

A young man with a beard, wearing a dark blue t-shirt, light blue denim shorts, a black and white baseball cap, and black sneakers, is sitting on a large, weathered tree stump. He is looking down and to the left. The background shows a lush green forest valley with rolling hills and a few buildings visible in the distance. A large, tall pine tree is on the left side of the frame.

THE 

# LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

SEPTEMBER 2021

## Restored

AFLC YOUTH MINISTRY



## THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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# PRAYING FOR RAIN

BY RACHEL MATTSON

**I** have always loved rain. The sound it makes on top of a roof, the excuse it gives to stay inside and read a book, the puddles it provides to boot-wearing adventurers, the refreshment it gives to a sweaty face, and the nourishment it provides to the ground. I have always loved rain.

Over the past year I've gained a new insight into the beauty and necessity of rain. You see, I moved from the big city to a small farming community after I married a farmer, enhancing my love for rain all the more. It still accomplishes all my favorite things listed above, but now I've come to see it as something far more precious, helping the crops to grow so that my farming family can survive financially. Rain is tied to our livelihood. I've always loved rain because of its beauty, but now I love and appreciate it for the way it nourishes and provides growth to the plants on which we depend.

This is why the verses from Isaiah 55:9-10 have become more deeply understood in my mind and a little sweeter to my heart. They say, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my Word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

Just as rain fulfills the yearning desire of a

farmer for his crops, so, too, the Word of God accomplishes that for which it is sent, to show the truth of who God is and who we are. I've never yearned so much for rain as I have this year because of my changed role in becoming a farmer's wife and because we have seen hardly any rain this year. My heart longs to see those droplets come from the sky so that the seeds planted yield a fantastic crop.

But I've been convicted of something in the process. How much more should I be longing for the living and abiding Word of God to rain down on my heart and change it for the purposes and plans that God has for me? For that's what He promises: that His words will change our stubborn, sinful hearts into moldable hearts that yearn after God. Hearts that want to know and love God more than anything. Hearts that understand that our eternal home far outweighs the joys of what we see on earth.

As I continue to pray for rain, my prayer also includes a cry for my own life. The cry that my heart would long for Christ and His Word, and that my heart would burst forth with joy in being changed by the powerful, true, and unchanging Word of Christ! Time spent in His Word is never wasted.

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

When we are out of sympathy with the young, then  
I think our work in this world is over.

—George MacDonald

Accepting a personal, caring God comes first; in  
coming to know Him, one learns what is embodied  
in propositional truths.

—Merton Strommen

Really, a young Atheist cannot guard his faith too  
carefully. Dangers lie in wait for him on every side.

—C.S. Lewis

When I was young, I was sure of many things; now there are only two things of  
which I am sure: one is that I am a miserable sinner; and the other, that Christ is  
an all-sufficient Savior. He is well-taught who learns these two lessons.

—John Newton

It's not about being perfect. We will always be on a  
journey of growing closer to God.

—Tim Tebow

There is restoration on the other side of this. God wants to restore things in you, around you, and through you.

~Eric Samuel Timm

By Ruth Gunderson

# Perspective & Pruning

It was only one night. One-hundred and nine minutes, to be exact. But those minutes were full of Word-fueled, gospel-centered, and hope-restoring promises for a generation of teens who have lost many of the touchstone life events they grew up expecting to experience—graduations, family reunions, sporting events, and camps.

Granted, one night—one measly hour and 49 minutes—cannot make up for the pandemic-fueled losses of the last 19 months. But perhaps the gospel-centered, Word-driven message that night would remind them of the One who knew these months would come and promised to walk with them through the losses. And, even more, promised to use these losses to restore them to a right relationship with Him.

That one night was held July 7, in the middle of the previously planned 2021 FLY Convention—now postponed to 2023. The free event, open in person to high school juniors and seniors, was livestreamed to youth groups around the country. It featured many of the aspects of the FLY Conventions that students love—live worship music, a student testimony, and an engaging message. But instead of the lofty heights of the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colo., students gathered on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College in Plymouth, Minn., approximate elevation 955 feet above sea level. And instead of 1,100 students jammed into the Longhouse, a smattering of some 30 teens were well spaced in the chapel's cushioned chairs.

There was a lot that was different about FLY One-Night. But one thing didn't change: God was there, as He always is. And it was His enduring faithfulness which was the theme of the night, as speaker and artist Eric Samuel Timm challenged teens to consider how God is using this moment to restore His creation.

Timm, who was a featured artist and speaker



at the 2015 FLY Convention (Identity), brought his characteristic humor and easy rapport with teens as he equated the pandemic to a childhood experience with a shark, a moment he vividly remembers every time he gets into the water.

“Metaphorically, this has been that shark moment,” said Timm, who then encouraged students, “There is restoration on the other side of this. God wants to restore things in you, around you, and through you.”

But there are two factors necessary for restoration, he said: perspective and pruning.

Timm launched into his talk by illuminating three Scripture passages. The first, Ezra 3:10-13, recounted the disparate

reactions of the remnant of Israel as they celebrated the foundation of the new temple.

“Some people were cheering, and some people were tearing,” said Timm. “You’ve got these two perspectives of the same event.”

To illustrate how paramount perspective is to restoration, Timm used a formula: E [event] + R [reaction] + F [faithfulness of God] = O [outcome]. Since you cannot control the event, and as God is always faithful, the only element in the formula that can change is your reaction.

“How you respond to the event will determine the outcome of that event,” Timm explained. “So, what are you going to do on the other side



of this event that God has been faithful through? You get to decide. We all get to decide.”

He challenged students to react in gratefulness to God, who has provided the many resources they enjoy: food, family, friends, home, and even their very breath.

“To choose to be grateful is to choose the path of great restoration,” he said.

But at the same time, Timm acknowledged that life is full of hard things like anxiety and depression (see pages 6-7).

“But know where they are rooted. They are rooted in worry, and they are rooted in fear,” he said. “Jesus said don’t worry, don’t fear, because He knows what we need.”

His second Scripture passage came from Luke 12:54-56, which he used to highlight

the necessity of recognizing the weirdness of the season we are in, to, in effect, “interpret the present time.”

“We are meant to be in relationship,” he said, noting how teens have had to live much of the last 19 months separated from friends and family. “We think we can get the same discipleship out of a can. It’s impossible. You have to be in the proximity of people. Jesus is saying you have to recognize the season.”

