

THE 

JULY 2021

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

THE MISSIONS ISSUE

*AFLC mission outreach
updates at home & abroad*





THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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BUILT ON NOTHING LESS

BY RACHEL MATTSON

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' Name.
On Christ the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.*

This is one of my favorite hymns to sing and read through because of its easily memorized tune and heart-convicting lyrics. The words are so rich with meaning for everyday life, and yet tell of the deep, biblical theology of our freedom in Christ. What is our hope built on? Jesus' blood and righteousness. The cost of our freedom was His death and the trade for our sinfulness was His righteousness. How can we not trust and stand on the solid rock, namely, Christ?

It's really easy for me to place my hope in circumstances, people, material possessions, my own gifts or talents, relationships, or dreams. God's Word has to daily remind me that true, lasting, joyful, life-giving *hope* is found only in knowing Jesus, and seeking to know Him more. That's why He came: to give us hope, life, and freedom from the burdens of sin in this present world. This eternal hope has set us free! John 8:36 says, "If the Son set you free, you will be free indeed!" He knows the cost of true freedom from sin, it was in giving His own life for ours. "Greater love has no one than this that He laid down His

life for His friends" (John 15:13). And He knows that our hearts need a daily reminder of where to put our hope. "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" (Psalm 42:11).

He has freed us from the power and condemnation of sin by dying our death and rising to life again for us. Our freedom is built on nothing less than this. It was Jesus' sacrifice. Our hope is in the solid Rock because He has traded His righteousness for our unrighteousness.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Our past, present, and future are all taken care of by His gracious hand. We have a God who is merciful and trustworthy. He has given us new life and a living hope. There is no other solid place to stand. There is no other lasting and living hope. There is no greater freedom than being found as His child.

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

Dear Father, we pray Thee, give us Thy Word that the Gospel may be sincerely preached throughout the world and that it may be received by faith and may work and live in us.

—Martin Luther

If preaching is Christian in the true sense of the word, it will always awaken and nurture the sense of mission even if the word “missions” is not mentioned in every sermon.

—Georg Sverdrup

God is a God of missions. He wills missions. He commands missions. He demands missions. He made missions possible through His Son. He made missions actual in sending the Holy Spirit.

—G.W. Peters

The congregation is both the child of missions and the mother of missions; where there is truly a congregation there would be missions.

—Georg Sverdrup

We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God.

—John Stott



PRAYING FOR OUR MISSIONARIES



A step-by-step guide

by Pastor Lynn Kinneberg

A

A keynote speaker at a Biola University missions conference some years ago began his message by asking those in attendance, “By show of hands, how many of you pray for missionaries on a daily basis and ask the Lord to bless them?”

He then asked those people to keep their hands up as he went around and pointedly asked many, “What do you mean when you ask the Lord to bless the missionaries?”

When each gave an answer, his response was always the same: “Well then, why didn’t you pray that?”

The message challenged me to revise my own missionary prayer list so that it would include a list of very specific things to think about as I pray for our missionaries.

First, I pray for their physical, mental, and emotional well-being, that they may maintain strength and stamina as they serve on the field. Consider the list of dangers the Apostle Paul faced during his missionary journeys, outlined in II Corinthians 11:25-28. We have become all the more conscious of the importance of praying for these issues as missionaries are exposed to diseases like malaria, Covid-19, hepatitis, dysentery, and Ebola.

Next, I pray that they will remain faithful to the Word, as Paul exhorted Timothy (II Timothy 2:2). Throughout the world, there are millions of pastors doing the difficult work of leading churches with little to no theological training. We need to pray that our missionaries will be equipped and ready to teach those pastors in God’s Word.

I pray for the families of our missionaries. I am compelled to mention here the tremendous value of the prayer cards put out by our World Missions department whereby we can become more familiar with names and faces. Please make use of them.

I pray that our missionaries will be strengthened in their sense of fearlessness and fervor. Paul had a similar request of the believers in Ephesus, asking them to pray that, “whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should” (6:19-20).

I also pray for fellow workers to serve alongside our missionaries. This includes praying for the ones they need (Matthew 9:35-38), and for the ones they have (Philippians 1:3-11). An article in *Christianity Today* about four years ago stated that jealousy, envy, pride, bitterness, and personality conflicts were among the majority of problems between missionaries. Even among the 12 disciples there were squabbles over who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom.

I pray for the fields where our missionaries serve and their flocks. Specifically, I pray that they would be sensitive to cultural differences (I Corinthians 9:19-23), see open doors (Colossians 4:3), and seize significant opportunities (Acts 17:16, 22-23). When it comes to praying for the world, Operation World offers many resources, both print and digital.

I pray that they will be filled with the Holy Spirit, both in exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and in exercising the gifts of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:11-12).

I also pray for their finances (Philippians 4:10-20). Of course, I might already be sitting on the specific answer—my own wallet!

I pray that they will maintain their focus (Acts 1:8), and that they will always keep the Great Commission and the mission statement of their sending agencies ever before them. I ask that they will not be easily distracted (Acts 6:2-4), nor diverted (Matthew 28:18-20).

I also pray for their foes, both spiritual (Ephesians 6:12, 18)—remember that Satan will not cede territory without a fight—and political (Acts 24:24-26). Governments can change in a matter of days or even hours, and so can attitudes towards Christians.

I ask the Lord to show them the fruit of their work (John 15:16). Nothing is more encouraging than planting seeds and then seeing a harvest. It keeps me planting a garden from year to year. A.T. Pierson wrote, “Prayer has been the preparation for every new missionary triumph, and the secret of all true missionary success.”

I also ask that they might be surrounded by friends—everyone needs them. The Apostle Paul was surrounded by friends in his ministry, and a great number of them were not missionary co-workers. We can toss out names like Lucius, Jason, Gaius, Erastus, Quartus, Stephanas, Epaphras, Onesiphorus, Pudens, and many more. Many of them were more like our own ministry assistants, which reminds me to pray for them as well!

Last, I pray with thanksgiving. Whenever word is received that a specific prayer request has been answered, we join our missionaries in offering up a word of praise and thanksgiving.

I am encouraged by the words of Max Lucado who wrote, “Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the One who hears it and not in the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference.”

Kinneberg serves Bethany Lutheran, Binford, N.D., and New Luther Valley Lutheran, McVie, N.D.





RICE AND BEANS AND PRAYER

R

Rice and beans are Brazilian staples. I love them, especially the beans! During my first year as a missionary at Camp Mourão, Brazil (1976), living at our Free Lutheran Bible Institute and eating with our students, I probably ate too many beans. I ended up getting a pain on my right side. I went to the doctor, and he instructed me to “eat less beans and more rice.” But the pain got worse, so I went back. He still couldn’t figure it out. As the pain got severe, I returned again and this time he figured it out. My appendix was about to rupture.

I was shocked when he sent me to a nearby pharmacy to get my own medications and IVs. The pharmacist supplied me with everything he could, but there were some things he didn’t have. Seeing the pain I was in, he volunteered to go to another pharmacy to get the needed medications. I was so relieved I could have hugged him.

