

Thursday, April 1, 2010—12:00 noon

**Saint Luke Lutheran Church
9100 Colesville Road at Dale Drive
Silver Spring, MD 20910**

“Haiti Relief from a Lutheran Perspective”

**The Rev. John A. Nunes, President
Lutheran World Relief**

John Arthur Nunes is the President and CEO of Lutheran World Relief—an organization that acts to end poverty and uphold human dignity by empowering the world’s most impoverished communities to bring about the transformation they need in order to live healthy, safe and secure lives. Combining 63 years of experience, an uncompromising pursuit of excellence, faith and prayer, LWR works with partners in 35 countries to promote sustainable development and increase human flourishing.

A prominent Lutheran leader, thinker and speaker, Nunes is known for his compelling voice applying theological insight to matters ranging from global issues to urban affairs. He joined LWR in July 2007. Prior to that, he has served as a college professor, management consultant, church musician, community organizer and pastor.

Nunes states: *“My call to LWR really gives me a prodigious opportunity to serve in the power of the Spirit, since, as Luther reminds us, ‘we should allow no one to suffer harm but show every kindness and love’ (The Large Catechism).”*

Nunes holds advanced academic degrees from schools affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). He is currently a PhD candidate at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

Born in Montego Bay, Jamaica, Nunes grew up in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, and has lived in the U.S. since 1981. He lives in Baltimore, Maryland with his wife, Monique, who is the principal of Baltimore Lutheran School, and his son, John, Jr. (15), the youngest of their five children.

We welcome Pastor Nunes to our April 1st meeting and we invite you to join us for his talk entitled, *“Haiti Relief from a Lutheran Perspective.”*

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We invite all Lutherans and their friends to join us for this luncheon meeting of **Lutheran Lay Fellowship**, scheduled for the first Thursday of each month from 12:00 noon till 2:00 p.m. at Saint Luke Lutheran Church, 9100 Colesville Road at Dale Drive in Silver Spring, one mile south of the Capitol Beltway at Exit 30. Ample off-street parking is available. Interested persons can make reservations for a delicious lunch by contacting **Vicki Porter at VICKI.PORTER@Longandfoster.com** or **301-229-9884** no later than 5:00 p.m. on **Tuesday, March 30**. The cost of the luncheon is \$9.00, payable at the door.

LLF Luncheon Minutes Thursday, March 4, 2010—12:00 noon

Our meeting began with a devotional by our guest speaker, Rev. Dr. Roy J. Enquist, who read Romans 8:18-24a, 38-39.

Announcements

March birthdays recognized included Lawrence Hayes (3rd) and Mary Hartzell (4th). Janet and Rodney Smith celebrate their anniversary on the 25th.

President Robert Sargeant asked for volunteers to serve as corporate members of Fellowship Square Foundation. This would entail serving on committees for local houses, giving financially, attending and voting at the annual meeting, and sharing their work in their community. Faye Codding from FSF mentioned its annual meeting, April 24, 2010 at Hunters Wood Fellowship House and the 50th Anniversary celebration coming up on Sunday, November 14, 2010. For questions, please contact Faye Codding at 703-471-5370 or fcodding@fellowshipsquare.org.

Rodney Smith has agreed to serve as Information Coordinator for the LLF Web Site. Items included on the site should be transmitted through him (socr1st@yahoo.com) or Robert Sargeant (bsarge6042@cox.net).

Speaker Notes

“The Courage to Believe: How Human Life May Flourish” **The Rev. Dr. Roy J. Enquist, Professor Emeritus** **Washington House of Studies, LTS-G**

Lutheran Lay Fellowship welcomed back the Rev. Dr. Roy J. Enquist (rjenquist@verizon.net), noted theologian and scholar, who introduced us to his new book, *The Courage to Believe: How Human Life May Flourish*. In his book published by Hansen-McMenamy Books of El Paso, Dr. Enquist writes that *“Biblical religion has made freedom, its power and responsibilities, not only central to the American heritage, but the birthright of all the children of God. Sometimes religion has been freedom’s chief enemy – an actual repudiation of the word of God. But mostly the enemy has been an act of defiance urged on by a wide variety of cultural leaders. In any case, our task again is to find a way to disentrall ourselves from the toxic dogmas of the quiet past. That requires finding the courage to believe we can reconnect power to moral responsibility.”*

(His introductory comment dealt with his connections to the LLF over the past 60 years and his commendation to the LLF for (1) its pioneering advocacy for Lutheran unity and (2) for its providing housing for seniors in the metropolitan Washington area.) Dr. Enquist then described his two major purposes in writing his book.

First, it should help us Christians be better disciples. A book about courage should encourage Christians in their conversations with family and friends. We don’t need more platitudes, clichés, and unexamined claims. We need more humor, humility, openness.

