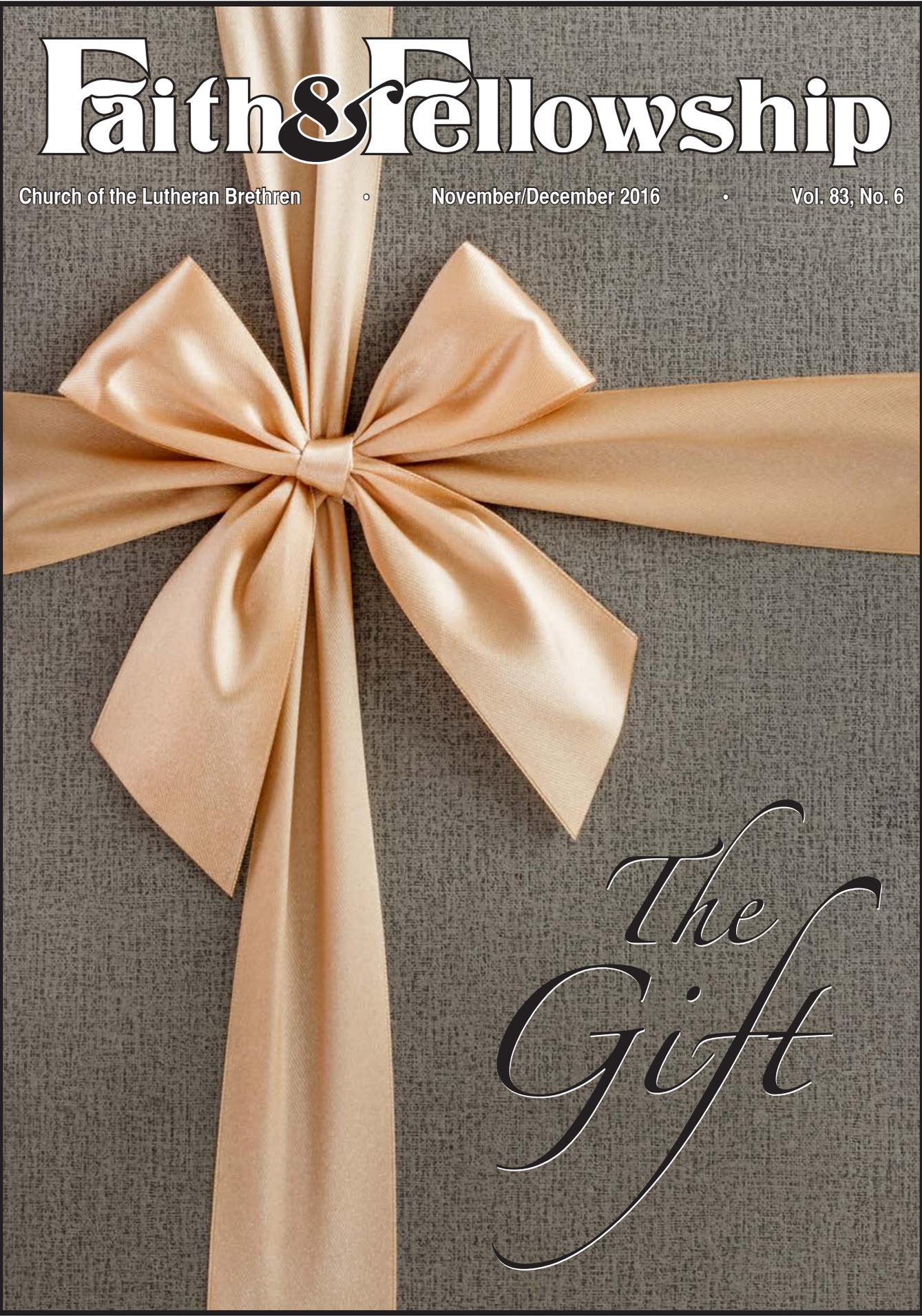


Faith & Fellowship

Church of the Lutheran Brethren

November/December 2016

Vol. 83, No. 6



*The
Gift*

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FAITH & FELLOWSHIP
Volume 83 - Number 6

Editor In Chief/
Graphic Designer: Troy Tysdal
ttydsal@clba.org

Contributing Editor: Brent Juliot
bjuliot@clba.org

Copy Editor: Aaron Juliot
ajuliot@clba.org

Cover Photo:
Kras1/iStock

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Quiet Moments

Email prayer requests to: pray@prayclb.org

The Gift of Christ

H.E. WISLØFF



Ragnar Dahl/Deighin Oslo Museum

The one, who with an honest heart expects something from heaven, will not be disappointed. For in heaven, God is waiting to give us what we need.

Are you longing for peace with God, for full assurance of the forgiveness of your sins? Are you longing to be made free and happy, or to meet him who can lift the burdens from your shoulders and speak the word of salvation to your condemned conscience?

A person cannot receive anything unless it is given from heaven.

With expectation in your heart, lift your eyes to heaven, and the Father will turn your longing and your thoughts to the One who came down from heaven to give life to humankind.

The Father will lift your vision to the Son... who came to us on Christmas day. With him you will find all that you need. He comes to you from heaven. Receive him—he will cost you nothing.

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

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

A Gift Denied?

TROY TYSDAL

It had been a difficult year. A year of independence, rebellion and deceit. The relationship between father, mother, and child had been broken. But oh, how they hoped he would come home for Christmas. It would not be the same without him. They had gone to great lengths to invite him, to let him know that he was loved, to let him know that he was forgiven. Mother had left a message on his phone. Father had posted a note upon his door. The message went unreturned, the note seemingly ignored.

On Christmas Day mother made his favorite meal, hoping against hope that he would come home. Father sat in the living room, staring at an unopened gift beneath the tree. It belonged to the son. It had been handpicked for him, bought and paid for in full. It was his, all he had to do was come home... and receive it.

ROMANS 6:23

The Apostle Paul writes, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

When Mary gave birth to the baby Jesus she already knew that the child was special. The angel Gabriel had told her that Jesus would be called the Son of the Most High, and that he would inherit the throne of his father David... and with that throne, a kingdom that would have no end. Mary did indeed know that the child Jesus was special, but I dare say, that as she wrapped the boy in swaddling cloth and placed him in a manger, she did not know, nor could she understand, the fullness of God's gift to her... and to us.

