



# **UNDER THE FIG TREE**

BY ELIZABETH NEUFELD

spent my morning off convincing myself to get out of bed. I had read my Bible, thinking I'd prepared myself for the day with a healthy mindset. I assumed I'd supernaturally have a renewed spirit. But my foggy brain glued me under piles of blankets

with thoughts that everything was wrong outside and I could do nothing but lie there and dwell on it.

That evening, I joyfully ate pizza with my husband who had just arrived home from work. How did I get to that point?

I used to think I couldn't imagine a life without Jesus. But that morning I experienced a taste of what it is like to forget the gospel. I confided in someone about this recent battle I've faced with investing in my spiritual growth, and she recommended that I start reading from the Book of John.

"I've read that book a million times," I thought. But that morning I read John's first chapter.

Subsequently, as I grasped the steering wheel on the way to pick up a pizza, I recalled asong I've had on constant repeat lately called "Love Let Him Go," sung by Golden State Baptist College. Through a majestically composed ensemble, the song recounts the testimony of our Heavenly Father allowing His Son to go through the lonely, grueling sacrifice to save us and bring us to Himself, because He loves us all.

The song reminded me of the passage I read that was supposed to rejuvenate my heart that morning: John 1. In it, Jesus was starting

His ministry journey—that path of sacrifice and He picked up a few people along the way to disciple. One man in particular, Nathanael, wondered how Jesus already knew him.

"Jesus answered, 'I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you" (John 1:48, NIV). I recently learned that "under the fig tree" was a historically Jewish term for "studying the Scriptures," as it was often done under the thick shade of a fig tree.

That morning, the Lord saw me. Even though I was stubbornly sad and feeling hopeless about the world, I was seen by God. And in the car, as I hummed the tune of "Love Let Him Go," I remembered that moment.

Despite all the wrong outside, the gospel is fact, the gospel is at work. And God, who loves me so much He allowed His Son to walk a long path of suffering, saw me as I clung to my pillow in hopes that something would push me back onto my feet.

When my husband came home, I hopped in the car for pizza, and I remembered the gospel. The Lord did His work in my heart that day. It took time for this lesson under the fig tree to sink in, but the lesson did come to fruition during an ordinary car ride, and despite the depressing attitude I had embraced all morning.

And now, because of the gospel, joy reigns and floods my renewed spirit.

Neufeld lives in Ewa Beach, Oahu, Hawaii.



## THE LUTHERAN **AMBASSADOR**

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## sound bites

Our core values do not sway with the trends or fads of the day, nor do they shift and change to the political correctness of the time.

—Pastor Todd Erickson

Congregational ministry ... isn't intended to be carried out in an online vacuum. Congregations are for congregating.

—Pastor Adam Osier

Amid days of uncertainty and fear in the world around us, we have a certain  $hope\,that\,compels\,us\,to\,prayerfully\,persevere\,through\,what ever\,circumstances$ confront us and to entrust ourselves and our ministries to His care.

—Marian Christopherson

The Spirit continues to be at work—it is essential that we allow Him to work in and through us in this new "normalcy."

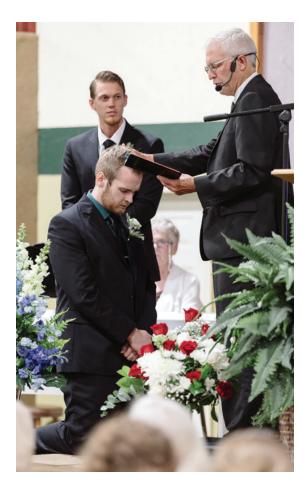
—Pastor Jerry Peterson

The current Coronavirus has slowed us down, but it has not stopped the vision. Jesus shall reign over all the earth.

—Pastor James L. Johnson









TOP: Pastor Lyndon Korhonen (right) AFLC president, ordained Micah Klemme (kneeling) and Matthew Abel during the opening service of the Annual Conference. Klemme, a 2020 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, serves St. Peter Free Lutheran, Melvin, Ill. Abel is an AFLC missionary serving in Paraguay.

ABOVE: Bill Fish (left), Everett, Wash., wrote resolutions for Committee #2 with Joel Erickson, Oslo, Minn.

RIGHT: Despite the abbreviated conference schedule this year, a significant amount of conference time was still dedicated to prayer for the various ministries of the AFLC.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Pastors in attendance at the opening service prayed for two newly ordained men, Micah Klemme and Matthew Abel.







