THE STANDARY 2021 LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



COMMANDMENTS



BLESSED CONTROLLER

BY RACHEL MATTSON



s I turn the calendar to January 2021, I can't help but think through the year that has past and wonder about the year ahead. Will it bring reprieve from sickness? Will it bring unity

from division? Will it bring ease from discomfort? Maybe it's just me, but I always feel very hopeful as I turn the calendar to start a new year or month. It's as if life gets a fresh start, or we hope it does—perhaps this year more than any other. Although there's nothing magical about turning the calendar, I flip it with eager anticipation for the plans that may be ahead.

The dreams I've pondered for my life throughout the last months and years have brought the realization that my soul cannot be satisfied by the things on this earth, but eagerly longs for the perfection of Heaven, of knowing my Savior face to face. And so, as I turn my calendar this year, I pray the words of Elisabeth Elliot that, "it will be a year of desire radically transformed, the year of finding, as we have perhaps not yet truly found, Christ to be the All-Sufficient One" (*Keep A Quiet Heart*). A prayer to remember that my eager hope is fulfilled in knowing Christ as my All-Sufficient One, the One who knows every longing of my soul and hopeful turning of my

However we find ourselves in this new year, we can join with the psalmist in saying, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God" (42:11). This is a reminder to once again tell our souls that hope is found in God, for He brings salvation to our lives and quietness to our souls.

The God who is "... the blessed controller of all things, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (I Timothy 6:15, Phillips). Therefore I say to my soul, "Oh my soul, hope in God, the King above all kings and the Lord above all lords, who sees all my days and controls all of time!"

As I turn my calendar this year it becomes an act of trusting this blessed Savior, the all-sufficient King, and the controller of all my days. And in this hope each new day is filled with a fresh start, a changed desire, and a finding of His sufficiency.

Turn.

Hope in God, for He knows your every sorrow.

Turn.

Seek His face, for His salvation is in each day.

Turn.

Praise His name, for His presence is already in tomorrow.

Turn.

Trust His plan, for through His Word He leads my way.

This year, instead of fretting about the outcome of each day, may our hearts' desire be found in knowing more of the All-Sufficient One. Turn. Your blessed Savior is in control.

Mattson is a member of Our Saviour's Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn.



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sound bites

ine greatest aid to adult educa	—C.T. Jones
Every Christian should be bo radical; conservative in prese radical in applying it.	
Training must come before tea can train their children prope discipline themselves.	
on is a fine instrument and useful by which to know God.	within its field. It was not given as —A.W. Tozer
Much time is spent teaching your make a living, yet few know ho	<u> </u>

To teach something you don't know is like coming

back from somewhere you haven't been.

—Henrietta Mears

—Vance Havner

January 2021 3

By Dr. Oliver Blosser

ollowing the Exodus from Egypt, the Lord gave Israel specific instructions for how to live their lives and teach the next generation to follow Him. God revealed His amazing power and wisdom in the Exodus from Egypt. He showed His people, and the whole world, that He was the ultimate authority.

The detailed instruction God gave to Israel is known as the law. This Mosaic document details what the LORD did for His people—redemption from Egyptian slavery—and explains what the LORD expected from Israel—obedience to the law, particularly the Ten Commandments. Moses summarizes the 613 commandments in God's law through the Ten Commandments, known in Judaism as "The Ten Words." The Ten Commandments are found in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the commandments are further simplified in the *Shema*, the basic creedal statement in Judaism. The word *Shema* means "listen up" and refers to the first word in the passage, typically translated as "hear." There are three fundamental elements to the *Shema*.

First, there is an acknowledgment of belief in one God. Deuteronomy 6:4 says, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" The LORD revealed His personal redemptive Name for relationship with His people—"I am the LORD."

Second, there is an affirmation to love God with all of one's being. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." Israel was to demonstrate love to the LORD through obedience to the law.

Third, there is an application to diligently teach the next generation about this spiritual reality. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 says, "And these words which I command you today

shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

The LORD's people were to show their love and respect for the one true God by teaching generation after generation to live according to the Ten Commandments.

If we love our children and grandchildren, then we will really teach them about the LORD's redemptive love and the importance of living life according to the Ten Commandments. There are key words in Scripture concerning the Ten Commandments—"remember" and

"observe." This is how followers of God maintain their holiness in covenant relationship. In Psalm 119:11 we are reminded, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You." To remember is to memorize. That is why Martin Luther wrote, "Exhort your household to learn [the Ten Commandments] word for word, that they should obey God. For if you teach and urge your families things will go forward."

The other 600 commandments support the observance of the Decalogue. For the sake of our children and grandchildren, it is important to obey the Ten Commandments in our homes and in our churches, as well as to teach their meaning.



Hear,
O Israel:



The LORD gave this Decalogue out of love for His people. The law in Hebrew is *Torah* which means "To cause to teach instructions in righteousness." Gilbert K. Chesterton observed, "No man can break any of the Ten Commandments. He can only break himself against them." All around us, we see individuals with broken lives due to breaking of the

The LORD our God, the LORD is one!

Ten Commandments. They are experiencing the consequences of sin. God's statutes will not budge because they were established by the One who states, "I am the LORD."

Jesus affirmed the Ten Commandments to be part of His Messianic *Torah* as He summarized the two tables of the law in Mark 12:28-31 and Matthew 23:34-40. Israel was to learn that without obedience, there can be no blessings, and without holiness, there can be no happiness. Israel failed to diligently teach instructions in righteousness to the next generation. That became a disaster for Israel. As the wisdom literature states, "Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

That's why the Ten Commandments should be posted in our Christian homes. That's why we must earnestly teach our children and grandchildren the Ten Commandments. That's why all education should be founded on Scripture and learning the biblical

worldview. The lives of our children and grandchildren will either be broken or blessed by how they respond to the love of a holy God. The Ten Commandments will not budge and that's the reason the LORD says, "I am the LORD."

Blosser is an adjunct professor of Hebrew at the Free Lutheran Seminary, Plymouth, Minn.