We are rebels. We were created by God in his image, to live in a relationship with him. He is our Father, the provider and giver of all good things. Yet, we rebel... our relationship with him is broken. We strive for independence, though he is the source of life. We look for meaning and



Adrian Pelcz/Stock

purpose in this world, though it cannot be found apart from him. We govern what is right and good by our own conscience, though he has already declared what is right and good in his holy Word.

Yes, indeed, we are rebels, worthy of hell from the moment we are conceived. But God does not give up on us. He does not abandon us to the mess we have made, nor does he take joy in our self-inflicted agony. Instead, he carefully picked out a gift... and when the time was right... he delivered that gift.

As Jesus hung on the cross at Golgotha, he did so as a gift, as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. You see, God had declared that sin would be punished... and Jesus took that punishment upon himself (1 Peter 2:24). Mary wept as she saw her son's lifeless body removed from the cross and wrapped in burial cloth. She wept because she did not understand the gift that had been given to her... the gift that has been given to us. It is the gift of salvation, eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him we are redeemed. In him our broken relationship with God is restored. Mary did not understand that death would

not be able to hold Jesus, and because it could not hold him... it will not be able to hold us either. That is the gift!

Will you come home for Christmas?

Our Father has gone to great lengths to invite you, to let you know that you are loved, to let you know that you are forgiven. The gift of salvation, eternal life in Jesus' name, awaits. It has been bought and paid for in full. It belongs to you. It is yours.

Come home, and receive it.

Rev. Troy Tysdal is Director of Communications and Prayer for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and serves as editor in chief of Faith & Fellowship magazine.



Visit the CLB online at: www.CLBA.org

A Gift Given

JOEL NORDTVEDT

In the summer of 1981, my wife and I arrived with our toddler at the CLB Annual Convention with great anticipation. We had been called by Lutheran Brethren International Mission to go to Taiwan and begin a ministry among the Hakka Chinese. I resigned my position in Seattle as associate pastor; we disposed of most of our belongings and packed what we planned to ship to Taiwan. Then we said our goodbyes, moved out of our Seattle apartment and drove to the convention.

Due to the economic downturn in 1981, there was a severe financial shortage. This forced the convention to pass a budget that did not include us! We were stuck! We could not go back, and our way forward was blocked!

Our dilemma was solved a month later when a young couple from Wisconsin heard about our situation and offered a gift of \$1,000 per month (close to \$3,000 in today's economy), thus enabling us to go to Taiwan that fall. We had been stopped, but their very generous gift opened the way. It was a perfect gift!

As people whom God created, we are meant to be with him—to enjoy fellowship with him, unfettered by sin and shame. But our life purpose is blocked by the sin we inherit and the sin we ourselves commit. We are STUCK! Nothing we can do will make a path forward toward our purpose. Much worse than our 1981 dilemma, we are lost “without hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

In Genesis, God promised to bring a solution to our dilemma. He told Abram that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3). Over and over again this promise was threatened by enemies from without and within. While many times it seemed that the promise was lost, the glimmer never died. Then, just at the right time (“when the set time had fully come”—Galatians 4:4) in God's plan, when things looked so dark, the Promise burst forth and the greatest gift was given: Jesus was born!

Jesus' birth set in motion this great salvation event—the Promise of God had arrived! He came in humility and



hxdyl/iStock

gentleness. There was a crescendo as Jesus demonstrated power and authority in his life, death, and the resurrection!

The Apostle Paul states it so well in Ephesians 2. His basic message is: We were dead but God made us alive with Christ (Ephesians 2:1-5). Of course there is much more to these verses—words that carry great meaning regarding our hopelessness and God's great love and mercy; words that deserve our study. But as we distill the essence of these verses, we see the stark problem that was solved by the gift given.

We were dead (period)! There is nothing a dead person can do. He cannot will himself to be alive. He cannot even ask to be made alive. He is stuck! He cannot go forward, nor can he go back. He is DEAD! The gospel words that follow ring with triumphant music: “But God.” The young couple graciously intervened in our 1981 dilemma. But God intervened so much more in our tragic state of being DEAD! He made a way forward by making us alive in Christ! “It is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).



One of Kaohsiung's Famous Tourist Attractions.

The wonderful traditions surrounding our Christmas celebrations sometimes obscure the profound gift that was given when “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). However, even if all of the trappings of Christmas disappear, all we need is this message: We were dead, but God made us alive in Christ! This is a gift given that surpasses all other gifts!

Dr. Joel Nordvedt works for International Students, Inc. in Phoenix, AZ. He helps international students adjust and enjoy their college experience in the United States while teaching them to understand the Bible and proclaiming to them the good news of our Savior Jesus Christ.

The Next Wave



The Hosch Family: Ben, Sara, Adelaide, Emery, and Winnie.

Thirty-five years ago Joel and Marybeth Nordvedt felt called to the Hakka people of Taiwan. A generous gift sent them on their way.

Today, Ben and Sara Hosch feel the call to continue that ministry. Ben and Sara have been sharing their passion for the unreached of Taiwan with CLB congregations while they wait for the CLB to confirm their call.

For information on how you can support this mission contact LBIM at: 218-739-3336, or by email at: LBIM@CLBA.org.





DragonImages/Stock

A Gift Received

DALE HEXUM

In the 1990s, some marketing expert came up with the idea of purple sunscreen. In theory, purple sunscreen was a good idea. Before the color faded away, it allowed parents to easily see where the product had been applied and where more was needed. My wife and I thought it was a good idea too—right up until the time our four-year-old daughter excitedly brought it into our living room to show her grandpa. The problem with this picture was that Emily was carrying it upside down with the cap open. Needless to say, when it was all over, we had a long purple streak that started in our hallway and went all the way into our living room. And unfortunately, this streak was on

cream-colored carpet that was less than a year old.

We felt terrible. Emily felt worse. Every time she saw that stain, she saw her mistake. Each time she saw that purple mark, she was reminded of her error. She could relate to King David's words in Psalm 51:3 after he was confronted with his sin. He said, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me." My daughter's mistake was right there before her on the floor. And it was purple.

Each one of us, like Emily and King David, can see the stain of sin in our lives. We see it all around us. We see it in messed-up relationships. We see it in

sick and decaying bodies. We see it in shootings, bombings, wars and genocide. But most of all, we see it in the sinful thoughts and attitudes that flow out of our very own hearts. We, like everyone else in the world, have a sin problem—a sin problem that originates in our hearts. And that serious problem needs a radical solution. That desperate situation requires nothing less than a miracle.

