Theological Council, there was additional work done by both an editorial committee and by the Council as a whole. We then presented the paper to the Church at our Biennial Convention in 2022 for feedback and discussion. Following the panel presentation, we received verbal and/or written feedback from over 25 people. Every comment was considered by a committee, with a recommendation to the full Council. We also received feedback and suggestions from a handful of individuals with personal experience in the matters of human identity and sexuality to which the Statement speaks. After further discussion, amendment, and editing, the Theological Council presented a revised paper to the Council of Directors. That brings us to the current document that the Church will consider for adoption at BC24.

Those of us who have had a hand in the paper are not only processing it as committee members, but also as pastors, parents, neighbors, and friends. We recognize that the words of a paper like this aren’t written into an ideological

“ *The paper is not a cold statement, but a clear starting point from which families, churches, and neighborhood missionaries can engage in the mission to which they are called—pointing people to Jesus.* ”

— Pastor Scott Skones

vacuum, but rather into a complicated, nuanced world replete with feelings, opinions, and lived experiences. As you and I read the paper, we do so with certain people in mind—people we love deeply.

As the paper entered the editorial phase, our editorial committee placed a strong emphasis on two things: First, that the paper just say what God’s Word says, with only enough additional commentary to make clear what is being said. And second, that the tone be such that it doesn’t create unnecessary conflict—recognizing that the subject matter could certainly be taken offensively. In other words, clearly declaring “thus saith the Lord,” while doing so in a helpful and engaging way. Maintaining that balance is a challenging task.

The Theological Council is strongly aware that this paper is the beginning of our work on the topic, not the end. The CLB needs a clear foundation from which we can develop further resources to help families and churches.

While I can’t speak for all involved in the paper’s journey, there are three words that have helped me as I have engaged in my portion of the work. It was a priority for me that the paper be human, pastoral, and redemptive.

Human

This is not just a paper about sexuality or sexual sin, but about issues that are central to what it means to be human. Additionally, the paper will be read by humans who are engaged in relationships with other humans struggling to understand who they are in this messy world. This is not just a theoretical paper.

The lies about human identity, personhood, and sexuality that permeate our culture are, as C.S. Lewis so beautifully expressed, making people

“without chests and expect[ing] of them virtue and enterprise.” To throw people into confusion about basic human identity (including gender and sexual confusion) is to rip from within them that which allows them to be who they actually are. And that demands a very human, compassionate, and loving response.

The paper is not a cold statement, but a clear starting point from which families, churches, and neighborhood missionaries can engage in the mission to which they are called—pointing people to Jesus and his cross as the source of their identity and salvation.

Pastoral

What does “being pastoral” look like? At his best, a pastor is diligently engaged in feeding, nurturing, caring for, and protecting his flock. To be pastoral is to have a balanced concern for both care and correction, protection and discipline.

In a culture in which the modus operandi of public discourse is just to yell louder and be more insulting than the opponent, we want a paper and related resources to be thoroughly pastoral—not avoiding the difficult things, but declaring truth with love and care for hurting and struggling people.

Redemptive

“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

—Colossians 1:13-14

As recipients of lavish grace, our greatest desire is for all who live in darkness, separate from God, to be rescued and redeemed. This has been a hallmark of our movement since the

beginning. We don’t exist for ourselves, but that the lost might be found. Every resource, statement, and paper must flow from our DNA as a Disciple-making Church. All that we say and do flows from our longing for all to know of God’s great love in Jesus Christ.

It’s my prayer, great hope, and expectation that the Church of the Lutheran Brethren will benefit from this paper. We are grateful to the Lord for all who have labored to bring it to its current form and ask that he would bless that work—that we would be better equipped to take the good news of salvation in Christ to lost people in our neighborhoods and communities, and make disciples in our families, churches, neighborhoods, and vocations.

“The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”

—1 Thessalonians 5:24



Pastor Scott Skones is the pastor of Living Word Fellowship in Dickinson, North Dakota. Scott also serves on the committee for the “Statement on Human Persons and Sexuality.”

VIEW & DOWNLOAD THE STATEMENT



To view and read the “Statement on Human Persons and Sexuality,” which will be presented for approval at the 2024 Biennial Convention, visit the URL below.

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Heartache, Hope, and the Gospel

ANONYMOUS

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The following (paragraphs in italics) is taken from the journal of a parent. This is shared as a tool to help our understanding of what a child or a parent may be going through when a family member comes out as LGBTQ+. We recognize that each person and each family may have their own version of this. This is one story. One example. However, all such journeys carry strong emotions. All situations require open hearts and open ears, as you can see, on both sides.

I am writing this account for two reasons. First, so I don't forget. I don't want to forget how it feels to be so low, so in need of relief that I am certain it is only the Lord who can provide it.

Second, as an invitation. Please pray. Please pray often. If you keep a written list of people to pray for, please put my spouse, my children, and myself on it.

