

foundations

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

Getting Bold, Southern Style ***Streamed Gathering Puts Reconciliation Front and Center***

By Vic Williams

Perhaps it was something in the warm South Carolina air, or in the fiery Pentecostal spirit as one holy calendar season gave way to another, but the latest Lutheran Men In Mission Bold Gathering, streamed digitally to Christian men across the nation on May 23, was packed with passion and purpose — for racial reconciliation, for community outreach and for personal discovery and redemption.



Ron Waters, Senior Pastor of Freedom of The Met Church

Produced in the state's capital city of Columbia, the Saturday event featured an outstanding lineup of clergy and lay speakers from throughout the South, and was "emceed" by Pastor Ron Waters, Senior Pastor of Freedom of The Met Church. He also anchored the Bold Gathering with his presentation "Are You Reached Out?", a passionate plea for congregations to get

outside their walls, "across the bridge, across the road, across the highway" to truly spread the Good News to communities different in sociological, racial and economic makeup from theirs.

"When you don't extend your arms, you get cramped up behind the four walls," he said. "You are a tyrannosaurus rex,

"When you don't extend your arms, you get cramped up behind the four walls. You are a tyrannosaurus rex, with those short arms. We become a fossilized church, and become extinct. We're not bringing in anyone new."

with those short arms. We become a fossilized church, and become extinct. We're not bringing in anyone new.

"We have to get out of our own community, and see others. We fear each other ... but we discover we are more alike. We need to do more folding the arms around others, to bring others into the fold."

To get the Gathering going, South Carolina Synod Bishop Herman Yoos carried on a socially distanced conversation titled "Reaching Across the Racial Divide Towards Reconciliation" with the Rev. LeRoy Cannon of Columbia's Christ Mission Lutheran Church. Together they shared how they have helped individuals and congregations take intentional strides toward racial reconciliation.

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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

Whose life may be changed by your presence?

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." —Ephesians 6:4

This is what I hope will be a unique Father's Day for a couple of reasons. First, we are still dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and all the challenges it brings. Social distancing may mean that fathers will not be able to be with their children; at least not closer than six feet. Many of our LMM brothers across the country have already been touched by this terrible virus and the pain and death it brings. They have lost fathers and children and will experience grief this Father's Day. Secondly, I expect this to be the last Father's Day with my own dad. For the past couple of years now my dad and our family have been fighting a losing battle with Lewy Body Dementia and the end is now in sight. It may not come in the next year, but there will be little left of the man who not only raised me but trained and instructed me in the Lord by next year.

Over the last year I have been taking time to spend as much time with Dad as I can, as long as I can. The difference between Thanksgiving and today is impossible to put into words. The man who has been larger than life for as long as I can remember has slipped away. There are now only glimmers of him left. This journey has led me to reminisce about growing up in the church, watching Dad preach, and the lessons he instilled in me. I mourn not being able to talk about what is happening in the news or the world. Days of discussion and dissecting theology are a thing of the past. There are no more jokes (or at least no new ones.) And yet, his sense of humor and faith remain.

There doesn't seem to be a day that goes by when Dad doesn't ask when we are going to church or about what is happening in the church. He can't remember the day of the week and often not even the people in the room, yet he inquires about what is happening in the mission fields where he spent the last 20-plus years of his life. He still hums and sings the hymns of the church. Somehow, even as his mind and memory are deteriorating, his faith remains strong. This may be the final lesson he instills in me and it is giving me comfort as he nears the end — faith remains.

This Father's Day, I encourage you to think about those men who brought you to faith. Your father, grandfather or a male role model in your life. Those who by either example or instruction have shaped your faith and walk with Christ. Imagine where you would be today without their faithful love and support. Our father's (and father figures) have helped to make us the men we are today. Now, I want you think about your children and those to whom you are a father figure. What are you teaching them through your actions? Your words? Whose life may be changed by your presence? What young person may come to know the Lord through your faith? These are the questions I encourage you to wrestle this Father's Day. As the world continues to figure out what the future may hold, we still need fathers, showing the way to a bold, daring life of following Christ.

To the fathers of the world, Happy Father's Day! God bless all of you.

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Herman Yoos, Bishop of South Carolina Synod

"Bridging the divide takes patience, persistence and a whole lot of prayer."

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"We are coming together as Christian men to bridge the racial divide," Bishop Yoos said, describing how the killing of young black men affected his faith and brought him to terms with his white privilege. He recounted making a pilgrimage to Selma, Alabama, seat of the modern civil rights movement, and being deeply moved by such landmarks as the Edmund Pettus Bridge and the Lynching Museum. "It was an impactful experience."

