

foundations

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

Hey, Man, How You Doin'?

Why Is This Such A Loaded Question? Just Ask Jesus.

We beseech the Lord to take care of them, to reclaim their spirit into the bosom of the great I Am.

*No, I've never been much of a church going man
But I read the good book, convinced there's a plan
Where I'm a piece of the puzzle and I fit in just right
And fate chose the right guy as part of the night sky:
A frame 'round the light*

—The Lost Dogs, “Hardening My Heart”

By Vic Williams

If you want to make a grown man cry, take away his dog. If you want to make a grown man sigh and ask why, take him away from God.

One could lead to the other as far as I'm concerned, because dogs clearly have a direct line to the Father, and when our Arnie the Airedale was abruptly and shockingly diagnosed with a bleeding liver tumor on Oct. 31, forcing us to say goodbye through two quick and cold

injections not three hours later, I felt far from our Lord, questioning Him through the tears that kept coming amid the pain and muted rage.

That was a very bad day, and to be honest, even now, in the heart of Advent with our first pup-less Christmas and New Year in decades staring us down, I catch myself getting emotional, and missing that big ol' king of terriers as much as I did when the first wave of grief knocked me down. Just a dog, you say? Oh, no. Just the best dog ever, like the best dog ever many of you have had over the years.

At that dreadful moment Arnie's heart stopped and I held onto his remaining warmth in that little room at the vet's office, I said a prayer and handed him to God, as we believers tend to do when death of a loved one comes. Feeling otherwise powerless and perhaps nudging dangerously close to despair, we beseech the Lord to take care of them, to reclaim their spirit into the bosom of the great I Am. Such thoughts give us solace as we get up off our knees yet again, trudge out the door and wade into the world weighed down with ... questions. So many questions.

Questions, *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**.

Lutheran Men in Mission

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From the Executive Director

Our Ministry and Shared Purpose

As we celebrate the coming of the Christ and welcome his loving, warming light in the world once again, it's also time to reflect on the past year and to give thanks for all that God has done and provided for us as bold and daring followers of Christ through **Lutheran Men in Mission**.

We began this year with the unexpected loss of our brother and friend Hal Derrick. He left us far too soon, with dreams yet to realize and much work to be done, and we will forever remember his passion for our ministry and shared purpose. That said, Hal's can-do attitude and welcoming spirit remains in every meeting our board undertakes, every project we kick into motion, every dream we share, and every prayer we say together.

On that note, I report with a full heart that LMM has much to give thanks for this year. Even as we were grieving, God had men ready to step up to help lead LMM into the future Hal had envisioned. We can rest assured he is pleased with men like Vic Williams who succeeded him as LMM's President and is surrounded and supported by an active, creative, and passionate board. In true LMM tradition, we barely missed a beat before getting back to the work of the Kingdom.

In 2023 we saw the return of a **One Year to Live** retreat to the Pacific Northwest along with several retreats from South Carolina to Wisconsin. For the coming year we will bring OYTL to Louisiana, Minnesota, South Dakota, and perhaps add one or two American southwest retreats.

Bold Gatherings continued as well, in Tacoma, Washington, last spring and Appleton, Wisconsin, this fall. LMM also released 36 new **Lifelines** through the **Project Twelve** website; we now offer 108 free study/discussion guides, with more to come in the new year.

These events and offerings only hint at we accomplished, with your consistent and faithful support, in 2023. It is a true blessing to see the work of Lutheran Men in Mission forever change men's lives for the better, for eternity.

It has also been a year of new discoveries, from rediscovering and imagining the Men's Ministry Consultant program to identifying acute challenges that we can and will overcome together. One of those challenges is communicating how LMM is funded. While your generosity is the foundation of our work together, many men remain unaware that in 2008, LMM became a separately incorporated 501(c)3 with the mission of creating bold, daring followers of Jesus Christ. This means that **we rely on donations, not the ELCA, for funding**. Only through your continued generosity can we cover our expenses and grow into our mission as a powerful resource for all men.

In that spirit, I prayerfully encourage you to increase your support of LMM, now and for 2024. Giving 10 or even 5 percent more will make a huge impact for men across the nation. Please take a moment to think about how God has blessed you through the ministry of LMM.

