"YOUR LIGHT SHALL RISE..."

Reflections from the mission of Lutheran World Relief

Jake Lyell for LWR

Lutheran World Relief
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, LASTING PROMISE
OUR MISSION
Affirming God’s love for all people, Lutheran World Relief works with Lutherans and partners around the world to end poverty, injustice and human suffering.

OUR VISION
Empowered by God’s unconditional love in Jesus Christ, Lutheran World Relief envisions a world in which each person, every community and all generations live in justice, dignity and peace.

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DEAR FRIENDS,

When I was new to LWR, I visited a project in arid Eastern Kenya, where we had recently worked with a rural community to improve their access to water for farming, and were training people to grow better crops and to work together to manage and maximize their resources. Rachael, one woman I met on that trip, sticks in my mind even today. As she told me how hard she and her family had worked, and how much brighter their future seemed, now that they had gotten just a little help from the outside world, she began to shout with joy.

“Zion is here!” she proclaimed. “God has remembered us and things will never be the same again!”

Just as Rachael prayed for her family’s needs, and gave thanks to God for answered prayers, we too turn to our faith to seek guidance in difficult times, and to share gratitude for our blessings. Our faith and our prayers unite us as part of the family of God, no matter where we’re from, what language we speak, or how much food we have on our tables.

This collection of faithful reflections brings together many of our partners in mission here in the U.S. with many of the incredible staff we have putting your faith into action around the world. From Pastor Tim Runtch’s reflection upon the well-known words of John 3:16 to Justine Polodor’s reminder to us that “every day is a gift from God,” this cloud of witnesses has gathered from far and wide to share in God’s vision for a world of love.

These devotions were originally written for use during Lent, for LWR’s Season of Hope program, but are appropriate for any time of year. Whether you and your congregation are walking through the 40 days of reflection, rejoicing in the promise of Easter, or anticipating the birth of Christ in Advent, I hope these reflections will continue to offer you one thing: steadfast witness to the lasting promise God offers all of the world through Jesus Christ.

As you use this booklet in your own faith journey, I hope you will feel a connection to all our brothers and sisters in need around the world and keep them in your hearts and prayers. Thank you for your support of LWR’s ministry!

Your brother in Christ,

Daniel V. Speckhard
“...if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.”

– Isaiah 58:10
I remember vividly three nearly simultaneous and rather breathtaking insights that I had the moment my first child was born. The first is that I had not known just how much love I had inside me. I mean, I loved my wife, my siblings, my parents and more. But the immediate and almost piercing desire I had to protect and nourish this child and give him all good things was nearly overwhelming. I didn’t know such love existed until this child came into the world.

The second is that I had never realized that my parents had loved me this much. I knew, of course, that they loved me, but I could not understand just how much until I had my own child. The third is that there was absolutely no way I could repay or even sufficiently thank my parents for their love and support ... except to try to love my child (and now children) as much as they loved me.

These realizations come to mind as I read this passage from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah, you see, is trying to correct a common misunderstanding among religious folk: that the way to please God is to fast and pray. Certainly, there are many places in scripture that give instructions about fasting, praying and other forms of worship. But there are far, far more that say God most wants us simply to care for others.

Perhaps this misunderstanding stems from a larger misconception about God’s very nature. We tend to think of God like a king, someone who deserves and demands our attention, obedience and praise. Some scripture does describe God as a king, but most often those descriptions are accompanied by disclaimers that God is not a king like human kings — all too prone to exploit their positions for personal gain — but rather is much more like a parent.

Which brings me back to those realizations I had when my son was born. God loves us more than we can imagine. God wants nothing more than the best for us. And there is no way we can sufficiently repay, please or even thank God except to share that love with others.

This is why true worship of God is caring for those around us and especially those in need. It’s the only thing God wants: for all God’s children to flourish. And this, too, is what I love about my involvement in LWR: the opportunity to extend the love of God to God’s children around the globe. Each time I do so, I feel like I am offering the only worship and praise God really wants.

