

2020-22 Lay Leader Network Participant Testaments – Just a Few

Drew Anderson

My connection to a community of faith was strengthened by the Lay Leader Network. In a season of isolation due to COVID-19, our monthly virtual meetings allowed me to connect with individuals in different cities who, like me, were reflecting on our role as modern Lutherans navigating the stressors of a secular age. Deep listening and idea sharing were the hallmarks of our conversations as we reviewed the Gospel, Luther's Small Catechism, and Andrew Root's *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*. A special meeting with Andrew Root himself speaks to the quality of curriculum that the LLN provides its participants. If you are exploring what faith leadership could mean in the day-to-day rhythm of your personal life, you will benefit from the LLN experience.

Monica Bruning

I've been an informal lay leader all my life – as a Sunday School teacher or confirmation mentor, Church Council, small group ministry leader, women's ministry retreat developer and host, et al – so when I read about the Lay Leader Network Intensive Series, I asked my pastor if my church would sponsor me and they did! What a gift and blessing is an understatement! I feel like I'm in seminary classes because the curriculum, faculty, and dialogue with my classmates is rich, sometimes profound, and feeds my need for faith and spiritual development. I appreciate understanding the history and sociological influences that have affected the/our church today as well as how together we must press on as the church, because the Bible tells us so! The biblical instruction of the curriculum provides methods to better understand and embrace what the wise book advises. What I am learning is put into action to advance the church and faithful!

Jamie Coniff

I've enjoyed LLN for at least a few reasons:

- I'm a newcomer to the ELCA and, really, to serious reflection on faith. LLN has been an opportunity for me to learn more about Christianity and Lutheranism in the context of the modern moment.
- LLN has been an opportunity to read and discuss great books.
- LLN has been an opportunity to meet new people, including rostered and lay leaders, from around our region, and to learn about what's inspiring them in their communities.

Rhonda Degelau

For me, the Yearly Intensive Series has been a rich experience of in-depth study of Scripture and other readings, reflection, and discussion. It's a "taste" of seminary, but so much more! I'm a life-long Lutheran, but am now grounded in my faith in new ways and seeing new energy and purpose for my faith community."

Doug Jacobson

The Lay Leader Network series is an excellent way for lay members of congregations to go deeper than is typically available in a bible study. My involvement for the past two years has vastly increased my understanding of the evolution of our society, where secularism was inconceivable as God was a part of everything, to one in which transcendence and divine action are unbelievable. The growing dominance of secular beliefs, technology and communication systems is at the root of declining involvement in congregations. Combining the study of the growth of secularism in our society, as described by Andrew Root, with the study of the Apostles, and writings by theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Thomas Merton has vastly enriched my spirituality.

Julie Jagim

It has been a personal gift to be able to dive into scripture more deeply and connect that with our Lutheran beliefs in today's cultural context. It has been both challenging and joyfully rewarding to live out my faith in this learning and sharing environment. It's a kind of fullness that I have not experienced before.

Ryan Jagim

When my wife Julie excitedly shared her interest in the LLN and the books they were planning to read, I responded that I was not interested in another activity, especially one that took away Saturday time. She shared some of the books that she had ordered for the upcoming sessions, and they caught my interest especially Speaking Christian by Marcus Borg. So, with a slight "twist of arm", I agreed to sign up and start this LLN journey. Now after 3 years, I look forward to next year's journey. I have been blessed by the amazing biblical scholarship of Pastor David Mesner and how he brings the bible passages alive for me. Pastor Mark Skinner helps me understand the history of my Lutheran tradition and the

challenges of faith in this secular age. While Pastor Jim Bailey is no longer part of the initial teaching triad, his ability to share the historical context of the scriptures was invaluable. This journey is a place where I could learn and share with others my faith journey and questions. The ability to connect, whether remotely or in person, with other LLN members across the synod has been so a great experience, that I look forward to next year's LLN series.

Bob Kelley

I have participated in the Lay Leader Intensive for the past two year. I came back after the first year (which I admit was challenging) because it helped to equip me for living in a post-resurrection world that is trying to leave the importance of Christianity behind. The Bible studies were revelatory and Dr. Root's texts (which are not part of next year's syllabus) gave context to living as a Christian in this rapidly changing world. It is well worth the time and monetary cost.

Sue Lyback

From the predecessor two-year School of Lay Ministry model, additional Elective sessions and now the Lay Leader Network, I have deeply benefited from ongoing educational opportunities and meaningful relationships that have both fed my hungry spirit and broadened my capacity to serve. I have been especially grateful to see the increasing inclusion, empowerment and engagement of lay persons in leadership roles in our synod. We all have gifts to share as members of the Body of Christ. Lay Leader Network can be one way to prepare lay leaders to recognize, develop and live into their own strengths in their congregations and communities. It has been a joy to journey with others in this way.

Tom Martin

The Lay Leader Program has given me a deeper understanding of the scriptures and has offered me new ways in which to read the Bible. I especially love the mornings, feeling like I'm diving into the Bible as a seminary student would, with the guidance of our Theologians. I feel compelled to write about God, and the ideas that have come to me during our study of the scriptures have made it into my writings. I also deeply value and appreciate the time that Pastors Messner and Skinner put into the program. They create an environment that fosters exciting discussions, and also develops a good sense of camaraderie with my fellow Lay Leaders. I am hoping to find new avenues in the future in which to pass along what I learn to my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Craig Sanders

LLN has invigorated me with a thirst for deep Bible learning and insight. My time has come to learn and absorb more deeply than ever in my life. It has also been VERY useful to learn about the cultural changes in the secularism that is emerging in the U.S. and in many parts of the world. I am learning how to respond to these changes in a succinct way. LLN has been exactly what I've needed for so long, and I am very thankful for the group learning environment.

Paula Tsufis

A few years ago, our congregation offered the Living Your Strengths Program based on the book, *Living Your Strengths: Discover Your God-given Talents and Inspire Your Community*, by Albert L. Winseman, Donald O. Clifton, and Curt Liesveld. As part of this program, I did the Clifton StrengthsFinder online assessment. My strengths included learning, ideation, intellection, strategic and achievement. My take on this is I tend to spend a lot of time in my head but eventually I get a lot of stuff done. The Lay Leader Network has been a Godsend for me to hone my God-given gifts for the future ministry of our congregation. The curriculum is appropriately challenging, the pastoral leaders Pastor Dave Mesner and Pastor Mark Skinner are awesome, and the conversation with other participants vital to working through the current challenges facing the church today. I would encourage church leaders struggling with "what to do" to join in our Spirit-led learning and practical discussion.

Sherri Underthun

So here is my take on the Lay ministry program. I have wanted to take it for years, as I am interested in covering for the pastor if needed for a service here or there. What I discovered in taking the class, just in the first year, is that I had the wrong idea. I learned lay ministry was a deeper immersion into the gospel. I also learned about scholars who have influenced the Lutheran ministry. My biggest take away though has been my faith journey growing beyond what I ever imagined. It has caused me to feel some very strong emotions this past year. I, like everyone else who has gone through the pandemic, have become more self-centered and less Christ – or community – centered. With the difficulties we have all faced I found myself not seeing others through the eyes of Christ, rather through the eyes of my man-made secular vision. I now believe true Grace and forgiveness comes when we give ourselves to God and give up the secular reasoning – not always easy to do. I am looking forward to continuing my journey and becoming closer to God.