BY PASTOR ROBERT LEE

ill He Find Faith?" (Luke 18:8) was the theme of the 58th Annual Conference of the AFLC, August 10-12, hosted by the Association Retreat Center (ARC) near Osceola, Wis. Abbreviated due to the current pandemic restrictions, it was certainly the most unique gathering in the history of our fellowship, with masks and social distancing encouraged. The theme struck an ominous and challenging note, but speakers and reports pointed to the prayerful context of the verse and its encouragement to hope. Yes, He will find faith, because He is faithful!

The schedule seemed quite familiar to those who have attended previous conferences. The Women's Missionary Federation (WMF) gathered for their annual convention during the day on Monday, the first day of the conference, while the conference committees met to formulate resolutions from the various reports of our common endeavors. Notable changes from previous conferences were the absence of a Holy Communion service, a youth service, a lay service, and a pastors' and wives' banquet.

The conference was opened by President Korhonen at the evening service. Pastor Todd Klemme, Bagley, Minn., was the service leader, and the message was preached by Pastor Jerry Moan, Corcoran, Minn. Two men were ordained: Matthew David Abel, for missionary service in South America, and Micah Robert Klemme, for pastoral ministry at Melvin, Ill.

Due to the current restrictions, other members of the 2020 seminary class were ordained in their home congregations or elsewhere. The service also included a remembrance of departed pastors, conducted by Rev. Gary Jorgenson, assistant to the president.

The next two days were quite full, with business sessions during the days and the traditional mission festival service on Tuesday evening. Missionaries present at the conference were recognized, and missionaries on the field sent greetings by video. Special musical numbers with a mission theme were sung by Paul and Becky Abel and Matthew and Ednay Abel. The preacher for the evening was AFLC missionary to Uganda, Pastor Brent Raan, whose text was Acts 14:19-23. Both evening services were livestreamed for the benefit of those who could not attend.

The conference concluded on Wednesday afternoon, which meant that a significant amount of business needed to be crunched into two days. The chairman firmly but kindly restricted the length of the reports to be presented, and there was good cooperation from the directors and board/committee chairmen.

A new feature of the conference this year was a series of afternoon electives at 1:15 and 2:15, led by each of our family of ministries: Co-ordinating Committee, Schools, the ARC, Home Missions, World Missions, Parish Education, AED (AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship), Parish Education, and Youth. This actually provided each of them with more time to present their work and respond to any questions, thus attempting to keep people better informed than what a normal conference format allowed, and comments from those who attended were quite positive.

This did not mean that the important devotional emphasis was limited. Both morning and afternoon sessions began with a brief scriptural meditation and a hymn with one of the newly ordained pastors as the leader. AED Director Randy Nelson conducted the daily



prayer times, and AFLC Schools Music Director Andrew Hanson led in the singing of several worship songs at various intervals.

The president's report expressed his gratitude for the harmony within our fellowship, but also highlighted concerns for our congregations and clergy. Our supply of pastors is improving, but he encouraged us to pray for a new class of 20 in the seminary. We could also use more lay-preachers who could help congregations that cannot afford a full-time shepherd, and pastors were urged to consider discipling men to serve in this way. In another word to the clergy, he reminded them of the importance of visitation, and called on the deacons to hold them responsible.

President Korhonen announced that this will be his last term in office, which means that there will be a presidential election scheduled for 2022, "unless the Lord would radically change something." He reminded the conference that a proposal to limit the president to two four-year terms was narrowly defeated, and that would be "healthy for the AFLC" for him to respect that vote.

The report of the Coordinating Committee repeated the mission statement that was formalized last year: Advance, Administer, and Assist. The first of these primary functions relates to "making known the Fundamental Principles and Rules for Work," and Chairman Dan Mundfrom announced that a Bible study of the principles has "essentially been completed." The Pastor and Congregational Care Team (PACCT) has been organized and is available to provide "prevention, intervention, and recovery care."

The funding of our church magazine, *The Lutheran Ambassador*, will remain as it is for the next two years, and a task force is investigating publishing in a digital format as well as the printed version.

The following four new member congregations were reported: The Source, Mesa, Ariz.; Waikiki Beach Gathering, Honolulu; Resurrection Lutheran Church, San Juan, Puerto Rico; and Center Free Lutheran Church, Salem, S.D. Three congregations have been closed or removed at their request: North Royalton, Ohio; Elkhorn, Neb.; Hendricks, Minn.

