



THE 

NOVEMBER 2021

# LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



PSALMS  
OF PRAISE





## THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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# MY GET-TO-DO LIST

BY RACHEL MATTSON

I started to write my usual to-do list this morning and the longer it got the more discouraged I became. I stopped and picked up my Bible to read from Colossians 3, and was struck by verse 3, which says, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.”

As I read, I noticed that Paul is basically giving the church at Colossae a to-do list of sorts. I glanced back at my own list and pondered the difference.

I know that I have things that must be done because that’s the way life is, but are they paired with the list from Paul? Clean the kitchen—with humility. Call the air duct cleaners—with kindness. Stop by the post office—with patience.

Do you write your to-do lists with this perspective or are you motivated by looking a certain way, making a good impression, looking like you have it all together, or keeping yourself busy so you don’t have to deal with heart things? We get so caught up with all that we must do, we forget why we’re even able to do things in the first place.

Christ calls us to a bigger perspective. Each day He gives us a gift, a reminder that we are His chosen ones, holy and dearly loved. We are given power to live our lives with the fruit of His Spirit. Our to-do lists are much more than mundane tasks. They are ways we bless our families, encourage our friends, use our time wisely, and

make Christ’s power known to those around us.

It is easy to get caught up in all that we must do, especially during busy seasons of the year. But that’s when these verses challenge and encourage me to think about why I do the things I do. Do I live differently because I know I have been chosen by God? Is the way I plan my day purposeful because of Who I put my faith in? With each day’s list, is my heart filled with thankfulness rather than grumbling?

It’s not about how much I can get done in a day, but about who reigns in my heart as I complete each task. Colossians 3:15 says, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” Who rules our days and impacts what we write on our to-do lists? Is the peace of Christ ruling our minds? We are His children, bought with Jesus’ own blood and saved from eternal condemnation to live eternally with Him!

Instead of a list I *have* to do, it becomes a list I *get* to do through Christ’s strength and His calling on my life. Rejoice with me in the life God has given you to live today. And pray along with me that we would live our lives in the purpose and power Christ gives us.

To do: As God’s chosen one, let Christ rule your heart.

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

Gratitude is an offering precious in the sight of God, and it is one that the poorest of us can make and be not poorer but richer for having made it.

—A.W. Tozer

God has promised to supply all our needs. What we don't have now, we don't need now.

—Elizabeth Elliot

When it comes to life the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude.

—G.K. Chesterton

It is a pleasant sight to see anybody thanking God; for the air is heavy with the hum of murmuring, and the roads are dusty with complaints and lamentations.

—Charles Spurgeon

This is the virtue characteristic of real Christians; it is their worship of God at its best. They thank God and do it with all their heart.

—Martin Luther





# AUTHENTIC PRAISE

BY PASTOR TIM JOHNSON



**Y**ou can often tell when someone's thanksgiving is genuine. For example, many years ago, when going door to door for Evangelism Explosion, my group was asked to drop off a Bible with a former Jehovah's Witness who had received Christ as her savior. When we arrived to give her a new Bible, she told us through tears that her family and church leaders were casting her out because of her new-found relationship with Jesus. Our hearts broke for her as she sobbed at the loss of relationships. Then she caught us off guard by adding, "But I've never been at more peace. Thank you so much for stopping. I can't wait to start reading this Bible." The sincerity of her gratefulness was without question.

What drives your thanksgiving and praise for God? Have you ever stopped to evaluate it? Does it come out of guilt or obligation? You know you should be thankful, but really don't feel like it. Or do you see thanksgiving and praise as something you do in church with a certain kind of music and instruments? Maybe it involves a certain form or order of service. Maybe there are Sundays where you "feel" it more than others.

Psalms 50:14 says, "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High." In this psalm, God is challenging His people for being too focused on their sacrifices, including the types of sacrifices they made and the methods they used to sacrifice. In the prior verses, God questions them, "Do you think I need these animal sacrifices? I own all the animals" (my paraphrase). God says He wants their hearts, instead, as they give a sacrifice of thanksgiving out of gratitude for who He is. He wants hearts that see Him as an all-powerful, just God who is also loving, gracious, and merciful. He wants hearts indebted to Him out of a sense of love and privilege. He wants hearts that don't get bogged down by the form, the music, or the sacrifice itself, but rather desire to express gratitude in spirit and in truth. These are hearts that agree with Psalm 56:12, "I must perform my vows to you, O God; I will render thank offerings to you."

While David was hiding from King Saul in a cave—not exactly what we think of in terms of a worship sanctuary—he writes in Psalm 57:8, "Awake, my glory! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn!" His heart was one of praise and

thanksgiving in a time of great peril and unrest. I doubt David had all the outer elements that we tend to associate with worship, yet he praised God.

I remember a time before becoming a pastor when I had to lead worship services that were much more structured than what I was accustomed to. The service had responsive readings, singing responses, read prayers, confessions of sin and faith, etc. It felt rote to me. I was used to a freer, less traditional style. After leading the first service, I sincerely complained to God, asking how I could authentically worship Him, let alone lead such a worship.

His still, small voice in my head asked, "Are the words truthful and reverent?"

I had to say, "Yes."

"Then just mean them," He said.

That experience began to expand my ability to praise and give thanks to God in almost any form or style of worship. It even carried over into the situations of my life. Things no longer needed to be a certain way for me to give thanks and praise to Him.

Authentic thanksgiving and praise come from the heart, and once it is able to spring forth, it begins to flow more commonly in all areas of life. David expresses this in Psalm 108:3, "I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations." Such thanks or praise doesn't have to figure out what to say and when, where, or who to say it to. Authentic thanks and praise naturally flow whenever and wherever you go. Someone at the store shares something good that happened, authentic thanks and praise says, "Praise God! Thanks for sharing." Authentic thanks and praise are quick to look for God's hand in everything, good or bad, and quick to share the revelation.

How do you begin to cultivate such an attitude of thanksgiving and praise? Romans 12:1 says, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." In this way, everything you are and everything you do and say becomes your expression of thanks and praise.

*Johnson serves Christ the King Free Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn.*



**A**saph, after pleading to God for His mercy in Psalm 79, declares in verse 13, “So we Thy people and the sheep of Thy pasture will give thanks to Thee forever; to all generations we will tell of Thy praise.”

“Forever”—how loosely we use that word, as if we might even understand it! “I’ll love you forever,” the young man tells his sweetheart. “I’ll never forget your kindness,” the distraught mother tells her benefactor. However we express it—always, continually, constantly, endlessly, eternally—the intention seems to be that of not forgetting.

