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Brandon Pangman

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025



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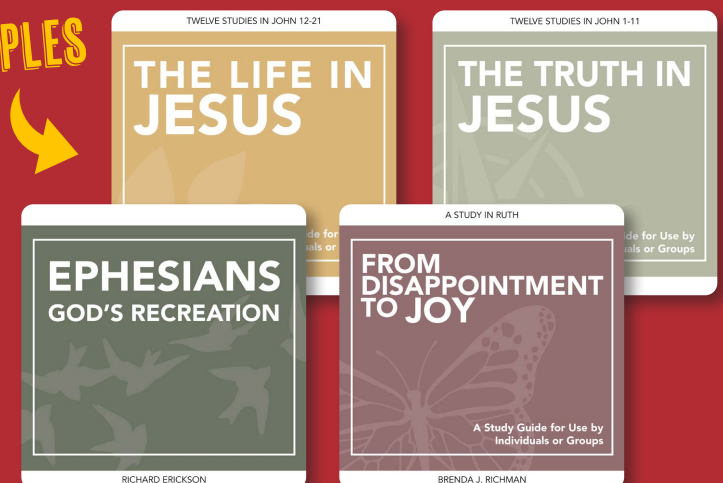
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Joining Jesus for 125 Years

TIM MATHIESEN

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free.”*

— Luke 4:18

Early on in Jesus’ ministry, he proclaimed these words of Luke 4:18, quoted from Isaiah. This was Jesus’ prophesied calling, his responsibility, and his mission. He would announce good news, proclaim freedom, give sight to the blind, and set the oppressed free—both literally and metaphorically.

Fast forward three years. At the end of his ministry on earth, Jesus invited his disciples into this mission by saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt 28:18-20a).

All authority was given to Jesus, and now he commissions us to join him! When you really think about it, it’s a little overwhelming, isn’t it? But, the same Spirit that Jesus mentioned in Luke is also with us today! Jesus said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

God’s Mission, that we are called to be a part of, is big, it’s risky, it can be dangerous, and it requires a lot of patience. But is there anything more important in life than the mission of the One who created us? While we spend our lives gathering possessions, experiences, and recognition in this world, God is on the move in the hearts and lives of those around us. He is using each of us to reach the world with the gospel. There is so much going on in this sinful, broken world that can consume us. So, how can

we possibly take on this commission that Jesus gave his Church nearly 2,000 years ago?

125 years ago, on December 17, 1900, five congregations gathered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and made the decision to form the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. While a part of the decision grew out of feeling isolated and alone, they also wanted to do together what they couldn’t do on their own: send missionaries and provide Christian education, and eventually plant churches. We are not alone. As the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, a disciple-making church, we have each other. We can plant churches, send missionaries, and prepare future church leaders, together!

But there’s so much more! The beautiful thing about Jesus’ commission is that there’s a promise attached to it: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:20b). We weren’t meant to do this on our own, and Jesus knows this. This isn’t one more thing on our task list—this mission permeates every area of our lives. It’s foundational to everything we do. As we work, as we play, as we care, as we teach, as we shop, as we cook, as we eat, and as we help, we can love others and share the gospel. As we live our lives, we watch for God’s work in those around us and boldly and lovingly share the gospel through our words and actions. All authority was given to Jesus to proclaim the good news, and he has invited us, his Church, to join him.

Planting churches comes naturally as part of our calling, and, as you’ll read in this issue, this is a really exciting time for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. Most

of us attend an established church in our community, so not many of us have had the opportunity to be part of a church plant. Over a decade ago, I had the privilege to be on the launch team for the planting of Bethel Lutheran Church’s campus in Battle Lake, Minnesota. It was a really exciting time as we did research, planned preview services, organized outreach events, trained volunteers, and prepared for launch Sunday on January 18, 2015. This was all done because we believed there were people in that community who needed to hear about Jesus.

Planting a church is really hard work and requires full commitment to God’s Mission, both with time and money, along with constant prayer. While there are many models of church planting, requiring different strategies and expectations, we can rest in the truth that there is only one God and one Mission—to worship God together and share the gospel with those who don’t know his love.

Please pray for North American Mission, as well as our church planters, as they carry out the Great Commission. And surely, Jesus will be with us, to the very end of the age.



Tim Mathiesen is the Director of Communications for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren in Fergus Falls, MN.



BRANDON PANGMAN

Church Planter Carl Juhl (right), speaking during the building dedication for Lincoln Church & Community Center, and Rev. Brandon Pangman (left).

I get asked questions about church planting all the time! (And I love it!) Questions like: How do you decide where to plant? Why don't we just focus on making our current churches healthier? Why do we spend so much money on planting? Why is planting so hard? Do you have to be a pastor to plant?

However, the question I get asked the most is, "Why do we plant churches?"

The answer is simple: Because we are called to. It's right there in the Great Commission, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples..." Jesus not only tells us to go make disciples, but he tells us that he is commanding us to do so with all of his authority. We see the early Church take this very seriously. They become dispersed because of persecution, but as they go out, they share the gospel. They see people come to faith. Then the early church leaders organize churches, bringing biblical structure and guidelines to the gatherings.

The command to go and make disciples hasn't come to an end. Today we are called to "Go" and reach people with the gospel.

One of the most influential pastors of my time, Timothy Keller, states, "The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial

strategy for numerical growth of the body of Christ."¹

I believe there are two reasons for this. First, church plants are designed around the disciple-making movement. A church plant starts with a few people or a few families, and the intention is to reach lost people. Church plants are designed around the concept of getting involved with the lives of those around you, just as Jesus did in the New Testament.

This leads to the second reason. Church plants usually have a time clock working against them. They are more likely to run out of funds before an established church would. New church plants are in "grow or die" mode. This is actually a good thing because it keeps the church focused on the mission of reaching lost people for Jesus!

Timothy Keller agrees with this, and he states, "The average new church gains most of its new members (60-80%) from the ranks of people who are not attending any worshipping body, while churches over 10-15 years of age gain 80-90% of new members by transfer from other congregations."² (We should talk about this more, but that will need to be another article!) The statistics show that church planting is effective at reaching those not already connected with local congregations.

There is another positive side effect of church planting for the CLB. It brings us back to our roots. In 1900, five churches came together to do something they couldn't do on their own: Send out a missionary. The CLB was birthed out of a desire to partner in mission. Today, over 120 churches from across Canada and the United States partner in mission. We join in mission to send out missionaries to unreached people groups, to raise up young people in faith, to train pastors, and, of course, to plant churches. Planting churches today is reaching the unreached.