Rev. Cannon described the experience of applying to a predominantly white college in the South, and how a policeman followed him around the perimeter of the campus to the school's admission office. "I didn't hear from them for four years," he said.

"Bridging the divide," concluded Bishop Yoos, "Takes patience, persistence and a whole lot of prayer."



LeRoy Cannon, Pastor of Christ Mission Lutheran Church, Columbia, S.C.

Up next was young, dynamic pastor Will Altman of United Methodist Church in Blythewood, S.C., who stressed God's presence in his presentation "Kingdom Builders: God Is Constantly Building His Kingdom Here."

"God comes down to us," he stated, adding that He truly works in surprising ways, through the most

"You can fall in love with Jesus in such a way that you can share that love with your neighbors and your friends. You just show up on time to share in God's kingdom."



Will Altman of United Methodist Church in Blythewood, S.C.

surprising people. "I started as a youth pastor and I needed volunteers. A woman showed up who wasn't a member of the church. She showed up every week. She always offered everything she was for those kids. She started to smile more."

Altman held the woman up as an example of how God works in our lives "each and every day."

"That's what we can do. You can fall in love with Jesus in such a way that you can share that love with your neighbors and your friends. You just show up on time to share in God's kingdom."

Altman finished by singing an apt tune, "Build Your Kingdom Here."

That's exactly what God is doing in the heart and spirit of Dwayne "Coz" Costner, a 47-year-old North Carolina native who owns and operates a moving company. He joined the Gathering to describe the darkness that descended on him after the death of his 13-year-old daughter to an overdose, and how a friend's urging to attend a One Year To Live Retreat helped him get beyond his loneliness and distress while identifying his mission in life.

Bold Gathering, *continued on page 4*



Dwayne "Coz" Costner of South Carolina

"My mission is to listen. God's laying something on your heart, and I challenge you to listen."

"I feel called to bring men to Christ by meeting them where they are, and behind an example of the power of God through my story."

His neighbor and friend Jimmy Smith, a longtime LMM leader in South Carolina, invited him to the retreat. On the third ask, he finally went. "I look back on the obstacles that Satan put in front of me to go there," he said. "I knew that when I went to this retreat, things were gonna change. And they did."

"My mission is to listen. God's laying something on your heart, and I challenge you to listen."

The Gathering's next speaker, Bishop Tim Smith of the North Carolina Synod, brought a well-written exploration of "Unity, Reconciliation and Forgiveness: The Essence to Cultural and Church Vitality." He started at Genesis, and man's fall due to not taking



Tim Smith, Bishop of the North Carolina Synod

responsibility and listening to God's promise: "In just a few verses, this beautiful relationship between man and God gets blown apart." Then he used the current COVID-19 scourge as a modern equivalent to this separation: "With this pandemic, we're always looking for someone to blame, but then again, when are we not?"

He then issued a challenge to American men. "It's not about rugged individualism or getting ahead. It's about reconciliation, the way of Jesus. It's your destiny. To which voice will you listen and which voice will you follow?"

Pastor Jackie Utlely certainly knows what voice to follow — it led her from the Church of God in Christ to Lutheran Theological Seminary (where she was only one of a handful of African American seminarians, and one of two black women). She became the first Lutheran African American ordained in the South Carolina

"It's not about rugged individualism or getting ahead. It's about reconciliation, the way of Jesus."



Pastor Jackie Utlely

Synod. "I never felt like an outsider [at seminary], and was welcomed by many. I consider myself a 'Luthercostal.'"

In her presentation titled "A Journey Through Inclusivity," Pastor Jackie, who prefers to be known by her first name, recounted her poor upbringing, her rising above racism, sexism and classism, her Pentecostal roots and her finding her way to the Lutheran fold. "I thank God for grace," she said.

She was the perfect lead-in to Pastor Ron Waters's powerful plea for true, deep and nourishing outreach — for challenging all mainline Christians to look beyond their own pews and familiar faces to keep Christ's message vital and strong.

"We call this a Bold Gathering, but we should be reaching out," he said. "We have to become one village, if we want our children to worship one God. Become a unified front, extend our arms, our reach. We have to extend God."

The next Bold Gathering is slated to be a live, in-person event at Carol Joy Holling Retreat and Conference Center outside Omaha, Nebraska, September 18-20. It will not be live streamed. Visit www.boldgathering.com to register or for more information.

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Fatherhood Is God's Good Virus

By Vic Williams

For my 60th birthday, in May, I got three and half yards of dirt.

Talk about a healthy dose of mortality.

