

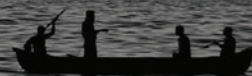
THE 

FEBRUARY 2021

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

EVANGELISM

messenger
message
meaning
methods
models





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THE GRANDER STORY

BY RACHEL MATTSON

When I was little, I used to have a recurring dream that revealed my biggest fear—that my life would have no purpose. This dream caused me to wake up in a panic and wonder if my life had any aim or significance. The more I dreamt, the more I wondered.

The dream was the story of my life and it unfolded with all the tasks I would undertake, the things I would accomplish, and all the sights I would see. Sounds great, right? But it was the end that always scared me. The last scene of this dream brought me to a room with an older man reading a book to a number of children surrounding him. As he finished the book and closed the cover, I would realize he was reading the storybook of my life!

That was it. My life was a short bedtime story read to children. The end.

I don't know how many times I had that dream, but it was enough to make quite an impression on my young self and cause me to question the meaning of life. I knew there was more to life and I was determined to "live my life on purpose."

My reaction to the dream changed when I was 8 and I began to read Scripture for myself. Jesus would remind me that yes, my life was short and a story for others to hear, but it was all a part of His story and under His complete control. He would prompt me with Scriptures such as Psalm 139:16, "Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." His book, His story, and His purpose.

As I studied the stories of the Bible, I saw that

God was intently interested in building the inner character of His people, shaping them into His image, and transforming them by His redeeming love in Christ. It doesn't matter how short or long they lived, or how seemingly small or big their tasks were—it was all authored by God in a story that magnified His authority and power.

In His goodness and love, His story includes me, His daughter. I have been added to His story not because of my own goodness or accomplishments, but through the sacrifice of Jesus on my behalf. He has made a way for me to know Him and be known by Him. He has called me by name, and I am His (Isaiah 43:1). As His child, I get to see Him work personally in my life as the amazing Creator (Nehemiah 9:6), gentle Shepherd (John 10:11), humble Servant (Mark 10:45), compassionate Father, and the reigning King (Revelation 11:15).

The childhood dream that once made me question my very essence now causes me to rejoice in my God-created life. My life isn't just a fairytale that begins with, "Once upon a time ...," and then leaves me hoping for a perfect ending to every dream and expectation. My life is part of a larger and grander, page-turning thriller that starts with, "In the beginning, God ...," and showcases His promises, His faithfulness, and His salvation to His children with a guarantee that He will never leave them or forsake them (Deuteronomy 31:6). What a story! What a reason for living!

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

We must get back to the simplicity of the Gospel because so many want Christ but don't know where to find Him. They have never heard it in simple, everyday language which they can understand.

—Billy Graham

The Christian community needs to understand its neighbors and their worldviews, and above all, to be able to share with them the unique truth they are privileged to know about Jesus Christ.

—A.R. Victor Raj

All evangelism is done in a context.

—Donald G. Matzat

To communicate the Gospel effectively we need to understand the audience. The world is changing rapidly, and we must be like the men of Issachar (I Corinthians 12:32) who understood the times and knew what should be done.

—Rick Marshall

Evangelism at its very heart is the natural response of believers and congregations in love with and on fire for Jesus Christ.

—George Carey



MESSAGE

of evangelism

BY PASTOR JEFF SWANSON

"We've a message to give to the nations, that the Lord who reigneth above, has sent us His Son to save us, and show us that God is love ..."

So reads the third verse of the great missionary hymn, *We've A Story to Tell to the Nations* (Lindsay Mayer Spreadbury). Indeed, we have a message to tell, and to give, as well as to receive and believe ourselves. This message is the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ. It's important these days, perhaps as never before, to clearly identify this gospel.

People speak today of various gospels. The social gospel says that mankind is temporal and physical needs are most important. The therapeutic gospel says mankind's felt needs and emotions are most important. The prosperity gospel says that meeting mankind's wants and desires is most important. The self-righteous gospel says mankind can save, improve, and make themselves acceptable to God.

These (and other so-called gospels) are really no gospel at all. We should say as Paul did in Galatians 1:6-7, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ."

Yes, the good news is the good news of Christ. As Paul said, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel of which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:1-4). Notice the message of the gospel is scriptural and Christ-centered. It is all about Jesus, His perfect life, His substitutionary death, and His resurrection. We could and should say that the message of evangelism is Jesus!

If anyone has an issue with that, consider the words of Peter, Paul, John, and Jesus Himself. Peter said, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under Heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Paul wrote, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and

my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (I Corinthians 2:2-5).

John wrote, "And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; and he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." (I John 5:11-13).

And Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6).

As we pray for people and as we proclaim the message of Jesus to souls who God loves and for whom Jesus died, with a desire to see them trust in Jesus, we rely on the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Our message needs to be clear and simple, pointing people to Jesus. He alone lived a perfect life, fulfilling the law of God. He alone suffered and died to bring to us forgiveness of sins. He alone rose again to give us victory over death and the grave. His life, death, and resurrection alone can reconcile us to God and give us peace with God and eternal hope.

Countless books have been written, sermons preached, and classes taught about evangelism and the message of evangelism. It is right and needed to emphasize the importance of law and gospel, sin and grace, repentance and faith. May all of this lead us to focus on Jesus.

I recall a song from many years ago that put it this way: "Make it clear, make it plain, make it easy to be understood, give the message of salvation, give it simply like you should. How many times have you been in a meeting, when you needed a dictionary just to know what was said? And when it's over they ask if it made sense to you, but the way to Heaven just went over your head."

One church I served had a cloth on the pulpit with this message embroidered on it, "Preach Christ." That's a good reminder for us all! May God equip us and use us in the winning of souls. "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30).

Indeed, we've a message to give to the nations, and to our neighbor. A wonderful message of Jesus and His love!

Swanson serves Hilltop Christian Fellowship Church in Naknek, Alaska.

evangelism's **MESSENGER**

I have stood outside many doors, hoping someone would answer.

I served as the welcome greeter for our local community. As such, I carried lots of things new residents needed to be introduced to the community, along with gift certificates from local businesses that were inviting them to their store. But I was met with mixed responses.

Some hid behind the curtain wishing I would just go away. Some came to their doors and told me they didn't need anything. Some stood at their doors hesitant and skeptical, assuming I was selling something.

There were times the home owner allowed their dogs to jump on me and on occasion even peed on my shoe; it was difficult to keep a smile and good attitude. There were times I wasn't sure I wanted to keep doing the job.

What made it all worthwhile were those who welcomed me into their homes, asked questions, and were thankful for the visit. Moreover, there were those who wanted to make connections, asked me to pray for them, and even attended my church.

This experience often reminded me of evangelism. What happens when you knock on a door as a messenger with the good news of Jesus Christ? Who is a messenger of good news?

