

**Kelly A. Fryer. Reclaiming the L Word: Renewing the Church  
from Its Lutheran Core.  
(Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2003).**

**Foreword**

Kelly Fryer is persuaded that the Lutheran church has much to offer the searching people of our day. It does not need to dumb-down its tradition, suppress its sacraments, nor adjust itself to the prevailing winds of evangelical America . It should rather cast off self-pity and wake up to use the treasures that it has.

Some will wonder about Kelly Fryer's credentials, just as many wondered about Luther's authority to challenge the church . In Fryer's case the credibility of this book comes not simply from her theological training and clarity , but even more from her rich and exciting experience as a pastor reaching out to the unchurched , building new congregations from the ground up , and leading people not only into membership in the church , but far deeper into active discipleship.

**Preface**

More than anything, I want to be writing this book for the people in my neighborhood and yours who don't know the great and wonderful God I have come to know in Jesus.

I want them to hear that "church" doesn't have to be a four-letter word. It doesn't have to be a disappointment. It doesn't have to be scary. It doesn't have to be irrelevant. I want to be writing to those people because I know what it's like to be one of them. And my heart breaks for them.

But, instead, I am writing to you. It will finally be through you - and your church - that all those people meet the God who loves them. It won't be because of some book they read, although that might help a little. It won't be because of a song they hear on the radio, although that can have a powerful impact. It won't be because of an on-line conversation they have in a church-sponsored chat room, although that could open some doors.

It will, finally, be because you have invited them face-to-face to come and meet the God you know in Jesus. And it will be because your church welcomed them to the journey of faith where, together, we meet God - or, better yet - are met BY God in the Word and in the Meal, in the Bath, and in the community of God's holy people. You - and you alone - will make the difference.

I know this because you – and your church – have made the difference for me. I wasn't brought up as a Lutheran. But the God I have met through this church – in its teaching and preaching and in the people whose lives have been shaped by its history and heritage – is a God who has changed my life.

And so, this book is a thank offering to God for you. It is my hope and prayer that it will help you think again about what it means to be God's people through Jesus Christ ... *who also happen to be Lutheran* ... and that it will help you rediscover why it matters so very much.

### **Introduction: Of Traffic Jams & Transformation**

I have a vision. Cars backed up for miles, bumper to bumper on a Sunday morning. And that guy in the traffic helicopter hovering overhead, reporting happily from the sky, "Well, folks, if you're on your way to a nine o'clock service, I sure hope you've already left your house. It's madness out there!"

This is a vision I share with MANY people in the Church. We want our congregations to be vibrant, growing places that make a difference in people's lives and in the world. But we just don't see it happening. In too many mainline churches, we see declining worship attendance and decreasing (aging) membership rolls. We see depressed pastors and angry congregational members. We feel like we have "tried everything" and nothing is making a difference.

In a recent study, the ELCA's Department for Research looked specifically at some of the "techniques" that most people think you would just have to use if you want your church to grow. In fact, there was no single "technique" that DID make a difference over the past decade. It didn't matter what our newsletters looked like or how often we knocked on doors inviting people to church or how much people liked the pastor's sermons.

There was – *get ready* – only ONE factor that was a good predictor for whether or not a church grew: the ONLY factor that really matters is whether or not a church has a clear enough vision of where GOD wants it to go that it is willing to do whatever it takes to follow wherever God leads.

After studying the results of a "decade of evangelism", the ELCA report concluded: **"A congregation must first capture a sense of mission and purpose and welcome innovation and change before evangelism, changes in style of worship, or establishing a media campaign will have an impact."**

God's transformation of the church you are part of will begin with YOU.

This will happen as we turn to Scripture and to our theological tradition; as we turn to each other in meaningful and lively conversation; and as we turn to God in prayer.

***And it will happen only as each one of us takes responsibility for doing these things.***