We are in the process of being refined by the Lord. Aren't we all? Life is hard, and the challenges we face draw us nearer to God. But this situation has put me flat on my face before him.

Grief is often described as "deep sorrow," "sadness," or "heaviness of heart." For me, in this situation, I would define my grief as "deep sorrow over shattered or unmet expectations." It's private and personal, yet at the same time, it needs to be known so it's not in the dark. This grief needs light.

Years ago, we began a long journey with our son. In early high school he shared with us his struggle with same-

sex attraction. We handled this news as we knew how—with the tools and people we had, with the support of our family and pastors, with God's provision and timing. It was terribly difficult and messy. We wrestled with what we believe God's Word says to us, what our son believes and how he will live his life, what this means for our future and our son's future, the milestones we planned for but may not experience in the way we expected. We grieved many things—many of which our son may never fully understand. And we know our son wrestled with emotions we will never fully understand.

However, with time, we have been given the gift of reconciliation. It is a gift from God that our relationship with our son is now stronger than ever. He has said that he deeply wishes it weren't so, but the fact remains that he is gay. We are able to continue to have honest, difficult conversations with him. And most importantly, in light of the gospel, we continue to remind him not only of *who* he is, but *whose* he is. That time

years ago was the hardest season we had known, until now.

On an ordinary Monday evening, another child took a deep breath and blurted out to us that she was gay. That she had known this for many years. That she was too afraid to say anything after seeing how it took its toll on our family once already.

We did not see that one coming. She had just confided in her brother weeks before, needing to tell someone, but not wanting to disappoint us, her parents.

The relief this dear daughter felt was visible, palpable, as finally she voiced a burden that she had been carrying alone for so long.

Here is a very familiar feeling. A gut punch so hard that I cannot breathe. An immediate knowing of the dismantling of assumptions and expectations that is to come. A depth of love and a depth of panic that I don't know what to do or say next. And a depth of responsibility to be oh-so-careful about what to say or do next.

“What I need is only what God can give—his heart that already knows every emotion that I feel... His hands that made me are now holding me. And isn’t that exactly what my son and my daughter need—to be known and loved?”

—Anonymous Parent

”

Grief, comparison, and pride are thieves. Guilt rides shotgun next to them—guilt for not knowing my child was in silent pain, guilt for focusing on my own feelings before recognizing how hard this has been for her.

The following days are a blur. It’s the end of summer, and we have a precious five days together. I’m supposed to have joy as I soak up every moment they are home. I’m supposed to pray over them, cheer them on, and be here when they need me. But, I can’t.

I’m in my body, but not really present. I want to hide. I cannot focus. I cannot sleep well. I don’t want to cook or laugh or socialize. I can’t look at shiny family photos on social media feeds. I can hardly hold a normal conversation. Emotions and tears are constantly just under the surface.

So in the following days, we did the best we could. We had honest, hard conversations. We cried. We talked about the love of God. We talked about wavering faith. We talked about our own sins and Jesus and the cross. We affirmed our unconditional love, reminding each one that they are made in God’s image, and that their identity is in Christ above all else. And as parents, we once again bore a weight in our hearts that was all too familiar.

We tried to do some “normal” things, too. We laughed when we could. We played our favorite family game. We had family meals. Then we did laundry. We packed plastic bins, and we packed cars. We slipped cash into the hands of each kid like we always do before they leave.

Then finally, we waved goodbye to three sets of taillights, to three different kids, at three different times, with silent tears and hearts burning high in our throats. Is it possible to be constantly praying under one’s breath for five days through tears and laughter? Is it possible to hold such pain and sadness in tension with loving someone so very much? Yes, it is. But it’s exhausting.

I do not want this right now. I can’t avoid it, and I don’t want it. My heart hurts.

But what I want, I cannot have.

Nor is it likely what I need.

What I need is only what God can give. His comfort, his presence, his Word, his timing, and his shoulders that can bear this—his heart that already knows every emotion that I feel. His hands that made me are now holding me.

And isn’t that exactly what my son and my daughter need—to be known and loved?

Isn’t that what we all need?

It’s a level field at the foot of the cross. And as I lay here, looking up at the cross from the puddle of uncertainty and grief, I know that I’m probably right where God wants me: remembering that I am his child, made for his glory. Just like my children. His plans are better and higher than ours. He says that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Thank God for Romans 8.

So that is why I’m writing this.