Often that recognition leads to the realization that God is using difficult seasons to prune away areas in our lives so that we can grow and produce fruit.

“Pruning is paramount for restoration,” he said, referring to the last Scripture passage from

John 15:1-6. “It’s not your job to produce the fruit. It’s your job to stay connected to the vine. And God will produce the fruit through you.”

How God prunes often depends on what needs to be cut away. To illustrate, Timm used a student volunteer to hold up a tree branch. First, Timm used scissors to cut away little branches.

“Sometimes it is just little stuff that God’s Word is trimming away at you,” he said, but, “His truth refuses to leave you there.”

He brought out hedge clippers and cut away bigger parts of the tree branch, and finally, a chainsaw. “I’m telling you that in this moment, in your life, it’s not scissors that He’s

OPPOSITE PAGE: Teens had a chance to chat with Eric Samuel Timm after the livestream event. Daniel Keinanen talks with Zofeyah Unverzagt, who gave her testimony during the event.

**E + R + F = O**

Event  
+  
Reaction  
+  
Faithfulness of God  
=  
Outcome



been trimming with, it’s not a hedge clipper, either. There have been these moments where I think God has really been using the chainsaw on us.”

But after the pruning, growth happens. Timm turned to his canvas and painted a tree stump. Out of the stump, small branches were growing new life.

“When God shows up with the scissors or the chain saw, embrace those things. Because on the other side of a stump they grow new trees,” he said. “On the other side of this God is doing something that you just don’t see right now. But He will not waste anything.”

*Gunderson, managing editor, is a member of Living Hope, Rogers, Minn.*

I just had to remind myself that  
when life is good, God is good.  
And when life is bad, God is good.  
~Zofeyah Unverzagt

By Dr. Jason Norlein

# Getting Back to Normal

Perhaps you are a parent, youth worker, youth pastor, or concerned adult and are wondering how you can help young people get “back to normal” as this pandemic prayerfully comes to an end. This article aims to help answer this question by examining some of the prominent psychological concerns that have come from almost 19 months of coping with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research has suggested that, because of the pandemic, there has been a marked increase in mental health concerns among people of all ages. Perhaps the most alarming increase is among youths ages 12-25. Visits to emergency departments across the country for concerns related to depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (thinking) are up more than 30 percent since the start of the pandemic for persons in this age range. Nationally, there is an estimated 50 percent increase in suicidal ideation among youths when comparing data from July 2019 to July 2020, during the height of Covid-19 restrictions. The impact of physical distancing, staying at home, and relying on virtual replacements for human interaction is thought to be the leading cause for these psychological concerns.

As a psychologist working on a large military installation, I work predominantly with young soldiers ages 18-25. I have seen these issues firsthand and know that the struggle is real. However, it is not always easy to detect.

Young people are by nature resilient and

able to adapt to new situations. Developmentally, they do this every day. They may not show the level of depression or anxiety they feel as they are physically disconnected from their close friends. Some may not even be aware that they are “feeling” it. Additionally, they may be uncomfortable talking about thoughts of suicide if they feel those with whom they confide will not understand.

Since we know that God created people not only to be in relationship with Him, but in relationship with others, it is understandable that when

people lack this ability the natural and normal reaction is depression. Therefore, it is extremely important for concerned adults to engage young people with an understanding heart and let them know it is a normal reaction to feel lonely, to be depressed, and to have thoughts of suicide. Concerned adults can do this by asking direct questions, expressing a desire to listen, and helping young people find the words they need to explain how they feel.

One result of the need for physical distancing during the





If you encounter a young person who needs additional professional care and support, there are many mental health professionals with specialty training who can assist. Your local pastor and your local pediatrician (or primary care provider) likely have good referrals. Two other resources to be aware of are the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 and the Crisis Text Line available by texting “HOME” to 741741.

pandemic has been an increase in the use of technology. Arguably, our youths have been the most impacted by this, and not in just a positive way. Most schools have had to rely on virtual learning. While the data is still being collected and analyzed, early results of standardized testing has shown a decrease in academic performance. Child psychologists have commented that adolescents learn best when they can physically interact with both their teachers and other students. They tend to speak more, ask more thought-provoking questions, and are far less distracted during in-person learning. The use of virtual learning has made it easier for teens to disengage from the learning process.

At the time this article is being written, the CDC is recommending that schools resume in-person learning.

It appears that most schools are moving in this direction. This presents an opportunity for concerned adults to help students prepare for this transition. As many youths have grown accustomed to less engagement, the return to physical engagement can bring about social anxiety in some. Being understanding with the goal of normalizing this experience can help students as they settle back into in-person learning. Simply telling youths that they “will be okay,” “hang in there,” and other platitudes may not be enough. Listening to their fears and concerns and responding with understanding is key. Challenging them to see how God is working in them and how He is preparing them for new adventures can also help provide needed direction.

Our youths are engaging in virtual relationships more and more because of physical distancing. Multiplayer online gaming is more popular now than ever. Facetime, Google Duo, and Zoom have replaced many trips to coffee shops, bookstores, and malls. This very convenient way of interacting is likely to remain in our post-pandemic world. As mentioned, however, adolescents need the physical interactions with others as they grow and mature. For optimal development, concerned adults should help youths understand this and set limits on the use of technology.

While it may seem like the solutions offered regarding how to help youths get “back to normal” are quite simple (i.e., have a listening heart, be understanding), this does

not mean that it will be easy. Oftentimes, simple things are difficult. As you strive to be physically, emotionally, and spiritually available to youths, you may be tempted to respond curtly and quickly. What youths need, however, are concerned adults who will spend time listening to their concerns, understanding them, providing a safe space for them, and someone who will pray with them as they struggle.

*Norlein is a clinical psychologist who assesses and treats soldiers stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C.*

# Growing In Faith

By Faith Hale

Over the last few years people have asked me to tell them my story. Honestly, I simply did not know what they meant by “story.” Did they mean how I grew up? How I came to live with my aunt and uncle? Or was it my testimony? I have come to realize that all those things played a role in how I grew in faith and completely gave myself to Jesus.