My neighbor Carmen is a walking miracle. Due to various health issues, she has received a double lung transplant and has endured not one, but two, kidney transplants. Obviously, she had some serious internal problems that could only be remedied by the radical removal of the

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel 36:26

old unhealthy organ and the replacement with a new healthy substitute. Without the life-giving miracle of organ transplants, Carmen would no longer be with us. Without the gift of new lungs and a new kidney, Carmen would have been without hope.

David understood that he needed a transplant as well. He understood that he ultimately needed the Great Physician to replace his sick and corrupted heart with a new and clean heart. In Psalm 51:10 he cried out, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." David knew that his heart was the problem. And his only hope was to receive the gift of a new one—one not stained with the ugliness of sin.

Too often we as human beings think we can fix our internal problem with external solutions. We believe that if we can change our habits or fix our behaviors, the problem of sin can be conquered. But the truth is that a problem as radical as a sinful, corrupt heart can't be fixed with a makeover. We don't need a beautician, we need a surgeon! We can't simply give ourselves a good scrubbing. We need a transplant! The stain is just too deep. Washing won't solve the problem.

We found out the same thing with our carpet. For hours after the spill, we tried everything we could think of to try to remove the purple streak. We tried stain removers. We tried a carpet steamer. We even tried bleach. But nothing would

remove that ugly stain from our carpet. Finally, in desperation, my wife called the manufacturer of the sunscreen to see if they had any ideas as to how to get their product out of our carpet. The woman on the other end of the line didn't have any suggestions, but instead took down our name and phone number. Not much help! Another dead end—until she called the next day.

We were surprised that a representative of the company would call back and even more surprised with what they wanted. They wanted a couple of estimates. At this request, my wife was a little confused. "Estimates for what?" she asked. "For new carpet," the woman said, "we are going to pay to replace your carpet." Needless to say, we were shocked. When we called, we were simply looking for a way to clean up the mess, to find a product to just make the carpet look presentable again. But what we received was so much more. Instead of just having our carpet cleaned, we received brand new carpet. What a gift!

This is what Christ has done for those who have put their trust in him. Jesus didn't come to tell us to clean up our act. He didn't come to show us how to put a nice polish on the outside. He didn't come as an example of how to live an unstained life. None of these would be an adequate solution because God's standard of cleanliness is absolute perfection.

Instead, Christ came to do something

so much more miraculous. He came to give us completely new hearts. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

Through an amazing gift of grace, he has removed an old, diseased, corrupted heart and put in its place a brand new one. He has removed our hearts of stone and given us hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). It is a great exchange that is summed up by Paul: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). What an amazing and unexpected gift we have received!

Rev. Dale Hexum serves Good Shepherd Lutheran Brethren Church as Pastor to Youth & Families in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.



Bertlmann/Stock

A Gift Lost?

LOIS UNDSETH

Joseph and I sat in the exam room of the oncologist's office that January day. It was a check-up after finishing his treatment for neuroblastoma ten months earlier. That had been quite a year, after discovering our beautiful, precocious two-year-old had metastatic cancer in his bone marrow and bones. We learned what Jesus meant when he said, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34). Days like the ones spent getting a three-year-old to consume eight ounces of fluid, only to have him vomit it up again the next morning, or days like the ones with dangerously low blood counts and a high fever.

We learned to treasure every day; after

all, that's really all we have. We treasured Christmas that year in our little family. Upon opening his gifts Joseph remarked, "It's just what I always wanted!" "Oh, my sweet boy," I thought, "you are so precious. *You* are just what I always wanted."

Dr. Bostrom peeked into the exam room and asked, "Is Steve here today?" Even as I answered his question, my mind asked and answered my own question—"Why do you need Steve here?" Immediately tears filled my eyes. When the nurse retrieved Steve from the waiting room, he saw my tears and remarked, "I was wondering why it was taking so long." That was a dark day as we learned that our now four-year-old son had cancer once again ravaging his

body. Dr. Bostrom said to us that Joseph needed two things—to be free of pain, and to be with us. We went home that day to make the most difficult decision of our lives. Considering Dr. Bostrom's words, our belief that God could miraculously heal Joseph, and the consultation of other parents in our position, we decided to pursue no further cancer treatment for Joseph, whose prognosis was poor.

The next Sunday in church we sang, "Jesus, Lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly, while the nearer waters roll, while the tempest still is high. Hide me, O my Savior, hide, 'til the storm of life is past; safe into the haven guide; oh receive my soul at last! Other refuge have I none; hangs my helpless soul on thee. Leave, ah, leave me not alone; still pursue and

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

comfort me. All my trust on thee is stayed; all my help from thee I bring. Cover my defenseless head with the shadow of thy wing.”

I was sobbing halfway through the song. Pastor Veum stepped down from the pulpit to tell me, “I chose this song for you today.” It was the prayer of my heart for myself and for my defenseless child. God’s gift of music was able to touch my spirit in a way words alone could not.

In case we had decided to return for more testing and treatment, the hospital had sent us something for Joseph to drink on our way down to Minneapolis for a CT scan. He came running to me after opening it with Daddy. “Mom, mom! Look what came in the mail—medicine to beat my cancer up!” My heart sank. I explained to Joseph that we weren’t going to have him take any more chemotherapy; we were going to let God heal him. One day as Joseph sat at the kitchen table I asked him what it was like to have cancer. He answered, “It’s no fun to have cancer... waiting for healing.”

I was tempted to blame myself that Joseph did not appear to be healed. My unfaithfulness in Bible reading and prayer was glaring in my mind. I obviously did not have enough faith for this. But Hebrews 12:2 (NIV, 1984) said to me, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.”

Joseph’s healing did not depend on my faith, but on the One who wrote that faith into my heart, the One who would perfect it. Pastor Veum also gave me comfort one Sunday when he recalled the words of his father-in-law: Does it take more faith to demand healing, or to trust God when the answer is not healing this side of heaven?

Those bright blue eyes did close in death that summer of 1994. We had his coffin lowered into the grave so that our children could see what was going to happen to it. Our two-year-old, Sophia, stood at the edge of the grave saying, “Good-bye, Joseph. Good-bye, Joseph. Good-bye, Joseph. Is Jesus down there?”

Yes, indeed. Jesus is down there. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (Psalm 23, NIV, 1984).

My favorite Bible verse is also the shortest: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). I have come to love the story of Lazarus perhaps more than any other Bible story because it shows me that Jesus is full of compassion. He was well aware of what he planned to do within a few minutes—turn their sorrow to joy!—and yet he saw and felt deeply the pain around him. It’s as though in that moment he allowed himself to feel the pain that sin brought to our world through the curse in Genesis 3. He knew the whole plan—that he himself had come to bring victory over

sin and death, and that he would redeem the world. Hallelujah! And yet, there at the graveside of Lazarus where he proclaimed himself the resurrection and the life, Jesus was deeply moved by the effects of sin.