One, because I don’t want to forget

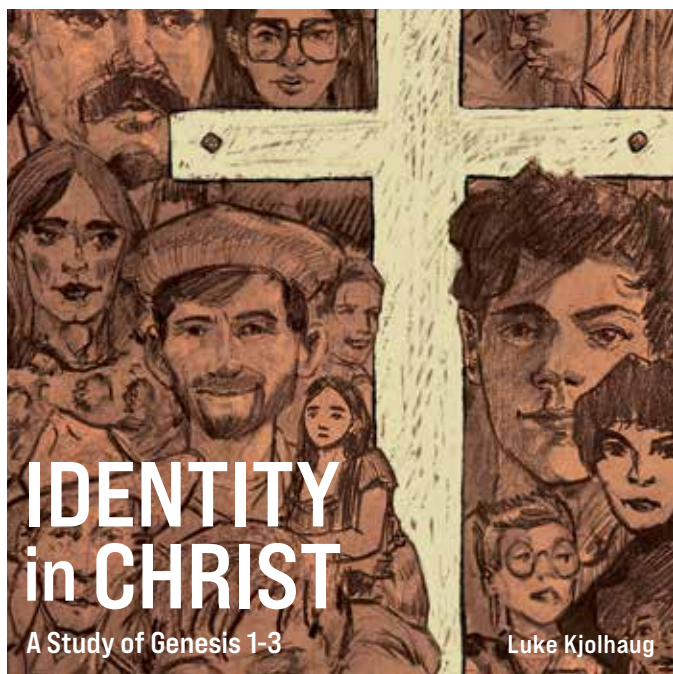
how this feels. I know that what I am experiencing will be used for God’s glory, even though right now I cannot see how. I know that even though I feel very alone, the Lord is closer than ever.

And two, I ask you please... pray. Pray for my family as we journey through this season. Pray for other families that may be going through their own journey. Pray for those who are feeling alone and scared, and uncertain about their identity. Pray that they will find their identity in Christ, at the cross, where he wants to meet them and love them.

Perhaps even dare to pray “Lord, adjust my posture to love others as you have loved me.”

And so, we continue on this journey. To quote Eugene Peterson, it’s a “long obedience in the same direction.” Our focus has shifted away from guilt and regret (which is just where the enemy wants us) to a heightened awareness of our own need for Jesus. And isn’t that where God wants all of us? So, of course, we keep loving our kids and their friends. We keep walking toward the messiness of relationships and sitting with the marginalized. It’s complicated. It’s hard. But it’s also sacred. And it’s the family the Lord has given us to shepherd, to love. And we do.

The author of this article is anonymous for the sake of the privacy of the individual and this family.



Artwork by David Pierce

Bible Study Resource

Our goal is to provide a practical resource for you, your small group, or your family, that can be easily implemented and applied. It is centered on the theme of each issue.

For this edition we've created a four-week Bible study on Christian identity. It is good to remember that any discussion of human sexuality falls under the broader umbrella of identity. Sexuality is an important part of who we are, but it is not the only part.

Each week, read the assigned Scripture along with the devotional, and answer the reflection questions. An action step is provided for you or your small group to live out what you have been learning over the previous four weeks. Companion videos, along with a PDF version of this study, are also available for you online at www.CLBA.org/magazine.

WEEK ONE: GENESIS 1

"God saw all that he had made, and it was *very* good" (Gen 1:31a, emphasis mine). This is God's declaration after creating Adam and Eve. In all of creation, only humans bear the image of God. As a master artist paints a self-portrait on canvas, so God paints us as a likeness of himself. We embody his image. God loves our bodies because he created them. They are intrinsically good, not evil. Male and female bodies were not the result of the Fall into sin, but part of God's original design of humans. We are "fearfully and wonderfully made," "knitted together in [our] mother's womb" (Ps 139:13). Ultimately, God cared enough about our bodies to become embodied himself, taking on human flesh, and tabernacling among us (John 1:14). Through faith, he makes a way for us to one day dwell with him in heaven forever, not just our souls, but with our resurrected, glorified bodies (Phil 3:21). The scope of God's endgame is even grander than "saving souls." He will not rest until he has rescued us *body* and soul.

Reflection Questions

1. What surprises you most about the Creation narrative in Genesis 1?
2. Read Psalm 139:13-16. How does David describe our bodies?
3. What do you see when you look in the mirror? Is it hard to believe you are "fearfully and wonderfully made"? Why or why not?

WEEK TWO: GENESIS 2

Weddings nowadays are elaborate affairs. Venues must be booked months if not years in advance, food and drink carefully chosen, and seating arrangements painstakingly coordinated. In contrast to this, the very first wedding scene in Genesis 2:22-24 is strikingly simple: There is a groom, a bride, a rib, and an officiant: God. God saw Adam's need for intimate human relationship, and he moved to meet that need. In God's good Creation, one thing was not good: Adam was alone. So God provided a helper suitable for him (Gen 2:18). The word "helper" is used elsewhere to describe the role of God himself in relation to humans, so it carries no connotation of inferiority. The word "suitable" is also key. The idea here is that Adam and Eve were a good and proper fit, with the woman (*isha*, in Hebrew) literally being formed from the man (*ish*, in Hebrew). This is God's original intention for marriage, sexuality, and gender. Anything less falls short of his design. Our identities are given by God, not self-determined. Everything is a gift. God gives Adam and Eve their gender, he gives them to one another in marriage, and he gives them the joy of being fruitful and multiplying. Ultimately, God gives us the gift of telling us who we are, rather than leaving us to our own devices to figure out our identities on our own.

