

Leaders 4Life – April 2020

A newsletter from Y4Life

March for Life 2020 – Lutherans For Life Was There!

by Michelle Bauman, Director of Y4Life, Lutherans For Life

Some are saying this year's March for Life in Washington, D.C., on January 24 was record-breaking. In fact, rough estimates claim over 500,000 people showed up. I don't know if that number is true, but I can tell you that there were more people present at the March than I have ever seen present in one place in my entire life.

Priests and pastors and parishioners showed up. Churches carried banners, and schools played in bands. Dioceses and districts strolled side by side. God's people intermingled, forming a beautifully diverse tide of humanity that ebbed and flowed down Constitution Avenue.

Some sang. Some chanted. Most held signs. Everyone smiled. This sea of 4Life witnesses was united behind one pressing purpose: **UPHOLDING LIFE.**

And mixed into this ocean of cheerful, life-affirming people were approximately 150 youth and adults who attended **Y4Life in Washington, D.C.** According to the students, the March and accompanying conference were more than impressive. They were inspiring. And for many, the entire experience was both life-changing and faith-affirming. "I loved the sense of community at this conference!" one participant said; "I truly feel like my faith was renewed this past weekend."

The free conference began Thursday evening and ended Saturday at noon. Students were able to spend time with other 4Life youth from across the nation while they made posters for the March, engaged in devotions, and reflected on how they could support life in their own communities. In addition to the March, high-school- and college-aged youth and adults learned about life issues other than abortion, issues that included teen suicide, physician-assisted suicide, euthanasia, sexuality, purity, and chastity. As created, redeemed, and called children of God, participants were reminded again and again that their lives matter and so do the lives of their neighbors.

It was a good weekend. Some might even say it was inspiring. And for some, like me, who saw just how passionate youth can be about supporting life, it was definitely life-changing and faith-affirming.

If you'd like to attend or financially support **Y4Life in Washington, D.C.**, next year, or if you would simply like more information, please contact me at mbauman@lutheransforlife.org.





For Life at the Movies

by Pastor Michael Salemink

Faith doesn't mean blind belief without any evidence. Rather, faith means particular past experiences influence future expectations. Faith means trust, and trust implies trustworthiness. The Heavenly Father earns and establishes our faith with His history of gracious overtures. Indeed, He has left evidences everywhere of His affection for humankind. As Romans 1:20 proclaims, **"For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made."** And Psalm 19:1a, 2a, and 4a affirms, **"The heavens declare the glory of God ... Day to day pours out speech ... Their voice goes out through all the earth."** Our Lord and God has put His fingerprints and footprints in time and space, most especially by the incarnation of His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

His shadow and His signature fall also upon history and story. Any good story only gets its goodness from echoing and reflecting the great story of sin and salvation. Maybe a specific story doesn't explicitly feature God or the Gospel, but its themes, characters, and plotlines parallel those of fall and forgiveness, iniquity and atonement, redemption and restoration. Using narrative to teach eternal truths didn't originate with Jesus, but He did give parables a special place in communicating Christian grace and faith. So movies make a great way to be Gospel-motivated voices For Life. Here are a couple recommendations for experiencing life's sanctity with family or neighbors. *What would you add to this list?*

1. **It's a Wonderful Life** (1946, PG): George Bailey's life gets repeatedly interrupted by other people's needs. He feels like a failure for never achieving his dreams. When he concludes everybody would be better off if he'd never been born, an unexpected intruder dramatically demonstrates how all human lives are inextricably intertwined.
2. **Horton Hears a Who** (2008, G): A Seussian elephant upsets the social order when he discovers a world of microscopic people living invisibly within a single flower. Though he risks losing everything by trying to help his skeptical friends hear the miracle, nothing takes away his cheerful enthusiasm that "a person's a person, no matter how small!"
3. **The Drop Box** (2015, PG): South Korean pastor Lee Jong-rak has a heart for children with disabilities. He and his wife build a baby-sized compartment into the wall of their home where unwilling parents can anonymously deposit impaired little ones to be cared for rather than abandoned to the streets. This documentary captures how much—believe it or not!—compassion and happiness enter the pastor's home and family through that small opening.
4. **Awakenings** (1990, PG-13): Dr. Sayers works with patients in a mental institution who are mostly unresponsive. Though the facility's staff has become somewhat callous, Dr. Sayers remains caring and persistent. His research leads him to a miraculous medication that restores many of the residents to full consciousness and ability, but it soon manifests sinister side effects. Along the way, everyone involved learns that the worth of humanity can't be limited to their physical or intellectual abilities.
5. **October Baby** (2011, PG-13): A series of medical mishaps sends teenager Hannah delving into her past for answers. The secrets she discovers—including an abortion—leave her feeling utterly unwanted. Little does she know that faith and the love of family will follow her into her grief until reconciliation brings healing.
6. **Bella** (2006, PG-13): Waitress Nina gets fired for arriving late to work. Chef Jose becomes concerned and follows her outside. As he walks and listens, she shares her anxiety about being unexpectedly pregnant, unemployed, and alone. She intends to abort, and he accompanies her to the clinic. Can his generosity and tenderness persuade her toward adoption? Will her needs raise him above his tragic past? Is there anything that the delightfulness of family can't heal?