In this life there is pain. I find great comfort in knowing my Savior acknowledged that, and grieves with me.

We sat at a Christmas concert that first Christmas without Joseph, and watched as the choir lined the aisles of the church. They sang a beautiful lullaby in honor of Baby Jesus. Since there was no choir to watch at the front of the church, I gazed at the cross hanging there. The thought came to me: Here we are, looking at the cross, listening to beautiful music. Joseph, you are in the presence of Jesus, listening to and singing in heavenly choirs. I am so happy for you.

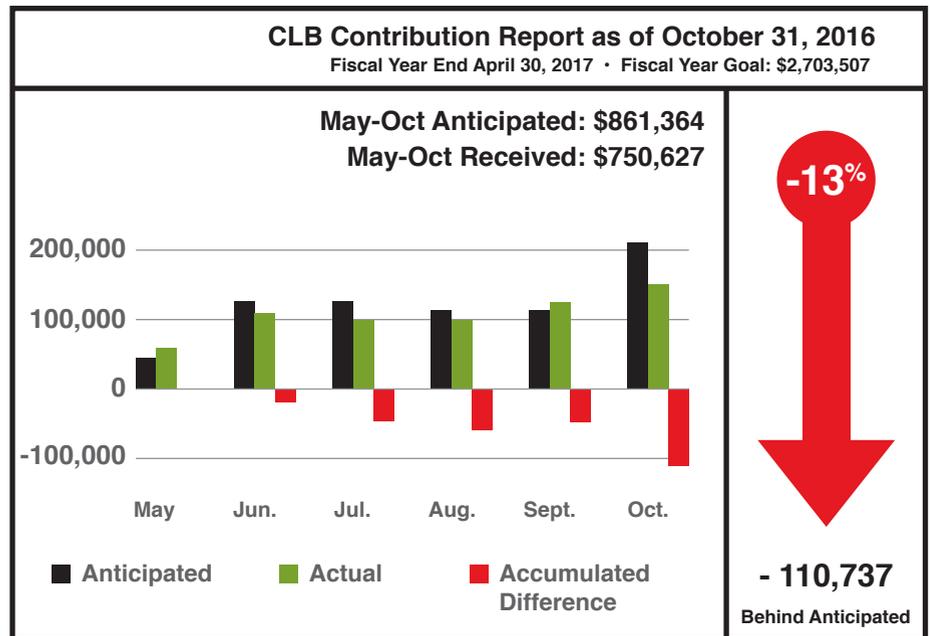
Lois Undseth lives in Fergus Falls, Minnesota and attends Bethel Lutheran Church.

An Incomplete Gift?

ROY HEGGLAND

An irrevocable trust is a technique used by estate planners to remove assets from a client's estate for tax or asset protection purposes. The assets the client wants protected are placed in the trust. But there are downsides to an irrevocable trust. First of all, the client loses all control over the assets. Second, the client loses the right to any income generated by the assets. Third, the beneficiaries who receive the assets upon the death of the client (usually the children or grandchildren) inherit the "basis" of the client in the assets rather than the "step-up in basis" which they would have received if the assets had been inherited under a will or revocable living trust. This can result in a significant difference in the amount of capital gains tax payable by the beneficiaries upon the sale of the assets.

To overcome these challenges, a very clever estate planner many years ago came up with an irrevocable trust that was intentionally defective: the client would maintain the right to change the beneficiary in the irrevocable trust through a "power of appointment" in the client's Last Will and Testament. Because of this, the Internal Revenue Service ruled that the gift of the assets into the irrevocable trust was an "incomplete gift," thereby allowing the client to receive the income from the assets. It also treated the assets upon the death of the client as though they were part of the estate that passes to the beneficiaries via a will or revocable living trust with a "step-up in basis." But the best part of the ruling was that the assets were not to be treated as part of the client's estate for estate tax or asset protection purposes. This is a case where an incomplete gift gives people



more than they would have had with a completed gift. (If you would like to learn more about this type of irrevocable trust, please email me at: stewardship@clba.org.)

While an incomplete gift in the estate planning arena can be a good thing, such is not the case in the spiritual realm. God's gift of his Son for us was and is complete in every way. Unfortunately, many Christians believe and act as though God's gift to us were incomplete. They think that God's acceptance of us or his happiness with us as his children is somehow dependent upon how "good" we are or how busy we are with "spiritual" things. Believing that there is anything we must do to initiate our receiving his gift is believing that his gift is incomplete.

When God gives his gift of salvation through his Son Jesus, it is wholly

dependent upon him and his love and grace toward us. John 1:12-13 says, "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." Live in the freedom of the Gospel! Enjoy living a life of good works for the benefit of your neighbors, knowing that God accepts you based solely upon the life and death of Jesus, not based upon how hard you work or how good you are. His great gift to us is complete in every way.

Roy Heggland serves the CLB as Associate for Biblical Stewardship.



Women's Ministries

Church of the Lutheran Brethren

www.WMCLB.org

Six Decades of Gifts

CHERYL OLSEN

She was twenty-five years old, sitting in an oak chapel pew, surrounded by her peers. The young wife of a Hillcrest Academy teacher, fresh from college, was about to become part of a movement of women that would influence and gift people on three continents for the next six decades. It was 1953, and she was my mother.

Not long ago, a woman that I highly respect mused: "I've never really understood why we have a separate national organization for *women*. Why not do everything together?" As we visited, I realized that I assumed that more women know this story, simply because it's familiar to me—but that's because my Mom was there, and she told it to me...

Back then, the churches of the Lutheran Brethren gathered together for an "Annual Meeting" each June in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, for worship, fellowship, and the business of elections, finances and plans for the half-century-old denomination. "Whole families attended, and often stayed in homes of the Bethel church families or in the Hillcrest dormitories..." It was a different time and culture, and since only men could vote in the business sessions, the women decided to organize themselves nationally as well. "It seemed a good time to have a meeting that women could be involved in." "It wasn't just another meeting they felt they must attend, but it was a chance for wider fellowship with like-minded women, an opportunity for service to God and others, in ways uniquely theirs."

In 1953 Women's Missionary Fellowship was born. They joined together to support and accomplish bigger projects than their individual women's groups could do. They raised funds for projects the CLB budget couldn't include, for which women had a special passion.