When you become a child of God, you are bought with a price, the life blood of Jesus Christ, which transforms you from one separated from God to one who has the Holy Spirit living in you. When you're filled with the Holy Spirit, He gives you a heart for the lost, eyes to see them, and ears to hear them. This is what it means to be a messenger, one motivated to share what Christ has done in your life so others can know the joy of living in fellowship with the Lord. There will be skeptics, hindrances, and attacks, but seeing the connection take place in the heart of a person who desires the Lord and starts a relationship with Him makes it all worthwhile.

An openness to Christ does not happen by any great skill of our own. We are simply those who have gone from brokenness to wholeness, confusion to clarity, chaos to peace. We have a message to share. Each one of us has a story of God's work. God the Father has shown Himself to each of us in a personal way. He intentionally plants us next to neighbors, coworkers, and other acquaintances, giving us opportunities to share His story with them. These opportunities have been planned by God. When we pray ahead of time for those moments to happen, God gives us a love for others and prepares our message and their hearts.

The sad reality is the human condition of sin, which creates a hard heart—it's like a closed door. Jesus, more than anyone, wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2:4). However, there is no eloquence or convincing argument on my part that will change hearts. They have to open the door. They have to welcome the message. The Holy Spirit does that work. My job is to be the messenger.

So how do we share His message?

Live out loud, alongside people. The Apostle Paul wrote in I Thessalonians 2:8, "We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives." When you do life with others, seeking them out, spending intentional time with them, you often earn the right to speak into their lives. You can bear witness to truth, faith, hope, and love. Others around you will see that your lifestyle, speech, and attitude are different. Lifestyle evangelism leads others to ask questions. Why am I important to you? What are you trying to accomplish? They start to see God's love through you.

Know the people on your street. Love them. God has put them there intentionally for you. I usually start by spending time outside or noticing when others are and join them. Some will not be like you, but the key is to find common ground. I take treats, extra harvest produce, or even ask to



BY PAM OLSON

borrow an egg or cup of sugar. I enjoy borrowing, because most people enjoy fulfilling a need and it gives me a second visit to return the item I borrowed.

Before my visit, I try to think of at least five questions I can ask that will allow them to tell me part of their story. What have been some challenges in the past week? Victories? Frustrations? Changes? How is God working in your life? Sharing stories with one another allows a relationship to be built and to convey what is important to us. As opportunities arise, I pray with them over things they have shared and also share Scripture. A few times a year, I will host a neighborhood gathering and help the neighbors make connections with each other. This allows other Christians in my neighborhood to knock on heart doors.

In time, the Holy Spirit will give you an opportunity to share your salvation message of Jesus Christ. On one occasion, I invited a woman to a worship service. She gave me all kinds of reasons why she didn't go to church. However, after I asked again, inviting her to a lunch afterward, she agreed. After the Sunday service, I asked her what she thought of the experience. The pastor had preached on excuses people give for not attending church. I told her I didn't call the pastor ahead of time, referring to our conversation the night before. I said that in my experience, it was the Holy Spirit knocking on her heart's door. It was then that she welcomed Him in and asked Jesus to be Lord of her life.

Lifestyle evangelism is a beautiful thing, filled with joy, friendships, and seeing God at work in the lives of people. Jesus has given you a story to share—be the messenger.

Olson is a member of Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn.



evangelism's **MOTIVATION**

BY STEVE DEYSHER

God is calling me to be an evangelist? Why would I want to do that? I don't have the skills or knowledge to be an evangelist.

It's so much easier to let the pastor do it. What would motivate me to go out with the idea that I could help bring people to know Jesus?

When we share the gospel, we are telling people about the love of God. When people start believing the gospel, God moves in their hearts to produce faith. We learn about the love of God and then live by it.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and rose again on their behalf" (II Corinthians 5:14-15).

I found peace in God's love and it has led me out of myself to Him and then toward others. Understanding God's love means also that we understand God's justice. I am scared of hell and don't want people to end up there. We will all one day stand in that place of judgment. That's why we need to work with everyone to get them ready to face God.

Jesus' last words to His disciples issued that important call, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ..." (Matthew 28:19). God's command is to go and evangelize, next door or to wherever you travel. We all have gifts from our Lord that we can use to evangelize. We have the free gift of eternal life. I'm excited to tell others about this free gift that I received from God. I want my neighbors to know about this gift. With God's help, I can do just that.

Jesus also told His disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Power received from the Holy Spirit involves courage, boldness, and confidence. It is our joy to receive the power of the Holy Spirit and witness for Christ. Our motivation for evangelizing comes from telling others what God has done for us. The power of a testimony is inspiring to many who hear it.

As members of the body of Christ, we are also motivated to make disciples in order to fully equip our local congregations. Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus that the work of evangelists, among other offices within a congregation, are "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). It's hard to be an evangelist alone. Together we can obey God's command better than any of us could alone. Pastors can teach us to do the work of evangelism. Every member of a church body has gifts that they can use toward the work of evangelism.

That work has an eternal impact. It's easy for us to say that there are a lot of lost people in our world, but what is lostness? It is living apart from God. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." I don't want—Jesus doesn't want—the lost people of the world to end up in hell. So, that's where we come in, the church body. We need to tell the world about Jesus. Without faith in Jesus, people are headed for death.

Paul writes that our God is a Savior "who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth" (I Timothy 2:4). This doesn't mean that all will be saved. Many people reject Christ. Don't let rejection get you down. We need to tell the lost that God sent his Son to save sinners just like us. No one is out of God's reach. If someone is still breathing, there is hope!

That hope finds its ultimate end in Christ. The only way to God is through Jesus, who said of Himself, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). It is important that this is what we teach the lost.

Our knowledge of God's Word builds up our faith and leads us to act out that faith. If you can talk, know what Jesus did for you, and believe that the Bible is God's Word, you are on your way to being an evangelist, bringing lost people to Christ. Your next-door neighbor might be lost. A family member might be lost. If we have been changed by our Savior, we certainly care about the lost.

Are you being called to help your neighbor find Jesus?

Deysher is a member of Living Faith Lutheran, Boyertown, Pa.

Evangelism. The word often strikes fear into the hearts of those who picture a man on the corner admonishing passers-by to repent and be saved.

Or perhaps it conjures up feelings of inadequacy as we envision Billy Graham speaking to a stadium filled with thousands of people. The term has always made me feel a mixture of both fear and inadequacy. That is, until I realized, quite surprisingly, that I was actively engaged in evangelism and didn't recognize it.

Through Jesus' example, I found that it is possible to reach out to others on a small scale. Jesus saw people as individuals, He listened to their words and their hearts, and He met needs in their lives. Following His example, we can be evangelists to the world, one smile, one kind word, one person at a time.

He was sitting on the subway, eyes downcast, alone. I didn't know him or his story, but my heart was suddenly captured. Not knowing quite what to do, I said a quick prayer and penned a short note: "You are valued. You are loved. God sees you and loves you." I handed it to him as I got off at the next stop. Evangelism.

