

October

NEW SCANDINAVIA LUTHERAN CHURCH OCTOBER NEWSLETTER 2022

“Can the Rural Church Grow?”

God’s Country by Brad Roth is a book that takes into perspective the faith, hope, and the future of the rural church. New Scandinavia, of course, is a typical rural church located west of Chetek, southeast of Barron, and north of Dallas, Wisconsin. The church is close to celebrating 150 years of life in 2025.

Today the church is no longer an agrarian church with many families engaged in farming as it used to be. While at one time the Sunday School and confirmation classes were large due to the family farms, this is no longer the case. One has to ponder the sustainability and future of our church and this book lifts up some basic principles that will continue to make NSLC a place where God is worshipped, and it thrives.

While growth in a church is often weighed by numbers, Roth lifts up the true value inherent to a rural church. First, he says that if we take cue from 1 Peter 3:15,



“but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence;”

For us this means that we can measure success and reclaim the ancient practice of early Christian's by relating and listening people into the kingdom of God. Thus, it is rooted in our own growth of having an authentic relationship in Christ Jesus.

Inherent in this is that God is at work in us and through us. Our personal vitality and love for Jesus will attract others to discover what we have discovered. Our challenge is that we are all suffering from a consumerism mentality that created maladies in our life. True recovery is not in Ibuprofen, Acetaminophen, Advil, or even Xanax but the peace of God in our life.

True growth comes through personal growth in the life of the church. Others will see and want we have. Others are looking for what the Holy Scriptures speak as the place where God's vision for humanity is fulfilled. Remember this word from Jesus,

What do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?" (Matthew 16:26)

The second cue for growth is that we welcome neighbors and strangers rather in the present rather than focusing on the past. The Gospel is about connecting people into the community of Christ. Jesus demonstrates this throughout his ministry on earth because he had a prophetic vision of the Kingdom of God. His appropriate words were "***Follow me.***" (See Luke 9:60; Mark 8:34; Mark 2:11; Matthew 4:19 et al.) At the heart of the issue is interconnectedness. As we meet and talk with others, we should seek to discover our interconnectedness. People are not limited in superficial niceties but authentic relationships. The Gospel is about connecting people to the community of Christ. This comes with listening to people not just telling things to other people!

Many of us have forgotten how to share our faith. It comes by first actively listening to our neighbors, and then when the time is right, we can share what our faith means to us. A simple example may go like this: "I went to Sunday School here and I have been going here all my life." or "Our pastor's sermon was on this little boy...and it touched me" or "I love it when we sing 'Amazing Grace' it just warms my heart all over."

Our church can grow when each of us are authentic Christians. When we live our life with meaning and purpose, we will draw others to us and our community of believers. This is how we can anticipate real growth. Instead of a focus on numbers, we are person focused as was our Lord Jesus!

By Pastor Ron Gerl who loves you for who you are