There are many ways to give — by mail, through our online giving page (the "Donate Here" button) at www.lutheranmeninmission.org, with a credit card to <http://lutheranmeninmission.networkforgood.com/>, by texting a gift amount to 833-305-6029, or by joining our Bedrock Society with a monthly gift of at least \$20 at www.bit.ly/LMMbedrock. Every dollar helps make our foundation even stronger so we can keep building God's kingdom with confidence, faith and deep love for one another, just as Hal would want it.

Again, thank you for your prayers and support of Lutheran Men in Mission. Together we will bring men, families, communities, and congregations closer to the light of Christ. May this holiday season and new year bring you great health and great blessings.


In the Power of the Spirit,
God Bless,

John Sundquist

Executive Director, Lutheran Men in Mission
john@lutheranmeninmission.org

It is a true blessing to see the work of Lutheran Men in Mission forever change men's lives for the better, for eternity.

Every dollar helps make our foundation even stronger so we can keep building God's kingdom with ... deep love for one another, just as Hal would want it.



*That's the love of God,
through grace—the love
we don't deserve but are
worthy of anyway.*

Questions, continued from page 1

Why now?

Why at all?

Why do you hurt my heart, Lord?

Why take away my best buddy, or spouse, or parent, or child?

Why?

OK, we know why. We know empirically that the flesh ends for all, even for the beloved dog that unfailingly followed us into breach with a wag and a leap, loved us at our best and our worst, indeed reflected that sometimes slippery notion of unconditional love back at us every moment of every day we were blessed to have them at our side. That's one big reason we love our pets so much: Their loyalty, their powerful nose for our pain, their inbred ability to quash it with a look or nuzzle, and their knack for bringing us back from the brink.

They somehow embody our best selves, as do the people in our lives who embrace every last bit of us, put up with our petty temper tantrums and paralyzing bouts of self-doubt or arrogance or "imposter syndrome," or that biggie

for me and so many other depressives, a dull sense of worthlessness. All of it. That's love. That's the love of God, through grace—the love we don't deserve but are worthy of anyway.

It's part of His plan for us, which brings me to the Lost Dogs lyric above, which bubbled up randomly on Apple Music during my daily walk—daily Arnie-less walk, that is. For the very first walk my wife and I took without him, not an hour after we sent him over what we pet owners somewhat cartoonishly (but sincerely) call the Rainbow Bridge, I held his empty leash in my left hand, looking like a fool, but I didn't care, because his sweet canine spirit most definitely still hung in the air. But that was the only time. We've walked dozens of times since without his leash, and while I can't and won't shake the feeling that he should still be there with us, just plowing through each step helps "harden my heart" in the survival sense, which is what the lead singer, clearly a sensitive and creative soul, is getting at in this song. He's not giving up. He's getting through, with God's help. Even if he doesn't

show up in church and perhaps reads "the good book" sporadically (as do I, I'll readily admit), he still finds ways to feed the faith that opens his heart to see his place in the unfathomable firmament of the stars, framing the light.

But is simple survival the core of the Plan? Of course not. Above all, God delights when we grasp or at least glimpse a jolt of joy every day.

Could be the smile from a stranger, or one of your own sent his or her way. Maybe a laugh among friends over breakfast or at Bible study, or the gleeful shriek of a child or grandkid. Or the way a verse in the Word, a line in song or a movie—or from a spouse or friend—strikes your soul in just the right way, at just the right time. Could be

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Questions, continued on page 4

something as mundane as realizing you've met the morning yet again in one piece and one peace, and you've got this or that to look forward to. (I'm still getting used to mornings without Arnie, who always got our day off to a rockin', door-nudging, get-your-butt-out-of-bed-old-man start, but it's all good. Again, his spirit hovers.)

As I write this, we men of LMM continue to enjoy a daily e-mail diet of Advent prayers. Something to look forward to for sure: nuggets of Hope, Peace, Love and, yes, Joy, the "anchor" theme for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. For several years I've been blessed with the opportunity to help write these preparatory passages, then repeat the faith-filled exercise during Lent. It's always fun and enlightening to

***I can keep moving forward,
and replenish my vessel
love at a time of year
where more than a few of
us run low, even taking it
below the red line.***

see how fellow followers of Christ approach each word, pair it up with a scripture of their choice, then write a devotional that speaks to their walk with Jesus *in this place, in this time*. It also helps refill my lantern with the fuel of faith so I can keep moving forward, and replenish my vessel love at a time of year where more than a few of us run low, even taking it below the red line. It helps fill my frame so the light can come through, just as working with so many incredible men in the LMM orbit makes that frame larger and stronger as the vast

possibilities within it come into focus.