I imagine it might have been similar for the woman from Samaria as she walked to the well, eyes downcast and alone. Was she hoping for a smile or maybe just a slight nod of the head? Perhaps that would be the day that she would be acknowledged, that she would feel like her life mattered. John 4:4 says that Jesus had to go through Samaria as He traveled to Galilee. Perhaps He was compelled by her need, this





evangelism's **METHODS**

BY TONYA TORVE

single woman who was alone and desperately needed living water that would change her life.

We live in a society where many people feel isolated and alone. Whether in the midst of many or few, people often feel disconnected. It is amazing how a smile or word can make a difference. When we take the time to see people, we can be part of planting a seed that His living water can bring to fruitfulness. Seeing others is evangelism.

She lived across the street. She was beautiful and outgoing. She had it all: a beautiful family, financial stability, smart kids, and a size-one wardrobe. But behind the surface there was anxiety and insecurity. We began as acquaintances, tentatively testing the waters of friendship. We walked and talked, shared life, and became friends. Many miles and conversations later we discovered that friendship is the best therapy. Evangelism.

Nicodemus was another who seemingly had it all together. He was a Pharisee, a member of the Jewish ruling council, "Israel's teacher" (John 3:10). He had lived his life in strict obedience to the law—an example to others of a pious religious life. Yet he had questions, perhaps doubts and insecurities, too. He knew the law but his heart was yearning to know the One who fulfilled the law. Under the cover of darkness, Nicodemus went to Jesus. Jesus listened. That conversation changed Nicodemus' life as he later defended Jesus before a council of his peers and helped to prepare the Lord's body for burial.

In a world where our lives are often on display, it's tempting to try to look like we have it all together. Honest conversation and transparent living are the cure for misunderstandings and division. We must be willing to be open and

vulnerable. Listening to others is evangelism.

We picked him up at the airport, strangers meeting for the first time. His first glimpse of America was our first glimpse of Africa. He needed a place to call home, a place to belong. We needed a broader vision of God's kingdom. Thirteen years later he has become our family. Evangelism.

There were three crosses on a hill. On two of the crosses hung men of this world, thieves condemned to die. Nearby hung the God-man: pure, unblemished, divine. He bore the sins of the world as a perfect sacrifice, a citizen of heaven. Only one of those condemned men perceived the radical difference between these two worlds. Perhaps this was the condemned man's first glimpse of the other world, or of what might have been in this one. He was dying with an uncertain future. He had the need to be forgiven and to be remembered in a kingdom that was eternal. Then Jesus, filled with excruciating pain as He bore our sins and sorrows, turned to him and answered, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Meeting the needs of others is evangelism.

The word evangelism no longer terrifies me. Daily, God provides opportunities where I can participate in His kingdom. The challenge is to keep a tender heart that is ready and willing to listen and to obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus saw those around Him, listened to their hearts, and met their needs, so He calls us to follow His example and do likewise. May you thrive in your calling to evangelism, one kind word, one smile, and one person at a time.

Torve is a member of Shiloh Free Lutheran, Black Hawk, S.D.



evangelism's **MEANING**

BY PASTOR MICHAEL BRANDT

In the early 1970s, a man by the name of Remer Reagan stood up to share during a Sunday evening testimony service.

We were all wondering what he was going to say. Remer was a new believer, brand new to our church plant, and it was his first time sharing a testimony.

"I'm not sure this verse is in the Bible, but I think it is. If it's not it in the Bible, it should be," Remer said. "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so!"

As a pastor, I live for moments like this.

No, this isn't a verse in the Bible, but it is truth. We heard this 60-year-old new believer share his testimony and then sit down. And with the angels of Heaven, we, his new brothers and sisters, praised God with loud voices of affirmation.

A few weeks earlier, Remer was at the point of death. He had asked his wife to call for a minister. Not having a church home, she called the first church listed in the phone book, our church. When I arrived, his wife quietly directed me to Remer's bedside. When the sick man heard

the pastor was a Free Lutheran, Remer did not act like Mr. Hospitality.

He responded with a little irritation, "I'm not Lutheran. I'm Methodist!"

Sensing the tension, I offered to share God's Word and pray. Remer accepted the offer.

That day, as we shared the gospel of Jesus, God's perfect law and perfect gift brought genuine repentance and faith. The Spirit convinced Remer of his lost condition. He wept over his sin. He believed. The lost was found. Remer was forgiven, made new, and adopted. He was saved!

The rewarding power of the gospel is what evangelism is all about. Whether you are a Methodist, a Lutheran, or not spiritually minded at all, the gospel works. Evangelism is proclaiming that good news—unto the salvation of souls.

Evangelism is defined by sharing the message of the finished work of Christ in the living, active Word of God. The Book of Hebrews says, "the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and



marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (4:12-13).

Those moments with Remer remind me that this is the Spirit’s working. The lost are saved, the old made new. And whether they know if it’s a children’s song or a Bible verse, people hear the good news and receive and claim it. They learn to share this much: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

As such, we “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

At the conversion of Zacchaeus, Jesus explained it this way: “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 9:10).

Share the gospel in love. To both Zacchaeus and Remer, it was the best news they ever heard.

Evangelism means reaching out to all kinds of people: Matthew, a corrupt tax gatherer; Andrew, a seeker; Peter, an impetuous fisherman; Nathaniel, a skeptic; Nicodemus, a troubled Pharisee; Mary, a demon-possessed woman; the Samaritan woman plagued by dysfunction; the thousands who cried out for salvation in Acts 2; Saul, the persecutor

of Christians; and Luther, a spiritually troubled monk. Even a Free Lutheran pastor who, in his youth, carelessly and then coarsely walked away from the covenant of his baptism—that was me.

As long-time AFLC pastor and evangelist Herb Franz would repeatedly declare, “There is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun.” Evangelism means the eternal destiny of souls is at stake. Therefore, Paul didn’t turn away from his call to reach the Gentiles with the good news. As Acts 28 explains, Paul didn’t give up. He kept “solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening” (Acts 28:23).

Don’t give up. Those new believers are closer than you think, inside and outside of your church’s walls. Without a doubt, there’s a Remer near you. There are hundreds, thousands, millions. Evangelism means sharing the gospel wherever they are.

Brandt is a member of Shiloh Free Lutheran, Black Hawk, S.D. His pastoral support ministry is called Shepherding the Shepherds.



evangelism & discipleship's **PURPOSE, GOALS**

BY PASTOR RANDY NELSON

Twenty years ago I joined the Lisbon-Seward (Illinois) Fire Department, a decision that didn't come easily.

Back then, firehouses were often viewed as men's clubs and firefighters were considered coarse. As a new pastor in the community, I was concerned that my association might hurt my ministry. There was also the time commitment for training, meetings, and responding to calls.

As I wrestled with that decision, even with the support of my church council, there were two questions I asked myself that ultimately made the answer clear. First, is there a need? There were very few people who worked in town and were available to respond. In fact, in my first month, there were two times when I was the only one who responded. There was a need that I could meet. Second, what would Jesus do? Would Jesus respond to 911 calls? Would Jesus make Himself available day or night, hang out in earthly places, and help people in their most difficult moments? I think we all know the answer.

