

Lutheran Lay Fellowship of Metropolitan Washington DC



LUNCHEON MEETING Thursday, May 2, 2013 – 12:00 noon

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

Opening Announcements

President Bob Sargeant opened the meeting shortly after noon, noting that we had a fifth table of attendees. There were neither first time visitors nor birthdays. Faye Coddling celebrates her wedding anniversary on May 4.

Devotions

Chaplain Larry Schmidt recalled an LLF board meeting present who spoke on the Eden alternative to health – aging is a continuing stage of growth and development rather than a period of decline. He offered the Collect for Ascension, which reminds us that Christ is with us always. He read the Epistle for the day – Paul to the Ephesians. The Eden approaches says that loneliness, boredom, and helplessness are the three "plagues" of the elderly. The Epistle provides an "antidote" to these.

Business

Candidates for next month's election are to be presented at this meeting according to our by-laws. Current officers of the executive committee will continue to serve for another six months while a planning process regarding the future direction of the organization is done.

The Roundtable for Northern Virginia of Roanoke College is looking for ways to expand working relationships with the school systems of both DC and Maryland. Those with names or suggestions of people in these school systems are asked to contact Bob Sargeant.

Faye Coddling presented news from the Fellowship Square Foundation board meeting in April. She distributed booklets on "Transforming Lives." Residents are eligible who

meet HUD poverty guidelines. Currently all meet the level of "extremely low income." Many who worked full or part-time no longer work, greatly reducing already meager incomes. She encouraged people to tell these stories in church newsletters and leave brochures in racks for pickup.

The LLF scholarship this year will be at the level of \$2000, with two to be given. These are for juniors and seniors in college. Now is the time to apply. Information and application form are online. Deadline is June 15. Our scholarship chair, Dan Bella, was hospitalized last week and had brain surgery. Information will be shared as it becomes available. John Priebe noted that there have been few applicants in recent years.

Carolyn Sowinski of Gifts of Hope thanked Fellowship Square for including them as donors in their literature. Online contributions can be offered all year – 39 different options. Cards are available for you to send to those you honor through a gift.

Rodney Smith on May 11 will be working on a person's home that needs rehab. Volunteers are needed with carpentry skills, as well as those with the knowledge of how to re-work things as well as do the physical labor.

Ellie Wegner again reminded of the employment and memoir writing groups as well as her leading an upcoming trip to Great Britain.

Introduction of Speaker

David Berg announced that our speaker for next month is President John Denninger of the LCMS Southeast District.

Due to the 4th of July falling on a Thursday, we will have no meeting that month.

Today's speaker, the Rev. Dr. Carmelo Santos, graced the February cover of The Lutheran Magazine. He is on the staff of St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Springfield, and teaches at Georgetown University. He received his Bachelor's degree from the University of Puerto Rico and his Master of Divinity and Ph. D from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. He lives in Arlington, Virginia with his wife and child.

Presentation

"God and the Brain from a Lutheran Perspective" was the topic for Dr. Santo's presentation. Dr. Santos has studied and teaches about a relatively new inter-field area of research called the biopsychological approaches to religion, or the neuroscience of religious experience - or "neurotheology."

Pioneers in this research include Andrew Newberg, a trained radiologist and Eugene D'Aguilli who together researched how the brain works during prayer. The advent of scanning technologies allows us to see what's going on in the brain in "real time." They studied Tibetan monks during their meditation, as well as Franciscan nuns, scanning them as they meditated or prayed. The research participants were instructed to pull a string when they reached the level they defined as their peak religious experience. The researchers then compared before and after scans. Their study is reported in their book *Why God Won't Go Away. Oneness with the universe (for the monks) or with Christ (for the nuns) was how they defined this ultimate experience.*

The researchers found an increase in activity in the frontal lobe of the left side of the brain, but a decrease in the parietal lobes. Scientists have mapped which parts of the brain are connected to parts of the body. The limbic system is associated with the processing of emotions (fight or flight emotions). On the left parietal lobe one finds the defining of the self in relation to the environment. The right side defines the environment. In "absolute unity," the frontal lobes were telling the rest of the brain to "block everything" except that which is being meditated upon, e.g. the Cross.

Different religions have different ways of activating these systems, through prayer, or music, or dancing, in which the person experiences an ecstasy.

More research by Austin, who is a Buddhist, has built on this research based on visual stimulus. Researchers use a "brain helmet" which maps electrical impulses. Pain management is also addressed through this knowledge of brain functioning. Other studies look at how morality is affected. The Templeton Foundation funds and reports on this research. Patrick McNamara of Boston College in *The Neuroscience of Religious Experience* reports that certain regions of the brain, which he calls "the religions circuit" He asks, why does the brain develop this? What is the evolutionary purpose? He posits that religious experiences strengthen the self. We have ideals, and we build ourselves in relation toward that ideal.

Barbara Bradley Hagery's *Fingerprints of God: The Search for the Science of Spirituality* is a good review of this nexus of faith and science.

A question was raised about the person's developmental process. Another question raised how mysticism is accounted for in this approach. What is a delusion? What is a "vision?"

From a Lutheran theological perspective: Luther talks about how we are changed as a result of our relationship with God, e.g. forged like iron.

What happens to the soul if we can explain all this through the brain? When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, it was also translated into the philosophical concept of the Platonic understanding and terminology. This has implications for how we understand the afterlife. We believe in the resurrection of the whole body, not just the soul. The concept of the "freedom of the will" – is there such a thing?

There is a "fundamentalism" of science – the brain scan is the new "Bible." There is confusion about what is an assumption and what is a conclusion.

A question was raised as to whether this information has been introduced to the seminaries. Yes, at Chicago and Philadelphia, at least.

Chaplain Schmidt dismissed us, reflecting on St. Paul's experience of Hearing, which no one else heard, and offered a prayer focusing on the mysteries of faith.