So here we are, on the threshold of another year, shoulder-to-shoulder and soul-by-soul. Here we are together as fellow seekers, believers, and brothers in the LMM charge to become ever more "bold, daring followers of Jesus Christ." We ask Him why and he never fails to answer, even if it's in a way we didn't expect or didn't even want. I may yet tear up when I walk the neighborhood without my dog, but will I face any step without God and Son? No way. With Them, there's no leash necessary, no death around the next corner, and no fear, even though brutal headlines and endless earthly pain nip at our heels.

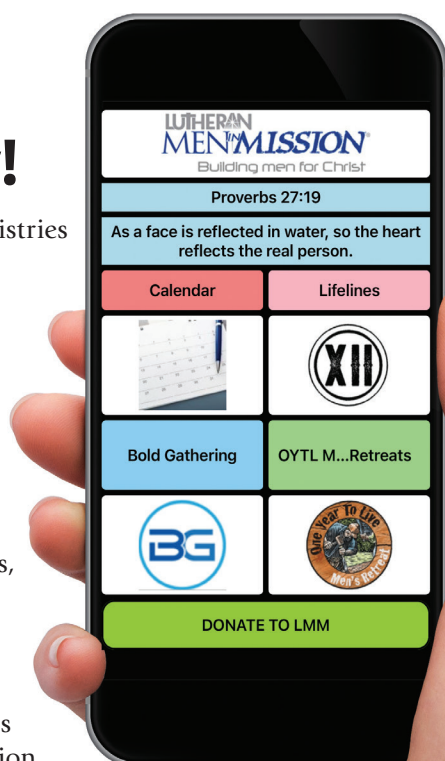
There's a plan, alright. Freedom and life, now and ever after.

Download the LMM App Today!

How about carrying all the ministries you love about Lutheran Men in Mission right there in your pocket?

The new LMM Mobile App for both Android and iOS is available right now for download, giving you access to a wealth of features and tools to help plan your next event, schedule a get-together with the guys, make a contribution, find out about retreats and more.

Open the app to an inspiring Bible verse, then make your way to buttons for our Calendar of events, information on Bold Gatherings and One Year to Live



Retreats, and one that links to a series of Project XII Lifelines — Bible-based group study guides designed for today's busy guys who want to gather for conversation, prayer and deep discussion.

Many thanks to app developer and designer Bruce Krueger for giving LMM this powerful, valuable and easy-to-use resource.

**Available
right now for
download**

Bold Gathering Comes To Wisconsin—Finally!

By Kevin Burke

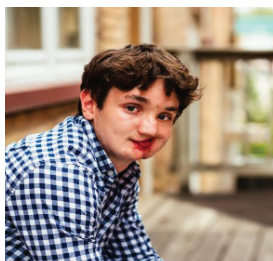
It was such a joy to host the fall 2023 **Bold Gathering** at **First English Lutheran Church** in Appleton, Wisconsin, on November 11. Driving back into this community where I used to live was like a homecoming. Connecting with friends and illuminating their stories and spiritual gifts was a treat.

For a while I had dreamt about sharing those stories and gifts with people around the country, but the LMM Events Team identified other Bold Gathering locations in the meantime; it wasn't yet the time for Wisconsin to shine. Then everything came together in 2023.

Dan Doersch was the anchor of our promotion efforts going into the event. His presentation, which links faith and science, is well known. Dan talks about “how some of the most modern science discoveries... actually add more evidence of a Supreme God.” Unfortunately, a couple nights before the Bold Gathering, he tested positive for Covid and we knew that he couldn't present for us. Still, he's adamant about sharing with us and has offered to privately record his talk and provide it LMM at a later date. We will happily let you know when that has been done and on the website. Dan had fairly minor symptoms and is recovering well.