Over the years, God used me in many amazing ways to help meet people's physical and spiritual needs because I was willing to make that commitment. As I complete 10 months as the AFLC's director of Evangelism and Discipleship, I find that I am still driven by those two questions. Is there a need? What would Jesus do?

Is there a need for evangelism and discipleship? Absolutely, now more than any time in my life. Our culture has lost its fear of God, and many who call themselves Christians have lost their belief in a holy and just God who will judge people to eternal damnation for their sins and their rejection of His Only Son's actions on our behalf.

Then, what would Jesus do? In love, He already came to reveal the Father's heart toward us by sacrificially paying for our sins with His own life so that we could be freed from our sin, offering forgiveness and grace to all who would receive it by faith. Then, in victory, He commissioned us to share this good news by "making disciples ..." (Matthew 28:19), which is clearly what Jesus calls us to do.

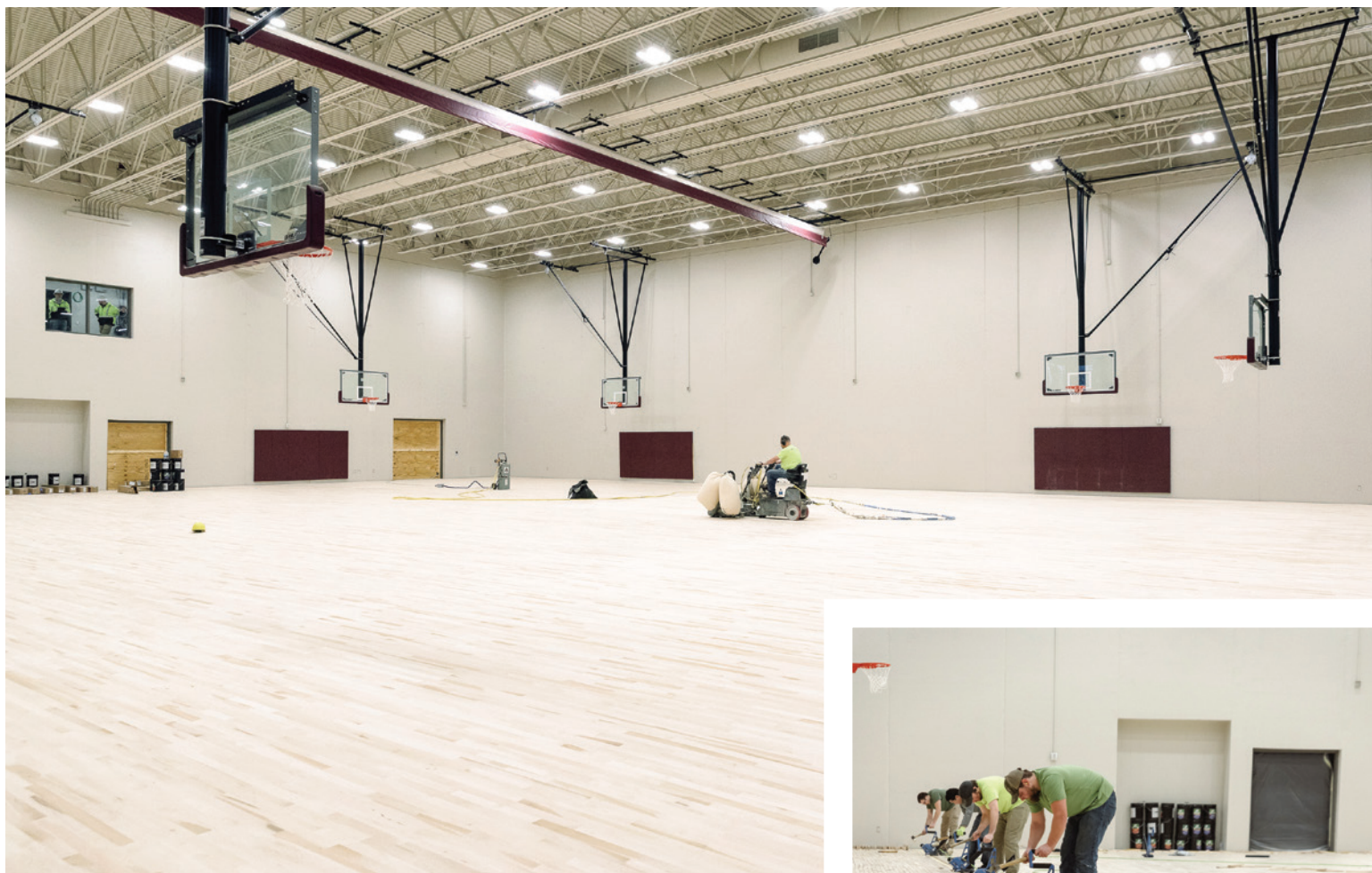
In the past year, we have seen a dramatic change in

our world because of the COVID-19 virus and its lethal effect on tens of thousands. However, our greater concern should be for the millions around us who are dying and headed for an eternity in hell without a saving faith in Jesus Christ. I wonder what our world might look like if we took our sin disease seriously. Because of sin, 100 percent of people without a Savior die and are headed for eternal separation from God, suffering torment and agony without end. Yet, there is a cure that has a 100 percent efficacy rate. Can you imagine the results if we were to respond fervently and sacrificially in working to educate people about this disease, and then equip them to share the cure? This should be our goal.

As a support ministry to our AFLC congregations and pastors, we believe that the most important thing we can do is to join in our shared calling to make and equip disciples who make and equip disciples. Not just converts, not just members, but disciples. Those kinds of disciples are committed followers of Jesus Christ, who are reaching out to others with the good news of the gospel and are seeking to grow in their faith by living it out every day. Not perfect or sinless, but the kind of maturing disciples who daily value the forgiveness and grace that is theirs through Christ, and then out of a thankful heart seek to find ways to reach those who are perishing around them.

As a means to this end, we are working in a variety of ways to encourage, equip, and assist our AFLC congregations and pastors to accomplish this shared goal, including our new speaker program which is designed to help churches have evangelistic or disciple-equipping events along with a reworking of our website to provide practical resources that will include how-to videos, reviews of ministry materials from a Free Lutheran perspective, a prayer and praise page, and other helpful tools. We'd love to hear your ideas, as well. More importantly we would ask that you first join us in recognizing this great need in our world today, and then ask yourself, "What would Jesus have me do?" May our answers and actions bring glory to God.

Nelson, director of AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship, is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.



SLC nears completion



Progress continued throughout January on the Student Life Center at the Free Lutheran Bible College in Plymouth, Minn. The gym floors were laid, sanded, and prepped for stain and line painting (above, top right). The locker rooms were tiled and lockers installed (right), and workers began polishing the concrete floors on the mezzanine level (above). A grand opening event will be held April 16-17.