When I was 7, I was placed in foster care for the first time with my aunt and uncle, Debbie and Dean Feistner. Two years later I was back living with my parents. I later came back into the foster system in 2017, when I was 11 years old, and have been with my aunt and uncle ever since. During that two-year period with my parents, I changed a lot. I hung out with the wrong crowd and did some wrong things. I completely steered myself on the wrong path. The dark path. The path that is difficult to get off and where I had completely cut Jesus out of my life. I ended up with depression and was in and out of the hospital. I did not really know my place and purpose in life.

In 2018, I went to my very first Bible camp at Pickerel Lake. I went there not really knowing myself and not really knowing Jesus, for that matter. During that week, I met the most amazing people and not only built good friendships, but also was beginning to build a relationship with God. By the time the week was over, I did not want to go home because of how the Holy Spirit had moved me. I realized that God could do miraculous things and I want Him to be in control of my life.

I was devastated when Covid-19 had entered the United States and the world completely shut down. People were severely affected by this virus and were scared to move on with their lives. I kept praying and praying that it would all be over soon, and never thought it would still be affecting us today. I did not end up going to Pickerel Lake Lutheran Bible Camp in 2020, even though it wasn't canceled. I was a little upset about it but stayed positive. But this summer, I did go to the senior

high camp at Pickerel, which was absolutely amazing. I also served as staff at the junior high camp. It was exciting to help and to watch kids like myself grow in their faith and love in Christ.

I have gone to Campus Days at the Free Lutheran Bible College in Plymouth, Minn., and made the decision that I will attend there in the fall of 2023 after I graduate. I also attended the Annual Conference there this summer and once again met the most amazing people who truly love Jesus. Every time I visit the FLBC campus I want to attend there more and more. That is the kind of community I want to be surrounded by—people who love Jesus and trustworthy people I can talk to about faith anytime.

Being around people who love the Lord, like those at camp and at FLBC, has helped me realize where I want to be in life and what I want to do with it, and that is to serve the Lord with everything I have, to give myself to Him completely, and to let Him use me in any way He chooses. I now know that serving Him is my place and purpose in life. It may have been PLLBC and FLBC that

have helped me get back on the right path and realize my place, but I truly do believe that our Savior Jesus Christ has been right here with me the whole time while I was and still am walking the path of growing in faith.

*Hale, a junior in high school, is a member of Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Madison, S.D.*



# Youth Ministry Adapts

When the 2021 FLY Convention was postponed, many AFLC congregations were left without a plan for their summer youth ministry programs. In the wake of the announcement, it would have been understandable if our congregations had cut their losses and began planning for 2023. Instead, three ad hoc summer camps sprung up as youth ministers and volunteers joined forces with districts near and far to use their time and resources and salvage a summer camping experience. In the following pages, you can read about several new camps: Thrive (California), Beyond FLY (Montana), and Onward (Wisconsin).



How did a youth group from Maryland end up at a California retreat? This was a question our group answered over and over as the planning for a substitute retreat came about this summer after the FLY Convention was postponed. While it may sound odd or confusing, it's actually an amazing story of the Lord working.

Back in January, we spent a week in Arizona at a Home Missions retreat. We serve as Home Missions church plant assistants at Christ Community Church in Williamsport, Md. While we were in Mesa, Ariz., we had joked with Pastor Eric Johnson about holding a retreat with his group in Arizona since the FLY Convention had been postponed. The three of us laughed, but then realized that this was actually a doable task and something worth looking into.

The planning began, starting with picking a theme. We chose to go through Romans 11 where Paul writes about being grafted into God's family and how to continue in that gift that He has given us. Our theme quickly transformed into the "Thrive" retreat, with speakers such as Pastor Jason Holt, director of AFLC Youth Ministries.

With our speakers and a theme picked out, we just needed to figure out where to stay. The three of us looked for an Airbnb in the Mesa area and checked hotels, but nothing seemed right. The next concern was getting the Mesa students excited about a retreat that was taking place at

# God At Work

By Moriah Graham and Jessica Nikunen

their home church and what that would look like. Though these were obstacles being thrown at us, we pressed on.

We were nailing down the smaller details for the retreat when Alex Monseth, from Good Shepherd Free Lutheran in Camarillo, Calif., contacted us and asked if he could join us and move the retreat to a camp in southern California. From that point on, we continued to see how all the small details we still needed to plan would come together with the help of Alex.

God had a much greater plan than we did. Together with Pastor Eric and Jason, we planned devotions, morning

apologetic sessions, and evening sessions. Each of us would lead small groups, Katy Dahl would lead worship, and Alex would lead team building games.

The more detailed we got with our plans for the week, the more our groups got excited about the retreat. God provided funding, leaders, and students for the week. There wasn't a detail that wasn't already covered by prayer and planned out by the Lord.

*Graham and Nikunen are Home Missions church plant assistants working at Christ Community Church, Williamsport, Md. Camp photos by Pastor Eric Johnson.*

# Made to Thrive

By Alex Monseth

“The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”  
Romans 13:11

My favorite artist, Jon Foreman, penned these words in a song of his, “Feels like I travel, but I never arrive. I want to thrive, not just survive.”

Oftentimes, our younger generation’s endeavor to adulthood is referred to with phrases such as “trying to get through high school,” “staying afloat in this crazy sea of culture,” and so forth. Simply avoiding the downfall of faith and staying somewhat connected to a local church can be the goal, rather than a call to see and know the vibrant beauty of the love of Christ on the cross and the radical response it produces in our hearts.

At Thrive Youth Retreat this summer in California’s San Bernardino Mountains, students from California, Maryland, and Arizona were given a picture of a thriving life through Romans 11-14. We read about the life of a believer who is abiding in the vine of Christ as a member of God’s family. Other sessions showed us the importance of understanding current cultural worldviews, their conflicts with the gospel, and how believers can be discerning and bring the hopeful light of Christ to others when faced with these messages of the world. And yet other sessions took the group into a scriptural understanding of suffering, unanswered prayer, and running the race of this life as Paul describes in the epistles.

They were difficult topics, but they pushed these youths toward a Christian life of thriving in the grace of God, not just simply surviving the barrage of the world.

The Lord worked in mighty ways at the retreat as He always does where His Word is proclaimed. The “mountaintop faith” experience that accompanies a time away from regular life was visible in many ways. Praise God! However, our hope and prayer as students departed from camp was not that the feeling of being on top of the world would last for a handful of months or years. Rather, that students would know deeply the One who has conquered the world and that they would live thriving lives in the freedom of grace that has been won for us on the cross. Let us all seek to encourage others to live in this incredible reality won for us by Christ!