Secondly, the book should be helpful for churches that want to provide opportunities for people to grow into a more mature understanding of the gospel. Brief sermons don’t have the time to do this. The liturgy isn’t able to give opportunity for immediate response. Fundamentalism on the right and secularism on the left seem to be prospering. They get a lot of media attention probably because religion is inherently interesting. But what we need is an option that recognizes the concerns of both of these groups but which goes on to offer an alternative, one which shows how faith is generative for the flourishing of human life. That’s a big claim. The public deserves to get an opportunity to hear of an effort to show how that would work. It’s the job of congregations to do that. The book, thus, is intended to engage the general public—not by talking down to it, but by meeting it in a spirit of understanding and humility.

So what are the major problems or issues with religious belief today? Our speaker identified five major questions:

What do we mean by religious belief? We mean faith in God. Oceans of ink have been spilled in attempting to explain what faith in God means. This book holds that the best answer is the one given by Luther in the *Large Catechism*. It is an answer that makes atheism and agnosticism psychologically impossible. Brother Martin tells pastors to teach that to believe in God or to have a god means to trust in something or someone as the source of goodness (or truth) for your life. That means that everyone has a God. It may be the Holy Trinity, or one’s own brain power, or one’s net worth, or one’s family, race, nation, gender, or sexual orientation. It can even be the belief that

there is no God. If you believe that religion is nonsense, that too is a belief. No matter how negative or foolish the object of one's belief, it nonetheless is your actual god—what you depend on for goodness and truth. Thus, everyone, even the atheist, is a believer in something. Nonetheless belief is inescapable.

What about the conflict between the Bible and the theory of evolution? The theory of evolution everywhere employed by contemporary natural and social science today was anticipated by 19th century German Protestant biblical scholars who showed how the biblical documents were developed historically in the oral traditions of Israel and early Christianity. It is now clear, for example, that the biblical understanding of creation did not suddenly appear all at once but developed in three major stages – twice in the 10th and 6th centuries BC and again in the 1st century of the common era. The continuities and changes in this biblical tradition is itself an evolution. Of course, creation still continues today. So should our understanding of the development of the natural world and its divine context

What about the mutual antagonism among the world religions? The religious tragedy of our time is not the spread of atheism--even though the 20th century clearly showed how dehumanizing atheism can be. The major tragedy is that Judaism, Christianity and Islam all claim to be monotheists. They claim they worship and obey the one, true, and only God of heaven and earth. Creator of all that is, the divine mystery from whom we all come and to whom we all go. Each tradition teaches that all who believe in this one God are eternally connected to him and that this is due to his justice, mercy and compassion. Receiving those gifts requires living in obedience to God and in justice with all of God's people. In practice though, these traditions are typically not willing to do this. They commonly turn the gift of faith in one God into a rationale for denying their connection to all others who have been given the power to believe in one God. Thus they show they are not obedient to the God they claim they believe in. The Bible has a very ugly word for that form of disobedience.

Who is Jesus? We have become able to see more clearly than did most believers in earlier times that the NT gives a wide range of answers. Each has its power and truth. Our creeds and confessions should not be permitted to obscure or deny this richness and vitality. The NT gives us five major pictures of him. In general sequence we name them after Paul, Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. Each graphically show his humanity—his historical kinship to all women and men. Each witnesses to his unique embodiment of the holiness, justice, love, and salvation of us all. Great art often employs. The faithful cannot forbid the Scriptures to do that as well.

What about religion in America? What about the constitutional separation of church and state? First of all, note that the Constitution does not speak of the separation of church and state. That was a theological notion which Jefferson obtained from the Baptists in Rhode Island. The Constitution is far more sophisticated. Its first amendment wisely prohibits Congress from respecting any "*establishment of religion*". That's an 18th century way of prohibiting the federal government from dealing (pro or con) with any established church-- such as the established churches of Europe. They characteristically functioned as departments of the government and were financially dependent on it. This control of the established institutions of religion was politically useful but denied religious groups social autonomy and prophetic integrity. The Founder's original solution to the relation of church and state was to limit the powers of the Congress on two fronts. They held that Congress is not empowered to control religious institutions or to prohibit the people from "exercising" their religious convictions. These two principles were combined in an attempt to deal carefully, respectfully, and creatively with what had been a traditional problem in Western culture. It seems to have been a boon to the churches. Subsequently, religion has proven to be a major force in American life-- mostly as a creative critic of the nation's moral behavior. The religiously shaped moral convictions of Abraham, Lincoln and Martin Luther King significantly grappled with major unfinished business the Founders left us with. Mark Twain was especially important.

The book ends not with these common questions but with a common concern. Today the churches and society are increasingly aware of the importance of good health. Strange to say, this has turned out to be both politically controversial and theologically challenging. The book ends on a strongly sacramental approach, what I call a "bodily spirituality." It shows how the sacraments are cleansing and nurturing, how they connect us as communities and as persons to the Source of our well being and being well.. When we are deeply connected to God and to one another, we are well connected indeed. That's the gift of the gospel. It's our duty and joy to claim, to celebrate, and to share it with the grievously wounded, suffering world we live in. Isn't that what disciples are expected to do? When you're well connected, you can do it.
