

THE 

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LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



lessons
[in] learning



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LAVISH GIFTS OF GRACE

BY KIRSTIE SKOGERBOE

My friend Khoi has the gift of hospitality. Khoi's hands make a practice of service, whether through his piano-playing, his handshake as he welcomes you into his home, or his cooking. A couple months ago, he hosted my husband, another friend, and me for a dinner of hot pot—a Chinese meal that involves submerging raw meats and vegetables in a steaming pot of broth and fishing them out with chopsticks once they're cooked. Knowing Khoi's gifts, we expected a wonderful (and delicious) evening.

We still caught our breath when we saw the table that night. Two enormous platters piled with thin slices of beef tongue, rib eye, and pork belly bookended the table. Next to them lay trays of bok choy, cabbage, tofu, mushrooms, and noodles, and a few bottles of dipping sauce. Two pots of chicken and garlic broth simmered. Steam curled over the table.

Awed by the feast before us and delighted by the company, we spent the next four and a half hours eating and talking, and eating some more, and talking still. We left full, warm, glad, and rested—valuable gifts from a friend who loves us well.

That night was, to me, a picture of Christ's hospitality: His welcome, His grace, and His feast. Ephesians tells us that in Christ, we have

received "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places ..." (1:3). Paul adds later, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us" (1:7). We taste those riches at the altar, hearing the words of Jesus: "This is my body, which is given for you," and "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:19, 20). And in His comfort to Martha, He comforts the whole church: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). As the psalmist wrote, no good thing does Christ withhold from those who follow Him (84:11).

We are often aware, and should be, that Jesus calls us to take up our cross. But even when we suffer, Christ is not meager with His gifts. He offers us the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting—invaluable gifts from a Friend who loves us well.

Skogerboe, a 2018 graduate of the Free Lutheran Bible College, Plymouth, Minn., lives in Irvine, Calif.

The Conference recommends that the Sunday Schools have a “mission emphasis,” and participate in the support of missions ...”

—1964 Annual Conference Report

Since the future of our church depends on what and how we teach our children, no work within our organization is more important than the program of parish education.

—Helen (Mrs. David C.) Hanson, 1967

The Conference expresses its thankfulness to all who are engaged in the teaching mission of the congregations, and urges them to be workmen who need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

—1963 Annual Conference Report

Foremost is the need for prayer support. Without this life-giving strength the program will bog down with the weight of insignificant differences.

—Helen (Mrs. David C.) Hanson, 1968

... our prime goal for this year has been to produce the text of CONSERVATIVE, TRUE TO THE WORD OF GOD, LUTHERAN Sunday School material.

—1969 Annual Report



[W]hat is education? Quick! What pictures first fill your mind? Even as a home-school parent of seven years, I still picture the yellow school bus. I see desks in neat rows. I hear bells signaling recess or class changes. I smell the sharpening of No. 2 pencils for standardized tests and feel my sweaty palms as I focus on shading in those ovals without crossing the line. I picture a means of education which has been the norm for generations. I'm not calling out the means. Yet, if our understanding of education is defined by a method, and the method becomes suspect, our foundation appears to crumble.

The events of 2020 and 2021 have found educators, administrators, grandparents, parents, and students in a state of crisis. We even termed it "crisis schooling." If we have not taken the time to thoughtfully answer that first question, then many of us have been in a state of crisis schooling for a long time—public school, private school, and home school, alike. The crumbling has revealed poorly constructed foundations. For the repentant this is good news, for the ruins afford the beautiful opportunity to construct a true foundation of education. And upon having a definition of education, we are free to consider the purpose of education, allowing for our creed to both lead and inform the means we choose to educate our children. And our children will benefit.

So back to my first question. What is education? When I consider this question, I first turn my thoughts to my children. I remember they are image bearers. Each child is made in the image of God. They are born in sin. As Lutherans we bring our

what **[is]** education?

infants to the Lord in baptism for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38-39). And as members of Lutheran congregations, we bear witness to the baptism of children with the promise to bring them up in “the fear and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). In the earliest days of a child’s life parents, grandparents, family members, and congregations are called to attend diligently to the task of training children in the Word of God. Our understanding of the purpose of education begins here. Education is the training of image bearers in the image of their Creator (Colossians 3:10).

I can hear your question. I’ve asked it of myself. “If foundational to education is the training of image bearers in the image of their Creator, what does that have to do with reading, writing, and arithmetic?” Our impulse as parents may be to segregate the spiritual from the academic. When we do, we risk transferring to another our God-given responsibility to equip our children for the vocation for which God has prepared them. Image bearers are called to kingdom work. The work of God’s kingdom here on earth is lived out in vocation. Martin Luther, in his explanation of the fourth commandment, “Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother,” writes these words.

Therefore let all people know that is their chief duty ... first to bring up their children in the fear and knowledge of God, and, then, if they are so fitted, also to have them engage in formal study and learn so that they may be of service wherever they are needed.¹

“So that they may be of service wherever they are needed.” This is the purpose of education.

For parents, the means or methods we choose to afford our child his or her education begin and end with us. Gene Veith and Mary Moerbe in their book, *Family Vocation*, bring further explanation to Luther’s writing on the fourth commandment.

Notice that the education of children is the responsibility of their parents. Parents may undertake this work directly, as

homeschoolers are doing. Under the doctrine of vocation, parents may also make use of others who have the specific vocation of being a teacher. But even if they send their children to school, parents remain the critical educators of their children.²

I know Christian parents who are sacrificing their financial resources to give their children a private Christian school education. There are parents sitting on their public-school board to serve as watchmen and leaders. Others are living out the vocation of teacher, administrator, librarian, counselor, coach, custodian, cook or bus driver in their local public schools with the conviction of bringing the hope of the gospel to precious souls. Across this country moms and dads are sacrificing their time and resources for the freedom to educate their children at home. All of these are parents carrying out their God-given responsibility to serve as the primary educators of their children.