A challenging report from the Home Mission director noted that our church family is decreasing, and in response the ambitious goal is to partner with congregations to plant new congregations. The report lists six "gatherings," five U.S. supported organized church plants (plus several in Canada), and six congregations "rebirthing." Eight graduating Home Mission

















#### **THIS PAGE**

TOP: Representatives from eight graduating Home Missions congregations were honored during the Mission Festival Service. FAR LEFT: Pastor Terry Olson chats with Pastor Tim and Rose Carlson. NEAR LEFT: Pastor Kris Nyman and Pastor Jesse Kneeland connect during a break. BELOW FAR LEFT: Teens attending conference had a time of organized recreation in the afternoons following a morning of worship and Bible study. NEAR LEFT: Gwenn Fischer and Pastor Ron Brubakken take in some sun during a break.

#### **OPPOSITE PAGE**

TOP: Pastor Earl Korhonen, Pastor Jason Holt, and Marian Christopherson discuss a resolution during a business session. MIDDLE: Ernest Hilbert and Mark Gustafson catch up during an afternoon break. BOTTOM: Children attending conference attended an all-day vacation Bible school program.







TOP: Pastor Ron Wik, Gene Vukonich, and Pastor Brian Davidson enjoy a moment outside. MIDDLE: The VBS programming brought out the laughs.

ABOVE: A group of Free Lutheran Bible College students volunteered to run the VBS program.













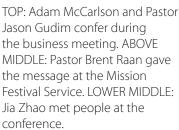














congregations were also honored during the Mission Festival service on Tuesday.

Finances became the focus of debate on several budget subsidy requests, as has often been the case during previous conferences. The Budget Analysis Committee, whose function is to review budget proposals from each ministry department, pointed to a "growing disparity" between requests and actual receipts for all of our common endeavors. Based on conference approved guidelines, the committee recommended no more than a 2 percent subsidy request increase above 2019 receipts. Some of the departments, however, were requesting a larger increase.

Some of the most spirited discussions on conference resolutions related to the budget requests of Parish Education and Youth Ministries.

"This is where it gets difficult," said Steve Jankord, representing the committee.

The Parish Education resolutions requested a subsidy of \$172,000, which was 15 percent higher than 2019 receipts. An amendment was proposed, lowering the request to a 2 percent increase, but it was defeated after lengthy discussion and the larger amount was approved. The Youth Ministries request also exceeded the suggested 2 percent guideline, but Director Jason Holt moved an amendment that would lower it in accordance with the guideline, from \$152,500 to \$137,160. The fact that the amendment was proposed by the director created a more favorable response, but it also was defeated.

Subsidy requests from Home Missions, World Missions, Schools, and Evangelism/ Discipleship were all within the recommended range of increase. The Coordinating Committee requested a 14 percent increase, defending it on the unusual grounds that it was only a .5 percent increase over the 2020 approved budget request, and the conference approved it.

The final report of the Credentials Committee listed a registration of 197 lay people with 3 visitors, and 113 pastors, for a total of 313.

The 2021 Annual Conference will be hosted by AFLC Schools, with sessions held in the new student center gymnasium.

Business was completed at 5:30 p.m. Aug. 12, and the conference adjourned with the singing of the "Doxology."

Lee, a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., is the editor.





TOP: Nancy Staudinger speaks to a resolution on the conference floor. MIDDLE: Solveig Hjermstad joined a group during prayer time. ABOVE: Gene Vukonich, Roger Timm, and Bonnie Timm enjoy a break from conference business.

RIGHT BOTTOM: Pastor Craig Benson meets with a group for prayer.



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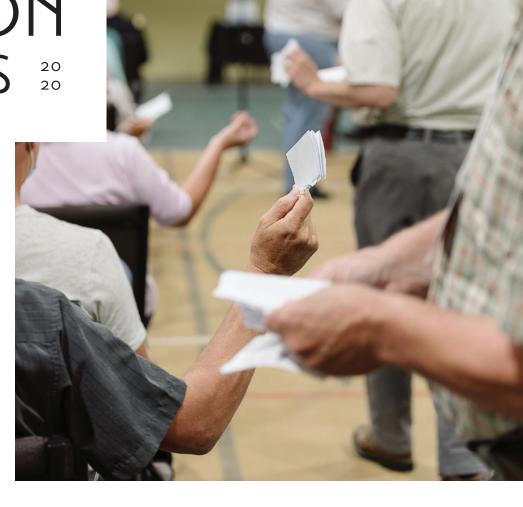
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One-year terms

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- · Layman, three-year term Darin Dykstra, Sioux Falls, S.D.