By Pastor Micah Hjermstad

s a child, I remember being very upset with the Israelites. How could they forget about God's miraculous deliverance so quickly after they left Egypt? How could they not trust Him to save them from Pharaoh's army on the shores of the Red Sea? Why would they complain about having to eat manna that literally came from heaven? Perhaps the most grievous offense in my young mind was the episode of the golden calf. Charlton Heston's The Ten Commandments helped me to picture what that was like. What would possess God's people to lose patience so quickly that they would think it was appropriate to actually worship a statue of a calf?

As I've grown older, God has shown me in His Word that I am not so different from

the Israelites. Far more often than I care to admit, when times of temptation, suffering, and threat are bearing down on me, I forget about God's deliverance, too. I complain when God's gracious provision doesn't fit my misplaced expectation. My heart and mind are far too easily distracted by different idols.

The sobering reality is that in our sin, we don't love God above all things. We fall short of all of God's commands, and that includes love for God. In the Ten Commandments, the first three commandments comprise what we call the First Table of the Law. They deal with our relationship with God, while the remaining seven commandments instruct our relationships with one another. In the first three commandments, we learn that we are to fear, love, and trust in God and cling to Him alone. We are to respect and honor His Name, call upon Him in every time of need, and take time to gladly hear and learn His Word.

You shall have no other gods before me.

Praise God for the forgiveness found in Jesus Christ for our failure to love God above all else. By His grace, we learn to keep our eyes on Him and remember His steadfast love for us. We thank Him for His faithful provision and care, and we find Sabbath rest for our souls in His Word and in the Word made flesh.

I recently read through Martin Luther's explanations of those first three commandments in his Large Catechism. Two thoughts stood out. First, it's so important to regularly meditate, study, and reflect on God's Word, including the Ten Commandments. In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Moses conveys the greatest commandment of God to His people, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all



your might." Love for God above all else is what the First Table of the Law addresses, and Moses goes on to explain that these words are to be taught and talked about at home, when you're walking, sitting, and rising. He describes them as being on your hands and even between your eyes. In other words, this command to love God above all else is to be

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. something you think about regularly. Loving God above all else shapes and informs every part of your life, and you and I need to be reminded of that all the time because we are so prone to wander. We need God's Word regularly, because it's His Word that creates and sustains life and love for Him. His Word convicts us of sin, and His Word delivers the good news of the gospel that we are forgiven when we fall short.

We also need to keep God's Word close and to keep our eyes on Christ, because the devil is actively seeking to destroy our faith. We must not underestimate the schemes of the devil. Luther writes in the *Large Catechism*, "He ceases neither day nor night to sneak up on you and to kindle in your heart unbelief

and wicked thoughts against these three commandments and all the commandments. Therefore, you must always have God's Word in your heart, upon your lips, and in your ears."

However, we must not overestimate the power of the devil. To love God means to trust Him, to cling to Him only. We do that only by grace through faith in the powerful Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

working of Jesus Christ on our behalf. It's in Christ that we find the One powerful to have "delivered us from the domain

of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14). Victory and eternal life are found in Jesus Christ, and His salvation fills us with love for God and for one another.

Hjermstad serves St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D.



By Pastor Brandon Marschner

oving your neighbors is hard, especially when they let their dogs run through your yard or cut you off in traffic. Sometimes it's even harder when your neighbors are your own family members. Let's sit at the feet of the Great Teacher and learn about loving our neighbors.

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets'" (Matthew 22:36-40).

The Pharisees ask for the one great commandment, but Jesus gives them two commandments. They both deal with love: love for God and neighbor. The Ten Commandments can also be divided up in this way. The First Table of the Law (1-3) teaches us to love God. The Second Table (4-10) teaches us to love our neighbor. Jesus describes the Second Table in His extended answer to the Pharisees.

Let's consider this: how do we love our neighbors? First, we need to define love. We generally speak of love in an emotional way, our feelings of love. But the kind of love that Jesus is talking about is not the gooey feelings you experience when you take your date out to the movies. Jesus is talking about a love that is a choice and an action.

Here's a good definition of love, "Love is an attitude of commitment to meeting the needs of others that is informed by genuine wisdom as to what those needs might be" (Jeffrey Gibbs, *Commentary on Matthew 21:1-28:20*). This is the kind of love that Jesus is talking about. Love is recognizing the need of another person and doing what we can to fill that need. This is the kind of love that we are called to have for our neighbors.

And the second is like it:



Who, then, are our neighbors? Our catechism gives a good succinct answer: "Every human being is our neighbor" (Luther's Small Catechism). So, every person with whom we come into contact is our neighbor. In fact, the whole world is our neighbor. And we are to love them. It's easy to get lost in the immensity of loving the whole world. That's right, we have about seven billion neighbors. Where do we begin?

Let's narrow it down a little and focus on the people we know. Furthermore, let's consider just those who are difficult to love. Our neighbors are those people with whom we are angry, or those whom we consider to be our enemies. The coworker who always takes a different side. The girls who gossip behind our backs. Anyone who has rubbed us the wrong way this week. These are our neighbors whom we ought to love. And the Second Table of the Law shows us how to love them.

Is there any good news here? Is there any gospel in the Second Table of the Law? In its strictest sense, no. But when we look at the law in relation to Jesus, then we can see the gospel.

Remember that the gospel is God's covenant promise. Gospel statements are meant

to be believed—you don't work at them. These are statements like: Forgiveness is yours; you are a child of God; you have peace with God. The statements in the Second Table are the law: Honor your parents; don't kill or hate others; be faithful to your spouse; tell the truth; and so forth. They are commands you work at obeying.

The good news in regard to the Second Table is that we are Jesus' neighbor. Jesus loves us as His neighbor. And Jesus loves us by recognizing our need and meeting it.

Our need is forgiveness and peace with God, neither of which we have any ability to fulfill. Even if we did start loving our neighbors like we should, our good works are tainted by selfrighteousness. We can't fulfill our own needs, but Jesus can. And Jesus did.

Jesus chose to love us. He knew we needed forgiveness, and He made the choice to meet that need. On the cross, Jesus died, fulfilling the Second Table. He loved you, His neighbor, by knowing your need and providing for it. You are forgiven.

Wow! Thank you, Jesus! It is good to be at peace with God. It is good news to be Jesus' neighbor. Now look out the window. There is your neighbor, he's taking a walk with his dog. Or maybe she is sitting on the couch in the living room. Wherever your neighbor

might be, go and love them.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

> Marschner serves Faith Free Lutheran, Brockton, Mont., and Bethel Community Church, Culbertson, Mont.



hey flattened the wrong house. A demolition company in Dallas finished their work thinking everything was fine. Then the phone rang: they missed their target by two blocks!