Their gifts furnished rooms in the "Home for the Aged," now known as Lutheran Brethren Homes; furnished and decorated a Mission House apartment for missionaries on home assignment; and furnished the Hillcrest Academy girls' and boys' dormitories.

Women's involvement and influence continued to grow. One of the WMF presidents, Joan Gjerness, was even listed in "Who's Who in Religion in America." Women's gifts sent several single women missionaries overseas, enabled Pastor Kosukegawa's radio broadcast to reach countless people in Japan, provided a parish worker for Home Mission congregations, enabled publication of missionary Juline Kilen's book (*My Experience with the Bandits*), helped in printing the Fulani Bible, and more.

Fifty years later, in 2003, WMF became WMCLB (Women's Ministries of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren) and added a Director: first Chloe Koslowsky, and currently Ruth Vallevik. For fifty years we had ministry *by* women and *through* women, but now ministry *to* women was needed, focusing on reaching women in our own changing neighborhoods. "Business" meetings are scarce, but weekly Women's Bible Studies now abound!

Still, the giving continues: Bible study material and retreats for Seminary women; and hospital walls, maternal health needs, blankets and baby clothing for Chad. This year we assist Liz in Asia, providing help for children with special needs.

Thanks to God for women who wanted to give, six decades ago! Their response to the gift of Jesus lives on...

Cheryl Olsen is the Faith & Fellowship correspondent for WMCLB.



Serving at Ebenezer LBC in Minneapolis, MN in the 1950s.



Serving at Bethel LC in Fergus Falls, MN in 2016.



In 1953, a group of CLB women gather at Hillside LBC in Succasunna, NJ.



WMCLB members gather at Living Faith LC in Cape Coral, FL.



David Narvesen sharing about his surprise at the receptivity to the gospel from the Fulbe people in Chad.

Why Chad?

DAVID AND SONJA N.

At the 2016 CLB Biennial Convention LBIM Mission Mobilizer and Recruiter Dan V. sat down with David and Sonja N. to discuss their call to Chad.

Dan V.: Dave... You and Sonja moved to Fergus Falls, Minnesota from Washington state three years ago, to attend seminary. It was not in your plans then that you would be here today, commissioned as international missionaries of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, on your way to Chad. Can you tell us what transpired to bring you to where you are today?

Dave N.: The simple easy answer to that question is God. I came to seminary with no thoughts or intentions of going to Africa as a missionary. I planned on being a pastor, hopefully in some small community in the Midwest. When Sonja

and I talked about where we might end up, I always said, “Anywhere but Florida, because it’s too hot down there.” But then, Dan, I heard you speak at the Seminary J-term of the need for missionaries in Chad. Sonja, who had always had an interest in missions, asked me what I had thought about your message. I had this sense of not being able to say no (which she thoroughly expected) and from there our calling to Chad grew as we continued to walk through the open doors.

Dan V.: Sonja... You and Dave and your four beautiful children (Nate, Eva, Boeden and Ivan) are now called and commissioned to serve with Lutheran Brethren International Mission in Chad. Chad is a place very far away from family and friends; Chad can be a challenging place to live. You will need to learn new

language and culture. Chad is one of the least developed countries of the world. This is a big sacrifice for your family. Why Chad?

Sonja N.: Why Chad? Both Dave and I grew up in the CLB and I believe God was working long before we knew he was in calling us to Chad through the Church. I remember a mission service where the whole church fellowship hall was transformed and I experienced a piece of Africa there. I also remember playing with the children of seminary students who came from Africa, and in later years attending Hillcrest with several former missionaries to Africa. But in recent years God has been cementing the purpose of his Word. In many nursing situations I have had the privilege of being a part of the end-of-life process. I



On July 17th at the CLB Biennial Convention the Church of the Lutheran Brethren commissioned Rev. Erick Sorensen and Rev. Harold Rust as church planters, David and Sonja N. as missionaries, and Steve Tonneson as Associate for Advancement Ministry.



Sonja N. speaking about leaving family for mission work in Chad.



LBIM Mission Mobilizer and Recruiter Dan V. with David & Sonja N.

realized early on that my words brought nothing. But through God’s Word, not only is comfort found, but also peace, freedom, restoration, salvation, hope and life. In those moments of deep pain God spoke his words through me to others. When I took the time to think about what life would be like without his Word, it was dark and empty. This is life in Chad. Many people there have never heard, don’t have a Bible to read, and most don’t even know how to read in their own language. How will they know if there is no one to tell them? Yes, going to Chad is a sacrifice, and to be honest there are times I don’t want to go. There are a lot of unknowns and “what ifs” that play through my mind, but God has called us to be obedient. So I will follow and obey, praying that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven, so that all will see and hear and know in their hearts that Jesus is Lord. God sometimes calls us to do hard things. He never promised life on earth to be easy; he tells us that we will have trouble. It’s easy for me to get stuck on the first part of that verse and try to figure out what the trouble or hardship will be, in order to try to avoid it or make it easier. But then I miss the second part of the verse in which Jesus says, “BUT take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Dan V.: You both traveled to Chad in January of 2015. Can you tell us a little bit about how that fit into your process of being called to Chad as missionaries?

Dave N.: We were already pretty certain of our calling, and were really curious to see what Chad was like. Many things from that trip helped me continue to process our calling, but I think what stood out to me the most was the receptiveness of the people in Chad. In the village where you lived for 10 years, the people said they hoped new missionaries would come and live among them again. They were a people who wanted to hear more about Jesus and his gospel. I did not expect to find such open willingness to receive missionaries. In fact wherever we went we were received with open arms. It was that openness that helped make it clear to me that these were a people that needed to hear the Word about Jesus for their lives.

Dan V.: The CLB/LBIM has a vision of sending more people to Chad to join you in the mission work among unreached people groups. What would you say to those in the audience who might be asking themselves this question, “How can I be a part of this?”

Sonja N.: The biggest thing to remember is that this is not just a calling of us to Chad, but of the larger church sending us to the unreached of Africa. Forgetting that you are a part of this as well really leaves us out there on our own, and we would not last long if that was the case. To have an entire body of churches that together send us is a blessing a lot of missionaries don’t have. If you or your

church want to be a part of this you can do so in a number of ways, the first being prayer—we need lots of prayer. Another thing your church could do is to adopt a people group. By adopting a people group your church is committing to supporting the proclamation of the gospel to them. You also get to support the ministry of the missionaries sent to those people, being a blessing to them as they minister among the people in Chad.



Is God calling you to mission work?