The morning of November 11 was brisk and had a definite chill in the air—perfect for those driving in to participate in the event. First English Lutheran's north site is a gorgeous property on the edge of Appleton. The front entrance is wide open with about ten wooden tables with six chairs around each one—a very welcoming space to walk into and share a cup of coffee with others. Beyond, in the sanctuary with a high gable ceiling with exposed steel rafters, speakers shared with attendee. Shuttered windows encircle three sides of the sanctuary, and when they are open natural light floods in, as do views of the surrounding tree-filled landscape—a reminder of the wonderful environment God created and we can be a part of it.

Carson Molle started us off. Currently a college sophomore, his story revolves around the demands he places on himself and how that affects his mental health. This internal pressure caved in on him when he was in high school, leading him to believe that suicide was a path he needed to



BOLD GATHERING



take. Incredibly, he survived a self-inflicted gunshot to the face. He recalls the events of the hours, days and months following that dramatic experience. Some of his first words were telling his parents that he was sorry. From their response and the outpouring of support he received from friends, his view on life changed for the better. Times are still challenging and he has low points, but he then reminds himself of how grateful he is for what is around him, beginning with the love and support of family. Everyone needs to hear Carson share his story!

Next to speak was **Jim Duehring**, who drove down from Marquette, Michigan, to join us. As the assistant to the bishop of the Northern Great Lakes Synod, he shared about the Wild Church of the U.P. This is a mission development initiative to offer a deep connection to God in the outdoors. It's been well received by the church community as well as a general public that's intrigued to integrate faith with nature. Wild Church has made enough of an impact that it's being replicated in other parts of the country. Hearing about how they collected edibles from a hike to create the elements of communion was an inspiring highlight of Jim's talk.

It was a pleasure to hear from **Kurt Larson** who is on the Events Team and has been a key factor to LMM for years. I won't spoil the video by sharing the 12 words that changed the way he sees and lives every day—words we

Bold Gathering, continued on page 6

Bold Gathering, continued from page 5

all need to know and integrate into our day-to-day lives. Several folks in attendance are a part of Kurt's story, which just made it that much more meaningful.

When my family lived in Wisconsin, we attended Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Seymour. **Ty Stoneburner** wasn't the pastor there at the time, but he has since taken the call and shared a "body of Christ" ministry story. Through long and meaningful relationships in the congregation, the church purchased property, then took time to pray and discern how to put it to best use for the entire community. They weighed needs, and finally, to honor a previous resident, the church constructed an all-inclusive park for people with various challenges, from physical impairments to folks of any age dealing with mental hurdles. Everything was considered, from the use of the various equipment to respectful access to public restrooms adjacent to the park.

Finally, I shared my longtime desire to return to Wisconsin and share some of its ministries, including an internship project that First English Lutheran has sponsored for many years. It employs college-age individuals during the summer, and sometimes some throughout the year, for their two sites. I was surprised and delighted to hear that **Collins Pritchett** is now the staff member in charge of operating this program. I had first met Collins at seminary in South Carolina back in 2017. He went off to experience other ministries including Young Adults In Global Mission with the ELCA. Then a little later he landed this position. He faced a few challenges, some of which he shared during his presentation—pairing well with everything Carson and



Kurt had expressed earlier in the morning. The information about the internship program was great, but it's the personal testimony that made Collins's segment so powerful.

Bold Gathering 2024

We have not yet set the date for the next **Bold Gathering** for the spring of 2024, which we hope will take place at a church in the Philadelphia area. As the Event Team pulls together more details, we will keep you in the loop via our newsletters, emails and other communications. Similar to the past two Bold Gatherings, it will be recorded live in that location, then premiere on the LMM YouTube channel at a later date. If you live in the Northeast and would like to attend in person, we will offer that information. Stay tuned!

As always, we appreciate all who shares their stories, those who attend each event in person and online and, of course, support the Bold Gathering in prayers and monetary donations. None of this would be possible without the generous support from men like you. We pray that we continue to share meaningful stories, testimony and inspiring ministries from all across the country!

All Bold Gathering videos are archived and shared for anyone to use at www.boldgathering.com.

PROJECT TWELVE
Ecumenical Epiphany Worship
Thursday, January 4th
7:00 pm CST - online



Our Next Leap (Year) of Faith

How blessed am I, and all of us, to be part of **Lutheran Men In Mission's** ministry?

Well, now that I have about nine months of road behind me as either board president or acting president and feel that I'm on firm footing spiritually to help lead this organization into what promises to be a year of exciting change and discovery, I'm happy to report that the blessings keep coming on all sides. It's like Christmas every day.

