

LifeNEWS

PROMOTING THE SANCTITY OF LIFE



AUGUST 2018

VOLUME 34

NUMBER 1

Life redeemed but not yet known

KIMBERLEY PFEIFFER

As Mary Magdalene came to the tomb grieving the death of Jesus she found him risen. Yet Christ asked her not to cling to him for he had not yet ascended (John 20:17). Only after his ascension can her sorrow turn into true joy, for he went to the Father where he, as our great High priest, hears the prayers of the church and sympathises with us in our weaknesses so that we may receive mercy and grace (Hebrews 4:15-16).

I remember the day she announced her pregnancy. It was with great joy at a Bible study for mums and kids at church. My dear sister in Christ that morning shared her joy and anticipation, nerves and excitement. I've noticed some of us Christian mothers doing this - announcing our pregnancies during those very early weeks - hoping that our family in Christ will pray for us. We know after all, that it is only by the grace of God that life in the womb is sustained and brought to its fullness in birth. A few weeks after we were sharing her joy we were grieving with her, for she had learned that the child she was carrying no longer had life. Some of us knew this kind of grief - it presses hard on the

soul. Carried by prayers of the saints who, in Christ, share in the cry: for mercy, for grace.

Another Christian mother shared with me her story about a pregnancy that came soon after the birth of her second child. Her first two children were quite close together and the thought of "three under three" was simply overwhelming. Her pregnancy began as normal but somewhere during the second trimester her womb began to feel hard, heavy. It was confirmed at her 20-week scan - no life. Labour was induced and she delivered her baby, still. They named him and she and her husband received pastoral care. Her grief was shared by

her congregation, but in a way that was not expected.

Though for her, her grief was mixed with relief, it offered her sisters in Christ an opportunity to also mourn their pregnancy losses yet grieved. A funeral for her child was held and later a commemoration service was offered for all who had lost a life through miscarriage, still birth and abortion. Guidance for this right was given by the LCA's book on Pastoral Rites and Resources (the blue book).



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Life News is the newsletter of Lutherans for Life Inc - Est. in 1987
Sponsored by the Lutheran Church of Australia.

PRINT POST APPROVED PERIODICAL NO, PP442570/0006 ISSN 1033-7725
EDITOR: KIMBERLEY PFEIFFER L.N.EDITOR@GMAIL.COM

Editorial

KIMBERLEY PFEIFFER

A conversation was once relayed to me about how we in the church regard the unborn. This person was making the claim that if we really took the life of the unborn seriously we would have funerals for every baby lost through miscarriage. The first article in this issue points out not only that we, in the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand, have recognition of the life of the unborn embedded in our rites and resources, but we have pastors quietly and faithfully serving those who have lost children in pregnancy and so acknowledging these lives.

I've been recently reading Dr Stephen Pietsch's book "Of Good Comfort: Martin Luther's Letters to the Depressed and their Significance for Pastoral Care Today." The book contains a number of letters penned by Martin Luther to individuals struggling with depression, anxiety or similar struggles. This book contains some Luther gems, but one feature that I have been most encouraged by is the role that the whole Christian community plays in comforting one another by bringing the incarnate voice of God to those who are suffering - the office of consolation (*officium consolandi*). Luther's letters remind his readers not to listen to their own thoughts, "but

listen to me, your brother in Christ," as he brings to them the comfort of the Gospel in their time of darkness. He says:

"So listen to what we say to you in God's name: that you ought to rejoice in Christ, your gracious Lord and Redeemer. Let him bear your load, for he certainly cares about you, even though things have not yet improved as you would like. Still, he lives. Expect the best from him. In his eyes, this is the greatest sacrifice; as the Scriptures say; no sacrifice is more pleasing and acceptable than a joyful heart that rejoices in the Lord."

Meditating on how Christ comes to us today in his church, through his Word and his people, through the prayer, hymns and art, we can all share in the comfort that God gives us in Christ.