Contact: dvenberg@clba.org

Spreading the Gospel

RODNEY VENBERG

The Church of the Lutheran Brethren has been sharing the Good News about Jesus Christ in the countries of Chad and Cameroon since 1920. Have all the personnel, the finances, the prayers been worth it? Since the work began, communicant membership in the churches in those two countries has grown to more than 75,000, with an average of some 190,000 people attending church each Sunday (compared to 8,600 communicant members and around 12,000 average attendance in the US and Canada, the sending church).

When Helen and I arrived and began to minister among the Peve people in southern Chad in 1966, our first task was to begin to learn their language, which was only spoken and had never been reduced to writing. As we learned more and more of their language, we also began to learn about their culture and belief system. Though they had never had a missionary living among them, they had belief in a god who had created the earth and all that lived in it. They also spoke of the fact that one day, when god was down visiting his creation, a woman accidentally struck him while pounding corn. That god became angry and returned to his home, and they no longer were able to get in contact with him. As a result, over time, they created a system of priests and sacrifices. They believed that the spirits of their ancestors hovered near the graves and, as each generation passed on, the spirits moved closer and closer to god. So they sacrificed to the ancestors in hope that the ancestors would be pleased and ask god to bless them with large families and good crops.

We began to share with them the message of the book of Hebrews, that



President of the CLB Chadian Church David G. (Left) and Director of Mission Poulo J. (Right).

there was someone living next to God who was the High Priest who had sacrificed himself to pay the penalty for their sins. This was like the missing piece of the puzzle—they now had a person who could communicate with God on their behalf. Jesus Christ was the answer to their quest. Their lives took on new meaning and assurance that God indeed did hear their prayers.

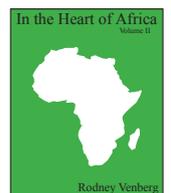
One day I was preaching in a bush village about Jesus, the High Priest who offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins and is now at God's right hand interceding for us. An old man in the audience—upon hearing these words—his eyes just lit up and sparkled! "How could this be? Did he really do this for me? Can he speak to God on my behalf?" When the man was assured that indeed this was true, what a sense of relief and joy this good news brought to him! He had a smile from ear to ear and a radiant countenance that had not been there earlier.

Yes, my friends, what we have invested in people and finances and prayers has certainly been worth it!

Rev. Rodney Venberg and his wife Helen served on the mission field in Africa for 30 years. During that time Rodney translated the New Testament into the Peve language while teaching seminary in Djidoma, Cameroon and Gounou Gaya, Chad.

In the Heart of Africa
Volume II

\$5.00
Plus Shipping



Rodney Venberg is the author of In the Heart of Africa, Volume II, A Brief History of the Lutheran Brethren mission in Chad and Cameroon, Africa 1950-2000.

To purchase, visit: www.CLBA.org/shop

God Gives Abundantly

ERICK SORENSEN

God has given so much to Epiphany Lutheran Church! A little over a year ago when we started on this adventure in New York City we truly didn't know what to expect. All we knew was that God had called my family and a few friends nearby to start a new Lutheran Brethren Church. The prospect of starting a church from scratch in one of the most secular/post-Christian cities in the United States seemed overwhelming (sometimes it still does). Questions like "How would we gather more people? How would we raise the money to fund this mission? How would we find a place for worship?" filled our minds as we gathered to pray over this effort. Nevertheless, it was exciting to think about God working through us and among us.



CLB Church Planter Erick Sorensen in Tompkins Square Park, Alphabet City, New York City, New York.

We knew, as Solomon said, "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain" (Psalm 127:1). So then, what has God given to "build his house" in New York City over the last year?

- God has given us numerous opportunities to engage our community in Gospel conversations. Literally hundreds have been met and relationships have been built.
- God has given us community. Oh it is gloriously messy, but God is forming a church here with a bunch of unlikely people. Whether it be at our small groups or at our outreach for skeptics (QA, a bi-weekly question and answer time with me at a local restaurant), God has seen fit to gather people from every walk of life under our roof for Bible study and conversation.
- God has given us opportunities to serve our neighborhood. Specifically

through a ministry we're calling "Feed ABC," God has gathered people from our community and from other CLB churches in the Eastern Region to feed the poor, pray with the poor, and share the gospel with the poor.

- God has given us wonderful partnerships. I have received amazing training for urban ministry over the last year from Redeemer City to City. More recently I've received personalized mentoring from Tim Keller on a monthly basis. Redeemer Presbyterian's downtown congregation has partnered with Epiphany, giving us opportunities to speak at their church and invite Redeemer attendees to join our mission. On top of this wonderful church partnership, para-church ministries like InterVarsity have asked me to join them for a monthly outreach to NYU graduate students.

- God has given us a building to hold worship services in. A historic Lutheran church in the heart of Stuyvesant Town has opened their doors to us! We've already begun holding preview services!

God has given us abundantly more than we could have ever asked or hoped for. And he has done it through the gifts of people like you praying for us and supporting us financially. There are many challenges ahead and we need as many of you as possible sending in your support, but we go out on mission with open hands, eager to receive what God wants to give us next.

Rev. Erick Sorensen is the church planting pastor at Epiphany Lutheran Church in New York City, New York.

To support Epiphany Lutheran Church visit: www.epiphanylutherannyc.com



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A Pastor's Gift

GARY WITKOP

Gifts. They are a huge part of Christmas and for the most part we love them. We love to give them and we love to receive them. Pastors often give their congregations gifts that the church never thinks about. Let me share with you our story concerning certain Christmas gifts.

When Debra and I went to serve our first church in Kelso, Washington, we moved away from “home.” All of our extended family lived in or around central Minnesota. When we came to our first Christmas and our first Easter it was the first time we did not get to celebrate either of those major Christian holidays with our extended families. So that first Christmas we bought a tree and set it up in the parsonage. We sent gifts to family through the mail and received several packages from parents, siblings and others who lived far away. It was our adventure, to start a new tradition in

the Gary and Debra Witkop family. We would have Christmas with, at that time, just the four of us.

That first Christmas in Kelso, spending Christmas away from parents and grandparents meant making phone calls to several family gatherings more than 1,000 miles away. We made the best of it, but it did leave us a little lonely for the traditional Christmas of children, parents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and especially, grandparents.

For many pastors, missionaries and their families this is the life we are asked to live. Often a pastor is called to serve a church far from extended family. This is always true for our missionaries in other countries. This then becomes our gift to the churches we are called to serve. We give you the gift of being with you instead of with our extended families.