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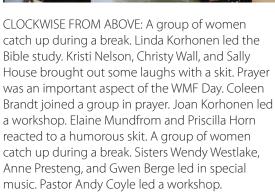






















# VICTORY IN JESUS

"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith. Who is the one that overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (I John 5:4-5)

#### BY KAREN FLOAN

ne hundred women registered for the Women's Missionary Federation Day on June 10 at the Association Retreat Center (ARC) near Osceola, Wis. Anne Presteng, the first vice president of the national Women's Missionary Federation opened the day with a welcome and prayer in the absence of WMF President Lavonne West, who was unable to attend. Ruth Rautio, as ARC hostess, gave a welcome to the women.

Bible study writer Linda Korhonen shared devotions based on the theme "Victory in Jesus" from I John 5:4-5. Korhonen shared how to be "Transformed from Victim to Victor by Renewing Your Mind" (Romans 12:2). A time of singing and praise were led by sisters Anne Presteng, Gwen Berge, Wendy Westlake, and Karen Floan, with Anne sharing some history regarding the theme song "Victory In Jesus."

Natalie Ballmann led a workshop on the Home Missions start up church she and her husband Matthew serve in San Antonio, Texas. She shared how there can be both discouraging and encouraging days in the work but victory is found in serving Jesus. A stretch break followed with door prizes given out, including purchased materials from AFLC Parish Education funded by Thrivent grant dollars. The second workshop was led by Joan Korhonen, who spoke on a "Journey with Jesus." Joan reviewed the Apostle Paul's journeys in Acts and how these relate to the AFLC World Missions.

A memorial service was led by Lori Willard, of Everett, Wash. Lori read the names of AFLC women and served in the AFLC and local WMFs who have gone to glory this past year. After lunch the theme song "Victory In Jesus" was lead by

Anne, Gwen, Wendy, and Karen. The sisters also provided the special choir music, "The Lord is My Salvation," since there was no group choir because of concerns due to COVID-19.

The third workshop was led by Pastor Andy Coyle, with a theme of "Life Through The Lens of Victory," referring to I Corinthians 15:57-58. Pastor Coyle emphasized that no matter what we encounter in this earthly life we need to keep being steadfast and remembering that Jesus has already accomplished the victory for us.

The New Image Players from Wisconsin (Kristi Nelson, Christy Wall, and Sally House) presented a couple of humorous skits. A time of prayer followed the skits with women breaking into small groups and praying for the AFLC ministries and other concerns.

Total offering for the day was \$4,147.

Another stretch break with door prizes given out took place before the business session began. Elected during the business meeting were Liz McCarlson, Minneapolis, Minn., to the role of second vice president; and Margie Lee, Beulah, N.D., to the role of treasurer. After the business session Col. John Eidsmoe, who presided as parliamentarian, gave the benediction in closing.

The WMF hosted the Mission Festival Service on Aug. 11, with Pastor Earl Korhonen, World Missions director, leading the service. Special music was presented by Paul and Beck Abel and Matthew and Ednay Abel. The evening message was given by Pastor Brent Raan, AFLC missionary to Uganda.

Floan, Plymouth, Minn., is the recording secretary for Women's Missionary Federation.



ne of the first things I do when arriving at the church office is check my voicemails. The first message on the first day of April 2019 was not one I expected. I heard the voice of the chief of the Shakopee, Minn., police department asking me to call him back to discuss an important matter. My initial reaction was, "Is this an April Fool's joke?"

With my heart beating, I quickly called the police chief. He told me that the police had recently learned that a group from Westboro Baptist was planning to protest outside our church on the following Sunday. My mind was swimming with so many questions. This infamous group of protesters known for holding up offensive signs outside churches, funerals of military personnel, and other national events was

coming to *our* church? Why us? What are they protesting?

Someone shared the flier produced by the Westboro group, which laid out their plans for the protest. Our congregation was one of three churches in our area they were protesting that morning. The flier read, "These mainline 'Christian' churches wink at sin and preach subtle, man-pleasing perversions of God's standards from the pulpits, to the delight of their congregants who turn to their smooth words rather than endure sound doctrine."

I got the sense that they had not actually visited our church website, read our statements of faith, nor listened to any sermons. We speculated that this group, based in Kansas, were mainly in



the Twin Cities to protest the NCAA Final Four and wanted to hit up a few churches on Sunday morning while they were here.

The news quickly spread, and our congregation prepared for an unforgettable Sunday morning. I chatted with our congregation's president about all the details that needed to be considered. An email was sent to the congregation explaining what was going to happen. The police chief strongly advised us to avoid any interaction with the protesters. I was mentally preparing what I might say to a protester if he or she were to come inside our church building and engage with us. We had been told that their *modus operandi* is to stay on public property as they protest. There is a sidewalk along our church property and that was where they would be protesting.