Reflection Questions

1. What do you observe about the

- marriage relationship in these verses?
2. When in your life have you experienced loneliness? Why are human relationships such a crucial part of God's design?
3. How can we as a church best position ourselves to minister to those experiencing loneliness? How does the brokenness of our identities—sexual, gender, or otherwise—contribute to loneliness?

WEEK THREE: GENESIS 3

This is where it all goes south. Satan begins his temptation by planting a seed of doubt, and it snowballs from there: "Did God *really* say?" (v. 1, emphasis mine). Eve then misquotes God's prohibition. God never actually said she could not touch the tree—only that she should not *eat* of it. This seed of doubt continues to grow until vv. 4-5, when Satan flat-out contradicts God's Word by convincing Eve that God is holding out on her. She and Adam sin, eat the fruit, break the world, and suffer the consequences. We have been reaping the bitter harvest ever since. Sin always leads to death. It separates us from God, from the world, from one another, and—most importantly for our purposes—from ourselves. Sin puts us at odds with ourselves, introducing conflict between who we believe we are and who God says we are. This, ultimately, is why we suffer from disorders like anxiety, depression, fear, and gender dysphoria. All brokenness can be traced back to the Fall.

“As a master artist paints a self-portrait on canvas, so God paints us as a likeness of himself. We embody his image. God loves our bodies because he created them.

– Luke Kjolhaug

”

Reflection Questions

1. What role do deception and doubt play in the events of Genesis 3?
2. What were the consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin (see vv. 14-19)?
3. Read Romans 1:18-32. What happens when we exchange God’s truth for lies? How can sexuality or gender become an idol?

WEEK FOUR: LUKE 10:25-37

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus tells the story of a man beaten, stripped, and left for dead by the side of the road. A well-manicured priest fresh off of Temple duty comes along, but he is too concerned about his own ritual purity to be bothered. He’s filled his ministry quota for the day. Along comes a Levite, another vocational minister, and he too turns up his nose and passes by. Finally, a mixed-race Samaritan enters the scene and takes compassion on the man. He pours oil and wine on his wounds, gently bandages them, and transports him to a local care facility, footing the medical bill out of his own pocket. The point is clear: Jesus is our good Samaritan. He meets us where we are—bruised, beaten, and bloodied by the consequences of our sin—and he is moved with compassion. The Greek verb used in v. 33 (*spagchnizomai*) literally means “he was moved in his most inward parts; in his entrails.” Whenever Jesus encounters wounded sinners, he feels for them in his gut. He is moved to action, meeting us where we

are—even if it’s right at the scene of the crime. He is unafraid of being polluted by our mess. He picks us up, bandages our sin-festering wounds, and pays the cost for our healing with his holy and precious blood. Unlike the priest and the Levite who found their identities elsewhere, our identity as believers is firmly grounded in Christ. We have been “joined with the Lord” and “become one spirit with him” (1 Cor 6:17). Our bodies are not our own, but have been bought with a price and are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19-20). In light of these new identities, Jesus’ exhortation at the end of the parable is crystal clear: “You go, and do likewise” (v. 37b, ESV).

Reflection Questions

1. Describe the priest and Levite. Where did they find their identities? What about the Samaritan?
2. Jesus tells this parable in response to a Jewish lawyer seeking to justify himself, expanding the man’s understanding of the word “neighbor” to include people that the Israelites would have viewed as outcasts. What people are considered outcasts today?
3. How might Jesus be challenging you to “go and do likewise”?

WEEKS FIVE to EIGHT: ACTION: Blessing Others

The issue of identity could be boiled down to how people answer one simple question: “Who am I?” As a group, identify four

families (possibly the same ones from last month’s Bible study) and write down how you think they might respond to that question. What things are important to them? Then, make it a point to learn one new thing about that particular family each week. If you’re really brave, you could do a survey to see how people respond to the question, “Who are you?” Just be prepared to give an answer of your own, prayerfully considering how you might witness as the Lord leads.

List the names here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

COMPANION RESOURCES: VIDEOS and PRINTABLES



To assist you in leading your family, a small group, or a Sunday School class through this study, **companion videos** and **printable PDF** files are available online.

GO TO: www.CLBA.org/magazine

Rev. Luke Kjolhaug is Pastor at Elim Lutheran Church in Osakis, Minnesota.



CLB Shared Ministry: Contribution Report

\$3,200,000

2023-24 Fiscal Year Goal
The CLB Fiscal Year ends April 30, 2024.