Scripture also expresses the thought negatively as in Hebrews 13:5 (AMP) where God Himself has said, “I will never (under any circumstances) desert you (nor give you up nor leave you without support, nor will I in any degree leave you helpless), nor will I forsake you or let you down or relax my hold on you (assuredly not)!” If this version seems a bit cumbersome, still you get the point, don’t you? A promise to never leave or forsake me—only an eternal God can make such a promise and fulfill it.

How can I understand and deal with the concept of God’s eternity and my own longing to praise Him forever? From generation to generation I understand. I love telling my grandbabes about the goodness of the Lord in my life. I love telling them of how we left the U.S. for Bolivia on the strength of those promises in Hebrews. I’m strong to tell them that not ever (no, never!) in our years of ministry has God let go of His hold on us, and how we have, time after time, looked back and in remembering His faithfulness, have gone on.

It is our God Himself who brings meaning to the words eternal and forever. I have been aided in my understanding by two books lately. These books are small in their appearance, with not more than 100-150 pages, but deep and meaningful in their content. A.W. Tozer in the preface of his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, states emphatically, “The church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshiping men.” He goes on to write that with this loss of the sense of majesty, “We have lost our spirit of worship and

our ability to withdraw inwardly to meet God.”

In *The Problem of Pain*, author C. S. Lewis in his introduction also writes about this sense of awe, awfulness, of God. He quotes a very poignant illustration to describe it, taken from *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Graham. Rat and Mole are approaching the island and the mythical Pan in their little boat. “‘Rat,’ he found breath to whisper, shaking, ‘Are you afraid?’ ‘Afraid?’ murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love, ‘Afraid? Of Him? O, never, never. And yet—and yet—O Mole, I am afraid.’”

Tozer prays, “Enlighten our minds that we may know Thee as Thou art, so that we may perfectly love Thee and worthily praise Thee.”

To know our Creator God, writes Tozer, is the most important thing in our lives. All the beautiful promises in Scripture are based on His very being, His power, love, justice, mercy, His grace. It is His eternal attribute to which we turn just now. It is not long-lasting. It is endless. I see that comparing God’s eternal nature to my own mortality forces me to consider the gift of eternal life God offers me through His Son, Jesus. I am a child of time, as Moses writes in Psalm 90. I, too, know that my days are numbered: 70? 80? 90? And then I am gone. I’ll fly away! Because God is eternal, He is my “one safe home,” as Tozer writes.

Because of that, I am not flying away into obscurity, but into life with my Creator. How often have I turned to Psalm 139 for confirmation of my own life here on earth? Verse 16 validates my life and yours, “Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them”

Some days I feel such a melancholy—not sadness, but a longing that is unnamed and unsatisfied. Have you felt it, too? I wonder if it isn’t a longing to be with our Creator. I think it is why Psalm 23 is so precious to so many of us, as it concludes: “And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Dr. Francis Monseth wrote, “Praise is glorifying Him for what He is in Himself.” Together with Asaph we will praise!

*Gunderson is a member of Bethany Free Lutheran, Astoria, Ore.*





# ETERNAL PRAISE

BY CLARA GUNDERSON





# CORPORATE PRAISE

BY SAM JAGT

**T**he Psalms are wonderful for their diverse attributes. Some are imprecatory curses hurled at the foes of God. Others are sobbing confessions of sin. Still more are made up almost entirely of praise and thanksgiving. Each serves its own purpose, but for ours we will look into thankfulness in the Psalms.

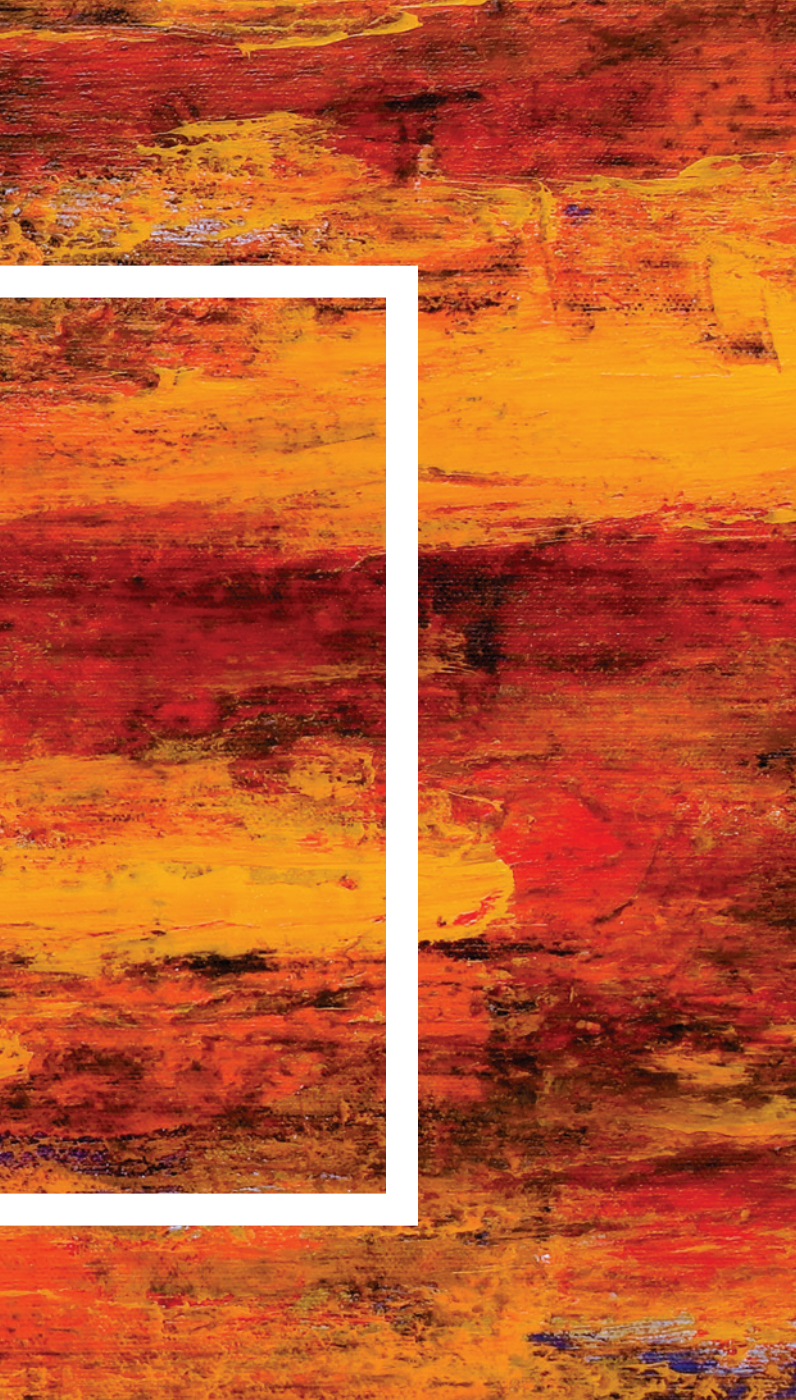
It is helpful to first establish who the psalmists are thanking. The Psalms offer rich descriptions of God: victorious, wise, long-suffering, creator of all things, and deliverer. These attributes help us to understand who we are thanking and why so that in every circumstance we can praise the Lord sincerely with thankfulness in our hearts to God.