Debra and I believed that the two most important services in our churches were

Christmas Eve and Easter Sunday. As a result, we made the determination that we would not travel home for either holiday. As pastor and wife serving a local church, we felt that we needed to be there for the two biggest events of the year in our church. For the most part we never looked back. This we did for 29 consecutive years gathering our children and eventually our first grandchildren at our home around a Christmas tree in our living room. It was Christmas at the Witkops' and we made the most of it.

Moving forward 29 years, I received a call to become a Regional Pastor (RP). One of the first things the five newly minted RPs learned is that there are seasons of busyness in our work. But when the churches are the busiest, we tend to be less busy. After all, when the local pastor is most busy, he doesn't need us getting in the way. So we tend to schedule fewer visits when their schedules are the



fullest. As a result, after 29 years of never celebrating Christmas with our extended family we were given a gift. We became free to travel to see family.

We took advantage of that gift when my grandmother was 102 years old, and we knew it would be her last Christmas on this side of eternity. Debra and I bought airline tickets and flew to Arkansas and spent Christmas with my grandmother and aunt and uncle. What a delight! What a welcome gift to us! Grandma was unable to have Christmas in her home so we bought a small tree and ornaments and brought them to the apartment to which she had just moved. We went to the local Walmart and bought room decorations. We made her room as festive as we could.

On Christmas Eve we received a second Christmas gift: we found ourselves for the first time since graduating from seminary in a Christmas Eve service that I was not leading and in which Debra was not singing or doing a reading. At first it felt strange not working on Christmas Eve. Not being "up front." Not preparing a message or planning the service was hard, but soon I was enjoying the Christmas message completely free from obligation, but fully aware of the gift the local pastor was bestowing upon us. He was not only proclaiming the message of a Savior who left heaven to bring salvation to those who did not deserve it... he was modeling self-sacrifice by leaving behind extended family to be with us on Christmas!

Now I have to be honest and say that there is a lot I miss about being a pastor of a local church. I enjoyed that work. It is hard being on the road as an RP, away from Debra who is busy teaching her third grade class. But there are also some things I, and I believe all the RPs, are finding new and gift-like in our work.

Gifts come in all sizes and shapes, but some of the best are not wrapped up in packages of any kind.

Rev. Gary Witkop serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as Regional Pastor of the Western Region.

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE® (All Periodicals Publications Except Requester Publications) Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation

1. Publication Title Faith & Fellowship		2. Publication Number 1 8 4 - 6 0 0			3. Filing Date 9/29/16	
4. Issue Frequency Jan/Feb, March/April, May/June, July/Aug., Sept/Oct, Nov/Dec		5. Number of Issues Published Annually 6			6. Annual Subscription Price N/A	
7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Not printer) (Street, city, county, state, and ZIP+4®) Faith & Fellowship • 1020 Alcott Avenue West Fergus Falls, MN 56537					Contact Person Troy Tysdal Telephone (include area code) 218-736-7357	
8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher (Not printer) Church of the Lutheran Brethren, 1020 Alcott Avenue West, Fergus Falls, MN 56537						

9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor (Do not leave blank)
 Publisher (Name and complete mailing address)
 Troy Tysdal • Faith & Fellowship, 1020 Alcott Avenue West, Fergus Falls, MN 56537
 Editor (Name and complete mailing address)
 Brent Juliot • Faith & Fellowship, 1020 Alcott Avenue West, Fergus Falls, MN 56537
 Managing Editor (Name and complete mailing address)
 Troy Tysdal • Faith & Fellowship, 1020 Alcott Avenue West, Fergus Falls, MN 56537

10. Owner (Do not leave blank. If the publication is owned by a corporation, give the name and address of the corporation immediately followed by the names and addresses of all stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of the total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, give the names and addresses of the individual owners. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, give its name and address as well as those of each individual owner. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, give its name and address.)

Full Name	Complete Mailing Address
Church of the Lutheran Brethren	1020 Alcott Avenue West, Fergus Falls, MN 56537

11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities. If none, check box None

Full Name	Complete Mailing Address

12. Tax Status (For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at nonprofit rates) (Check one)
 The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes:
 Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months
 Has Changed During Preceding 12 Months (Publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement)

13. Publication Title Faith & Fellowship Magazine	14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below Sept/Oct 2016
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15. Extent and Nature of Circulation		Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies (Net press run)		8,500	8,500
b. Paid Circulation (By Mail and Outside the Mail)	(1) Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)		
	(2) Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)		
	(3) Paid Distribution Outside the Mails Including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS®		
	(4) Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail®)		
c. Total Paid Distribution (Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), and (4))			
d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (By Mail and Outside the Mail)	(1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies included on PS Form 3541	6,883	6,836
	(2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies included on PS Form 3541	503	506
	(3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail)	300	300
	(4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means)	25	25
e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3) and (4))		7,710	7,667
f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)		7,710	7,667
g. Copies not Distributed (See Instructions to Publishers #4 (page #3))		790	833
h. Total (Sum of 15f and g)		8,500	8,500
i. Percent Paid (15c divided by 15f times 100)		0	0

* If you are claiming electronic copies, go to line 16 on page 3. If you are not claiming electronic copies, skip to line 17 on page 3.

16. Electronic Copy Circulation		Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Paid Electronic Copies			
b. Total Paid Print Copies (Line 15c) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a)			
c. Total Print Distribution (Line 15f) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a)			
d. Percent Paid (Both Print & Electronic Copies) (16b divided by 16c x 100)			

I certify that 50% of all my distributed copies (electronic and print) are paid above a nominal price.

17. Publication of Statement of Ownership
 If the publication is a general publication, publication of this statement is required. Will be printed in the Nov/Dec 2016 issue of this publication. Publication not required.

18. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner
 Troy Tysdal, Publisher
 Date
 9/29/16

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties).

Juliot Installed



Front L to R: Howard Juliot, Carl Brunkow, Brent and Ruth Juliot, Irv Peterson, Pastor Rod Larson. Back, L to R, Armin Christofferson, Steve Redmann, John Neiderhauser, Regional Pastor Stan Olsen, David Holmstrom.

Rev. Brent Juliot was installed as pastor of Oak Ridge Lutheran Brethren Church, Menomonie, WI on July 24. Central Regional Pastor Stan Olsen officiated.

Kjolhaug Installed



Pastor Lukas and Bethannie Kjolhaug.

On September 18, 2016, Lukas Kjolhaug was installed as pastor at Bunker Hill Lutheran Brethren Church in Princeton, NJ. Regional Pastor Warren Geraghty officiated.