Advent and Christmas introduced us to the glorious truth that what man could not do, God in His love for us did. He found a way to get through to and communicate with us. It is impossible for us to comprehend and even difficult for us to accept, but God entered into our world of conflicts and confusion in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. We could not come to Him, so He came to us.

What methods did the Son of God, this humble figure from Nazareth, use to communicate with mankind? His methods hardly seem very dramatic in our day of Air Force jets, Army tanks, Navy ships, and a Space Force. He did not call down legions of angelic hosts to sweep the world clean of its evil and ugliness. He did not organize and set up a power block or corporation of influential and wealthy men. He never picked up a pen, or even a sword, to assist Him in His purposes. And yet He, more than any person this world has ever known, succeeded in communicating to billions of human creatures the

will and purposes of the loving and eternal God.

Jesus communicated by *proclamation*. When Jesus was in the Nazareth synagogue on the Sabbath, He proclaimed, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18a). What a seemingly insignificant weapon against the fearsome powers of evil and darkness that abounded throughout the world. Jesus chose disciples and they preached. Those who followed in their paths continued to preach. It was out of such preaching that the reformations and crusades were launched, revivals born, tidal waves of wickedness checked, churches founded, institutions of mercy established, slaves set free, and the sacredness of life established.

Jesus also communicated through *demonstration*. He came to provide "freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed" (Luke 4:18b).

This is what evangelism ought to mean to us. It must include, but is not confined, to preaching. The gospel is available, but it is ignored. It is important that we demonstrate God's love to our world by showing concern for physical as well as spiritual needs. We have many opportunities to demonstrate His love, including donating to a local food shelf or pantry, helping people with their rent and utilities, and speaking encouraging words for those who are in a hospital or jail.

Jesus used both proclamation and demonstration as a method to share the gospel. God has come to us. In His love and grace may He come to others through us.

Harris, the chairman of AFLC Institutional Chaplaincy, serves True Vine Lutheran, Mora, Minn.

COMMUNICATING CHRIST

BY PASTOR MARLIN HARRIS

Encouraging the Mongolian church

Partnership to plan language camps; AFLC World Missions to send Bible teachers

AFLC World Missions has been seeking ways to encourage the work of the Mongolia Evangelical Lutheran Church. One way is through English language camps. The vision of the Mongolian Church is to use English language camps as an outreach tool. Many people in Mongolia are interested in learning English. People are drawn to a language camp, especially one featuring native English speakers. The Bible can be used in the camp as a means of teaching English and also introducing people to Jesus.

Spiritual Orphans Network (formerly EEMN) is partnering with Mongolia Evangelical Lutheran Church to conduct a language camp July 21-Aug. 2, 2021. For more information about the camp and how you can be involved, visit their website (sonetwork.org/serve/opportunities).

Another means of partnering with and serving the Mongolia Evangelical Lutheran Church is by providing teachers for their Bible school. We will send them to teach two-week classes in Bible doctrine and exegetical courses. Our plans for sending teachers in 2020 were canceled because of COVID-19. Our hope is to send teachers this fall. AFLC World Missions has developed a fund to assist in the travel expenses of sending teachers to other countries. If you would like to contribute to that fund, visit the AFLC World Missions website at: aflcworldmissions.org/online-giving.

—Pastor Craig Johnson, chairman,
AFLC World Missions Committee

FLBC plans for Campus Days

Potential Free Lutheran Bible College students are invited for a weekend of learning and fellowship April 9-11 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. The weekend will include workshops, classes with FLBC professors, praise and worship time led by current students, and access to the new Student Life Center. This year, because of COVID-19, guests will stay off campus at a local hotel, where a special rate has been secured. For more information, visit flbc.edu/events/spring-campus-days.

AFLC departments plan reawakening events

Do you ever lose track of priorities? I do. I'm a reader, so I get lost in books. I'm a people person and get distracted with conversations. I'm a trained journalist, so I lose time observing captivating newsworthy occurrences.

The same thing happens spiritually. Spiritual movements veer to the side. Local churches lose sight of primary purposes. Church fellowships fall asleep.

With so many distractions, it's easy to lose focus of the Great Commission of Jesus, "Go therefore and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19).

We all need to be reawakened. For that reason, members of several AFLC departments are gathering national ministry directors for Saturday events called "Reawakening to the Mission." Four half-day conferences on Saturdays are in the works—the first of which will be held in the AFLC's Illinois District on Feb. 20 at Helmar Lutheran of Newark, Ill.

Sessions for the reawakening event include: "Reaching Gen-Z," with Youth Ministries Director Jason Holt; "Reawaken Us," with AFLC President Lyndon Korhonen, "The Gospel for Newcomers," by Evangelism Director Randy Nelson; and I will present "Reawakenings in Church Planting." Missionary speaker Michael Rokenbrodt will bring a message, as will two other ministry leaders.

The plan is part of a desire of leaders like Korhonen to get out of the office and into our 253 congregations. "We need to keep in touch with our people to see and ministry from their vantage point," said Korhonen, who tries to visit a different Free Lutheran church every Sunday. "We need to know them if we hope to effectively minister to them."

Nelson agrees. "One of the hardest parts of 2020 was how the pandemic kept us apart," said Nelson, who began his new call two months before the COVID-19 limitations in the U.S. began. "I'm excited for us to come together to refocus on the mission of sharing the good news of Jesus."

Another "Reawakening" event is scheduled for March 20 in the South Dakota District, hosted at Pipestone, Minn. Other districts are welcomed to schedule similar conferences.

Along with World Missions Directors Earl Korhonen, I was inspired last year when Our Savior's Free Lutheran Church of Thief River Falls, Minn., organized a similar event. The conference drew members and area believers to discuss church planting, the call to send missionaries across the globe, and the mission in Alaska.

"The fellowship was fantastic," said Earl Korhonen, who oversees AFLC missionaries. "I appreciate how the weekend lets us share our heart for missions, but it's just as important to hear the hearts of our congregations."

The approach is similar to the network-building effort the AFLC Evangelism Committee created in 2002 called "Pass the Baton." Gathering with district churches from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., it gave the AFLC president, the school deans, and the Evangelism director a chance to get out of the office, mix in with the churches, and stir a passion for the gospel. The Pass the Baton events coincided with a revival among students at the Bible school, a record number of new congregations joining the AFLC, and new high attendance marks at the Free Lutheran Youth Convention.

Jon Benson, pastor of Newark Lutheran, is the president of the Illinois district. He wants to see Illinois congregations get to know our missionaries and send more students to the Bible College. "As I have visited with pastors in the district," said Benson, "there's an interest in getting our churches reintroduced to our greater church body. We get isolated or insulated. I'm looking forward to getting our folks acquainted—a day when people can see the faces, and build the vision for missions."

—Pastor Jim Johnson, director, AFLC Home Missions

The fall rally for the Western North Dakota and Eastern Montana district was held Oct. 3, 2020, at Beaver Creek Lutheran, rural Ray, N.D. After the rally was canceled in the fall of 2019 because of a blizzard and canceled again in the spring of 2020 because of COVID-19, district officers and members of the host WMF group were committed to making sure this rally happened.