North American Mission is asking you to join us in praying for our church planting mission. "Then he [Jesus] said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field'" (Matt 9:37-38).

Speaking about sending out workers into the harvest field, here are a couple of ways that the Lord is working in the CLB. Our Redeemer's in Minot, North Dakota, just launched a church plant 20 minutes away in Velva, ND. Pastor Ed Nugent said that there was a group of people from Velva who had been driving to Minot to worship and that they had been talking with leadership about planting a church. This very motivated group of 20 or so

Building Dedication

Lincoln, ND



Pictured (clockwise from top): 1) The new building for Lincoln Church. 2) Dedication ceremony. 3) Lunch following the worship service.

On September 13, 2025, a building dedication ceremony was held for Lincoln Church & Community Center's newly renovated building in Lincoln, ND. Involved in the ceremony were the pastors who are part of the Initial Leadership Team: Rev. Pete Pederson (Our Redeemer's Church, Minot, ND), Rev. Ryan Nordlund (Grace Church, Bismarck, ND), Rev. Ron Erickson (LB Fellowship, Williston, ND), and Rev. Scott Skones (Living Word Fellowship, Dickinson, ND). Rev. Brandon Pangman, Director of North American Mission for the CLB, officiated the ceremony. LaWayne Rogness, Director of Finance and Personnel for the CLB, shared as well.

found a place to host worship in Velva, sent word out around town, and launched a church. They have held several Sunday evening services with 70-80 people in attendance. Pastor Ed said that they were thinking of calling a pastor in the future, but things are moving in such a way that they are praying about doing this soon.

We are also excited that, from October 20-22, Jordan Spina (Associate Director of North American Mission) and I will be traveling with two potential church planters to Washington D.C. for church planting assessment. One of these pastors has completed the nine-month Passion for Planting intensive cohort, and the other is in the class currently. This is a very important next step for each of these men as the assessment will teach us how to build teams around them.

The CLB now has seven church plants in North America and we have two more on the horizon. NAM has also held discussions with a number of other churches looking to plant new churches and additional campuses!

Would you please pray with me?

Lord, we pray that you would lead our CLB churches and NAM in planting more churches. Lord, lead us to where you want us to go and help us to engage this world so that people might come to accept you as Lord and Savior. Lord, as you call workers into your fields, we pray for you to equip and gift them to gather people, disciple those around them, and speak your truth into the lives of those who don't yet know you.

Brandon Pangman is the Director of North American Mission for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren in Fergus Falls, MN.

¹ <https://redeemercitytocity.com/articles-stories/why-plant-churches>

² Ibid.

Preparing Our Church Planters



PASSION4 PLANTING™

Learn more: church-planting.net

The Church of the Lutheran Brethren has chosen Passion for Planting as the organization that will prepare and train our church planters. This intense program meets online once a week for six hours over nine months and includes required reading and assignments. Along with training, the program requires three trips to Washington D.C. for in-person classwork, church plant visits, and presentations.

Their Mission

Passion for Planting exists to equip church planting leaders to plant healthy, reproducing churches.

Their Story

We are a non-profit, church-planting support ministry started by a group of church planters from New Life Christian Church. New Life was started as a church-planting church, and, through God's blessing, we have helped start many more reproducing churches. In 2002, our vision was to help start one new church every year and to be actively working with at least four church planters at any given time. And now, through God's blessing, we've helped start over 300 churches and we've indirectly supported numerous other church plants worldwide. Passion for Planting is an outgrowth of our local church experience and our passion to help start healthy, reproducing churches.

Testimonial: Paul Fauquet (Rock of Ages Church, Seattle, WA)

"While LBS trains theologically, pastorally, and missionally, Passion for Planting provided a tangible, step-by-step framework for turning that mission into reality. Throughout the residency, we heard directly from experienced church planters and learned from their firsthand stories. We were also equipped with practical tools, insights, and systems to navigate every stage of the church planting process. Over the 40-week residency, I worked alongside a cohort of leaders who shared the same passion to see new churches established. I'm deeply grateful for all I learned and experienced through this transformative training."



Cleveland, OH.

“Do You Think You Might Be A Church Planter?”

DAVID MARTIN

A couple of years back, I had the opportunity to visit with CLB President Paul Larson when he and his wife Bee came to visit us at Pilgrim LB Church, Mentor, Ohio. As we discussed God’s calling on my life, I remember him asking me, “Do you think you might be a church planter?” I had never planted a church, so I didn’t know how to answer him. But the more I thought about it, the more I thought, “Maybe I am.” I started to think about what that might look like. My spiritual gifts cause me to be what many would refer to as a “dreamer.” My poor wife Amy regularly hears, “Hear me out...” as I lay out sometimes outlandish possibilities of how God might lead us to potentially plant a church (or churches—don’t tell Amy).

In Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria...

Coming out of the COVID-19 shutdown, I had the privilege of leading the “restart” of our Missions Team. We found ourselves guided by three scriptures. The first being Acts 1:8 (ESV), “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses

in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” We took this to be God’s call on us to minister both financially and physically to the people in our community in the suburb of Mentor, in our county, in the greater Cleveland area, nationally, *and* internationally. I believe it is through this work that God grew my heart for “not-yet-believers” outside of our congregation.

Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you...

The second scripture God used to lead us was Jeremiah 29:7, “Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” It’s no secret that the city of Cleveland doesn’t have the best reputation. Once the home of millionaire industrialists like John D. Rockefeller, Cleveland is part of the “rust belt,” sometimes referred to as “the Mistake by the Lake,” and is infamously known for its Cuyahoga River catching fire in 1969 due to industrial pollution.

But that was then, and this is now. We are making a comeback. Today, Cleveland

is thriving because of a reasonable cost of living, world-class hospitals, and a thriving cultural scene that includes museums, orchestra, chefs, and Metro Parks. Add to all this a surging economy, and there is no question that the prosperity of the City of Cleveland has a direct effect on the suburb in which our church, Pilgrim LBC, is found.

As you are going...

The third scripture God used to guide the Missions Team was The Great Commission. Matthew 28:19 is translated in almost all our English Bibles as “Go therefore and make disciples...” But the original Greek construction of the sentence is: “As you go, make disciples...”