What would happen? What would this morning look like? How would God use this event in our congregation? As it turned out, I was actually excited for the morning. We had learned that the group would be protesting for 30 minutes prior to the start our worship service. Our congregation was instructed to calmly park in our lot, not making eye contact with the protesters as they came to church. A few police vehicles, one with the police chief, arrived well before the protesters showed up.

When the protesters from Westboro Baptist arrived, I was surprised to see just a handful of people. It also surprised me to see the generically mild messages on their signs. One sign read,

"God Hates Proud Sinners." What I didn't expect was the counter-protesters. In the days leading up to this event, our church had received messages from a few people across the country offering to support us. A group of about a 12 to 20 counter-protesters set up across the street from the Westboro protesters. The signs they were holding up were obscene, including many swear words and vulgar messages. The counter-protesters yelled at the Westboro protesters. I, along with our congregational members who had arrived, watched out the front windows of

our church building. We marveled that this was actually happening.

The scariest part of the morning came when a counter-protester, dressed up as Jesus, arrived in our parking lot. He held up a sign, yelled, and started weaving through the Westboro group. The cops slowly moved toward him and pleaded for him to cross the street and join the other counterprotesters. Thankfully, he did. After that flurry of activity, everyone was gone.

When the police left after the protesters and counter-protesters, it was time to begin the worship service. I was so proud of our congregation for remaining calm during this ordeal. It was a privilege to address the flock at the start of the service. It was a teachable moment that I didn't want to see pass. I shared that this event was a good opportunity for us to consider how we can be prepared to give an answer for the hope that we have in Christ. I concluded, "Take heart, friends. And be excited. Obviously, we have a target on our backs. This won't be the last time that you are directly called a false teacher. I am praying that God uses this to fire us up for the faith. Keep becoming a congregation that is saved, strengthened, and serving, being used by God to make a difference in our community. And, at the end of the day, being the sheep of our Savior's pasture, we are safe in His hands."

I was thankful to have a guest preacher that morning. I sat in the sanctuary, relieved and thankful to receive God's pure gospel and joyfully to sing praises to the Lord.

Boe serves King of Glory Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn.

## More conference photos





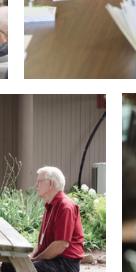




TOP TO BOTTOM: Conference attendees headed outside to enjoy the weather during a break from business. Lots of crafting projects were part of the vacation Bible school program for children attending with their families. Members of Committee #4 (Rebecca Moan, Albert Engevik, Pastor Brett Boe, and Amy Dalager) met to consider resolutions for Parish Education and Youth Ministries.











MIDDLE RIGHT: Jeannie Sheldon and other members of Committee #1 met with Pastor Micah Hjermstad, conference secretary. ABOVE: Finding a comfy seat during conference business.



## FINDING PLANTER PASTORS

BY PASTOR JIM JOHNSON



here do you find church planters? That's what we're asking in AFLC Home Missions

every day. Our mission is to help churches plant churches. The seven-member committee is looking for men, women, young adults, and youth who are gifted to start living congregations.

Some come from China, some from North Dakota. Some are pastor's kids, some own businesses. One is a bank president. One of them was a missionary in Ukraine. Another was a bi-vocational pastor with a ranching background who still loves working with cattle.

One was planning to be a mining engineer. He now mines for souls.

His name is Holmes Zhao. Holmes and his wife, Jia, are planning to start a new church in St. Paul, Minn. A Chinese Lutheran church. Holmes earned a Ph.D. in science, but midway through college he confessed Jesus as his Lord. Holmes and Jia are gifted soul

winners. Their mission is to reach the 4,000 visiting scholars from China and invite them to Bible studies. They take them shopping, and coordinate picnics for their families. They help the Chinese families move in and move out.

One of their contacts is Zhou, a Chinese woman who attends their Bible study.

"She recently accepted Jesus as her Savior," said Holmes.

Her autistic son was the next person in her family to come to faith.

"I was teaching Jerry how to pray one night," said Holmes. Jerry finished the prayer by himself. "Dear Lord Jesus, please protect me. Jesus loves me, and Jesus please heal me."

Another Bible study attendee now lectures on government in a large Chinese university.

"He worries about losing his job in China," Holmes said. Seekers of Christ don't always have great job security.

One loving Bible study attendee returned to Shanghai recently. She reminded Jia and Holmes about the importance of reaching Chinese scholars while they are still in the US.

