

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

WORKING *WITH* JESUS TO BECOME MORE *LIKE* JESUS

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JULY/AUGUST 2025



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FAITH & FELLOWSHIP

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Live in Grace, Serve on Mission

TIM MATHIESEN

“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

— John 14:25-27

”

In John 14, Jesus promises his disciples that he will give them what they need to be able to follow him. Today, Jesus continues to provide us with the Holy Spirit, who reminds us of what we have heard and works in our hearts to understand the Scriptures. In the Gospels, we get to see the life of Jesus as he models a perfect life of mission. But what do we do with all of that?

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:1-2).

But Jesus is the only one who lived perfectly, so how can we possibly match his example?

We read in the Book of Concord (a doctrinal standard for Lutheran theology), “...Christians are not under the Law, but under grace, because by faith in Christ the persons are freed from the curse and condemnation of the Law ...their good works, although they are still imperfect and impure, are acceptable to God through Christ...”¹

As we grow in our faith and live out God’s mission that he’s called us into, our good works are not attempting to add to the saving work that Jesus has already done. Instead, these actions are in response to that saving work.

Jesus gives us the answer when he says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do

nothing” (John 15:5). A few verses later he says, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.”

Remain in my love. We aren’t meant to do this on our own! When our focus is only on ourselves, our efforts are for nothing. Our efforts here in this broken world are sure to fail, end in disappointment, and only temporarily satisfy us. We plan our meals, vacations, school events, time with friends, and tasks at work, because, if we don’t, our lives become chaotic. What if we were also this intentional in our relationship with God? Do we treat our spiritual lives as just another piece to fit into our schedules? Or do we recognize that God desires to be the foundation in all areas of our lives? What if we made our spiritual lives an intentional part of our meals, our work, our friendships, and our vacations? Then every part of our lives would be an act of remaining in his love.

Luke 12 records Jesus reminding his followers not to worry because God will take care of them. Notice the way Jesus wraps up his speech in Luke: “But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well” (Luke 12:31). And then, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:32, 34).

I used to read that last verse as law—that my heart would only be right if I followed the rules. But in the context of the gospel, I now hear it as the Lord’s invitation to treasure him most of all, and to intentionally “draw near” to him in all

areas of life.

“Draw near to God and he will draw near to you” (James 4:8a, ESV).

I am reminded of how my wife and I encourage our children to “draw near”—to trust us, to listen to us. Not because we desire to control their lives, but because of our deep love and care for each of them. We want to be near to them in all parts of their lives. God loves us, he cares for us, and he desires the best for us. Christ’s sacrifice at the cross provides the grace and forgiveness we need when we fail, but he also wants us to intentionally seek him.

When we are intentional in our spiritual lives—listening to the Holy Spirit, reading the words of Scripture, and worshiping together as his Church—we will naturally grow closer to God. What better way to live our lives? Saved by grace through faith in the completed work of Jesus, but also wholeheartedly responding to God’s loving invitation to listen to his words. Let us live daily in his grace and serve him on mission.



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

¹ Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration, Article VI, paragraph 23



Spiritual Formation

Working with Jesus
to become more
like Jesus

ALAN JOHNSON

serbogachuk / Envato Elements

After finishing seminary and settling into my first pastoral call, I began to worry about who I was becoming. I felt like I had *learned* so much more about God, but I was not sure I *knew* God any better. There seemed to be a disconnect between my intellectual knowledge about God (which had grown immensely) and my relational experience with God (which felt very stagnant).

Healthy trees grow both upward and downward. The upward growth is seen, but it is the downward growth which anchors the tree to withstand storms and provide nourishment. Pastors can especially become prone toward the public and upward growth. I worried that my spiritual life was becoming increasingly top heavy and I did not really know how to cultivate that downward growth on my own. The truth is, we do not ever grow on our own.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.
—Matthew 11:28-30

As a carpenter, Jesus likely made a number of yokes. It is a farming instrument used to harness two animals together to do a shared task. A yoke also served as a way to train inexperienced animals how to work more effectively by pairing them with a more experienced partner. This is the invitation at the heart of spiritual formation. Simply: working with Jesus to become more like Jesus.

Spiritual formation can be a touchy topic for some because it can seem to veer toward mysticism, subjectivity, and works-based righteousness. However, we are all undergoing spiritual formation all the time. Jesus is inviting us to learn how to do the work of the kingdom with him; we are invited to become people who look more and more like Jesus for the sake of others.

Who we become is based largely on the things we do. So working with Jesus to become like Jesus means we need to pay attention to the things Jesus did.

Scripture

Jesus' life was shaped by Scripture, even from an early age. Luke tells the story of the adolescent Jesus who runs off to the temple where he is found days later

listening to teachers and asking questions about Scripture (Luke 2:41-49). Later, during the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus rebuffed each with Scripture (Matt 4:1-11). If we are going to be like him, we need to open our Bibles and let it shape our being.

Silence and Solitude

Jesus often retreated from ministry and crowds to commune with God. Silence and solitude are pathways to communion with God.

I love podcasts and audiobooks. If I'm doing chores or going on a walk, I'm usually listening to someone talking. This is not a bad thing, but Jesus spent his alone time listening to God, not podcasts. Solitude is about disconnecting from society; silence is about quieting the noise around us, to listen for the still, small voice of God.

Slow

Pay attention to the pace of Jesus. When was he in a hurry? Never! He walked everywhere and seemed to have time for everyone, including a foreign woman (John 4:1-26), a little child (Matt 19:13-14), and a tax collector in a tree

(Luke 19:1-10). If there is one thing Jesus modeled during his time on Earth that is most out of step with modernity, it just might be his pace. We pride ourselves on our busy lives; as if our busyness is a sign of importance and not the path to burnout. Going slow means noticing what's unfolding around us and finding time to engage with the people God places along our way.

Repentance

This all sounds fine and dandy, but what if you blow it? What if you screw up again and again? Some spiritual formation traditions contain the idea of “Christian perfectionism.” This is the belief that a Christian ought to have less and less sin as they journey through life toward eternity. But it is completely contrary to what Luther says in the first of the 95 Theses, “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ (Matt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”

Even in the area of repentance, Jesus serves as an example. The ministry of Jesus begins with him submitting to the baptism of John, which was a baptism of repentance (Matt 3:13-17). I believe Jesus is doing this in part to model a life of repentance. It is ironic that we resist repentance when we have many reasons to repent, whereas Jesus embraces repentance when he has no reason to repent. And it is when Jesus comes out of the water that he hears our Heavenly Father declare, “this is my Beloved Son” (Matt 3:17, ESV). When we repent, we ought to be reminded that we, too, are God’s beloved children.

Every good thing we do is in response to what God has done. Spiritual formation is not about moving toward God through our actions, but working with Jesus in response to his invitation. If the work feels heavy, difficult, and exhausting... you are probably doing it wrong. In keeping with the invitation, it ought to feel restful, easy, and light. Learn from Jesus, but always leave the heavy lifting to him.

While we all receive the invitation to work with Jesus, most of us are prone to one of two errors in response to the invitation: we either sideline Jesus or sideline ourselves. In other words, some

of us insist on doing the work ourselves, while others of us never get around to the work at all. We need to remember that while “it is by grace you have been saved, through faith” (Eph 2:8), we are “created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:10).

My struggle to experience God relationally was a result of sidelining Jesus in an attempt to do things *for* him instead of *with* him. I was stuck because I was trying to make things grow on my own. Using these tools of spiritual formation, I feel more rooted in God’s love and grace for me, and it is changing the way I see other people.

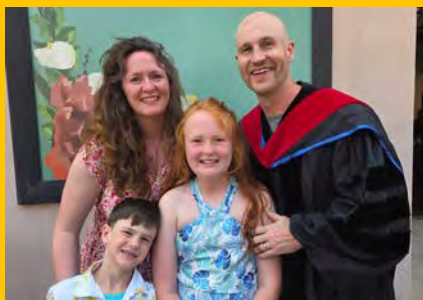
We are all invited to come and partner with Jesus to become more like him for the sake of others. If you take the invitation seriously, it will change you; if you ignore the invitation, that will change you, too. The real question is this: Who do you want to become?

If you are struggling with where to start on your journey of spiritual formation, ask God for the desire to become the person he created you to be—someone saved by grace through faith and created to do good works.



Dr. Alan Johnson is pastor at Regeneration Church in Sammamish, WA. He is married to Cheryl and they have two children. Alan received his DMin in June, 2025.

Rev. Alan Johnson earns DMin



On June 13, 2025, Rev. Alan Johnson graduated with a Doctor of Ministry degree from Fuller Theological Seminary.

Recommended Resources

by Dr. Alan Johnson

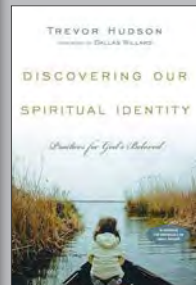


Further Reading & Study



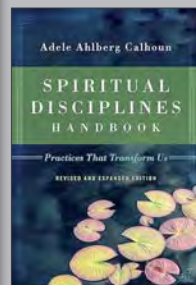
Gretchen Ronnevik *Ragged*

Ragged will give you a paradigm shifting approach to daily devotions. God intends to grow us in his love through all of life’s disruptions. Using scripture, you’ll see how your relationship with God—from start to finish—is not dependent on your works but on the works of Christ.



Trevor Hudson *Discovering Our Spiritual Identity*

Each chapter is peppered with simple practices that bring us into God’s presence and help us experience life as his beloved. At the end of each chapter is a set of questions which are ideal for discussion with one or two friends or a small group.



Adele Ahlberg Calhoun *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*

While the word discipline might at first seem daunting, Calhoun shows how your desires and discipline can work together to bring the transformation you’re longing for—the transformation only Christ can provide.

Links to these resources and More at clbforge.org/recommend

4-Week Bible Study

Dr. Alan Johnson has written a FREE 4-week study on the topic of Spiritual Formation.



See Page 9

Spiritual Discipline of Discipleship

GRETCHEN RONNEVIK

nsrisawai / Envato Elements

Discipleship is something that we often file into the *we-probably-should-be-doing* category of tasks, with all the guilt of an uncompleted chore list. We know it's a good thing to do, but it feels like work when we already have overfilled lives. As with any spiritual discipline, it's important we keep our theology as the framework. "Unless the Lord builds the house, the laborers work in vain" (Ps 127:1a).

While we are called to "make disciples" (Matt 28:19), it's important to remember who is doing the verbs so we don't take on burdens that don't belong to us. First, that justification is the work of *Christ*, and second, that sanctification is the work of the *Holy Spirit* (Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism, #222 and #232). This should be a freeing word to us as we are called to disciple! God is doing the work, and we get to come along for the ride! Our efforts are not intended for the sake of their salvation, but for leading toward a good life under God's grace.

I've found that the hardest part isn't finding young people willing to be discipled (young people are often lining up begging to be mentored), it's getting the older people to understand what

discipleship actually is. When the older generation has a tough time understanding what discipleship looks like, they become very resistant to signing up.

It might be for good reason that they hesitate. "Mentorship" and "Discipleship" have been marketed through American Christian publishers for decades, framed in authoritative terms of "getting people to do something." The message of Titus 2 has been twisted into a list of things to be followed. Discipleship is then reduced to training in the law, with the gospel as a minor starting point, rather than the ending point.

My family has developed and grown into a lifestyle of discipleship with many applicable lessons pulled from Titus 2.

- "You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). In other words, *we* shouldn't teach people what we think they should do; we are to teach them that *God* is doing the work. We are to live in anticipation and expectation that God will be faithful to do in them what he says he will do (Phil 1:6).
- "For the grace of God... teaches us... to live self-controlled, upright

and godly lives..." (Titus 2:11-12). The law can tell us what is good, like the definition of a noun. But grace is the verb of what is good. Grace in action is the work done in us and through us. Training someone in the law is like throwing a dictionary at them. It teaches vocabulary, which is good and necessary, but being trained by the gospel is like feeding them a hearty meal. And as with food, they need to be fed often.

- Titus 2 is instruction for older men and women, not a command for young men and women to obey their mentors—and for good reason. We are imperfect, and lots of "advice" passed down is not good. I remember one older Christian woman trying to "train" me to manipulate my husband, using Titus 2 as a reason that I should trust her. No, the direction here is for older men and women to become "sound in faith," and to "teach what is good" so as to be worthy of the trust of their disciples. I have learned that while I don't have to earn the love of God, I do have to earn the right to speak into young people's lives.

Titus 2:1-8

“

“You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.

Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.”

”

Looking to the model of Jesus and his disciples, we can learn how service is the entrance to discipleship. He ate with them, he prayed over them, and he washed their feet. We might bring them a loaf of banana bread, take them out to breakfast, or offer to babysit their kids. I’ve found serving in the nursery as an excellent way to connect with younger moms. They immediately see how much I care for their children, and I can naturally offer help when I see them struggling.

While there is some benefit to “putting people to work” in the church as a model of discipleship, many people show up just needing help. To bring young people into discipleship, we must begin with “washing their feet” and “serving them food” in whatever way is applicable to their lives.

Even as our children are starting to grow up and move out of the house, their friends have kept coming around for supper—and those friends bring their friends. We now have an open supper table, without a week going by without a young adult texting, “What’s for supper tonight?” The irony of this “work” is that we soon were blessed by those we were discipling at a much faster rate than we could bless them.

In our home, they see our flaws—see us argue as a family. But they’ve also hugged us after a heated moment, thanking us for showing them that having healthy boundaries in a family is possible. They’ve watched us mess up, forgive, repent, and move on in grace. All of this demonstrates

for them the stability we can have because of the lavish grace of Christ in our lives.

They ask us for help choosing a job, picking a car, or working through reasonable relationship expectations. Each situation is an opportunity to build trust, and point them to Christ. The more we serve them, the more they trust us. And the more they trust us, the more they want to jump into our family and serve as well. Discipleship has woven itself into our family life and blessed us more than we knew possible.

As a spiritual discipline, discipleship is training others in the lavishness of grace that comes through Christ alone. It involves more listening, serving, and waiting, and less pushing our own agendas and wishes. God is already doing something in their lives. He’s already calling them. We just get to bear witness to it and encourage them along the way.



Gretchen Ronnevik is an author and a speaker. She is married to Knut and they have six children. They live on a farm in Minnesota and are members of Good Shepherd Lutheran Brethren Church in Fergus Falls, MN.

Resource by Gretchen Ronnevik



Loneliness is a battlefield. When we are alone, our hearts start to hear voices of doubt, and we start to think that if we could just solve this problem in our marriage, or if we could just be this kind of mom or that kind of mom, or if we could just get on top of the mess in our home, or get on top of that diet, then we would be okay. We strive and we strive, and we end up feeling lonely and exhausted. And most of the time, it feels like no one notices.

This course was designed to equip and inspire you to start right where you are, just you and God, to start a gospel-centered mentoring ministry, big or small, right in your home, or in your church.

The goal isn’t to add to the striving trap that younger women find themselves in to be better at everything. The goal is to free them from the striving. The goal is to show them that the freedom of the gospel affects their lives, their homes, their marriages and their children. The beautiful doctrine of the law and the gospel is for the nitty gritty, practical parts of our lives.

Learn more: gospelmentoring.com



Drawing Closer to God

SCOTT BECHTEL

peus80 / Envato Elements

A couple years ago, in a conversation with my pastor, Pastor Alan Johnson, I asked some questions about faith. He shared with me the concept of spiritual formation and how it might be helpful in my own spiritual journey. What I experienced next was way beyond all my expectations.

Although I was baptized and confirmed in a Lutheran Church, as an adult, I stopped attending church regularly. After going through some challenging times in 2015, however, I came back to Jesus, accepting him as my Lord and Savior. I have since been an active member of the churches I attend, most recently at Regeneration Church in Sammamish, Washington. I now attend Lutheran Brethren Seminary and have been preaching occasionally.

Since that first discussion with Pastor Alan, I have sought out instruction in spiritual formation, through information sessions at our church and one-on-one sessions with a spiritual director. I also took a class at LBS with Pastor Alan as the instructor. Since starting to incorporate spiritual formation practices into my daily life, I have started seeing God at work in all aspects of my life, and it has improved my relationships with those close to me.

Prayer

Spiritual formation study has taught me different forms of prayer, helping me to focus on God and to see how he is working in my life. Before I started intentionally practicing these prayer techniques, I would lose focus and become distracted during my prayer time. We can easily get stuck in our daily routines, including in our prayer life. Changing our prayer habits, and anticipating God's leading, is exciting. I've been looking to see where God is showing up in my life, and have developed a deeper, more meaningful, prayer life.

Lectio Divina is a practice of meditative Scripture reading and prayer. I found a mobile app which guides listeners through prayers focused on specific Scripture passages. During one of the guided prayers, the guide talked about Moses living in the desert. They explained how Moses first needed to be in the desert before he could lead his people out of the desert. I thought of my own journey and how God is using my challenging past to help mentor others in recovery. I was shown how my suffering isn't wasted, but, rather, how God is using it to help others.

The prayer of *Examen* is a practice

of spending time at the end of the day considering where you have felt God's presence and how you responded. This practice of reflection has helped me make improvements in areas of my life so I can live more effectively for God's Mission.

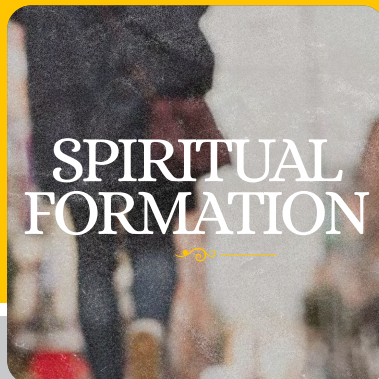
Direction

My spiritual director and I discussed the practice of goal setting as a part of daily devotions. It made me realize that I had separated these two practices, as if life planning was all about my will and not God's. Now, I bring all my goals and desires for my life to God in prayer and intentionally reflect on where he is leading me. This process places God at the center of my life as I set these ambitions at the foot of the cross, yielding to his will for my life.

Love

During one of our conversations, I shared with my spiritual director some of the difficulties I was having with someone very close to me. I was feeling frustrated and judgmental toward them. We spent some time in silence, listening for God's direction. I felt God placing one word on my heart: Love. We discussed how we are

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Created by
Alan Johnson



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- an accompanying video
- assigned Scripture reading
- discussion questions
- spiritual practice activity

Week 1: Becoming the Beloved *[Mark 1:1-11]*

Week 2: Meditating on God's Word *[Psalm 1]*

Week 3: Listening to God *[1 Kings 19:9-19]*

Week 4: Holy Friendship *[Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, 1 Samuel 18:1-4]*

called to love each other, not judge each other. Going forward, I tried to focus on love instead of judgment. The result has been a closer, more loving relationship with the individual.

Sometimes in life you are not sure what you are looking for, but as you set out on an adventure, you somehow find exactly what you need. Learning about different spiritual formation techniques has provided me with new and effective ways to draw closer to God. I realized that he is with me in all parts of my life! All I had to do was pay attention. This realization has drawn me closer to God, and I am now more grateful for all his blessings.



Scott Bechtel was an elder at Regeneration Church in Sammamish, WA. He has since returned home to Minnesota to care for his mother. He attends Lutheran Church of the Master in Brooklyn Center, MN.

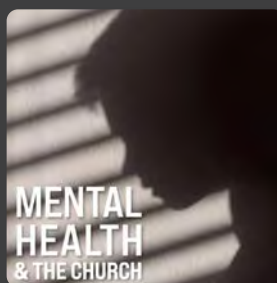
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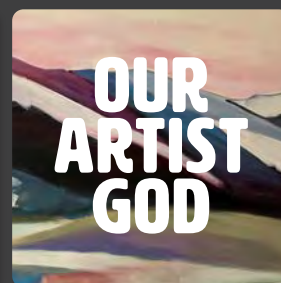
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New Location for Elevate

DANIEL STENBERG



Elevate Youth Convention Planning Committee walking the grounds of Asbury University where the 2026 convention will take place.

As we wrapped up Elevate '24, we were confident that we'd be able to get something worked out with the YMCA of the Rockies for Elevate '26. God had other plans. When it became clear in November that our denominational youth gathering would be moving, we had a lot of questions; God, as always, had answers.

In the last week of May, the Elevate Planning Team met in the great state of Kentucky. There we toured the new home of Elevate '26, Asbury University. We walked a campus that is dedicated to the work that God is doing in the hearts of young people. We sat in an auditorium that, in 2023, played host to a revival, "an Outpouring" as the Asbury staff calls it, whose waves did not stop on our country's shores. God has been, and continues to be, at work on the Asbury Campus, and we are so excited for how he will move in the hearts of our youth as they walk those halls, run through those fields, worship in those auditoriums, and sit under the Word.

Church, what an exciting time!

Our theme this year is "Immeasurable." Our God is huge, he is awesome, he is *immeasurable*. In a world that tries to define and confine, our God works outside the box that our culture, and our sinful hearts, have tried to put him in. We can't grasp how deep his love is for us. We can't comprehend the depths of his grace and mercy. He is *immeasurable*; his genius is unparalleled.

Our youth will have an opportunity to wonder at the creativity of our Lord, as they will be given tickets to the Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum, two opportunities for us to sit in awe of just how *immeasurable* our God is. We pray that these experiences will continue to enforce the truth of God's love and favor towards us.

We are so excited about this theme and all the plans that have been made for Elevate '26. We pray that our youth will leave the convention in awe of the gifts that God gives to us and his calling on our

lives. We want them to know that he has called us to be *immeasurably different*, that in him we find *immeasurable peace*, and that he imparts on us an *immeasurable calling*. Our God is so good, and we are so excited for the speakers, teachers, and worship that will encourage and bless our youth. It is our prayer that their time at Asbury will have an *immeasurable* impact on their lives. We look forward to you joining us for Elevate '26 at Asbury University, July 12-17, in 2026!



Daniel Stenberg is the Director of Elevate Youth Convention and Pastor at Hope Church at Silver Lake in Everett, WA.

JULY 12-17, 2026



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BRENT ANDREWS



Students studying in the Christiansen Memorial Library.



Above photograph from Faith & Fellowship Magazine (November 5, 1990)
Pastors John Kilde (left) and Don Brue (right) presented a plaque to Mrs. Julia Christiansen (second from the left) and her daughter Alta Hemmingson, at the Lutheran Brethren Schools' Homecoming Service, October 7, 1990. The plaque commemorated the recent naming of the Christiansen Memorial Library at Lutheran Brethren Seminary. Pastor Christiansen served as an instructor and librarian at Lutheran Brethren Schools for many years.

The Christiansen Memorial Library at Lutheran Brethren Seminary (LBS) has been, and continues to serve as, a central resource for the CLB. The library holds more than 20,000 print volumes, plus online digital databases that contain academic journals and e-books, along with scholarly articles.

Renamed in 1990 to honor Reverend Christopher Christiansen (1902-1982), a former seminary professor and librarian, the library plays a vital role in supporting the mission of LBS, promoting a Christ-centered understanding of Scripture, and equipping graduates with the skills and character needed for effective ministry. It provides access to materials across various disciplines including biblical studies, Church history, systematic theology, and sermon preparation.

We have recently implemented substantial modernization initiatives by beginning the difficult process of transitioning our classification system from Dewey Decimal to Library of Congress Classification. Doing so will place Christiansen Memorial Library on competitive footing with other renowned seminary libraries in the Midwest and beyond. We are also working to enhance

our digital offerings through partnerships with JSTOR and Logos for Education. Modernization and expansion initiatives also aim to improve accessibility in alignment with the Seminary's focus on distance education.

Both students and faculty benefit from the library's extensive and contemporary theological resources. We strive to support the theological and spiritual growth of our seminarians and pastors in their academic pursuit as well as sermon preparation on a weekly basis.

Supporting the Denomination

While the library serves seminary students and faculty first, its abundant resources are available to the broader CLB community! We wish to encourage and educate laypeople, church leaders, and future pastors within the denomination, equipping them for their ministries or personal studies.

We welcome you to explore the library's offerings—whether by contacting the library for assistance, accessing digital resources via the online catalog (visit www.LBS.edu and click on "Library"), or visiting the facility in person. It is our prayer that the library allow members

of the denomination to deepen their understanding of Scripture, strengthen their ministry, and connect with the rich heritage of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

The Christiansen Memorial Library is a testament to the Lutheran Brethren Seminary's dedication to theological instruction and the development of spiritual leaders. The library is committed to its ongoing support of the denomination's disciple-making mission.



Brent Andrews is the Librarian and Instructional Technology Specialist at Lutheran Brethren Seminary.



Library resource inquiries are welcomed and should be directed to Brent Andrews at library@lbs.edu

Fall Conference 2025

Thursday, October 9th–10th
Lutheran Brethren
Seminary

A.A. Pedersen Lectureship Thursday, October 9th

Speaker:
Dr. Ryan Tinetti



Preaching by Heart

Many pastors would like to be able to preach without notes, but are unsure whether they could ever do it—or how. Ryan Tinetti will provide an overview of what it means to “preach by heart,” why it matters, and how to do it.

Continuing Education Thursday, October 9th – Friday, October 10th

Speaker:
Jim Davis



The Great Dechurching: The State of the Church in 2025

These presentations by Jim Davis will help us understand the reasons why so many people are no longer attending church and, more importantly, what can be done about it.



Learn more: www.LBS.edu/fallconference2025



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www.lbdiscipleshipinstitute.org

LBDI equips members of the Body of Christ to be disciples, carrying out his Great Commission. Learn how to apply Scripture to everyday life, develop skills to do ministry, and grow spiritually through personal discipleship.

NEW! Lord, Teach Us to Pray



What is prayer? What's happening when we pray? Why can't I seem to do it more consistently? In Luke 11:1, the disciples said to Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray.” In this study we look at the Lord's Prayer and what it teaches us about the nature and power of prayer. The disciples didn't ask what we should pray, but how we should pray. We can do no better than to sit under the teaching of Jesus with the same request.

ALSO, CHECK OUT THE Biblical Knowledge Package:

- Reading and Understanding the Bible
- Old Testament Survey
- New Testament Survey

All available LBDI Courses

- Freedom in Christ: A Study of Galatians
- Reading and Understanding the Bible
- Proclaiming Jesus
- Worship Leading
- Elder Training
- New Testament Survey
- Old Testament Survey

Each course includes video-based instruction, discussion questions, assigned reading, recommended resources, and more.

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www.lbdiscipleshipinstitute.org



Interested in helping fund this ministry? Click on “DONATE.”

Relief to the Weary

AMY BOURQUE

“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

— Psalm 23

The past year was an eventful one for our family. My husband and I celebrated our 30th anniversary, we celebrated the births of two grandchildren (traveling to Albertville, France, to meet one of them), I enrolled in a grad school program (designed to complete a two-year program in one year), and I manage middle schoolers for a living. Survival became dependent on checklists, spreadsheets, late nights (NOT my favorite), and my family pitching in to keep the ship afloat. I am tired!

I counted the days from Christmas break until April, where two friends joined me for our spring break at the beach (a place which has always been synonymous with rest and rejuvenation for me). I could hardly believe it when we finally arrived and were blessed with beautiful weather. One afternoon, while my friends explored and wandered, I found myself sitting alone on the beach, wrapped in towels to protect me from the wind, and with my feet firmly planted in the sand. My attention wandered from the book I was reading, and I found myself mesmerized by the rhythm of the waves as they washed up onto the shore. The blue-green water sparkled in the sun; in the distance, a pod of dolphins lazily swam toward the pier. I took a deep breath, physically feeling the presence of God, and the words of Psalm 23 echoed in my head.

Familiar, comforting words. But on this day, I noticed something different. Who is the one doing all of the things? It isn’t

me! The shepherd is Christ, who makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside quiet waters. Green pastures are a place of cool and refreshing rest, and quiet waters evoke images of the same. Why would he do that? To refresh my soul. He leads me in his will, always wanting the best for me, even when I sin and walk away from him. If ever I needed a reminder of the Lord’s presence in my life, and how much he cares for me, this was it!

But wait! There’s more! When I am afraid, when struggles come, when evil seems to loom large over me, his rod and staff comfort me. I can sit at the feet of the Lord, confident that he will never leave me or forsake me. God himself prepares a table for me in the presence of my enemies and anoints my head with oil. In the Old Testament, oil was a means of sanctification, of being made holy, like God. If ever anyone was unholy, it is me, and yet my Lord anoints me to make me like himself. My cup overflows! The Lord’s goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life—again, he is doing the work!

I pondered these verses that day on the beach, literally lying down beside quiet waters, and realized that this is reminiscent of Law/Gospel Theology. In his explanation of his 95 Theses, Martin Luther wrote regarding Thesis 62 (The Gospel), “The gospel is a preaching of the incarnate Son of God, given to us without any merit on our part for salvation and

peace.” There is literally nothing I can do to earn my way to eternal life with Christ, other than believe in him and trust him to lead me. It’s no accident that the only thing I will actively do is dwell in his house forever. What a relief!

As this crazy year comes to an end—summer break just out of reach, but finally in sight—I am looking forward to not going to work every day, completing my graduate school program, spending time with my family and grandchildren, and resting in my Lord. My cup overflows and I want to sing with Isaiah, “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (Is 40:28-31). What a wonderful Savior we have—one who does all the verbs for us so we can be in his presence forever. He will never grow tired or weary like me. His power will increase in my weakness. He is the Good Shepherd, and I am so thankful to be called one of his sheep.



Amy Bourque is the secretary of WMCLB and also serves as the president of the Eastern Region WMCLB.



LEARN MORE ABOUT WOMEN’S MINISTRIES AT www.WMCLB.org
CONTACT: WMCLBContact@gmail.com

CLB Shared Ministry Contribution Report

\$3,300,000
2024-25 Fiscal Year Goal

99%

The CLB Fiscal Year ended April 30, 2025.

\$3,267,442
Received Through 4/30/25

View the latest contribution report at
www.CLBA.org/give-online

Thank You!

We officially closed the books for the 2024-2025 fiscal year on May 7th. Our contribution goal was \$3,300,000, and we came very close, raising \$3,267,442—just \$32,558 short. But here's the good news: thanks to underspending by \$233,111 and surpluses in several areas, we finished the year with a net positive cash flow of \$301,559. Praise the Lord!

We are so incredibly thankful for your

gifts and prayers throughout the year. Your support is essential to our mission as a Disciple-Making Church. Because of your generosity, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren will continue to plant churches, train the next generation of pastors and missionaries, and share the life-changing message of the gospel around the world.

Thank you for your faithful support and for walking alongside us in this mission.



LaWayne Rogness is the Director of Finance and Personnel for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

Women's Ministries Contribution Report

\$66,100
2024-25 Fiscal Year Goal

107%

The WMCLB Fiscal Year ended April 30, 2025.

\$70,800
Received Through 4/30/25

Our 2024-2025 WMCLB Budget was based on a contribution goal of \$66,100. With a large outpouring of gifts in April, we were able to *exceed that goal* with total contributions of over \$70,800 for the

year. We want to thank all the supporters of Women's Ministries for their generous gifts and for their prayers. We look forward to another year of supporting God's work, both here in North America and around the world.



Karen Stenberg is the Director of Women's Ministries for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

God's Quiet Call to Hillcrest

LUKE FISKNESS *President of Hillcrest Lutheran Academy*

I grew up in a wonderful and Christ-centered Lutheran Brethren home. My faith was formed and nurtured through the Church of the Lutheran Brethren: a summer on Servant Teams, four summers serving at Inspiration Point. During my college years, I had the privilege of serving alongside Pastor Shawn Bowman at Victory Lutheran Brethren Church in Jamestown, North Dakota. For those years, I was immersed in hands-on ministry: preaching, discipling, and walking with families through real-life faith.

After college, our growing family moved to Minnesota to be closer to family. I needed a job, so I took one at a retail store, something I thought would be temporary, but God had other ideas. Over the next 15 years, I worked my way up in the company, eventually serving as a Senior Director overseeing the small business segment for the East Coast. My employees supported over a million customers and drove hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue each year. As the years went on in the corporate world, I kept sensing that all of this leadership experience wasn't just intended to maximize profits and improve the bottom line.

When the opportunity came to explore the role of President at Hillcrest, I was intrigued, but unsure. I wasn't super excited to leave a fifteen-year career or a job that I really loved. Yet, there was a still, small voice that wouldn't go away; a quiet stirring that said, "This is what I've been preparing you for." I went through the interview process; still unsure, praying, doubting, asking a lot of questions. Over and over, God gently whispered that he was calling me to Hillcrest. In the middle of that discernment, a line from an old Gospel song kept looping in my mind: "Little is much when God is in it. Labor not for wealth or fame."

That lyric played like a soundtrack through my mind over and over again as

I wrestled through the decision. About a week into that wrestling, I woke up one morning and told my wife, Katie, "I'm going to take the job." Without hesitation, she said, "Good. I knew you would." God had been working on both of our hearts. It may not have made sense on paper, but it made perfect sense in the Kingdom.

As I lead Hillcrest into this next chapter, my heart is full of hope. I believe this school matters more now than ever. We are unapologetically Christ-centered, committed to Classical Christian Education, and passionate about forming students in faith, intellect, and character. In these times of great uncertainty—where young Christians are pulled in so many directions—we are forming young men and women who can walk into the culture with courage and conviction. Students who know Truth, love the Lord, and are prepared to serve wherever he leads them.

Hillcrest Lutheran Academy, as an auxiliary ministry of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, exists to come alongside the mission of your local church. The students you entrust to us are prayed over, challenged, taught, and loved with one clear goal: that they would be better equipped to live as disciples of Jesus and serve the local body of Christ. Whether they go on to college, ministry, business, or missions, we want their years at Hillcrest to give them deep roots and strong faith.

We're also leaning into greater partnership with our denomination's ministries. We want to walk even more closely with LBIM, LBS, and NAM as we help raise up the next generation of pastors, missionaries, and gospel-hearted lay leaders. My desire is that Hillcrest continues to be a place where students catch the heartbeat of God; not just for their own salvation, but for the nations, for their neighbors, and for the next generation. We're not just teaching students; by God's grace we're discipling



future leaders for the CLB and the world.

Do you know someone who could benefit from what Hillcrest offers? Maybe it's your son or daughter. Your grandchild. A niece, nephew, or a kid from your church. Maybe it's a neighbor or a student who's ready for something more. We meet a lot of families who are looking for a place where Jesus is at the center; where students are grounded in Truth and surrounded by people who care. Where they're challenged to grow, not just in what they know, but in who they're becoming. If someone comes to mind, would you point them our way?

Hillcrest Academy is a local school for PreK-12 and a boarding school for grades 9-12.



**Currently accepting applications for
the 2025-2026 school year.**

www.ffhillcrest.org

Erickson Ordained as Elder



Pictured back row (L-R): Elders Kurt Frustol, Rolf Ronnevik, Knut Ronnevik, Rev. Dale Hexum, and Rev. Forrest Erickson. Front row (L-R): Dr. Eugene Boe and Joel Erickson.

Joel Erickson was ordained as an elder on Sunday, April 27, 2025, at Good Shepherd Lutheran Brethren Church in Fergus Falls, MN. Dr. Eugene Boe officiated the service.

Schmid Installed as Pastor



Pastor Tony Schmid being prayed for by the elders and Rev. Jordan Spina.

Pastor Tony Schmid was installed as pastor and Fred Trappe as an elder on May 4, 2025, at Salem Lutheran Brethren Church in Grand Rapids, MN. Rev. Jordan Spina, Associate Director of North American Mission, officiated the service.

Bovia Ordained as Elder



Pictured (L-R): Elder Charles Strand, Rev. Mike Hussey, Jon Bovia Sr., Pastor Mars Harper, Elder Paul Carlson, and Elder Ken Roed.

Jonathan Bovia Sr. was ordained as an elder on June 1, 2025, at Bethel Lutheran Brethren Church in Antler, ND. Rev. Mike Hussey, vice-chair of the Western Region, officiated the service.

Nadgwick Commissioned



Pictured back row (L-R): Pastor Nick Olson, Elder Al Van Ravenswaay, Elder Jeff Mootz, Elder Jared Ronningen, Elder Andrew Rosen, Rev. Paul Lang (Beka's grandfather), and Elder Phil Lee. Front row: Rev. Brandon Pangman, Beka Nadgwick, and Rev. Jason Lang (Beka's father).

Beka Nadgwick, Youth and Worship Director at Word of Life Church, LeSueur, MN, was commissioned on May 18, 2025. Beka says, "I am so incredibly thankful for the opportunity and I am so blessed to be a part of Word of Life!" Rev. Brandon Pangman, Director of North American Mission, officiated the service.

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Let's do it again in 2026! 

EXPONENTIAL⁷

ORLANDO, FL
March 16-19, 2026

Exponential takes place in Orlando, FL, on the campus of First Baptist Orlando, bringing in incredible speakers for the main sessions and offering dozens of breakout sessions on almost any ministry and discipleship topic you can imagine.

120 CLB LEADERS!

In March, 100 CLB leaders attended Exponential!

North American Mission has already purchased 120 tickets to provide to church leaders at a discounted rate for next year's conference!

*More than half have already been claimed,
so contact us soon!*

GROW TOGETHER

- We will enjoy a dinner together on Tuesday evening and spend plenty of time connecting in the evenings to process together what we learned.

Join North American Mission and other CLB leaders in Florida to grow as disciple makers.

INTERESTED?

clbforge.org/exponential

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