Now it’s your turn to answer. What is education? What do you see as the purpose of education? Together we have explored foundational principles of education. Your further development of these principles will bring clarity to the means you choose to carry out this God-given responsibility of raising up image bearers equipped to be of service in God’s kingdom.

Mobley is a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn.

¹ “The Fourth Commandment,” The Large Catechism, in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 410.

² Gene Edward Veith Jr. and Mary J. Moerbe, *Family Vocation: God’s Calling in Marriage, Family, and Children* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012) p.153.

equipping [in] the oasis

By Pastor Chad Friestad

PARENT OASIS THIS WAY!

[A]n a-frame chalkboard sign points toward the sanctuary. Inside, a dozen parents congregate, taking bites of strawberry cheesecake and sipping pomegranate-flavored La Croix. The topic for tonight's workshop? "Navigating Tough Times as a Family," presented by Robb Oram, a local pastor and trained counselor. Robb makes small talk with several parents as he sets out his notes. A few stragglers walk in as introductions are being made, they grab a dessert and snag the last couple of chairs in the semi-circle.

Meanwhile, 200 feet behind the church building, it's night three of Destination Dig, the theme for the 2021 Backyard Summer Kids Club (aka vacation Bible school). After the opening song, kids are off to their first station—some to crafts, others to games, and the rest to Bible story time. Ninety minutes pass quickly, so every moment counts.

Every moment counts for parents, too. That's why our congregation decided to give them a reason to stick around each evening during VBS. But what would make them want to hang around the church on a beautiful summer evening rather than run a couple quick errands or go on an ice cream date with their spouse while the kids are occupied? After all, it's cheap babysitting, right?

While many parents did the drop-off thing, it was apparent that others were searching for community and spiritual support for their family. Most parents, regardless of their spiritual background, want to know they're not alone on the child-

rearing journey. The Parent's Oasis provided a casual, safe place for parents to discuss common family struggles and gain practical tools for family discipleship. We promoted the workshops to every parent who signed up a child for VBS. We also reminded parents about the opportunity as they dropped kids off. Some decided at the last minute to stay and see what it was all about.

Each night's topic was facilitated by a different speaker, some from within our congregation and a few from without. We tackled the following topics each evening.

Starting Spiritual Conversations with your Kids. How can we make

God part of everyday conversations with our kids? And how do we start these conversations? Talking about spiritual matters doesn't mean we have to quote the Bible or preach at our kids. This session provided tools for opening spiritual conversations with kids and teens.

It Takes a Village: Building a Community for Your Family. Rome wasn't built in a day. Community isn't either. We all long for authentic friendships, for ourselves and for our kids. But are we willing to put in the time and effort to make it happen? In this session we discovered that community comes with challenges and conflicts, but hard work and



patience pay off in beautiful ways.

Navigating Tough Times as a Family. Every family faces disappointment, hardship, stress, and loss. Whether it's a strained relationship, financial hardship, tragedy, or a major life change, all families will experience a certain level of stress or grief. What are healthy ways families can press on together in stressful situations? This session uncovered ways to keep open channels of communication, grieve in a healthy way, and see hardships as opportunities for growth.

Taking Your Kids to Church without Freaking Out. Whether you've been attending church for a long time or not at all, taking kids to church can be

daunting. This session gave practical advice on how to overcome the obstacles that keep families from experiencing the blessing of a church family and weekly worship.

Generation Z—Challenges and Opportunities. Generation Z (those born after 1995) have been facing a mental health crisis, lack of social and emotional skills, and paralyzed perspective on their future. Adults tend to have a very negative attitude toward the Gen Z population and aren't helping the problem. This session revealed the opportunities parents and leaders have to inspire Gen Z to learn through life experiences, own responsibilities, and grow through challenges.

Ninety minutes fly by, especially when you're making meaningful connections. The speaker is finished, Q&A is wrapped up, but parents linger. Friendships are being forged. Honest struggles are shared. Moms, dads, couples attending together, single parents—even grandparents—are encouraged and reminded they're not alone in the trenches.

The sound of the closing program off in the distance signals that the evening has come to an end. Parents slowly make their way over to the Big Backyard. At the word of dismissal, parents sign their kids out. Families head to their cars, hands full of crafts, minds filled with Scripture, mouths filled with catchy VBS songs, and hearts filled with blessings. Even the parents.

Friestad serves Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Camarillo, Calif.



from traditional [to] inter-generational

*A congregation
works to foster
effective ministry*

By Daniel Keinanen

[C]ongregations are more effective when generations are connected and actively involved with each other. Through a long learning process, my local congregation began to see that our goal was intergenerational ministry. To that end, we made small adjustments to our ministry focus over several years, beginning with youth ministry. Initially, these small changes included our Sunday morning worship service, our small group studies, and our ministry teams.

Our worship service started to look different. A grandparent and grandchild read Scripture together during the Sunday morning worship service. Teen-aged men assisted with communion. Children were greeters alongside their parents. As a result, teens, adults, and children were making more connections on Sunday mornings. These were small adjustments, but they made a big difference.

Our leadership team consistently evaluated where we were and continued adjusting so that we would involve all generations in the life of the church. After some time, our whole congregation was involved in the changes that were happening. The focus of those changes moved us from a traditionally minded church to an intergenerationally minded church.