"We have no opportunity to hear the gospel at the universities," she told our church planters. "It can't be shared at the university. And when professors do find access to the gospel, the greatest obstacle for them to believe is fear. They fear the government will know and that they will lose their jobs. Pray for God to overcome their fear."

The AFLC will soon have a Free Lutheran

church plant filled with Chinese speakers. Holmes is a graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary. They will make Chinese disciples and equip them with the gospel. And then they will send them back to the great nation of China, with Jesus as their Lord.

We know God provides missionaries, pastors, teachers, shepherds, and evangelists. They are out there somewhere. Some are in our seminary. Some are leading youth groups. Some are teaching in schools or building houses. It's like Ephesians 4 explains it: "To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it," says verses 7-11. "He gave gifts to men ... some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers."

These planters are rare. But God sends them to us as gifts to spread the gospel.

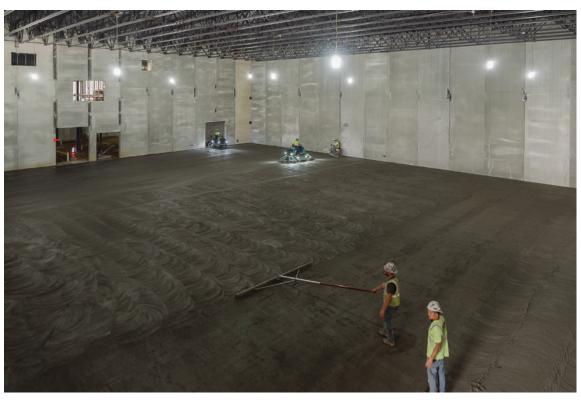
Keep your eyes open. God gives planters to church families like us.

Johnson is the director of AFLC Home Missions.

## **Progress continues on Student Life Center**



In the second half of August and the first half of September, crews constructed the southern terrace, poured concrete flooring, and began the final enclosure of the building as students began to arrive on campus.







## AFLC chaplains to host training seminar on grief counseling

AFLC Institutional Chaplaincy will host a chaplain training seminar Oct. 26-28 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis. All AFLC pastors and their wives, as well as lay leaders are invited to attend.

The 2020 training seminar theme is "Grief in

the Congregation." Featured in the training will be Dr. James Molstre, dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary, who will present three 50-minute sessions based on his doctoral thesis on establishing a grief counseling project in a local congregation, and the lessons learned during the process.

Other presentations and discussions relating to grief will also be featured during the schedule.

Registration will be 6-7 p.m. on Monday followed by a worship service.
Registration cost is listed on the ARC website at \$125-160 (depending on housing

choices). Registration can be completed by following this link to the ARC registration page: arcevents. campbrainregistration.com.

For more information about this training seminar, contact Pastor Marlin Harris (marjoyharris@yahoo.com) or by phone: (612) 559-2886.



Brazil mission field, January was always my favorite month.

In the southern hemisphere January means summer. Yet it was not the warmer weather that made it my favorite, nor was it because school was out—because it wasn't really. Our home school never really took formal vacations. Rather, we had multiple holidays breaks throughout the year. What, then, was so special about January? Camp!

The excitement of expectation kept camp at the front of my mind. Usually a week of vacation Bible school (VBS) preceded the Bible camp, making my expectations rise even higher. Half-days of Bible stories, music, crafts, and relays were great, but soon it would be camp time—similar to VBS, but you have to go home. Our camp included intensity, competition, and fun, but the focus was

# AN OPEN DOOR THROUGH CAMP

BY PASTOR MATTHEW ABEL

always on the gospel message. Bible camp was just that, a time to learn the Bible. Stories, lessons, memory verses, skits, songs, puppets, crafts, etc., were used to intentionally teach the Word of God and the message of the gospel.

When I became a teenager, February was my favorite month. Can you guess why? Teen camp was in February! I don't think there has been a year in my life in which I haven't been to at least one Bible camp. Have you ever been to Bible camp? The experience of getting away from the day-to-day routine, surrounded by Christian fellowship, immersed in biblical teaching, removed from the regular preoccupations, has an incredibly positive affect on one's spiritual life. The evangelistic impact of Bible camp is also unmatched by other church activities.