*Monseth is the youth and worship director at Good Shepherd Lutheran, Camarillo, Calif.*

# Going Beyond FLY

By Pastor Ryan Tonneson

When the 2021 FLY Convention was postponed, I went through the five stages of grief in rapid succession over the loss.

The denial and anger stages happened instantaneously and simultaneously: “No! They can’t cancel FLY! How dare they do this to our students!”

My depression lasted just a few seconds, “There’s nothing I can do about it anyway,” I thought.

Then I began to accept the reality of the situation and bargained with the FLY Committee—and with the Lord—“Okay, fine. You can take FLY this year. But if you do, we’re going to do something for our students; something that is beyond FLY.”

I immediately began brainstorming an event for our students, whose lives had already been significantly impacted by the pandemic.

A few days later, the deacons from Maranatha Free Lutheran, Glyndon, Minn., met, and we discussed the possibility of providing an alternative camp for our students. The deacons, along with members of our church council, wholeheartedly encouraged me to continue to explore options that were “beyond” FLY.

We knew, of course, that nothing can ever replace the FLY Convention in terms of scope and spiritual impact, but we also knew how much our students needed time away with God. Therefore, it quickly became our desire to provide an avenue for our students to connect with the Lord and enjoy fellowship with other students in a way they hadn’t been able to do in more than a year.

After an extensive location search, we settled on a United Methodist camp on Flathead Lake, near Kalispell, Mont. They happened to have the same week as the FLY Convention open—July 5-9—so it was a natural fit.

From the earliest planning stages, we desired Beyond FLY to be open to other congregations. So, we made an open invitation for other AFLC churches to join us. As Beyond FLY began, there

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Isaiah 41:10

were 101 registrations from eight different congregations. Pastors and youth leaders from these congregations led the students in worship and in study of the Word.

The theme, taken from Isaiah 41:10, was “Fear Not.”

Beyond FLY wasn’t a replacement for the FLY Convention, but students had the opportunity to connect with other believers, explore God’s beautiful creation, and deepen their relationship with the Lord, who calls us all to “Fear not!”

*Tonneson is the pastor of youth, young adults and families at Maranatha Free Lutheran, Glyndon, Minn.*



# Fear Not

By Isaiah Quanbeck

Before going to the Beyond FLY camp in Montana, I didn't know what to expect. But I did know that it's not often a youth worker takes it almost solely upon himself to create a high school Bible camp. But that's what Pastor Ryan Tonneson did. And, while the camp lacked the formidable planning of the FLY Convention, our time there ran smoothly. The spontaneous plans worked out in a moment went even better at times, allowing for more flexibility in the schedule. I can safely say that my week there was one of the most carefree weeks I've had at a camp, if not in my life.

Our days at camp started with a Bible study after breakfast. In between lunch and supper, we had free time for recreation. On one day, most of us went to Glacier National Park, and on another we went white water rafting on the Middle Fork of the Flathead River. In the evenings we had another Bible study session, a campfire, and then devotions in individual cabins. The cabins were vintage, being more than 70 years old. And the view of the mountains over Flathead Lake was beautiful.

The Bible study sessions taught me so much, but the friendships were the most encouraging and enjoyable part of the week. Although the camp was much smaller than at the FLY Convention, I still met many new people and strengthened old friendships. I believe that was the shared experience among everyone. I've found that the smaller the

camp, often the better you can get to know others.

I believe we are all searching for fellowship, especially considering the past year when we have been without it. But I think it has been especially hard for youth, as we are used to regularly spending time with others but have been blocked from doing so. Because of this, I believe teens have been looking for events to attend at which they would have that communion with others. Increased attendance at recent AFLC youth events, such as FLY Beyond and FLBC's spring Campus Days, has shown this to be true. The news that the FLY Convention was canceled was very hard for a lot of us as we had anticipated the fellowship for numerous months.

At Beyond FLY we greatly received that fellowship. I am thankful for the friendships I made and the encouragement they gave me.

The theme of the camp was "Fear Not." We were encouraged to remember that we never have to fear because God has a plan greater and better than what we see. The theme was fitting as throughout this last year's difficulties, God has still caused good things to happen, including this camp.

*Quanbeck is a member of Maranatha Free Lutheran, Glyndon, Minn.*

# Press Onward

By Kirk Rautio

When my wife, Ruth, and I heard that the 2021 FLY Convention was being postponed for two years, we both immediately felt a call on our hearts to do something, anything, to fill a small portion of the void that was created for many kids this summer. Later that evening, while we were waiting for our eldest boy to get out of wrestling practice, we both decided to hash out a plan.

We prayed and talked about what our ideal programming would look like and who we would love to have lead worship and teach. We realized it was possible to pull together a plan for a youth camp. We just needed paper, mostly because my memory was not on target that evening. Ruth found a scrap piece of cardboard on the back floor of our truck, and we wrote out a plan. We paused, prayed again, and made calls right there in the parking lot.

Everyone we called on our initial list confirmed within a day of being asked. I remember feeling overwhelmed and overjoyed at their willingness to come together for this camp. From the start, God took over. All the details fell into place. In fact, the lack of stress was almost unnerving. We knew this was His camp.

We hosted about 100 teens June 27-July 1 at Onward, our senior high Bible camp at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis. Our theme was taken from Philippians 3:14, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." We had morning Bible studies, afternoon recreation, worship, and evening sessions.

During the week hearts were broken, tears were shed, relationships were challenged, and souls were pressed. By the end of the week eternal friendships were forged, hearts were mended, tears of joy were shed, callings were heard, and many souls were saved. The Holy Spirit was present and the whole camp experienced it. There are moments that I have trouble explaining the experience and the impact this camp has had on my life. Not only were the students impacted, but the adults, speakers, and worship leaders were impacted, as well. It was nothing short of the presence of God.