With nearly 40 people in attendance, our theme was, "Thinking Globally/Working Locally." Pastor Erin Tormanen of Our Savior's and First English Free Lutheran Churches in Stanley, N.D., shared two studies on John 21:17. In the morning, he focused on the question, "Do you love Me?" and challenged those in attendance to anchor their love in Jesus. In the afternoon, he shared from Jesus' command to "feed My sheep." With this in mind, Tormanen reminded us that we are called to promote and support the mission efforts of our AFLC.

During the "Thinking Globally" section of the day, we were all given names of our AFLC World Missions missionaries and where they

are serving. Using smartphones, we were asked to find out interesting facts about our missionaries and the countries they serve. Each group then shared their findings. The same research activity was done with our Home Mission churches and gatherings. We all became more familiar with our missionaries, mission fields, gatherings, and missionary pastors.

During the "Working Locally" section of the day, a hands-on project was offered for those in attendance. All ladies participated in tying fleece into blankets to be sent to mission fields in Brazil and Mexico. Thrivent monies were used to buy fleece to be cut to size for blankets for kids living abroad. Ladies from the Stanley congregation had pre-cut the fleece to size and readied them for tying. Each WMF was asked to provide a suitcase that would not be returned to them but would



go, full of these blankets, with various missionaries traveling to their destination, thus avoiding the expense of postage, duty, and inspection at borders. Many WMF ladies also took blankets back to their local WMF groups to complete the project with their own

women or with the help of their Sunday school classes. What a blessing. Not one blanket was left; all were taken by our wonderful churchwomen. It will be very interesting to hear and see how these blankets are received.

What a day! It was wonderful to see our WMF friends. We realized how precious our fellowship really is in our WMFs. The Lord truly blessed us.

Kinnoin is a member of Our Savior's Lutheran, Stanley, N.D.

LOCAL & GLOBAL MISSIONS

BY CONNIE KINNOIN

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Peter Ward has resigned from his call as associate pastor at St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D., effective Feb. 28.

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary will host a **Spotlight Missions** conference Feb. 8-9 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. The featured speaker will be Pastor Earl Korhonen, director of AFLC World Missions. Visit flbc.edu for more information.

Several AFLC missionaries are returning to their foreign fields of service after furloughs or have extended furloughs. They include:

- **Pastor Brent and Emily Raan** and their three children returned to Jinja, Uganda, on Jan. 17. They will transition their ministry to the Gulu area in north central Uganda.

- **Pastor John and Hannah Lee** and their four daughters will return to Campo Mourão, Brazil, on March 3, where John will work with the theological seminary (SETELL). Three short-term assistants with Journey Missions will travel with the Lees as they begin three-month terms in Brazil. **Leah Hetzel**, Stanley, N.D., and **Casey McLoughlin**, Minot, N.D., will serve at the Miriam Home with missionary Jonni Sliver. **Abigail McMillan**, Arlington, Wash., will serve with the Lees.

- **Pastor Matthew and Ednay Abel** and their two children have returned to Paraguay for their third year of ministry after two years of language and culture studies. The Abels have moved to Villarrica, a town in southern Paraguay, where they will begin the work of church planting.

- **Michael Rokenbrodt**, a part-time missionary to Uganda, has extended his home stay through spring semester as he continues his studies at the Free Lutheran Seminary. He hopes to return to Uganda this summer.

Pastor Robert L. Lee, Crystal, Minn., retired from his call as a member of the AFLC Schools faculty in December. Lee served as full-time faculty (1979-1989, 2008-2014) adjunct instructor (1993 to 2007), and part-time since 2014. He was acting seminary dean from 2013-2014. He will continue as an adjunct faculty member, as well as his duties as editor of *The Lutheran Ambassador*.

Orville M. Jensen, 91, Escanaba, Mich., died Dec. 19, 2020, at the Pinecrest Medical Facility, Powers, Mich. Jensen served for several years as the lay pastor of Escanaba Free Lutheran Church. Blessed be his memory.



Pastor Don Thorson

Pastor Donald Curtis Thorson, 92, of Chippewa Falls, Wis., died Jan. 9. Born Dec. 22, 1928, in Decorah, Iowa, he was the son of Elmer and Sadie (Woldt) Thorson. He married Marguerite Lemoing on Oct. 3, 1952, in Minneapolis.

He was baptized in 1929 at Decorah Lutheran Church. After living in Battle Creek, Mich., for a few years the family moved to Charles City, Iowa, and finally to Minneapolis. He graduated from Augsburg College, Minneapolis, and Luther Seminary, St. Paul. He pastored parishes in New Rockford, N.D.; Milwaukee, Wis.; Chippewa Falls, Wis.; before joining the AFLC fellowship roster. He served Peace Lutheran, St. Francis, Kan.; and Trinity Lutheran, Boscobel, Wis. He was the first assistant presiding pastor of the American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC) and is listed as a founding father. He served on many boards, both church and community, including St. Joseph Hospital Advisory Board, St. Joseph's building fund drive, YMCA board of directors, Kiwanis, Chippewa Clergy Assoc., lecturer at Transitus House, counselor for AA, planning committee for L.E. Phillips Treatment Center and Lutheran Campus Ministry.

Surviving is his wife; four children, Kathryn (Daniel) Brink, Steven (Debra) Thorson, Jeanette (Rolf) Arnquist, and Gregory (Rhonda) Thorson; 11 grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held at a later date.



Pastor Irvin Schmitke

Pastor Irvin Marquis Schmitke, 84, of Thief River Falls, Minn., died Dec. 26, 2020, at Sanford Medical Center, Fargo, N.D. Born July 24, 1936, in rural Stephen, Minn., he was the son of Carl and Alvina (Baier) Schmitke. He married Janice Hall on Dec. 25, 1955. She preceded him in death on Dec. 9, 2016. He married Alyce Lund on May 26, 2018, at Free Lutheran Church of Roseau, Minn.

He graduated from Newfolden High School, Newfolden, Minn., in 1954. He entered the U.S. Army, 11th Airborne Division in the fall of 1954 and served overseas for two years. He received his honorable discharge in 1957. They lived in Biwabik, Minn., where he worked at Erie Mining Co. He attended McConnell Airline School and was employed with Eastern Airlines. He then worked for North Central Airlines in Thief River Falls. In 1983, the airline left Thief River Falls and Irvin transferred to Fargo, N.D., where he worked until 1993. They moved back to Thief River Falls and Irvin was employed by the city as maintenance personal at the airport until April 30, 2009, when he retired. Irvin had a heart to serve God and received his first license to preach and do ministerial work in the fall of 1981. He served congregations in rural Minnesota for eight years besides filling interim calls and preaching in the absence of the churches' pastors. Irvin attended the AFLC Summer Institute of Theology, graduating in 2010. He was ordained on Sept. 22, 2013, at the Free Lutheran Church of Roseau, where he accepted a call to serve along with Norland Free Lutheran Church of Salol, Minn. He also held many offices in Our Saviour's Lutheran Free Lutheran, Thief River Falls, and St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo.