Next, we need to ask how we thank God. The Book of Colossians has a good deal to say about thankfulness. In a similar fashion to the Psalms,

the Apostle Paul urges the church in Colossae to “be thankful. Singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (3:16-17). Colossians, just like the Psalms, tells us that we must thank the Lord together. It is not enough to thank Him individually. We are to thank the Lord for all that He does for us, and we are to do it together as the people of God.

Let us now ask a different question: Why do we thank God? Thankfulness is not just something we are taught by our parents when we are 2 or 3 years old, it is something God prescribes to His Church. It is written throughout the Psalms. “It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High” (Psalm





92:1). And, “Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care” (Psalm 95:6-7).

So, we understand that we are called by God to thank Him, but what does it accomplish? Here are a few examples. From my own life, I am able to look back and count the blessings God has given me. I thank Him regularly for those blessings. What I thought was a decision made on a whim, I now realize was God working through others to point me in a good direction. He brought me to the Free Lutheran Bible College in January 2016. I had just graduated with an associate’s in arts degree and had no other plans. My mom convinced me to go to FLBC through the recommendation of her friends, and so I went.

Little did I know that this would change the course of my life for good. God worked to provide fruitful opportunities and continually helped me along even when I was unsure. Now I am in California and happily married with a wonderful wife, baby, and congregation, and it is all to the glory of God. Thank you, Lord!

When I thank God publicly, I am like the Psalmists of old who said, “I will praise you, Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth” (Psalm 57:9-11). The power of thanking God goes beyond just personal gratitude. It transforms the lives of others by providing a powerful witness and encouraging the hearts of fellow believers.

Another example of what thanking God can do was provided during the pandemic. A study found that regular church attendees were the only group among the subjects who did not experience a decline in mental health due to the pandemic. While some groups—especially non-religious people—reported a decline in mental health, regular church attendees actually saw their mental health improve from the previous year. This is an example of how God wants the best for us.

God is interested in our welfare—spirit, body, and mental faculty. Sometimes that care comes simply by going to church. This is why the author of Hebrews exhorts believers not to cease meeting together. God wants us to thank Him together. Sadly, I have seen several fellow believers leave the church over political matters. Increasingly, believers today are swayed by the environment around them.

It is a difficult thing to remain thankful despite all the hurt that this life on earth entails. This is why corporate thanksgiving is so important, especially in our time of life. Corporate thanksgiving turns us outward toward God and away from our own selfish desires. The antidote to the troubles and sinful wishes of our hearts is to praise and thank the mighty God we serve for what He has done. He has endowed us with many gifts and promises. Take comfort, dear Christian, and rejoice in thanksgiving for all that God has done for you.

*Jagt is a member of Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Camarillo, Calif.*



**E**piphany is still weeks away, yet in my preparation for this article, I had an epiphany moment. That is, a moment of sudden revelation or insight. While pondering and praying over Psalm 91:2, which reads, “I will say to the LORD, ‘My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!’” the realization struck me that if the LORD is my refuge (and He is) and I flee to His fortress for protection (and I do), then in all reality, I am a refugee.

In late September of this year, an estimated 15,000 Haitian refugees were living under a bridge in Del Rio, Texas, awaiting one of three fates. They could be forced to cross the border and return to Mexico; they could be air-lifted back to Haiti, their country of origin; or they could be allowed to remain in the United States. Their futures were in the hands of the United States government. These refugees were willing to risk everything to come to America, the Land of Opportunity.

God has been using the plight of this world’s refugees to broaden my thinking and understanding of the relationship between a refugee and the refuge which he or she is seeking. First, let’s consider the refugee. This world’s refugees often flee their home country in an effort to find food, shelter, freedom, or peace. Drought and famine may have decimated their crops. Flooding and hurricanes may have destroyed their homes. Oppressive governments may have stripped them of their freedoms. Turmoil all around may have resulted in physical, emotional, or spiritual chaos. Where is a person to turn in the midst of these feelings of helplessness and hopelessness? The refugee’s solution is to escape the devastation and flee to a place that offers hope and help—a place of refuge.

I am a refugee. More specifically, my soul is a refugee. Events in this world cause my soul to hunger for truth, seek protection, long for freedom, and ache for peace. I can identify with the refugees of this world. Life on this side of eternity is filled with adverse situations for which

I seek relief, situations from which I might want to flee. I become a refugee.

Fleeing, running, escaping. Normally these words have a negative connotation or meaning. The refugee’s focus, however, is not on where he or she is fleeing from, but on where he or she is fleeing to—the place of refuge.

Let’s now consider the refuge. To truly be identified as a refuge, a place must be secure and safe. Game refuges, or preserves, are prime examples of secure and safe sanctuaries for wild animals. My childhood home was just half a mile from a state game refuge. It was commonly observed by Minnesota hunters in the fall that after the first rifle shots rang out, the massive bucks which graced the cornfields the week before had fled to the game refuge for protection and safety during hunting season. Instinctively, the bucks recognized the refuge as a place to freely find food, shelter, and freedom to peacefully roam about.

This real-world example of a wildlife refuge is a mere shadow of the abundant security and safety offered by God to all who by faith come to Him for refuge. The psalmist describes God as “our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). When the events in this world cause my soul, or your soul, to hunger, seek, long, or ache for provision and protection, remember to focus on the One to whom we can flee—God. He is our refuge and strength. Like the Haitian refugees fleeing to the United States, or like the trophy buck running to the game refuge, God invites any and all to flee, run, or escape to Him for protection and help.

This imperfect refugee truly gives thanks for the perfect refuge—the Lord, my God. The title of a 1946 gospel song says it all, “Where could I go but to the Lord?”