\$2,368,196

Received Through 2/16/24

By the time you read this, we will be less than two months away from the end of the fiscal year for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. April is an important month as we receive a large percentage of our giving leading up to the end of our fiscal year. Thank you for your generosity throughout this year and we look forward to how God will use it to further his mission through the CLB.

LaWayne Rogness
Director of Finance & Personnel

Support the CLB:

ONLINE:
www.clba.org/giving

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

BY MAIL (CANADA):
5601 Enevold Drive
Camrose, AB, T4V4N4

2024 Biennial Convention

Fergus Falls, MN

June 8-11, 2024

Disciple-Making Church

**PARTNER
in MISSION**

Speakers



Paul Larson
CLBA President



Alan Johnson
Regeneration Church
Sammamish, WA



Eugene Boe
Lutheran Brethren
Seminary



Mike Edwards
Good News Church
McAlisterville, PA



June 8
Saturday

June 9
Sunday

June 10
Monday

June 11
Tuesday

Day of Equipping Various Locations

- Women's Ministries Convention
- Youth Education Track:
- Sean McDowell
- Church Leaders Track:
- Greg Finke

Day of Community Various Locations

- Worship - Good Shepherd Church
- Lunch and Activities - Bethel Lutheran Church
- Kubb Tournament
- Trivia Night

Day of Ownership Bethel Lutheran Church

- Morning Worship
- Business Sessions
- Workshops - 2 blocks
- Evening Worship

Day of Resolve Bethel Lutheran Church

- Final business session
- Communion Service

www.CLBA.org/bc24



The River: FOCUS Project Update

HAROLD RUST



The River Church in Red Deer, Alberta has been blessed to be a place where newcomers to Canada come to hear the gospel in their mother tongue and to worship the Lord in joy and freedom.

Over the last few months, the congregation has grown rapidly with the influx of many large refugee families from central Africa. Suddenly, we are ninety percent African, and our worship includes Bible readings in Swahili, French, Kinyarwanda, English, along with Ukrainian, and the occasional Arabic or Cree. It feels like we are living the seventh chapter of Revelation with "a multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language" gathered at the throne of the Lamb.

The music has grown as well, with William from Sudan, Musa from D.R. Congo, and Rwandans Evode and Dieudonee, each sharing their love for Jesus and music, as they lead people in songs of worship and praise. The rhythm is amazing, lyrics uplifting, and the dancing... well, it's pure joy! When we lead the music, with our Scandi-Canadian style, it certainly is much tamer. The River is a cross-cultural experience of worship and praise to our awesome God, and we love it!

The sermon is always in English with a multilingual translation on the screen. Biblical truth described in simple words and well-explained with passion has created an atmosphere of love and

RED DEER
Alberta, Canada

FOCUS
project 2023-24



an attitude of prayer. Every sermon is followed by a time of congregational prayer in small groups throughout the sanctuary. The young children are led by an adult, and every person is given the opportunity to pray in their heart language. Last Sunday, two men were asked to lead us all in prayer, Abedi in Swahili and Mgunga in Kinyarwanda. Everyone joined in with whispers of agreement, calling out to Jesus to heal the sick, to set free the oppressed, and to bring salvation to our city. Lydienne, from Cameroon, went to the microphone when the men were finished and spontaneously sang a beautiful hymn in French.

Our people are growing in their desire to give an offering as part of their worship, as well. Our hope is that soon the offerings can cover the cost of renting our worship space. One of our men was emphatic when he said, "You've got to start teaching us more of what God says about giving!"

Friends in a neighboring church know how to give. They gave us their twelve-passenger van so we could give rides to church to the many newcomers who, as

How to give: www.WMCLB.org/giving

Mail to: PO Box 655, Fergus Falls, MN 56538-0655

yet, have no vehicle or license to drive. The time spent in the van is often filled with laughter, worship, or debate in other languages, but it is all building community and friendship.

The Women's Ministries of the CLB (WMCLB) also loves to give. We were so blessed to receive your generous gift for the developing ministry here at The River. Children, teens, and young adults will be so blessed as specific ministries for them are created, and whole families will grow in faith as the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is taught clearly with love and joy.

Thank you for all your support. Come visit sometime. Better yet, invite a family of newcomers into your home for coffee or tea. You will be blessed.

Rev. Harold Rust is a church planter in Red Deer, AB, Canada. Harold also serves as the President of Church of the Lutheran Brethren Canada.



Learn more: www.WMCLB.org

Contact: WMCLBContact@gmail.com

TOGETHER IN MISSION
LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS NEAR AND FAR



WOMEN'S MINISTRIES
CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN BRETHREN

SATURDAY | JUNE 8
BETHEL CHURCH | FERGUS FALLS, MINNESOTA
BIENNIAL 2024





Photo by Inspiration Point Christian Camp & Retreat Center.

A Disciple-Making Camp Ministry

GREG ANDERSON

The vision of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren is to be a Disciple-making Church. I could make a pretty good case for that statement to be considered part definition and part aspirational. It is both who we are and who we desire to be.