God's law is like that phone call. We go about our work as seemingly average people, not the best and not the worst. Then God's law calls and stuns us. The Holy Spirit works through God's Word of law to convict us of failing to be holy and succeeding in being sinful. To sin is to miss the mark, and we've missed it by far more than two blocks.

But how bad is it really? James 2:10 says that holiness before God is an all-or-nothing deal. "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." That is to say, you are either all-the-way holy, or all-the-way unholy before God. Romans 3:23 has you in mind when it says, "all have sinned," and I Corinthians 6:9 puts the nail of the law in your coffin when it says, "the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God."

This bad news should terrify our consciences. It should awaken us from complacency and give us a wide-eyed fear of God. In the *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther writes in the conclusion of the Commandments, "God threatens to punish all who transgress these commandments. We should, therefore, fear His wrath, and in no way disobey them." The call of God's law is terrifying indeed!

In His mercy, God turns this awful realization into a benefit. My confirmation students are following Ambassador Publication's *Foundations of the Faith* curriculum, which took them through the Ten Commandments this fall. Question no. 16 in *The Explanation of the Catechism* asks, "Of what benefit, then, is the Law?" First, "it points out to us our sins and the wrath of God toward sin." This function of the law is spelled out in Romans 3:20b, "through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."

How can terrors of the conscience and knowledge of sin possibly be a benefit? Because they lead to the second benefit of the law, that it "makes us anxious to seek Christ." The law made the Apostle Paul, a believer who was struggling against temptation and sin, seek a savior. When it became clear to Paul that he could not conquer sin and fulfill the law on his own, he cried in Romans 7:24, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" His question, "Who will set me free?" was born of the Holy Spirit

working through the law to "make him anxious to seek Christ." The law asks, "Who?" The gospel answers, "Jesus."

God uses His law to convict our hearts of our sin. The law is that, according to your sinful nature and your sinful works, you are all-the-way sinful. God uses His gospel to deal with our sin and deliver Jesus to us. The gospel is the good news that Jesus took the punishment for all sin on the cross and that God declares all who believe to be forgiven and all-the-way holy! Paul arrived at the gospel in Romans 7:25, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" When we see the full severity and accusation of the law, the gospel becomes that much more beautiful. Paul saw both clearly and erupted in joy in Romans 8:1, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

The third benefit of the law builds on the joy of the gospel. You have freely received the good gift of salvation, now freely give of yourself for the benefit of your neighbors and for the glory of God.

But where to begin? Look to God's law as your guide! The third benefit of the law is that "it points out to the believer what fruits his faith must bear."

We are saved through faith alone, and our good works are fruits of faith that bless

Who will set me free from the body of this death?

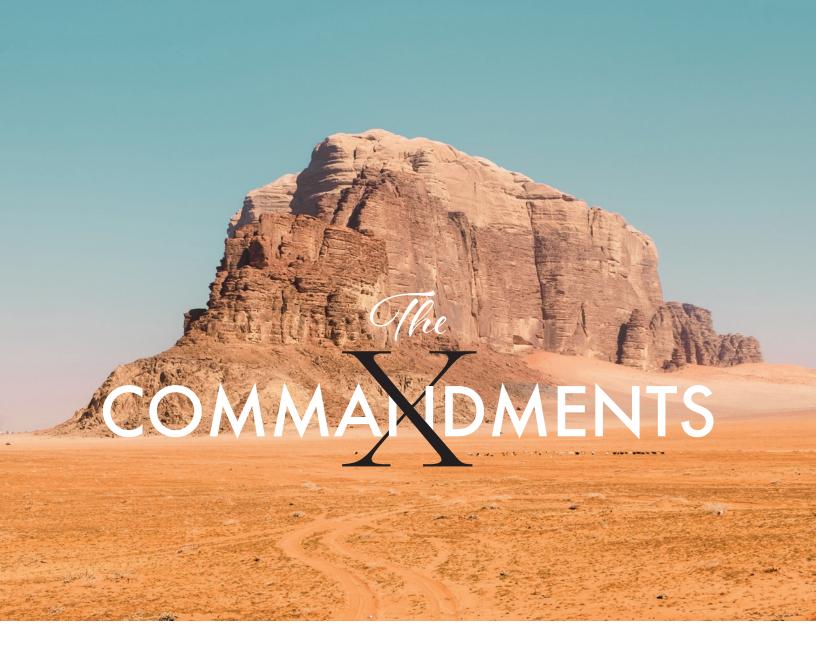


Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! our neighbor and bring glory to God. In Flame's song, "Good Works," he puts it this way, "We should guard against our good works becoming the basis for our righteousness before God, and we should guard against our righteousness of faith being used to eliminate the need for good works." Ephesians 2:8-10 explains that we are saved by grace through faith, not works, and yet as saved people we are crafted by God for good works which He has prepared for us to do.

To believers who walk humbly in repentance and faith, the Ten Commandments should be an indispensable and friendly guide to be obeyed with joy for the benefit of your neighbor.

The law of God has revealed our sin like the call revealed to the demolition company that they leveled the wrong house. But thanks be to God that the law also makes us anxious for a savior. With minds set on the gospel, that our Savior allowed the temple of His body to be razed on the cross in order to redeem us from the curse of the law, let us freely love God and our neighbors with His law as our guide.

Amiot serves Our Saviour's Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn, and Reiner Free Lutheran, Goodridge, Minn.



By Maren Sletten

od gave us the Ten Commandments because He loves us. God gave us the Ten Commandments to lead us to Jesus the Savior. The Ten Commandments teach us how to live as God's people. Jesus was the only One who kept the commandments perfectly. We can ask God to forgive us when we break His commandments, and He will hear us and forgive us. These beautiful truths are woven throughout *The Ten Commandments*, the new AFLC level two (second grade) Ambassador Publications Sunday school curriculum.

The original Ten Commandments curriculum was first published in 1970 and was revised in 1987. The new edition will be released this year. The previous edition was in a book format, but the new lessons are individually printed in a four-page leaflet format, allowing students to bring their lessons home on a weekly basis. This is also helpful when children invite friends who may be at Sunday school only once—they can have their own lesson to keep.