During the closing praise and worship time I was blessed with the opportunity to send our campers off. I showed them a picture of the scrap piece of cardboard and asked them if they knew what it was. A couple

kids yelled out, "Onward!" They were right. I gave them a brief nutshell of the evening that the plan for this camp came into reality. I wanted them to understand that a call was heard and answered. Everything that happened during camp was good. I challenged them to make this event in time their scrap of cardboard and answer their call. I also challenged them to take a moment and imagine what God can do with all their scraps of cardboard collectively. If He could make a week like this happen with just one scrap, imagine the beauty and impact He can make from all of ours together. So, "Get out there and press onward!"

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

# A New Life

By Caitlyn Bostaph

On July 3, 2021, I did something I never thought I'd do—I spoke to my mother for the first time in three and a half years.

As I was growing up, my relationship with my mother wasn't great. In fact, it wasn't even okay. As for my father, I didn't get to see him that much. As an airline pilot, he's always somewhere foreign. My parents divorced when I was just about 7, so I've never truly experienced what it's like to have married parents.

Since my father wasn't around, I lived with my mother. Things took a turn for the worse in April 2018. I had just been diagnosed with depressive disorder, anxiety, and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). My relationship with my mother was getting worse each day. One day, I had enough and decided that I needed space from her, so I cut all forms of communication. However, I still had to live with her.

It's important to note that I was born, raised, baptized, and confirmed a Catholic, but was never close with God or even present in my faith until earlier this year. My sister and I walked into church one night and I felt out of place. A man approached me and asked if I had been a VBS helper in the past. I had, and we started talking. He told me that God

was working in my life, even when I stopped believing. It was difficult to believe him because I always wondered, if God was real, why would I suffer? Why would He put me through this?

So, for months I attended youth group and church, but I still didn't feel connected.

That was until I went to Onward Camp this summer. To be truthful, the only reason I was excited for the trip was because I had never been to the Midwest, and I wanted to say I had been there. But when I started to listen to people express the happiness they had in their faith, it made me want to dive right into creating a relationship with God.

While listening to some girls' testimonies during a small group setting, I was compelled to get up and share my testimony with the entire camp. Looking back, I realize that it wasn't me who wanted to share my story. Rather, it was the Holy Spirit working inside of me. I

had no clue that walking on that stage and sharing my story with others would change my life for the better. While speaking, I was absolutely terrified of being judged, but the response I got from people afterward was one of the greatest gifts I've ever gotten. What a gift to be included, feel seen, and most of all know that I am loved by so many, including God Himself.

That week at camp was the most influential week of my life, and seeing others being happy in their faith made me realize I needed a change for the better. I needed my mother. Because of the relationships I created at Onward Camp, I was inspired to grow in my faith. I knew if I wanted to do that, I also needed to work on my relationship with my mother.

I realize that God is real, and I am so loved no matter how flawed I may be.

*Bostaph is a member of Ruthfred Free Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa.*



# Pickrel Lake

Pickrel Lake Lutheran Bible Camp, Grenville, S.D., hosted two weeks of youth camps this summer with the theme of “Win Win” from Philippians 1:21. Senior high week was June 27-July 2 with Pastor Benjamin Baker (Traer, Iowa) and Pastor Matthew Nelson (Radcliffe, Iowa) as speakers. Junior high week was July 25-30 with Pastor Aaron Olson (Arlington, S.D.) and Pastor Ryan Patenaude (Kindred, N.D.) as speakers.



# Slim Buttes

This summer members of Slim Buttes Free Lutheran Church, Reva, S.D., had a record of 60 children at our vacation Bible school. What a tremendous week we had!

We live in a sparsely populated ranching area, but our community loves the fact we have VBS and that we are able to get a summer team to come here from the Free Lutheran Bible College. Hats off to members of the Cornerstone team, who were committed to giving up their summer to live out of a suitcase, drive thousands of miles, stay with a variety of people, and meet hundreds of children. And most of all, teach the Word of God, which never comes back void. We also had a great team of helpers from our church who I call our Labor of Love team. Everyone worked together.

The children who have come in the past still sing the songs and quote the verses they have learned in years past. I am a substitute teacher in Buffalo, S.D., and have kids asking me all winter when “that Sunday school” will happen. What a joy to see that they are wearing their



t-shirts to school and teaching their classmates the songs and the verses they have learned. I have the privilege of singing and quoting the verses right along with them. What a witness these children have become.

Two weeks after VBS, Reva held its annual Turtle Races, and a little girl told me she was disappointed we didn't have VBS the second week. She didn't want it to end. She said she will be back next year. God works in so many ways. We also have some children who came to

VBS with at least one who parent doesn't go to or want to have anything to do with church. But those parents were there for the program. Amen!

We just want to thank our Bible College for having this effective evangelism tool through the summer teams and pray that this program continues to grow.

*Submitted by Linda Mohagen, Slim Buttes Free Lutheran, Reva, S.D.*



# FLY

FREE  
LUTHERAN  
YOUTH

## FLY Federation meeting held

On July 9, FLY Committee President Pastor Gideon Johnson presided over an online video meeting of the FLY Federation. The FLY Committee called for this special meeting earlier this spring after the 2021 convention was postponed. The Federation meeting was promoted in advance by a letter to congregations, via FLY social media, and during the FLY One-Night livestream. Since the FLY Federation is defined in the FLY Constitution as all youths, pastors, and adult advisors of all AFLC congregations, the online video meeting format was utilized to reach a national audience.

A resolution was passed that made the 2023 FLY Committee the members of the 2021 committee with their same roles. It also included adopting the four years (2019-2023) between conventions as a single term of service for these officers. A second motion extended the existing FLY Nominating Committee to the same responsibilities leading up to the next convention. The national youth gathering dates are still in process, but FLY is expected to be held in July 2023.

## CANCEL THE ‘C’ WORD

BY PASTOR GIDEON JOHNSON

**P**erhaps you’ve found yourself confused as to why the 2021 FLY Committee has and continues to communicate that the 2021 FLY Convention was postponed, not canceled (there’s that “c” word). Using the words from the famous speech by Luther Heggs (played by Don Knotts) in *The Ghost and Mr. Chicken*, “Let me clarify this.”

Members of the 2021 FLY Committee have continually considered and called the 2021 convention “postponed” instead of “canceled,” not as a sort of backlash against cancel culture or because it makes us feel better about ourselves and the hand we’ve been dealt. Rather, we believe that to cancel would mean starting over at square one. That means coming up with a new theme, new branding, new speaker lineup, new contracts, new registration rates, etc.