When I got back to the doctor’s office, he operated right away. When I came to, he told me that my appendix had ruptured right before the surgery. However, he was able to get to it in time so that the poisons could be treated. I had to stay in the hospital a whole week, but I recovered completely. Praise the Lord!

I had been admitted so quickly that there wasn’t time to tell the other missionaries or students, or to ask anyone to pray for me. We didn’t even have a phone, but I knew the Holy Spirit was leading people to pray for me—I could feel their prayers; I could sense the peace of God. I knew Dad and Mom were constantly praying for me, and I knew others were praying, too, not knowing exactly what was happening to me that day. They were praying that God would take care of me, even though they were thousands of miles away.

Fast forward to 2016 when I went to Brazil with a group for the 50th anniversary of our

AFLC mission. The first thing I did when I got off of the plane was to trip and fall on my face on a cement walkway. Praise Jesus for His protection. I just chipped a tooth and had a small cut on my lip. However, after an X-ray at a local clinic, a doctor was quite sure that my right kneecap was broken. That was on a Thursday, but on Monday, Pastor Paul Abel took me to another clinic for a second opinion. My knee was badly strained, sprained, and swollen, but not broken. Praise the Lord! It wasn’t until I got home that I heard the rest of the story. Moira, my good friend and prayer partner, told me that God had gotten her up early and told her to get down on her face on the floor and pray for me early that very Monday morning. She sensed the urgency and obeyed, not knowing exactly what was going on but knowing that I needed His help, even from thousands of miles away.

I heard the story of missionaries in Mexico who were ministering to people in the mountains. The missionaries had to travel at night on high, narrow, winding roads, and their vehicle broke down. What did God do? He woke someone up in the middle of the night a thousand miles away and laid on his heart to pray for the missionaries. In response to his prayer, the Holy Spirit spoke to someone’s heart who lived nearby, prompting him to go out and find the missionaries and repair their vehicle.

Why does God work this way? Could one reason be that He wants to involve as many people as possible in His mission? We missionaries need your prayers. We’re not super Christians, just ordinary people like you who are willing to go out on a limb for God. William Carey, missionary to India in the late 1790s, famously said, “I’m going down into the mine, but you’ve got to hold the ropes.” That’s what you need to do for us—uphold us in prayer. We need

by Priscilla (Wold) Dutcher

you as our partners, for we are all co-workers with God.

When you face problems, pray for missionaries who experience similar problems while being in a different culture with a different language in different time zones and hemispheres. Pray as we're seeking to win the lost that we won't lose our own families, but that we will make time to be together. Pray that we'd realize this isn't our mission, but God's mission, and that He is sovereign and in charge. Pray we will realize that it's not about us, but all about Jesus. Pray God's Word over us like II Chronicles 20:12 and 15: "We are helpless and clueless but our eyes are on You ... Don't be afraid or discouraged for the battle is not yours, but God's." Pray that we might have the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20).

Pray we'll ask good questions. Pray we will be good at listening, good at learning, and good at laughing—especially at ourselves. Pray we would be quick to forgive and to ask forgiveness. Pray for our patience. Pray we'd quickly turn our stresses over to God. Pray for humility, submission, and good relationships with fellow missionaries.

Praise God for each person on mission boards around the world. Pray for insight as they make decisions for people thousands of miles away. Praise God with us for the privilege of being His ambassadors.

Dutcher, a former AFLC missionary to Brazil, lives in Pearce, Ariz. Her home congregation is Bethany Free Lutheran, Abercrombie, N.D.



When God invites us into the mission.



AN UPDATE FROM PARAGUAY

by Pastor Matthew Abel

V

Villarrica del Espiritu Santo is the name of our new city. My family and I moved here in November 2020 to begin work as church planters in Paraguay. At first everything was so new, different, and disorienting. But after being here for half of a year, the feelings of disorientation

are giving way to the comforting sigh of “home sweet home.” The repetitive conversations centered on introductions are being replaced with real conversations, and life is getting easier. We have learned where and how to do the basic things that initially required extraordinary effort. On the other hand, feelings of ministry urgency end expectation begin to build.

We are now anxious for certain results. Personally, I desire to have

a congregation to pastor and a team to lead. I am eager to be surrounded by members of the body with complementary gifting. The key question is: How do we get from here to there?

Our ministry here in Paraguay is currently focused on four fronts: first, evangelistic home Bible studies; second, kids club; third, elementary school, and fourth, evangelism and discipleship of individuals.

We have been studying the Gospel of John with a home group. Every chapter of John is a call to faith in Jesus Christ, and we are praying for

fruits of conversion among those who are hearing the Word.

Our kids ministry is named Joaju Club.

Joaju means together. We have gathered the kids each Saturday to share the gospel through stories, songs, games, and crafts. We have had the opportunity to share the gospel message with 44 children from our neighborhood. We know that God’s Word is always effective and we expect to see it affecting this community in a positive way.

I also teach English to 87 elementary students, grades 3-6. Through this I get to daily share Scripture and pray as I teach them English. It also acquaints me with many families in the community.

Our home is a ministry center, and Ednay is very intentional in making the home a witness for the Lord. Besides that, she loves to teach and disciple women. Women young and old are attracted by her loving interest, and she has been dedicated in the task of discipleship.

As missionaries we are dreamers. We plan ahead and envision outreach and ministry development. Even though we do not yet have a committed core group, we are planning to begin holding regular worship services and weekly testimony bonfire services. We believe that as we step out in faith, God will bring to us the people to whom He would have us minister.

Another exciting development is planning to build a church. We have begun the process of buying land for a church in a new area where we will be a lighthouse for the gospel. This land is an approved AFLC World Missions project to which you can donate and be a part of this foundational step in establishing the Paraguay mission.

Abel and his wife, Ednay, are AFLC missionaries serving in Villarrica del Espiritu Santo, Paraguay.

by Glenda Kvale

F

Fifteen years ago, my husband Steve and I were accepted into full-time missionary service with Wycliffe Bible Translators. In 2007, we were humbled to receive a letter of call as missionaries on loan from AFLC World Missions, which we gratefully accepted. Pastor Phil Haugen and Pastor Richard Sliper officiated at our commissioning service at Christ the King Free Lutheran in Pipestone, Minn. We work remotely from our southwest Minnesota farm site.

It is a thrill to be able to give our careers to missions and experience the rewards of helping advance Bible translation with our expertise in information technology (IT) and administrative services. We help facilitate computer support needs, prayer meetings (national and international), connection of intercessors with field prayer requests, and provide answers regarding Bible translation for missionaries, translators, and the Bible-less. Our roles have an emphasis in developing strategic prayer partnership vital to the advancement of making God's Word accessible to everyone in a language they can understand. We help bring waiting languages to the starting line to begin translation work, keep those works in progress, and get them to the finish line.

Technology has changed the way missions are done. Online tools have made the time in remote villages more bearable since missionaries

can communicate with family and ministry partners back home. People using their skills in network security, database management, project management, and programming enable missionaries on the field to focus on their work. Scripture can be checked so that translation teams can start work the next day. Scripture and resources can be accessed online, including audio formats, which enable people to receive Scripture even if they are unable to read.