In our new focus, teens were noticeably helping with our ministry teams. Adults were coming to youth group and sharing their stories and testimonies with our teens. We saw generations connecting with each other; thus, our congregation was being strengthened through relationships. However, we realized we were not addressing the need to strengthen relationships between parents and their children.

One adjustment our congregation made was to focus on parents and equip them to do the job to which God has called them—raising disciples who will raise disciples. The temptation for churches is to use its children and youth ministry as the substitute for parents. But the role of the parent is much greater than the role of a youth director, or even the church.

According to Dr. Jim Burns, president of HomeWard, when parents have conversations with their children about Jesus and their faith, children are three times as likely to keep their faith after they leave high school. In *StickyFaith*, Kara Powell and Brad Griffen found that college students name parents as the most influential people in their lives, followed by grandparents, friends, teachers, then adults in their local congregation. The teens in our church have consistently said they want to have meaningful conversations with their parents. The issue is that those conversations, according to our teens, were not happening.

If meaningful conversations are going to happen, then the key is helping parents understand the influence they have. Influence can be both positive and negative, present and absent. Parents must decide how present they will be as they raise their children. If there is little to no interaction between parents and their children, we can see the results: the role of parents is supplanted by other things, including social media, extra-curricular activities, and constant entertainment through a smart phone, just to name a few.

So how do churches equip parents? How can youth ministry programs come alongside parents to help them foster the influence they have at home? What could we do to help parents develop their parenting superpowers?

It took a long time to develop, but with the goal of assisting parents and grandparents, we started a Parent Forum Learning Community (PFLC). We meet every six to eight weeks, gathering to listen to speakers address a range of parenting topics and to have conversations with each other. We spend time equipping and sharing tips with each other. Some parents have opened up to us with their frustrations

“... without relationship, there is no influence” [Dr. Ron Hunter].

or discouragements. Other parents have been able to share what they have learned and bring encouragement to others.

In one of the videos we watched together, Dr. Ron Hunter (executive director of D6 Family Ministry) said, “Without conversations, generations do not value each other, because they have no relationship ... without relationship, there is no influence.”

The goal of PFLC is to equip parents to have a positive and present influence, both in the relationships they have together as parents and in the relationships they have with their children. If parents offer the most influence in a teen's life, then the church's goal should be to help parents accomplish that task. We took steps to move from traditional to generational, and that led us to the ministry we have with parents today. To be generational, a church must teach parents and grandparents how to have faith conversations with their children and grandchildren. This leads to a church that involves and includes everyone in ministry.

We understand that to be effective, we must become generational. We have taken some initial steps toward that goal by making small adjustments and by starting the PFLC. We look forward to how the Lord will continue to lead us as we move toward our goal.

Keinanen is the youth, worship, and congregational director at Christ Is Lord Free Lutheran, Onalaska, Wis.

being [their] examples

By Joan Culler



[Y]ears ago, when my children were youngsters, I read quite a few books about parenting, where I found all sorts of helpful advice. Here's one insight that I've never forgotten: children learn in three ways—by example, by example, and by example. Of course, that's an oversimplification, but it also draws attention to an important truth—our core values, our traditions, even our behavior, are more often “caught” than “taught.” That means that the best way to ensure that our children become adults with a Christian worldview is to have one ourselves—to live out the faith we profess in practical, daily ways that are visible to those around us.

How do we do this? Of course, regularly going to church, Sunday school and Bible study are important. We need to learn the basics of the faith so that we understand what we believe and why. But this kind of knowledge is not enough. Polling expert George Barna reports that only 20 percent of those who attend evangelical Protestant churches have a biblical worldview. In other words, sitting in the pew doesn't make you a practicing Christian any more than sitting in a garage makes you a car. The Bible warns us that our faith is more than just intellectual assent to a set of doctrines. True faith results in Christian action.

The Apostle John wrote, “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech, but with *actions* and in truth” (I John 3:18, emphasis mine). And James echoed, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters if someone *claims* to have faith, but has not *deeds*?” (2:14, emphasis mine).

As Lutherans, we know that we are not saved by our works, but these verses and others make it clear that Christian behavior will be evident in the life of a believer. What I'm describing is the process of sanctification, and it *is* a process. It doesn't happen automatically when we are baptized, or join a church, or complete confirmation

classes. It's a lifelong commitment of being transformed by the Holy Spirit into the image of Christ. If we model this, our children will notice and remember it for the rest of their lives.

My grandfather was a great influence on my life. I recall going shopping with him one Saturday. As he parked the car in a tight space, he bumped into the car in front of his, making a slight dent. He left a note with his phone number and a promise to pay for any damage. He could have just driven away, but he told me that wouldn't be right. He also owned a small grocery store and gas station where he allowed regular customers to charge their purchases and pay him on payday. He cared for his elderly mother, always giving her a gift of cash on her birthday or other special occasions—he said she never had any money of her own when he was growing up. When I was a teenager, he often treated me and other young family members to a free tank of gas when we stopped by. His actions taught me to value honesty, generosity, respect for my parents, and concern for other people. He didn't lecture me about those things or turn them into strict rules I had to obey. He just lived in a way that inspired my admiration. I wanted to become the kind of person he was.

My own children are grown now, but I have been blessed to see some similar results in my life as a parent. When our daughter, Kate, was a teen, another parent commented about how polite she was.

“You must be a very strict disciplinarian” she said.

My reply was, “No, I just treat her with courtesy and respect, and assume she will treat others in the same way.”

Another time, my daughter, Beth, was complimented on being a good listener and her thoughtfulness.

