

CROSSINGS Connection

WHERE THE GOSPEL MEETS OUR DAILY LIVES

PENTECOST 2023 | Vol. 150 | From the Crossings Community, Inc

Gospel Fluency

By the Rev. Ella Moehlman

The congregation where I grew up celebrated Pentecost the same way, year after year. Year after year, the same man came forward for the first reading. Instead of going to the lectern, he stood at the chancel steps. Pacing back and forth, he delivered from memory the entirety of Peter's Acts 2 sermon.

He was Peter telling us how God was fulfilling the scriptures and pouring out his Spirit on young and old, men and women ... how the time has come when everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved ... how God raised from the dead this Jesus whom we put to death by nailing him to the cross ... how what we are seeing and hearing is the promised Holy Spirit.

The man in my church delivered all this from memory. I was impressed.

Equally impressive was the "voice choir" up in the balcony. This choir contributed a variety of languages to the readings and did a simultaneous Lord's Prayer. My dad always took part in it because his native tongue (flaming at times) is Dutch. There was a woman in the church who spoke Hindi. To honor the cultural history of our congregation, someone always spoke Swedish. And then there were the typical languages taught in the area high schools: French, Spanish, and German.

This emphasis on language and performance is what I remember about the Pentecost Sundays of my childhood. It seemed as if the congregation was in competition with itself to showcase more foreign languages than the year before. The more exotic, the better. Not to mention the feat of the man who had Peter's speech memorized.

Pentecost is supposed to be about what the Holy Spirit does. But in my memories, we turned it into a celebration of what we could do. The point of the Pentecost story is that the gospel is intended for all people. And that the Holy Spirit

(see page 4)



The Holy Spirit gives us the ears to hear, and enables us to listen and understand, because otherwise the gospel remains a foreign language to our sinful, human ears.

New Writers Join Sabbaththeology

By the Rev. Bruce K. Modahl

The Rev. Lori Cornell is the editor of Sabbaththeology, the weekly online text study. She says she is always on the lookout for new writers. We introduce two of them in the following article.

If you are not acquainted with the Crossings six-step method, visit the Crossings website, crossings.org. Type The Crossings Template into the search bar.

The Rev. Ben Williams has been writing text studies for Sabbaththeology since 2021. As a student at Luther Seminary (St. Paul, Minnesota) Williams attended his first Crossings conference. The Rev. Dr. Patrick Keifert, a professor at Luther, introduced Ben to Crossings. Williams says Keifert profoundly shaped his Lutheran theology.

Cornell was his internship supervisor at

Calvary Lutheran Church in Federal Way, Washington. The Crossings six-step method was a consistent part of their conversations about preaching. Williams attended his second Crossings conference during his year of internship. Cornell recruited Williams to write for Sabbaththeology not long after his 2020 ordination.

In preparing his sermons, Williams follows the Crossings six steps as he studies the text. He says that the method drives him deeper into the text where he finds a profound experience of the good news.

Williams serves Immanuel Lutheran Church of Cicero, located in the farm fields west of Green Bay, Wisconsin. He describes himself as a church kid. For the majority of his childhood, his mother served in children, youth, and family ministry.

Williams enrolled as a music major at Elmhurst
(see page 3)

Message from the Executive Director

Thank You!

In recent weeks, as executive director of Crossings, I've had the opportunity to review the video recordings that were made during our January conference. Those ten sessions were lively and insightful in person, and they have retained their robust quality as video recordings.

In the weeks ahead, those who registered for the conference will have access to the recordings. Eventually, the recordings will become part of the Crossings library—the treasure trove of essays and other resources for doing and living law-gospel theology.

Reviewing those videos has also given me an even deeper appreciation for all those who have volunteered—and continue to volunteer—to make it possible for Crossings to host conferences and other events. Many of the same people, along with a host of others, contribute to our weekly text studies, Thursday Theology, the book discussion group, and Table Talk.

This generous gift of time and talent is matched by your generous financial support and active involvement in Crossings. In the opening months of the year, Crossings has received an outpouring of gifts—including the generous challenge grant from Kathy and Mark Helge (see page 4).

All this generosity provides the financial foundation as we work together in this community of faith and learning to receive and pass on the Spirit of the Risen Christ this Pentecost season.



Sherman Lee
Executive Director



The Rev. Ben Williams

(from page 2)
College, a school of the United Church of Christ in a Chicago suburb. Williams says his fellow students in the music program spoke about music as the calling that gave meaning to their lives. He soon realized this wasn't the case for him and changed his major to Biblical studies.

In his text study for the fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Williams writes, "Christ meets us and gives us new belonging and meaning. On the cross, Christ goes to hell and back to redeem our humanity; in the resurrection, Christ breathes new life into us. In worship, we gather at a table where we receive a foretaste of the feast to come. At this table, Christ becomes our gracious host and we his eager guests."

Jonas Ellison is in his final year at Wartburg Lutheran Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. He describes himself as a midlife seminarian. He grew up Roman Catholic but drifted away from the church. At age 40 he had a conversion experience in the middle of a Roman Catholic mass. Then he met some Lutherans, who, in his words, "taught him about God's radical, scandalous grace."