Now, bear in mind, some of these details and elements will be tweaked, overhauled, or begun anew for 2023; culture and specific needs change, after all. However, what we can retain from the 2021 planning process will be carried

over to 2023. So, by way of example, our theme “Restored” will carry over. Our hope is that some of the workshop speakers and evening speakers will carry over. Though additional work and consideration will take place, many of the electives that we prepared for will likely carry over. As was resolved at the FLY Federation Meeting on July 9, the 2021 FLY Committee (with a few new members by appointment) will carry over, becoming the 2023 FLY Committee. The registration rates for 2021 will carry over. And, most certainly, our prayerful hopes and expectations for 2021 will carry over and even increase.

So, although no one will condemn you or cancel your registration for FLY 2023 if you use the “c” word, members of the 2023 FLY Committee will continue to use the word “postponed” as we carry on to FLY 2023.

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*Johnson, who serves Hope Free Lutheran, Killdeer, N.D., is the president of the 2023 FLY Committee.*



## Students attend Summer Institute of Theology



Sixty-one students were on hand for the 2021 Summer Institute of Theology, held Aug. 2-6 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, Plymouth, Minn.

Featured speakers for the week were Dr. Bryan Chapell, who taught classes Monday through Wednesday morning, and Dr. Zac Hicks, who taught classes Wednesday afternoon through Friday. The theme for SIT was, "Christ-Centered Preaching and Teaching." Pastor Gary Jorgenson, assistant the AFLC president, taught a course on I and II Peter.



Students (middle left and right and above) filled up both large classrooms during the week-long institute, featuring teaching on Christ-centered preaching and teaching.



Featured speakers at the 2021 Summer Institute of Theology were Dr. Bryan Chapell (top), Dr. Zac Hicks (center), and Pastor Gary Jorgenson (above). Summer Institute attendees (top left).

# INTRODUCING BOARD MEMBERS

*“Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18).*

## **Linda Hensrud, communications secretary**

I was raised in a home where being involved at our country Lutheran church was what we did as a family and community. I was baptized and confirmed there, then graduated from Augsburg College in Minneapolis. Still holding onto my childhood dream of being a missionary, I headed to Australia to teach school, even though by then I was basically a Universalist.



When I came back to the United States, by God's amazing grace, I ended up living with a Christian education director who had a living faith, and I heard the real gospel message. Thinking that it was ostentatious to know whether or not I was going to heaven, I was given assurance through I John 5:13, “I write these

things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.” It was then that I encountered a real, living, and powerful Jesus!

I was 23 years old at the time and as I look back, I was part of the 1970s revival that was happening in the Minneapolis area. I was also in a young adult Bible study that helped me grow in my faith, and where I met Steve Papillon. After we were married, we raised our family and did ministry together for more than 40 years until he was graduated to heaven three years ago. As I have been recovering from that loss and wondering where and how I fit in anywhere without him, the Lord has truly been my comfort and strength, a real presence in this part of my life's journey.

Then as only my loving Lord could do, He brought me another godly husband, my daughter's father-in-law, whom I married a year ago. It's a sweet story and that includes joining yet another new church and community, Bethel Free Lutheran of Grafton, N.D. I'm learning anew how much my heavenly father loves and cares for me, and how He is sovereign in all circumstances, the Eternal Creator and yet my personal Savior.

## **Lavonne West, president**

I recently asked members of the WMF Board what they thought we were doing well. We are eternally grateful for the ladies who gather around the Word faithfully. We are thankful for each one who prays diligently and gives generously to support AFLC missions as well as the Bible College and



Seminary. We also pray for the AFLC's Parish Education department as they bring God's Word to our churches through their publications. We strive to be fiscally responsible for every penny given toward the general fund.

Some things still need improving, so, the work continues. I look ahead to the next three-year term with these goals in mind. First, a clear answer to the following questions could form a possible fresh vision statement—What is the WMF and why do we do what we do? Next, I want to make sure we provide an intentional invitation for women of all ages to engage in this adventure along with us. Can you be a “Grandmother Lois” and “Mother Eunice” to anyone? Let's practice what we preach. I know there are women who faithfully come alone to our churches. They may be single, widows, or have a spouse who isn't on the same page for Sunday time well spent. Some come with their grandkids.

We are blessed with strong women who pray, give, and “go into all the world” (Mark 16:15). I'm thinking of Jonni Sliver, AFLC missionary to Brazil, and others who inspire us to go. In this last year, we have been called to “guard what has been entrusted to your care” (I Timothy 6:20). By God's amazing grace, we “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14).

Thank you for electing such wonderful teammates for me along the way. They make the vision work.

## FLBC hosts annual Golf Scramble



The Free Lutheran Bible College hosted a Golf Scramble on July 30 at The Refuge Golf Course in Oak Grove, Minn. The annual event raises funds for scholarships for Bible College students. This year, a total of \$7,000 was raised. Above, Micah Johnson and his son, Noah, prep for a putt.



Golf Scramble participants (top) participated in a hole-in-one competition prior to heading out onto the links. Gwen and Jim Berge (above) led the train of golf carts out to the links. Carter Kneeland (left) watched his putt with the rest of his team, including Nate Crellin, Brad Bierle, and AJ Watland.

## Kalispell congregation celebrates 50 years



Members of Faith Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont., celebrated the congregation's 50th anniversary on July 17-18. Saturday's events included a dinner, concert, and service (above). Sunday's events included a morning service of thanksgiving and reception. Pictured (left) are current and former staff, including (front, from left) Heidi and Jon Nelson, Pastor Steve and Tracy Snipstead, (back) Pastor John Rieth, Kevin and Sarah Johnson, Emily and Tim Herset, and Ruth and Pastor Paul Kneeland. (Submitted)



# THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

BY PASTOR JOHN LEE

*"For since, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21).*

W

hat a gift we have in preaching repentance. I think of my father-in-law's admonition to me, as an experienced pastor to the inexperienced: "Preach the Word!"

And the words of my seminary professors echo in my ears, "The power is in the Word!"

I remember being so concerned in seminary about persuading people—using the right turn of phrase, making things interesting, confidently saying just the right thing to convince people to follow the Lord so that they could experience what I had—and then being shocked by Paul's "trembling" and "fear" (palpable fear, as I have felt) when he was with the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 2:3). I was shocked at his refusal to make use of "persuasive words" (2:4).