7. **Arrival** (2016, PG-13): Alien spacecraft descend around the world, and the American government enlists Louise, a linguist, and Ian, a physicist, to investigate. Their optimism contrasts with the skepticism of everyone else and enables them to decipher a powerful technology. Louise and Ian learn that even supernatural forces cannot achieve beauty apart from suffering, but that fleeing from grief also means losing goodness.
8. **Juno** (2007, PG-13): Casual sex results in flippant sixteen-year-old Juno becoming pregnant. Though abortion seems the obvious answer, she finds her experience of the clinic distasteful and begins pursuing adoption. But even that arrangement begins to unravel, and it will take the love of her family, the support of her child's father, a sense of humility, and a lot of humor to keep the situation from turning catastrophic for everybody.
9. **The Nativity Story** (2006, PG): This faithful dramatization presents the experiences of Mary and Joseph as they face her unplanned pregnancy. Though they encounter many more dangers and inconveniences than most, they receive parenthood as a holy calling. Herod's attempts to use death as a solution also wreak more havoc, but through it all the miracle of new life is worth it.



Good Books for You(th)—and How to Find Them

by Michelle Bauman, Director of Y4Life

Dear Youth: I'm writing you this letter on the eve of Christmas Eve, and do you know what I'm hoping is under the tree for me?

Books.

Could there be a better gift? A better companion for your nightstand? A better friend to spend your time with while waiting for the dentist? I don't know about you, but as a bibliophile, I love everything about books - the smell of the pages and the font of the type; the dog-eared corners and the colorful dust jackets; the shape, and the size, and the weight of a tome in my hand.

Even more than the physicality of books, I love the stories. The allusions and the linguistic nuances, the rounding out of characters, the syntax and the diction, even the final paragraphs that bring the saga to an end—everything about books brings me tremendous joy.

Now I know that not all of you like books as much as I do. In fact, I'm certain that books might have been the last thing some of you wanted under your Christmas tree. But as a former English teacher, I have to believe that there's at least ONE book that's a PERFECT match for you. And as a professional match-maker—I mean English teacher—you should know that I've paired up hundreds of students with the love-of-their-life books over the years.

So, when I was asked to compile a list of life-affirming books for youth a few weeks ago, I'm guessing you thought it would be easy for me. Am I right?

Ironically, it wasn't.

And it's not because those books don't exist; it's just that I desperately want them to exist for YOU. The truth is I want a perfect match.

There are two things I need to know about you to recommend the right book. First, I need to know what you already like to read. We all have different likes and dislikes. Some appreciate a good mystery; others fall in love with romance. Some youth love dystopian novels—and others despise them. There are so many genres: historical fiction, action adventure, anime, sci-fi, and fantasy to name a few. And that's not even accounting for the classics, nonfiction, and self-help books. Our tastes in literature reflect our interests, our needs, and our desires; they are as unique as we are.

Here's the second consideration: your Christian conscience. Though we all know that there's literature outside of the fence or curb of God's Law, there is also, by God's grace, much room within the fence to pursue personal interests and enjoyment. *(If you're not sure what you should avoid, here's an easy test: Read it out loud to your mom. If even the thought of that act makes you squeamish, you probably shouldn't be reading it. And in case you're wondering, I still use this as one of my measuring sticks!)*

So instead of recommending a specific book, I'm going to list a few guidelines for finding life-affirming books and provide a smattering of examples, hoping that at least one of the books will spark your interest. Here we go:

First, we need to recognize that a life-affirming book isn't going to avoid sin. Good literature never does. But it should address sin and the human condition in a way that is **“true ... honorable ... and worthy of praise”** (Philippians 4:8). It should recognize that life is inherently valuable, and even though the book doesn't need to have all of the answers, it should have some of them. It should depict a battle between good and evil, whether internal or external, and despite hardship and destruction, life-affirming literature should ALWAYS end with HOPE. All good literature should point to a need for a Savior; life-affirming literature is no exception. So, where do we find these good books?