The main challenge we face is recruiting enough people to use their skills for the Lord. Issues on the field include theft, destruction, and manipulation of computer equipment. This spiritual warfare is common and seems to heighten in the last three years of a project's completion. It is so important to pray projects to the finish line.

One of our favorite testimonies came from an Asian woman who said, "Reading the Bible in someone else's language is like eating a banana with the skin peeling on but reading the Bible in my own language is like eating a peeled banana! It's so much more satisfying."

Hearing the spiritual need in her voice keeps us motivated. There are 7,390 languages in the world. Of those, 2,003 are awaiting a Bible translation and 2,737 others have work in progress. There are 706 languages that have the complete Bible, while 1,569 have the New Testament. Included among those who need a Bible are millions in the deaf community, of which there are 400 sign languages. Only one has a complete Bible (American Sign Language).

The deaf community has been on our hearts with Steve's small experience in deaf ministry, so as we seek the Lord for His will, Steve has been slowly getting one or two linguistic classes done in the winter months, which is inching him closer to joining the global sign language team.

As we think of God's faithfulness and your prayers over the last 15 years, we are grateful. "Prayer makes our work work" is the slogan we serve by. Let's keep working together for Christ's glory amongst every language community on earth. You'll find us at translatetheword.org.

The Kvales, AFLC missionaries on loan to Wycliffe Bible Translators, are members of Christ the King Free Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn.



AN UPDATE FROM THE KVALES



THE ROAD TO CHURCH PLANTING

by Luke Edlund

I



I've been reminiscing the last few years in a place that I've found to be a safe-haven and a stronghold for life-altering decisions in years past for me, Bethany Bible Camp. This was where I learned the core beliefs of the faith as a kid listening to Gary Stegman, long-time dean of junior camp, and many other teachers in that small camp chapel in Bemidji. It's the place where I first started learning the importance of youth ministry and passing on the faith to the next generation as I counseled students from all over northwest Minnesota. And it was the place where I was asked to pray about and consider being a part of a church plant in the west metro of the Twin Cities.

I had been asked several times to lead or join church planting teams in a few different scenarios. But this would be the first time that I put any real thought into that request.

Buffalo, Minn., was always the place that my wife and I knew that we would end up. Neither of us could answer what the initial draw to Buffalo was. It could have been the location being in a "sweet-spot" in the northwest metro, close enough to catch a Minnesota Twins game without a hassle, but far enough away from the hustle culture of the big city. Maybe it was the breathtaking view of a Buffalo Lake sunset driving on Highway 25 south through downtown Buffalo on our way to college from up north, or stopping

by What's the Scoop? to get some of the best ice cream that I've had to this day. Whatever it was, when the question of where to plant a church arose, our focus snapped to Buffalo.

As it turns out, we were not the only ones seeking to see a movement of the Holy Spirit in Buffalo. Several members of the AFLC and the surrounding communities have been praying for a church start here for years.

Since the initial request to pray about this calling, we have seen it affirmed and encouraged time and time again. Several families have committed to praying for this plant and seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance in seeing it come to fruition. My wife and I have committed to a two-year residency at Living Hope in Rogers, Minn., training under Pastor Jesse Kneeland and the leadership team. There, I am getting pastoral experience through preaching regularly, sitting in on elder and management team meetings, as well as contributing to different ministries within the church as our giftings allow. I am also taking seminary classes as I am able at our Free Lutheran Seminary. In August we will have been serving at Living Hope for one year and I cannot express how much we have learned and grown in our first year of residency and I look forward to what God has for us in year two.

This fall we will be starting once-a-month worship meetings in Buffalo to spend time

together in the community bringing our praise, prayers, and concerns to Jesus. These meetings will consist of a praise and worship time, a devotional, and then a time of prayer for the community and for the church plant. The goal of these meetings is to give our plans to God as it is His church. We want to build momentum for an official launch in the fall of 2022. I am pumped to be a part of the work God is doing in Buffalo and excited to share with anyone willing to join us in this mission.

There are three main ways that you can support us in our mission to reach the Buffalo community with the life-changing truth of the gospel. The first is to pray. “The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps,” says Proverbs 16:9. Pray for God to continue to build our leadership team and a launch team. Pray that our focus remains always on the author and perfecter of our faith, and pray for Buffalo, for the hearts and souls that God is already working in.

The second is to give. “Do not neglect to

do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God,” says Hebrews 13:16. While Katie and I both are working, we would like to step back to part-time to be able to devote more time to the ministry. To do this we need your help. This step is secondary to prayer, but still important.

The third is to come. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth,” said Jesus in Acts 1:8. Consider joining us in our mission to reach people in the Buffalo community for Jesus. Come to our monthly worship meetings starting in the fall and see what the Lord is doing.

Edlund is an AFLC Home Missions church planter in training, currently serving for two years at Living Hope, Rogers, Minn. He also works as the media specialist at the Free Lutheran Schools.



*Residency in local church
part of preparation process*



T

This past year has been a whirlwind, and there was no exception for those at the Waikiki Beach Gathering (WBG). While we did experience a few struggles scrambling to figure out how to adjust our mission to fit within Covid-19 guidelines, we have experienced so much of God's protection and blessings. We were able to begin meeting in person again by the end of May 2020, when members of Our Redeemer Lutheran, located near the University of Hawaii, graciously allowed us to meet in their church's yard since the area beaches where we typically meet were still closed. We went back to what we call "Church on da Beach" by the end of June.

We are so grateful that churches have been one of the few exceptions to the restrictions on large group gatherings, allowing us to gather in person. In the past, Pastor Brady Arneson would reserve a spot at the park every Sunday, but both the City and County of Honolulu have not been offering park permits since March. Because the Gathering has been faithfully meeting on Waikiki Beach for more than four years, we are known within that community. Authorities have

graciously allowed us to meet in our spot, even without any reservations. We feel like this is such a testament to God working in and through the Gathering and evidence of His Holy Spirit being displayed in His Church. There has even been construction in the park recently, and they have specifically avoided the area where we meet. What a crazy blessing!

At the beginning of 2020, the WBG leadership team planned to start two connect groups to study God's Word. When we had to stop meeting in person, we debated whether or not this was the right time to start Bible study groups, but we decided to stick with the original plan. This ended up being perfect timing since many people were searching for ways to connect with people during lock down. Now we have five connect groups, including a youth group, led by five different members of the Gathering.

We have been blown away by the amount of people willing to step up and lead within the church. Besides the connect group leaders, we now have eight team leaders within the church. We have the setup team to basically build the



church from the ground up every Sunday and for our Last Friday Night events. The sound team sets up our entire sound system and mixes the sound during the service. The worship team leads us in praising Jesus through music. The welcome team builds relationships with people and helps those passing by learn about the Gathering. The security team makes sure all the equipment and people are safe and helps prevent disruptions during a service. The food team brings food and drinks for everyone. The photo and video team capture what the Gathering looks like and records the sermons for YouTube. And our surfing team plans our monthly surfing event. We will soon be adding our ninth team as we plan to launch a Kids Beach Gathering. Each team leader assembles the volunteers needed to serve each Sunday and is the point person for questions and for training.