He gives us the reason, "that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (2:5). How often do we get wrapped up in reasonable or persuasive dictums, and how often are we blown from one opinion to another? Instead, we must build our lives on the firm foundation of God's Word.

What a difference it made in my ministry when the focus was turned from speechcraft

and worldly wisdom to the "demonstration of the Spirit and of [the] power" of God (2:4). Demonstration means showing, evidencing, and living in God's holy will and being clothed in God's own righteousness, freely applied to our record by Jesus. What freedom this knowledge brings! We are holy, royal priests (1 Peter 2:9), praising God for what He has done for us.

This semester, I am teaching two classes at SETELL, the seminary and Bible school in Campo Mourão, Brazil: I and II Corinthians, and Romans and Galatians. My call is to impress the sacred truths of God's Word onto the hearts and minds of Free Lutheran men and women.

I ask for prayer during a difficult time in Brazil. We recently lost Pastor Antonio (a father and husband) to Covid-19. He cared for our two Londrina congregations. Another congregation hundreds of miles away from everyone else has lost their pastor to overwork. Central, our first Brazilian Free Lutheran congregation, had died out and is gathering believers to begin again. We have difficulties in our home mission congregation of Ijuí and in a sixth congregation, too. Our Brazilian leaders tell me it is a tough time here in Brazil.

I pray that we would be faithful to our congregations' spiritual freedom as expressed in our Fundamental Principles rather than synodical pragmatism of pastoral chess. How we need the Spirit of the Lord to wield His Word! Who knows

what challenges we will face tomorrow?

We need faithful men and women of God to rise up and serve. Who will faithfully call the lost to repentance and share the gospel? Who will come help us gather God's people together? We do not want any more personalities, persuasive words, or projects to gather people. We need God's Word to do it, God's Word preached out of a living faith to call others to personal faith in Jesus.

Dear friends, implore our heavenly Father for workers in Brazil. Not just pastors, but workers. We need faithful, God-fearing biblical workers who are busy making disciples in God's field.

*Lee is an AFLC missionary in Campo Mourão, Brazil.*

## PEOPLE &amp; PLACES

**Pastor Frank Cherney** has resigned from serving Ebenezer Free Lutheran, Humboldt, Tenn. His future plans are uncertain.

**Pastor Peter Ward** is serving Maranatha Free Lutheran, Ulen, Minn., on a part-time basis, leading worship and visitation ministry.

**Gwen Haugen**, Crystal, Minn., has been appointed as the Minneapolis representative for the 2022 Nominating Committee. She replaces Beverly Enderlein, Plymouth, Minn., who stepped down.

**Pastor Ron Wick**, Sparta, Wis., has accepted a call to serve Holmes Evangelical Lutheran, Clarion, Iowa. Wick has been added to the AFLC Fellowship Roster.

**Pastor Patrick Charles**, a member of the AFLC fellowship roster, has resigned from Good Shepherd Lutheran, Pleasanton, Texas.

AFLC World Missions has hired **Madison Greven**, a 2018 graduate of the Free Lutheran Bible College, and a 2021 graduate of the University of Northwestern—St. Paul, as a full-time communications coordinator.

**Josh Fish**, a member of Calvary Free Lutheran, Everett, Wash., has joined the Alaska Mission, Naknek, Alaska, as the director of maintenance.

**Alex Monseth**, youth and worship director at Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Camarillo, Calif., has resigned. He has accepted a call to FaithPoint Lutheran Church (LCMC), New Prague, Minn.

## SD district to host Reawaken conference

A number of AFLC ministries will come together to host three AFLC *Reawakening to the Mission* conferences in various AFLC districts this fall, giving local districts a chance to meet with representatives from AFLC ministries. The events will feature presentations from representatives from the AFLC president's office, Evangelism and Discipleship, Home Missions, the Pastoral and Congregational Care Team (PACCT), and the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary.

The first conference will be held Saturday, Sept. 18, at Calvary Free Lutheran, Arlington, S.D. The day will be filled with encouraging and challenging messages centered on reawakening within evangelism and missions. There is no cost to attend. The day begins at 8 a.m. and concludes at 3 p.m., with breakfast and lunch provided for free.

Upcoming Reawakening Conferences include Oct. 16 in Roseau, Minn. and Nov. 20 in Arlington, Wash. For more information, contact Chanel Nelson (chanel.nelson@afcl.org) in the president's office with questions.



## Digital Ambassador

*The Lutheran Ambassador* is available online. Download the free Issuu app in the iTunes app store or Google Play and then search for and follow our magazine. It's free to read!

## Members appointed to 2023 FLY Committee

Three new members have been appointed to the 2023 FLY Committee, replacing members who were unable to extend their term to 2023. Sharon Rykhus, Sioux Falls, S.D., replaces Aaron Arneson as first vice president. Rykhus completed two terms on the AFLC Youth Board, serving as the liaison to the FLY Committee. Adam McCarlson will replace her as liaison. Caleb Holt, Fargo, N.D., replaces Cassie Moan, Williston, N.D., as the second vice president. Ruth Gunderson, Brooklyn Park, Minn., replaces Julia Pillman, Pipestone, Minn., as secretary.

## Kalispell church offers RV hook-ups

Members of Stillwater Free Lutheran, 1401 Church Drive in Kalispell, Mont., are nearing completion of an activity center, including RV hook-ups with shower accommodations. (No sewer connections.) The hook-ups are available for use. For more information, contact the church office at (406) 257-4614.

## JULY MEMORIALS

<b>AED</b>	Alma Lau
Deb Benson	Pastor Jerome
Gordon Twedt	Elness
<b>All Departments</b>	<b>Parish Education</b>
Deb Benson	Deb Benson
<b>Bible College</b>	<b>Seminary</b>
Deb Benson	Deb Benson
Dave Salvhus	<b>Vision</b>
Gordon Twedt	Kent Quanbeck
Bonnie Aasness	<b>WMF</b>
Ruth Claus	Deb Benson
<b>General Fund</b>	Timothy Lane
Deb Benson	Victoria Haabak
<b>Home Missions</b>	<b>World Missions</b>
Deb Benson	Vernon & Dorothy
Holly Matson	Russum
Gordon Twedt	

## AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-July 31, 2021

FUND	REC'D IN JULY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$31,098	\$242,123	\$245,005
Evangelism	9,911	79,220	57,029
Youth Ministries	14,739	107,840	65,199
Parish Education	23,212	117,575	77,291
Seminary	27,473	173,383	170,884
Bible College	35,822	255,562	207,354
Home Missions	97,254	333,103	202,493
World Missions	26,888	247,111	224,233
Personal Support	56,806	490,799	447,854
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$323,204</b>	<b>\$2,046,716</b>	<b>\$1,697,342</b>
For additional financial information for each department, go to <a href="http://www.afcl.org/giving">www.afcl.org/giving</a>			

# SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

There are times when something old could seem like something new.