The level two curriculum contains 36 lessons divided into three quarters. The first six lessons introduce the Ten Commandments and

include the historical background of Israel's captivity in Egypt, and their deliverance. Students will read the dramatic narrative of God giving Moses the two tablets containing the commandments, and they will learn about God's wonderful name, "I AM."

Introducing Parish
Education's new
Ten Commandments
Sunday school
curriculum.

The next lessons focus on the individual commandments, with approximately three lessons dedicated to each of the Ten Commandments. In lesson nine, "Trust in God Above All," the students will read passages from Genesis and learn about how God kept the promises He made to Abram and Sarai. The students discover how this Bible story relates to the first commandment. As they continue through the curriculum, students will read about Jesus and the moneychangers at the temple, Daniel honoring God above all others, Zaccheus receiving forgiveness, and many more Bible stories, each one providing more insight into specific commandments.

It is vital for children to know that keeping the Ten Commandments is not what makes them a Christian. Ambassador Publications strives to create Christ-centered curriculum, and one of the main goals in designing the new level two curriculum was to ensure that students would see the gospel in each lesson. Students will read in the lessons that the law shows them their sin, points them to Jesus, and helps them live as God's people. Comforting reminders of God's promise of forgiveness through Jesus Christ are present throughout the curriculum.

Second graders typically have acquired enough skills to read their Sunday school lesson themselves, so *The Ten Commandments* curriculum is written at a second grade level. However, the lessons also include some challenging terms. Students are gradually introduced to words that may be new to them, such as "salvation," "idolatry," "contentment," and "pharaoh." Their vocabulary is enriched as they continue through the lessons.

As students make their way through the entire Ambassador Sunday School Series, they are given a strong foundation in the Bible and *Luther's Small Catechism*. All lessons in *The Ten Commandments* curriculum have a Bible memory verse and an extra challenge memory verse. Each lesson also includes a brief section of *Luther's Small Catechism* that corresponds with the commandment for that lesson.

Every lesson plan includes a variety of age-appropriate activities including word searches, fill-in-the blanks, matching puzzles, and hands-on activities. These activities continue to reinforce the biblical truths from the lesson. All the lessons are accompanied by new full-color illustrations created exclusively for this curriculum by a volunteer artist. The people depicted in the watercolor illustrations are realistically portrayed so that students are continuously reminded that the Bible characters they are learning about were real people.

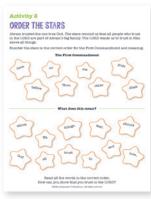
It is a wonderful blessing that the AFLC publishes its own high-quality, Christ-centered, theologically sound Sunday school curriculum. Please let your congregation's Sunday school superintendent or Christian education board know about the new AFLC level two curriculum. Please pray for the children who will be using this curriculum in the coming years. Pray for them as they read or listen to the words of the lesson, as they look at the illustrations, and as they memorize God's precious Word. May they see Jesus in the lessons and know that the Ten Commandments are God's gift to His people.

Sletten, a member of the AFLC Board of Publications and Parish Education, is a member of St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D.









By Erin McMinn

he halls and sanctuary of Ruthfred Lutheran Church in Bethel Park, Pa., like most churches across our nation, were quiet for several months at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our doors were closed out of extreme caution for our members, since we did not know yet how best to handle this new virus.

Up until that time, our church offered limited ways to connect to the worship service for those not able to attend services. As the pandemic caused us all to become shut-ins, Ruthfred members were pushed out of our comfort zone. We had to consider how best to bring the Word of God to our people so that they could experience a full worship service in a time when we were not physically able to be together.

Ruthfred is not unique. The flurry of pastors learning YouTube and Facebook live techniques to bring their messages to their congregations was evident all over social media. For Ruthfred, a more liturgical Lutheran church, the idea of video recording or live-streaming a service was not something that was ever planned. Thankfully, lay leaders stepped forward to figure out what to do, and to do it well. Initially, our services were prerecorded. Willing volunteers used their trusty iPhones to record and upload videos, each week refining their skills. On Easter Sunday, the church took the leap to live streaming. Links to on-line giving, worship attendance sign-in, and the bulletin were added to enhance the worship experience; we were trying as best as possible to replicate an in-person service.

In June, our lay-led, re-entry committee decided to re-open the sanctuary for worship while also continuing the live streaming. The committee has done an outstanding job staying up to date on current CDC guidelines, reading and understanding the exceptions in place especially for churches, as well as following the state and county mandates. They have taken great care to not make decisions out of fear, but also with safety of our members and concern for them in mind. We wear masks and sit in every other pew. Hugs and handshakes are on hold, but we do ■

have fellowship—a very vital part of congregational life.

The leaders of our church have worked well together to bring as much normalcy to our church programs as possible. Although there are obvious modifications for care and safety, we are still able to meet and continue to provide programs that other churches in our area have simply stopped right now. The annual church picnic in August was still held, but instead of a potluck, we had a food truck, eliminating the concerns that come with sharing serving utensils. Vacation Bible school was virtual and concluded with an outdoor closing on Friday evening on the ball field behind the church instead of inside the sanctuary. Weekly Bible studies, youth, and men's ministries have all been able to continue to meet by using a combination of virtual and in-person meetings. Sunday mornings,

What was born out of necessity ...

we have continued both adult and children's Sunday school. The senior choir has been able to continue by being spaced across the altar area and into the first rows of seating. By maintaining distance between each other and the rest of the congregation, the choir is safely able to use their talented voices to give glory to God. God has blessed us with a wonderful church building and outside space, and we have been able to use it to its fullest.





What was born out of pure necessity to continue to spread the Word with worship services on line has grown into something bigger than we could have imagined. The pandemic has been a time of growth. God has given us new ways to grow as a church

has grown into something bigger than we could have imagined.

and spread the gospel. Dave Compel, who fills our newly created digital outreach coordinator position, has a passion for using his tech skills to connect Ruthfred with the community. Before being on staff, Dave volunteered his time with the on-line services. He coordinated an outdoor contemporary music concert in August, an outdoor movie night in October, and is working on a Christmas live stream special with youth from all over the AFLC.