Heavenly Father, continue to bless our Lutheran congregations as we experience life together in Christ, thank you for faithful pastors who quietly minister to those grieving the loss of an unborn child. Help us grow in sharing the Gospel of Christ with each other in times of vulnerability and weakness for our good and for your glory. Amen.



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lutheransforlife@lca.org.au

Life New Editor

LN.editor@gmail.com

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LFL activity...

GROW MINISTRY'S NATIONAL YOUTH FORUM

On April 13, 2018 two of our committee members, Joshua Pfeiffer and Chelsea Pietsch, were invited to speak at the 'Have a Voice' National Youth Forum in Adelaide run by Grow Ministries. About 30 young people were there from all around the LCA. It was a tremendous privilege to be involved. Joshua and Chelsea spent the day covering Biblical foundations for life issues, abortion, marriage, sexuality, euthanasia, and practical Christian responses. They looked at what the Scriptures teach us as well as medical and legal perspectives. They also spent some time approaching the whole area from the angle of 'worldview', exploring how so many differences on these issues arise from fundamentally different ways of seeing the world. It was great to hear the young people of our Church thoughtfully engage with these issues and begin to integrate this into their Christian faith. LFL hopes to be able to continue offering talks and presentations like this in our Church for the cause of life.



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I was encouraged to later learn that the mother from my Bible study group had also been warmly ministered to by her pastor during her time of grief. Many weeks after, I was in a conversation with this pastor about this couple. He mentioned to me that when he shared the news of the miscarriage at an evening pastoral care team meeting this similarly gave permission for other sisters to share their grief. The pastor was then able to offer them comfort in their sorrow and peace through Jesus Christ.

The 'blue book' of Rites and Resources for Pastoral Care offers some good advice and words of comfort:

"Repeatedly reassure Christian parents who may be anxious about the unbaptised state of the deceased that unbaptised children are also children of God their creator, who have been committed to his keeping during pregnancy. In addition it may be assumed that an unborn child lives within the baptismal life of his/her mother as a member of the Christian congregation while he/she is within the womb." (p 101)

And, with the words of Isaiah 49:

"Before I was born, the Lord chose me and appointed me to be his servant. [The Lord

says:] can a woman forget her own baby and not love the child she bore? Even if a mother should forget her child, I will never forget you. I have written your name on the palms of my hands."

And the prayer:

"Father in heaven, in your loving kindness draw near to these parents in their sad loss. You know with what joy they looked forward to the birth of their child, and with what deep sorrow they now face their baby's death. Take them into your tender care, and support them in their grieving. Reassure them that, as their little one was committed to your care, you have gathered their child into your everlasting arms. Good shepherd, lead these parents by the hand, give them courage and strength to face the future, and provide for their needs. Amen.

We at Lutherans for Life commend the use of this resource to all pastors ministering to women and their families at the loss of a child before birth.

'Rites and Resources for Pastoral Care' produced by the Commission of Worship of the Lutheran Church of Australia is available at Australian Church Resources

Mercy at Life's End

Increasingly in our society the Christian perspective on life and death, and on what is appropriate as one nears death, is at odds with prevailing opinion and practice. The drive for legalised euthanasia in various states adds further uncertainty. In this situation some Christians may be looking for a simple guide which provides theological, spiritual, pastoral and practical help in navigating this terrain. John Pless has provided just such a guide called 'Mercy at Life's End: A guide for laity and their pastors'.

Pless impressively draws on broad areas of Christian ethical thought and condenses it into a relatively short and accessible little booklet. As well as reflecting theologically and offering pastoral words of encouragement, he also introduces some of the fundamental principles and distinctions Christian ethicists have used. This then develops into some very practical and helpful questions that Pless suggests a Christian person may want to ask their medical practitioner about proposed treatment or withdrawal of treatment.

We highly recommend this resource for anyone looking for help in this area. It can be found on the Lutherans for Life website under the 'Euthanasia and physician assisted suicide' tab.