In this season of hope, how might you challenge yourself to extend God’s love to others in your family, in your community and around the world?

The Rev. Dr. David Lose is a member of the Lutheran World Relief Board of Directors and serves as the Senior Pastor of Mt. Olivet Church in Minneapolis, Minn.

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**PRAYER**

Dear God: Remind us of your love and inspire us to share that love with those in need, that we might offer fit worship of you and grow in faith and life. Amen.
TREASURE
Janice Wendorf
We all have something we treasure. It might be a picture or a figurine, a family heirloom or a well-worn Bible, or any number of other items we hold dear.

When traveling to Tanzania with Lutheran World Relief on behalf of the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, I had the opportunity to visit a distribution center. Among the kits and supplies stored there were bales of quilts to be distributed to various missions and ministry centers. Our travel over the next days included delivering quilts to individuals in remote locations.

“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

— Matthew 6:20

Later, in visiting the rooms of those who had received the quilts, I saw that, for many of them, their quilt was their most cherished possession — and in some cases their only possession. The women of my home congregation made one of the quilts I had brought with me. When I shared a picture of the recipient and the quilt with the women back home, the tears flowed as they saw what a blessing, a treasure, the quilt was to this woman.

The quilts that are handmade throughout the United States represent not only a physical need that is being met but also the love of God through the hands and time of others touching the hearts of their recipients. They show that someone cared and did something for them. They represent hope.

This Lenten season, as we ponder our Savior on the cross, we are reminded that he did not have any earthly treasures. The gruesome picture of his agony and death tells of the love that he has for us and the hope that he gives to everyone around the world. As we receive his love in faith, we receive the greatest treasure of all: the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of life eternal.

Sharing this hope with others is what LWR is all about. As LWR shares practical items such as quilts or kits, or passes along new skills to small farmers, the recipients get a glimpse of the real treasure we have: the same grace that God first gave us. That treasure was freely given to us, but it was given at a great cost. The sinless Son of God, the word made flesh, suffered and died for us. What great love; what a treasure!

How does your life reflect the hope and the treasure that you have in Jesus Christ, for neighbors near and far?

Janice Wendorf served as President of the LWML from 2007 - 2011. She now serves as an LWR Ambassador, living in Neenah, Wisconsin.

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

PRAYER

Jesus, priceless treasure, draw me closer to you this Lenten season. My hope is built on nothing less than your blood and righteousness. Amen.
God of promise, thank you for the hope and grace you proclaim to the world, from setting the rainbow in the sky to sending your son, Jesus. May we respond by keeping our promises to the people and creation you have placed in our lives. Amen.
Felipe stood and spoke to the highest governing body of the small farming community: the community assembly. “The time has come to do the minka for our Champaccocha irrigation canal. We have to clean and repair three kilometers of the canal, and we will begin it in two weeks,” he said.

The 95 men and women assembled were not surprised. In fact, everyone knew that August was the month to clean and repair this community necessity. Not tending to the task would mean risking not having maximum water flow capacity and, therefore, the danger that many families wouldn’t have enough water to irrigate crops and livestock grazing areas.

Minka is a Quechua word, meaning collective work based on reciprocity. The practice of this ancestral tradition deeply rooted in the Andean population dates to a pre-Colombian era but continues today in Peru and other nearby countries. The minka was and is a covenant or agreement among farmers and communities to ensure the collective service of a public good. Above all, it ensures the life of the whole system.

I will never forget the day of that gathering, when I was working on an LWR project aimed at promoting the cultivation of native potato varieties.

Two weeks later, men, women and children assembled to do their minka duty at the canal. Their work would ensure more water, and that would mean more food, as well as more products to take to the closest town market, bringing in more cash income for the families.

Wishing alone would not bring more water. Without an agreement, or covenant, that makes sure all parties contribute to actions supporting the collective — and without everyone following its guidelines — this would not have been possible.