The pandemic has been a difficult time. Many members of our congregation have returned to participating together inside the church building, while others are still not ready. Although our hope is to have everyone return to worshiping together in the sanctuary, it is wonderful that technology is available to those individuals who need it. The Bible commands us in Hebrews 10:25 to not forsake the assembling together of believers. It is encouraging to see the many masked faces Sunday mornings and to see the on-line participants comment on the live stream.

May we be an encouragement to one another while we are face to face—although six feet apart—and even in our times when we are together, but on line. God can use us even with masks and hand sanitizer—and even on our computers, too!

McMinn is a member of Ruthfred Evangelical Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa.

A confirmand writes: What I believe

BY BRYLEE LINGEN

o vou ever wonder why your parents made you grow up in the Christian faith? If you do, you are not the only one. We may not actually start to think about why we are Christians until we are in our teens; that time is now for me. Faith can be a confusing idea for teens to navigate alone, which is why confirmation is so important for us to goes through. This paper will explain what I think it means to be a Christian, Lutheran, and AFLC Lutheran.

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means believing that God is our Savior and that no matter what, even when we fall short of the covenant, He is willing to save us if we are sorry and ask for forgiveness. We have a covenant with God, and even if we break our side, God has not broken His side, and that is something

He has always promised to us. Even though we make millions of mistakes in our lives, God will never give up on us. If we ask for forgiveness daily and repent, God will sanctify and save us.

What does it mean to be a Lutheran? As a Lutheran we follow the teachings of Martin Luther who led the Protestant Reformation. But that isn't all it means to be a Lutheran. We base our beliefs on justification by faith alone, salvation by grace alone, and doctrine from the Word alone. We also believe in only two sacraments as Lutherans, baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are important things that we use and take very seriously. Probably the most important thing we believe as Lutherans is that above all the only thing that has authority for matters over faith and life is the Holy Scripture.

What does it mean to be an AFLC Lutheran? The congregation is considered the right form of God's kingdom on earth. As AFLC Lutherans we, the congregation, make decisions for ourselves and the only thing that determines those decisions is the Holy Word of God. The AFLC's main goal is to establish free and living congregations all over. To be a free and living



church means to be free in Christ and living the right form of God's kingdom on earth. This means we as AFLC Lutherans need to contribute to the church, take part in it, and spread the Word of God any chance we get.

All three of these categories have in common one important thing—love for God, which is the most important thing in my eyes. I have learned so much in confirmation this year that I didn't know before. It's very helpful to know the history of our church because now I understand why so many things are the way they are. It has also helped me grow closer to God and understand why I want to continue in my journey with Him. I have completed another chapter in my journey with God that I have been preparing for over the last three years. I can't wait to continue that spiritual journey and learn more everyday about how much God loves and cares about me.

Lingen, pictured above center, is a member of Our Saviour's Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn. This was her paper written at the conclusion of three years of confirmation classes with Pastor Alex Amiot. (Submitted photos) On November 1, seven teenagers from Our Saviour's Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn., were confirmed. Pictured, from left, are Colton Braun, Aaron Dyrud, Isaac Mauch, Lauren Jones, Brylee Lingen, Tage Grahn, Alexander Dyrdal, and Pastor Alex Amiot. The crosses, above, were

handmade by Pastor Amiot and given to each confirmand. Each cross has the confirmand's baptism date burned into the top left corner and the date of their confirmation on the bottom right.



He also cared about the glory of God. For that reason he

talked about children, memorial stones, and "the hand of the Lord." Consider Joshua 4:21-24:

"And he said to the sons of Israel, 'When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, "What are these stones?" then you shall inform your children, saying, "Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground." For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the Lord your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed; so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, so that you may fear the Lord your God forever."

We learn life's most valuable lessons through history and through formal education. We learn from great people and their experiences. We learn from our pastors and teachers, and from our parents and grandparents, from those who have gone before us. We learn

THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD

BY PASTOR DALE FINSTROM

from mentors and friends, from trial and error, from successes and failures. We learn because we are stubborn and do things our own way.

God wants to teach us all we need. He has given us the Bible, which records the mighty acts of God. The Bible is a history, telling us how God acted and intervened in the affairs of men. God acted in creation, the fall of man, the flood, the forming of the Jewish nation, the Exodus, the Promised Land, and the greatest act of all time—God's salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection. The Bible is given to us to remind us of the mighty acts of God.

If our church family is to grow, we are going to need to point the next generation to the mighty hand of God. We plant new congregations not because we know so much or because we are so mighty, but because the hand of God is mighty. We cannot rely on tradition, or history, or even our fundamental principles. God is mighty. We need to be reminded of God's ability to create new life by bringing souls to salvation, and by starting new churches.

Many of our problems come because we forget so easily. That's why God told Joshua to place the stones at Gilgal. People need reminders.

We set up gravestones with the names of the people we love, the date of someone's birth and death, with a dash in between. That dash represents a life. Today you and I are living in our own dash, writing our stories and living our legacies. How we live this life determines what others will write and talk about.

That's what Joshua 4 is all about. Israel needed to see the memorial stones "so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, so that you may fear the Lord your God forever" (vs. 24).

This is the mission we have in our cities and rural areas. We set up memorial stones by starting new churches. We gather people for united, concerted prayer for our nation to be delivered from our sin, and to call out for His mercy, inviting the Holy Spirit to move among us. We band together to establish new churches and strengthen older ones that will reach the lost and make disciples in the next generation.

Finstrom, of Fertile, Minn., is a member of the AFLC Home Missions Committee.









SLC Update

Progress continues to be made on the Student Life Center on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College. The distinctive red metal siding on the north and west sides of the building (top photos) was installed, windows were sealed, and drywall and painting work continued inside the building (above, right). The large center dividing curtain was also installed in the gym ceiling (middle). At right, the future site of a coffee shop area takes shape in the main entrance lobby.

Originally scheduled for completion in December, delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic have pushed completion to February. The college has scheduled a grand opening for April 16, which will precede the alumni basketball tournament.





PURSUING CONTENTMENT

BY DEANNA LARSON

All were warmly welcomed at the door with gracious instructions to follow COVID-19 guidelines. Lavonne Lundebrek, district vice president, greeted everyone with Proverbs 3:5-6. Jan Mayfield welcomed all and shared the theme verse. Donna Trapp, district secretary, led us in song.