From its earliest incarnation, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren has been a “sending” Church. It was one of the things that drew me to become a member of Pilgrim LB Church. Growing up, I thought of “missions” as work done somewhere else by someone else. However, God used now retired LBS Missiology professor Dr. Gaylan Mathiesen to open my eyes to the fact that the United States is now considered the third largest mission field,



Dave and Amy Martin.

behind China and India, based on the size of our non-Christian population. Through his teaching and example, I got to experience how we can minister to lost people in our own cities here in the United States, even in Cleveland. I began to realize that Jesus was talking to me when he said, “you.” But then the question is, “Wherefore is the ‘therefore’ he wants me to go?” Amy and I agreed that we were being called, but we didn’t sense God calling us away.

Go your way; behold, I am sending you...

Through Brandon Pangman, our Lutheran Brethren North American Mission Director, I have begun an intensive nine-month church planter training with an organization called Passion for Planting. This training includes not only knowledge but also tools and resources necessary to successfully plant a church. This includes guidance on where to plant. In Luke 10:1-12, Jesus gives his disciples instructions on what to do and what to look for as he sends them out into the harvest field. He tells them to look for “someone who promotes peace,” and if they find such a person, they should stay in that place. This week, based on a demographic study, I went looking for these “persons of peace.” I identified four different gathering places in the area. Before entering, I prayed that God would show me a sign if this was where he was calling us to. I am happy to report, I was greeted by “persons of peace” in every case!

The heart of a man plans his way...

For some people, the word “plan” is a four-letter word (technically, it is for everyone, but you know what I mean). Benjamin Franklin said, “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” The truth is, plans rarely work out, but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t plan. Instead, this is why we make contingency plans. Author and motivational speaker Claire Cook reassures us, “If plan A doesn’t work out, the alphabet has 25 more letters—204 if you’re in Japan.” This probably best explains Solomon’s thoughts in Proverbs 16:9 (ESV), “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.” As I begin this journey of becoming a church planter, I will gladly share what plans I have at that given moment, but don’t be surprised when my plans change. I will also tell where God is establishing my steps, what doors he has closed, what doors he has opened, and where I have found “persons of peace.” There I have confidence, because God has promised that he will establish his Church!

David Martin is Associate Pastor at Pilgrim Lutheran Brethren Church in Mentor, OH.



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The Impact of a Church Plant

EVAN LANGLOIS



The ACTS Team helping Grace Community with an outreach event.

Throughout Scripture, we see people who feel like they aren't qualified to do great things. From Moses, to King David, to Mary, each of them wondered, "Who am I, Lord?" that God would work through them. In each of these cases, and many more besides, God raised them up for something that was far greater than what they were able to do on their own. There is no doubt that many who serve in ministry feel the same. At times, it feels almost insurmountable as we think of ourselves and what "we" could possibly accomplish for the sake of his Kingdom! I have felt this in pastoral ministry, and have felt this all the more as our church, Praise Christian Fellowship of Barkhamsted, Connecticut, has been part of supporting Grace Hill in Boston, Massachusetts. Lord, who am I? Who are we?

The Word answers this question well. God answers us, saying, "You are mine." Because we are his, Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:24, ESV, "He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it." The Lord will care for his Church. He has always been faithful and continues to be faithful.

We have seen this as a local church. Though planting a new church in a major city seems like something that is too big for

us, God is faithful. Through committing to pray for, serve, and give to this ministry, God has encouraged the hearts of people within our congregation that he is at work. More than that, God has shown us that he will even use us to be part of this bigger mission.

This past August, our ACTS Team (Actively Caring Through Service) arranged a bus trip for our church to travel to Boston and help with an outreach event at a public park in the area where Pastor Kristian and Mary Anderson are ministering. I watched as our church members helped run games for kids at the park, served food, and even went out on canvassing walks to share information about Grace Hill. In debriefing with our team when we returned, they had a new appreciation for the work being done. They saw the neighborhood that Grace Hill is seeking to minister to. They met and talked to the Grace Hill team members that they are praying for. The ministry of Grace Hill became real to them, and it was a galvanizing time for our church to take real ownership of Grace Hill as their church and to see that God will work through even our small efforts for his sake!

Though there have been benefits for our congregation overall, coming alongside

the church plant has benefitted Praise's leadership as well. Planting a church and running an established church are vastly different. As part of our Initial Leadership Team (ILT) for Grace Hill, I have had the opportunity to work with a coach who has given our ILT many useful tools to help us plan and execute the ministry in Boston. From team dynamics to developing strategy, what we have learned with our coach has been helpful as we have worked together with Pastor Kristian and Mary in our desire to see a thriving church.

These lessons have also translated to our elder team for our ministry at Praise. Our eyes have been opened to the benefit of working with a coach to help navigate the challenges of growth that we're experiencing in our own congregation. One insight that has been particularly helpful with our elder board at Praise is our understanding of personality profiles among our board and among our ministry leaders. With tools that I learned from our coach, we have taken time to identify our elder team's giftings and skills more closely to see where we have strengths and where we could also use help as God continues to bring growth. This has caused us to focus on praying that God would raise up more leaders to guide his church here at Praise as we continue to grow.

More than that, we have been reminded (yet again) that though we can learn new skills, gain insight, and come up with strategies that will benefit us in ministry, ultimately, God will grow his church. It is so easy to rest on our own abilities in leadership. But it has been a helpful reminder for our leadership that this church is not ours; it is his alone. And he will build it!

Working with Grace Hill has shown our church that God will use us, insignificant as we think we might be, for his glory, both in Boston, MA, and in Barkhamsted, CT. He is doing a work in and among our people here at Praise and at Grace Hill. He has shown us that he, indeed, is faithful, and that when we rest in him, "he will surely do it."



Evan Langlois is pastor at Praise Christian Fellowship in Barkhamsted, CT.

Difficult, Yet Rewarding

RYAN NORDLUND



Church Planter Carl Juhl teaching the Bible lesson at Kids Club.



Students playing a game at Kids Club.

When we began talks and prayers for beginning a new work for the Kingdom of God, we didn't have any idea what some of the unintended positive consequences might be. Little did we know (but should have) that God would do more than we ask or imagine. All we thought we were doing was trying to start a new church so that the gospel would be advanced in Lincoln, North Dakota. Through this effort, many of our Grace LB Church members and attenders have served and volunteered in ways they never have before.

