



NEWSLETTER

timeline

1ST QUARTER • 2016



REV. ROOSEVELT GRAY, JR.

“There is nothing more reputable to a race or nation than Christian service. So let us not hesitate, but grasp every opportunity that will enable us to do some good for others. As teachers, teach the people; as merchants, supply their needs; as doctors, administer their wants; and as preachers, proclaim the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

~ Rosa Young, 1909. ”

Rev. Gregory Manning with summer campers at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, New Orleans.



DO THE WORK OF AN EVANGELIST

As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Tim. 4:5).

“Do the work of an evangelist” is the call of the Spirit through the apostle Paul to the young preacher Timothy. “Tell the story of the Good News about Jesus” is His plea to all God’s children. Share the Gospel, the light of the world, to those who sit in darkness.

Rosa J. Young knew that call very well. This year, we celebrate 100 years of her ministry and its effects with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), sharing the Gospel in rural Alabama. In her book, *Light in the Dark Belt* (first published by Concordia Publishing House in 1950), Dr. Young talks of her commitment to sharing the Good News.

Every summer, when she was not teaching, she “made it a rule to visit every home in the community and adjacent communities.” She wrote, “Every morning I rose early, prayed the Holy Spirit be with me that day and through his Word to cause the pure Gospel message to touch the hearts of all I see. ... So I set out on my mission tour, seeking souls for Jesus all along the way.”

Young and the LCMS also proclaimed the Word by establishing parochial schools for rural blacks, responding to local pleas for “the Lutherans” to come to isolated communities throughout the region. They established 30 schools, 35 congregations and a college, reaching thousands of blacks in rural Alabama. Young noted in her book that some 3,200 souls were added to the membership of the LCMS and the kingdom of God.

Today, as I look at our congregations from coast to coast, I see laypeople and pastors loving their neighbors in word and deed, proclaiming Christ in summer programs, afterschool tutoring, food pantries, senior classes, health clinics, day care centers and schools. “We proclaim Christ crucified in all our programs,” Pastor Greg Manning says, as he reaches the poorest of the poor in inner city New Orleans. In Baltimore, Berea Lutheran Church welcomed nine children through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism after they heard the Good News in Vacation Bible School. Great Commission Lutheran Church in St. Louis received six new members through Baptism as a result of their outreach program. Praise God!

If you are interested in loving your neighbor through an effective, Christ-centered outreach and don’t know where to start, please contact my office and ask for a Gospel Seeds mission workshop (page 3). I encourage you also to read about two heroes of the Civil Rights Movement who were Lutherans (page 2)!

As we continue our centennial celebration of the LCMS in the Alabama field, we pray that Rosa Young’s commitment to evangelism becomes an inspiration for you in your vocation as God’s chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, and people for His own possession, that you too may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 PETER 2:9).

ULYSSES BLACKMON AND JAMES GILDERSLEEVE: TWO COURAGEOUS LUTHERANS

Just over 50 years ago this March, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., led the campaign for racial justice and voting rights for blacks in Selma, Ala.

This nonviolent movement led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act in August 1965. Its success was due in part to the unheralded but hardworking “foot soldiers” – including two Lutherans, James Gildersleeve and Ulysses Blackmon – who confronted racism, threats and discrimination while seeking justice.

As civil rights activist and now-Congressman John Lewis recalled in his memoir, *Walking with the Wind*, “Selma was even more a mass movement than any of the others ... it was essentially the people themselves who pointed the way.” In listing the “longtime civil rights soldiers” of Selma, Lewis included Gildersleeve and Blackmon.

Gildersleeve and Blackmon were life-long Lutherans originally from small towns near Selma. They attended Lutheran churches and schools that were founded through the mission work of Rosa Young, Rev. Nils Bakke and other dedicated ministers in central Alabama beginning in 1916.

Gildersleeve went on to study at Miles College in Birmingham, Ala., and served in World War II. Blackmon graduated from Knoxville College in Tennessee and served in the Korean War. In the 1950s, both Gildersleeve and Blackmon became instructors at Alabama Lutheran Academy and College in Selma (now Concordia College Alabama). Gildersleeve taught history and social studies and Blackmon taught math and a variety of other subjects. In addition to imparting valuable knowledge to their students, they also inspired their students regarding the importance of having faith in God in difficult times.

Gildersleeve and Blackmon became active members in the Dallas County Voters League, a local civil rights organization seeking to register black citizens, who made up over half the population (57 percent), though fewer than two percent

were registered to vote. As the League became more active in 1950s and 1960s, it faced increasing opposition. Local organizations such as the Citizens Council and the Ku Klux Klan threatened the livelihoods, and even the lives, of those trying to bring about racial change. Yet despite the danger, eight core members, including Gildersleeve and Blackmon, continued to press for racial justice.

The courage and commitment of these individuals earned them the name, “the Courageous Eight.” After years of struggle, it was the Courageous Eight who set in motion Selma’s civil rights campaign. In the fall of 1964, they invited Martin Luther King to come to Selma to push forward the cause of equal voting rights. King and his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership

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James Gildersleeve



Ulysses Blackmon

Conference, arrived in January 1965, leading mass marches and bringing national attention to the inequities of the Jim Crow South.

The Courageous Eight were from different religious backgrounds, but all were motivated and united by their belief in Christian equality and the dignity of each individual, the foundation of the American Civil Rights Movement. Lutherans can be proud that, thanks to James Gildersleeve and Ulysses Blackmon, they were well-represented in Selma’s campaign for racial justice.

Dr. Kathryn Galchutt is a professor of history at Concordia College—New York, Bronxville, N.Y. She received her master’s degree and doctorate from Marquette University and is the author of The Career of Andrew Schulze, 1924-1968: Lutherans and Race in the Civil Rights Era.

