

# foundations

Our vision is for all men to become bold and daring followers of Jesus Christ.

## The Season of Lonely *...or not, if we accept the gift ... together*

By Vic Williams

**B**aby Jesus, it's cold outside. And deep inside the hearts of many a man, it's even colder.

Even as we dutiful dudes drag out the decorations to push out the pain with sparkle and electric spirit; even as the parties pass by in a staggering stream; even as the annual "let's keep everyone happy" cultural and commercial responsibilities pile up like berms of dirty snow, it's sometimes difficult if not impossible to share warmth with our loved ones and with each other, in a real, deep and authentic way.

Let's just assume we all actually have loved ones, that our lives are relatively stable in terms of economic

position, employment status or "retirement comfort." On the home, extended family, church and perhaps work fronts, we're all tapped into a reliable flow of emotional support, and it suffices for most of the year, even as we fight off the occasional bouts of self-loathing or, at the very least, confidence deficit.

But this time of year adds another level of modern-day challenge, doesn't it?

Indeed, for a great many American fathers and sons and brothers and buddies, the spiritual thermometer

drops into the danger zone during "the holidays."

Truth to tell, those four syllables can stop an otherwise outwardly "tough guy" in his tracks.

Advent, the season of joyous waiting and hope, becomes a teeth-gritting ordeal of dread.

The hope freezes into fear.

Fear that we're falling short yet again.

Fear that we're more alone than we seem at first glance.

Fear that Christ's coming, the immense gift of it, isn't for us, but for the man down the street or in the office or, yes, at church who "has it together" far more than we do. You know, the guy we all know – the perfectly pious man, adored by all. The one who has found a way to leave his sins by the side of the road and roll on, cleansed, cozy, cocooned in unquestioning faith.

Of course, that guy doesn't exist, but we idealize anyway, to our great harm and God's great distress.

Most often, such harm presents itself as that old bugaboo:

Loneliness.

And it's killing us.

Once study after another reveals the brutal truth: Loneliness, especially among middle-aged-and-older men, is just as deadly as heart disease, diabetes, cancer



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**The Season of Lonely**, *continued on page 3*



## LUTHERAN MEN IN MISSION

The *foundations* newsletter is sent to all who contribute to the ministry of Lutheran Men in Mission. Your contribution ensures that *foundations* will continue to be sent to you.

Our vision for *foundations* is that it be a source of personal spiritual growth, as well as a source of information for those involved in congregational men's ministries. Please contact us to share your stories of men's ministry that we can use in future issues, or to let us know what topics and issues you're interested in seeing featured in *foundations*.

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## From the Executive Director

# The reason for the season

I have a confession to make: this is my favorite time of year. It's not that I love the cold and the snow or have any desire to wait patiently for Black Friday sales. I love this time of year because during Advent, some of my favorite moments and traditions occur.

First and foremost, we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To borrow an overused saying, He is, after all, the reason for the season. Once we've celebrated Thanksgiving with family and friends, we enter into the time of Advent, a time of anticipation. We spend the next month remembering and preparing for the birth of Christ.

Yet for me the four weeks of Advent bring much more. I am not talking about the pretty decorations and celebrations which are already popping up everywhere. For me Advent has always been a time of reflection. I review the year rereading things that had moved me and marveling at all that God has done around me. I enjoy reminiscing how God has moved in the lives of those closest to me, celebrating their victories and mourning their losses. Without fail, God uses this time to remind me of what is important in life, and that when I trust in Him, everything works out as it should.

In addition, for the last ten years or so, I have begun the tradition of going through the notes, poems and cards in one of my most treasured possessions, my grandma's Bible. It took me years to open it after she was called home. I can't explain why, but it sat in the blue zippered cover just as it was when last she held it. Once I finally opened it and began to explore its contents, and I was moved by what I found. Birthday poems to my grandpa long gone, even after she had remarried. Notes of excitement and loss, funeral cards of long-lost friends and family and clippings of the birth, graduations and marriages of her grandchildren, and a few special others.

Since I began doing this, every time I open her Bible, grandma has left something that speaks to me. This year was no different.

I had been thinking about LMM and giving. (It is that time of year, and as Executive Director it is one of those things you worry about.) Flipping through the Bible, I came across folded corner and a small piece of bulletin; on it was written "Prov. 11:24-26 – if only everyone understood and practiced." When I read the scripture passage, I understood her note:

"One man gives freely, yet grows all the richer;  
another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.  
A liberal man will be enriched,  
and one who waters will himself be watered.  
The people curse him who holds back grain,  
but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it." Proverbs 11:24-26

God calls us to live and give generously. During the Advent season we are reminded that God so loved the world that He gave his only Son so that we may live. All we have comes from God, and this reminded me that when we give freely with open hearts, God blesses us for our faithfulness.