Another team recently created was the spring retreat leadership team. Four members of our church planned a 12-hour event for one Saturday. We rented a movie theater room, had speakers, small group discussions, praise and worship, served three meals, and, of course, watched a movie. Our four speakers were different members of our congregation who shared from the Bible and from their lives. At the end of the event, we had an open mic for people to share something God was putting on their hearts. We prayed together, we laughed

together, we cried together. One person who attended said the words that resonated with her from the event were “love” and “authenticity.” As an introvert, I fully expected that I would leave when the event was over and the movie started, but some of us ended up being there for 14 hours. At our women’s group the following Tuesday, we went around and told our highlight from the week, and everyone who had been to the retreat said that was their high.

The people who attend the Gathering come from all walks of life and all kinds of different backgrounds, and I’ve learned a lot from them. When one of the speakers shared part of her testimony, she said she started coming to our church with her boyfriend (now husband), and she kept hearing the same thing every Sunday. She kept hearing about Jesus. I think the reason all of us who attend the Waikiki Beach Gathering are able to get along so well despite our differences is that we all find common ground in Jesus Christ. The reason we are able to love authentically is because we have been forgiven of our sins and have been accepted into the family of God, and we want to share that with others.

Arneson is a member of the Waikiki Beach Gathering, an AFLC Home Missions church plant in Honolulu, Hawaii.

by Marli Arneson

GROWTH AT THE GATHERING



T

The early stages of what is today known as Hope AFLC Church of Enderlin, N.D., can be traced back to around 1998, when several families in the Lisbon, N.D., area sought to be fed from God's Word. The group in Lisbon was assisted for a time by the Rural Home Missionary Association. The group eventually made the decision to move to a storefront in Enderlin in the mid 2000s. The congregation at this time was around 25 and being served by pastors from the Evangelical Free Church of America.

In 2010, the congregation began to shift toward Lutheran teaching. Members of the congregation contacted Pastor Lee Hoops, who was serving West Prairie Free Lutheran in Kindred, N.D. Pastor Paul Nash, the AFLC Home Missions director at the time, was also informed of the congregation's desire to pursue Lutheran teaching, which led to the church becoming an AFLC Home Missions congregation in August.

*From rural mission to
growing local ministry*

THE STORY OF OUR CONGREGATION

by Pastor Tom Olson

The newly formed AFLC congregation, consisting of about 12 families, continued to meet in the storefront in Enderlin with area AFLC laymen and AFLC seminarian Sam Menge providing pulpit fill. In June 2012, the congregation entered into a rental agreement with an Enderlin Methodist congregation to rent church space. On Aug. 5, 2012, the congregation called Pastor Dennis Norby to be their first full-time pastor. Pastor Norby also took the position of chaplain for the North Dakota Veterans Home in Lisbon. Pastor Norby and his family served until Jan. 14, 2018. AFLC Pastor Christian Andrews arrived as the congregation's interim pastor in October and served through September 2019.

I was called to serve the congregation as an AFLC Home Missions tent-making pastor and began serving on October 1. I use my farming background to help local farmers, and I also drive school bus for Enderlin Area School as a substitute. On July 15, 2020, I also began serving a small Presbyterian congregation of six to ten people in Lisbon as interim pastor.

Hope's baptized membership is 23 and baptized/confirmed membership is at 39. Our congregation also has about seven non-member families consisting of approximately 25 people who call Hope their home church. We continue to see growth both spiritually and numerically.

Our congregation has been blessed greatly with a good-sized Sunday school consisting of approximately 35 students, which includes several community children attending. In 2020 our congregation started two new youth community ministries called Kids Connect (grades 5-8) with approximately 12 students attending and Youth Connections (grades 9-12) with approximately six students attending. The Youth Connections students enjoy connecting monthly with our sister church, West Prairie Free Lutheran Church of Kindred, for fellowship and Bible study.

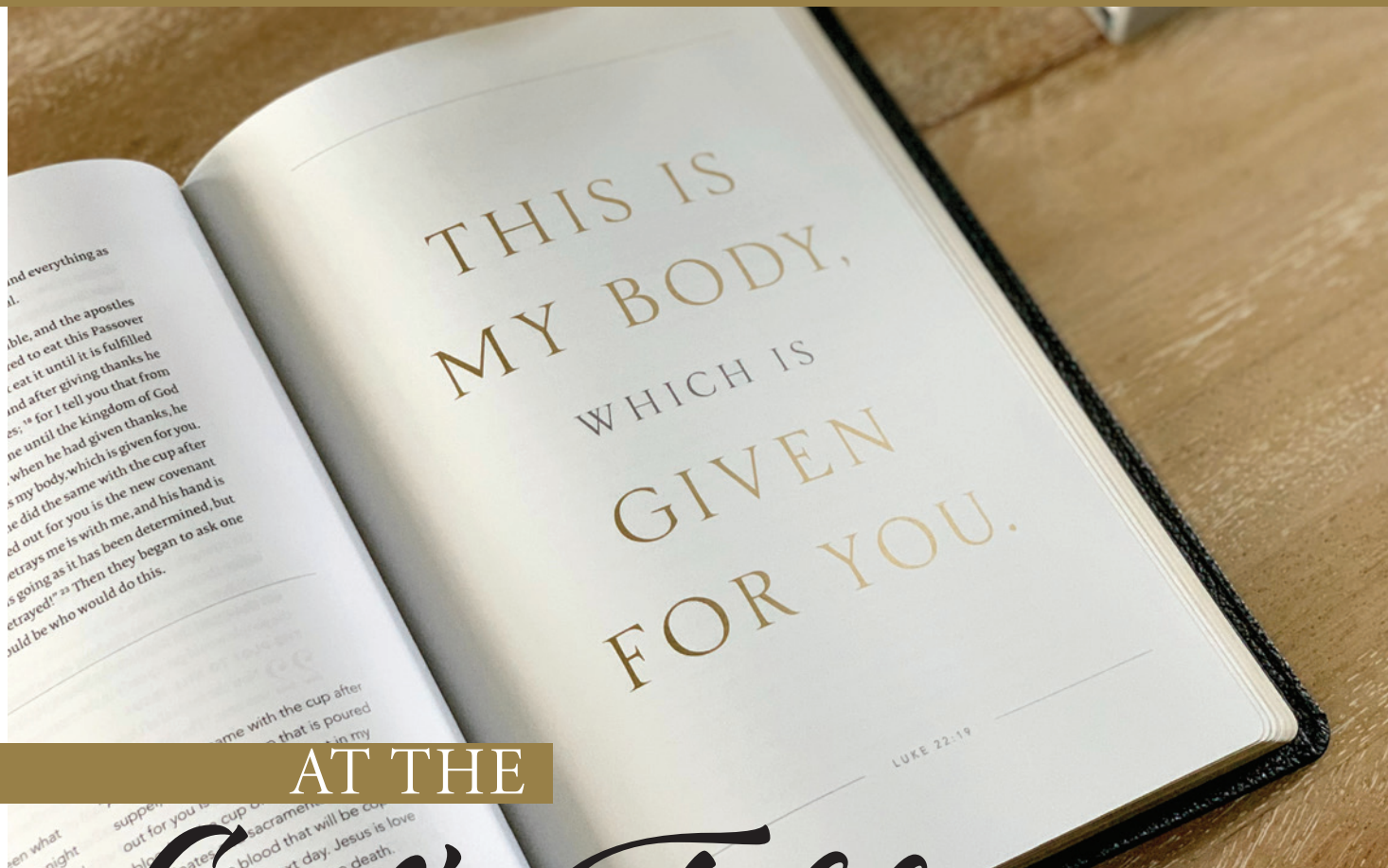
Over the last two years my wife, Beth, and I have been assisting the local Methodist church with their community kid's ministry called Adventure Club. Beginning in June,