During your editor's wandering through the story of the early years of the AFLC, it has been quite evident that there has been a great change from past



Pastor Robert Lee

to present in our youth ministry programming. The name has even changed, and the Luther League Federation has become FLY (Free Lutheran Youth), a label adopted by many (most?) of the local groups as

well, in which student leadership teams are often elected instead of officers. There were no salaried youth workers 60 years ago; the pastors, at times with parent volunteers, were responsible for coordinating this area of ministry. (When I taught the "Youth Work" course in our Bible school during the early '80s, this was still the most common arrangement.) AFLC National Youth Director Jason Holt says that today we have 25 full-time youth directors and at least that many serving part-time within our fellowship.

Biennial national conventions continue to be scheduled, but the scale and scope of the Estes Park, Colo., events are far beyond anything we might have imagined in the 1960s. National officers are still elected, and their main task may be the planning of the next convention. The structure that we inherited from the Lutheran Free Church, with district officers and conventions, was followed for many years, as it still is by the Women's Missionary Federation (WMF). The LFC national Luther League officers connected with their district counterparts, who sought to be the channels to the local league officers for program materials, convention information, etc. It's hard to know how this organization actually played out on the local level, but one cannot help but be impressed. Today this may have totally disappeared, except in part within

those districts where there is a Bible camp.

The words of the writer of Ecclesiastes struck me as a caution while this editorial was in the process of preparation: "Do not say, 'Why is it that the former days were better than these?' for it is not from wisdom that you ask about this" (7:10). Older folks sometimes tend to look back with a more positive perspective than we apply to the present, and sometimes we just plain forget. Just because that's the way we used to do it, doesn't mean that it was better.

Yet could there be some things old in youth ministry that might deserve a new look?

First, many of our congregations used to regularly schedule an event called "Family Night." For some smaller congregations this may have been their total youth ministry activity. It consisted of a Sunday evening service that was youth led, with devotions, singing, and some sort of a program ... a film, a special speaker, skits, etc. The pastor was often called upon at the end for remarks, and afterwards (of course) there was lunch.

Sounds dull? Depends how it was done. Positively, it was an opportunity for families and friends to be together in a more informal setting, and there was also a measure of leadership training involved. Could this be translated into a 21st century event led by the youth of your congregation? Perhaps.

Second, an annual "Youth Sunday" was quite common within the AFLC and other Lutheran churches for many years. Are there still some that schedule it? Usually, the regular order of worship was followed, but each part was led by the youth. Often two young men would preach, others would serve as ushers. Someone would give the announcements, read the Scripture lessons, and another lead in the confessions of sin

and faith. The hymns would be selected by the youth, and they would provide special music, as well, sometimes with a youth choir. Not all who preach will end up as pastors, of course, but my first time walking up the steps to the pulpit in my home church was on a youth Sunday and it was a part of God's calling in my life. And don't we encourage lay preaching, too?

The third event may perhaps be the most likely to still be practiced among our congregations: an Easter sunrise service led by the youth and followed by breakfast. No, they weren't all exactly at sunrise, and maybe not even close, but they were much earlier than many today that are called by that name. Some were even held in cemetery chapels or outdoors, but usually held in the church sanctuary. Like with the youth Sundays, there was youth

*Yet could there be some things old in youth ministry that might deserve a new look?*

involvement in the service, but it seems that in most cases the pastor of the congregation would preach.

Is there something old that you might add to this list, something that may be considered new by the current youth generation?

*something to share*

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# LIVING IN THE PSALMS

BY GRACIA GILBERTSON

**R**ecently, two friends came to spend a couple of days with me at our home in the mountains. As we were sitting around the fire pit one night, one of them said, "Let's pray using only Scripture." We didn't have our Bibles with us, so we had to rely on our memories, glitchy as they may be! How wonderful to hear God's Word pour out, lifted back to Him.

The older I get, the more I treasure God's Word. Many verses were implanted in my mind and heart by my parents, Sunday school and vacation Bible school teachers, and through confirmation as I grew up. Those words of Scripture still come to my mind throughout the day, especially when needs, fears, and doubts arise. In the morning, I often echo one of my mother's favorite verses, "This is the day the Lord has made, I will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24). I return many times to a verse our pastor's wife, Jeanne Brandt, shared

with me as I faced an unexpected move to Wisconsin prior to my senior year of high school, "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be discouraged" (Deuteronomy 31:8). How these words reassure and calm my troubled mind!

A dear older woman in our church who taught children's Bible classes for years often said, "When you know a verse, be sure to memorize the address." I have to confess I've had to work on that, since sometimes a verse comes to mind and I have only a vague idea of where to find it. Somehow it seems to give the verse more credence when you can quote the reference, too.

Several years ago, I was encouraged by a pastor to begin memorizing Psalms. I knew only one or two very familiar ones, like Psalm 1 and Psalm 23. So, I began to work on memorizing several others that have become favored prayers, like Psalm 121, 42, 46, 13, 123, and 130. Looking back,

I wonder if the Lord was preparing me for some hard challenges ahead, giving me words to cry out to Him when I couldn't formulate my own. I remember my dad telling me that he once asked his mother how she had survived the years of drought and crop failure, the Depression, the eventual loss of their homesteaded farm in western North Dakota, followed by having all five of her sons serve in WWII in various branches of the service all over the world. Her response was, "I lived in the Psalms."

Our pastor is preaching a sermon series on the book of Joshua. I was struck anew by the words of Joshua 1:8, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth, meditate on it day and night ..." Oh, may we be people who have His words in our minds and at the tip of our tongues, ready to share the hope of Christ with all we meet.

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*Gilbertson lives in Leavenworth, Wash.*