

Christian Publications—a Gift from God

Christian publications are one tool that God provides His children to help them in living faith. Some writings teach about God’s Word and His kingdom. Some address Christian Doctrine and the core tenants of living faith. Other writings share personal experiences—joys and struggles—and speak to the reader. Some writings are historical. Writings are written especially for children, using pictures and stories. Christian publications also serve as a mission tool—to call and invite those outside of God’s kingdom into His precious fold.

How does the believer view Christian publications? How do LLC’s periodicals—the *Voice of Zion*, *Christmas in Zion*, and *Shepherd’s Voice*—serve us personally, and in our homes and families? Do LLC’s books help to teach and encourage? Do they serve our children? How can we find time in our busy lives to plant the seed of God’s Word in this way?

“Blessed Is He that Readeth...”

Christian Publications Are Gospel Work

“Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:13); “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy” (Rev. 1:3).

In these Bible verses, the apostles stress the importance of reading God’s Word to the early Churches. In recent years, God’s children have been richly blessed by having available numerous publications about faith. The Holy Spirit has created a desire in believers’ hearts to perform this type of gospel work. God has also awakened gifts to prepare articles, which aid in rearing our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Besides the Bible, Luther’s Catechism, and doctrinal books, the LLC congregation bookstores carry many publications and musical products, which instruct and strengthen the life of faith. Recently, the LLC publications staff prepared a questionnaire regarding use of Christian publications in the home and family environment.

These Williston congregation families spoke to the questions: Jeff and Anna Byman, Paul and Debbie Herrala, Adam and Carley Lampi, Sam and Kaisa Forstie, Tim and Melinda Kallio, and Ed and Angie Rintamaki. The visits were enjoyable with entire families gathered to discuss the questions. The responses reflect comments from both the parents and children.

Are LLC-written publications valued as a support to one’s life of faith?

- “Absolutely! Certainly! Without a doubt!”
- “Our small children love to look at the *Shepherd’s Voice* as soon as it arrives.”
- “I read the Home and Family articles first—they resonate with me at my stage in life.”
- “The new *Illustrated Home Bible* is a treasure. The language is easy to understand, and the pictures clearly illustrate the stories.”
- “When we read LLC publications together as a family, it feels like home services.”
- “We bought our kids their own ‘pocket songbooks,’ which they cherish. They love to use them when they play church.”

- “I found my eight-year-old reading the *Shepherd’s Voice* after school, and he was so excited because his friend in another congregation had written an article about his baby sister! He had to read it out loud to me.”
- “Our family travels long distances in the car. I read articles out loud from the *Voice of Zion* and *Shepherd’s Voice* when we travel.”
- “Songs of Zion are calming to my baby when I rock her to sleep, both when listening to CDs and when singing.”
- “Singing and music are priorities in our home. We play CDs a lot, especially in the car.”

Has reading the Bible or LLC publications become solely dependent on one’s schedule? Is it a value, or only a priority?

- “Reading the Bible is very important because it’s God’s Word. Yet, unfortunately, we don’t put as high a priority on it as we should.”
- “A hindrance to me to reading the Bible often occurs because the language is old English, and it’s written such that it requires dedicated concentration. For that reason, I usually read Christian publications before the Bible. The new Illustrated Home Bible helps in reading Bible stories.”
- “I read the Bible when I have a particular question.”
- “I enjoy reading the Bible for pleasure. The old English isn’t a problem if we read it regularly.”

Has the value of reading to children diminished? If so, why?

- “The value of reading has not diminished. It remains as important as it ever was, but the importance we place on reading will diminish if we neglect it.”
- “For children, I feel that reading spiritual articles and Bible stories should have a high priority. The challenge for me is to keep it a high priority.”
- “The cozy atmosphere of parents and children gathering in the evening to read stories and articles is a treasure that will remain with the child for the rest of their life.”
- “In God’s kingdom, similar to the rest of the world, there is a temptation to replace reading with audio and visual presentation in electronic devices. This can be detrimental, especially when the content isn’t wholesome.”

Has modern society created an atmosphere in which few want to take time to read and think about what they read, because it requires effort?

- “Reading has diminished in society as a whole. This was recently confirmed by my child’s teacher.”
- “When comparing reading to electronic media, reading does require more effort. A person does not need to expend much energy to watch and listen to electronic audio and video.”
- “I believe that reading is more beneficial than listening or watching something because a person is able to gain a deeper understanding of a matter by going back and studying what is written.”
- “Many times the context of the written words adds to understanding and enjoyment, which is not possible by merely listening.”

Would the Bible and Christian publications be read more if they are available electronically?

- “There are pros and cons to both. If a person is not inclined to read published articles, he may not be inclined to read from an electronic device.”
- “I feel it’s more relaxing to read articles and stories from a paper or book than an electronic device, especially when reading to children.”
- “I have the Bible loaded on my phone. This is a convenient way to follow the text for a sermon.”
- “When holding a small baby, it’s more convenient to read from an electronic device than to hold a book or paper.”
- “It would be good to have more books in electronic format to listen to when driving.”
- “I like having the songbook downloaded on my phone. I always carry my phone, so I always have the songbook with me.”

Many Benefits

The Williston believers confirmed that they receive many benefits from the *Voice of Zion*, the *Shepherd’s Voice*, and other publications. The news articles and the pictures of activities in other congregations connect us to those believers, especially we who have moved from a congregation that we called home for many years.

The LLC News and Notes keeps us aware of activities taking place in the central organization, the LLC, and keeps us connected to the entire Zion. The spiritual articles help to keep us rooted and grounded in faith.

Larry Anderson

Gather around Me—Let’s Read!