As my wife and I prepared for the missionary task of church planting in Paraguay, we discussed the prospect of Bible camp ministry. In February

we took one new disciple from Paraguay with us to experience youth camp in Brazil. Since then God has opened doors for us to develop a Bible camp ministry along with church planting in Paraguay in an area where there is currently no evangelical Christian witness. As we begin ministry in a new area of Paraguay, we will have a Bible camp as part of our outreach ministry. We could never have imagined that God would give to us, in our very first year in the country, the opportunity to help develop and coordinate a Bible camp. We are excited about the prospect of other missionary church plants coming together for developing this Bible camp ministry. Perhaps there will be a next generation in Paraguay whose favorite month is based on Bible camp, as well.

Abel is an AFLC missionary serving in Paraguay.

## PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Mark Olson has accepted a call to serve Zion Lutheran, Dexter, Minn., and Mount Sion Lutheran, Kasson, Minn. Olson had recently served the congregations as interim pastor.

Pastor Alan Arneson has accepted a call to serve Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis., beginning in December. Arneson currently serves Calvary Free Lutheran, Fosston, Minn.

Pastor Curt Emerson has retired from the Zion Free Lutheran and Bethany Free Lutheran churches in Wadena, Minn., and has moved to Lancaster, Ohio.

Speakers for the 2021 FLY Convention have been released. They include Pastor Ryan Patenaude, Kindred, N.D.; Pastor Alex Amiot, Thief River Falls, Minn.; Pastor Micah Hjermastad, Fargo, N.D.; Pastor Adam Osier, Plymouth, Minn.; and Pastor Brent Olson, Robbinsdale, Minn. The convention will be held July 5-10 in Estes Park, Colo.

AFLC Home Missions recently sent out three new Parish Builders to work in church plants. They include Alison Mundfrom, who is serving with Calvary Free Lutheran and The Source in Mesa, Ariz.; and Julia Albright and Sarah Duffy, both of whom are serving with Trinity Lutheran in San Antonio, Texas. All three Parish Builders graduated from the Free Lutheran Bible College in May. Eli and Elizabeth Neufeld, who served as Parish Builders in Mesa, Ariz., recently stepped down from their roles.

## Tormanen, Carlson, Emerson installed



Pastor Erin Tormanen (center left) was ordained and installed Aug. 30 at Our Savior's Free Lutheran, Stanley, N.D., with Pastor Gary Jorgenson officiating. Also pictured are members of the church council.



Pastor Tim Carlson was installed Aug. 9 at Timberland Ringebu Free Lutheran, Cumerland, Wis., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president officiating.



Pastor Luke Emerson (center) was installed July 26 at Peace Lutheran, Saint Francis, Kan., with Pastor Curtis Emerson (top), his father, officiating.

### - AUGUST MEMORIALS <sup>,</sup>

#### **Bible College**

**Ruth Claus** Dorothy Russum Sherman McCarlson Darrel Johnson Pastor Ken Thoreson

#### **Home Missions**

Marilyn Nasby Pastor Ken Thoreson

## **Journey Missions**

Vernon & Dorothy Russum

#### **Parish Education** Kent Quanbeck Donna Ranger

#### Seminary

Darrel Johnson

#### Vision

Lorella Hartman

#### **World Missions**

**Dorothy Russum** Don Dillon Marilyn Nasby

#### **WMF**

Lavonne Milim Dorothy Russum

## **Youth Ministry**

John Keinanen

### AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-August 31, 2020

FUND	REC <sup>'</sup> D IN AUGUST	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$20,749	\$265,754	\$279,928
Evangelism	5,769	62,798	82,161
Youth Ministries	14,271	79,470	92,845
Parish Education	22,714	100,005	104,378
Seminary	13,885	185,769	178,507
Bible College	29,421	259,328	370,332
Home Missions	33,125	252,175	241,025
World Missions	17,594	241,827	275,974
Personal Support	59,658	507,511	410,078
TOTALS	\$217,186	\$1,954,638	\$2,035,229

For additional financial information for each department, go to www.aflc.org/giving

## THE FELLOWSHIP

here are certain advantages to membership in a smaller church body, and a major one is the fellowship or family spirit. This can be a disadvantage, of course, when it makes people feel excluded, but a growing and open fellowship like we have enjoyed in the AFLC can be a real positive strength.

Certain activities have nurtured this



Pastor Robert Lee

family spirit, and early in our life as a church body we discovered the impact of the summer family Bible camps. Faith was born and nurtured through the evening services and the Bible classes, and Christian friendships were

established and strengthened.

The fellowship role of our biennial national youth conventions has guite dramatically increased over the years, as young people from congregations north and south, east and west, assemble at a campground near Estes Park, Colo., and currently constitute the largest gatherings in the life of the AFLC. Although the programs are not geared to adults, there are many who come as advisors and counselors, or who fill other staff positions, and they share together in the blessings of the week, too, and in the warm fellowship.