Surviving are his wife; three children, Gregory (Renate) Schmitke, Moorhead, Minn., Mark (Kim) Schmitke, Thief River Falls, and Kristi Schmitke, Fargo; four step-children, Rachal (Douglas) Erickson, Roseau, Minn., Larry (Carol) Lund, Warroad, Minn., Gayle (Charles) Baxter, Ironwood, Mich., and Kathleen (Craig) Slick, Baudette, Minn.; one sister, Mildred (Emery) Horien, Thief River Falls; seven grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren; ten step-grandchildren; and 13 step-great-grandchildren.

The service was held Dec. 31 at Free Lutheran Church of Roseau, with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating. Burial was in Rindal Cemetery, rural Viking, Minn. Memorials are requested to FLAPS (Free Lutheran Association of Pilot Supporters) and AFLC Home Missions.



BY PASTOR BRENT RAAN

Contentment: this word has been on my heart lately and has stuck out to me numerous times throughout last year. Am I content in what God has for me and my family, and the path that He has for us? Am I content being on furlough, or serving in Uganda? Am I content with my walk with Christ, in the joys and in the suffering? Many times, my answer to these questions is no. But I think one aspect of that answer is healthy. Am I content with my walk with Christ? I think if that answers is yes, then I have crossed over to complacency in my life. We are called to so much more!

I am not content with my walk with Christ. I want to know Him more. I desire to look more and more like Him! Sadly, so often my flesh gets in the way, my pride starts talking, or my anger starts boiling within me. Lord, deliver me from evil!

Yes, that prayer is also a

TO BE CONTENT WITH GOD

prayer to remove sin and evil from within our lives. It's a prayer that shows discontentment with sin in our lives. The very nature of the Lord's Prayer is saying, "God, I am not okay with sin. In fact, I hate it and want it away from me! Get it out of my life, my friend's lives, and throughout the world!"

As God does this work, He also works within us to remove selfish desires and replace them with an eagerness to surrender our will to His. It is in this surrender that often God grants peace and grace. I am not saying that He offers us a free ride through trouble or that He places us on easy street. We might get beaten down. In fact, maybe we are at an even greater risk to our health and safety because in the enemy's eyes we become more of a threat. But our Savior offers us His presence through every circumstance.

May we not be content when our faith is being attacked, whether that attack comes from within us or from without. I have challenged people lately to memorize Philippians 3:8-11. I

must confess that I have been lacking when it comes to memorizing Scripture, and I pray that God would continue to work in me a heart for memorization of His Word. Would you join me in this prayer during 2021? And ask God to work on our hearts to hate evil and love Him more. This is our call. Romans 12:9 says, "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good."

May we continue to love what God has called good. But if God has called it evil, then let it be cast out. If we struggle with discontentment, then may we turn to Him and pray that He would start a work in our lives to find contentment only in Him.

Lord, help me to live each moment as if Your return might be the very next moment!

Raan is an AFLC missionary serving in Jinja, Uganda.

Bergers, missionaries to Uganda, end service with World Missions

Due to health reasons, AFLC missionaries to Uganda Micah and Famke Berger completed their service with AFLC World Missions in December. Micah began his ministry in Uganda in 2011 as a short-term missionary and transitioned to full-time in 2014. They have worked primarily with the Ambassador Institute, teaching and training national leaders. They currently live with family in the Netherlands and plan to move to the United States after they secure the proper documentation for Famke and their daughter Naomi.

World Missions thanks those who have supported the Bergers. Even though they no longer receive a missionary salary from AFLC World Missions, they will continue to receive funds to replenish their personal support. Contact the World Mission office for information about our missionaries' greatest needs.



Pastor Howard Kjos

Pastor Howard Kjos, 93, of Roslyn, S.D., died Dec. 11, 2020, at Strand-Kjorsvig Nursing Home in Roslyn. Born Oct. 23, 1927, near Pelican Rapids, Minn., he was the son of John and Dagny (Peterson) Kjos. He married Delores Erickson on Dec. 27, 1960, in at Minneapolis. She died in 2009.

He graduated from Pelican Rapids High School in 1945, and worked various local jobs until 1950, when he was drafted to the U.S. Army and serve during the Korean War. He was wounded in action and received the Purple Heart and two Bronze Stars. He was honorably discharged in 1952. After marriage, they lived in Minneapolis, where he worked for the railroad until 1961. He earned a degree in horticulture from the University of Minnesota. He graduated from the Free Lutheran Seminary in 1967. They moved to Hampden, N.D., where he served three churches. He served the Lake Region Parish, Roslyn, S.D.; Grace Lutheran, Aberdeen, S.D.; a church in Sacred Heart, Minn.; and Skudesnes Lutheran near Pierpont, S.D. He was a member of the Roslyn American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, and Sons of Norway.

Surviving are one son, Danny (Roxie) Kjos, Roslyn; one daughter Linnae (Paul) Spiering, Sioux Falls, S.D.; six granddaughters; and ten great-grandchildren.

The service was held Dec. 17, 2020, at Fron Lutheran Church near Roslyn.



Pastor Donald Norr

Pastor Donald Clarence Norr, 89, of Brainerd, Minn., died Jan. 4, 2021. Born Nov. 17, 1931, near Freedhem, Minn., he was the son of Robert and Florence (Erickson) Norr. He married Janet Bisson on June 8, 1957. She preceded him in death.

He was a veteran of the U.S. Army, serving as a military policeman in Japan following the Korean War. He worked for Standard Lumber in Pequot Lakes, Benson, and Bemidji, Minn., before they moved to Proctor, Minn., in 1969, where he was general manager for ASDCO Inc., a building supplies wholesaler, for 20 years. He received his certification as a licensed pastor and served Good Shepherd Fee Lutheran, Virginia, Minn., for 20 years. He also was past president of the Minnesota chapter of Gideons International, ministered in hospitals and nursing homes, and served as a Fifth Step Guide for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Surviving are four sons: Bradley (Therese Privette) Norr, Scott (Lisa Yetzer) Norr, Thomas (Viry) Norr, and Mathew Norr; 11 grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

A private funeral service was planned.