"But it's also about growth, too," said my wife, and mother to two of my four children. Thank God I have her around to set me straight. Now that soil is feeding tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, pumpkins, cucumbers, cauliflower, carrots, Swiss chard and a bunch of herbs.

Growth, possibility, maturity.

Still, as I make this big round-numbered turn into the final third of my life (I'm being generous), thoughts of The End do creep into my mind, especially in the middle of a deadly pandemic that clearly will continue for a while.

"To dust you shall return," says the Lenten prayer, and that's most certainly true, but I ain't quite ready to get "dusted." So I've used that big pile of triple-mix to plant a big garden instead, calling upon the same nurturing instincts that, I'm told, have carried me through nearly 34 years of fatherhood without too much damage to my son and three daughters, or to my already wobbly sense of self-worth.

In fact, I'd say that among all the vagaries and challenges of modern life I've negotiated so far, being a decent, involved, loving dad has been, and remains, a path of least resistance.

Not that it's been easy, nor is it for any guy. Despite all the books on fatherhood out there, including the Greatest Book of All, there is no panacea, no hard-and-fast

roadmap, for negotiating a successful journey through the most daunting and comforting and soul-expanding journey a man can take.

It's a snap to become a dad: Just toss some seed out there and see what happens (or not, for far too many "slip out the back, Jack" types), but being one, a "good" one ... well, that takes grit and grace and, above all, faith.

Take my father, who died a few days after suffering a stroke, at age 76, in 1998. He somehow held on a few days, enough time for most of us siblings to assemble at his bedside and say our goodbyes. He passed several hours after the Denver Broncos beat the Green Bay Packers in his beloved Super Bowl. He and I had bet on the Pack — darn that John Elway and his helicopter touchdown — and I kept our losing ticket in my wallet until it crumbled to, yes, dust.

Though he was baptized Episcopalian, Dad hadn't darkened a church's door, except for weddings and funerals, in my lifetime, and probably for many years before I was born. Yet he lived a life of faith, gratitude and sometimes grudging but always evident joy. He married a woman with four kids, which some would say is the definition of insanity, then fathered me and my brother in his 40s. He was nothing



A pile of dirt can signify the end of life ...

Among all the vagaries and challenges of modern life I've negotiated so far, being a decent, involved, loving dad has been, and remains, a path of least resistance.

if not a stalwart patriarch, guided by God even if he didn't outwardly recognize His presence. He carried himself with a mix of don't-mess-with-me authority and sneaky vulnerability — the latter rooted, I believe, in his mother's suicide when he was in high school. It was

Fatherhood, continued on page 6

Fatherhood, *continued from page 5*

a deep scar he never exposed to us until we found out the truth via my uncle, his youngest brother. Shame is a ruthless taskmaster, and Dad never fully shook it.

But he did persevere, combining hard work with a wide-open lust for life. Dad loved broadly and generously, even recklessly. He cussed and cried, yelled and laughed. He gambled and drank and kept some interesting friends, but he also provided for us all, without fail; when he and my mom divorced just as I graduated high school and headed for college, he kept on providing for me and my brother. He went on to find another love and seemed to grow deeper into his own brand of faith.

In my estimation and to my continuing benefit, he kept growing into fatherhood, and manhood, right up to his last days. He taught me the value of respect for others — and, by default, for the higher power he chose not to name but somehow kept in contact with. He

gave me a quick-fire temper that brings on a brand of temporary blindness that so many guys recognize, but with it came the capacity to gain a deeper self-awareness in the storm's aftermath, a brighter path to finding meaningful, healing words of apology, rather than band-aid blurts of shallow shame.

I inherited his complications, his optimism and, I hope, his powerful sense of loyalty to family and friends. And he gave me the foundation to build a life on faith, in whatever form it took through various points in my life. Sometimes that meant a direct dialog with God, sometimes sin and repentance, sometimes despair and self-destructive behavior and, eventually, rebirth.

I accept it all, the good and the bad of Dad's legacy, and he remains atop my personal heap of heroes, who I think of when I think of a man in full, 22-plus years after his death.

Now that I am 60, with kids ranging from ages 33 to 20 – two marriages, two kids each — I spend more

He gave me the foundation to build a life on faith.

time reviewing my own efforts at fatherhood, where I've failed miserably, where I've somehow hit the mark of mentorship, where I've achieved that overused but still honorable goal of loving my kids unconditionally.

And when Father's Day rolls around, minor "holiday" though it is, I find myself fighting the urge to grade my "performance" as family patriarch, individually and collectively. God doesn't want me to keep score, but we're built to label and limit ourselves with such arbitrary markings, aren't we? Not exactly the definition of grace-filled living.