In this time of year, when we celebrate the greatest gift of all, let us give with open hearts. Share with hearts full of love and thanksgiving from the bounty that God has provided us, and do so all to the Glory of God.

May this Christmas season be full of friends and family, love and laughter, joyful generosity and thanksgiving.

In the Power of the Spirit, God bless and may you have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year,

**John Sundquist**, Executive Director, Lutheran Men in Mission

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or just about any other physical ailment you can think of.

Human beings are social animals, which is one big reason, at least to me, that God sent his only True Son to be among His flesh-and-blood children more than two millennia ago. Jesus came to Earth to bring humanity together, first via a haggard handful of fishermen and weary wanderers – most of whom didn't understand why he singled them out as his disciples – then via hundreds and thousands more followers through his stories and parables and matchless combination of wisdom and unconditional love.

Then, ultimately – and as a great and blessed beginning – He spread His message of togetherness, of friendship and love, to the world via the ultimate gift, His sacrifice on the Cross.

Still, even though Jesus' words and actions remain powerful to believers now as then, they often get lost on we guys who are constantly bombarded with the all-American message of "going it alone," "forging our own path," "bucking up and bulling forward" – the Strong Man myth that, if taken to its extreme, spells certain doom.

The myth brings addiction.

The myth fosters anger and resentment.

The myth makes some men reach for the gun, to harm others or themselves.

The myth alienates others from their spouses and kids and friends.

The myth is nothing but pain, with loneliness at its cold heart.

It's all too easy to internalize the feelings and thoughts that bring us down, to mistake the myth for strength rather than ask others, especially other men in our lives, for help.

It's all too easy to go down the rabbit

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hole of social media, allowing our false selves to take over and hide behind the digital wall that, it's clear to me, threatens to tear at the fabric of healthy connection, of societal and spiritual support, until it's in shreds.

It's all too easy to take an extreme political side and get lost in the media echo chamber.

I've struggled with all of those things. Still do.

I also struggle with isolation.

I've worked at home for a decade now. It fits my introverted nature, and is an actual plus for a writer in some ways — not that I don't have a powerful talent for manufacturing distractions or succumbing to procrastination. But it can also be a loneliness trap. I have to work to reach out, beyond my laptop and standing desk, beyond the strange pseudo-comforts of "being my own boss," to keep connected with my male friends, in particular.

I do so through man-to-man lunch dates, through rounds of golf or other outdoor pursuits, through regular Men's Bible Study, through "Home Invasions" with other hurting men, or casual "firepit" gatherings where we air our grievances, from the mundane to the monumental, and offer support to one another.

But it's still a struggle.

After all, it's hard to admit you're lonely, isn't it?

God forbid we should reveal our

weakness, our helplessness in the face of the fear that is always just around the corner, relishing the opportunity to swallow us whole.

But isn't that exactly what God wants us to do? To turn the weakness into faith, and faith into a strength that has no earthly match?

To simply repent, turn back to Him and away from the darkness?

Yes, it is. But here we are again, facing down the holiday season together, yet alone, searching for some semblance of true joy.

It's there. Right there.

Advent, giving way to rebirth we so desperately need and want.

The coming of the Child of the Light, helpless but ever-powerful, loving us without exception, stripping away the worldly artifice and revealing the Way to life, the promise.

All we need to do is open our arms and minds and hearts and embrace that promise, by embracing each other, in the flesh or by text or the phone or whatever. By sharing our love for each other, no strings, no fear, and carrying it into the new year.

It's a gift we're all worthy of. God gives it freely, and it's high time we accept it, together.



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# From the Inside Looking Out

## Double-Blessed at the Bold Gathering

By Dave Newman

**O**n November 9, LMM's Bold Gathering brought their traveling show to our congregation, Zion Lutheran Church in San Antonio. Not only were we blessed by the presentations (as were all the online viewers), we were blessed also throughout the entire production process.

### Preliminary Work

In October 2018 one of our LMM men at Zion, Paul Goldenbaum, flew to Fargo, North Dakota, to observe first-hand a Bold Gathering. He then felt "called" to host a future Bold Gathering at our church. The LMM Board agreed and the date was set.

Starting even before the August Bold Gathering in Des Moines, we were in the capable hands of Lon Buss, Kevin Burke, and John Sundquist. We met several times in online conferences, kept in touch via email, and occasionally phoned as well. Their experience, organization, coaching, coordination, and prayers were our driving force... a true gift from God.