DECEMBER MEMORIALS

All Departments

Dean Hobelmann

AED

Pastor Ray Klug

Bible College

Art Twedt

Ruth Claus

Larry Gunderson

Martha Anderson

Tom Fugleberg

Alice Hedin

Verlys Homme

Marlin & Reenie

Benrud

LeRoy Schierkolk

Alice Zeh

Richard Westlake

Seminary

Harold Skovlund

Darlene Schwartz

Ardyce Aplan

Sharon Steffen

Everett Smith

Home Missions

Arlene Faust

LeRoy Schierkolk

Pastor Richard

Gilman

Joseph Ello

Clyde Peterson

Gladys Schauland

Lorene Erickson

FLAPS

Pastor Mike Crowell

Harvey Hoops

Pastor Irv Schmitke

Parish Education

Marlin & Reenie

Benrud

Ardyce Aplan

Pastor Ray Klug

WMF

Ellen Fox

World Missions

Larry Gunderson

Pastor Richard

Gilman

Glenn Larson

LeRoy Schierkolk

Pastor Henry

Johansen

Clyde Peterson

Gladys Schauland

Pastor John Abel

Pastor George

Knapp

... in honor of

Bible College

Pastor Wade Mobley

Pastor J.G. Erickson

family

W and H Missions

Leila Gilman

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-December 31, 2020

FUND	REC'D IN DECEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$53,109	\$394,302	\$415,102
Evangelism	12,651	128,173	130,106
Youth Ministries	17,234	141,275	134,522
Parish Education	29,822	161,551	149,140
Seminary	36,230	288,051	280,679
Bible College	66,994	405,428	525,170
Home Missions	29,585	405,735	391,991
World Missions	48,070	401,711	428,260
Personal Support	125,304	913,120	672,131
TOTALS	\$429,000	\$3,239,345	\$3,127,101

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

THE PASTOR AS EVANGELIST

The ministry of evangelists has been without question a part of the life of the AFLC from the beginning, as it was in the fellowships from which most of our congregations came. An evangelism commission was established early, and annual conference resolutions year after year encouraged special evangelistic meetings to be scheduled. This meant that a special speaker was invited to preach, and two of our pastors served the AFLC for a time as full-time evangelists. Congregations often included in letters of call that their pastors could serve in this capacity during the year at other churches for a week or



Pastor Robert Lee

two (a few even more often) without counting it as vacation time. The Lutheran Evangelistic Movement (LEM), and earlier the Hauge Federation, had full-time evangelists who regularly ministered in our congregations and Bible camps. Is there a full-time Lutheran evangelist today? I don't think so.

The word itself means one who proclaims good news, and there are three instances of it in the New Testament: Acts 21:8, Ephesians 4:11, and II Timothy 4:5. The first refers to Philip, one of the seven; the second simply states that the Lord gives "some" as evangelists; the third is part of Paul's final words to his child in the faith, that Timothy should do "the work of an evangelist." Thus, on the basis of the first two verses and as well as what we have seen over the years, we have believed especially that there are some who possess a God-given gift for evangelism and should be encouraged to use it. It is not only a pastor who may possess this gift. There have been laymen who have served well as evangelists, and one pastor told me that he was convinced the giftedness was most often given to laymen.

It has been my privilege to serve as a

guest evangelist in several congregations, at Bible camps, and youth conventions. I do not believe that I have the gift of evangelism, but God honors the preaching of His Word through imperfect instruments. These opportunities proved to be a personal blessing as well as a strengthening of my calling as a pastor and teacher.

So, what about the pastor as evangelist? Perhaps here is where Paul's words to Timothy are especially applicable. Most pastors may not have a unique gift as evangelists, yet all are called to proclaim the good news—to major in it, in fact—while endeavoring to preach both law and gospel.

The pastor does the work of an evangelist in his preaching. Never assume that all is well spiritually with everyone in the congregations we serve. Some of our evangelical Lutheran forefathers even warned against the pastor using expressions or terms that implied all his hearers were believers. Some congregations did not use a confession of sin, and all were uneasy with a public unconditional absolution. There will be some who struggle with the assurance of salvation, and others who may know that they are not right with God. Our fourth Fundamental Principle states it clearly, pointing first of all to the preaching ministry of the pastor:

Members of the organized congregation are not, in every instance, believers, and such members often derive false hope from their external connection with the congregation. It is therefore the sacred obligation of the congregation to purify itself by the quickening preaching of the Word of God, by

earnest admonition and exhortation, and by expelling the openly sinful and perverse.

The pastor also does the work of an evangelist in his visitations. Most of our visits should include Scripture and prayer

Most pastors may not have a unique gift as evangelists, yet all are called to proclaim the good news ...

with words of encouragement to people in times of need, while some may have an evangelistic element. People facing a medical crisis may be especially spiritually open, wanting to know for sure that all is well with the Lord. New to a parish, a pastor will sometimes ask people to tell him about their spiritual journeys. Others have used the old Evangelism Explosion question, that if you died today and stood at the gate of heaven, and God asked you why He should let you in, what would your answer be?

The pastor does the work of an evangelist in his ministry to the youth of the congregation. What a privilege to teach the confirmation classes! Yes, it's not always easy, and there may be a few who really challenge you, and sometimes years will pass before you see the fruit. I have great memories, too, of retreats and Bible camps with the youth of my congregations, and there is fruit that has remained.

The Evangel Himself is Jesus! Pastors, preach Him and be His ambassador in every situation! Lay people, pray for your pastor and encourage him, that he might be a faithful evangelist.

building the base

GOD'S BIG ERASER

BY PASTOR DAVID JORE

I had not heard the term, “total forgiveness,” until I read a book with that title by Dr. R. T. Kendall, former pastor of Westminster Chapel in London. It is a graphic picture of the forgiveness we encounter in the kingdom of God. Our natural response when we are hurt or see our loved ones hurt is, at best, partial forgiveness toward those who have wronged us. Total forgiveness is completely letting others off the hook.

This type of forgiveness has its foundation at the cross. Here we see Jesus without any guilt of His own and suffering excruciating pain, yet praying a prayer of forgiveness, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). In this prayer Jesus was not only releasing forgiveness to those gathered around Him on that Good Friday afternoon, but to all sinners, including you and me.

When Don Fladland was president of the Lay Ministry Training Center, a Bible school in St. Paul, Minn., where I was on staff for many years, he would often remind us of the truth of God’s total forgiveness. The phrase he used to express this was, “God has a big eraser!” I was reminded of this phrase when I was preparing a sermon this fall entitled, “I Look Not Back,” based on the song by that title. In my sermon I used the five verses of that song as the five points in my sermon. When I had just finished typing my first point, which was the same as the song’s title, I accidentally and irretrievably deleted that whole point. The Bible verse I had just finished typing before this deletion was Isaiah 43:25. Here the Lord says, “I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”

It didn’t take me long to realize that God was speaking very personally to me.

I sensed the Holy Spirit saying, “Dave, I want you to remember that I not only forgive sins, but I blot them out—I erase them completely.” That is total forgiveness! It is only possible because of the shed blood of Jesus, the innocent Lamb of God. As we confess our sins and put our trust in the finished work of Jesus on the cross, God blots out our sin with His big eraser. He also reminds us of this truth in Psalm 103:12, “as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”

One of my favorite Bible verses, which the Lord has used repeatedly to encourage me, is Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” I can’t think of any better news than that. It is God’s total forgiveness in Jesus.

Jore serves Maple Bay Free Lutheran, Mentor, Minn.