One of our Church body's four objectives, "Unleash New Leaders," has been a focus for decades at our camp and retreat center in Minnesota, Inspiration Point. Fifty years ago, young adults gathered on that tiny peninsula where they were discipled and trained for ministry under the adept tutelage of Pastors Harland Helland, Elroy Vesta, and others. One of those trained said, "[The staff] tell you that you can do things you think you can't possibly do." Still today, camps play a central role in the training and deployment for ministry.

Over the past few decades at Inspiration Point, 642 young adults from 20 different

states have been recruited, hired, trained, mentored, and unleashed to bring the gospel to more than 221,000 children, youth, and adults. Their intense, three-month, summer experiences commence with a 132-hour training on topics such as leading Bible studies, building relationships, community living, safety, teambuilding, understanding the world in which we live, public speaking, trauma-informed care, Scripture memory, abuse prevention, culture creation, and the list goes on.

In the following ten weeks, the ministry muscles built during training are exercised, as the staff leads and interacts with all ages during their stay. Each day is infused with worship, Bible study, personal devotions, prayer times, loads of activities, and opportunities to debrief.

For some, the summer staff experience leads to a gap-year internship. Inspiration Point launched CheckPoint in 2013,

and more than 50% of the students who attended went on to serve in full-time ministry. Following the sunset of CheckPoint in 2020, Inspiration Point continued its commitment to training young adults by launching IPoint Interns, a free, nine-month ministry training program following a summer on staff. During their time in the program, interns are paired with a mentor and receive training and experience in camp ministry and guest service, site and facilities care, program design, Bible study, Financial Peace University, cooking, church-based ministry, and community living. In addition to housing and meals, participants earn a \$1,000 stipend each month.

Whether spending three months or three years at Inspiration Point, the goal for staff members is the same—to depart with the disposition of "not being able to stand the thought of not serving." We like

Summer Camp Ministry



Photos by Inspiration Point Christian Camp & Retreat Center.



For summer youth camps and other information visit: www.ipoint.org

Summer Family Camps

June 20-23	June 27-30
July 4-7	July 12-14
July 18-21	July 25-28
August 1-4	August 9-11



Christ Hikes

(Free & Open to the Public)

June 12, 18, 21, 25, 28 (7:15 PM)

July 2, 5, 10, 16, 19, 26, 30 (7:00 PM)

August 2, 7, 13 (6:45 PM)

Other CLB Auxiliary Camp Ministries



Deer Valley Meadows

CLB Canada / ibcanada.org

Family Camp Dates: June 27-July 1

Speaker: Dr. David Veum

Many family activities in addition to children and youth programming.



Warm Beach Camp

Pacific Region

biblecamprocks.com

Bible Camp Dates: June 25-30

Gather for a week of fellowship!

Ministry and activity for all ages.



INN & CONFERENCE CENTER

Eastern Region / tuscarora.org

Junior Week: July 7-13

Teen Week: July 21-27

Leisure Weeks: July 13-10

July 27-August 2

to say, "That's bad grammar, but a worthy ministry goal!"

One former staffer expressed at the end of his third summer, "Being empty has never felt so full," describing what he'd learned, i.e., the best life lived is the one that is given away. We know this is true because the best life ever lived gave his life away for our sake.

While it is common for a follower of Christ to point back to a camp experience as a time when, by God's grace, they came to "a knowledge of the existence of salvation through Christ" (Yesteboe, 121), the impact of a camp experience isn't only for the ministry receiver. It is, perhaps, even more prevalent and powerful for the ministry deliverer. Each December, IPoint gathers the staff from the previous summer for a reunion. As we sit in a circle the first evening, I like to poll them about their ministry leadership involvement since leaving camp in

August. The percentage is always around 90-95% who have continued in lay and vocational ministry.

Furthermore, Barna Research reported in its 2017 Pastor's Poll that 39% of U.S. pastors report that they received their call to ministry while serving at camp. How does that translate in our Church body? I wouldn't be surprised if our experience is similar. Seventeen pastors, nine missionaries, and scores of full-time Christian workers have come through the summer staff and/or year-round internship program at Inspiration Point in the past couple decades alone.

Training young leaders has been a staple of Inspiration Point, and our Church body for decades. That focused effort continues today, and the impact is felt moving forward in God's mission. As Pastor Doug Rogness of Moorhead, MN states, "I cannot tell you the number of ways Inspiration Point has shaped my

life and the life of my family. Both my wife and I served on summer staff where we learned so much about life, growing up, living out the gospel, and sharing the gospel with others. I cannot imagine what my life would be like had I not worked at camp."



Greg Anderson is the President of Inspiration Point Christian Camp & Retreat Center.

Yesteboe, Timothy. *We Believe: Commentary on the Statement of Faith*, 121. Faith & Fellowship Press, 2009.