Bishop Erik Gronberg



### Boots on the Ground

One of the most rewarding aspects of the event was watching God at work through our local men, who had never done an event like this. Our music ministry guy, Rob Mikulski, volunteered to set up our lighting, microphones and sound board. Brinkley Harrell confirmed our wireless network capabilities and set up the camera. David Umlang taught himself the YouTube software component (thanks also to LMM's Kyle Pedersen) and became the backbone of the production. Pastor Dave Schulte agreed to be our wonderful Master of Ceremonies. Many others did outreach, promotions, registration, room setup, and food provisions. It was amazing to see God blending our assorted gifts into a holy whole.

### Speakers

Our speakers were inspirational – even more so on a live stage. "Bold"

Gathering only begins to capture what it must be like for these men to do real-time presentations in front of a national audience. I was humbled by their courage. God again – His Spirit working his message through all of the bold presenters.

### Event Weekend

What a special time! The Bold Gathering crew flew in Friday evening. We were finally able to meet in person the "talking heads" with whom we had been online, conferencing, for weeks. After checking out the facility for Bold Gathering, we got to know each other at a casual dinner that evening.

Saturday of course, was amazing. Approximately 50 men joined us as we watched the six speakers live. More friendships built, more insights shared, more examples of

**Bold Gathering, continued on page 5**



**Bold Gathering**, continued from page 4

God at work drawing us together in His name. The day concluded with tours of historic St. John's Lutheran Church, the Alamo, San Antonio Riverwalk, and delicious Tex-Mex food at Mi Tierra's. It was one of those special days when the Spirit's presence could be tangibly felt and shared.

## Reflecting on Hosting

It was a blessing to host the Bold Gathering. We all know that being a Christian man is difficult in isolation. Bold Gathering was an occasion to meet, work with, build up and affirm other men also seeking to strengthen relationships with Christ.

Zion Lutheran will continue to host group-viewings of the next Bold Gatherings. We will again bond locally. But in our hearts, we will reconnect digitally to the same men who boldly gathered on November 9 – and still be in fellowship. I strongly recommend the experience of hosting a Bold Gathering. It is an unforgettable occasion and the opportunity of a lifetime.



John Sundquist



Jim Monkman



Dave Umlang



Robert Manger and Dave Schulte



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# How being generous reflects God's gift to us

**A**t this time of the year, everyone looks forward to showing those we love and care for with your own personal generosity for them. Giving gifts is one of the time-honored ways of showing this generosity. The greatest gift to us is God's only son, Jesus, who came to this earth to save each of us from our sin and give us the gift of eternal life with God if we truly believe.

What a wonderful gift.

Generosity comes in the sharing of our time, talents and resources with others. At Lutheran Men in Mission, we have shown this generosity in every aspect of our ministry. From the Master Builders Bibles to our One Year to Live Retreats to our Disaster Recovery Efforts to our Bold Gatherings and everything in between, LMM devotes our time, talents and resources to helping all men achieve our vision for everyone to become a bold, daring follower of Jesus. We are asking you to join us now, during this season of joy and celebration, by showing your generosity for others and financially supporting our ministries.



**LMM**  
UPCOMING  
**EVENTS**  
& programs

Watch for upcoming 2020  
One Year To Live Retreats  
on the **LMM website**.

Visit [www.lutheranmeninmission.org/  
events/one-year-to-live/](http://www.lutheranmeninmission.org/events/one-year-to-live/) for information.

We also want to make you aware of how you can make a bigger impact by donating long-term assets, such as stock, bonds, and mutual funds, directly to LMM. Compared with donating cash, or selling your appreciated asset and contributing the after-tax proceeds, you may be able to automatically increase your gift – and your tax deduction.

***Join us now, during this season of joy and celebration, by showing your generosity for others and financially supporting our ministries.***

It's a simple and easy process. When you donate a long-term asset like stock to LMM, you'll generally take a tax deduction for the full market value of the stock at the time it is donated. Because you are donating stock, your contribution and tax deduction may automatically increase by 20%. If you would prefer to donate bonds or mutual funds, the same benefits will apply.

You will need to contact your stock broker or financial advisor to help you process this type of donation to LMM, and contact our Treasurer, Jeff Mason, [jeff.mason@lutheranmeninmission.org](mailto:jeff.mason@lutheranmeninmission.org) if you have any questions regarding this contribution. You will receive the benefit of giving the asset at the full market value, while LMM also receives that asset at that same value. Thus, the long-term capital gains taxes are avoided and your gift will make a bigger impact.