"Contentment in a Restless World," from I Timothy 6:6.

Whitney Franz shared a devotional about restlessness based on John 13:30. Franz shared how craving money, power, and fame sucks the joy out of life. She urged us to take comfort in John 14:1, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me." Franz said that when we give up control of our lives and let Jesus take control. He transforms us from the inside.

Linda Nelson, district missions secretary, shared current news about AFLC World Missions, as well as a video produced by AFLC World Missions. It was a delight to hear from our missionaries and their families. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted many plans for all the mission fields where our missionaries serve, and the needs are still great. Nelson urged us to continue to pray and support them

Lynn Class then led a Bible study on contentment. At the beginning of creation, all was contentment and order in the Garden of Eden, she explained. But in a fallen world with immense wealth, we are not content. She used the biblical examples of the priorities of Mary and Martha from Luke 10:38-42, and then challenged us to get into the Word of God and think on it. Other biblical examples of contentment included King Solomon and his findings in Ecclesiastes 1:6, and the Apostle Paul who found contentment in difficult or peaceful times (Philippians 4:11-13).

During the business meeting a motion was passed to form a Constitution Committee to update and clarify points within the current document. The board encouraged all to take on monthly support at any level for both AFLC

missions departments, home and world. Many needs exist, which means many opportunities. A motion was made and approved to give extra funds above those needed for the district to missions. Elected to a one-year term as president was Lana Olson, and a two-year term as vice president was Carol Knapp.

Following lunch, Pastor Randy Nelson, the AFLC's director of Evangelism and Discipleship, spoke on the theme of godliness with contentment, basing his message on Philippians 4:4-13. He encouraged us to have a heart attitude like this and to live it. First, to rejoice always! Second, to not be anxious, but instead pray about everything. Third, to go to God in prayer with everything. And last, to fill our minds with good things. By putting what we have learned into practice, we are evangelizing.

Pastor Nelson then installed the new officers and Lundebrek closed with praise and prayers.

Larson, of Ortonville, Minn., is the communications secretary for the WMF.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Brian Ricke has resigned from his call to Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis. He does not yet have a new call.

Pastor Rob Edwards has resigned from his call to Good Shepherd Lutheran, Cokato, Minn., and is taking some time off from pastoral ministry.

Pastor Richard Sliper has resigned from his call to First Lutheran, Ellendale, Minn., and is serving as interim pastor at Cornerstone Lutheran, Argyle, Wis.

Pastor Justin Hartman has resigned from his call to Our Savior's Lutheran, Dillon, Mont.

Pastor Craig Johnson announced plans to resign from his call to Bethany Lutheran, Astoria, Ore., in April. He will move to Lake Stevens, Wash.

Pastor S. Jerome Elness

Pastor Jerome Elness, of Livonia, Mich., died Dec. 11, 2020. Elness, an LFC/ALC missionary to Hong Kong and Taiwan, served Our Redeemer Free Lutheran, Superior, Wis., for 16 years, and parishes in Montana and Minnesota. His wife, Elaine, preceded him in death. Surviving are four children, a foster son, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He was the president of the Literature Society for the Chinese.

Marlin & Oryen Benrud

Marlin and Oryen Benrud, Kenyon, Minn., died Oct. 30 and Nov. 3, 2020, respectively. Marlin served on the Coordinating Committee, and Reenie was a member of the Ambassador Hymnal committee and The Lutheran Ambassador editorial board. Married in 1963, they are survived by chidren, David, and Jan (Strand), five grandchildren, and one great-granddaughter. A funeral service was held on Nov. 6 at Emmanuel Lutheran Church of Aspelund, Kenyon, Minn.

LeRoy Schierkolk

LeRoy Schierkolk, 82, of Valley City, N.D., died Dec. 1, 2020. Schierkolk served on the AFLC Missions Corporation and the Association Retreat Center Board. He is survived by his wife, Kathleen, three sons, including Pastor Todd, AFLC missionary to Mexico, and Pastor Tom, Eben Junction, Mich., Scott, Minneapolis; two daughters, Kristin Peterson and Katrina Zeltinger, both of Valley City, 20 grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. A service was held Dec. 8 at Grace Free Lutheran, Valley City, N.D.

Rec facility built for outreach







The Rock, a newly built outreach facility at Zion-Sarpsborg Free Lutheran, Dalton, Minn., features an exercise area on one side and a recreational area on the other. The congregation dedicated the new building on Oct. 25. (Submitted photos)

'n the fall of 2019, members of Zion-Sarpsborg Free Lutheran, Dalton, Minn., were blessed by God with a generous gift from a member family with the vision of reaching out to our community and region. Plans were draw up for a facility, a builder from the church was secured, and construction began in the spring of 2020 on what is now called "The Rock," named after our Savior, Jesus (Matthew 16:18).

The new building on the church property has two main areas, one set up with space for conversation and fellowship, equipped with recreational games such as pool, Foosball, darts, table shuffleboard, and other interactive games. The other half of the building is a fitness and wellness area with treadmills, elliptical machines, free weights, a weight machine, and a wide variety of exercise equipment for all ages.

Members of our youth group, called Anchor, have made good use of the The Rock and are helping with selling snacks and also with some of the cleaning. We pray that God would use this new outreach building to provide another connection between our church and the local community to make Jesus known. We want our city and region to know that we are here to reach out to them and be a vital part of what is going on in everyday life. As such, this facility has already opened many doors.

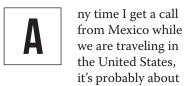
Our congregation held and open house on Oct. 25, and we also served a drivein meal with the funds from that event given towards AFLC church planting. It has been a joy to see the smiles on people's faces as they entered The Rock. The building, which is open daily from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., has already been used on a regular basis. We praise God for the generous gift that has enabled this new ministry opportunity built on the Rock of Jesus Christ.

-By Pastor Mark Johnson



TURNING A BAD SITUATION AROUND

BY PASTOR TODD SCHIERKOLK



something bad that's happened. In past years, our house has been broken into twice and our garage once during our travels. This time the bad news wasn't about anyone breaking in, it was that something had been—how to put it—ripped off.