It is precisely the kind of covenant that God proposed to Noah and, through Noah, to all of humanity and the earth. God’s promise invites us to reflect on the need to be respectful and vigilant about the agreements and commitments we make to one another and to our environment.

After the grace shown by God in the rainbow (Genesis 9:13), Noah and his family assumed responsibility for making sure humanity would live their lives differently, taking on not only individual commitments but also collective ones. It is the same kind of commitment we are called to make as a Christian community to care for the resources God has given us.

Does today’s world provide incentives for keeping our covenants and commitments to one another in the way Andean communities fulfill such commitments? Do we live in a world where the need to fulfill our commitments is recognized, respected and encouraged?

Eduardo Contreras is the Country Director for Lutheran World Relief-Peru. He has over 20 years of experience in rural development in Peru, Latin America and the Caribbean.

“I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.”

— Genesis 9:15
“But the angel of the LORD called to [Abraham] from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”

– Genesis 22:11
Colombia continues to be the country with the world’s largest displaced population. Between 1985 and 2016, 6.8 million people were forcibly displaced, with rural families suffering the most dramatic impact. Armed rebel groups forced peasant farmers off their small plots of land, threatening to kill them if they did not leave. Entire families fled, leaving all their possessions behind.

In the 1990s, I visited northern Colombia and met with families still living in the zones of violence. I remember with profound sadness my conversations with local leaders whose lives had been threatened, and I remember hearing about those who had already been murdered by paramilitary groups.

In one of my visits to a farming cooperative partnered with by LWR, I was captivated by two children hugging their father. There was a great tenderness that I’ll never forget. After the assembly, I told my colleague that I wanted to visit that family.

Don Pablo was a recognized and respected leader. His family included daughter Maria, 11, and son Marcos, 9. There was no mother. The family told me about the foods they grew, their production methods, how they were able to feed themselves, and how they used the income from food sales to pay for school, health care and clothing. I was deeply impressed by how Maria and Marcos described their responsibilities in relationship to the needs of the other family members. And Don Pablo told me proudly that his children were very good students.

The conversation advanced naturally to talk of the future: their vision for the cooperative in 10 years, market development, and the cooperative’s infrastructure. But we also listened to Maria and Marcos talk about their future, how they wanted to support their father after finishing school. Maria, as I recall, wanted to be a doctor and her brother wanted to work in construction. The father and children all expressed their dreams with confidence and happiness.

I have to believe that when this family was uprooted and had seemingly lost everything, Don Pablo wisely helped his children understand everything in the context of faith and hope. I still give thanks to God for the opportunity and privilege of meeting Don Pablo, Maria and Marcos.

Don Pablo’s faith reminded me of the conversation where Issac asks, “Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” and Abraham replies, ‘God himself will provide…”

How might you recast your troubles and worries in the context of faith and hope?

Pedro Veliz served at Lutheran World Relief for more than 25 years, retiring in 2015 as Regional Representative for the Andean region.

**PRAYER**

Father, thank you for the life you give us and for the opportunities we have to give witness to our faith and hope. May Isaac’s question be a constant reminder of our need to let your wise Spirit guide us, and may Abraham’s response illustrate the confidence we need to share with others. We ask this in the name of your son, our savior. Amen.
FOOLISH

Rev. Adam Copeland
In medieval times, among the people employed by the royal family was the royal jester. The jester was not unlike our image of a clown today: a person who performs at parties, shares jokes and generally seeks to entertain. Yet the vocation of the jester also included, at the right moment, the call to speak uncomfortable truths to the king. The jester, the one tasked with acting foolishly to entertain the masses, became the only voice of truth the ruler could actually hear.

“I share this description not because I’m a big fan of clowns. In fact, if I’m honest, most clowns scare me a bit. Yet I’m drawn to the image of a jester because I think the truth of the gospel is best shared in a way that holds in dynamic tension both discomfort and joy.

In our day-to-day lives, we might see paying attention to how products like coffee or chocolate are sourced as trivial, even foolish. But I’ve seen firsthand in Nicaragua how the faith of Lutherans put into action through these products can make a difference for communities experiencing poverty. Joy comes from creating new opportunities through these crops — and the farmers who grow them — that the world sees as trivial.

The gospel foolishness of which Paul writes in 1 Corinthians sparks both a deep yearning for the call of the gospel and a delight in knowing that God has already claimed us. We can all hope for such a spark in our own lives.

Gospel foolishness is different from foolishness for its own sake. It’s more than funny jokes and silly skits. Paul writes, instead, about how the very wisdom of God seems foolish because it upends all normal human expectations. Following such a God, therefore, means we, too, must take up the call to become a bit strange — fools for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of the world. Such actions might make us stick out of the crowd a bit.

As the writer Flannery O’Connor once put it, “You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you odd.” Yet sometimes the people who are odd are the very ones through whom the truth is shared.

How are you called to put your faith into action for the sake of others, and how might that look foolish?

Rev. Adam Copeland teaches at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he directs the Center for Stewardship Leaders. Adam serves as an LWR Ambassador.

PRAYER

God beyond all human wisdom, you call us to follow your surprising truth. Deepen our understanding of your ways. Guide us on the paths of life that we might be fools for your sake, and your sake alone. Amen.
“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”

— Ephesians 2:8-9
When I was growing up in North Carolina, I was blessed to have parents who loved the Lord and taught me and my siblings to do likewise. They took us to church as a family every Sunday. In fact, I was in college before I can recall attending church without both of them (except once when my mom was ill). They not only took us to church, but, more importantly, they also showed us by example what it means to serve God by working in various ministries. We didn’t have material wealth by any means, but we always seemed rich because our parents modeled being happy in Christ.

As a result, I learned to enjoy serving in church and elsewhere, and especially by reading the word of God. This passage from Ephesians has always been a favorite of mine because it speaks to lessons I needed to learn early in life. As the youngest of eight children, I often felt intimidated by the success of my older siblings. They were very intelligent and very good athletes; their names were always in the newspaper. So when people compared me with them, I worried about my ability to live up to those expectations, especially athletically. I wondered what I could do to have people praise me like they did my siblings.

My mother’s wisdom challenged me to consider that worrying was counter to having faith in God. As she taught me, God loved me because I was his child, a gift to the world, made in his own image. I did not need to be a great athlete or do things to live up to other people’s expectations because God had predestined me for his own purpose to live according to his will. It didn’t matter what other people thought because God’s grace was sufficient. Once I accepted that this gift of grace is free and I don’t have to earn it, I could understand the hope and joy my parents found in serving God and their desire that we know such hope and joy, too.

Realizing that, I could then discern how God was calling me to serve him, including as a member of LWR’s board for 12 years. Through quilts and kits that provide warmth and fosters improved hygiene which strengthens dignity, work with farmers that promotes sustainability, and innovation that helps marginalized communities be self-sufficient, LWR transforms lives. By accepting God’s call to serve through LWR, my faith has grown, not because of anything I’ve done, but through my gratitude for the opportunity to be used to make a positive difference in the world.

How does the knowledge of God’s grace free you to live out your calling for the sake of the world?

Emma Graeber Porter, management consultant from New York City is a member of New Hope Lutheran Church in Jamaica, Queens and founder of Graeber Consulting, Inc. She previously served as Secretary of the Lutheran World Relief Board of Directors and on the Board of Trustees for United Lutheran Seminary.

PRAYER

Most gracious and loving God, I thank you for your grace and mercy. I know I don’t deserve it, but I am grateful for the love you give me and the things you provide for me, chief among them salvation through the death of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.
LOVE

The Rev. Timothy Runtsch
One of my favorite quotes of all time is from St. Augustine. He was a Christian leader in northern Africa in the fourth and fifth centuries. At one point in his Confessions he said, “God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.”

As I contemplate this quote, it is a truly powerful and profound reality that God loves each and every person equally. No one more. No one less. You see, God doesn’t play favorites like we do. He loves all. He loves each one.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
— John 3:16 (NIV)

A few years ago, I was blessed to travel to Honduras to see the wonderful work that Lutheran World Relief is doing there. It was truly an aha moment. As we met with coffee and cocoa farmers whose lives and livelihoods had been affected by the good work of LWR, I was moved by one particular interaction. A farmer and his wife who lived in a remote location spoke of how LWR had helped them see God’s love in a whole new way. They talked of how, since working with LWR, they had a terrific new life as a family, far beyond what they ever imagined.

“God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.”

I am so thankful for my interaction with this farmer and his family in Honduras. Their joy at how God had touched them personally in ways beyond their hopes was obvious and overflowing!

God so loved the world.
God so loved each one.

As Christians, Lent is a time for us to reflect on the great love of God for us in Christ Jesus. He willingly gave his only son as the greatest example of love in action. As we believe in Christ, in this gift of love, we have the blessing of eternal life now and forever. We have a God who stretches his arms around the whole world yet loves each of us as the one beloved child he has always longed for.

As I left that Honduran farmer’s home, I said words of blessing: “Dios te Bendiga.” God bless you. But I was sure in my heart that God already had. He had blessed them with knowing and experiencing the love of God for them ... and for all.

What was one particular event or time in your life when you felt God’s love directed at you as a parent loving their only child?

The Rev. Timothy Runtsch currently serves as Senior Pastor at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Greeley, Colorado, and also serves as the Secretary of the Lutheran World Relief Board of Directors.

PRAYER

God of love: We are amazed at your love for the whole world — and yet how you love each of us as if we were your only child. As we follow Jesus in lives of devotion and faith, lead us to bear your love to all people near and far. Amen.
RESTORE
Louise Evenson
Having grown up on the farm homestead of my great-grandparents in South Dakota, I have an appreciation for farmers; their work ethic; their reliance on sun, rain, and productive land; and their resolve to innovate in order to improve their yield and product.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.”

— Psalm 51:10-12

So when I was asked by Lutheran World Relief to see what LWR does with Peruvian potato farmers living at 13,000 feet in the Cocha community in the Castrovirreyna province, I was intrigued and curious. There I met Daisy and her family. Daisy, like me, is a farmer’s daughter. Her family returned to their native land after fleeing from the Shining Path, a terrorist group. Fear drove them away, but a more powerful emotion brought them back: hope.

They returned to their hectare of land that had lain fallow for many years. Their seedling potatoes for this high altitude had been lost. The rains came less frequently, and the snowmelt had also decreased.

Fortunately, LWR found Daisy and several other small potato-farming families, and they started to trust “outsiders” to help them develop their farms again. LWR provided Daisy and the farmers with better potato seedlings that survive in a very harsh environment, so they were once again able to produce native potatoes. We gave these farmers the expertise and innovation of capturing melting runoff and rains in a pond. Then LWR taught the farmers about irrigation, so their potato crops are more likely to thrive and mature. Additionally, other vegetables were added to their crops to help diversify their diet and curb childhood malnutrition.

So when I read the words of Psalm 51 — “a new and right spirit,” “restore to me the joy,” and “sustain in me a willing spirit” — I remember Daisy and her community in Cocha, Peru. They returned to their native land and had new and right spirits. They had hope, joy, and willing spirits coupled with the guiding and skillful hand of LWR.

Their example leads me into this season of Lent, a season of reflection, renewal, and, ultimately, joy.

Where do you see steadfastness, restoration, and hope in your world?

Louise Evenson serves as a Board Director for Lutheran World Relief. She resides in Thousand Oaks, CA where she is a member of Ascension Lutheran Church.

PRAYER

Clean out, O God, the inner conflicts of my life. Search out, O Lord, the hidden motives of my life. Root out, divine master, the destructive actions of my life. May actions of faith, hope, and love increase in everything I am and in everything I do. Amen.
HOPE
Gladys Soto
I began to work with LWR about six years ago. I had experience with what I thought were similar institutions, but little by little I began to realize that LWR is different. My colleagues have a special kind of spirituality infused in their work. They are committed to bringing about change in the lives of the people we work with, and their enthusiasm and commitment is truly inspiring to me.