Your previous support and prayer for our ministry has always been appreciated, and we ask that you continue to keep LMM and the ministries we develop and foster in your hearts and prayers.

You also have my personal best wishes for a joyous and generosity-filled Christmas season.

Your Brother in Christ,

**Hal Derrick**, President, Lutheran Men in Mission  
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**Lutheran Men in Mission Online** You can find us online at our website [lutheranmeninmission.org](http://lutheranmeninmission.org), or on:



and the **Reaching Men blog** at [reachingmen.blogspot.com](http://reachingmen.blogspot.com)

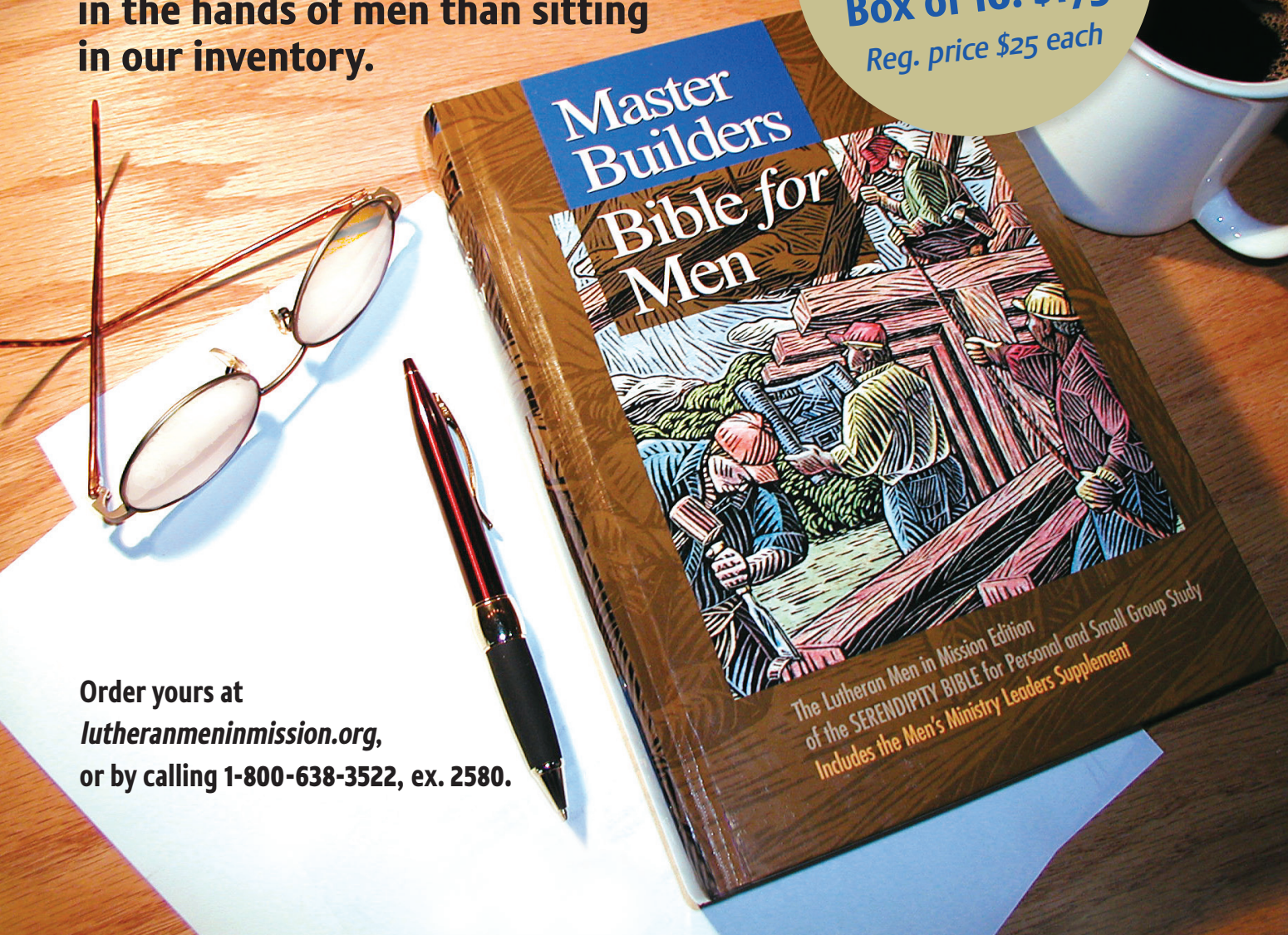


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