members of Hope stepped up to assume full responsibility of this children's ministry reaching 10-15 kids weekly. Our congregation has also been bringing in AFLC Home Mission Barnabas teams for vacation Bible school (VBS) each summer, which has averaged more than 40 children in attendance. This year we will be hosting regular VBS, a sports clinic, as well as a theater production with the Barnabas team. We give the Lord thanks for the strong number of children He has brought to our congregation. To help with our children and youth, Isak Olson and Phoebe Holt (both recent Free Lutheran Bible College graduates) have been hired as parish builders for the summer.

Like a lot of other congregations, Covid-19 had an impact on Hope's ministry. In May 2020, the congregation made the decision to go outside and hold services in the parking lot. Church attendance was strong during the four and half months that we met outside, which included our members and many visitors, as well as neighbors listening from their backyards. The results were so positive that members of the council made the decision to host outdoor services again this summer.

Our congregation is seeking to encourage believers and reach lost people in the community through community events, as well. Members are actively inviting others to their congregation and recording worship services for online services. Our congregation is blessed with members and leaders who are totally committed to the authority of God's written Word, ministering the Word and sacraments to our congregation, and reaching the lost of our communities. Thank you for your prayers and financial support to Hope AFLC Church as well as all our AFLC Home Missions congregations.

Olson serves Hope AFLC Church of Enderlin, N.D.



AT THE

Lord's Table

BY DORIS STENSLAND

Oh, Lord, I come into Your house today with a feeling of unworthiness. My heart should be full of joyous anticipation because of this holy invitation, but instead, I realize I have treated it as a common everyday happening. This is only one more guilt that wears my soul.

"Come for all things are now ready." Today you lovingly beckon us—sinners all—to this special closeness with Yourself. My feet approach Your table with a mixture of eagerness and reluctance. I feel my need, but I also feel Your holiness.

At the altar rail the cross and Your suffering become very real. Into my ears come the words, "The body of Christ, given for thee." Wounded for my transgressions, Your broken body hangs on the cross for me. In response to this love, my heart wells up with thanksgiving.

"The blood of Christ, shed for thee." I receive it gladly for I know that Your blood is my only hope of salvation. The

taste makes me mindful of the bitter dregs of pain and anguish You had to drink for the remission of my sins. In no other way could You make it more real to me than to let me partake of—taste and feel—Your precious body and blood.

In these moments as Your guest, I have sampled the love that drove you to Calvary.

I am glad you were thinking of us on that evening before Your crucifixion and instituted this sacrament for our blessing and benefit.

Through Your gifts of bread and wine, I have tasted forgiveness. The misgivings and sins I came with, now lie behind. I know I am cleansed.

New strength comes with this holy food for it is Thyself. Discouragement has turned to encouragement. Self-confidence has turned to Christ-confidence. I have been recharged.

There is peace. This heart troubled with sins and weaknesses is quietened.

This communion with You has

tightened the hold You have of my hand. It is an extra squeeze of reassurance, as if You are saying, "Go onward. Do better now, my child."

Here I have felt a closeness with You and with other Christians that has reminded me that I am not alone. Today we have sat at table with You and You have taken bread and blessed it and broken it and given it to us, and it has happened to us as it happened to the men at Emmaus—our eyes have been opened to behold You, the living Savior, and to see more clearly what You have done for us.

Now our hearts burn within us because we have been in Your presence and tasted anew Your love, forgiveness, peace, and life.

We have remembered you.

And we have received strength for the coming days ... until you come again.

Stensland is a member of Redeemer Free Lutheran, Canton, S.D.



W

hat can our AFLC offer to the broader church planting movement in

America? What gifts do we have? Is there something unique about us? What can we offer that the generic Bible believing church down the road can't? We both believe the Bible. We both might even be congregational. We both speak about being gospel-centered and evangelical. We both seem to value lay ministry giftings. We both value expository preaching. We might even sing the same songs on Sunday. We both seek to foster real community and relationships. So, why are we unique? How would you answer those questions?

As a church planter, I have spent countless hours wrestling with these deeply profound questions. What I am realizing more and more is that we should not only celebrate our Lutheran theological heritage, but lean into it, as well. Why? Because our theology, which is beautifully summarized in the *Catechism*, is the very thing that makes us unique. Sometimes in our broader American evangelical culture, we want to

WHAT MAKES US UNIQUE

BY PASTOR ANDY COYLE

downplay our theology. It's easier to simply blend in and do what everyone else is doing. However, in a culture where people are longing for experiential spirituality, Lutherans have unique gifts shaped by Scripture and God's people, into which we can invite people to participate.

Being Lutheran is all about the gospel of Jesus and how Jesus comes to us. As Lutherans we celebrate sacramental theology and the earthliness of God's work in our lives through His Word, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. It is through these physical gifts that Christ is made present in our lives. As we struggle through the ups and downs of life, He promises to come and minister to us through these gifts in the local congregation.

Being a Lutheran also ties us deeply into the history of the Church. How beautiful it is to realize that we stand on the shoulders of the faithful and don't have to reinvent the wheel in hopes of catching every constantly changing fad within the Church. I can joyfully embrace the gracious rhythms that God has used in the Church for centuries (i.e. creeds, confession of sin and grace, and the sacraments).

So, are we unique? Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that our churches are grounded in a far more historic and sacramental shape than many evangelical churches today. Yes, in that within the Lutheran world, we cherish congregational freedom. But we aren't unique in the sense that these historical beliefs, practices, and rhythms are anything new, but really a continuation of how God's people have worshiped all along.

As our culture's spiritual foundation continues to erode, we can bring real gifts to the table. Could I be so bold as to say our culture needs more Free Lutheran congregations? Congregations that magnify Christ and bring Christ into people's lives through His Word and sacraments. Congregations that invite believers to follow Jesus through the simple rhythms God has used to shape His people for centuries.

May God grant us wisdom, humility, and intentionality to continually learn how to express these great gifts in our culture.

Coyle serves Shiloh Free Lutheran, an AFLC church plant in Somerset, S.D.