*Johnson is a member of Our Savior’s Lutheran Church of Stanley, N.D.*





# REFUGE OF PRAISE

BY CANDICE JOHNSON



## "I GIVE YOU THANKS, O LORD, WITH MY WHOLE HEART; BEFORE THE GODS I SING YOUR PRAISE."

**T**his is the declaration of the psalmist in Psalm 138:1. The Psalms are songs written by past saints that all saints can join in singing. One saint who has been singing this song of thankfulness with her whole heart is my mother. She is overflowing with praises even though she was recently diagnosed with incurable cancer. She has been calling me and others to join her in praising God.

What is it that makes a woman who has terminal cancer give thanks? Throughout the Psalms we can ask this same question, as we see the psalmists lament their hardships and beg release from their captors. What is this gift for which the saints give thanks to the Lord? Romans 3:23-24 answers the question well, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." God deserves this offering of thanksgiving and delights to hear it. He alone is able to provide salvation, and He did so for each of us.

You may ask, can I join in this song? Is it possible for me to join with the saints in giving thanks to God with my *whole* heart? How can I praise Him when am a sinner plagued with pain and struggles, doubts and fears? I find discontentment or anger around nearly every corner. My anxious thoughts can consume me, keeping me awake at night. Don't these things stop my whole heart from thanking God? Am I unable to join in this song?

To thank God with my whole heart I must confess some things. The first is that Jesus is Lord. Romans 10:13 says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." My praise must be directed to the only One who deserves it.

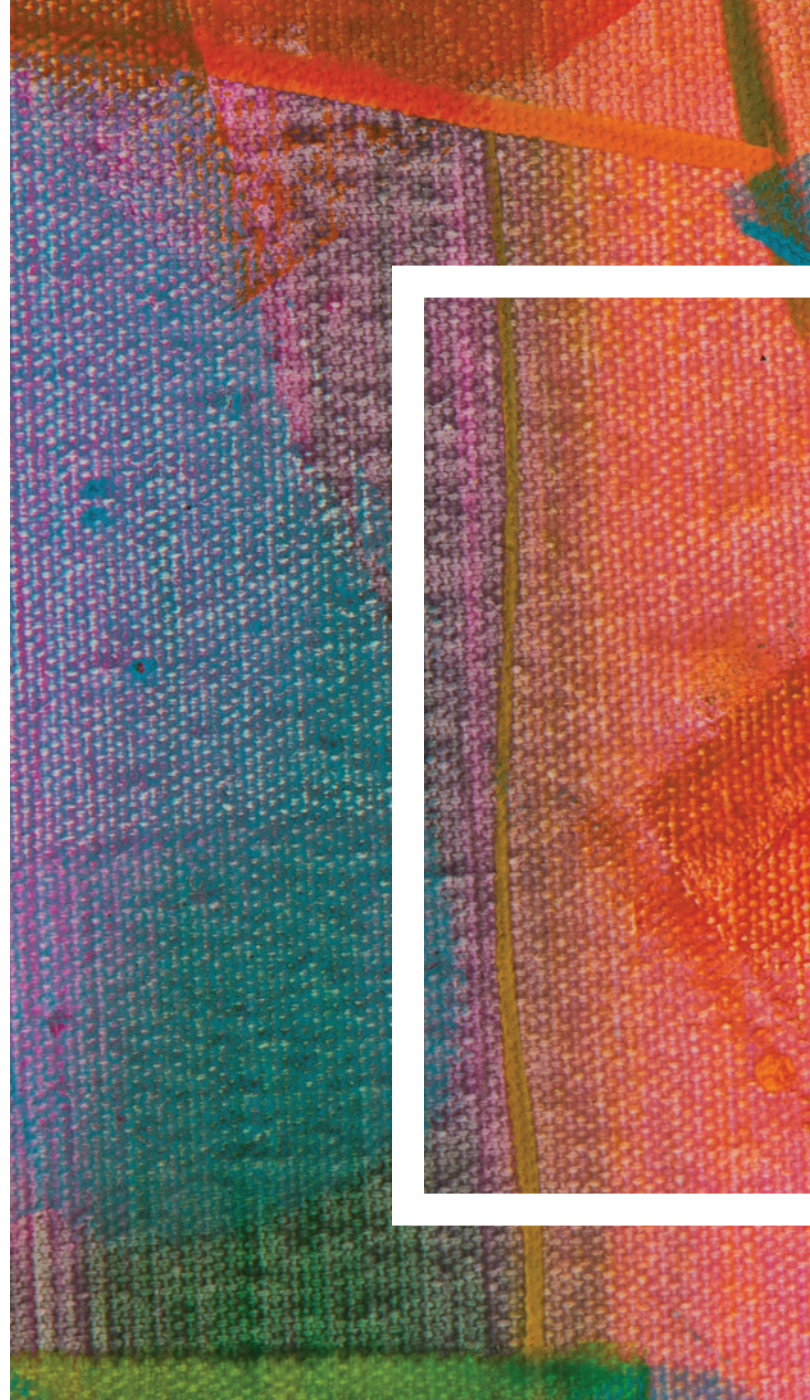
The second confession is that I have been blessed beyond measure and only because God has loved me. Ephesians 2:8 declares, "For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God." To truly give thanks, I need to recognize the reasons for which I have to be thankful. Christ Jesus laid His life down for me! I have been set free from sin and death!

I must also admit that I can't do this by my own strength or ability, but it is the Holy Spirit


who makes these confessions possible.

I Corinthians 12:3 tells us that "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except in the Holy Spirit." In other words, I cannot by my own reason understand what this gift is, but God through the Holy Spirit reveals it to my heart and leads me to sing it with sincerity. I Corinthians 2:12 says, "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God." Praise God for His Holy Spirit at work within me to confess that Jesus is Lord and to reveal to me His gift. He puts a song in my heart.

The psalmist's song of thankfulness is our song. It is the song that began in Genesis when God laid out His plan of redemption. It is the song that the Israelites sang when freed from slavery







# HEART OF PRAISE

BY LORI NELSON

in Egypt and again when they were rescued from exile in Babylon. The song now announces and proclaims the salvation delivered through Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

I have been so blessed as I have heard my own mother singing this beautiful song of thanksgiving with her whole heart. She sang this song even after a terminal cancer diagnosis, following her first chemo treatment that caused awful symptoms, and again when the tumors responded by shrinking. Her song was heard again after the tumors grew aggressively following a break in treatment, and again at the uncertainty of further treatments. She invites those around her to sing this song, too.

When her children and grandchildren gather, share joys and sorrows, when we share about a

mundane task or a great success, she responds, "God is faithful. I am giving Him thanks!"