I'm not talking about Amazon boxes crowding the space under the tree. I'm not talking about anything of this earth other than the seeds being spread in Jesus' name, by guys like me knocking through life with only Christ's light to guide us. I'm not talking about anything that can quantified on a spreadsheet or tracked by an invisible algorithm.

I'm simply talking about the powerful creative juices flowing through our board and spreading like a catchy hymn through rank-and-file followers like you. Blessings that have yet to be realized but are forming on the tips of our tongues, on the agendas of each monthly board meeting, and yes, in the burning coals of our souls.

Just as Jesus reimagined and reclaimed humankind in his father's name, we are working hard to reimagine and reclaim LMM in ways that will bring new men into the fold with gladness and gratitude and leverage our unconditional love for God and each other into a mighty force for good in myriad ways.

Allow me to share a few of these “reclaimed and reimagined” blessings with you.

The tried and true: In 2024 and beyond, we remain dedicated to providing the tools for men to give each other spiritual and mental support through Bold Gatherings, One Year to Live Retreats, online Bible and book studies.

The retooled: As winter moves into spring, we're working on ways to make the LMM website more user-friendly across all platforms, update our messaging and branding to widen the net of welcome and shape new ways of doing God's “business” here on earth. We're also putting special and intense focus on our Project XII website—filling out the long-planned Lifelines litany and considering ideas for a new set of modern man-friendly lessons to be written for future rollout.

The expanded and strengthened: In 2023 we saw a gratifying and heartening increase in men who committed to be LMM Ambassadors at the congregational level and Netcasters at the synod level. A big thanks to Dave Newman for his passionate and steady work on those fronts (and to our new Special Events Director, Matt Love, who has made major synod-level inroads out here in the West). We are making a difference in pews and within local men's ministry groups across the country!

More digital power: Dave is also the guy who brought us Bruce Krueger, a big-hearted Texan who, on his own time and own dime, built the first-ever LMM smartphone app, which he keeps improving every month, and puts the power of our ministry in the palm of your hand.

Indeed, there's a lot on our plates, but we've got a big appetite for creating and sharing the Good News in as many ways as possible. And there's more to come.

How to fuel this spirit-led work? With the power of your stewardship, your commitment to partner with us in terms of money, time, and faith. As we wind up 2023, we'd like to extend our hands and hearts to you, with our standing goal of \$250,000 still very much in play — perhaps you'd consider a year-end gift or commit to becoming a Bedrock Society member? The holiday appeal letter you received by mail from Executive Director John Sundquist spells out these ongoing needs and the many ways you can contribute both now and down the road. We truly can't do what we do, or dream what we dream, without you.

On behalf of the entire board and leaders, I thank you for the blessings of your partnership and passion, and pray for a safe Christmas season and healthy, light-filled 2024.

Your Brother in Christ,

Vic Williams

Board President, Lutheran Men in Mission
vic.williams@lutheranmeninmission.org



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We'd like to extend our hands and hearts to you ... We truly can't do what we do, or dream what we dream, without you.

foundations

Lutheran Men in Mission

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Lutheran Men in Mission Online

Find us online at lutheranmeninmission.org, or on:



and the Reaching Men blog
at reachingmen.blogspot.com

UPCOMING LMM

EVENTS & programs 2024



One Year To Live Retreats

April 19-21

**Tracy's Camp,
Pinewood, SC**

Registration Information
Online Registration

April 26-28

**Camp Cherokee, Kings Mountain
State Park, Blacksburg, SC**

Registration Information
Online Registration

April 12-14

**YMCA Camp Santa Maria,
Grant, CO**

Registration information
coming soon!

May 3-5

**Good Earth Village,
Spring Valley, MN**

Registration information
coming soon!

For information, visit www.lutheranmeninmission.org/events/
and www.lutheranmeninmission.org/events/one-year-to-live/

REACH beyond

LUTHERAN
MEN IN MISSION®



BOLD GATHERING



PROJECT TWELVE



As you count your blessings

consider supporting
Lutheran Men in Mission.

**With your support
more men will have
the opportunity to
become bold, daring
disciples of Jesus Christ.**

Visit the donation page of our website.

www.LutheranMeninMission.org