FLY Federation to convene

Pastor Gideon Johnson, president of the 2021 FLY Committee, has called for a meeting of the FLY Federation to be held virtually at 7 p.m. (CST) on July 9. The purpose of the meeting is to take steps necessary to fill the 2023 and 2025 FLY Committees. During a normal cycle, committee members are elected during a FLY Convention. Since the 2021 convention was delayed to 2023, this process has been affected. Accordingly, after seeking legal advice, the FLY Federation must be convened in order to propose and pass two related motions.

The FLY Federation, which consists of all AFLC youth, youth workers, pastors, and caring adults, are asked to take part in a brief online meeting via Zoom. On the agenda are two resolutions. First, it is proposed that the current committee remain as elected members through 2023, effectively electing them for a single term from 2019 to 2023. A second resolution proposes that the members nominated to serve on the 2023 FLY Committee (which would have been elected at this summer's FLY Convention were it not postponed), would become the nominees for the 2025 FLY Committee.

For more information, including the proposed resolutions and a link to the Zoom meeting, contact AFLC Youth Ministries at fly@aflc.org.

Artist Timm to speak at FLY One-Night



National artist Eric Samuel Timm (left) will headline FLY One-Night, a live-stream event planned for 7 p.m. (CST) July 7 and presented by the 2023 FLY Committee and AFLC Youth Ministries. All are welcome to join the live-stream at flyconvention.org.

High school students in the classes of 2021 and 2022 are invited to attend the event in person at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary (FLBCS) chapel, Plymouth, Minn. Registration is required and is available online at flyconvention.org. Seating is limited for the live event, which is free, but donations are welcome.

Other speakers for the evening include FLY Committee President Gideon Johnson, FLY Convention Coordinator Daniel Keinanen, and AFLC Youth Director Jason Holt. The evening will include music, testimonies, and a word from FLBCS, event sponsor. For more information, email fly@aflc.org.

AFLC Youth Ministries offers 4-week Bible study on vocation

AFLC Youth Ministries has written and produced a four-week Bible study called "God's Wisdom for Vocational Living." Each two-page study covers topics related to God's call to live for Christ in all aspects of life, from relating to those God has placed in your life and the importance of meeting together as believers, to the types of roles played within a household and what spiritual gifts, talents, and abilities can lend themselves to your vocation.

The four lessons encompass a directed study on vocation, and can also be used in a group setting as discussion prompts and prayer topics are included. The free resource PDF can be downloaded from the AFLC Youth Ministries website (aflc.org/youth) under the "resources" tab at the top of the page. The study is also available on the AFLC Youth Ministries app, found on the iTunes app store, Google Play, or Amazon app store.

FLBCS Events

Alumni Picnics planned through summer

Alumni and friends of the Free Lutheran Bible College are invited to attend one or more regional picnics hosted around the country this summer. Mark your calendar for the following dates and locations:

- July 18—Sioux Falls, S.D.
2 p.m., Upper Tuthill Park
- July 18—Thief River Falls, Minn.
4–7 p.m., Oakland Park
- July 18—Plymouth, Minn.
4 p.m., FLBC campus
- Aug. 15—Fargo, N.D.
5 p.m., Lindonwood Park

To RSVP and find out more information about local events, visit the FLBC website (flbc.edu/event). If you are interested in hosting a picnic in your area email alumni@flbc.edu.

Golf Scramble fundraiser July 30

The Free Lutheran Bible College will host a golf tournament on July 30 at The Refuge Golf Club in Oak Grove, Minn. The annual event, which is open to all friends of FLBC, raises funds for Bible college scholarships.

The event begins with registration and driving range and putting green opening at 10:15 a.m. A shotgun start at noon will culminate in dinner, prizes, and a brief program at 5 p.m.

Registrations are open to both individuals and teams, and sponsorship levels include hole, clubhouse, event, and partner. For more information and to register, visit flbc.org/events/golf-scramble

Seminary hosts Summer Institute

The Free Lutheran Seminary will host the Summer Institute of Theology Aug. 2-6 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. Guest speakers are Dr. Zac Hicks and Dr. Bryan Chapell, who will speak on the Institute theme: "Christ Centered Preaching and Worship."

Two sessions will be offered. Session 1, taught by Chapell, will focus on "Christ Centered Preaching," and will run Aug. 2-4, in the morning. Session 2 will run Aug. 4-6. Registrants can choose from the following lectures: Hicks will teach sessions on "Christ Centered Worship," Pastor Gary Jorgenson will teach a session on I and II Peter, and Dr. Nathan Olson will teach on "Ethics and the Follower of Christ."

Registration is open for one or two sessions. For more information, visit flbc.edu/events.

Throughout my life, the Lord has continually reminded me to “be still” and know that He is God (Psalm 46:10).

My oldest sister is the first teacher I remember from my early days of Sunday school. I had occasion to remind her of that when she was hospitalized recently after having a stroke. While there, her oxygen line became twisted, cutting off her air supply. She had hallucinations and was extremely frightened because the doctors and nurses wore masks, and she had no idea who anyone was. She asked me if I believed in God anymore. I reminded her that she was the one who taught me about Jesus in Sunday school. She taught me to sing “Jesus Loves Me,” and I reminded her that He still loved her and sent the nurses and doctors to help her get well so she could go home. I was thinking of her earthly home, but God had bigger and better plans and took her to her heavenly home.

When I worry about what to make for company or fret over cleaning my house, I remember the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). The Lord again reminds me to be still, to be like Mary. Thank

LESSONS ON BEING STILL

BY LINDA KROGSRUD

you, Lord, for reminding me of what is of first importance.

When our oldest son had to see just how much trouble he could get into when he graduated from high school, my Bible study group was there to give me the support I needed to get through, reminding me to be still and trust the Lord. One important lesson I learned in that time is that growth happens as we walk through valleys—they are lush and green—not when we are on top of the mountain. Thank you, God, for the valleys in which we grow. Our son later married in 1996. His wife died of cancer in 1998, and he died in a car accident a year later. I thank God for taking them home even though I miss them daily.

In 2000, my mother suffered a massive stroke on the anniversary of my son's death. Ten days later God took her home. I think God was reminding me to lean on Him for strength, not my mother. He tells us to cast all our cares on Him for He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). All we need to do is be still and listen. No matter what we are going through He is there for us. He gives us the

strength we need to get through any situation.

After my mother passed away, my marriage steadily declined. I tried to keep going, but I was forgetting one thing. I looked up and prayed that God would give me the strength that I needed. Again, His reminder to me was to be still. Soon He helped me find a new church home and led me to Bible study groups that have helped me grow. I was amazed that one group to which I belonged were couples who had been married for many years. I was the only one who was single—and divorced. The group encouraged me by letting me know that they accepted me as I am. Thank you, God, for dear friends.

Even now, I seem to be bombarded with trials which want to distract me and keep me from sharing my faith. Again, I have found that if I am still and listen to my God, He will give me the guidance I need. Thank you, Lord!

Krogstad is a member of Abiding Faith Free Lutheran, Ortonville, Minn.

AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship hosts Rekindle the Fire



Pastor Jerry Nelson (far left), was the featured speaker during Rekindle the Fire, a one-day event held in conjunction with the Annual Conference and hosted by AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship. Nelson represents the Pastor and Congregational Care Team (PACCT), an AFLC ministry focused on nurturing healthy pastors, wives, and congregations. Pastor Matthew Quanbeck and Micah Johnson (left), members of the AED Board, led worship. Pastor Richard and Clara Gunderson (top middle) took part in the worship time, and Pastor David and Cheryl Skordahl and Pastor Marlin and Joyce Harris (above) took part in the prayer time.



Debra Benson

Debra Benson, 61, of Morris, Ill., died June 9 at Hinsdale Hospital, Hinsdale, Ill. Born March 2, 1960, in Thief River Falls, Minn., she was the daughter of Sheldon and Delores (Moe) Mortrud. She married Craig Benson June 14, 1981, at Our Saviour's Lutheran, Thief River Falls.

She grew up in Thief River Falls, and graduated from Thief River Falls High School in 1978. She attended the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, Plymouth, Minn, graduating in 1980. After marriage, and following her husband's ordination as an AFLC pastor, they served the following AFLC congregations: Salem Lutheran, Radcliffe, Iowa, St. Paul's Lutheran, Jewel, Iowa, St. Peter Lutheran, Armour, S.D., Amazing Grace Free Lutheran, Mitchell, S.D., and Grace Evangelical Lutheran, Morris, Ill. She faithfully supported her husband as he also served in the U.S. Air Force. She served as the treasurer of the Women's Missionary Federation (2014-2020).

Surviving are her husband; one son, Alex Benson, Minneapolis, Minn.; three daughters, Heather Benson and fiancé Willie Coffman, Hubbard, Iowa, Erin (Mina) Youssef, Scottsdale, Ariz., and Kayla (Bradley) Rhoades, Minneapolis; three sisters, Sonia (Don) Balmer, Thief River Falls, Minn., Marilee (Mitch) Johnson, Maple Grove, Minn., and Cindy (Ron) Petsinger, Arvilla, N.D.; four grandchildren; and many extended relatives.

A service was held June 26 at Salem Lutheran, Radcliffe, Iowa, with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating. In lieu of flowers, memorials are requested to any of the AFLC ministries.



Pastor Kelly Henning

Pastor Kelly Henning, 65, of Humboldt, Saskatchewan, Canada, died June 2 at his home. Born on July 5, 1955, in LeRoy, Saskatchewan, he was the son of Elmer and Myrtle (Anderson) Henning.

Henning was baptized at LeRoy Lutheran Church and attended LeRoy School. Later, he attended the University of Saskatchewan and earned a bachelor of arts and master of divinity degrees. He served an internship at a church in Weyburn, Saskatchewan. Later he served with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada at three-point parish in southern Saskatchewan towns of Kyle and Outlook. He transferred to the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations-Canada, serving a congregation in Salmon Arm, British Columbia. He then accepted a call to serve a congregation at Lake Alma, Saskatchewan. He served as vice president and then president of the Association of Free Lutheran Churches-Canada from 2017 until April 2021. Due to failing health, in May he moved to Humboldt to be closer to family.

Surviving are his mother, Humboldt; two sisters, Tannis Henning, Humboldt, and Margot (Pat) Mihalicz, Calgary, Alberta; and numerous relatives

A service was held on June 11 at Malinoski & Danyluik Funeral Home, Humboldt, with Pastor Alvin Pinno officiating. Burial was at the LeRoy Cemetery. Memorials may be directed to the AFLC or Heart & Stroke Foundation of Saskatchewan.

A MINISTRY OF FAITH

BY PASTOR AUGUSTO FIURI

The ways in which the Lord began the Free Lutheran work in Switzerland and His continued provision for the outreach amazes me. I was born and raised in Brazil in the Free Lutheran Church. I went to Bible school there and became a lay pastor. In 2011 I decided to travel to Europe and become an Italian citizen. After finding work in Switzerland, my family joined me two years later. During this time, I attended church and started teaching Bible classes. In an unexpected turn of events, I was asked to pastor a small group of people and begin a Free Lutheran church in Geneva in 2015. In mid-2016 we were able to rent space in a beautiful historic Lutheran church for our Sunday evening worship services. I continue to be a tentmaker, supporting my family by working a secular job.

The AFLC ministry here is challenging, as anywhere in the world, I imagine. Starting a ministry is not an easy task;

it requires faith, experience, patience, love, and resources. Initially, we dedicated ourselves to forming our base, which included teaching interested people in our Free Lutheran doctrine, planning weekly church services, choosing a name (El-Shadai Free Lutheran Church), establishing a church council, and drafting a constitution and by-laws.

Although our church is composed mostly of Brazilians living in Switzerland, our goal is to minister to the French-speaking Swiss people, as well. Our services are a mixture of Portuguese and French, and we always have someone available to translate.

In partnership with the AFLC in the U.S. and in Brazil, we have received visits from many pastors and missionaries to encourage us and teach us. I am thankful to be a part of a balanced, Bible-believing, conservative, pietistic denomination. We are a church known for our emphasis on prayer and the teaching of God's Word. We are free from the shackles of traditionalism found within many Protestant churches and free from the exaggerations of the Pentecostal churches. We offer a place where anyone is free to worship without the extremes.

The DNA of our small church is composed of three elements: faith, prayer, and missions. Geneva is a fertile field for missions due to the number of nationalities represented here. In the neighboring country of France there are cities that have no evangelical churches. Even though the law prohibits direct evangelism, we have been



able to make many personal contacts and invite people to come to Jesus.

When the pandemic forced us to abandon church fellowship in 2020, we stayed connected by using video. My wife and I visited members and ministered communion in individual homes. We are slowly returning to some normalcy, and we hope to soon return to our beautiful sanctuary downtown.

On behalf of El-Shadai Free Lutheran Church in Geneva I want to thank you for this opportunity to share about our ministry. Please join with us in prayer that we might grow numerically and spiritually to be a light to the nations.

Fiuri, a former lay pastor in Campo Largo, Brazil, serves El-Shadai Free Lutheran Church in Geneva, Switzerland. Translated by Becky Abel.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor John Kiehl was installed June 6 at Spencer Creek Lutheran, Eugene, Ore., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating.

Kyle Smith, a 2021 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, was ordained June 20 at Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Cokato, Minn., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating.

Members of **Amazing Grace Free Lutheran**, Mitchell, S.D., have purchased a church building in Mount Vernon, S.D. The building was dedicated March 7, with Pastor Gary Jorgenson, AFLC assistant to the president, officiating.

Members of **Hope Free Lutheran**, Sisseton, S.D., have called **Pastor Bill Helland** to serve their congregation. Helland is rostered with the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

Coltin Cox, a 2021 graduate of FLBC, has accepted a position as youth director at United Lutheran, Laurel, Neb.

Regan Johnson, a 2017 graduate of FLBC, has accepted a position as youth director at Ruthfred Evangelical Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa. The position was held by Brandon Fouks, who will resign at the end of July.