We are a family of bookworms! Once homework and chores are done after school, reading is a favorite hobby for most of our children. On any given day, one or two are usually tucked into the couch or chairs in our living room reading. Screen time is limited in our home, so a recent trip to the library during a school break was a treat! The kids walked out of the library with smiles on their faces, loaded down with books. As the kids devoured their new books, I took a moment to contemplate why we don’t read more of the LLC-published books on a regular basis.

Jesus-Stories Teach

Our older ones, now teenagers, remember reading the four-book Jesus-story series when they were first published. I recall reading the stories before naps or bedtime. Yet nowadays they sit high on a shelf in our living room with other LLC books we’ve purchased through the years. I consider them “precious books” so they have a special spot to rest, along with our Bibles and catechisms. My husband and I have used them to teach Bible class, Day Circle, and Sunday school, but we haven’t recently shared the stories with our younger ones.

One evening, I gathered the little ones around me on the couch. We started with the first book, *Jesus, The Son of God*, and read the first few stories. Seven-year old Ingrid was enthralled! A few days later I asked her what story she liked best. Her favorite was when Jesus was born, the story the most familiar to her. As we continued to read, she became a bit worried when Joseph and Mary couldn’t find Jesus in Jerusalem when they visited there

during Passover, and certainly was relieved when they found Him in the temple a few days later! Every few days we read stories from the first book. Our middle-aged kids were interested to learn more about the disciples that followed Jesus and the miracles He performed. Reading these books has given us the chance to discuss Jesus' life, to marvel and to wonder even more about His time here on earth and all He did to save us from our sins. We look forward to reading all four books in the next few months.

Pictures Teach, Too

Last summer we received the new picture book, "God Loves You," as a gift at Toronto Summer Services. We've enjoyed reading the Bible portions and the explanations, as well as studying the bright, beautiful photos on each page. Five-year-old Ivar likes the picture of the two buffalo butting heads. The Scripture portions with the picture remind us that "patience and kindness can stop arguments." Three-year-old Rowan likes the picture of the two young grizzly bears play-fighting and then hugging on the next page. As is typical in our home, our two young sons play together when happy and console one another when sad. Most importantly, we are reminded to forgive one another when we hurt each other's feelings.

The *Shepherd's Voice* has also been welcomed in our home. The kids wait in line to read it as their siblings slowly page through the publication. The little ones look at the pictures for familiar faces of cousins and friends in other congregations. They like to have the stories read to them at naptime or bedtime.

Greta Huhta

Christian Publications Support Our Faith

As believers, we have been blessed with many Christian publications to guide, instruct, comfort, and strengthen our faith. The Bible is the most important book for us to read and study, as it is the basis of living faith.

Everything we need to know for our walk in faith can be found in the words of the Bible. However, we don't always understand what we read. That is why it is helpful to have such publications as *Let's Study the Bible* and LLC's new book, *Illustrated Home Bible*, which we are using in our congregation's Bible class in Rockford.

When the lessons are presented from this book, it makes it easy to do our "homework" before coming to Bible class. Reading the story ahead of time makes it more interesting to listen to it explained in more detail at Bible class.

God's Word Remains the Same

Another publication we are probably all very familiar with and look forward to receiving each month is the *Voice of Zion*. It is so fun to get. I have to say that I always look at the pictures first, as it's fun to see familiar faces and activities going on all over the U.S., Canada, and other countries where believers are living. The articles are interesting and heartwarming. Bible texts are explained along with many writings specifically helpful for the time we live. God's Word remains the same always, even though we encounter new difficulties which seem to be getting greater as the devil tries to win souls in these evil days. We are so fortunate to have comfort away from the world when we gather with God's children.

The *Shepherd's Voice* is also a precious publication. It captures the interest of the young children, and all ages, with many pictures of children and stories that the little ones especially are eager to look at and read.

There are also some books that have stories of believers' real-life experiences. Many are written to encourage the doubting traveler. We are not alone in our doubts and fears, and we are given instruction and comfort when reading these. Included in this area are books such as *I Found God's Kingdom*, *At the Crossroads of Choosing*, *Crossing the Current*, *The Sheepfold Tender*, and *Fortifying the Foundation*.

Christ's Spirit Teaches

May we all be given hearts and minds to continue to listen to what the Spirit says to the churches through sermons, presentations, and publications. It is our hope and prayer that we would all be heaven acceptable when this life is over and eternal life begins one day.

Susan Tarnanen

Discussion Points:

1. How can we encourage reading and discussion of Christian publications in our homes?
2. Many parents discourage too much "tech time" and encourage their children to do other activities, hobbies, etc. How can parents likewise encourage the reading of Christian publications as a valuable alternative activity?
3. Share examples of how certain books and/or writings from God's kingdom have helped and encouraged you in faith.
4. Have you or your family used LLC's publications to call and invite others to God's kingdom? Share experiences. In this endeavor, as in all things, we know that it is God who gives the increase.

Can You Help?

Take a Publications Survey.

We would like to learn more about your ideas and preferences regarding LLC periodical and book publication. The LLC sees publications as part of gospel work with the purpose of nourishing one's faith life and communicating with our membership. Please take time to help us accomplish this by filling out the LLC Publications Survey found in the Quick Links at www.llchurch.org.

Did you know it is possible to publish the *Voice of Zion* and *Shepherd's Voice* in digital format?! Would you like to get either or both electronically? View a sample copy of each publication by going to the LLC Publications Survey page found under the Publications tab and in the Quick Links.

The survey can also be completed in the hard copy form. Congregation chairmen and local Publications Directors have received electronic copies to print off. Congregations can also consider planning a special time to fill out the surveys, such as at home and family gatherings, home services, a special congregation evening, or similar. The survey will run May–September.