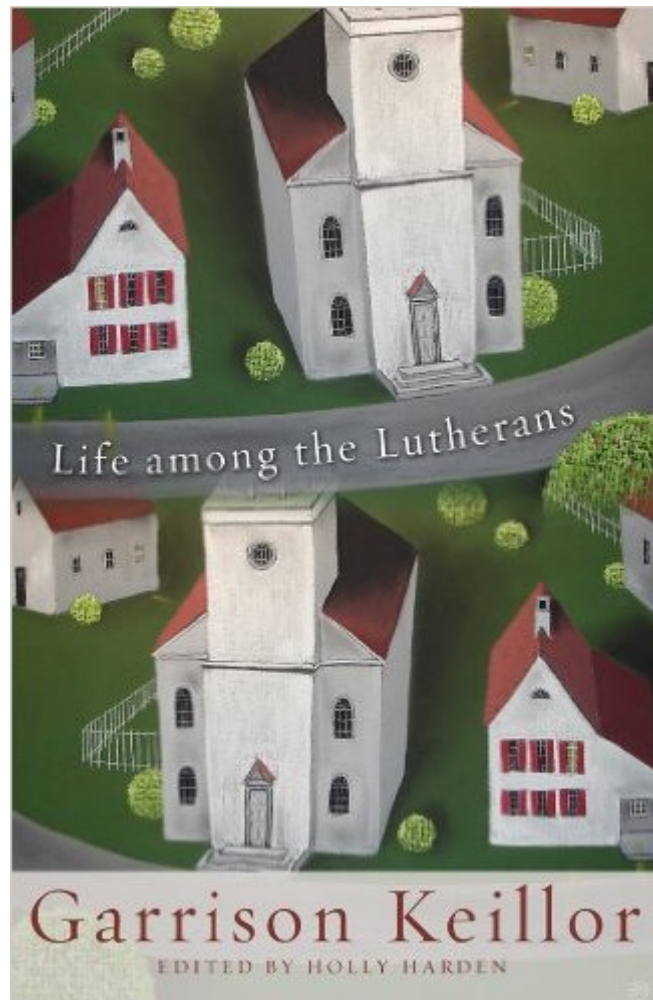


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Life Among The Lutherans



Synopsis

Based on Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon monologues, *Life among the Lutherans* is a collection of stories about the struggles of ordinary people in an imperfect world, the life and work of the pastor who leads them, and the church to whose high standards they aspire in the small town they call home. The stories in *Life among the Lutherans* reflect everything Keillor fans have come to expect of this master storyteller. Some are familiar, including the quintessentially Lutheran "95 Theses" from *Lake Wobegon Days*, others are new. Laugh out loud about the church directory filled with photos that are just plain awful. Share the moment when Pastor Ingqvist receives a leather-bound copy of his sermons. Keillor's command of every little detail of life in Lake Wobegon is bound to entertain, surprise, and make readers - even those who aren't Lutheran - feel right at home in the mythical community where "all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average."

Book Information

Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: Augsburg Books; 1 Reprint edition (August 1, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1451400861

ISBN-13: 978-1451400861

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 0.6 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (56 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #101,842 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #121 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Literature & Fiction > Collections & Anthologies](#) #1835 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Humor & Satire > Humorous](#) #4665 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Religious & Inspirational](#)

Customer Reviews

Life is good every Saturday evening when Garrison Keillor begins his melodious radio monologue, "It's been a quiet week in Lake Wobegon" on *A Prairie Home Companion*. So when his new book, *Life Among the Lutherans*, arrived this week, I was ecstatic. I savored every short chapter of Lutheran life among the Norwegian farmers and dysfunctional families in fictitious Lake Wobegon, Minnesota. It was delicious--and I'm not even Lutheran. Pastor Ingqvist suffers fools willingly, but he faithfully reads *Sanctity Fair* to keep up professionally. "A sermon should have a good beginning