“I get that from my mom,” she answered.

I'm not trying to blow my own horn, because I've also



“These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up ... Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” [Deuteronomy 6:5-9].

failed any number of times. Often my children were the ones who called me out when this happened! For example, I once told one of my daughters to avoid someone who had hurt her.

“But mom,” she said, “doesn’t the Bible say we are to forgive seventy times seven?”

Whoops! Thankfully, admitting our sins and asking for forgiveness is also something our children need to see and imitate. My point

is this: for better or worse, our children will be influenced by the way we live. So, think about it. If you have your own children—or children with whom you regularly interact—what is your life teaching them?

Culler is a member of St. Paul’s Evangelical Free Lutheran, Hagerstown, Md.

“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” [Proverbs 22:6, ESV].

training [in] the garden

By Pastor Joe Faldet

[O]ur lives are like gardens. Ever since the fall of humanity we have inherited weed-filled gardens, and there is nothing that weeds do better than spread seeds. If we pull a weed from our garden without putting a beneficial plant in its place, then that bare ground will soon be weedy again. When Jesus enters our lives, He gives us seeds to plant in our garden. He calls us to sow, weed, and water, and then promises that He will give the increase. So goes our lives, day by day and year by year in this world.

Our gardens are not isolated. They come elbow to elbow with our neighbor's gardens. Their plants propagate into our gardens and our plants propagate into their gardens. Some plants spread more easily than others. It seems that some soils are more suited for one species than another, but there are many different soils in each garden. As Jesus enters our lives, He changes the soil through the seeds that He gives us, and He calls us to spread that seed throughout the whole garden.

Now imagine that Jesus comes into your rank and weedy garden and says that He wants it to produce good fruit. What do you do? The first step is to weed. We do this through confession. We agree with God that what is growing there is a weed and through forgiveness He removes

it. But we should not simply plant another weed there. We repent. We study His Word to see what thought, feeling, or action He wants in that place, and we plant that. So, we go through our lives confessing our sins, receiving His forgiveness, and repenting unto righteousness. He, in His grace, sends the sun, the wind, and the rain. He then grows, strengthens, and sustains these plants (that He has given us the seed for) through His Word.

Gardening is hard work. It can be hot and sweaty work. It is often buggy work. It takes patience to plant and wait for fruit to be born. It takes humility to acknowledge that our garden is weedy and that each of those weeds needs to be dealt with. It is hard to pull desirable plants that have become weeds when they grew in the wrong places. Some shirk this calling, but they do that to their own harm. The harvest of righteousness is much greater than the harvest of weeds. The work is worth it.

How then do we train another to tend their garden? The best trainers are practitioners. They know how to spot weeds in their own lives, and they know how to have them removed. There are many, young and old, who either ignore their weeds or beat themselves up to remove them. Since weeds are ultimately spiritual, physical and emotional abuse has no effect on them. Only God





can pull the weed up by the root. Only He can forgive and cleanse the sin. We need to weed in the daylight so that our neighbors can see how it is done. We need to testify about the sins that He has pulled from our lives. When we hide the fact that there used to be weeds where tended fruit now ripens, we blaspheme the weeder. By doing so, we leave our fellow gardener either in shame that his garden only produces weeds or in anger that you, by luck, received the better plot. We train by practicing confession and repentance in full view.

Our neighbor also needs to know where we get the seed. If we send them to anyone but Christ, to anywhere but His Word, we send them to weed sellers. How do you know that what you are planting bears good fruit if the Word of God does not show you? Thus, we must rely upon the Word of God for ourselves and always point others to it. It is, ultimately, the only source of good seed.

Finally, we let our harvest be visible. The poor sinner cultivates thistles thinking that he will get grapes. He tends thorn bushes hoping for figs. Pleasure does not bring joy. Money does not bring peace. Power does not bring self-control. The fruits of the Spirit only come from the Spirit. They are what our world is looking for. Exhibit them in full view for the world to see.

Will one so trained always live his life in service of Christ? Sadly no. This is a proverb, and proverbs describe broad trends rather than specific instances. One of the reasons that Proverbs 22:6 is given to us is that we might seek to live out our callings as Christians with the motivation of training our children, grandchildren, and all those around us. If the fruit of the Spirit in our own lives is not motivation enough, perhaps our witness to those whom we love will spur us on.

Faldet serves Hosanna Free Lutheran, St. James, Minn.

***The best trainers are practitioners.
... We train by practicing confession
and repentance in full view.***

meet



Name: Leeanna Lunn

Hometown: Upsala, Minn.

Church: Word of Life Free Lutheran, Upsala

One influence on your spiritual

formation: The greatest influence in my spiritual formation was, and remains, Scripture itself. It might sound trite, but I realized quickly that the spiritual teachings of those around me were unreliable. I had to find the objective source. So, I taught myself to read at the age of 4 and started my first read-through of the Bible. Over and over again, God's Word has brought me to the truth in times of darkness and confusion and has remained the rock to which I cling.

Why are you interested in serving on the Parish Education board? I have loved reading and writing ever since I was a child. Having the opportunity to do something I already love to support a ministry within the AFLC has been a wonderful experience. Ever since I was a pastor's daughter in small-town Iowa, I have dreamed of working with Sunday school materials. Words have always been my strength with a love of reading, writing, teaching, and public speaking. The Parish Education board perfectly matches those strengths with needs in the AFLC. I honestly love every second of it, and praise God for this opportunity.

What are you reading lately? As well as Scripture, I love to dive into the writings of Christians from the past. Currently, I am binging (yet again) on John Chrysostom; specifically *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, as well as my typical sci-fi thrillers.