The dying man (1518), Lucas Cranach the Elder

Meditations on a new (old) hymn

For my spiritual encouragement I recently found myself singing the hymn "*Dear Christians, one and all rejoice*" at Divine Service. The original can be found at Lutheran Hymnal 322 and the modernised version can be found at *Together in Song* 196. For this meditation I'll be referring to the version found in *Together in Song*. This hearty Lutheran anthem, originally penned by Luther in 1523, has been revised for our encouragement and to continue the unity of spirit shared with the saints for nearly five hundred years.

The first verse awakens us from our slumber with, "Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice" and invites us to join in the joy and celebration as we proclaim what God has done for us through Christ: "the battle fought, the victory won, and how much it has cost him."

The hymn reminds us that despite the despair that sin brings upon our hearts, in times of weakness and vulnerability in life, we need not fear for we have already been redeemed by the love of God in Christ.

As I stood in church that morning singing this hymn I found great comfort in knowing that though sin brings only death, and though Satan loves to taunt me, the saints have known for centuries that these trials are a part of the Christian life of sanctification.

By sweet grace, we breathe in the gospel and proclaim it in song to each other in the third and fourth verses. And if the gift of the gospel, given for us before we knew our need were not enough, the hymn goes on to encourage us in our Christian life now by laying out for us the path as we enter into our life in Christ. This is the path that, though it brings us to the cross and into struggle and even death, is one where Christ travels with us. The comfort is that he *goes before us and struggles for us*. His life "will swallow death and win, that Christ has covered all our sin and we are blessed forever."

Thanks be to God for the saints who have taken the effort to encourage the church today by keeping hymns such as this one alive. KP



TIS 196: Dear Christians, one and all rejoice

- 1 Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice,
let's celebrate together;
let's sing with joy and confidence
about our loving Saviour;
proclaim the great things God has done,
the battle fought, the victory won,
and how much it has cost him.
- 2 Once Satan held me in his chains,
I suffered night and morning,
for I was lost in death through sin,
the sin that I was born in.
My heart was filled with deep despair;
I feared that only death was there,
and I'd be lost for ever.
- 3 But long ago God saw my need;
his mercy would not leave me,
and he remembered his great love,
determined now to save me.
He turned a father's heart to me,
and, knowing what the cost would be,
gave up his dearest treasure.

- 4 God said to his beloved Son:
'It's time to show compassion.
Then go, my heart's most precious crown,
and bring the poor salvation.
Release them from their sin's distress,
kill death, with all its bitterness,
that they may live for ever.'
- 5 To me Christ said: 'Hold on to me,
and I will go before you;
I wholly give myself to you,
and I will struggle for you.
My life will swallow death, and win;
my innocence bears all your sin,
and you are blest for ever.

'Nun freut euch, lieben Christen gmein
Martin Luther 1483-1546/ Tr David Schubert 1989

Available at http://www.lca.org.au/worship/cowadmin/?tachment_id=5098

Euthanasia soon to be before Australian Federal Senate

After Victoria passed its assisted dying by lethal dose law (to come into effect in July 2019), the Australian Capital Territory and federal Labor and Greens began a push to repeal the Commonwealth law that stops the territories from making laws to allow euthanasia. The ACT parliament are holding hearings into choices available to Canberrans at the end of their life. Providers of palliative care are speaking of the significant unmet need for wider and better palliative care services.

www.canberratimes.com.au/politics/act/a-retired-major-general-makes-his-case-against-the-right-to-die-20180517-p4zfst.html

My medical colleague David Van Gend writes on euthanasia, as the Federal Senate prepares to consider the Restoring Territory Rights (Assisted Suicide Legislation) Bill when it returns from its winter recess in August. Should it pass the Senate, Greens MP Adam Bandt has promised to sponsor the Bill in the House of Representatives. We have politicians talk of preventing rising suicide rates and then looking at passing a law to assist people to suicide, when requests to end life prematurely are often a cry for help. Can those who share my concern please write to their Senators asking them to reject this Bill and promote improved palliative care?