PLANTING GOSPEL SEEDS IN TRINITY GARDENS

Members of Trinity Lutheran Church are planting Gospel seeds in their neighborhood of Trinity Gardens, where multi-generational poverty, substandard housing and high unemployment plague single parents and families. Going door-to-door in pairs, members of the north Mobile, Ala., church ask residents to tell them what the church could do to improve the community, and listen to their deepest concerns for the elderly and children. They also give each homeowner information about Trinity's ministry.

The goal is to spark new mercy ministry in response to neighbors' needs and concerns and to share the Gospel as the person-to-person relationships grow.

"Planting Gospel Seeds While Serving Human Needs" is a decade-old community outreach training process founded by Rev. Dr. Carlos Hernandez, director of Church and Community Engagement for the LCMS Office of National Missions. Over 100 congregations in communities across the county have been cultivating ground through the Holy Spirit, Pastor Hernandez said.

"The process of serving and discussing critical unmet or under-served human care needs in a congregation's community leads to significant sustained contacts that can foster close relationships," he noted. The community outreach focuses on listening and on making connections for the Gospel.

Pastor Hernandez and Rev. Roosevelt Gray, director of LCMS Black Ministry, brought the initiative to Trinity-Mobile last spring, working with Rev. Ulmer Marshall and church members to reach out to their neighbors. The first Saturday morning canvassing was the best in the 17-year history of the program, Pastor Hernandez said, with 43 conversations in one hour by seven two-member teams who also got contact information from each conversation.

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"Planting Gospel Seeds While Serving Human Needs" is the most effective outreach relationship-building, information-gathering ministry process I have witnessed in the last 26 years of my pastoral ministry," said Rev. Gray. "It is truly a 21st century community needs-assessing ministry tool for neighborhood revitalization and congregational reformation."

In addition to talking door-to-door with neighbors, church leaders and lay people met with other "neighbors:" leaders at community service centers, colleges, businesses, health

clinics, recreation centers, city council members and others to get their thoughts on critical needs and ways to collaborate in mercy ministry.

"This program has really helped our members become more concerned about serving our immediate neighborhood," Pastor Marshall said. "We had members involved in outreach who have never done that before."

Trinity sponsored a community forum in November with government representatives to address expressed needs such as abandoned homes, trash and overgrown empty lots, drugs, unsafe streets and more.

"We feel sure we can solve some of these problems by working together with the residents and the city and county officials," Marshall said.

Trinity has been serving the community for six decades through church worship, Bible study, music, an elementary school, day care, after-school tutoring and summer programs. It also houses a public library and a community garden, and offers health initiatives, senior meals, and food and clothing distributions.

Gospel seeds are being sown. Since teams first went out, several neighbors have begun attending church, and the school has a full enrollment with a long waiting list.

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SHARE YOUR STORIES

Please send your articles to Rev. Roosevelt Gray, Jr. at roosevelt.gray@lcms.org by the end of the first month in the respective quarter (i.e., July 31 for the 3rd quarter newsletter) so that we can share your news in our next edition.

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ROSA YOUNG: EVANGELIST IN ALABAMA

Building relationships is essential to sharing Christ with others. All the technology we possess won't substitute for one flesh-and-blood person reaching out to another.

Rosa Young modeled this evangelism as she worked with the Synodical Conference - the mission arm of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod - to bring the Gospel to rural Alabama. Her stirring appeal first brought the Synodical Conference to Alabama 100 years ago with Rev. Dr. Nils J. Bakke, missionary to the Black Belt (central Alabama, named for its rich black soil).

As a teacher, Young encouraged people to send their children to the schools she helped establish, and where she taught. The introduction of Lutheran schools in the Black Belt of Alabama met a need for many black children who were previously denied access to education because of segregation and discrimination. As a church member, Young encouraged people to join the Lutheran churches she helped establish, where the Word was proclaimed and the Sacraments given.

Young also was a committed evangelist. "Visiting is the key to success in mission work," she wrote in her book, *Light in the Dark Belt* (first published by Concordia Publishing House in 1950). "I hunted lost souls for Jesus somewhat as I hunted for money to build and maintain my first school. ... I walked in prayer all along the way from one person to another, asking the Lord to bless the message of His Word as I delivered it." She walked hundreds of miles every summer, from small, isolated communities to steamy-hot cotton fields to the backwoods homes of elderly ex-slaves, sharing the Good News.

Not only was she scorned for bringing the Lutheran Synodical Conference to Alabama,

but she also suffered what her doctor called "heart trouble, and prostrated nerves (exhaustion) brought on by hard study, work, worry, insufficient nourishment, insufficient recreation, sleep and unkind treatment." This can be attributed to her dedication to her mission that often denied self and sacrificed for the sake of others. Yet she reflected, "With all the hardships, I knew that I was about my Father's business and Jesus was with me."

"I prayed the Holy Spirit to be with me and to enlighten me with His Word ... to cause the pure Gospel message I would deliver to sink into the hearts of all to whom I would that day tell it. I would then choose a short Bible verse ... copies of the Lutheran Pioneer ... (and) set out on my mission tour ..."

As Rosa Young cultivated relationships, she relied on the spiritual "tools" of prayer, meditation on the Word, memorized Bible verses, favorite hymns and her confirmation studies. She encouraged students to become teachers and preachers; many are still serving the Church today. Her love for "her people" and for her Savior helped the Gospel light shine throughout the Black Belt, where it still shines today.

Rev. Thomas R. Noon, Birmingham, Ala., has served in black congregations for 50 years, beginning as a college intern at St. Paul Lutheran, Birmingham, in 1965, where he was later a pastor. As a historian, he has written several articles about Southern mission work, including "Rosa Young" in the Encyclopedia of Alabama.



“VISITING IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS IN MISSION WORK.”