Name: Suzanne Tietjen

Hometown: Torrington, Wyo.

Church: Lutheran Church of Hope, Loveland, Colo.

One influence in your spiritual

formation: Solveig Hjermstad has been a strong spiritual influence. She served on the board during my first two years. Her kind heart and love for Jesus shone through her work and her interactions with the members of the board. Watching her fill her role prayerfully and humbly served as an example of how to balance hard work and joy in serving Jesus.

Why are you interested in serving on the Parish Education board? Although Calvary Free Lutheran in Eben Junction, Mich., was our first AFLC congregation, we felt like we had come home. When Pastor Tom Schierkolk asked if I was interested in having my name put up to serve on the board, I needed him to explain what it was and what it did. Since I was experienced in editing, I thought I had the necessary skill set. Our Sunday school curriculum presents God's Word to our young members in ways that are age appropriate and doctrinally correct. I also love the give and take and consideration of board members as we work on both editing and business aspects of our calling.

What are you reading lately? *Open and Unafraid: The Psalms as a Guide to Life* by David O. Taylor. Its tag line is, "How can we find a more transparent, resilient, and fearless life of faith? Look to the Psalms." I need to read a chapter, then stop and apply what I've been reading to my life in some practical way. On deck—Andrew Peterson's *God of the Garden*.



Name: Pastor Ryan Patenaude

Hometown: Kindred, N.D.

Church: I serve West Prairie Free Lutheran in Kindred.

One influence on your spiritual

formation: When I was 13 my older brother and I stumbled upon Resurrection Free Lutheran in Beltrami, Minn., where I instantly began confirmation and have been the sole Free Lutheran in my family ever since. Post AFLBS (now FLBC, 2001-2003), I helped out at Peace Lutheran Church in Canal Winchester, Ohio, in various capacities, not planning on staying for more than a year or two. One wife and four kids later, I was happy to stay in Ohio forever. Plans changed when I was called to begin seminary in 2015. We now have five kids.

Why are you interested in serving on the Parish Education board? I serve on the Parish Ed board because Pastor Micah Hjermstad thought it would be good for both Parish Ed and me. It has been good for me, and hopefully it's good for Parish Ed. I enjoy pushing everyone out of their technological comfort zones.

What are you reading lately? When I mow the lawn, I listen to sermons by Kevin DeYoung, my favorite preacher. I am reading *You Are What You Love* by James K.A. Smith and I find it mind-blowing.

the parish [ed] board



Name: Maren Sletten
Hometown: Argusville, N.D.
Church: St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D.

One influence on your spiritual formation: After experiencing some significant health problems in the last few years, I have better realized how dependent I am on God's grace each day. The Psalms have become richer and more meaningful to me. Structured prayers, like those found in the *Lutheran Book of Prayer*, have become helpful to me during times when I feel overwhelmed and can't gather my thoughts. I am so thankful that God is holding my hand and walking with me each day.

Why are you interested in serving on the Parish Education board? I have loved reading and writing ever since I was a child. Having the opportunity to do something I already love to support a ministry within the AFLC has been a wonderful experience.

What are you reading lately? Recently, I've enjoyed reading the novels *Charis in the World of Wonders* by Marly Youmans and *A Gentleman in Moscow* by Amor Towles. I've also been reading and re-reading *Christ and Calamity* by Harold Senkbeil.



Name: Pastor Dennis Norby
Hometown: Valley City, N.D.
Church: Grace and Zion Free Lutheran Churches, Valley City

One influence on your spiritual formation: I am thankful for the way that God has used many things to help me grow in my faith through the years. When considering this question I quickly come to the two years I spent at FLBC as foundational for my spiritual formation.
Why are you interested in serving on the Parish Education board? I have been glad to participate in the work of the Parish Ed board because we have the unique joy of presenting the congregations of the AFLC with well-crafted Lutheran materials for their use in various aspects of their ministry. I have enjoyed the opportunity to see various members of the AFLC use their gifts and talents to produce these materials for the building up of God's Kingdom

What are you reading lately? I am reading about ten different things at once! I am rereading again C.F. W. Walther's *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*. I am reading a book entitled *Weary Joy* by Kim Marxhausen. It is a book for caregivers that I picked up at a Lutherans For Life conference. I am also reading a fantasy novel written by the wife of a pastor who lives in Valley City.

Board members serve up to two consecutive five-year terms

The board is made up of two pastors and three lay people

Members meet twice a month in online meetings, and 3-5 times/year in person

Members are tasked with:

- Writing, editing, and producing educational and devotional publications
- Guiding and planning future projects
- Evaluating how best to serve congregations through the production of publications

A PLACE FOR FELLOWSHIP

BY PASTOR ERIC JOHNSON

Are you a homebody? Do you enjoy being at home more than being out and about? I think about half of us are homebodies. We have crafted home, whether purposefully or incidentally, to be just what we want. It is decorated the way we want, has the amenities we enjoy, and is a place to relax without pretense.

The other half of us are not homebodies. Home is not necessarily what we need after a long hard day. We enjoy being out with people as often as possible, and it doesn't matter where that is.

It is not surprising, then, that churches would like to be a place where both groups feel they can relax and enjoy sincere fellowship. Jesus clearly desired that His disciples would be "one" (John 17:20-21), and the Apostle Paul emphasized the importance of the unity of the body of believers (I Corinthians 12:12-31). To do that, we must live life together. We must praise God and study together, as well as eat and even play together.