How about a Lutheran publishing house? Concordia Publishing House has many life-affirming and



faith-affirming options. *Grounded in God's Word: Commentaries on Life* by Lutherans For Life and CPH, *You Ask about ... Life* and *You Ask about ... Relationships* both by Tim Pauls, *Echo* by Jonathan Fisk, and *Sexuality Mentality* by Heather Ruesch are just a few of the books I've picked up recently that speak to youth of all ages. (And they're good reads for adults too!) The books I've listed are all nonfiction, but CPH has a smorgasbord of fiction to choose from as well.

As I alluded to above, good, life-affirming literature doesn't depend on genre; instead, it is determined by its timelessness and truths about life. Countless secular books, whether their authors intended it or not, speak about life in a true and uplifting way. *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd, *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak, *Twelve Angry Men* by Reginald Rose, and *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare are all great examples.

In addition to timelessness, a life-affirming book, as stated above, will always provide hope. That doesn't mean that every problem is wrapped up neatly in a fairytale ending by the conclusion of the book or series; perfect endings don't often ring true. What it does mean is that despite sin, death, and destruction, there is still hope for a better future. *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* by Rick Riordan, *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand, *Les Miserable* by Victor Hugo, and *The Giver* by Lois Lowry are great examples.

Some books make it easy; they actually contain a Christ figure who affirms the value of life. Christ figures die so that others might live; their suffering is always sacrificial and unmerited, and their act reminds us of the hope we have in Christ. I've made a list of books with Christ figures (see note at the end of the article), but I'll mention a few of my favorites here: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis; *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien; *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles; and my absolute favorite: *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens.

When literature recognizes lives are valuable, provides hope, and points to a Savior, it is indeed commendable. No book but the Bible does that perfectly, but there are many other books that can remind us of who and whose we are. Life-affirming books are gifts, and whether they were under your tree or not, I hope you find time to pick up at least one of them. Better yet, I hope you find your perfect match. For those who prefer viewing stories rather than reading them, I've made a list for you too!

A Note to Readers and Viewers: The line of Christian conscience varies greatly among believers. Books and movies that delve into the supernatural—magic, myth, special powers, and even vampires—can be life-affirming, but they may not be within the fence for some Christians. The same can be said of some nonfiction texts and documentaries, political or otherwise. So, when the line of Christian conscience varies among believers, we recognize that's okay, and encourage each believer to remain within the confines of his or her own conscience in reference to novels and films.

Novels with Christ Figures:

The Staff and the Sword Trilogy by Patrick W. Carr
The Red Badge of Courage by Stephen Crane
A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens
Lord of the Flies by William Golding
The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne
The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway
A Separate Peace by John Knowles
The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by C. S. Lewis
Harry Potter Series by J. K. Rowling
The Lord of the Rings by J. R. R. Tolkien

Life-Affirming Movies (in addition to the film versions of the books mentioned above!):

"Avenger's Endgame"
 "Dead Poet's Society"
 "Dr. Strange"
 "Forest Gump"
 "The Greatest Showman"
 "Hacksaw Ridge"
 "Hidden Figures"
 "Horton Hears a Who"
 "The Lion King"
 "McFarland USA"

"Pacific Rim"
 "The Passion"
 "The Pursuit of Happyness" (sic)
 "Saving Private Ryan"
 "Stand and Deliver"
 "Schindler's List"
 "Superman"
 "The Transformers: The Movie" (1986)
 "Up"
 "War Horse"
 "Wonder"
 "Wonder Woman"



Symbols of Pleasure, Gifts from Above

by Michelle Bauman, Director of Y4Life

Our lives are filled with symbols. They're printed on billboards and designed into logos, sewn onto clothing and emblazoned on monitors. Even without words, these symbols communicate their messages loud and clear. The smiling box on your doorstep promises instant gratification from Amazon. A crowned mermaid on a cup of coffee sings the seductive call of a Starbucks siren. Two golden arches towering over the interstate guarantee a full belly at the next exit.

Most symbols in the advertising world are meant to bring pleasure to our lives; they remind us of what we're missing, what we should be longing for, what we cannot live without. And because they're so good at what they do, we comply. We purchase. We imbibe. We fill our bellies with the things of this world.

And you know what? That's not always bad. Finding pleasure in life isn't always a sin.

**Gasp* What did she just say?*

I know, ... I know, ... I probably have some explaining to do. Hold on, this will only take a minute.

If you're like me, you've cautioned your children against instant gratification. You've told them that happiness isn't the primary goal in life and that plenty of hardships await them in the future. And like any good parent, you want your children to be ready for those difficult times. You want them to cling to Christ no matter how terrible those trials might be, confident that He will see them through.