Our Bible school (now called a Bible college), established in 1966, created a unique fellowship across the years of those who studied there. Now their children are enrolling, and we have even welcomed some third-generation students. In many cases the children of friends have become friends. and it's great to see. The conventions and camps have been an important feeder for our school, too.

The focus of this issue is the annual conference, and without a doubt these gatherings have been the major source of nurturing for our church-wide fellowship. The uniqueness of a church convention, open to all voting members of our congregations (and to guests!) rather than elected delegates, surprises our newer members who learn not to think of them as political conventions.

Our 2020 annual conference is history now, and pandemic restrictions make it impossible to compare to past conferences. Hopefully, God willing, we will never see another one like this again. So the issues that will be raised in this editorial refer to our conferences in general, but especially to those in recent years. Please consider these concerns:

• A conference that is for everyone can end up being for no one. In the early days of the Lutheran Free Church, our parent church body, there was a concern that the strongly committed founders were passing away and attendance was becoming a problem.

problem for the AFLC, too. For some of our founders. conference attendance was not an option but a necessity. Was your congregation represented at conference during the past ten years? Were there some members in past years who regularly attended but are no longer living? Have some taken their place?

I believe that this may be a

- It is best that the majority of people at the conferences are lay men and women, and it may be a sign of weakness if the conferences are dominated by pastors and their wives. No, I don't mean that they shouldn't be there, but our goal should be more lay people than clergy in attendance for a truly healthy fellowship. Was your pastor the only one who represented your congregation at the conference in recent years?
- Several changes to the structure of the conferences have been made. The first was concluding on Friday rather than

Sunday. There were no longer any people with work commitments who registered only for the weekend, and many pastors left early in order to conduct their own services on Sunday, so attendance became a problem. I'm not sure that the problem is solved, as it seems that people still decide to leave early. Has it helped to change the order of business to schedule the reports first and resolutions for later in the week? I don't think so. Will the workshops/electives break the monotony of long business sessions and encourage more people to attend? We'll see, but commitment may be more of a problem than schedule.

One of the founders of the Free Lutheran movement in America called the annual conferences "a great spiritual powerhouse," and I am convinced that the potential is still there. Please plan to attend

A conference that is for everyone can end up being for no one.

> the conference next year yourself if possible. Take the matter to your congregation's annual meeting so that financial assistance is provided for your pastor and at least one lay person to attend. Encourage your congregation to provide subscriptions to The Lutheran Ambassador for every member; if that is not done, then subscribe for yourself and at least one other person. Okay?

Our fellowship is at stake.

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd. Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

## association retreat center

# A TACTICAL RETREAT

BY KIRK RAUTIO



n observing the groups that have visited the Association Retreat Center this season, I have noticed that they all have one thing in common:

they all have intentionally taken time as a group to take a break from their daily routine. Their desire to "come away ... and rest a while" (Mark 6:31) shows in their decision to spend time here. During this season of restrictions and mandates due to COVID-19 policies, our visitors have had a deeper desire to leave stressful situations and find rest as they have been pressed into smaller and smaller circles.

It is amazing to see people get out of a car, take a deep breath, and excitedly greet their friends—including the awkward moment when they wonder, "Should we hug or not?"

Our visitors at camps this summer have shown signs of the need to retreat. They

have listened deeply to the teaching, they have embraced times of praise and worship with loud voices, they have invested time into others in a more intentional way, and they have stayed up a whole lot later than normal, as none of them wanted to waste a moment. They are also more vocal in their appreciation.

With many camps closing for the year—and some for good—this season has made people realize that they might not always be able to take their annual retreat. In fact, they realize the privilege of being able to get away, and they do not want to squander it. Groups have left here refreshed and empowered to go back into their circles and do the work to which they have been called.

Serving in a place that enables people to have a couple days of normal has been an honor for us. We are thankful that the ARC has been placed in a geographical location that has enabled it to still offer retreats. Yes, times are tough, planning needs to be spot on, serving the groups takes more hours of labor, and winter is going to be a challenge to which none of us are looking forward. But, knowing, seeing, and engaging with what happens when Christians make it a priority to get together makes every trial worth the cost.

Make it a priority in your life to "come away ... and rest a while." Even if it is in your living room, underneath a blanket tent with your kiddos, or with other families and friends via a computer or phone screen. Get together for even a day. Break the routine of life. Find opportunities in your area to gather as Christ's church outside the weekly routine. It will be worth the time invested.

Rautio is the executive director of the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis.