

THE 

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LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

Time
Talents
Treasure





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INQUIRING MINDS

BY RACHEL MATTSON

If you've ever spent time with a 3-year-old, you know that they are very busy and tend to ask a lot of questions, usually the same one over and over again. I experienced this recently when my 3-year-old nephew came to stay with me for a weekend and it reaffirmed my love for this age group. There are so many lessons to be learned from children and here's what I learned from my nephew.

The weekend he spent with us was a busy one because it was during wheat harvest, so my husband was gone for most of the day on Friday and Saturday. My nephew must like my husband because he continually asked, "Where's Joel?" Even after we rode with Joel in the truck and caught a ride in the combine, my nephew still asked me, "Where's Joel?" "What is Joel doing?" I would have to remind him that he was in the field working. After about the thirteenth time, I asked him where he thought Joel was and he proudly said, "He's working in the field." He knew. But I think he kept asking me because he wanted reassurance. He wanted to know where Joel was, what he was doing, and that he'd come home at the end of the day.

Observing my nephew for those days made me desire the same kind of inquiring mind. I want to be the one to ask the same questions throughout the day, but I want to ask the questions about God. Where is God? What is He doing? And will He come to bring me home at the end of my life? These have some pretty obvious answers, right? But they are the easiest to forget when we go through our normal routines.

"Where is God?" He is with us always and He is everywhere fully present, knowing all that is going on. He never needs to catch up on the latest

news or be shown our new accomplishments. He's been with us every step of the way. Psalm 139:5 says, "You hem me in, behind and before, you lay your hand upon me."

"What is He doing?" We can't always see the specifics, but we do know that He is in control, ruling in power, and never changing. We can find peace no matter the situation because He who spoke order from chaos, calmed storms, healed the sick, and caused people to rise from the dead is the same God who is working in our lives today. His power has never and will never change. It cannot increase or decrease from one day to the next. He alone has the authority to act and is qualified to rule. And since He is the very essence of goodness, He uses all His power and control for good. Psalm 100:5 says, "For the Lord is good; His steadfast love endures forever, and His faithfulness to all generations."

"Will He come again to take me home?" Yes. He has promised in His Word, and that cannot change. John 14:3 says, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

There is a deep assurance that comes over me when I ask these questions throughout my day. When life becomes overwhelming or just frustrating, asking these questions reassures my mind, heart, and soul that I am not alone and that I have Jesus Christ on my side. The One who will never leave or abandon me. The One whose arms never grow tired or weary to support and protect me. And the One who will come again to bring me to Himself, where I'll dwell with Him forever!

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

There are two questions a steward needs to consider.
1. Who owns it? 2. How much is enough?

—Ron Blue

Find out how much God has given you and from
it take what you need; the remainder is needed by
others.

—Augustine

When we surrender every area of our lives—
including our finances—to God, then we are free to
trust Him to meet our needs.

—Larry Burkett

Abundance isn't God's provision for me to live in luxury. It's His provision for me
to help others live. God entrusts me with His money not to build my kingdom
on earth, but to build His kingdom in heaven.

—Randy Alcorn

You can give without loving. But you cannot love
without giving.

—Amy Carmichael



God Creation Mankind

By Kirstie Skogerboe



he word *stewardship* has surfaced repeatedly in my mind and conversations this past year. I've spent a lot of time pondering my responsibility to the Mexican passport tucked away in my file box and the care I take in maintaining the Spanish language that sticks to my tongue more than it used to. I've witnessed righteous stewardship in my family members for years, and been moved to imitate them. But I haven't, until now, distilled from Scripture and experience the fundamental characteristic of a steward: using God's gifts to take part in relational restoration.

Three relationships broke in Eden: man's proper relationship to God, creation, and fellow man. By allowing us to steward, God permits us to participate in repairing those relationships. The *Lutheran Study Bible* comments that Adam retained his duty to steward creation even after expulsion from the garden; moreover, his offspring who were once spiritually expelled now testify to the redemption of the world and pronounce grace to all mankind (21). Righteous stewards thus catalyze a return to every right relationship man once lost.

As ranchers, my sister and brother-in-law recognize their duty to rightly relate to creation, a duty which requires maintaining the health of their land. Twice a week, they build a large paddock and push their cattle to new sections one to six times a day, six days a week. Heavy concentrations of manure sink into the ground, enriching it with nutrients. Since the cattle only graze long enough to fertilize the ground, the roots of the grass are preserved to maintain land cover. My family's stewardship of their land not only protects and improves the soil, but ameliorates the cattle's nutrition. Their commitment to proper stewardship echoes Adam's working and keeping of the garden (Genesis 2:15). By dedicating their work to the health and preservation of God's gifts, they reflect man's proper care for creation.

My parents have devoted their life to restoring people's relationship with God, even when their mission work has looked far different from what they expected. Many hard hearts have encountered the gospel through their teaching, yet few have softened; and of those who have received the Word, many have been overcome by the thorns of this world. Few of those confirmed in the church have remained in it. Three of my childhood Christian friends have given up on church entirely, permitting their painful past to claim victory. Yet my parents patiently guard the Word entrusted to them, and continue to sow it with truth and love. The apostle Paul writes, "But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Romans 8:25, ESV). Stewards wait for the restoration of men to God, no matter how long.

My mother- and father-in-law steward their home to repair the brokenness of mankind's relationships. They are quick to see who might need a meal or a safe place to sleep for the night. Sometimes, they offer their home to others for years at a time, like the two foster kids whose giggles and caterwauls now fill the parsonage. Each need they meet—even each diaper they change—speaks to a healing of human relationships. Just after the parable of the talents, Jesus foretells, "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me'" (Matthew 25:34-36, ESV). Righteous stewardship requires noticing those who need what we steward, and fulfilling those needs as though we housed or clothed or fed Jesus Himself.

What God asks of His stewards is, of course, quite different from what we manage to accomplish. Yet through Christ's sacrifice, we are given a grace that covers even our poorest treatment of the gifts God entrusts to us. By restoring our relationship with Him, He shapes us into stewards who use our gifts to draw others into right relationships. It is His grace that unfolds the character of a steward—a character that belongs to stewards only because it belongs to God.

Stewardship
can be defined by
the relationships
God permits us
to take part in
repairing.

Skogerboe, daughter of AFLC missionaries Pastor Todd and Barb Schierkolk, lives in Orange, Ca.



When we lived in South America, the *hacienda* system was still in place in remote corners of the country. A *hacienda* was a land grant given 400 years ago by the King of Spain to a Spanish nobleman, often consisting of more than a million acres that might include mountains, jungles, and arable land. The *hacienda* amounted to something the size and equivalent of a county in the United States. The *hacendado*, the landlord who was a descendant of the original Spanish noblemen, owned everything: the land, the buildings, crops and cattle, and even the people who lived on and worked the land, who were called *peones* (the English equivalent would be serfs). If the *hacendado* sold a tract of land, the sale included the *peones* who lived on that land.

The *hacendado* himself usually lived far away. He might live in the provincial or national capital city, or maybe in Europe or the United States. He often owned houses in several countries. I met one *hacendado* whose property included the largest cattle ranch in the country. He told me he hadn't been to his *hacienda* in more than 30 years—although he often flew to San Francisco for lunch!

The daily running of the estate was in the hands of a *mayordomo*, or steward, who actually lived on the land. The steward had full power of attorney to act on behalf of his lord. He could buy and sell machinery, buildings, cattle, crops, land, and *peones* at his whim. He was authorized to act in every way as though the estate were his own. His decisions were final and absolute. The only way in which the steward was different from the actual landlord was that at any time the *hacendado* could appear and require an accounting of his administration of the estate. The steward was required to always act in the best interest of his lord. A visit by the *hacendado* was a huge occasion, anticipated with fear and trembling and celebrated with a party attended by everyone who lived on the *hacienda*.

When the Bible calls us stewards this is what it means. We have been given life, a set of talents, financial treasure, a social position, a family, children, a circle of friends, a job, a business, a country of which we are citizens. We are free to treat all these things as though they were our own, but we don't really own any of it. We are stewards, *mayordomos*. All of it belongs to God, and He has placed these things—these people—in our care to treat them as though they were our own, always acting in the best interest of our Lord. At some point we will be asked to give an account to Him for what we did with all that He put into our care.

Tithing is one good way, endorsed by God in His Word, to keep us always aware of who owns what we have. Giving the first ten percent of my income back to the Lord keeps my focus on whose it really is. It's not that God needs my money. But I need to be reminded that it isn't really mine. So, the Lord set up this system whereby He gets the first chunk of it, and He promises to bless the rest of it when I do tithe. "Bring all the tithes into My storehouse ... test Me on this, and see if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour out a such a blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10).

I've discovered that I can always do more with the 90 percent left over after I give God that first 10 percent than I ever could do with the full 100 percent. It's a mathematical mystery. There have been many times over the years when I would sit down and do the calculations and know that 100 percent of my paycheck would not be enough to cover all the bills, but then I would find that somehow, with God's blessing, the 90 percent left after I gave God the tithe would cover it all and usually leave me with something still in my hand.

Dear Christian, we are not at the mercy of the economy. We deal with God, and He has His own system. "The blessing of the Lord makes rich and he adds no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22).

Just as in everything else in life, when we handle our finances God's way, we find blessings we never imagined possible. Always remember, you are a steward, a *mayordomo*. None of it is yours. Use whatever God puts into your hand as a faithful steward, always working in God's best interest.

Giles serves Calvary Free Lutheran, Mesa, Ariz.



Always
remember,
you are a steward,
a “mayordomo.”
None of it
is yours.



By Pastor Dan Giles

What Tithing Is/Does



Generations of Giving

By Linda Nelson





y grandparents' garden seemed to have an endless supply of vegetables. There were enough green beans and peas to supply family and neighbors with gifts, and leftovers were sold in the local grocery store. When I spent one high school summer helping in my grandparents' home, I expected to bring enough vegetables home to feed all five of my siblings. The vegetables helped, but I found that Grandma had a gift of rationing. Thus, feeding our entire family would take away the extras meant as gifts for cousins and neighbors, and leave grocery shelves empty of their local produce. We needed to share.

God's spiritual gifts are different in that sharing our gifts with others increases the supply of grace upon grace.

Mom gave us each a quarter for offering at Sunday school or church when I was a child. We didn't go to Sunday school very often as Dad needed us to work on the farm. After Dad passed away at age 67, we visited Mom and she handed me a dollar to put in the offering plate. I didn't expect anything from Mom, but could see it was important to her to give to God from unexpected independence. We know that the widow's mite is meaningful to God.

Giving our children to the Lord began in earnest when my husband and I attended a Teens Encounter Christ weekend together.

Our children were between the ages of 5 and 11. I trusted in Jesus and accepted His forgiveness and mercy, quickly following with a prayer that He might save at least one of our children.

I didn't have enough faith at the time to ask for more. God saved all four of them!

It overwhelms us daily living in His generosity. We asked our children to follow God's lead instead of always trying to do what we might expect them to do. It gave them some freedom as teenagers and encouraged them

and us to trust the Lord. A memory of our

child going on a mission trip instead of attending her high school graduation ceremony comes to mind. The Word of God became a guide for us. Isaiah 55:11 says, "So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." A study Bible our children received in church became family devotions for a year as my husband read the text and insights in their entirety. God's Word is true, and we needed to hold onto that truth in raising our children.

Within a year of our coming to faith in Jesus, Maranatha Free Lutheran Church, Glyndon, Minn., formed and joined the AFLC. II Corinthians 3:17 now became

special to us. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom." Blessings beyond our expectation occurred in our church home. Our eldest child was alone in a confirmation class which soon grew to five students. Our youth group leader encouraged him to consider the AFLC Bible college. Four graduates later we again stood in awe of God's generosity. Mission Trips offered through our church, the Bible college, and other ministries have encouraged our family to see how God works in other cultures and continues to be meaningful as He allows us to give of ourselves and learn from other churches. Our children have traveled as the Lord led and gave opportunities. Garage sales and God's gifts of support through family and church family provided for trips to Mexico and Russia (English language camps). One summer we had a daughter sharing the gospel in a mime group in Siberia and another daughter spending her summer in Alaska. I have been to Mexico (as a youth group chaperon) and my husband was blessed to go to Uganda with a work group to build a mission house. We both came home and shared with our family a vision for outreach and appreciation for God's hand in the gift of time.

Another way that I witnessed God's provision later on was in our own church when I served as the treasurer. Many individuals gave of their means to support the needs of ministry, and often I found consistent giving to a specific purpose such as the building fund, missions, or the AFLC Bible school. When our kids went to Bible school and college, we were able to pay half of their expenses. We requested that they meet us in the middle, knowing the importance of their investment and trust in God's grace for the life decisions they would make. Financial blessings have been part of God's provision.

My own Grandma's Garden, a remnant of farm life and a reminder of my grandparents' and parents' provision, has extended living in God's grace to include grandchildren. Nearly two years ago the Lord answered an ambulance ride prayer allowing me to recover from a heart attack and meet our grandchild. A blessing beyond belief. Treasured memories include bringing grandchildren to enjoy sharing God's bounty. One year it may be a pumpkin harvest, another apples. Encouraging them to walk in faith includes planting with them in the spring and finding the results of harvest later in the summer or fall. We can grow in daily prayer and trust the Lord to keep our grandchildren in His care as they grow. Some focuses of my garden have been the Mother's Day gifts our grandchildren have brought me over the years, including a pine tree sapling that reminds me of growth in Christ.

Invest in people, ministry, and God's kingdom. Be faithful to family, extended family, and neighbors. Trust God with money and time. Know we can't out-give God and in His time He makes all things beautiful.

Nelson is a member of Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn.

It overwhelms
us daily living in
His generosity.

What God's Word Says

By Pastor John Kiehl

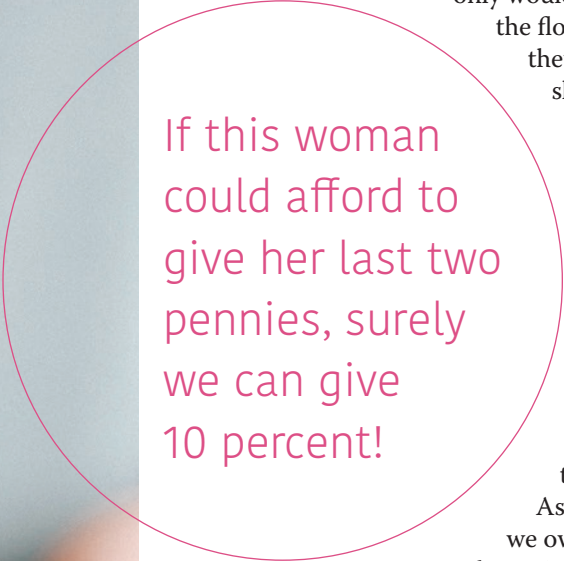
T

hough there is no command in the New Testament to tithe, there is support in the New Testament for tithing. In Scripture, tithing began with Abraham. Abraham gave Melchizedek 10 percent of everything in Genesis 14:14-20. Abraham passed the concept on to his descendants. When Jacob was fleeing his brother, Esau (Genesis 28), he saw the Lord in heaven and angels ascending and descending a stairway to the throne. Jacob was so overwhelmed, he vowed that if God fulfilled the vision, he would take the Lord as his God and would give Him 10 percent of everything he possessed.

In the Law of Moses, we see that God regarded 10 percent of the Israelites' possessions as belonging to Him (Leviticus 27:30-33), the Lord expected Israel to support the Levites and those in need with their tithes (Numbers 18:21-24), tithes were not the only offering they gave (Deuteronomy 12:6-7), and the Levites and priests were also to tithe (Numbers 18:26).

The passages in the Pentateuch establish God's ownership of all things, including the tithe. We also see that tithes are not the upper limit of what the Lord's people could give back to Him. When the people were not faithful, their giving fell off. As one result, the Levites would leave the Lord's service (Nehemiah 13:10). Amos also pointed out that tithes, in themselves, were not always accurate indicators of a pure heart (Amos 4:4). Part of Jewish renewal





If this woman
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10 percent!

movements, such as Nehemiah's, included restoration of the tithe (Nehemiah 13:5, 12).

Perhaps the clearest Old Testament teaching on tithing is found in Malachi 3:6-12. In this remarkable passage, several things are emphasized. Failure to tithe was regarded by God as both turning away from Him and robbery. If the people were faithful to tithe, not only would the temple be well supplied, but the Lord Himself would "open the floodgates of heaven" so that they would have more blessings than they had room for. Haggai taught, and Jesus confirmed, that we should "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given you as well" (Matthew 6:33).

Jesus proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount that He had not come to abolish the law or prophets, but to fulfill them. He went on to commend those who keep the commands of God (Matthew 5:17-20). Tithing was a command, even if not one of the ten given by the Lord on Mount Sinai.

During Jesus' ministry on earth, he encountered a rich young man who asked Him about eternal life. The young man claimed to have kept God's commandments, but went away sad when Jesus said, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Matthew 19:16-21).

As followers of Christ, we must be willing to give up everything we own—100 percent. Yet, Jesus apparently does not call all of us to do so. Scriptures point out the importance of providing for one's family (I Timothy 5:8) and working so you have something to give others (Ephesians 4:28). But none of these obligations cancels out giving our tithe.

Jesus pronounces woes on those who are blind and hypocritical in their spiritual life. Notice Matthew 23:23-24. Here, the Lord Jesus specifically mentions the tithe. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." Jesus didn't give us a choice between tithing and godly behavior. We are to do both. In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) Jesus teaches that we should not neglect teaching obedience to "everything I have commanded you."

In another scene recorded in Mark, Jesus sat down and watched people putting money into the temple treasury. (I imagine He still watches us as we give!) He commended the widow for giving 100 percent of all she had, though it wasn't much (12:41-44). If this woman could afford to give her last two pennies, surely we can give 10 percent.

In I Corinthians, Paul discusses the collection the Corinthians believers were preparing for Paul to deliver to needy Christians in Jerusalem. His teaching encouraged them to set aside a portion of their earnings every week (or every paycheck). In other words, don't wait until later, or you may have little or nothing to give. Money tends to sprout wings and fly away, according to Proverbs 23:5.

Paul's primary instructions on giving are found in II Corinthians 8-9. His teaching encouraged believers to give out of the grace God had given to them. First, give yourself to the Lord. After that, giving of mere money is easier since it is all His anyway. Give willingly. Give in accordance with what you have. God doesn't expect you to give what you don't have. Give generously. (See also Jesus' words in Luke 6:38.) Give according to your plan and give cheerfully. Your generosity will be rewarded, meaning that you will have enough for yourself, and enough to continue to give generously. He added that thanksgiving and praise will result from generous giving.

Philippians 4:19 was a promise given to generous givers: "My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." Tithing should not be our goal, but our starting point. Give generously and be blessed.

Kiehl serves Spencer Creek Free Lutheran, Eugene, Ore.

Time

By Chanel Nelson



I cannot seem to escape the topic of time. At the beginning of 2021, I found myself eagerly counting down the days until that glorious day when I'd finally change my name to Mrs. Samuel Nelson. Yet, somehow, the days didn't seem to contain enough hours to complete the vast number of wedding projects yet to be tackled.

Shortly after the wedding, I decided to further evaluate my use of time. What takes up the majority of my day? To what am I dedicating the few waking hours that I have each day?

As the Psalmist writes, "Teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom" (90:12). If you numbered your days, what would be on your list?

As I evaluated my use of time (and "numbered my days"), I chose to take an indefinite break from social media. Although I love the chance to catch up with Bible college classmates and to read about the lives of my friends back in South Dakota, I was strongly convicted by my own eagerness to turn to my cell phone at every available opportunity. Eating dinner with Sam and feeling a lack of conversation? I'd pull out my phone and scroll through Facebook. Waiting for an oil change at my mechanic's shop? You'd probably find me looking through recent popular posts on Instagram. Wasn't there something that could more effectively fill my time?

I was reminded of the words of missionary C.T. Studd, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last." Certainly, my life has more purpose than simply scrolling through the internet at every possible moment. The Lord has given me numerous vocations to invest in during my short time here on earth. How could I waste one moment that could be spent investing in those roles and relationships?

As believers, we are entrusted with various vocations in life. I am a daughter, sister, wife, employee, church member, friend, citizen, etc. Right here, in the place where the Lord has put me, I have a job (apart from my regular day-job) to do, serving those who the Lord has placed in my sphere. What better way could I steward my time than to invest in these relationships that He has given? Our time is a tool that can be used to God's glory, for the good of those around us. As we read in Ephesians 5:15-16, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." Another version uses the phrase "redeeming the time" here. What a worthwhile phrase to ponder. To redeem means to buy back. Buying back the time. We know not what time we have left. Do we even have tomorrow?

Although I have recently returned from my social media hiatus, that online platform now feels like a means to further communicate with those the Lord has placed in my life rather than an escape from the reality of life around me. The Lord is so abundantly good in giving me time with those around me. May the Lord guide our use of our time, for the good of our neighbor and for God's glory alone.

Nelson attends Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis.

God was using that time to hone my talents and gifts, divinely preparing me for the years of ministry to come.



Talents, gifts, abilities ... we often use these words as synonyms in conversation. But Scripture explains that they are actually unique and independent qualities. I'd like to share with you my own testimony of how God worked in my life to develop my talents for His purposes.

As a youth, I was often asked if I would pursue the same vocation as my dad. Since I was a child, I had assumed that I would continue carrying the mantle of ministry held in trust by my dad, who was a pastor.

As the years passed, I became aware of the growing number of options for someone feeling a "call" to ministry. There were positions available in mission work, youth ministry, worship, and of course, Christian education. Maybe ministry was bigger than the pastorate. Yet, I felt an inner drive for pastoral ministry, and I set my GPS for seminary.

The next several years were a blur of secular jobs, seminary classes, and volunteer church work. I finished my studies at an independent seminary, and soon began my first call in a church plant west of Minneapolis. I was bi-vocational, driving a school bus during the day and filling the rest of my time with ministry. Soon, I realized that though seminary had done a wonderful job preparing my brain, I had learned little of life—at least, the life that most of my members were living. So I laid aside my ordination and picked up the ordinary life of a restaurant manager.

Along with my wife, Vicki, I continued to volunteer in the churches we attended, singing on worship teams, teaching Sunday school, serving in the nursery, providing pulpit supply, and serving on various boards. But my real education came through my jobs: warehouse worker, foodservice manager and trainer, restaurant renewal, and even several years as a telephone debt collector.

Every one of these posts taught me something, honing talents and abilities that I would later need. But at the time I didn't realize it. I couldn't understand why God was wasting my time. I had contacted several churches and synods, but to no avail. There were no positions open. If I was supposed to be pastoring a church, why wasn't God opening a call for me? I felt like Joseph serving Potiphar in Egypt, and then in prison. But as Joseph later declared to his brothers, "... you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

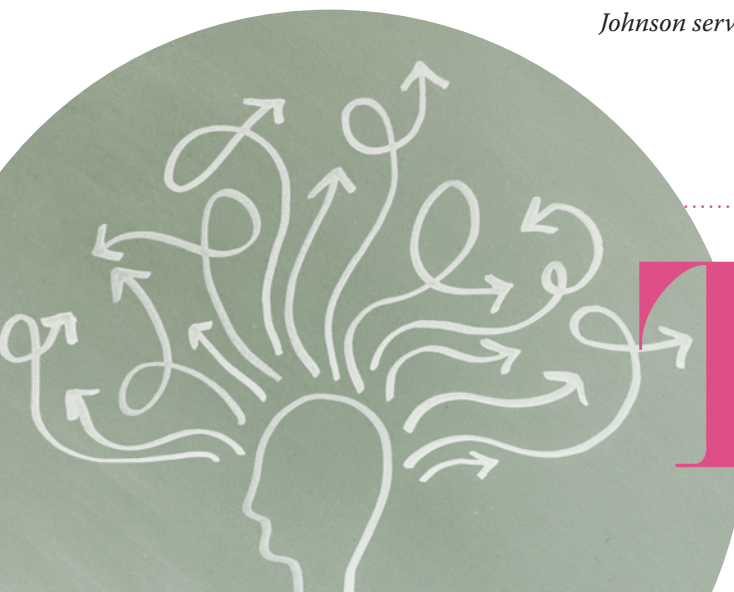
Eventually, one of my favorite biblical phrases came true in my life. "In the fullness of time," God opened all the right and necessary doors for the pastorate. The AFLC opened their doors to a Lutheran pastor needing a call and who had been through two schools of training: seminary and the school of life.

From my perspective, my pastoral call had been put on hold. But God was using that time to hone my talents and gifts, divinely preparing me for the years of pastoral ministry to come. And to this day I wouldn't trade a thing, not the years of preparation, nor the decades of pastoral ministry which followed. I have often thanked God for His foresight in my preparation, and for every talent He refined in each job. To God be the glory.

Johnson serves Living Faith Lutheran, Boyertown, Pa.

By Pastor David Johnson

Talent



By Hans Tanner

Treasure



Why me? This question has consistently popped up throughout my adult life. More specifically, the question goes something like this: “Lord, why have you blessed *me* with substantial material resources?”

When I was first on my own after high school and attending the Association Free Lutheran Bible School (now the Free Lutheran Bible College), I struggled with why I was able to get through that time with little to no financial concerns. I was blessed with family members who sponsored my entire Bible school costs. On the other hand, I saw others working incredibly hard to stay up to speed on their student bills, and I admired their resourcefulness. I thought, “Why do I deserve to not have to work as hard as they do?”

The simple answer was that I didn’t deserve it. The longer and hopefully more clear answer is, it is not because of me—or anything in me—that I have been blessed with these resources. An appropriate amount of humility comes when I rest in that answer. As with all His other gifts, God’s financial blessings are entirely undeserved. Even the wages we earn and invest are thanks to the other gifts with which God has blessed us, making it possible to earn the wages in the first place. All good gifts come from the father (James 1:17). But what are those gifts for?

All of God’s good gifts—material blessings included—have been given so that we can reflect His blessings to others. This pattern is first explicitly seen in the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3), but it is also woven throughout the entirety of Scripture. Ultimately, we see it fulfilled in the life of the Son, given so that we might live when death was our only fate. The opportunities we have been given to steward the resources God has given us help others encounter their creator. The problem we have is the persistence of a sinful nature that balks at anything other than selfish indulgence.

When we lose sight of why we have been given God’s good gifts, we tend to become enchanted with ourselves and the gifts, believing they are deserved and for our own good. Scripture is clear—money and other material blessings are not in themselves evil. Rather, it is the love of those resources, stemming from the sinful nature, that leads us to idolatry (I Timothy 6:10). We all fall into this error, and so it is only as we rest securely in the forgiveness of our sins and walk humbly with the Lord in repentance that we become free to love our neighbors by stewarding our treasure well.

As we rest secure in our salvation and keep eternity in perspective, we can make decisions with our money and other resources that are not based on getting ahead of our neighbors and milking this life for all its pleasures. Instead, we can use our money in ways that say to others, “I love you,” and more importantly, “God loves you.” Stewarding our treasures well, as with so many other biblical mandates, is an opportunity to see both God’s law and gospel.

Tanner is a member of St. Paul’s Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D.

... we can use
our money in ways
that say to others,
“I love you,” and
more importantly,
“God loves you.”

Living Stone Chinese Church is a new church plant located on the campus of the University of Minnesota. We reach out to Chinese migrants and the 3,200 university students from China who are on campus every year.

Thank God for His blessing, as we have witnessed conversion moments from friends over the past three years.

A Chinese woman who attended our Bible study, I will call her Anna, joined us with her husband when we first started. They both have striking educational backgrounds. The husband is a believer; the wife is not. For a long time, Anna regarded the Bible as a philosophy book and always asked us questions. I soon realized that I didn't have enough knowledge to give her answers. So for me, she was someone hard to deal with.

However, my wife, Jia, and I learned to love this couple. I do not remember how many times Jia and I asked Anna, "Are you ready to accept Jesus as your Savior?" But she always replied: "Not yet!" After many conversations I lost patience with her. When Covid-19 started to spread around the U.S. last year, we didn't see her often. Sometimes when I thought about her, I doubted if

she would ever accept Jesus and believe in God.

But one afternoon, Anna went to a grocery store and a tall white man, who did not dress very neatly, walked toward her asked her if she knew who Jesus is, and if she was ready to accept Jesus as her Savior. That was the moment of her conversion. The Holy Spirit filled her, and she finally realized it was her time, and she said yes to Jesus!

Her story reminds me of I Corinthians 3:6-7: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." God is the one working behind the scenes. He can bring people to Him at the most unexpected places.

Another unique characteristic of church planting at the University of Minnesota is fluidity. Because many Chinese who participate in Bible studies are students and visiting scholars, most of them will return to China after a period of time. This makes our church a sending church. Even under the influence of Covid-19, from May 2020 to May 2021, a total of 73 Chinese visiting scholars returned from the University of Minnesota to 22 cities in China, 12 of whom

are already Christians. Praise the Lord! He is in control.

The biggest takeaway I have from the last two years is the change of my view on church, mission, and programs. I used to see church and missions as two separate things. I tended to think of missions as a project. Now I believe missions is the essence of the Church; it's the call we have received from a missionary God. Therefore, the goal of this Chinese church plant is not to plant the coolest church or do things that have never been done before, but it is to reach people, to be on mission, to faithfully preach the Word of God, and to share Jesus's love with our neighbors in the community.

We should trust God to deliver transformation rather than our own efforts, the musicians, the worship leaders, and the pastors to deliver a good show.

Thank you for praying for our Chinese American church, Living Stone. We love being a part of the AFLC family.

Miao Zhao, a 2020 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, serves Living Stone Chinese Church.



PLANTING A MISSIONAL CHURCH

BY MIAO "HOLMES" ZHAO

A LIFETIME'S WORK

A COLLECTION OF WRITINGS FROM FORMER SEMINARY DEAN

VOLUME FIVE

This was the book I was waiting for. It was 20 years ago, traveling to a convention in Colorado Springs, Colo., that I posed the question. Dr. Francis Monseth was in the driver's seat of our minivan as I was riding shotgun. Looking back, as the junior faculty member, it was rather forward of me to bring up what was lingering on my mind, but I meant it as an encouragement: "So, when are you going to write your book?"

I had in mind something in the field of systematic theology or Bible doctrine. It was Fran's specialty. What a treasure a volume like that would be, coming from the pen of a dear mentor who had taught me so much as a young boy at Bethany Bible Camp and later as a Bible college and seminary student. The Lord had something even better in mind.

In his opening biographical essay, Pastor Robert L. Lee notes, "This volume is recognition that God blessed Francis Monseth with an expanded ministry beyond the classroom through his writing." *One Thing I Seek: Selected Writings of Francis W. Monseth* is the most recent addition to the Heritage Series which

consists of writings that reflect the Lutheran, pietistic, and Scandinavian heritage of the AFLC. The present volume, edited by Marian Quanbeck Christopherson, fits perfectly within this heritage.

What's included in this collection? The book is divided into five parts. Part I is a collection of topically-arranged articles from the pages of *The Lutheran Ambassador*. Twelve essays focus on prayer, highlighting the biblical pattern of prayer and ingredients of effective prayer. A chapter on the means of grace explains how the sacraments relate to evangelism. Principles and practices of evangelism are presented with a biblical, worldwide focus. The work of the Holy Spirit is illumined in the light of Scripture. In short, expect a smorgasbord of edifying essays addressing a range of topics affecting the

congregation and what it means to be a servant leader. These are classic articles—doctrinal, historical, and practical—that reflect our Lutheran heritage and God's blessing on our AFLC.

Part II features a selection of essays from *The Servant Pastor*, published by the Free Lutheran Seminary, examining what it means to be a congregational shepherd. The seven articles in Part III, drawn from *The Sverdrup Journal*, explore the impact of the leadership of Georg Sverdrup and the formation of the Fundamental Principles which guide the ministry of the AFLC. Part IV includes additional historical writings relating to Sverdrup and Philip Spener, one of the early leaders of the pietist movement. Part V rounds out the collection with devotional writing featured in bulletin articles and excerpts from Annual Conference seminary reports.

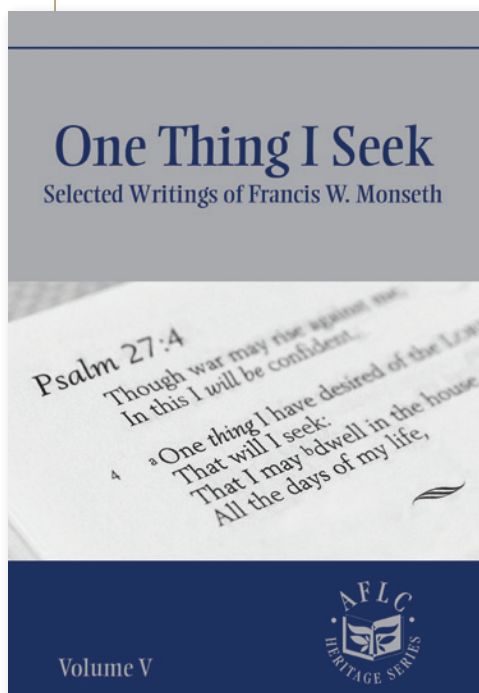
The reality is that all through his years of ministry, Francis was seeking "one thing"—humbly living out his faith "in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27)—writing his "book." Above all, these chapters reflect a Christ-centered focus, a confidence in the authority of the Bible and the finished work of Christ, a concern for reaching the lost and building up the body of Christ, a love for godliness and truth, a heart for missions and the training of faithful workers, an appreciation for the wholesome, biblical pietism of our heritage, and a longing to serve Christ faithfully to the glory of God. All of these things are part of the "one thing."

What is it that you are seeking in life? Would you say with the apostle Paul (and with Francis), "To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21)? This volume will challenge readers to faithfulness in their walk with the Lord. It will be valuable for pastors, ministry leaders, and those being trained as servant pastors. Small groups will find it a useful resource for Bible studies or adult classes. In *One Thing I Seek*, every reader is sure to find a treasure of eternal value.

Yes, this was the book I was waiting for. It was not what I had envisioned 20 years ago. Yet, in God's gracious plan, this is a book that will serve to pass the baton of God's truth to the next generation. Contact our Parish Education office today and order a copy for yourself, your family, a friend, or your congregation. It will be an investment in the one thing that matters most—knowing God and His salvation through the unchanging truth of His Word.

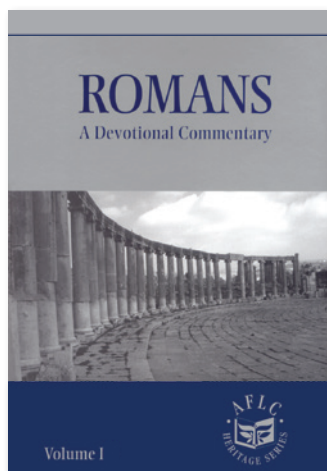
By Dr. Jerry Moan

Faculty, Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary



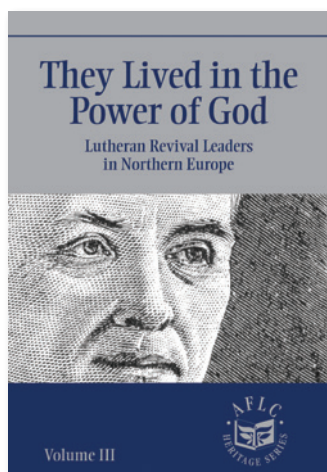
The AFLC Heritage Series

Inaugurated by the Board of Publications and Parish Education in 1999, the AFLC Heritage Series is an open-ended book series including five volumes so far. Volume VI will be a history of the AFLC by Rev. Robert Lee. The series consists of writings that reflect the Lutheran, pietistic, and Scandinavian heritage of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. The writings in the series are theological, historical, biographical, or devotional in content and may include new works, works previously published, and works not previously translated. For more information and to make purchases, visit ambassadorpublications.org.



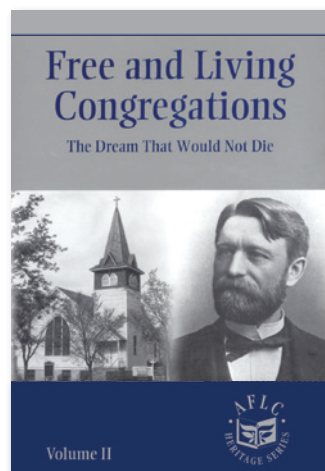
VOLUME ONE

Enrich your daily devotional life in the Book of Romans with verse-by-verse meditations by Swedish writer and lay evangelist, Carl O. Rosenius, known for his clear distinction of law and gospel.



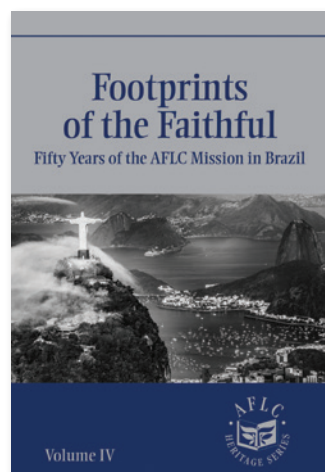
VOLUME THREE

Translated from Finnish, this collection of biographical writings by Lutheran scholar Dr. Uuras Saarnivaara, reflects the European heritage of Lutheran congregations in America and includes individuals from Germany, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland, who have significantly impacted spiritual life among Lutherans between 1500 and 1950, such as Hallesby, Hauge, Rosenius, and others.



VOLUME TWO

In celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the AFLC in 2002, this volume includes chapters on the history of the AFLC, the biblical understanding of the congregation, the role of pastors and lay people in the free church, the annual conference, and selected writings of John P. Strand, the first president of the AFLC. Correlating study guide is also available.



VOLUME FOUR

From a primitive Brazilian frontier through western expansion and to the developing cities, God prepared the groundwork, provided workers to plant the seed, and brought growth through the Word of God. Fifty years of mission work brought challenges, unforeseen circumstances, grief, and loss, yet these historic accounts demonstrate God's hand guiding, sustaining, and expanding the work of AFLC-Brazil to the present.

Slim Buttes church adds fellowship hall

Members of Slim Buttes Free Lutheran, Reva, S.D., are in the process of building an addition onto their church building.

The project began when the congregation discussed having better handicap accessibility. Though a handicap ramp into the sanctuary was available and there was ground-level access to the basement, wheelchair users had to go outside and around to get to the basement fellowship area. This was difficult, especially when winter weather brought snow.

A suggestion was made to have a ground-level entrance and, if possible, not have an elevator. The project grew to include a fellowship area housed in an addition that would replace the basement area.

The new addition will include a new kitchen, two handicap-accessible bathrooms, and a large fellowship hall. The addition is ground-level accessible and includes direct access to the sanctuary. The basement will still be used for Sunday school and the pastor's office. The former basement kitchen will be made into an office.

The first stage of construction is complete. According to Pastor Henry Mohagen, much of the material costs were locked in prior to the huge price increases that have taken place in



the last year. The siding on the old church building also was replaced. Bids have been accepted for the interior construction, as well.

Mohagen said that the congregation has fielded a number of comments from the community about the new addition, especially as many churches around the country are closing.

The congregation is located in an area of sparse population but has a strong, active membership. Mohagen has announced his retirement pending the call of a new pastor. He said the congregation offers an opportunity for a young pastor and family to have a great ministry in a rural area with a good school and a great place to raise a family.



Crews worked to frame (top), roof, and side (above) an addition to the Slim Buttes Free Lutheran church sanctuary. The addition, which includes a fellowship hall, kitchen, and restrooms, gives the building handicap accessibility. The congregation is located in Reva, S.D., and is served by Pastor Henry Mohagen.

Alaska Mission to celebrate 100 years of ministry

Members of Dell Lutheran, Frost, Minn., will host the 100th anniversary celebration for the Lutheran Mission Society, now called the Alaska Mission. The afternoon and evening event will be held on Tuesday, Oct. 12. All are welcome.

The schedule commences at 1 p.m. with reports from ministry representatives and testimonies from those involved in the mission throughout its history. A dinner (please RSVP to Dell Lutheran) will be served at 5:30 p.m. and the evening service, featuring a message from Pastor Jeff Swanson, will begin at 7 p.m. The service will be livestreamed. Visit dellfreechurch.org and click on "sermons."

Lutheran Mission Society (originally the Federation of Norwegian Young People) was organized in 1921 as a society of Norwegian youth groups from coast to coast dedicated to keeping Norwegian immigrants in the faith and in the church. This effort

was aided by the magazine called *Norsk Ungdom* (Norwegian Young People). Annual meetings numbered in the hundreds in attendance. From an early date the society supported mission work in Alaska, which included seamen's missions, an orphanage, evangelists, church planting, and eventually radio station KAKN and the gospel aviation ministry in Naknek.

Though interest in the society wained in the 1970s, supporters kept the mission work going until it was turned over to AFLC Home Missions. LMS today no longer oversees the work but instead raises money and prayer support for the Alaska Mission. Current officers include AFLC Pastors Tom C. Olson (president), Brian Davidson (second vice president), Joe Ocker (treasurer), Henry Mohagen (secretary), and layman Michael Johnson (first vice president).

DISTRICT RALLIES

BY LAVONNE WEST

It's time once again for apple crisp and pumpkin spice. The days are shorter, and nights are cooler. As the Women's Missionary Federation plans for the fall gatherings at the district level, here is a look back at a couple of spring events.

Dorothy Hjermstad wrote about the Central Tri State rally hosted at Living Word Lutheran in Mankato, Minn.

Brenda Nelson, our first speaker told us that she loves music and finding hymns with Scripture as their source. We looked at the hymn, "How Firm a Foundation," by John Rippon. We sang each verse, and then Brenda commented on the Scripture which inspired it. Verse one tells us that we must build a strong foundation (Matthew 7:24-27). The second verse calls us to not fear for God is with us (Isaiah 41:10). The third verse reminds us that the deep waters and rivers will not overcome us (Isaiah 43:2). And verse four reminds us that God's grace is sufficient (II Corinthians 12:9, I Peter 1:6-7).

Pastor Randy Nelson, the AFLC's director of evangelism and discipleship, spoke on our theme for the day, "Great is Thy Faithfulness." He referenced Lamentations 3:21-23, which recounted when God's people had turned away from Him and followed false gods. We, too, have turned away from the Lord. No matter how bad things are, we can have hope. God's very being is faithfulness.

We broke into small groups to pray together before lunch was served. During our business meeting, we elected new officers. It was a wonderful day, filled with sharing God's Word and reconnecting with friends we hadn't seen in a long time.

It really was fun to travel to Washington with three ladies from my church. We sang and shared and prayed along the journey. The streets of Everett were lined with beautiful cherry blossoms and budding flowers. We had great hosts at

Calvary and Atonement. It was breathtaking to see Puget Sound and the naval base there. Let's all pray for the families of our sailors and soldiers. We are a grateful nation. Great is Thy faithfulness, indeed.

Thank you to Lori Willard and Dorothy

Lori Willard reported on the Pacific Northwest District rally hosted at Calvary Free Lutheran in Everett, Wash.

Six churches were represented. Our theme was "Jesus, Name Above All Names" from Philippians 2:9-10. We sang hymns and songs that focused on Jesus' name. Betty Blacken, from Atonement Free Lutheran in Arlington, Wash., presented devotional thoughts on the theme. LaVonne West, from Stillwater Free Lutheran in Kalispell, Mont., spoke on being in the Lord's Army, and carrying the armor of God. She asked us to list the various names of God. It was not an exhaustive list but it gave us opportunity to reflect on the goodness of God and the descriptions of His attributes.

During the business meeting, discussions included:

- The importance of personal invites from WMF ladies to individual church women to attend district meetings.
- A suggestion to announce the next rally months ahead so outlying churches can make advanced plans to attend.
- Planning for summer District Bible Camp and the WMF Women's Tea.

District elections were held. Sue Oshie, Calvary Free Lutheran, was elected president. And Ilene Kutz, Atonement Free Lutheran, was re-elected as treasurer.

One highlight was a prayer time for our missionaries and ministries of our AFLC.

Hjermstad for their willingness to report. These reports are abbreviated versions.

West, president of the WMF, is a member of Stillwater Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont.

We need to go to church

By Pastor Micah Hjermstad

You need to come to church. Who would have thought that would be such a provocative thing for a pastor to say? But here we are.

First, I need to do my best to explain my heart in that statement and my tone. This is not meant to be some sort of strict order or “guilt trip” given by an embittered pastor. Rather, I say this because I love you. Christians have a unique bond of love in Christ. I love you, and I’m telling you that you need to come to church. It’s healthy for your soul.

In the myriad of voices and opinions shared during the COVID-19 pandemic, I haven’t heard this simple fact said out loud very much. Church is healthy for one’s soul, and we need that. We’ve listened to doctors, educators, politicians, and a host of other city, state, and national leaders. Their words inform the decisions we have been making as individuals, families, and congregations, and that’s wise. But Christians also need to encourage one another to consider the reality that church is valuable and healthy.

Certainly, this is a complex issue for many people who feel like they are stuck between a rock and a hard place. They know how valuable church is, and they also know that it might not be safe to attend. Those are agonizing decisions. Let’s pray for one another in that! And let’s also consider alternative and creative options, because prolonged absence from regular, in-person fellowship around the Word is not healthy for your soul. The livestream option of attending church, as helpful as it is for short-term absences, was never intended to be a long-term replacement for in-person attendance.

Here’s why. One of the common arguments that Christians make in defense of staying home is that the “Church is not a building.” That’s true. I say it all the time. However, here’s one thing the Church is: it’s a gathering. It’s an assembly. We do believe this assembly is a spiritual one. By faith, we are assembled, or gathered, as the body

of Christ. That’s why we believe that Christians all over the world constitute the Church, even though we don’t physically assemble with every Christian in the world. I can’t wait until that happens in heaven! And sometimes it’s not just geography that prevents the Church from gathering, even within a community. Shut-ins know this very personally, because they haven’t been able to gather with their local congregation for years, in some cases. But we don’t leave them in their isolation, either. We find alternative ways for them to gather in person with other Christians, because they need that. We all do.

And that is one of the great benefits of the local congregation. When we physically gather with other Christians, we get a taste of what heaven will be like. That

encourages us, and fills us with hope. That is why the author of Hebrews exhorted Christians to “not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” In other words, we need each other. That is why the Church, ever since it was born on that day of Pentecost, has gathered.

We gather around the Word. We don’t have to gather in a church building, but wherever we gather, we do so around the Word, and we receive the good gifts that God has so graciously given us. We receive those gifts in personal study, too, by faith. But we are also blessed by the community of the gathering of saints.

We must not forget that separation and isolation are crafty tools of the devil who uses them to discourage us and attack our faith. This virus has caused much separation, at least some of it necessary. But that doesn’t mean it is a good thing, or that we should be content with it. Our souls need that fellowship to combat the isolation that makes us prone to attacks on our faith.

I read somewhere recently about the beautiful imagery that is found in Christians rising on Sunday morning to go to church. The Bible calls Christians collectively the Bride of Christ. For brides, their wedding day is such a special and exciting and joyous day. They wake up, prepare themselves, and finally walk down the aisle to meet their bridegroom, where they are joined as one. There is great meaning for Christians, as the Bride of Christ, to wake up, prepare themselves, and go to meet their Bridegroom, Jesus Christ where, by faith, we are joined to Him in His Word.

We are Christ’s bride. What a joy! Come to church, or wherever you can safely gather with others, and meet your Bridegroom in His Word.

Hjermstad, who is the secretary of the AFLC, serves St. Paul’s Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D. Excerpted from the congregation’s September 2020 church newsletter.





B

irth is an amazing miracle wherein God works to create life. In humans, the

process normally takes right around nine months to voyage from conception to birth. When a baby is born, the child is small and vulnerable and must be cared for and provided for very carefully until he or she can grow, strengthen, and learn. In time the child becomes fully grown, strong, and independent.

We are on that journey in more than one way. First, I am happy to announce that our third child is on the way, due April 2022. Zoey, our oldest child (3), is very happy for a new sibling and is hoping for a girl. If I can guess, I would say that Ian, our youngest at nearly 2, wants a brother with whom to roughhouse. The gift of life is such a miracle and a blessing.

The birth of a church is also an amazing miracle in which God works to create life. The Paraguay mission is also happy to announce a new birth, a church. As with a baby, the church was conceived (envisioned) before there were

THE MIRACLE OF LIFE

BY PASTOR MATTHEW ABEL

any visible metrics. The embryonic church has been growing and developing behind the scenes, becoming more established and more visible each day. The growing process has included our commissioning, our move to Paraguay, determining a location for our work, beginning the groundwork for establishing a church, starting kids club and a home Bible study, offering campfire ministries, contacting and evangelizing people, and preparing a worship center. Finally, the church that had been in the preparing period for so long has now been born.

On September 12 we inaugurated and dedicated *Iglesia Esperanza Viva* (Living Hope Church). God delivered the new congregation! The challenges of the birthing process are behind us and now we have the challenges of rearing an itty-bitty baby church: fragility, vulnerability, the ability to only drink milk, and crying in the night.

As with a baby, we hope our church will be always healthy and happy. Realistically, we know that challenges are inevitable.

Please pray for us and for our babies. Pray that we would be faithful in preaching the gospel of Christ. Pray that God our Father would give



us each day our daily bread in all that pertains to these callings. And pray that He would grow the new lives entrusted to our care.

Abel and his wife, Ednay, AFLC missionaries since 2015, are working to plant a church in Paraguay, a mission field that the AFLC conference approved in 1977. They first went to Paraguay in February 2019 and moved to Villarrica, Guairá, in November 2020.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Luke Quanbeck, a 2012 alumnus of the Free Lutheran Bible College, Plymouth, Minn., has been hired by FLBC as the communications coordinator. Previously, Quanbeck worked as a content marketing creator in the e-commerce industry.

Pastor Lance Morrison, a 2021 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, was installed Sept. 12 at Our Savior's Lutheran, Dillon, Mont., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating.

Pastor Kyle Smith, a 2021 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, was installed Aug. 29 at First Lutheran, Ellendale, Minn., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating.

Members of **Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran**, Lakeville, Minn., celebrated the congregation's 40th anniversary Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 11-12, with a youth carnival, dinner, and program. An offering was taken to buy chairs for veterans at the Lakeville American Legion. The Sunday service featured special music from Pastor Mark and Ruth Antal, who served their seminary internship at Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran, and a men's chorus. More than 200 people were in attendance, including former pastors Mark Olson, Todd Erickson, and Richard Anderson, and youth pastor Wade Mobley. Former pastors Les Galland and Al Monson were remembered. Wayne Hanson, founding lay pastor, sent greetings from his home in Arizona.

News from AFLC World Missions

♦ **Pastor Brent and Emily Raan** and their family have relocated from Jinja, Uganda, to the northern city of Gulu, Uganda, where they are working with AFLC World Missions to begin a church planting process. They are currently studying to learn the local language (Acoli), and have begun a biblical counseling class to equip them to serve many young men in the area who were forcefully conscripted into the Lord's Resistance Army. They also recently welcomed their fourth child, Amari Hope.

♦ **Michael Rokenbrodt** is currently serving in Uganda, spending half of his time working with the Ambassador Institute leadership in Jinja, and half of his time with assisting the Raans in Gulu.

♦ **Pastor Nate and Rhoda Jore** and their family returned to Nabukosi, Uganda, in early September after spending a few months in Minnesota on a respite break.

♦ **Pastor Matthew and Ednay Abel** celebrated the inaugural worship service of *Iglesia Esperanza Viva* (Living Hope Church) on Sept. 12, a newly planted congregation in Villarrica, Paraguay. See page 21 for more information.

♦ **Joshua and Ruthie Wagner**, AFLC missionaries on loan to Lutheran Bible Translators, are transitioning in their roles within the ministry. Formerly sent to work with the Theme Bible Translation Project in Sierra Leone, the family now resides in Northfield, Minn. Joshua has accepted a role as partner technology support coordinator. He will travel extensively, encouraging and supporting LBT's international partners (including Bible societies and church bodies) in the effective use of technology for translation, Scripture engagement, and administration. Remotely, he will advocate inside of LBT for the technology and training needs of international partners. After experiencing medical issues over the last two years, Ruthie is transitioning to a role in volunteer ministry in order to continue in the recovery process. The Wagners continue to work on a support basis. Donations for their support can be sent through LBT.

FLBCS hosts several upcoming campus events

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, Plymouth, Minn., will host several events in the coming months.

UpClose, held Oct. 21-22, gives prospective students a chance to tour the campus and take part in sample classes, a chapel service, and activities.

The Alumni Tournament, Oct. 22-23, will feature a kickoff to the men's and women's basketball season with a tournament of games with alumni teams.

Friends of the School Banquet, Nov. 11, gives supporters of FLBCS a chance to hear about ministry updates.

AUGUST MEMORIALS

AED	Parish Education
Rebekah Knapp	Rebekah Knapp
Bible College	Seminary
Deb Benson	Deb Benson
Sherman Benson	Alma Lau
Ruth Claus	WMF
FLAPS	Jean Nash
Sharon Goetze	World Missions
General Fund	Norman Iszler
Sherman Benson	Sherman Benson
Deb Benson	Jeannette
Home Missions	Finnesgard
Alfred Hauser	Rebekah Knapp
Holly Matson	Chester Dyrud
Sharon Goetze	

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-August 31, 2021

FUND	REC'D IN AUGUST	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$35,596	\$277,719	\$265,754
Evangelism	6,043	85,263	62,798
Youth Ministries	12,074	119,915	79,470
Parish Education	6,505	124,079	100,005
Seminary	15,972	189,355	184,769
Bible College	32,596	288,158	236,775
Home Missions	20,207	353,310	229,347
World Missions	22,342	269,453	241,827
Personal Support	76,720	567,519	507,511
TOTALS	\$228,055	\$2,274,772	\$1,908,257

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

A LIFETIME OF STEWARDSHIP LESSONS

Stewardship cannot be taught in a six-week course that we complete and are then done with for the rest of our lives. It involves a lifetime of learning and should begin with children at home. Our first stewardship teachers, at least for most of us,



Pastor Robert Lee

were our parents.

My mother was my first teacher. Our house was a small cinder block building that Dad built himself. He intended it to be a garage when/ if a new house was built on the adjoining lot. I

never felt that we were poor, as it seemed like most of our neighbors were in the same condition. But when Dad was out of work, money must have been in very short supply, and Mom would give haircuts and home permanents to make a few dollars.

It must have been my mom who taught me about tithing. I guess some were taught in a more fearful or legalistic way ... “Give your tithe to God or the devil will collect it in some other way!” ... but I recall learning simply that it was a guide that our Lord had given us. One time Mom said that she had put her last dollars in the church offering, and the next day someone paid her for a haircut. The lesson was that God supplies when we are faithful. I remembered this many years later when I received a generous gift in a time of need from someone who had never done it before or afterwards.

When Dad grew in his relationship to Christ, he was an example of the stewardship of time and talents. At church and in the community, he tried to be available to help others in need. Years later when they lived on a small farm, a neighbor told me how Dad reached out to several elderly bachelors in the area, not neglecting to point them to Christ as he helped with their many other needs. I was told, too, that one Sunday in the absence of the pastor he stepped into the pulpit with fear and trembling and read a sermon from *Decision*

magazine. There was a need, and he tried to fill it.

Dad volunteered to serve on a committee to raise money for our church building project, and a professional fundraiser was secured. The man wanted information about the average income of members according to where they worked, and then instructed the committee members to ask for a higher account of a pledge than they could probably afford because then they will probably give more than they intended. “Gimmicks and pressure!” Dad said as he quit the committee, and this was a lesson to me, as well.

My confirmation pastor was also my stewardship teacher. The congregation our family attended at the time had a pledging program, calling on all the members and asking them to indicate what they would be able to contribute each Sunday during the coming year. Pastor Anderson and one of the deacons made a special call on me after I was confirmed, and treated my very small pledge (fifteen cents a week) with great respect. I told them that this was all I could pledge, but during the summer I earned more money so would be able to increase my offerings then.

God also provided me with stewardship teachers during my years of pastoral ministry. One Sunday in one of the first congregations that I was privileged to serve, I forgot to call on the ushers to receive the offering.

“You’ll never be a success as a pastor if you forget the offerings,” one of the men said to me afterwards with a smile.

Faithful stewardship is more than the Sunday offering, of course, but in my personal stewardship with the congregations that I served, the tithe was a good, basic guide for giving. (Dr. Iver Olson told us in seminary class that during

the depression years he was once asked to give less money to the congregation in the offerings, because he was embarrassing some of the other members who knew how little they were paying him!)

An elderly lady comes to mind who had very little of the world’s goods. She was able, however, to knit some special handiwork to sell “so that I could have something to give to the missionaries,” she said. Another good stewardship teacher!

Early in my years of ministry one congregation’s system of accounting indicated that only funds that were specifically designated went to our AFLC missions and schools, and I discovered that a few larger gifts from two or three individuals made it appear that we were doing well. After discussing it with the council and deacons, I suggested to the

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annual meeting that ten percent of the Sunday offerings would go to our common endeavors so that everyone would have a part in supporting them.

Who were your stewardship teachers? Remember them with thankfulness.

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Periodicals

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association retreat center

OPTING INTO THE MISSION

BY KIRK RAUTIO

When I sit back and reflect on the summer season, as I embrace the falling leaves and the chili cooking on the stove with the change of seasons, I am blessed beyond measure. I am blessed not merely because of the goals that were met and surpassed, but moreover blessed because of the hearts that were impacted, changed, and touched because we continued onward in our mission at the Association Retreat Center, and God worked through us.

Each and every one of us has a choice on a daily basis to engage in God's mission or to sit back and say, "Someone else will do it ... I am not needed today." It is true that God's ultimate mission will continue whether you join it or not, but you will not

reap the blessing from that mission if you opt out—the blessing that He has called you to steward for that particular purpose.

There are countless stories from this summer of the Lord working in hearts to draw them close to Him. We know some of those stories. The Lord has called many into ministry service, He has drawn many down paths of schooling, and He has called many to walk with Him. This is not our work, but the work of Him who sent us and called us to be faithful, to press onward, and to remain engaged in the work of stewarding the gifts He has given us.

I am reminded of the change of the season for the Christian. How are you pressing into this time of your life? How are you allowing Christ to deeply impact you? We all have Kingdom impact opportunities,

but how are we stewarding the time we are given? Are we rising up to answer His call? As Isaiah 6:8 says, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"

We ask you to join us in prayer for those we meet at the ARC, those to whom we get the opportunity to minister, and those whom we work alongside. From our family to yours we are thinking and praying for you as you remain on mission in your sphere of influence.

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