In our town, the water and gas copper pipes are all exposed on the tops of the houses and down the outside walls. So when people have lost their jobs due to business closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, someone might get desperate to the point of stealing copper to recycle. That's my theory anyway. Whoever jumped the fence got into our back patio, then cut off all of our copper water and gas pipes and stole them. Thankfully, this was mostly just a very frustrating situation that was going to

require a lot of clean up, and a couple weeks of pretty cold showers. But this bad situation led to something good that I did not foresee.

The man who came to install the new plumbing and gas pipes is a brother of two women in our church. We have prayed for him for years. He used to be very active in his church back before he was married. He was a guitar player, and he had even read through the whole Bible, which is no small challenge because he isn't the best reader.

But then everything fell apart for him. At a family gathering a year ago I asked him what happened. He looked at me without knowing what to say, not defensive, not angry. He just couldn't find the words.

"Life?" I asked.

He nodded his head, yes.

So, on two separate days, for a number of hours each day, I helped him install the pipes. And while he installed the pipes, I begged God for His grace to be able to talk wisely and discreetly to this man who used to be "on fire" for the Lord. We spent the first day talking mostly about his



growing up and general life experiences. Thankfully, that went well enough.

On day two, I began to probe a little more, and in God's mercy, he was willing to share a little more.

And then he flat out asked me, "Have you ever fallen?"

For the next several hours, I shared my own testimony of how Jesus opened my heart to Himself and we talked about the challenges for Christians who face temptations. When we finished up and all the tools

were put away, I paid him, and I also gave him a much easier version of the Bible to read.

After he drove off, I went inside and thanked God that He allowed someone to come and steal all of our pipes. I praised Him for turning a bad situation upside down and for giving me the opportunity to share about His mercy and grace. Now I continue to pray that a lost soul would find his way home.

Schierkolk is an AFLC missionary serving in Jerez, Mexico.

Luther for the Busy Man

FLBC, in cooperation with Ambassador Publications, launched a new website (lutherforthebusyman.org), including a daily devotional and podcast featuring this classic, which will be reprinted in 2021.

Pastor Henry Johansen Pastor Henry A.E. Johansen, 90, of Carlton, Minn., died Nov. 17, 2020, at Augustana Care Center, Moose Lake.

Born Aug. 12, 1930, in Lake Norden, S.D., he was the son of Henry and Jemina Johansen. He married Doris Forse Oct. 12, 1952.

He graduated from Barnum High School in 1948 and worked in the trucking industry as a diesel mechanic and driver. He was a member of the Army National Guard, serving with the Headquarters Battery 257 AAA Gun Bn from 1949 to 1959. After a short time at Bible school, he entered the seminary, graduating with a theology degree. He was ordained in by the AFLC. Henry was fluent in the Finnish language and served Good Shepherd Lutheran in Virginia, Minn., for many years, a Finnish and English congregation. He was then called to Zion Lutheran, Willmar, Minn. He was a current member of St. Paul's Lutheran, Cloquet, Minn. He attended the Billy Graham School of Evangelism and Leadership Clinic at St. Paul Bible College.

Surviving are his wife; four children and their families; and one sister, Mary (Harald) Rettig, Switzerland.

A private family service was held. Burial was in Sandy Lake Cemetery, Carlton.

Pastor Raymond Klug

Pastor Raymond Frederick Klug, 89, of Blackduck, Minn., died Dec. 5, 2020, at the Blackduck Good Samaritan Center, Blackduck, Minn.

Born Dec. 16, 1930, in Blackduck, he was the son of Fritz and Lora Klug. He married Elaine Jacobson on April 21, 1957. She preceded him in death on Sept. 29, 1992. He married Geraldine Whitinger in May 1996. She preceded him in death in 2005.

He graduated from Blackduck High School in 1948, where he was given the FFA American Farmer award his senior year. He attended the University of Minnesota, graduating in 1952 with a Bachelor of Science degree in education and agriculture. He taught at Canton High School in Canton, Minn. In 1953 he was drafted into the Army. There he made Senior Field Sergeant for Company C, 6th Quartermaster Battalion at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. In 1955 he returned to Minnesota and began teaching in Clearbrook, Minn. After marriage, they moved to Minneapolis, where Ray attended Luther Seminary. He graduated in 1960 and was ordained at Zion Lutheran in Blackduck. He served parishes in Edmore, N.D. (1960-1964), and Valley City, N.D. (1964-1968). In 1968, Ray became the director of Red Willow and Park River Bible camps. He also became a deputy sheriff in Griggs County. In 1974 he returned to parish ministry, first in Blackduck, where he served as pastor of his home church until 1980. He then served parishes in Glyndon, Minn. (1980-1985), Fairbury and Deshler, Neb. (1985-1994). He retired from full-time parish ministry in 1994 and moved back to Blackduck. There he kept active by providing pulpit supply for area churches and served as chaplain for both the local American Legion and the American Veterans groups. From 2005 through 2015 he served as an interim pastor for parishes in Larimore, N.D., Bagley, Minn., McIntosh, Minn., Northome, Minn., and his new home parish of Faith Lutheran in Blackduck. In 2015 he became a resident and chaplain of the Blackduck Good Samaritan Center.

He was preceded in death by his son, Luther. Surviving are three children, Rebekah (Keith) McDonagh, Hatton, N.D., Daniel (Marna) Klug, Moorhead, Minn., and DebiJo (Tommy) Hoffman, New Port Richie, Fla., one step-daughter, Sharon (Mark) Lemke, Mendota Heights Minn.; two brothers, Robert (Marge) Klug and Russell (Marie) Klug of Blackduck; eight grandchildren, and seven greatgrandchildren.

A family service was held Dec. 10 at Faith Lutheran Church, Blackduck with Pastor Michael Flechsig and Pastor Dan Klug officiating. He was buried in Lakeview Cemetery, Blackduck, with military honors by American Legion Post 372.

