

Nbr. 25 – August, 2020

### Handling Our Blessings

The story is told of a man in India, of the Brahman caste, who was converted to faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. Life did not become easy for this man. Upon his conversion, he lost his family, his friends, also his job and respect in the community. He lost aspects of life that many people think of as most precious.

One day, an acquaintance stopped him on the street and asked how he was handling his problems. He had lost so much, so many things that had been near and dear to him. How did he handle these troubles?

The new believer replied, “Many people have asked me that question since I became a Christian. But no one has ever asked how I handle my blessings.”

This man knew what St. Paul was talking about: “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Having the crucified and risen Jesus as your Lord by faith is of *such* surpassing worth.

And we have Him! We *have* been blessed! Despite COVID-19, unemployment, rising tensions in society, and the impending pressures of a contentious election season, nevertheless, we are baptized. We have been blessed to know Christ and be known by Him.

How to handle His blessings?

One way is to serve as a conduit of blessing. Be a river instead of a reservoir.

*See? WOW!* Having received, we give. Now that we have been blessed, the Lord makes us a blessing to those around us. Having heard, we tell.

### Fall, 2020 LLL Retreat

Join the CID Lutheran Laymen’s League for a workshop presenting timely and practical tools to equip you as an effective witness for Jesus. It will be held at Camp CILCA on Saturday, September 12, 2020 from 9:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

The leader will be Rev. Peter Kirby. He serves as Lutheran Hour Ministries’ Regional Director for Eastern Europe and Jamaica. A 1994 graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Rev. Kirby also holds masters’ degrees in theology and business.

You can attend the retreat either in person at Camp CILCA or via Zoom on your computer. The LLL encourages congregations to sponsor a virtual session at their church building for members who lack Zoom capability.

Register today! Telephone Deloris Blessman at 309-361-1461, or email her at [delorisblessman@yahoo.com](mailto:delorisblessman@yahoo.com).

There is a registration fee of \$15 in person or \$5 via Zoom to cover lunch and materials. All students can register for free.

Zoom connection instructions and lesson materials will be provided via email to all who register.

In case group attendance is cancelled by the authorities, the meeting will proceed by Zoom only.

Camp CILCA’s address is 4124 Camp CILCA Road, Cantrall, Illinois 62625.

News of this event is being sent by CID office to all District congregations. C-WOWs can perhaps underline its importance by giving a special reminder to pastors or to evangelism committee chairmen in the congregations of their Circuits. Thank you!



**Circuit Witness and Outreach Workers**

# See? **WOW!** News and Encouragement for CID Circuit **W**itness & **O**utreach **W**orkers

## Worth Considering –

“Why Do Churches Grow?” is the title of a recently completed doctoral dissertation by Indiana District Mission Executive Geoff Robinson, a former CID pastor. His research identified, in three LCMS Districts, churches that had shown a sustained increase in attendance. Geoff asked the pastors and lay leaders in these churches about factors that either contributed to or worked against an increase in church-going. All the congregations were in the Indiana, South Wisconsin, and *Central Illinois* Districts. Geoff’s findings are worth considering.

Tending to *increase* church attendance:

- **Worship:** overall quality of services, but especially preaching. Most of the congregations surveyed use liturgical or traditional worship.
- **Lutheran ethos:** emphasis on Word and Sacraments, faithful teaching, Bible study, catechesis. Small group Bible study was mentioned, but not to a major extent.
- **Welcoming newcomers:** friendly congregations, in which people relate positively to visitors. “Fellowship” was noticed more by lay leaders than pastors. Assimilation is important; when missing, it can become a major factor working against church attendance.
- **Intentional outreach:** Churches with growing attendance pay prime attention to evangelism. Pastors must place a high priority on it and lead in it, also by personal example. Pastors go out of their way to converse with people they do not know, and laypeople cultivate relationships with people outside the church, all for the sake of telling the Good News about Jesus. Some congregations as a whole develop community connections. A significant subset of outreach efforts have to do with young people. Among these, Lutheran schools came up most often. Also mentioned were other

forms of children’s ministry, as well as free-standing preschools.

- Pastoral leadership was also identified as a factor contributing to rising church attendance – not pastors micro-managing, but instead helping a congregation to state a vision and enabling staff and lay leaders to organize.
- “Growth”: congregational membership increasing not only by transfers from other LCMS churches but also via converts from other denominations; births of more babies within congregations; more people living in community (noticed more by laypeople than pastors).

Tending to *decrease* church attendance:

- **Lack of commitment:** competing activities for kids and adults, apathy toward church, also competition from other churches. Related to:
- “Spiritual concerns”: pervasive worldly culture and the church’s counter-cultural message. (Respondents did not necessarily object to this counter-cultural message, but they recognized that some people are offended by it.)
- Pastors neglecting members, isolating themselves, and preaching poor sermons
- Inward focus: churches resting content without intentional evangelism or assimilation efforts
- Building and location (which can be “plusses,” but may stick out more if they are “minuses”): shrinking population in neighborhood, limited parking and space problems at church.

From the above, I observe, in general:

1. Intentional outreach helps church attendance.
2. Consider what you are inviting newcomers TO!

-- Ken Schurb [kschurb@cidlcms.org](mailto:kschurb@cidlcms.org)



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