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.”

— Isaiah 7:14

Every week or so, the whole LWR Peru team meets to read a Bible passage and reflect on it. Those reflections inspire our work as we accompany people on their journey, seeking to help them and learn from them, and thanking them for the opportunity to serve. I was also lucky enough to learn from a special LWR guide, Pedro Véliz.

I have visited several of the places where LWR has projects, and in each one I have found very grateful people who recognize that LWR is helping them improve their lives. When I participated in the distribution of LWR School Kits in a small school in the Peruvian rain forest, for instance, the children were quite young, and I didn’t expect that they would be so happy to receive notebooks and pencils. I had seen this kind of joy when my own children received a toy of some kind, but when I saw these children clap and laugh over the School Kits, it made me acutely aware of their needs and how important this small gift was for them. Of course we told them where the kits had come from: “Our Lutheran brothers and sisters in the United States prepared them for you with great kindness.” I will always remember their little faces and their joy, and they will continue to be an important motivation for me in my work.

As a mother, when I visit some of the LWR project areas, it has been difficult for me to see the children’s unmet needs. But I know that we must have faith that these difficulties will be overcome, and I know we are not alone on this journey, that people we don’t even know are giving generously, reaching out to us just because they want to help their neighbor. From my part of the LWR world, I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to you for helping us help others.

When you reflect on difficulties you see in the world, how do you find hope? How do you think you might be best able to give help?

Gladys Soto serves in Peru as the Regional Finance Officer for LWR’s Latin America team.

PRAYER

God who gives gifts: From the gift of your son to the simple gifts that help us learn and grow, thank you for being such a generous giver. Remind us that to follow you is to be generous in all we do, just as Mary was generous in welcoming you into the world. Amen.
This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

— Psalm 118:24
Every day is a gift from God. And every day — even if it’s a tough one — is full, rich and precious, with new opportunities and blessings.

Sometimes we are led to think that only the moments that make us scream with joy and happiness reflect the work and the presence of God in our life, that God has made happy days and wouldn’t be so involved in circumstances that we would qualify as bad ones. Those might include war, famine, natural disasters, starvation, and the economic and social vulnerability in which many of the rural families LWR works with are living. Are those tough moments also God’s works?

God walks with us through trials to help us cultivate endurance. He never said life on earth would be a series of good events. How can we rejoice in the not-so-good ones?

First, by faith. The Lord is faithful and takes care that today we will not be tempted and tried beyond our ability to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). He promises to be with us in every difficult moment, and we believe in that. The presence of God by our side, the privilege to count on him when things are going poorly, is a recurring theme that helps us accept and live every moment as the “day that the Lord has made.”

Second, we can rejoice by our actions. As our life is full of grace and God’s accompaniment in difficult moments, we must also return those blessings and that grace to our community. By accompanying the most vulnerable and helping to alleviate their pain, we can manifest and express our gratitude to God.

If our way and LWR’s way of working and accomplishing our calling is not based only on material and personal satisfaction, and if we give back with both science and conscience, we become instruments of God’s hand to help everyone, even the most vulnerable, be able to say, “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

It reminds me of what Sentales Seratil, member of a local partner based in Northwest Haiti, said to me last year in an LWR focus group in Petite Riviere (Jean-Rabel): “LWR may not be aware of it, but the decision of working with us and providing seeds to us after this long drought was not a human decision. I strongly believe it was God’s decision.”

Let us rejoice!

How did you rejoice after a particularly not-so-good day? How did God accompany you, and how did you look with hope toward the next day?

Justine Poldor serves as the Program Manager for LWR in Haiti.

PRAYER

God who accompanies us through the valleys, fill us with your grace so that even when your presence feels far away, we can reach out to those in need. Every day is a day made by your hand. May the blessing of that be shared with all! Amen.
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