One of the best signs of the health of a church might be how many people stick around after services and other events just to talk to each other. This builds close relationships that cause growth in a body of believers. Church leadership should be asking how they can encourage these kinds of interactions. I love to ask other pastors, "How have you facilitated building your church body to be closer as a family?"

At The Source Church, in Mesa, Ariz., we have strived to facilitate that very growth. How? One example is our building. Renting a school gym on Sunday mornings was cheaper, but it just couldn't build the family atmosphere we desired. Several years ago we started co-renting a space with a company that needed a bit of storage and office space during weekdays, and we used the building in the evenings and weekends. After a few years, we were able to afford the whole space on our own.

Next, we worked to make that space feel like home. We needed it to facilitate casual fellowship,



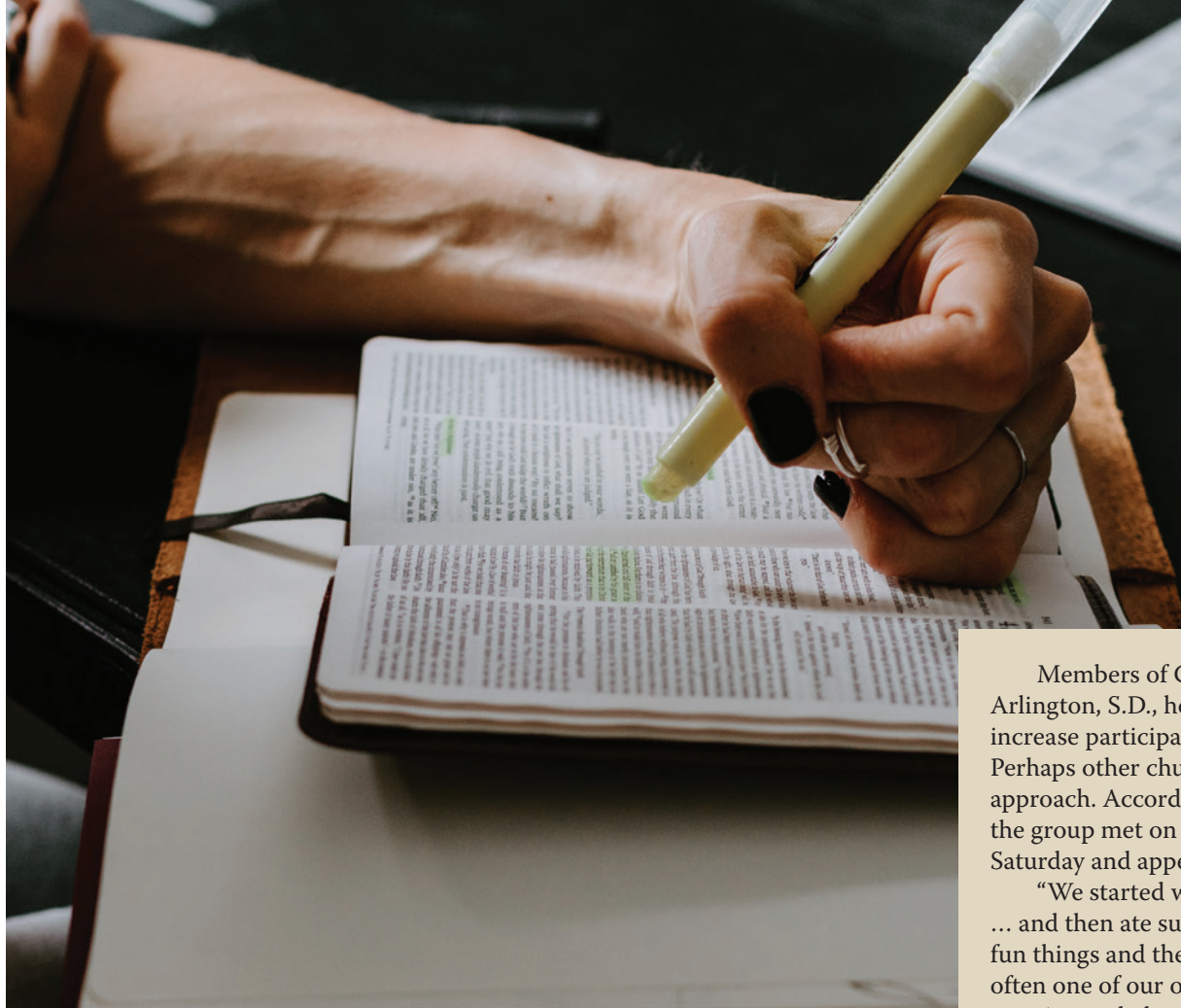
to be that home away from home. During the pandemic, we expanded our main room and built a stage and a sound booth with streaming cameras. We also took one of the three boring white front rooms and transformed it with bookcases, couches, and cozy chairs. We now call it the living room. We then renovated our foyer into a coffee shop complete with wood décor, tables, and chairs. We even took the sterile florescent lights out of the drop ceiling and replaced them with warm, dimmable lighting.

Suddenly, these two rooms have become our favorite places to hang out. From the kids, to moms, to small groups, these rooms have become friendly places

to talk and enjoy people's company. And it didn't cost that much because we did the work ourselves. The construction process became a tool for building the family atmosphere we desired as we worked side by side.

Are there more spiritual things we did to build up our family? Absolutely. But don't underestimate the atmosphere of a location in the congregation's efforts to build the kingdom of God. It made a huge difference for us, and we hope it will continue as we move forward with plans to serve our community.

Johnson serves The Source Church in Mesa, Ariz.