Pietz Installed



L to R: Elders Mike Hays, Jim Rice, Chris Johnson, Eric Tangen, Rev. Greg Pietz, Rev. Jack Story, Elders Dan Strandby, Erick Erickson, and Regional Pastor Phil Heiser.

Rev. Greg Pietz was installed as Transitional (Interim) Pastor at Maple Park LBC on Sunday, September 25 by Pacific Regional Pastor Phil Heiser.

Spina Installed



L to R Standing: Regional Pastor Phil Heiser, Elders Rich Erickson, Dale McClaren, Bob Olson, Rev. Brandon Pangman, and Elder Jim Olson. Kneeling: Pastor Jordan Spina.

On October 23, 2016, Jordan Spina was installed as pastor at Rock of Ages Lutheran Brethren Church in Seattle, WA. Regional Pastor Phil Heiser officiated.

Dahl Ordained as Elder



L to R: Rev. Shawn Bowman, Rev. Ryan Nordlund, Elder Nate Dahl, Pastor Keith Wolderich, Elder Rod Jonas.

On June 26, 2016, Nate Dahl was ordained as an elder at Grace Lutheran Brethren Church in Bismarck, ND. Western Region President Rev. Shawn Bowman officiated.

Hoverson Ordained



Rev. Jeff Hoverson with Rev. Shawn Bowman at the 2015 Western Region Biennial Convention.

On October 2, 2016, Jeff Hoverson was ordained as pastor at Living Word Lutheran Church in Minot, ND. Regional Pastor Gary Witkop officiated.

Hillcrest Lutheran Academy Presidential Search

MARK SOHOLT

The Board of Directors has initiated a search for the next president of Hillcrest Lutheran Academy in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Since 2003 Hillcrest has been led by former President Steven Brue and is presently led by interim President Joel Egge. The selection of the next president is expected to be announced in the spring of 2017 and the new president installed in July 2017.

The mission of Hillcrest Lutheran Academy is to equip students in a Christ-centered, Bible-based environment for a life of eternal significance. As an affiliate ministry of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, Hillcrest's programs, values and campus life reflect the denomination's mission and vision statements which affirm:

"In response to God's person and grace, we worship him with everything we are in Christ, serve one another in Christian love and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all people."

"We see God stirring in our church a fresh passion to reach beyond our own comfort to all people among whom God places us. We embrace God's mission to bring the life-changing Gospel to unreached people in Asia and Africa, and we sense God convicting us to more intentionally reach out to people who live in our midst in North America as well."

Hillcrest Lutheran Academy is governed by an elected Board of Directors to whom the president reports and with whom the president works to fulfill the school's mission. The president is responsible for the spiritual, educational and financial strength



Hillcrest Lutheran Academy, Fergus Falls, Minnesota

of the school. The president is responsible to administer the program of the school, working with the faculty, subordinate administrative people, other staff, the student body, and in the community so as to realize the Board's adopted policies, plans and educational objectives. The President is the executive officer for the HLA Board of Directors in matters relating to the operation and management of the school, as duly authorized by the Board, and shall have the authority to act on behalf of the Board in approval by the Board of Directors.

For more information and the application process, please go to www.ffhillcrest.org and click into the Presidential Application pages.

Faith & Fellowship is the official publication of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, 1020 W. Alcott Ave., P.O. Box 655, Fergus Falls, MN 56538-0655, issued six times a year (January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, November/December) by Faith and Fellowship Publishing, 1020 W. Alcott Ave., P.O. Box 655, Fergus Falls, MN 56538-0655. Phone (218)736-7357. The viewpoints expressed in the articles are those of the authors and may or may not necessarily reflect the official position of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA). Periodicals Postage Paid at Fergus Falls, Minnesota 56538.

(USPS 184-600) • (ISSN 10741712)

SUBSCRIPTIONS: **Faith & Fellowship** is offered to its readers at no charge. We would encourage your continued support with a donation, and if you would like to be on our mailing list, please contact our office. Periodicals Postage Paid at Fergus Falls, Minnesota. CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Please give both old and new addresses and allow four weeks.

Direct all correspondence, including submission of articles, to: **Faith & Fellowship**, P.O. Box 655, Fergus Falls, MN 56538-0655; Telephone, (218)736-7357; e-mail, ffpress@clba.org; FAX, (218)736-2200.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to **Faith & Fellowship**, P.O. Box 655, Fergus Falls, Minnesota 56538-0655



A Gift Requires Sacrifice

What makes a gift a gift? On the receiving end, it costs you nothing. But on the giving end, it must cost you something.

I posed this statement recently in a sermon, with some uncertainty on my part as to its validity: “True kindness, true love, always involves sacrifice on the part of the giver.” For us as human beings, the giver is diminished in giving the gift. If not, then it’s not an expression of genuine love. What do you think? Is this true?

If you offer hospitality in your home, it involves time and preparation. Even hospitality outside the home involves time and expense. An act of kindness—mowing a neighbor’s lawn or transporting them somewhere—this involves physical labor and, again, time. No matter what kindness we show, no matter what gift we give, it will require either time, labor, money, or using our abilities to benefit another person. Sacrifice.

And generally the receiving person recognizes this and expresses their thanks to you. So what do you say then?

“It was nothing!” “Don’t give it another thought.” “Don’t mention it.” “Don’t worry about it.” “It was no big deal.” “It was easy.” And in the case of a tangible gift, “I won’t miss it.” “I didn’t need it anyway.”

Why do we say such things? Perhaps we feel uncomfortable that they might feel indebted to us. That they might feel obligated to return the favor somehow. But the truth is, it did cost us. And if we really don’t have the sense that it cost us anything, if there was no sacrifice involved, was it really kindness? Was it really love?

“True kindness, true love, always involves sacrifice on the part of the giver.” Is this true for us humans?

What about God? “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). He is the source of all the daily gifts we take for granted. However, while we humans may be diminished by our sacrificial giving, God is not diminished. In his immutability, he does not change. He does not become less.

Even so, God knows sacrifice. When he gave the greatest gift ever given, sending his Son to this world, with the goal and purpose of suffering and paying the death penalty for us sinners in our place—the sacrifice was real. God felt loss on our behalf. This is genuine and authentic love.

We, the recipients of his undeserved kindness, are absolutely indebted to him, forever indebted, and forever grateful to Jesus Christ.

Rev. Brent Juliot serves as pastor of Oak Ridge Lutheran Brethren Church in Menomonie, Wisconsin.

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