Group photo from Elevate Youth Convention 2022.

Learn more about
ELEVATE
▼
elevateyc.org

Making Disciples Among Youth and Young Adults

DANIEL STENBERG

In the summer of 2001, having just graduated high school, I served for a few weeks with a team of other youth assisting Berea Lutheran Brethren Church in Alexandria, Minnesota with their Vacation Bible School. A few months later, I was a part of another team of young adults headed for Chandler, Arizona, where the plan was to spend the next nine months working alongside Lutheran Brethren Home Missions (now North American Mission) as we sought to plant a church in that city just south of Phoenix.

My story of being involved in Lutheran Brethren Youth Ministries is only one note in the song that is the beautiful history—the awesome legacy—of the Lutheran Brethren’s investment and concern for the generations that would

follow them. And that investment paid off. When I went through Seminary, I was reunited with others I had trained or served with through my time in Youth Ministries. Now as a pastor serving CLB churches, moving around the U.S., and spending time in Canada, I have met and been reunited with people from all over our denomination who participated in, or were served by, Youth Ministries during that time. Some of them were pastors, some were elders, some were Sunday School teachers or members of a trustee board. Some are serving overseas as missionaries. This is a beautiful testament to the investment in our youth, being paid off in our churches.

It wasn’t long after I had graduated through Youth Ministries that our denomination had to make some difficult

choices. This isn’t written to criticize the decisions that were made, or any past or current leadership—please do not see it as that—but I would be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge that our denomination hasn’t been investing in the youth of today as we once did with the youth in my day.

But even while I recognize that this is true, what has encouraged me, why I am writing this article, is because we, as a denomination, have not been satisfied. Between our several camp ministries, which have been discipling our youth and young adults for many years, and our churches continuing to faithfully disciple our next generation, investment in our youth has never stopped. It’s exciting to witness our denomination taking more intentional steps to lead us



Learn more about
ROOTED

rootedgapyear.com



The new Rooted Gap Year program is looking for a couple who would be willing to serve as the resident life directors. The primary role would be to live in the campus housing and be a part of community life.

There are also a number of job openings at Tuscarora for employment. There is an opening in the position of summer staff supervisor at Tuscarora from June–August which would require moving in the beginning of June.

INTERESTED? Contact Roger Viksnes
roger.viksnes@gmail.com / (860)805-0760

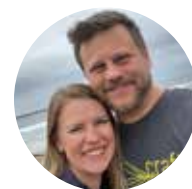
Photos from Tuscarora Inn & Conference Center.

in these efforts. There are some fantastic and exciting things on the horizon for the youth and young adults of the Lutheran Brethren.

This summer (July 2-6, 2024), youth from CLB congregations will gather in Estes Park, Colorado, for our biennial youth convention, which is titled “Elevate.” The theme for Elevate ’24 is *Crafted*, with our theme verse as Ephesians 2:10, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” It is our prayer that all in attendance would be encouraged in the truth that God has intentionally and powerfully *crafted* each one of us. He has *crafted* us in his image and has called us to great missional purpose—fantastic works—that he has prepared for us to do. What a wonderful opportunity for our youth, to gather in one place with peers from around the continent, to be encouraged in who God has made them and for the purpose to which he has called them! And what a blessing for us as a denomination to invest in our future!

Another exciting way that the Lutheran Brethren is unleashing new leaders is by partnering in mission with Tuscarora, an affiliate ministry of the CLB: a conference center based on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware river. The Church of the Lutheran Brethren and Tuscarora have joined forces to present Rooted, a gap year program for young adults 18 to 25 years old. The foundational verse for this exciting new program is Colossians 2:7, “Rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” This opportunity for our young adults is designed to be a one-year adventure into what it means to be a disciple. There will be class time and service projects, along with time of fellowship and growth, both individually and as a group. The desire is to invest in our youth, give them practical tools to be everyday disciples, and help them fall in love with the theology of the Lutheran Brethren. We don’t know where God will take it from there, but we’re excited to see what he has in store. This program launches in September.

The vision the Lutheran Brethren has for youth and young adults does not end with just these two new exciting opportunities. We know that we need to be investing in our future. We know that a convention every two years is not enough. We know that adding one location for a gap year program won’t meet the needs of a growing Church. So, please keep our leadership and other ministries in your prayers, as they continue to cast vision and make plans for this incredibly important demographic.



Rev. Daniel Stenberg is the pastor at Calvary Church in Bergenfield, New Jersey. Daniel also serves as Interim Director of Elevate Youth Convention and as a board member for Rooted.



Dan and Claire Rose spending time with some friends.