There's no doubt that being a white Christian male, born at the tail end of the baby boom, has strengthened my hand as a father in America, especially on economic and social fronts. It's folly to deny that I was

Fatherhood, *continued on page 6*



... Or a pile of dirt can be an invitation to great growth.

born on at least first base, more likely second. And I must acknowledge that I passed along my sense of privilege, blatantly or implicitly, through much of my kids' formative years, even as I also worked to instill in them a sense of common purpose toward the greater good, of sacrifice and empathy and generosity — of moving through mortal life with the tenets of Matthew 25 as crucial mile markers. Of being like my own dad, a man they barely or never knew.

I'll give myself a passing grade in that class. I'm sure I have a lot of company, especially among my fellow Lutheran Men in Mission of a certain age.

Of course, we dads have all failed our share of tests. For me, those black marks came through flares of anger and the verbal (but never physical) abuses they ignited; through spates of inattentiveness, veering dangerously close to indifference, thanks to work distractions and travel; through bouts of self-loathing that would send me in a depressive funk; and through venal, self-involved pursuits to mask or medicate the fear of failure, to numb the pain of parental (and marital) pressure.

Suddenly I'm whole again, the Dad I strive to be, if only until the next wave of humanness washes over me, and the brokenness surfaces.

I've always managed to fight off the guilt, the pangs of inadequacy, but I've never done it alone. My wife, friends and, especially, my kids come to the rescue by returning my halting efforts at boundless love, tenfold. Suddenly I'm whole again, the Dad I strive to be, if only until the next wave of humanness washes over me, and the brokenness surfaces.

Still, I'm here, and my family is intact and close, with one semi-exception. My eldest child and only son spent nearly a decade overseas, first as an Army specialist in Afghanistan, then as a private defense contractor in that country and others. Such physical distance put a strain on our relationship in several ways and cost him his marriage — one unfortunate family "trait" that I passed down to him, though under very different circumstances. I feel sometimes as if I've failed him through those crucial twentysomething years, then realize that I had somehow given him the greatest gift a parent can confer on a child: The freedom to be his or her own person, and just get out of the way with love and trust.

Through it all, as our all-too-seldom conversations via phone or text wound up, we never failed to say or write "I love you." That's something. That's manly stuff.

Now he's back stateside and we talk or text regularly, even as COVID-19 has caused our physical reunion to be delayed. We look forward to many rounds of golf together, to rebuilding those father-son muscles — different from those that have blessed me with the strong bonds I enjoy with my daughters, but just as powerful. I welcome that blessing, that opportunity, that gift.

Again, I'm sure my "older" LMM journeyers can relate.

For you younger followers of Christ, who either haven't yet experienced fatherhood, or are just getting started — well, get back to us, will you?

Just don't wait too long. The dust awaits us all, down the road somewhere. In the meantime, there's plenty of fertile soil to till, as fathers, and sons, and grandfathers. Thank God.

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I Love to Tell the Story

As we enter into our third month of social distancing and virtual worship, I am strengthened by the thoughts and memories of my Dad. This June, we will honor our fathers just as we honored our mothers in May in this new environment of coronavirus distancing. Things just aren't quite the same without being physically together and enjoying the embrace from someone you love. But there is always the opportunity to share our love and caring for others, so please don't stop telling the story of that love and caring through whatever social distancing, virtual or electronic means you have available.

At this time in my life, I am part of the older generation and my parents have passed from this life. I know that they are now in the company of the saints in the presence of our Lord. However, I still can reflect on the lessons given to me by my Dad. He was a humble man and lived to serve others more than himself. One of my earliest memories of Dad was his singing with us in church. Dad could not read music or keep a tune, but there was one hymn that he truly loved. He would sing "I Love to Tell the Story" with all his heart and voice. This hymn is the story of Jesus' love for all of us and our need to share that story. Sitting next to Dad as a boy, I now realize this story and his passion to sing

it gave me a lesson on real discipleship that has helped me be a bold and daring follower of Jesus.

Remembering our fathers on that special day in June, let us be bold in telling the story of Jesus and his love. At Lutheran Men in Mission, we embrace that story and have been using this time of social distancing and virtual gatherings to grow our ministry in areas that were not previously part of our ministry.

Remembering our fathers on that special day in June, let us be bold in telling the story of Jesus and his love.