NOVEMBER MEMORIALS

Bible College

Ruth Claus Richard Westlake Don Hylden Tom Fugleberg Alice Hedin Marlin & Reenie Benrud John Larson

Seminary

Alice Hedin Bud Anderson Don Hylden Jeanne Norby

General Fund

Marlin & Reenie Benrud

Home Missions

Marlin & Reenie Benrud Paul Gorder

Parish Education

Marlin & Reenie Benrud

Vision

Sherman McCarlson

WMF

Donald Schroeder Delores Rishovd Althea Miller

World Missions

Gladys Schauland Paul Gorder

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-November 30, 2020 FUND REC'D IN NOVEMBER TOTAL REC'D TO DATE PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE

FUND	REC'D IN NOVEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$23,934	\$341,193	\$373,929
Evangelism	6,539	115,522	117,017
Youth Ministries	15,666	124,041	122,595
Parish Education	11,847	131,729	139,046
Seminary	19,182	251,820	252,542
Bible College	26,518	338,434	482,661
Home Missions	36,842	366,149	355,217
World Missions	24,198	353,641	379,166
Personal Support	60,009	787,816	572,785
TOTALS	\$224,735	2,810,345	2,794,957

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

'I SHALL NOW DIRECT CERTAIN QUESTIONS TO YOU'

he words in the title of this editorial should sound familiar to most of us, since they are part of the introduction to a portion of our AFLC Ministerial Acts book, entitled Reception of New Members. It's always a special encouragement when new people are added to the membership of a congregation, and it is customary that they are asked the following questions:

- Do you accept and adhere to the teaching of the Lutheran Church as set forth in its historical confessions?
- Do you promise to abide by the constitution and by-laws of Lutheran Church?

The theme of this issue of *The Lutheran* Ambassador is Christian education, and



Pastor Robert Lee

the focus of most of the articles is on the Ten Commandments, the subject of our recently developed new parish education material. The commandments are an essential part of our faith heritage, emphasized in

confirmation instruction. It is no accident that the Small Catechism begins with the commandments, for an understanding of the fullness of their meaning prepares students for receiving the gospel, which is explained in the following section. The instruction received during preparation for confirmation helps to create an important unity of faith in the life of a congregation.

But what about the instruction of new members? How do we try to include them in our unity of faith? What do we believe and why do we believe it? A congregation is cheating people if this is not made clear before they join.

During bygone years most congregations offered adult confirmation for prospective church members, but my impression is that this has almost totally disappeared. Now there are membership classes, and often the word "instruction" is exchanged for "orientation," which perhaps sounds less threatening.

What does your congregation require

for the preparation of new members? How many sessions? What materials are used by your pastor? Our Ambassador Publications offers the Adult Class Manual, whose ten chapters certainly can be adapted to the needs of most congregations and pastors.

At least one congregation requires every applicant for membership to attend an orientation class, even those who are already confirmed Lutherans. Some include a session that introduces them to the AFLC, and the booklet Roots of Freedom by Loiell Dyrud can be a helpful resource for such an effort.

During my years as a pastor, the classes for new members were a great opportunity and encouragement. I found

that they needed to be adapted somewhat according to the background of the new member applicants. There would be special issues to consider when, for example, most of the people came from Roman Catholic background. As the biblical basis for our teachings was explained and questions answered, I never had anyone decide not to join because they did not agree. The classes are also an opportunity to discern where the people

are coming from spiritually, if they possess assurance of salvation through faith in Christ, and this can be another great open door for the pastor.

The AFLC is an association of Lutherans, and this means that there are certain teachings where we respectfully differ from other evangelical Protestants, and these should be clearly explained before people join. The neglect of doing so may well create a potential powder keg for problems in the future.

Our congregations also are corporate bodies with constitutions and by-laws, and copies should be provided to all new members. It is good for them to understand how the congregation is structured, the duties of the various officers and

committees, and where they might use their spiritual gifts. Another question addressed to new members mentions employing spiritual gifts for the edification of the church. Let them know that they will be expected to participate in the congregational meetings, too.

During my years as AFLC president, I learned that many questions addressed to me could simply be answered by a question: What does your constitution say? One congregation was considering calling a non-Lutheran pastor and asked me if the AFLC would allow them to do it. I asked about their constitution, and I was impressed and relieved when the candidate graciously said

What do we believe and why do we believe it? A congregation is cheating people if this is not made clear ...

> that on the basis of their constitution he did not qualify.

But some say that their constitution does not work in the present circumstances. Then go through the process of amending it. Don't ignore it, or you are asking for more trouble in the future. Some constitutions state, as an example, that the members who are faithful to it possess the rights to the property, etc., which provides the basis for court cases that could have been avoided.

One feature of a living congregation is "the unity of the faith," no longer "carried about by every wind of doctrine," with each individual part working properly (Ephesians 4:13-14, 16). May God grant this to us all.

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

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

association retreat center

PRESS ONWARD TOWARD THE GOAL

BY KIRK RAUTIO



new year marks a new dawn and a chance to look back at our original call. As we march on into a new year, I am reminded of Philippians 3:14,

where Paul writes, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." What is your call?

I'm guessing that many of you have talked about the challenges of the past year with your friends and families, and, if asked, would describe 2020 with the word, "uncertainty." But in this passage, Paul reminds his readers that they have been called from the beginning to press on—despite their circumstances, despite their faults, despite their worries—to the goal, the ultimate prize to which God has called them.

What is that goal? We are to fix our

eyes on Him. Thus, whatever we have encountered in the past—including 2020— and whatever may come in this new year, Paul challenges us to press onward. We are encouraged to put our feet on the ground and with every step, press onward to the upward call which Jesus has given us. We are reminded that we are not fixed here, in this moment. Instead, we are to have our eyes fixed upward.

How does this work? When I am at the Association Retreat Center, and the day before Thanksgiving I have sewer water backing up in my house, and other various building troubles, it is easy to focus all of my thoughts on issues here. But this, my friends, is not the call. The call is to have our focus fixed on the upward call in Christ Jesus. We should always remember our Kingdom goal, our call to press onward.

Paul writes to the believers in Philippi, telling them that if they are focused on this goal, they will press on to reach the prize to which God has called them. What is the prize? It is eternal life. Ultimately, that is the salvation of souls, ours included.

As we press onward into a new year, I challenge you to have a Kingdom impact on those around you. Do you see your impact? Are your eyes fixed on that upward calling from Paul? Press onward for the goal to which God has called you in Christ Jesus—look inward, look outward at those around you, and look upward at the One who holds you.

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