We began the church by means of a Kids Club. Every Wednesday evening, we gathered in the Lincoln Elementary School gym for a night of activities and a Bible lesson. And for 10 years (yes, you read that correctly—10 years!) we had volunteers from Grace serving as game leaders, craft supervisors, snack providers, and Bible teachers. Many of these volunteers spoke of how much fun they had—many of them serving year after year. And when I say many, I believe that Grace had around 50 people give of their time to make this church plant happen.

Aside from the amazing privilege of teaching the gospel to hundreds of kids over the years, one of the effects of being

a part of this work has been how the hearts of so many Grace people have been changed. Lincoln Church and Community Center would not have happened without God using each and every one of them for his wonderful purpose. After a crazy Kids Club night, I would hear them tell stories of how one of the kids asked them a question about the lesson, and they got the privilege of further explaining what was taught.

Perhaps the best positive consequence was two individuals and one couple from Grace making the sacrificial decision to leave the church they had been very active members of for years, devoting themselves as local missionaries to the people of Lincoln. Seeing how God has worked in their lives has been awe inspiring.

I recently got a chance to sit and talk to the couple. They told me how difficult it was leaving their church, and with that, the people to whom they had grown quite close. There was much that they had to give up, now being at a church in its infancy rather than an established church. Through this, they have been stretched and have grown in their faith more than they ever thought. And, though hard, it has been the most rewarding endeavor they have ever been involved in.

As I sat there with this dynamic duo (who

would never want their names mentioned), I praised our Lord. Only our Savior could do this. Only he could take regular people and give them the desire to do a work like this. And it reminded me that if God so wills something to happen, he will raise up and equip the people necessary to get it done.

And our work isn't done yet. We have already started another fund that we call *Grace For Tomorrow*. We are still in the very early planning stages of what this will look like, but in starting one church, and seeing it actually happen, we are excited to see how God might use the regular people of Grace yet one more time.



Ryan Nordlund is pastor at Grace Lutheran Brethren Church in Bismarck, ND.

BIENNIAL CONVENTION

JUNE 13-16, 2026

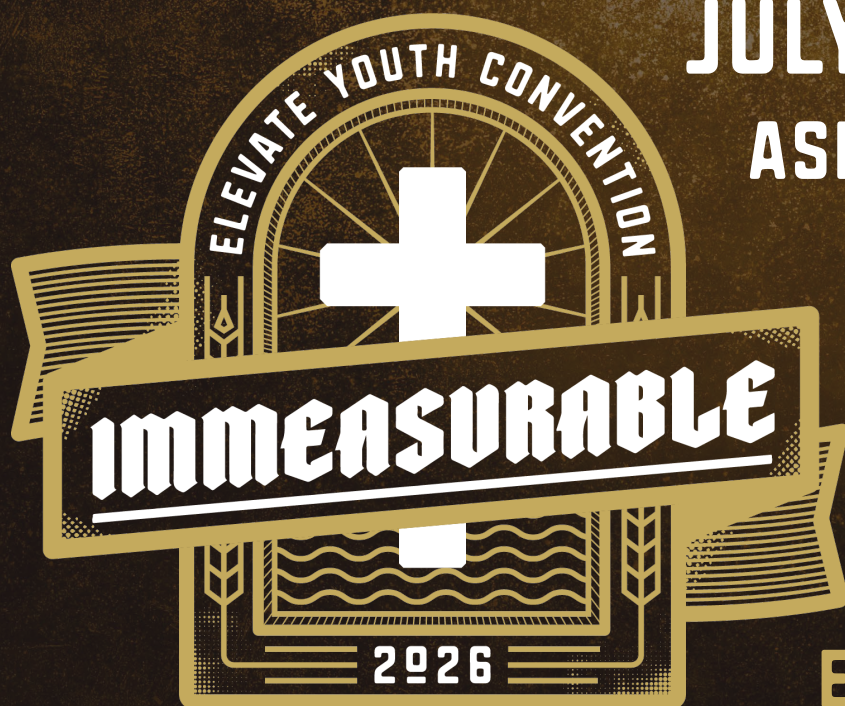
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Presidential Nominees

Voting for the CLB president will take place at the 2026 Biennial Convention (June 13-16, 2026).

With gratitude to the Lord of the Church for his provision and trusting his leading for the future of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, it is my privilege to inform you that we have two nominees to be presented to the 2026 Biennial Convention for the office of CLB President. Rev. Michael Edwards (Good News LBC, McAlisterville, PA) and

Rev. Mark Nienow (True Life Church, Rochester, MN) have been put forward by the Council of Directors and have graciously agreed to be nominated.

Join us as we pray for the Lord's leading and will for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren in this process. Please also be in prayer for the nominees, their families, and their churches as they wait on the Lord's direction through the call

of his Church. May all we do be for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ in service to his kingdom.

On behalf of the CLB Council of Directors,

Jeff Kleveland

Chair, Council of Directors of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren

Michael Edwards



Born and baptized as an infant in Kansas, I was raised by Christian parents in rural McAlisterville, Pennsylvania, where my father served as a Lutheran pastor. My introduction to the Church of the Lutheran Brethren was by way of annual summer camps at Tuscarora Inn & Conference Center. While pursuing a Biblical Studies degree at Messiah University (Pennsylvania), I married my high-school sweetheart Christy in 1991. Shortly thereafter, I took employment with Waldenbooks/Borders Books and Music which resulted in a 20-year career; the first 13 years in store and multi-store management, at one point overseeing 30+ retail locations in New England and metro New York City, followed by seven years in corporate human resources, supporting and counseling operational vice-presidents and 300+ retail locations nationwide. In 2004, my wife, children, and I moved back to McAlisterville where we found Good News Lutheran Brethren Church and I was called to be an elder. In 2011, I was called to pastor Good News LBC and was ordained in 2022, following further studies at Moody Bible Institute and Lutheran Brethren Seminary. I have served on various sub-committees of the CLB Eastern Region, and as Vice-chair of the Region's Executive Board since 2021.

Our son Gabriel, his wife Leilynn, and their daughter Anastasia reside in Lititz, PA, and are members of Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church (LCMS). Our daughter Margaret resides in Mifflintown, PA, is a member of Good News LBC, and is engaged to be married.

It is an honor to be considered for this office. The Lord has been very kind to me. May God's will be done!

Mark Nienow



My name is Mark Nienow and I am currently serving as a pastor of True Life Church in Rochester, Minnesota. My wife Andreia and I have been married for 28 years and we have two sons, Luke and Caleb. Luke recently graduated from the University of Northwestern, St. Paul, MN, and will be married in December. Caleb is a student at the Free Lutheran Bible College in Plymouth, MN.

I began reading the Bible during my freshman year of college, and it has had a profound impact on my life and faith. Following graduation, I received intensive training in youth ministry from Tentmakers and served a church in the Chicago, Illinois, area in two roles. The first was as a youth director and later as the Director of Discipleship Training. It was through this position that I recognized my need for further training and began my journey to the CLB. I graduated from Lutheran Brethren Seminary in 2007 and have served at True Life since, first as an associate pastor with Pastor David Rinden, and then as the Lead Pastor since 2012.

I have served as secretary for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren Council of Directors since 2016. I have enjoyed being part of the Council of Directors for our family of churches and have sought to bring the voice of our congregations and pastors to the Council as we continue to pursue being a disciple-making Church. I enjoy spending time with family as well as being a "car guy" and long-suffering Vikings fan.

Fall 2025 Incoming Students

Jordan Lakoduk
Minot, ND



I am from Minot, North Dakota. My wife Julia and I have been married eleven years and are members of Our Redeemer's Lutheran Brethren Church. I attended Minot State University for Computer Science and finished with a dual major in Management Information Systems and Marketing; post-graduation I managed an IT department for a non-profit for nearly twelve years. We moved to Fergus Falls, Minnesota, in early June. Since then, Julia started a business called Otter Speech Therapy, providing pediatric speech language services to the Fergus Falls area. I started my Certificate in Theological Studies with an emphasis in missions this Fall, full-time and in-person. My wife and I went on the LBIM vision trip to Taiwan last summer and had a wonderful time learning about missions and culture in Taiwan. We helped with a week-long VBS, stayed with several host families, and ultimately found that missions could likely be a great fit for us. We had felt God had something different in store for us, but we weren't quite sure what that was. We agree that we didn't make any decisions to end up in Fergus Falls, rather, it's been a series of doors that opened and others that closed.

Mark Poore
Bottineau, ND



I grew up in Lakewood, Colorado, attending Community in Christ, the Lutheran Brethren church in Arvada. My dad, Bill Poore, was the worship leader there up until 2014 when he accepted the call to be the pastor of Yellowstone LBC in Billings, Montana, after completing seminary courses. I finished my high school career in Billings and moved to Butte, MT, for my Bachelor of Science in

Metallurgical and Materials Engineering at Montana Tech, which I finished in Spring 2023.

Over those summers between semesters, I worked at Inspiration Point Bible Camp and felt God calling me into ministry. I served as a servant leader in Chi Alpha campus ministries during my time at Montana Tech, and realized I enjoyed working with people and spreading the gospel more than grinding the same metallurgical equations over and over. I received a call to serve as the Youth Director for Grace LBC in Bottineau, North Dakota, during the summer of 2023. After much prayer, I accepted the position and have been working here as Youth Director since September of 2023.

I am only taking three classes in the Master of Divinity track to get started this semester so I can figure out the balance of youth group, seminary, and helping out around the church. My intention is to attend this first year remotely from Bottineau, but I hope to move to Fergus Falls sometime soon and complete the rest of the program in person. Once I complete my degree, I'll officially become the third pastor in my family, right after my dad and my grandfather, Luther Larson. I love playing disc golf, board games, video games, fishing, and cooking.

Mason Shaw
Fargo, ND



I grew up in Hendricks, Minnesota, which is about 30 miles northeast of Brookings, South Dakota. I originally went to Lake Area Technical College (LATC) for welding, but God had other plans for me! The summer after I graduated from LATC, I came up to a Christian camp called Inspiration Point! After my first summer at camp, I moved to Fargo, ND, to work at Triumph West LBC. I was a youth leader there, and when

I wasn't working at the church, I was at the New Life Center, a drug rehab facility and homeless shelter. A year after living in Fargo, I worked my second summer at camp and also accepted the call to work at Inspiration Point full-time following the summer. With the eye-opening experiences God presented to me in these vocations, I felt a pull towards pastoral ministry, and with further encouragement from friends and family, I decided to pursue it! I am now attending seminary while being a newlywed and interning/volunteering at Triumph West.

Dominic Wiese
DeWitt, IA



I grew up a Christian my whole life, going to church every Sunday, and participating in Sunday school and youth events. I've been attending Emmaus Road Church in DeWitt, Iowa, for around 15 years, and I've been a part of our worship team there for about 14 years.

The seed to pursue becoming a pastor was planted when I was around 16 by Pastor Jason Lang, and I brushed it off and didn't answer the call for a while. I pursued a degree in cyber security but quickly found my passion for that died very early on. For a little while, I stepped away from my faith, not on purpose, but just distracted chasing the wrong things in my late teens and early twenties. I came back home to ERC and found my faith becoming stronger than it ever was with the guidance of the pastors there and other mentors. After my father passed away in December last year, I felt the call again, but this time it was much firmer than before. I decided to answer the call to enter seminary with the goal of becoming a pastor, to continue to share the music I love so much, but also to share the great news of God's love for us, his sacrifice, and his promises to us.

Marlon Webb
Browns Mills, NJ



I have lived in New Jersey for all my life with the exception of living in Rhode Island for undergraduate at Johnson & Wales University where I studied Business. I studied at Liberty University and Virginia University of Lynchburg for graduate courses. I have served as a police officer/detective for the past 23 years. I have served in the Army National Guard and Army Reserve for the past 16 years. I have been serving in ministry for the past 16 years and as an interim pastor at Messiah LBC, Browns Mills, NJ, for the past two years. I am married and father to 14 children and 22 grandchildren (one great-grandchild). My hobbies include being a fan of the life activities of my children and grandchildren, and volleyball. I am pursuing a Master of Divinity. I'm excited to be studying with my fellow students.

Jacob Zacha
Fergus Falls, MN



I studied Social Studies Education at Minnesota State University Moorhead and went on to teach 8th grade geography in Fergus Falls for two years before sensing God's call to full-time ministry.

My wife Brita grew up in Fergus Falls, and with her family nearby and a teaching job opening, moving to Fergus Falls was a no-brainer. Since then, we've been blessed by the community around us. I am currently serving as an intern at Dalton Free Lutheran Parish. It has been such a blessing to be part of a church family that supports and encourages me as I walk through seminary.

I grew up in the church, but stepped away from the faith for a time. During college, I rededicated my life to Christ. Ever since making that decision I have been on fire for him, wanting to serve wherever he leads. This calling led me to

pursue a Master of Divinity at Lutheran Brethren Seminary, where I am excited to see how God will continue shaping me for ministry.

In my free time, I enjoy fishing, hiking, and kayaking, as well as sports like basketball and pickleball. I also love board games, reading, and even running a steam engine at the Dalton Thresherman's Show. I'm open to just about anything that comes my way. God Bless!



Fall Conference 2025

Stream the sessions now!

A.A. Pedersen Lectureship



**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.

Speaker:

Dr. Ryan Tinetti



Continuing Education



**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, why there is still tremendous hope in the midst of this crisis.

Speaker:

Pastor Jim Davis





Meet the Waldie Family

DAN VENBERG

Todd & Leah Waldie and their children (L-R) Nathaniel, Jeriah, Peter, and Gabriella.

Met the Waldie family, LBIM's most recent missionaries called to Chad! Todd and Leah have four children (Gabriella, Nathaniel, Jeriah, and Peter) and currently live in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, where they are members of Bethesda Lutheran Brethren Church. Todd attended the Association Free Lutheran Bible School for two years following high school and then pursued a Certificate of Theological Studies in Youth Ministry through Lutheran Brethren Seminary, followed by a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies through Faith Evangelical Seminary. Todd has a diverse vocational experience, including youth ministry, truck driving, and machine operator.

Leah has Bachelor of Science degrees in psychology and biology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has extensive experience in administrative and managerial positions in the education and healthcare fields.

Todd and Leah have found themselves increasingly drawn into a calling to serve as missionaries with LBIM. This sense of calling has developed out of a shared desire and openness to serve the Lord wherever they can be used, and has been affirmed through the encouragement of friends and fellow members of Bethesda LBC. When they heard of Lutheran Brethren

International Mission's need to call a new family to manage the Lutheran Welcome Center in N'djamena, Todd and Leah felt that familiar stirring of a call, which was again affirmed by their local church.

In the Fall of 2024, the Waldie family traveled to Chad and spent two weeks with Jeremy and Sallee Stanton, familiarizing themselves not only with life in Chad, but to the daily workings of the Welcome Center. Upon their return, they affirmed with LBIM Director Venberg their desire to continue as candidates for service with LBIM-Chad.

In April of 2025, the Council of Directors of the CLB formally offered the call to Todd and Leah to serve with LBIM, a call they promptly accepted. They were scheduled to complete some additional pre-field training in May, but due to a knee injury to their son Nathaniel, and subsequent surgery and recovery, their timetable was delayed. They started on LBIM support in mid-August, attended a month-long pre-field training in Colorado that focused on language acquisition and cross-cultural adaptation, and are now back in Eau Claire. They will spend the last months of 2025 focusing on learning French, applying for French visas, and auditing some additional LBS coursework. They will deploy to France in December and start a year of full-time French

language study at a school in Albertville (Western France) dedicated to teaching French to missionaries sent to the French speaking world. Once their French training is complete, the Waldies will deploy to Chad and begin the transition to their role of managing the Welcome Center. This is a vital administrative and support role for our Chad field. The Welcome Center is a guest house and conference center, used by both LBIM field missionaries and other mission and church organizations serving in Chad. Furthermore, as managers of this Center, the Waldies will provide logistical and administrative support to our field missionaries, manage the finances of the LBIM-Chad operating budget, and serve in a liaison role between LBIM field missionaries and national government offices, ensuring that all necessary and required paperwork is kept up to date.

Thank you for your prayers and support for the Waldie family in these next steps. This is a major transition for their family. Their commitment to this call is even more significant in light of the current uncertainty of the Chad visa situation (see back page of the printed November Daily Prayer Notes). May the Lord bless them as they take these steps of faith to serve in our Lord's mission among the nations.

Hands to the Plow: A welcome resource for our African Lutheran Brethren Ministers of the Gospel

LBIM is excited to share the news of the recently completed and printed resource entitled *Les mains à la charrue! (Hands to the Plow!)*.

This book is the fruit of a collaborative effort by LBIM missionary Reverend Dr. Paul Szobody (primary editor), Reverend Dr. Eugene Boe (sponsor), Pastor Elroy Vesta (printer), LBIM missionary Matthias Szobody (illustrator), and others who helped along the way. 1,000 copies have been printed, and LBIM will assist in shipping these books to Chad and subsequently distributing them at a subsidized cost to our Chadian and Cameroonian colleagues in ministry.

Following is the introduction to the book, written by Dr. Szobody:

Herein are some documents considered essential for workers in Lutheran churches in French-speaking Africa.

At a conference in Chad for the continuing education of church workers, one of the speakers, Dr. Eugene Boe, a professor of Systematic Theology in the United States, quickly recognized the need for a manual of confessional texts, something practical for all workers—pastors, catechists, elders, etc.

Dr. Boe proposed that we gather together certain important and fundamental confessions for the ministry of the local church. After targeting certain texts, it was decided to also add a practical explanation of the Christian calendar year, showing its usefulness in the liturgical and pedagogical life of the Church. We want this manual to be useful to everyone, including missions and the most remote parishes in the bush. We are especially targeting workers with few sources and little education in French or theology. We translated several documents (the first part of the manual) into easy-to-understand French, based on what is heard among ordinary people in Chad. Our model was the dynamic language used in the Word of Life Bible translation, an ecumenical translation project in West Africa. We sincerely thank Dr. Boe for



Pictured (L-R): Dan Venberg, Elroy Vesta, Matthias Szobody, Gudrun and Eugene Boe.



Pictured (L-R): Paul Szobody, Potifar Souina, and Eugene Boe.



Eugene Boe and Paul Szobody teaching at the training in Chad.

proposing this project and for assisting in its implementation. Lutheran church workers in Africa owe him a great deal.

For the first part of this Manual (chs. 1-4 and the Glossary), we thank the readers in N'djamena, those who worked to correct the texts and suggest expressions that were better understood locally.

Furthermore, I am extremely grateful for the availability and work of Dr. Ambroise Téko for his valuable contribution with his final readings and corrections.

For the second part of the Manual (chs. 5-6), in Middle French, we thank The Lutheran Heritage Foundation (USA) for granting us the rights to print certain works by the late Dr. Wilbert Kreiss, works lovingly created for French-speaking missions in Africa.

Finally, we express our great appreciation for the drawings of Matthias Szobody.

Paul Szobody, Ph.D. in Theology

On behalf of LBIM, I want to add my expression of gratitude to Dr. Szobody, Dr. Boe, Pastor Vesta, Matthias Szobody, and all who helped this vision become a reality. I am grateful and full of anticipation as to how this resource, placed in the hands of our fellow ministers of the gospel in Francophone Africa, will serve the advancement of the gospel in that region, for the glory of our LORD. Thank you, Church of the Lutheran Brethren, for your prayers and support of the global disciple-making mission that we hold dear.



Dan Venberg is the Director of Lutheran Brethren International Mission in Fergus Falls, MN.



Our Plans vs. God's Plans

KRISTIAN ANDERSON



Grace Hill's first preview worship service on October 19.

This past June, our Grace Hill team began planning for public worship services. In East Boston, buildings with enough public space to host a service are few and far between.

One prospect was the school where Mary teaches and I volunteer. We've established good, deep relationships there. I asked the administration if this was a possibility and was given the green light. We started working through Boston Public Schools' red tape to prepare for preview services this fall. We hosted an August park evangelism day and canvassed our neighborhood, distributing over 400 flyers with a link to information saying our first service would be at the school in September. Nine days before the service, our final approval was denied, with no reason given. Puzzled and confused, we sought out answers. Maybe it was a simple problem like a one-time scheduling conflict, an issue with our requested timeframe, or custodial complications. Whatever the problem, we wanted to solve it. Soon enough, we got our answer: they just didn't want a church meeting there. Rejection hurts. Especially from those with whom you've established real relationships.

We were just a little over a week out, and I felt completely dejected. What were

we going to do? How would I explain this to everyone? Where were we going to meet? In that moment, God reminded me of something. The reason why we were rejected is the very reason we are here in the first place. We came to Boston to make disciples despite knowing how hard the soil is. This is par for the course. This was Friday.

Monday morning I started pounding the pavement, scouring our neighborhood for whatever might work. My initial criteria had been thrown out the window; I was willing to try anything. A friend told me there was a local yacht club with a banquet hall they used to rent for their staff Christmas parties, but it became too expensive. Well, I reached out to them anyway. Two days later, I got a phone call back from a woman named Mia. I shared with her that we're a church looking for a place to hold our services, initially for some preview services, but on a weekly basis after that. I asked if they'd be open to renting to us for that continual timeframe. Her response: "I love this idea. I really want this to work. I have to talk to my board, but I think this could be a really positive thing." Two thoughts rushed into my mind: One, Praise God! Two, I don't even know what the space looks like, or

what it costs.

I asked Mia if I could come and take a look at the space. She said she was currently there and asked if I was local. I said, "Yes, I live in Orient Heights." She said, "I do, too." I said, "I live on Leyden Street." She said, "I do, too!" I said, "I live at 30 Leyden." She said, "I live at 108." Unbelievable. I told her I'd be over in a few minutes to see the space.

I got off the phone and updated Mary, and it suddenly dawned on us why 108 sounded familiar. On our park evangelism day, we sent out teams to canvas blocks around our neighborhood. The Leyden street group met a woman named Cynthia at 108. They shared about Grace Hill and she said she was looking for a church!

When I got to the yacht club, I shook Mia's hand and said, "I have a weird question for you. Is your mom's name Cynthia?" She said, "Yes!" I told her that we'd already invited her mom to our worship services! She couldn't believe it. Her father also serves on the yacht club board and would be in on final decisions. As I toured the space, I couldn't believe how beautiful it was. This could work for us in so many ways. I still had two lingering questions: Could we rent weekly, and what would it cost? Mia told me she'd talk to



The yacht club where Grace Hill will meet for worship.

the board. She called me within the week with the news that they're comfortable renting to us for our preview services and are willing to sign a 3-month contract when we want to start weekly. They're also charging us about half of their normal fee!

It's our nature to always want to know why things happen, though it can be hard to discern. Here, it's clear that God had planned something even better for us.

We're praising God for our very first public preview service, which was held on October 19. One of the neighbors of a Grace Hill member, who had not been in a worship service for decades, commented: "It was beautiful. I learned some things I had never heard before about Jesus. I'm going to try and move my schedule around so I can be at the next one. I have a co-worker who I think would appreciate this. I'm going to invite him."

That is why we are here!

Our second preview service is on November 9.

I had a chance to share the gospel with Mia as we signed paperwork and ate a burger in the yacht club restaurant. She and her mom are planning to attend our next service, too. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!



Kristian & Mary Anderson are planting Grace Hill Community Church in Boston, MA.

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Grace for Boston

MARY ANDERSON

Several years ago, my husband and I accepted a call from the three New England Lutheran Brethren churches to move to Boston to plant a new church. This is a pretty unique call, as it's issued from a collaboration of LB churches working together to send a planter to a location that is very unreached. We are close enough to our sending churches that visits are possible, but not close enough to have members of those congregations attend weekly events in Boston.

We've spent the last three years tilling new ground here—getting to know the city, making connections, and building friendships and networks. We've been hosting Bible studies and worship nights for those people we've met who are looking for a place to connect with other believers or who are curious to learn about what we're doing.

Kristian and I had felt for a long time that we'd be called into church planting. We are both people who love cities and have spent most of our lives on the East Coast, so this call to Boston felt like a natural fit. In many ways, that has been true; we love our new city and feel connected here already. However, it was surprising to realize how long it takes to build something from the ground up when you don't have any networks or connections going in.

Additionally, while our mission and vision is to grow with the intention of eventually establishing a self-sustaining church, this isn't necessarily the vision of those who've connected with us. Our group has grown through newcomers who have moved to the city and are looking for a place to worship, and through people we've met who are unchurched or dechurched, but who become interested

in joining us because of the relationships we've built. But many of these people aren't coming because they're interested in seeing a new church established; they're simply coming because God has drawn them to the community we're building. For us to move from a small community gathering to an established church, we'll need to have attenders and leaders who view this as their own mission. In the last year, God has brought us several people who may help us do this work. Here are some experiences from two women attending Grace Hill.

Kim Charles shares her thoughts on the community we're building here: "Joining Grace Hill was the first time I truly felt seen in a church community. I grew up in a culturally-driven church where authority was emphasized. I often wondered if I would ever find a place where I could ask questions and be myself.

From the moment I arrived, I felt so welcomed and embraced, even as a newcomer in a small congregation. I feel encouraged to show up authentically, knowing that I am seen and can make a meaningful impact for the Lord.

This sense of belonging is a testament to God's work in Grace Hill and to Kristian and Mary, who have created such a welcoming space. As Grace Hill continues to grow, I pray that others will feel the same encouragement, spiritual growth, and genuine community that I have been so blessed to experience."

Olivia (Foss) Antuna shares that, "Church planting has brought both unexpected challenges and unexpected joy. There are days when numbers are small and the future is uncertain, yet time and time again I have seen the Lord show

up in our lives and in the lives of people around us, reminding me that this is his church.

One of the joys has been seeing the Lord bring in people who didn't think church was for them, and then seeing them begin to open up and ask questions and find community here. Even those small moments feel like big miracles. This season has reminded me that God is at work in this church and he is the one building it. We just get to be part of the story."

This experience of church planting has truly been the most challenging ministry season I've ever had; God has to work in my heart on a daily basis to remind me that this is *his* mission and *his* church. It can't be built on the basis of our hard work, effort, or even talent. While we put in all the effort and talent we can, it will only come about through *his* will, through *his* call on peoples' hearts. While the ministry can be exhausting, it has been an incredible opportunity to rely on God in ever-deepening ways, and to see how he works and draws people to him, even in a city where some view faith as a liability. As we plan to start public worship services soon, we rest in that reality and wait to see how God will move here in Boston.



Mary & Kristian Anderson are planting Grace Hill Community Church in Boston, MA.



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

Joe Skaret Installed

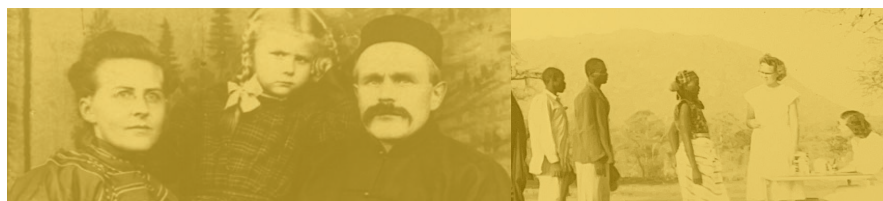
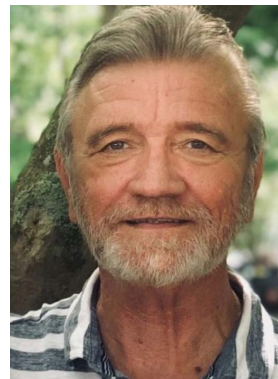


Pictured (L-R): Elder Naeem Peter, Elder Matt Wang, Pastor Joe Skaret, Elder Victor Castillo, and Pastor Evan Langlois..

On October 12, 2025, Pastor Joe Skaret was installed at Calvary Lutheran Brethren Church in Bergenfield, NJ. Rev. Evan Langlois officiated.

Les Carl Passed Away

Lester Carl died on August 7, 2025. He married his high school sweetheart Kathryn Nitz on June 1, 1968. Les worked in retail management for the first few years, and in 1976 they settled in Fergus Falls, MN, where Les and Kathy bought their first women's shoe store. Together they successfully owned and operated four shoe businesses in different locations for over 40 years. In 1979, Les accepted Jesus as his Savior, and in 1985 he felt the Lord calling him into ministry. Les graduated in 1988 from Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls. From 1988 until 1992, he served as an associate pastor at Triumph Lutheran Brethren Church in Moorhead, MN. From early 2000-2022, Les served in ministry at many different churches including Anselm, ND, and most recently in Disputanta, VA.



Celebrate Together

- 1 **In-Person Event:** December 14, 2025 (Sunday)
2:00 PM / Bethel Lutheran Church / Fergus Falls, MN
- 2 **At Your Church:** The videos, prayer booklet, and program used at the in-person event are available for you to download online.



December 17, 2025, marks the 125th Anniversary of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. On that day in 1900, five Lutheran congregations without denominational affiliation gathered in Milwaukee, WI, and voted to form the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

WWW.CLBA.ORG/125YEARS

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re:Think

I Am Not A Church Planter

DAN JULIOT

In the course of editing this issue of Faith & Fellowship, I found myself reading the words of our friends in the North American mission field as though I'm a distant observer. I'm cheering for their success, of course, and I feel deeply awed by their perseverance, but... I am not a church planter.

Church planting is *hard*. So I assume that it takes a certain kind of person, with a clearly defined calling, to be able to do what they do. I might wish I was a church planter, and even feel guilty that I'm not able to do what they do, but in all my reasoning, I'm unable to shrug off the feeling that I haven't gotten it quite right.

When I think of a church plant, I think of a pastor, a couple, or a team, going to a location that is predominantly unchurched and working to make connections, finding or winning new believers, in the hopes of establishing a self-sustaining, organized church. This is indeed what they *do*, but what *is* a church? Not the building, especially considering most church plants are not operating out of their own building initially or even for some time. The church is the people they gather. And what is the action of planting? "Sowing the seed" is one of several plant-based parables Jesus gives us. But this analogy is not pointing toward physically building a church, rather, we plant the seed of the Word in the hearts of our friends and neighbors and trust that the Holy Spirit will work to bring them to God.

Church planting might feel like a calling for a prestigious few, but it is what we are *all* called to, and it is what we are *already* doing. This isn't a matter of spiritual fortitude, but of perspective. I *am* a church planter, I just didn't realize it. The process of church planting is the calling of every Christian as we partner in the mission of God. In sharing Christ with others, we are planting little churches of our own. Our commissioned church planters are surely on the front lines of the physical effort of planting, a notably radical living out of the calling, but we share with them a single, unified mission to reach people with God's love.

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Paul said of the Church, "...we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16b). At its heart, church planting is about an overflow of love for everyone around us—that's what's on the mind of Christ. We may not be formally called, but in Christ we have been gifted with a church-planter's mindset.

In this issue, our church planters share with us their practical goals in the struggle of church planting. In living out our own callings, we can rally around them, supporting them in their practical needs and encouraging them in their faith. They also speak to us in their heart for the mission. Here we can be humbled and inspired to live out our own calling to sow the seed, knowing that our brothers and sisters in Christ are likewise paving the way for a fruitful harvest.



Dan Juliot is a Copy Editor for Faith & Fellowship. He attends and volunteers at Living Hope Church, Menomonie, WI.



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