and a good end, and they should be as close together as possible." Dorothy, at the Chatterbox Caf , recently hung a memorable sign on the cash register: "This Is Not a Real Job. This Is Only a Test. Had This Been a Real Job, You Would Have Received a Raise, a Promotion, and Other Signs of Appreciation." All-thumbs Lawrence Bunsen (Cliff's 22-year-old son), narrowly survived his two years at Bunsen Motors, but is leaving for California. "Lawrence is enormously strong but not mechanically gifted, which is a bad combination." Keillor nets it out with wordsmithing insight. "Being a child of one of the owners, he had job security, but for two years they've had to keep an eye on him and to anticipate disaster and to practice preventive management. They sent him off with a glowing recommendation. Our revenge on the West Coast." After 20 years at Lake Wobegon Lutheran, the church board usurped his budget for the annual winter ministers retreat in Florida (the funds went to the needy instead), so Pastor Ingqvist quietly flies to Dallas to interview for the \$85,000-a-year airport chaplain job. Their inter-denominational pitch: "We're trying to promote a concept of community here.

If you listen to "A Prairie Home Companion" on NPR or have read any of Garrison Keillor's previous Lake Wobegon books, you know that encounters with Lutherans come up on a regular basis. It's inevitable, since the tales are based in rural Minnesota. And while GK is quick to admit that he is not a member of the faith, he has an uncanny talent for correctly reporting all of the inner and outer nuances of Lutheran life. (Not that anyone would admit to having such things.) We can find ourselves in his stories, and that's what makes them so much fun to read and to hear. Germanic and Northern European roots still anchor contemporary Lutheranism and lift it nearly to a stereotypical level. Our upbringing allows us to endure cold weather. We are required to respect any authority we run into. If we have any feelings, we certainly never express them. Our first inclination is to stay in the background of any social situation. And if we have to resolve or meet a dilemma, we must do so with a casserole (or a Minnesotan hot dish) in pot-holdered hands and a fruit-filled Jello pan for dessert. These aren't generalities, mind you: they're facts. Garrison Keillor takes these themes and spins them into fictional characters and situations. This book is a compilation of 28 stories that he has told in print or on the air over the past two and half decades. A Wobegon Lutheran "Greatest Hits," if you will. Pastor David Ingqvist of Lake Wobegon Lutheran Church makes several appearances, as you might expect. The classic tale of the 24 visiting Lutheran ministers perched on a pontoon boat in the middle of the lake is probably the most humorous and most visual episode in the book.

This collection of Garrison Keillor's stories, which focus on the faith and foibles of the Pastor Inqvist's Lake Wobegon Lutheran parish, will come as no great surprise to long-time Keillor fans. Much of the material comes from his radio show, *A Prairie Home Companion*, or from his other books. Nevertheless, the stories are lovely, dealing with themes as old as humanity -- patriotism, guilt over time misspent, the folly of not speaking up, religious inhibition. Keillor's strength is his ability to conjure up a whole town of fictional people and make them seem as real as yesterday. We see shy Pastor Inqvist retreating from a foot massage proffered by an eager parishioner, a boatload of Lutheran pastors slipping into the shallow depths of Lake Wobegon, a family trying to amend up for the rejection of a World War I era girl who got herself in the family way, a patriotic disquisition on the merits of a well-made potato salad, folks made strange by lightning strikes, imperious organists, and nostalgia summoned by a tete-a-tete between two outfielders chasing the same fly ball. Keillor keeps his narratives on the fuzzy line between fiction and reality, making his characters peculiar, but also likable (mostly) and familiar. Having just heard a few of these stories delivered before a live audience on Keillor's "Church People," I had a chance to compare Keillor's written work to his delivery in person. On stage, Keillor pares down the inessentials from his written work. Still, as wonderful as the written stories are, there is nothing like hearing them intoned in his deep and melancholy voice. That was especially true for "Potato Salad," with its mock outrage at those who foist market-bought potato salads on Fourth-of-July picnic-goers.

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