Ellison decided to go to seminary. The problem, though, was he did not have an undergraduate degree. At the Lutheran School of Theology—Chicago, he was allowed to take a class to determine his capabilities for graduate education. The course was Lutheran confessions taught by the Rev. Dr. Kurt Hendel.

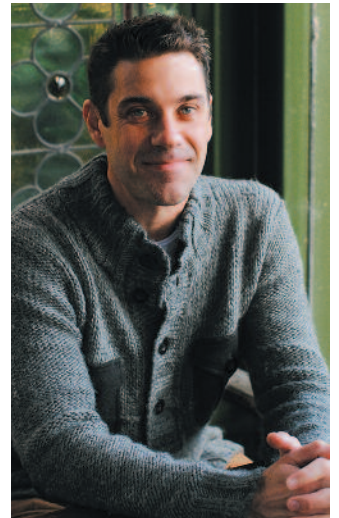
During the pandemic he moved his family from Chicago to northern California where his wife's parents live. He enrolled at Wartburg Seminary, which has an extensive online curriculum. He interned at Lord of Mercy Lutheran Church in Sparks, Nevada. Along with his pastor supervisor, he split his time between the church and as chaplain at the Reno Nevada Detention Center.

Ellison began writing a blog narrating his journey back to the Christian faith. One reader comments, "I've lived my whole life in a religious setting where God was always angry. I've been to many different churches and have never encountered the train of thought that Jonas holds."

Ellison's writings have appeared in *The Huffington Post*, *Observer*, and *The Good Men Project*.

Ellison became acquainted with David Zahl, the founder of Mockingbird Ministries and editor of its website, *mbird.com*. A keynote speaker at two Crossings conferences, Zahl introduced Ellison to Crossings and urged him to contact the Rev. Lori Cornell.

Ellison began writing for Sabbathology in 2022. In his post on Isaiah 58, for the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany in 2023, he writes, "If we are left to our own devices to free the oppressed, feed the poor, and house the houseless, we have a very long road ahead of us. But when we read this through the lens of our crucified and risen Lord, we see a God who goes before us to redeem and restore."



Jonas Ellison

Cornell says, "Jonas and Ben have good instincts about the distinct nature of the gospel, and an honesty in their writing that demonstrates they understand the law. To help them get ready to write Sabbathology, they joined me in plumbing the depths of the Crossings method."

"I continue," says Cornell, "to recruit new writers, who are also younger writers, as part of my investment in the longevity of the Crossings community. As these new voices continue to be added to our text study writing pool, I grow in my confidence that our law-gospel focus is indispensable and that Crossings can have a continued impact on the church."

Gospel Fluency

(from page 1)

will see that it does reach all people. The emphasis in our Pentecost observance was more about our performance and the performance of that company of Galileans speaking Parthian and Median and Cappadocian and Phrygian and Pamphylian and so on.

Perhaps focusing on all the different dialects and languages serves to remind us that the gospel itself is a foreign language. Our natural inclination is to tune it out or fail to make sense of it, as one does when surrounded by people speaking in an unfamiliar language.

Later in the season of Pentecost, Jesus will say to us more than once after his parables, “whoever has ears to hear, hear!” And we Lutherans hear that we cannot by our own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to him. Rather the Holy Spirit calls us to faith through the gospel.

The Holy Spirit gives us the ears to hear, and enables us to listen and understand, because otherwise the gospel remains a foreign language to our sinful, human ears.

Dear readers, this Pentecost season may the Holy Spirit make each of us fluent in the gospel.

Our guest columnist is the Rev. Ella Moehlman, who serves Trinity Lutheran Church in Lisbon, North Dakota, 70 miles southwest of Fargo. She grew up in central Illinois and attended Hope College in Holland, Michigan.

After graduation she taught English for ELCA Global Missions, spending two years at the Evanjelicke Lyceum in Bratislava, Slovakia. Ella returned to central Illinois to serve as the director of youth and family ministry at Advent Lutheran Church in Morton, Illinois. She then attended Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California, where she met her husband, Louis. They have a 2 ½ year old son, Theodore.

Ella heard about Crossings from members of her internship congregation, The Bridge, in St. Charles, Missouri, and attended the 2020 Crossings conference. She returned for the 2023 conference.



The Rev. Ella Moehlman

Your Gifts to Crossings Matched!

Again this year, Kathy and Mark Helge have generously offered to match all contributions to Crossings up to \$25,000. That means your gifts to Crossings will double in value.

Last year, many in the Crossings community responded to the challenge grant provided by Kathy and Mark. Those gifts along with the matching funds made it possible for the 2023 conference to involve more participants—both in person and, for the first time, online.

Now, your gifts in the months ahead will help Crossings meet this year’s challenge and support preparations for a two-day Crossings seminar in January 2024. Your financial support will also sustain the ongoing stream of weekly text studies and Thursday Theology. Making both the seminar and our online offerings available to new audiences is a priority. Thus your gift—matched by the Helges—will enable many others to experience the gift that is Crossings. Thank you!



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QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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PENTECOST 2023

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