Arriving in the Village of Doh

CLAIRE ROSE

The anything-but-physically-smooth road to Doh has been paved with an unimaginable smoothness as experienced through the Lord's kindness and faithfulness throughout our journey. Like all our contemporary predecessors and those who will come after us, we completed Seminary, studied French for a year in France, studied Chadian Arabic for a year in the capital of Chad, N'Djamena, and have (finally!) recently moved to our decided-upon ministry site, Doh. It has been quite the journey just to get to where we sense the Lord has been calling us, through many ups and downs and everything in between. We are thrilled to be in our lovely new home right next to our encouraging teammates, the Narvesens, amongst the beautiful people of Doh. This excitement and sense of accomplishment is simultaneously coupled with a sense of infancy and inadequacy as we find ourselves learning another language, another culture, and another way of life. We look forward to the day that we can speak with our Fulbe

neighbors, but that day is a long way off. For now, we will continue to have a ministry of presence, simply being present and listening, observing, and praying for the people sharing the mats with us.

Like our drive from N'Djamena to Doh, there are many times when we have had to veer off the road, because the main road is worse than the dirt path next to the road, and seemingly detour around various difficulties. Our difficulties, for the most part, have not been physical in nature (and for this, we praise the Lord and seek his continued protection!). The Lord has physically and seemingly effortlessly brought us to this place. However, our struggles have been with the spiritual, emotional, and mental aspects of life on this journey. Throughout this journey, we have had to depend upon the Lord like never before. We simply reach the end of our abilities much quicker than if we were called to a different life. Now we have no choice but to turn to him to carry us. Thankfully, this is what he desires from us, and his grace

and strength are sufficient (2 Cor 12:9). We lean heavily on his Word to carry us through, as the spiritual battles Paul talks about in Ephesians 6 have become very real. Paul's letters to the Thessalonians have been especially encouraging to us as of late. We cling to 1 Thessalonians 5:24, "He who calls you is faithful; *he* will surely do it" (ESV, emphasis mine). And 2 Thessalonians 3:3, "But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one." Each day we are stretched to lean not on our own understanding, but on the Lord. We thank and praise him for his faithfulness, even when our faith and trust may falter.

We would love your prayers as we continue to transition to our life in Doh. We have had many visitors and are looking to get into a routine as a family. Pray for our relationship with our teammates. Pray for our future ministry together.

- We have commenced official Fulfulde studies as of the end of February, and would greatly appreciate your prayers for patience,



"Feeling like an infant for the fifth time in the past seven years is weighing on me: sobriety, Seminary, French in France, Arabic in N'Djamena, Fulfulde in Doh. But I know that once again God, with a little help from his saints, will see me through."

—Dan Rose (Pictured above with new friends)



Daughter, Ashley, with a new friend.

grace, encouragement, stamina, and for the Lord to quicken our minds as we continue to be stretched linguistically.

- Pray for homeschooling. We have never attempted this before, and it is a new added dynamic to our previous family dynamic. Pray for grace and patience, compassion and understanding for both the students and teachers.
- Pray for the people of Doh. What a blessing to live among these warm, gracious people! Pray that the Lord

of the harvest would grow faith and call believers unto himself.

The fact that it is not easy, does not mean it's not worth it. Despite the hard work, it is worth it because he is worth it. And he is faithful in both his calling and acting, as well as in his sustaining of us. Isaiah 58:11 reads, "The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail." These words to Isaiah have never spoken more truthfully into our

lives than they do here in Chad. Whatever the future holds, we cannot fail if we are obedient to his leading. He never fails, and this truly is his mission, on which we have the privilege of joining him.



Claire Rose and her husband Dan serve as missionaries to the unreached people of Chad.

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Bronson Joins LBIM Team

As of September 1, 2023, Danny Bronson, former missionary to Chad, started serving part-time as Ministry Coordinator for Lutheran Brethren International Mission (LBIM), assisting with its expanding ministry platforms and a growing international missionary team. Danny will continue to serve as pastor at Community of Joy Church (Eagan, Minnesota) while dedicating one-third of his time to LBIM. His role will primarily revolve around the coordination and oversight of LBIM's holistic ministries, including but not limited to LBIM's Living Waters well ministry, school ministries, famine relief, refugee relief, the Joseph Project, community health ministry, and agricultural development. LBIM works hard to ensure that these ministry platforms embrace and enhance our disciple-making mission in ways that are both biblically faithful and practically effective.



Ronnevik Installed



Rev. Jon Ronnevik was installed as Associate Pastor at Victory Lutheran Brethren Church, Jamestown, ND. Rev. Brandon Pangman, Director of North American Mission, officiated the installation service.

Bethel Ordains New Elders



President Paul Larson officiated the ordination of three new elders at Bethel LB Church, Ottawa, IL. Pictured kneeling in front are the new elders (L to R): Jack Knudtson, Ted Sanders, and Chris Holtzman

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Preview Service in Lincoln



Lincoln Church, a CLB Church Plant in Lincoln, North Dakota, held a preview worship service on February 4, 2024. Pastor Carl Juhl reported that, out of the nearly 100 attendees, around 50 were from the Lincoln community!