Her song of thanksgiving is not dependent on circumstances. It is dependent on her God, the One who has provided her with salvation, in which she rests. The One in whom her whole heart trusts. I am blessed to hear this song, encouraging me to join her and sing along because this salvation is mine, too. I do proclaim with the psalmist, "I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise!"

*Nelson is a member of Salem Lutheran, Radcliffe, Iowa.*





# REASONS FOR PRAISE

BY PASTOR LEE HOOPS



"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

**F**our hundred years ago, in 1621, the Plymouth colonists celebrated their first harvest with the Wampanoag tribe. In 2021, those powerful, God-inspired words written by the apostle Paul to the Philippian church still direct and comfort God's people.

The last Thursday of each November we observe Thanksgiving Day in the United States. The word *thanksgiving* implies action prompted by an attitude. Thanksgiving requires a thanksgiver, a unique word I found in Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*. The entry reads, "THANKSGIVER, *noun* One who gives thanks or acknowledges a kindness."

Christian, we have much reason to be thanksgivers. First, the apostle John wrote of our ultimate reason for thanks, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (3:16).

Luke 17 supplies a familiar example displaying the contrast between a thanksgiver and others who chose to not thank Jesus, their healer. "Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan" (vs. 15-16). In Luke's narrative, ten men were healed by Jesus and delivered from a dreaded, isolating disease called leprosy. But only one of the men returned to their healer to acknowledge and glorify their Savior.

Christian, through the suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, you and I have been graciously delivered from the deadly, isolating disease named sin. And we were all guilty. John writes, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:8-9).

Paul explains further, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our

transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:4-5).

Every thanksgiver may sing the words to the hymn *Thank You, Lord*, by Bessie Sykes, "I trust in Him from day to day, I prove His saving grace; I'll sing this song of praise to Him, Until I see His face. Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul, Thank you, Lord, for making me whole; Thank you, Lord, for giving to me Thy great salvation so rich and free" (*Ambassador Hymnal*, 521).

Next, we can be grateful that the Lord Jesus preserves His Church, and we give thanks for all God's people. Notice how Paul greeted first century Christians living in Rome, "... to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world" (Romans 1:7-8).

Paul's example reminds us to actively, daily give thanks for our fellow Christians. For AFLC families serving the Lord around the world, for pastors and their families serving the Lord throughout these United States, for faithful servant-hearted congregational leaders, and for those who quietly serve, we echo Paul's gratitude and thank God through Jesus Christ for the people who are working throughout the world proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 10 offers encouragement to the body of Christ, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day approaching" (vs. 24-25).

Last, after being thankful for God's saving work through Jesus Christ, and thankful for brothers and sisters in Christ, we can be thankful that the Lord remains ever so faithful as His people pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." For agri-businesses which produce food for a growing world, we thank and praise the Lord. Every breath we breathe, every move we are still able to make, these also prove God is faithful, worthy of all thanks and praise.

Having been given so much, may the Lord find us generous in giving. Happy Thanksgiving dear thanksgivers!

*Hoops, St. Michael, Minn., serves on the Pastor and Congregational Care Team (PAACT).*



# FLBCS campus hosts live recording of WNG podcast

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary hosted a live recording of *The World and Everything In It* on Sept. 30 during the fall Spotlight conference. The daily news podcast is a production of the WORLD News Group (WGN), which publishes biblically sound, daily coverage of global, national, and cultural news events. WGN also publishes *WORLD* magazine and produces *WORLD Watch*, a daily news video program geared toward teens.

The Spotlight: Media conference included a morning session on navigating the news with biblical discernment, featuring a panel discussion with Nick Eicher and Myrna Brown, hosts of the daily podcast, and moderated by Hannah Harris, a reporter with *WORLD Watch*. Afternoon sessions included a presentation by Pastor Adam Osier, dean of FLBC, on discerning worldviews in the news, a session on Christian identity by Dr. Wade Mobley, president of FLBCS, and a session on podcasting and theology with Pastor Jason Gudim and Pastor Brett Boe, who host and produce the *Being Lutheran* podcast.

The live recording of the podcast, held in Hauge Chapel, was open to off-campus guests who registered for the event. Pastor Osier recorded the introduction, followed by several live recordings of news pieces by Eicher and Brown. Brian Basham, news anchor for *WORLD Watch*, then recorded several pieces for the television show. After the recordings, the news anchors opened the mics for audience questions. The podcast aired on Oct. 1.



TOP: Nick Eicher and Myrna Brown record a segment for the news podcast with Paul Butler (right). ABOVE: Brian Basham records a segment for the news television show. MIDDLE: Hannah Harris, Myrna Brown, and Nick Eicher lead a panel discussion on biblical journalism. NEAR RIGHT: Student Jacob Thornblad asks a question during the morning session. FAR RIGHT: FLBC students and guests listen to the panel discussion.





**T**hroughout Scripture, God uses the picture of a plant or a tree to help us understand how our spiritual life works. Psalm 1 compares the one who delights in God's Word to a tree planted by streams of water. In Matthew 13, Jesus tells the parable of the sower to show that those who hear and understand the Word of God grow and bear fruit. And Romans 11 speaks of being grafted into an olive tree to help us see how those who have faith in Christ have been brought into the promise of God.

These examples are quite helpful. It's easy to look around at the grass or trees or fields and be reminded of how our faith in Christ is growing and developing, and how God is working to sink our spiritual roots deep into Christ.

The challenge with our everyday lives is that, unlike a tree or plant, our roots aren't in one place. We shift between many different gardens that play a part in helping us grow into whatever we will one day become. For teenagers, these gardens include their home and

church, both of which nurture and prune them to grow spiritually. But they also have school, work, extracurricular activities, social media, and online communities that contribute to their growth and development.

AFLC Youth Ministries recognizes this complexity and seeks to both focus directly on the spiritual lives of teenagers themselves, and indirectly in support of those spiritual gardens in which these young teens are growing. Since AFLC Youth Ministries wants to be effective in carrying out our mission to "win, build, equip, and multiply," as our mission states, we are not merely doing ministry to teenagers, but also seeking to equip and encourage their families and churches.

For congregations, one shift in mindset that you may consider making if you haven't already is to consider not just youth ministry, but what youth and family ministry might look like. This isn't just a change in wording but reflects our attitude to recognize the importance of discipleship in the home and the effect it will have on the long-term spiritual life of teenagers. The result of our ministry to teens shouldn't be that teens feel further removed from their families, but that teens and parents would be brought closer

together. Churches can encourage a vibrant life of faith in teens as individuals and equip families to live out a vibrant life of faith together.

Families, consider your priorities. There are so many good things on which we can spend our time. But it's easy to let the good things crowd out the best things. While each family is going to find a different balance on their family calendar, we all ought to consider our homes not just as a place to eat and sleep, but a place where parents and children grow spiritually together. Make the time for spiritual conversations, church, service, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines that will keep your focus on Christ.

With all the different gardens that teens spend their time in, we should do all we can to develop rich soil in our churches and homes for teens to grow their roots into Christ. Then, regardless of what other worldly influences they encounter, they will be able to find their identity, assurance, and forgiveness in Him.

*McCarlson, a member of Abiding Savior, Sioux Falls, S.D., serves on the AFLC Youth Board.*

# ROOTED DEEPLY IN CHRIST JESUS

BY ADAM McCARLSON





## All boards & pastors conference

Newly elected officers serving on AFLC boards and committees were installed Oct. 5 during the all boards conference (top left). Boards and committees met in separate meetings on Oct. 4, and then gave a short report the following morning as they gathered on the FLBCS campus in Plymouth, Minn. Marian Christopherson (top right) gave a report on current and projected projects of the Parish Education department. Pastor Gary Jorgenson (center), assistant to the president of the AFLC, gave a presentation on the relationship of AFLC ministries to its congregations. Linda Hensrud (above left) listened to the reports. Bill Sheldon and Steve Deysher (middle right), both members of the World Missions Committee, talk during a break. The Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis., then hosted the pastor's conference, held Oct. 5-7. Speaking at the conference were Barb Brubakken, Loiell Dyrud, and pastors Jim Ritter, Brent Olson, Nathan Olson, Craig Johnson, Jason Holt, and Terry Olson. Several pastors participated in a softball game (right, submitted photo).





S

ister trips have been wonderful connecting times for us Snipstead sisters. September

2017 found the four of us on a sister trip to Nashville, Tenn. We were looking forward to enjoying some of the culture and history of the area, but our primary goal was attending the Sing! Getty Music Worship Conference.

At the same time, we started praying for God's direction and leading in writing a WMF Bible study. How do four sisters from different states write a study together? We remembered the first session of the Sing! conference gripping us as we listened to pastor and author Alistair Begg share on Psalm 100, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord ..." The Psalms seemed a wonderful topic for our Bible study.

We rely on the strength God's Word has provided in our lives, and we share a joy of music. Our blessings include wonderful families, supportive husbands, and many wonderful children and grandchildren. A decade separates the two older sisters (Karen and Anne) from the little sisters (Gwen and Wendy). Writing this study together has been a wonderful bonding time for us.

## STUDY: BEHOLD OUR GOD

BY KAREN FLOAN, ANNE PRESTENG, GWEN BERGE, AND WENDY WESTLAKE

Karen Floan is a retired administrative assistant, serving AFLC presidents Elden Nelson and Lyndon Korhonen. Anne Presteng is a retired speech language pathologist and full-time grandmother. Gwen Berge, formerly an elementary principal at Heritage Christian Academy in Maple Grove, Minn., currently works as their accreditation and academic development specialist. Wendy Westlake is a busy pastor's wife and gifted artist with paintings featured in multiple galleries across the nation.

As we behold God in Psalms 90-100, we are overwhelmed with His mighty power as creator and ruler of heaven and earth. We are humbled by His holiness and His plan of salvation. We see His faithfulness in our lives and throughout all generations.

Whether we are overwhelmed by joy or



overtaken by sorrow, God hears the cry of our hearts, He draws us to Himself, and His presence changes us. It is the Almighty God who lovingly commands us to praise Him for our good and His glory. May you be blessed as you "Behold our God" in the Psalms.

*Floan & Berge are members of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn. Presteng is a member of Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D. Westlake is a member of Our Saviour's Lutheran, Zumbrota, Minn.*

### 2022 WMF Bible Study • Behold Our God

The cost per copy is \$13, which includes shipping. If mailing to your church, please make sure address and PO Box are correct.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of copies: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Church name: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

**Make checks payable to "WMF of AFLC" and mail to: WMF Executive Secretary, Dawn Johnson, 2991 30th Ave., Wilson, WI 54027.**



## PEOPLE &amp; PLACES

**Pastor Brett Boe** was installed Sept. 26 at Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn., with Pastor Gary Jorgenson, assistant to the AFLC president, officiating.

**Pastor David Ryerson** has accepted a call to serve as associate pastor at Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D. He previously served Hope Free Evangelical Lutheran, Ishpeming, Mich.

**Michael Onstad**, a 2021 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, has accepted a call to serve Valley Free Lutheran, Portland, N.D. He will be ordained Oct. 31 at St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating.

**Pastor Brian Ricke**, who has rostered with the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), has been removed from the AFLC clergy roster.

**Pastor Del Palmer** is serving as interim pastor of King of Glory Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn., through April 2022.

Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee have approved three new congregations.

- **Living Stone Chinese Lutheran Fellowship**, St. Paul, Minn., is a Home Missions church plant served by Miao (Holmes) Zhao, a 2020 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary. The new congregation is sponsored by Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn.

- **Resurrection Free Lutheran**, Ramsey, Minn., is a Home Missions church plant served by spiritual life director Alex Woodworth, a student at the Free Lutheran Seminary. The new congregation is seeking a sponsor congregation.

- **Living Word Lutheran**, Kingman, Ariz., is served by Pastor Brandon Scroggins (non-AFLC).



## 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!

## Youth Ministries director to remain full-time

Members of the AFLC Youth Ministries Board recently announced that their director, Pastor Jason Holt, will remain full-time in 2022.

The Youth Ministries Board reported to the Annual Conference in June that financial implications of the 2021 FLY Convention postponement to 2023 could include moving Holt to part-time status in 2022. Individual and congregational donors were responsive to the situation as evidenced through giving received in the months that followed.

"We knew the pandemic was financially difficult for many folks in the AFLC. We wondered if that might have a significant impact on our Youth Ministry budget," explained Adam McCarlson, AFLC Youth Board secretary. "We are so grateful that God provided through the generosity of our AFLC family, and that Pastor Holt can stay full-time and keep doing the work we've called him to do."

The event calendar for AFLC Youth Ministries in 2022 includes Youth Workers Weekends Jan. 15-17 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis., the D6 Family Conference April 20-22 in Orlando, Fla., and FLY Beyond July 17-21 at the ARC. For more information, please contact AFLC Youth Ministries via email at youth@afcl.org, by phone at 763.545.5631, or online at www.afcl.org/youth.

## Board, committee nominees to submit bios

In response to general resolution no. 1 from the 2021 Annual Conference, members of the AFLC Nominating Committee approved a motion during its October meeting to ask all nominees to submit a brief biography to the AFLC president's office. The resolution reads:

WHEREAS the management and oversight of the AFLC Corporations are growing in scope, budget, and complexity;

AND WHEREAS we as an Association desire to glorify God by seeking qualified people to serve in various boards and committees;

BE IT RESOLVED that we continue to seek to nominate qualified candidates for our board and committee positions;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Annual Conference requests that nominees to our boards and committees be better introduced to the Conference floor.

The biographies will be made available to the 2022 Annual Conference at the discretion of the Conference Committee. Biographies will be solicited from members of boards and committees only, excluding corporations, conference committees, and the Nominating Committee, which is elected from the conference floor.

## SEPTEMBER MEMORIALS

## Bible College

Ralph Peterson  
Deb Benson  
Mary Nash  
Stanley Christenson  
Ruth Claus  
Gordon Twedt  
Tim Lane  
Sherman Benson

## General Fund

Stan Christenson  
Janice Peck  
Mary Nash

## Home Missions

Carolyn Hansen  
Evelyn Copes

## Parish Education

Mark Langemo

## Seminary

Elaine Brasel  
Otto Kaschube

## WMF

Marlette Thompson  
Jean Nash  
Mary Nash  
Greg Zander

Larry Pederson  
Marion Raad

## World Missions

Sue Rucker  
Mary Nash  
Deb Benson  
Chester Flechsig  
Ralph Peterson

... in honor of

## Bible College

Pastor Wayne  
Hjermstad





# THE GOD WHO MADE YOU

BY MICHAEL ROKENBRODT

**N**asty yellow spikes blocked the lane. When I see them on Ugandan roads, I wonder if the police pull them up from some medieval torture chamber. My friend Pastor Alex was driving me back to Jinja from my first two weeks of ministry in Gulu with the Raan family. We had come to a place in the road where police were pulling over random drivers for vehicle inspection. There were only so many vehicles they could pull over at a time. We were one of them.

The policewoman who greeted us announced, “We are giving you a receipt [fine] for driving with tires that are not safe. Pull over there.”

Alex complied. When his plate numbers were run through their system, we were informed the previous owner of the vehicle had left unpaid receipts for which Alex was now responsible. The grand total of the receipts came to 340,000 shillings (100 USD).

Alex got out of the vehicle to speak with the officers. I prayed. The police informed Alex that the receipts must be paid immediately, and there was a bank up the road at which Alex could make the payment. However, he must leave his vehicle behind. Alex protested that he did not have the

money. Then came threats. The police said they might impound the vehicle. They might take a hammer to his license plate. There was a man with a hammer present. Several empty vehicles were around us with no license plates.

“Who is your passenger? Is he an ambassador?” asked an officer.

Apparently, I looked important.

“He is an ambassador of God,” said Alex.

“Which god? A big one or a small one?”

“The God who made you,” replied Alex.

“My father made me.”

“And who made your father?”

“My grandfather.”

“If you follow that line back, you will finally meet the God who made you, the heavens, and earth,” said Alex.

The man with the hammer came forward, preparing to take our plate.

“Do not remove!” interrupted the officer. Looking at Alex, he said, “We don’t know why, but we are going to release you with your vehicle. But you must pay the receipts.”

I helped with paying the receipts. Paying another man’s debt is not unusual in Uganda. Only three days previously, my colleague Brent

Raan discovered the office we had rented for our ministry at the Gulu Central Market had an unpaid electric bill. The power would not be turned on until it was settled. A friend told us of a similar situation which had happened to him. His landlord ended up getting trapped into paying a bill of hundreds of dollars over a few years.

Brent brought our situation to the Market Master. The Master said it would be taken care of. The electrician was sent up to power our office the same day. We never found out how much the demanded amount was.

When Seth found he had inherited Adam’s original sin, I wonder if he ever wished that Adam could have made payment with God rather than handing it down to him. I wonder if Enosh felt the same about Seth. But the debt went unpaid until it came to Jesus. Jesus paid the debt of all the ones that came before Him—and the ones after! A thought like that sure mitigates the injustice I feel paying another man’s traffic receipts.

*Rokenbrodt is an AFLC missionary serving in Uganda.*





## Pastor Paul Nash

Pastor Paul Michael Nash, 67, of Fergus Falls, Minn., died Oct. 9 at Fargo, N.D. Born Nov. 9, 1953, in Breckenridge, Minn., he was the son of Kenneth and Mary (Faust) Nash. He married Laurie Dietsche on June 29, 1974.



He grew up on the Nash homestead in rural Colfax, N.D. He attended and graduated from Richland #44 High School, Colfax, in 1971, the Association Free Lutheran Bible School (now FLBC), Plymouth, Minn., in 1973, Moorhead State University, Moorhead, Minn., in 1975, and the Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary (now FLS), Plymouth, in 1979. He served Hope Free Evangelical Lutheran, Ishpeming, Mich. (1979-1984), was interim pastor at Zion Lutheran, Tioga, N.D. (1984-85), and served Warroad Lutheran, Warroad, Minn. (1985-1992), and Christ Lutheran, Wichita Falls, Texas (1992-95). He then served as the director AFLC Home Missions for 23 years (1995-2018). His greatest joy was working with young people and training them to serve God through the Parish Builders program of Home Missions. He helped start FLAPS

(Free Lutheran Association of Pilot Supporters) and worked extensively with the Alaska Mission, including KAKN Radio in Naknek. He was a licensed pilot and flew as a search and rescue pilot for many years. He served as chaplain for the Roseau County Sheriff's Department, Roseau, Minn., and served on the AFLC Youth Board and AFLC Schools Corporation. Most recently he started Shamgar Ministries which focuses on mobilizing men for God's mission and His glory.

Surviving are his wife, Laurie; one son, Samuel (Emily) Nash, Fergus Falls, Minn.; two daughters, Melissa (Daniel) Windsor, Trinity, Fla., and Sara Nash, St. Petersburg, Fla.; 10 grandchildren; three brothers, Donald (Penny) Nash, Fargo, N.D., Marlow (Ranee) Nash, Colfax, N.D., Kermit (Angela) Nash, Maple Grove, Minn.; and one sister, Marjorie (Arden) Jacobson, Coon Rapids, Minn.; and one sister-in-law, Kendra Nash.

The service was held Oct. 22 at Maranatha Free Lutheran, Glyndon, Minn., with Pastor Eldon Nelson giving the message and Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating. Burial was in Bethany Free Lutheran Cemetery, rural Galchutt, N.D. In lieu of flowers, memorials are requested to FLAPS or the Alaska Mission.

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/s/ Ruth Gunderson, Managing Editor

## AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-September 30, 2021

FUND	REC'D IN SEPTEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$26,451	\$304,170	\$287,061
Evangelism	7,655	92,918	80,411
Youth Ministries	15,380	135,295	96,339
Parish Education	10,078	134,157	110,490
Seminary	15,923	205,278	206,680
Bible College	24,774	312,932	262,625
Home Missions	123,280	476,590	247,076
World Missions	28,502	297,955	267,950
Personal Support	59,658	627,177	621,815
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>311,702</b>	<b>2,586,474</b>	<b>2,180,447</b>

For additional financial information for each department, go to [www.aflc.org/giving](http://www.aflc.org/giving)



# NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD

The hymn, *Now Thank We All Our God* (*Ambassador Hymnal*, 145), should be a familiar one to our readers since it is found in most Christian hymnals. The author, Martin Rinkart (1586-1649), was a Lutheran pastor in Germany during the terrible Thirty Years' War, and in one epidemic he conducted funerals for 4,480 people, including his own wife. Surely only by the grace of God could one of the most powerful hymns of thanksgiving be born in the heart of a pastor in such a time of great grief and suffering! It is interesting, also, to learn that the words were originally intended to be a prayer to be sung in the home by the parents and children after a meal.



Pastor Robert Lee

The first words of the old hymn may provide us with a new outline for our prayers and practice of thanksgiving this year.

*Now thank we all our God with heart ...*

A thankful heart is a cleansed heart (Psalm 51:10), and the psalmist assures us that God will not despise a broken and contrite heart (51:17). He will forgive us when we confess our sins, giving the repentant sinner a purified heart (James 4:8). Paul's letter to the Ephesian congregation speaks of a heart in which Christ dwells (3:17), and His Spirit within inspires thankful, heart-felt worship ... "making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father" (5:19-20).

*Now thank we all our God with heart and hands ...*

Thankful hands are those that have also been cleansed as we draw near to God (James 4:8) in confession and faith. We thank God with busy hands (I Thessalonians 4:11), which are not only intended to

provide for our own needs but also to reach out to help the poor and needy (Proverbs 31:20).

Thankful hands are also praying hands, as Paul wrote in his first letter to Timothy, admonishing men to pray, "lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling" (2:8) as well as warning them against praying in the wrong spirit. The lifting of our hands in prayer, by the way, seems to be not an uncommon Old Testament posture, as we see, for example, in the Psalms (28:2, 63:4, 141:2), and we also find words of warning (Isaiah 1:15) about hypocritical prayers.

*Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices.*

It is in the Psalms that we find a further emphasis on expressing our thanksgiving in words. It is good to pray thankfully and sing joyfully, and it is also good to tell others of the goodness of God as well as of the blessings He has showered upon us and others "... singing aloud a song of thanksgiving and telling all Thy wondrous deeds" (26:7). Remember, too, that His "wondrous deeds" include not only our personal blessings and provision but also ... and more importantly ... the glorious gospel, that God loved us so much that He gave His only Son to pay the price for our sins that we could never pay, and to grant us new life now and forever. The old gospel song reminds us to "count your blessings, name them one by one" (*AH*, 575), and the Spirit will guide us to look beyond our material ones to those blood-bought blessings of eternal value. Another hymn writer seeks to strike this balance:

Thanks to God for my Redeemer,  
thanks for all Thou dost provide!

Thanks for times but now a memory,  
thanks for Jesus by my side.  
(*AH*, 149)

So how will we celebrate Thanksgiving this year?

Traveling for some, dinners for many with family and friends, wonderful feasting with traditional favorite foods ... but is that all?

Hopefully you and I will find a quiet time to search our hearts and seek forgiveness for the ingratitude that mars our relationship to the Father, thanking Him from the heart for His grace.

Are there some concrete or material ways that we might express our gratitude to God on Thanksgiving this year with our hands? Is there an act of love or service that may be still undone? Any opportunity missed?

Thanksgiving needs to be served in

*The first words of the old hymn may provide us with a new outline for our prayers and practice of thanksgiving this year.*

words as well as deeds. Words of prayer seem the most obvious and central way to express our gratitude, but there may be others to whom special words of thanks should be addressed. Ask God to bring them to mind ... and do it.

Best wishes to all our readers for a Thanksgiving of heart, hands, and voices!



*building the base*

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# TOTAL FORGIVENESS, JOSEPH STYLE

BY PASTOR DAVID JORE

W

hen I was a Bible teacher in the Lay Ministry Training Center, I taught a course on the Book of Genesis. As you may know, this book includes

the dramatic story of Joseph and his brothers, how they wronged him by selling him into slavery in Egypt, and how he freely offered forgiveness to them 22 years later. After teaching the course on Genesis for several years, I thought I had a pretty good handle on the steps of forgiveness that Joseph followed. However, after reading R.T. Kendall's *Total Forgiveness*, I realized I had much more to learn and even more to apply to my life in this crucial area.

According to Kendall, people have often asked him, "How can I know if I have totally forgiven someone who has wronged or hurt me?" After reflecting on this question, he said that the best answer he has found is in studying the life of Joseph. What he discovered was six steps that Joseph followed which demonstrated that he totally forgave his brothers:

Step 1: Do not let anyone know what someone said about you or did to you. Joseph had all the Egyptians present leave the room when he revealed himself to his brothers. He did not want them to know what his brothers had done to him.

Step 2: Do not allow anyone to be afraid of you or intimidated by you. Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers with tears of compassion. The last thing he wanted was for them to fear him.

Step 3: We will want them to forgive themselves and not feel guilty. Joseph said to his brothers in an emotional scene, "And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here" (Genesis 45:5a).

Step 4: We will want them to save face. Joseph said to his brothers, "for God sent me before you to preserve life. ... So it was not you who sent me here, but God" (45:5b, 8a). He was saying to them, "You didn't do this; God did." In so doing, he enabled them to save face.

Step 5: We will protect them from their

greatest fear. The greatest fear Joseph's brothers had was that their aged father, Jacob, would find out what they had done. Joseph instructed them to simply tell their father all he needed to know—that he was alive in Egypt—but not any more details.

Step 6: It is a lifelong commitment. Seventeen years later Jacob died and Joseph's brothers panicked, wondering if he would take revenge on them. He didn't, but instead said to them as he wept, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. ... So do not fear." (Genesis 50:20).

May God give each of us grace, we who have been forgiven so much by Jesus, to extend that same forgiveness to others by the enabling of the Holy Spirit—total forgiveness!

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*Jore serves Maple Bay Free Lutheran, Mentor, Minn.*