WE ALL NEED JESUS

BY JANE HAUFSCILD

Members of Calvary Free Lutheran in Arlington, S.D., hosted a district rally on Oct. 9, 2021. They chose the theme, “We All Need Jesus,” and used John 14:6 as their theme verse. During the business portion of the meeting, members present chose to split the offering between Pickerel Lake Bible Camp and the Association Retreat Center.

Michelle Olson, a member of Calvary Free Lutheran, gave a presentation entitled “More Than Enough.” She also gave us ideas on how to study the Scriptures a little differently as we all came away with new ideas to use at home and in our Bible study groups.

The afternoon speaker was Anab Nuur who spoke on “Forgiving the Unforgivable.” Anab, who was raised as a Muslim, gave an account of her journey to becoming a Christian. She went to a youth gathering at the age of 16 because they were offering free pizza. She also wanted to learn more about Jesus after listening to what the youth leader had to say. After becoming a Christian, she was disowned by her family when she was about the age of 20. She is still telling her story and trying to turn others to Christ.

It was a day filled with inspirational messages, fun, fellowship, and of course the delicious food. With six churches represented they are hoping for even more in 2022. Thank you, ladies, for all that you do in your home congregations to keep spreading the Word of God because we all need Jesus.

Haufschild, a member of Calvary Free Lutheran, Arlington, S.D., is the secretary of the South Dakota WMF district.

Members of Calvary Free Lutheran in Arlington, S.D., hosted a Ladies Night Out to increase participation for their local WMF. Perhaps other churches could benefit from this approach. According to member Elaine Kohl, the group met on a Wednesday night instead of Saturday and appealed to husbands to baby sit.

“We started with the business meeting ... and then ate supper at 7. After that we did fun things and then had a speaker. This was often one of our own ladies,” said Kohl. “The meeting ended at 9 so ladies could get home if they needed to. We were surprised that many of them stayed to visit. We are a scattered congregation with some ladies driving more than 20 miles to Arlington. We often say that we work together, pray together, and need to play together.”

Here are several of their Ladies Night Out themes. For more information, contact Jan Mobley (nomopies@gmail.com) with questions.

- Hot Chocolate: making choices
- A Walk Down Memory Lane
- Great is Thy Faithfulness: I Peter 3:15, a “Pie Lady” shared how God led her to start her business, with a pie-making demonstration
- Faith Journey: missions theme
- It’s All in the Family: I Peter 4:10-11, with a mother/daughter team emphasizing strong faith and using gifts of art to inspire others
- Joy: Philippians 4:4
- Basket of Blessings: I Thessalonians 5:16 and Philippians 4:6-7, finding blessings in hard times
- Bountiful Harvest: Matthew 9:37-38, and using the skit “Doubly Blessed,” from skitsandstuff.com
- Once Upon an Apron: Deuteronomy 11:18, focusing on the ties that bind

FLBCS hosts Christmas concerts

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary hosted a weekend of events Dec. 3-5, bringing back its annual celebration of Christmas music and basketball games for parents and friends to enjoy on its Plymouth, Minn., campus. Activities included an evening of gospel team music on Friday evening, men's and women's basketball games in the Student Life Center on Saturday, and Christmas concerts on Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon. The concert featured the men's seminary chorus, Proclaim Choir, and Concert Choir singing with the theme, "God's Glory Revealed." Andrew Hanson directed, and a Symphonic Wind Ensemble and organist Marian Christopherson accompanied the choirs.



ABOVE: Joe Larson, Scott Olson, and Micah Moan sang with other members of the Free Lutheran Seminary Chorus. RIGHT: Stephenie Kelso, Brooklyn Park, Minn., accompanied a congregational carol with the wind ensemble. ABOVE RIGHT: Dr. James Molstre and family sang a hymn with the congregation on Sunday afternoon.



ABOVE: Kevin Bump, of Stacy, Minn., was one of seven flutists in the Wind Ensemble. TOP: Members of the combined choirs joined the ensemble for "The Glory of the Lord," from Handel's "Messiah."



ABOVE: Andrew Hanson, music director at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, directed the combined choirs in the final musical piece, "Is He Worthy," by Andrew Peterson, which included a duet by Carter Kneeland and Bria Larson.

Sverdrup Seminary Forum planned for January 14

The Free Lutheran Seminary, Plymouth, Minn., will host the Georg Sverdrup Society Seminary Forum on Jan. 14 in the Hauge Chapel.

The forum, meeting under the theme, "Life in the Congregation," will be held from 9 a.m. to noon. Pastor Martin Horn will present "Sverdrup and the Sacraments," Pastor Brian Lunn will present "The Liturgy Committee of the LFC," and a panel discussion will be held on "The Relationship of the Servant Pastor to the Congregation."

Annual conference housing registration now open

The 2022 Annual Conference will be held June 15-18 at the Association Retreat Center near Osceola, Wis. Housing and meal registration is now open by visiting the ARC's website at arc-aflc.org/2022-annual-conference. Users will be asked to create an account or login to a current account. Off-site lodging options are also listed on the web page with links to options in the Wisconsin towns of Osceola, New Richmond, Amery, and St. Croix Falls, and the Minnesota towns of Chisago City and Stillwater.

Conference registration and more information about nominees, activities, and the schedule will be printed when available.

Salinas congregation to host Reawakening event

The AFLC will offer a Reawakening Conference on Jan. 8 at St. Ansgar's Lutheran, Salinas, Calif. The one-day conference, held from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., will

emphasize a call to reawaken to the mission of evangelism and missions, and the work the Lord is doing through AFLC congregations and ministries.

Featured speakers include AFLC President Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship Director Pastor Randy Nelson, PACCT members Tom and Linda Mathre, AFLC Youth Ministries Director Pastor Jason Holt, FLBC Dean Pastor Adam Osier, and WMF President Lavonne West.