And you were right to teach them those truths. You were right to prepare them for the hardships they will face. You were right to point them to Christ.

But I have to wonder if sometimes we faithful adults don't miss the forest for the trees. I have to wonder if sometimes we are so focused on the promise of eternal joys that we forget to notice the present joys God has prepared for us. Joys like the sunshine on a winter day. Like the boisterous burp of a baby in the pew on a Sunday morning. Like your child teaching you how to work your own smartphone. Like soap that doesn't chap hands.

We Christians don't often talk about finding pleasures in this world, but maybe we should.

The Bible certainly reminds us that God, our heavenly Father, is a great gift-giver. He desires to shower us with presents; He not only provides for all of our needs, He gives gifts in abundance. In fact, it's pretty clear that God created a world full of pleasure for His children. Psalm 104 beautifully depicts God's gift-giving in



His creation—it's as if He's wrapped up the whole world as a present for His people, a present that provides both provision and abundance. The psalmist writes, **"You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart"** (104:14-15).

Not only does God gladden the hearts of His people through food and wine, but He also provides for us in other ways. We confess in *Luther's Small Catechism* that God provides "clothing, home and family, work and play, and all that I need from day to day" (p. 117). He works through our vocations to bless us with friends, family, and even material goods. It's clear that our heavenly Father takes pleasure in us, and He takes pleasure in providing for His children.

Now it's true, that even as we rejoice in the things of this world, we should steer clear of the carnal delights. We should run from the temporary pleasures sin brings and cling to what is good. Paul is serious when he writes, **"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things"** (Philippians 4:8). God certainly wants us to steer clear of evil.

But the freedom we have in the Gospel gives us many opportunities to find pleasure in this life. That Marvel movie you went to see with your teenage son? That was a blessing. That video game he plays in his free time? It's a gift too. The purse you ordered on Amazon? Merry Christmas. The coffee you crave? Happy Tuesday. And if McDonalds brings you bliss, well ... go for it. When we have eyes of faith, eyes that recognize these delights are gifts from God, then we realize that what we're missing, what we should be longing for, what we cannot live without, isn't Amazon or Starbucks or McDonalds. It's Him. And when we have Him, every other gift makes sense. Every other gift falls into its proper place. **"Every good gift and perfect gift is from above"** (James 1:17a).



Blessed Again ... in Milwaukee

Y4Life Teams are active and well in Lutheran high schools as well as on Lutheran college campuses. Concordia Wisconsin has a thriving **Y4Life Team** that engages with students on campus and people in the community. Bonnie Egger, a member of CUW's Students for Life group, shares information about one of their successful service opportunities:

In the thick of the undergraduate semester, schedules fill and assignments pile high. Members of the Students for Life group at Concordia University Wisconsin, however, make time to volunteer and help uphold life, even at the busiest times in the semester. This November, twelve members of the school's life team spent a Saturday morning volunteering at **Blessed Again Resale**. Blessed Again is an LCMS affiliated thrift store in Milwaukee that donates their profits to **A Place of Refuge** (www.aplaceofrefuge.org), a local home for women facing crisis pregnancies.

Blessed Again does not lack merchandise, thanks to generous donors in the area, but the influx of donations makes organizing, pricing, and shelving items a tall order. The extra hands that morning helped speed the work of sorting through donated items. After three hours with some of the group pricing and arranging shoes and some pricing toys and cookware, hundreds of new items were out on the shelves and ready for purchase to benefit A Place of Refuge.

What Students for Life at CUW loves about volunteering at Blessed Again is how multifaceted its work is. The donations to A Place of Refuge are, of course, an enormous contribution to the For Life cause. On top of that, though, by selling toys, cookware, furniture, and clothes for all ages at very low prices, the store enables families in need to purchase things—even necessities—that they might not otherwise be able to afford. They are able to reach hundreds of people and support them in caring for themselves and their children.

Because of this, Students for Life has worked over the years to develop a strong relationship both with Blessed Again and A Place of Refuge. The group also hosts a baby shower each spring for the moms who live at A Place of Refuge, which allows them to meet the women and children for whom they work and pray.

It's exciting to hear about how the students of CUW's **Y4Life Team** engage in service activities that directly benefit the lives of others in their community! We pray God's continued blessing on their service. If you'd like more information about how to start a **Y4Life Team** at your Lutheran college, please contact Michelle Bauman, Director of **Y4Life**, at mbauman@lutheransforlife.org.



I'm **Y4Life** ... Now what?



4 Steps to Becoming a Y4Life Messenger

I'm **Y4Life** ... Now what?

Offering high school and college opportunities

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5 Steps to Becoming a Y4Life Messenger



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