- We are holding weekly virtual Bible studies on a national basis.
- We stop every Wednesday at noon for prayer and encourage all to join us in these prayers for the safety and health of our communities, our nation and the world.
- We are continuing to offer our Bold Gatherings in a virtual environment and invite all men around the country to join with us at each Gathering.
- A new book study ministry will start during the last week of May and all are invited to become part of this Christian learning experience.
- We continue to plan for our in-person One Year to Live retreats to restart in the fall, or when the time for us to safely be together is appropriate.

All of these events, activities and ministries could not happen without your financial support and for that we are grateful. We ask that you will participate with us and help us to "Tell the Story." Please continue to keep LMM, our ministries and our virtual events in your hearts and in your prayers.

Your Brother in Christ,

Hal Derrick, President, Lutheran Men in Mission
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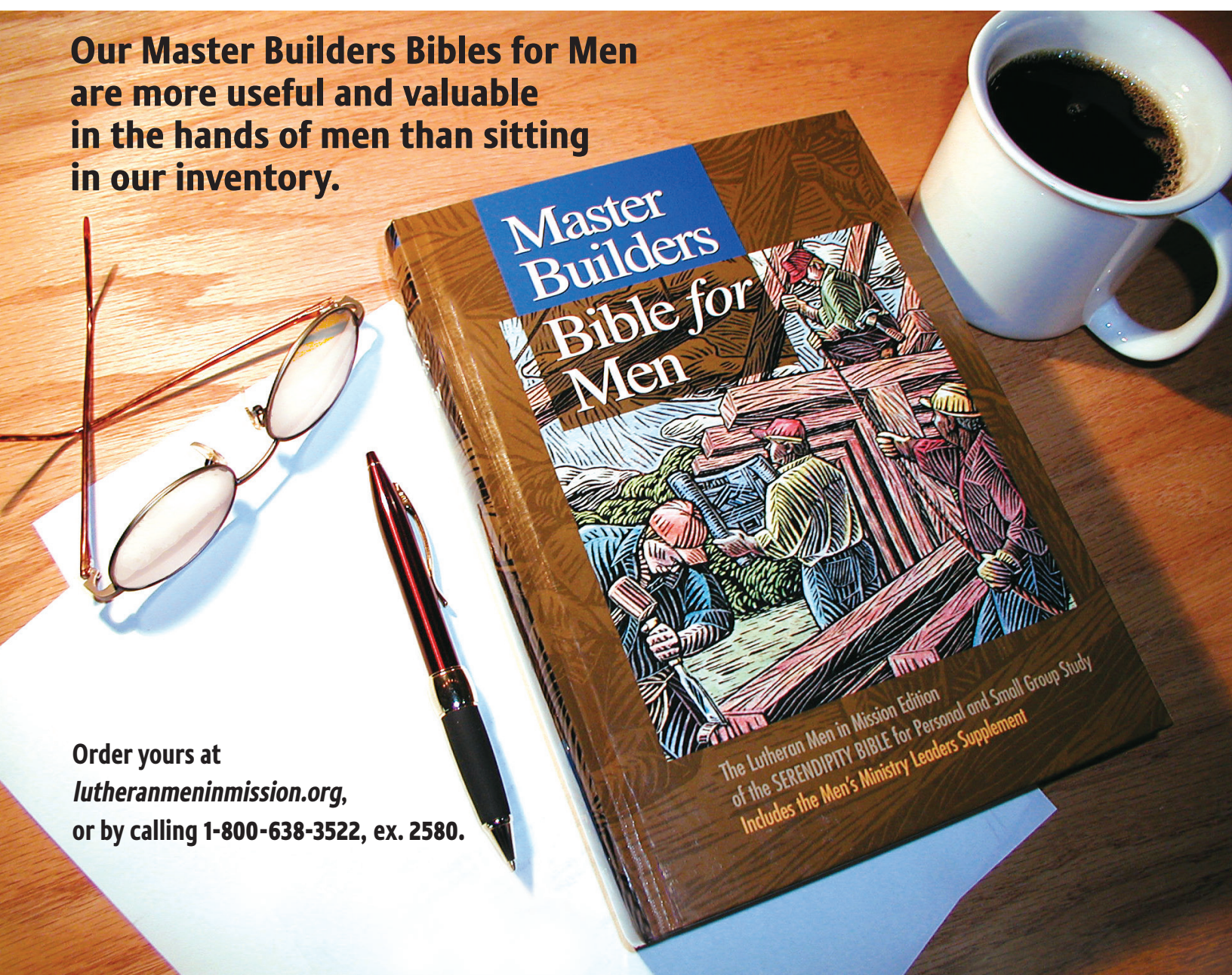
Visit www.lutheranmeninmission.org/events/one-year-to-live/ for information

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