Digital Ambassador

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MAY MEMORIALS

Bible College

Verlys Homme
Rose Stoerzinger
Ruth Claus
Helen Jones
Millie Strand
Jerome Rice

Home Missions

Jerome Rice

Parish Education

Millie Strand
Harlan Dyrud

Seminary

Judy Fugleberg
Irene Westby

WMF

Beverly Heggen
Jerome Rice
Merna Picsek
Joyce Larson

... in honor of

Bible College

Pastor Wade
Mobley



Members of the Alaska Barnabas team (right) spent the second week of June in Ekwok, where they taught VBS and handed out Bibles (left) during the Sunday service.

Alaska team begins summer ministry

Four young adults are spending the summer in Alaska, serving with AFLC Home Missions as they teach weekly vacation Bible school (VBS) in rural villages served by the Alaska Mission. The Alaska Barnabas team members include Katy Meester from Valley City, N.D., Carl and Emily Juhl from Fergus Falls, Minn., and Heather Hansen from Naknek, Alaska.

Starting in early June, the team headed out to their first of nine weekly trips to rural villages reached only by airplane. Each week, the team packs all of its food, as well as VBS curriculum and crafts, puppets, and clothing. They load a six-seater airplane called the Cherokee 6, which is owned by the Alaska Mission and flown by Pastor Jeremy Crowell. Their first week was spent in Ekwok, a nearby village to Naknek, the mission's center and home to the ministry.

"Kids keep on coming back to VBS," wrote Hansen, who has spent five summers serving on the VBS team. "The kids were so eager and excited to learn about how to read the Bible."

The team spends the week in the rural village, teaching VBS in the morning and afternoons, and often reaching out to teens in the evenings. In Ekwok, the week culminated in a Sunday service in which they gave kid-friendly Bibles to a number of children.

"We are praying that those Bibles are ones that will be read," said Hansen.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-May 31, 2021

FUND	REC'D IN MAY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$24,526	\$174,126	\$161,654
Evangelism	6,265	58,620	42,065
Youth Ministries	13,038	85,488	45,464
Parish Education	14,383	70,729	56,206
Seminary	25,244	133,908	126,252
Bible College	48,608	202,234	160,531
Home Missions	71,750	206,144	131,647
World Missions	19,001	192,631	162,129
Personal Support	51,399	377,439	334,252
TOTALS	\$274,214	\$1,501,318	\$1,220,200

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

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

What is the heart of our fellowship? Those of us with roots in the former Lutheran Free Church were often reminded that the heart was our college and seminary, and one of the strong encouragements to merge was the supposed benefits that this institution would surely gain as part of a much larger church body.



Pastor Robert Lee

Some have followed this reasoning over the years by suggesting that our Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary are the heart of our fellowship today. This is an error, for such institutions, important though they are to the life of a church family, should never be called the heart.

This is true, also, for the work of missions. Brazil is our oldest missionary endeavor, and the fellowship there has been blessed with a campus in Campo Mourão, Paraná, where workers continue to be trained for kingdom service. But the school, the infant home, the Bible camp are not the heart of that work, either.

Professor Georg Sverdrup, father of the Free Lutheran movement in America, wrote the following:

The task of missions is, therefore, not simply to get a soul saved here and there, but to establish congregations of the converted which will conduct the same work through Word and Sacrament as is now standard practice in the so-called Christian lands.¹

Notice, please, the importance of Word and Sacrament. In another essay, Sverdrup wrote that it is “the use of the Word and Sacraments that constitutes a congregation in the biblical sense.”²

The heart of the AFLC, therefore, is not our headquarters in Plymouth, Minn., with all its officers, directors, boards, and committees. Nor is it our Bible college and

seminary. The heart of our fellowship is our local congregations, for it is there that the Word is preached and taught, with baptism and the Lord’s Supper rightly administered. Evangelism is central, of course, but it cannot nor should not be separated from congregational life. The local congregation, at home or abroad, is where the action is in God’s plan.

I recall some of our discussions when serving on the Ambassador Institute committee several years ago. It was a real thrill to hear of the open doors for our program of orality training and the growing number of men and women graduating from it. Yet we were continually reminded that the primary result of our mission efforts must be the birth and growth of local congregations.

The reason that our church fellowship exists is to serve the Lord by serving congregations, assisting them to do together what one congregation usually cannot do best alone ... such as missions and schools, for example. A congregation is not an arm of the Church; in the purest biblical sense, a congregation is the Church, “the right form of the Kingdom of God on earth” (Fundamental Principle 1).

How easy it can be in the passing of time for organizations and institutions, created to serve the congregations, to start to see the congregations as serving them, cash cows created to pray and pay, and excusing this error by claiming to be serving the Lord.

A fresh vision of the centrality of the congregation in God’s plan is needed by our missions and all other common endeavors, a vision that is born in the pages of Holy Scripture. (I state this as an obvious fact, not a criticism.) A congregation is the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:27), His dwelling

place and His instrument. A congregation is also the Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27), and “from this fact its freedom derives,” Sverdrup taught.³ There are instances, of course, where Scripture verses may refer to both the congregation and the universal Church, but I believe that it is significant to note that some are found in letters to a particular congregation (Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, etc.) and deserve to be interpreted in that light.

Each congregation would benefit from a fresh vision, too, of its awesome place in God’s plan, in a day where there is widespread disrespect on the part of society in general, and even at times among professing believers. A renewed concern for the meaning of the congregation was a mark of revival in the past and may even be a sign of the Spirit’s moving today. God grant it!

The heart of our fellowship is our local congregations, for it is there that the Word is preached and taught, with baptism and the Lord’s Supper rightly administered.

¹ Georg Sverdrup, “The Growth of Missions.” *The Sverdrup Journal*, Volume 5, p. 49.

² Georg Sverdrup, “What is the Congregation?” *The Sverdrup Journal*, Volume 2, p. 40.

³ Georg Sverdrup, “A Chosen People.” *The Sverdrup Journal*, Volume 2, p. 55.

association retreat center

VOLUNTEERING AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

BY KIRK RAUTIO

Volunteers and volunteerism cannot be appreciated enough. Nor can appreciation be expressed in a way that fully covers how one feels when you are on the receiving end of gracious help.

Our staff recently hosted a Family Work Weekend at the Association Retreat Center near Osceola, Wis. We host this event every year at the ARC, and as the name implies, guests stay for a free weekend at our camp and in exchange they work on many projects to get the property ready for the summer season. Projects include painting, planting, general maintenance, and spring cleaning.

As I walk around the campus on these weekends, I am still amazed at how much can be done by willing hands in such a short period of time. I am reminded of Paul's words to the Galatian church, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to

everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

As someone who is on the receiving end of the gift of volunteer work on a regular basis, I can tell you that it is humbling and an honor to be supported by individuals of all ages and abilities. I encourage you to volunteer, in any capacity, anywhere you can, as often as you can. The impact you have on the location and the people you are with will be felt immediately. While you are there the Holy Spirit is working, as well. Friendship evangelism is the easiest and most effective way of showing Christ's love to others. Your presence and Christ-centered personality is contagious to all who experience it. Go, volunteer, and spread Christ's love.

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