www.spectator.com.au/2018/07/did-granny-jump-or-was-she-pushed/

Journal of Palliative Care examines euthanasia

Margaret Somerville and others have written in the Journal of Palliative Care to summarise what they consider to be the five strongest reasons to oppose euthanasia. The headings are – 1) slippery slopes, 2) lack of self-determination, 3) inadequate palliative care, 4) medical professionalism, and 5) difference between means and ends.

www.bioedge.org/bioethics/what-are-the-five-best-arguments-against-euthanasia/12723

Child Protection and Adoption in Australia

“Chloe Valentine’s tragic death (in 2012) has sparked renewed calls for the permanent adoption of vulnerable children ... Dr Sammut ... has published reports and a book, The Madness of Australian Child Protection: Why Adoption Will Rescue Australia’s Underclass Children .. in 2015-16, about 46,500 children were in out-of-home care but only 278 adoptions were finalised”

www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/law-order/tragic-abuse-cases-like-chloe-valentines-are-fuelling-moves-for-more-permanent-adoption/news-story/2475785ec61ab5c7ba396981d99b5d30

Hungary’s pro-family government

“Hungary’s ever increasing support for families by the government is creating an environment where marriages and families are flourishing and abortion numbers are dropping.. The support has caused abortion numbers to plunge by more than a third of what they were in 2010 (40,449 to 28,500) .. (There has been) a plunge in the number of divorces (23,873 in 2010 to 18,600 in 2017 and a surge in the number of marriages (35,520 in 2010 to 50,600 in 2017)”

www.lifesitenews.com/news/hungary-sees-abortion-numbers-plunge-with-rise-of-pro-family-policies



NSW passes 150m “safe zone” around abortion clinics

On 8 June the NSW Parliament passed a private members bill to create what are called “safe access zones” of 150 metres around all NSW abortion facilities. The new law makes it a criminal offence to communicate in any way with women attending a facility, with a penalty of a fine of up to \$16,500 or prison for up to 12 months. It appears that even silent prayer within the zone can be regarded as illegal intimidation. Pro-life sidewalk counsellors will no longer be free to offer help to vulnerable and desperate women who are considering an abortion and are possibly being coerced by an abusive partner, family member or employer. Such women receive no genuine counselling within abortion clinics, whose purpose is to sell abortions. The women may be unaware of other options such as pregnancy help centres, which can provide support including accommodation and cover medical costs. That kindness and generosity can now land pro-life people in jail when any person such as a partner chooses to complain. Over the last few years hundreds of women have accepted such offers of help and so hundreds of babies are alive today.

Epping MP Damien Tudehope said the new law was an “extreme and unjustified violation of free speech. In my own experience people who engage in prayer vigils and sidewalk counselling are peaceful and caring citizens ... What this bill does is turn those people into criminals.”

www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/backbench-mps-argue-over-abortion-clinics-safe-access-zones/news-story/d89d1ca7de4255cf2b23c392cad124bb

Ireland Legalises abortion

“Ireland has legalised abortion by repealing the Eighth Amendment to its constitution (passed in 1983). Turnout was strong, with about 64 per cent of the electorate casting a vote after a long and hard-fought campaign on both sides.” Ireland has become more progressive over recent years, legalising same-sex marriage in 2015. In the vote on 26 May, 66 per cent of voters backed allowing abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, and between 12 and 24 weeks in exceptional circumstances. Sceptics note that similar laws in other countries are bent to allow abortion on request right up to the time of birth. Many sources, including

www.bioedge.org/bioethics/ireland-votes-to-legalise-abortion/12709

US withdraws abortion funding to international agencies

US President Donald Trump has enforced the Mexico City Policy, which prohibits any taxpayer funding to international groups that promote and/or provide abortions overseas. The International Planned Parenthood Federation says it is losing an estimated \$100 million in US funding as a result. While pro-abortion activists claim the policy is hurting women across the globe, the truth is that the US funding has been diverted to more than 700 groups that provide true medical care, with only four pro-abortion groups losing their funding.

www.lifenews.com/2018/06/06/president-trumps-decision-to-defund-international-planned-parenthood-cost-it-100-million/



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