The conference is free of charge, and breakfast and lunch will be provided. For more information, contact Chanel Nelson by email at chanel.nelson@aflc.org.

Hymnal committee seeks input

Reprinting needed to resupply stock; will fix known errors

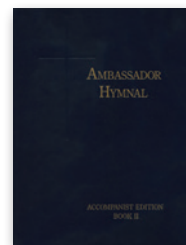
As members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee reported at the 2021 Annual Conference in June, a hymnal committee has been established to assist with the reprinting of the AFLC's *Ambassador Hymnal*. The hymnal, first published in 1994, has blessed numerous individuals and congregations throughout the years. However, there is a desperate need of a reprinted volume in order to keep the hymnals stocked and ready for shipping to congregations and individuals.

The hymnal committee's goals for this project include correcting errors and typos within the current *Ambassador Hymnal*, looking into the possibility of adding time signatures to the hymns, and printing a quality bound edition. The committee members' work will not include a complete revision of the current hymnal or changing which hymns are or are not included. Rather, they will aim to create a high-quality reprint of our current hymnal while eliminating known errors prior to printing.

If you know of a correction that should be made, your input would be valued. Please submit your suggested edits by emailing ambassadorhymnal@aflc.org or calling (763) 412-2001. Mail should be addressed to: AFLC, Attn: Hymnal Project, 3110 East Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441. You are also welcome to contact the hymnal committee members directly. Committee members include the following individuals:

- Pastor Thomas C. Olson, Farmington, Minn. (pastortomolson@gmail.com; 740.644.0537)
- Andrew Hanson, Plymouth, Minn. (andrew.hanson@flbc.edu; 763.412.2027), and
- Rachel Mattson, Newfolden, Minn. (rachelpapillon@gmail.com; 612.910.8719).

Your help is appreciated as the committee members prepare to reprint and restock the *Ambassador Hymnal*.



Transition to free subscriptions

Beginning in January, *The Lutheran Ambassador* magazine will be free of charge to subscribers. For nearly 60 years, our magazine has existed to educate readers about the AFLC, to encourage the local congregation, to equip Christians for service, and to evangelize our neighbors and the world. Our staff is honored by our mission to be ambassadors for Christ.

If you wish to begin receiving our monthly publication, please contact Liz McCarlson (lasubscriptions@aflc.org). You may also subscribe online at aflc.org/lutheran-ambassador. Our print version can be mailed to your home address or to your local congregation in bulk. We also offer a digital version which can be found on the Issuu app, available in the Apple store and Google Play. Both the app and the magazine are free.

While our magazine will be free, we will continue to incur production costs of nearly \$60/year per subscriber. For many years, that cost has been subsidized by our common AFLC ministries. Our free subscription means that we will be dependent on donations. Check our website for giving opportunities. We appreciate your support as we work to serve our AFLC congregations.

I might not currently live in a foreign country and have the calling as a missionary, but there is one thing for certain that I have in common with our AFLC missionaries: we both share stories with others. They share the greatest story ever told—the proclamation of salvation through Christ alone. I get to share their stories with you.

It is a great privilege to become the chronicler of the works of Jesus Christ through the lives of our missionaries. As a recently hired addition to the AFLC World Missions department, my job is creating ways to best share information from our fields of work with our congregations back here in the United States. In short, I'm a storyteller.

It has been a delight to witness how AFLC World Missions works from the inside out. When I first started in my position, I interviewed each of our missionaries, getting to know their callings and ministries. In every case, they expressed a deep love of

discipleship and studying Scripture with those they have reached with the gospel message. The missionaries of the AFLC are passionate about expressing the truth of God's Word and seeing that Word penetrate and change individual lives.

In the office here at AFLC World Missions, the reason we do what we do all centers around the action of sharing the truth of the gospel with a broken world. Our missionaries echo the heart of the Psalmist in chapter 40, "I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have spoken of Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great congregation."

Although each of their opportunities and ministries is different, our missionaries strive to live solidly on the truth of God's Word and tell the story of salvation in Jesus. The biblical account of history—God's redemptive narrative—has been, is, and will be challenged in every culture in which it is presented. We have missionaries who encounter everything from witchcraft to gender identity confusion in the locations they serve. Opposing narratives try to drown out the truth of Scripture.

In a sinful world that thrives on spreading lies, Scripture calls us to proclaim what is real and true: "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen" (II Peter 3:17-18).

Throughout the year, our missionaries will write articles, newsletters, and updates. I challenge you to keep an eye out for our missionaries' stories when they make an appearance in the materials published by the AFLC. Make it a point to look out for ways to pray for them. Share their trials and triumphs with your congregation. Encourage others with the truth about how God is working. Be a storyteller.

Greven, the communications coordinator for AFLC World Missions, is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.

BECOMING STORY TELLERS

BY MADISON GREVEN

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Mark Richardson was installed Dec. 12 at Calvary Free Lutheran, Fosston, Minn., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating.

Pastor Ryan Mairs, Waseca, Minn., has been removed from the AFLC clergy roster at his own request.

Jeremy Larson has accepted a call as associate pastor of St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D., beginning Jan. 3. He is pursuing lay licensing through the AFLC Coordinating Committee.

Pastor Richard Carr has accepted a call to serve Bethany Free Lutheran, Astoria, Ore., starting at the end of May. Carr currently serves Zion Free Lutheran, Tioga, N.D.

Pastor Patrick Charles will resign from Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Pleasanton, Texas, in mid-January.

Correction: A lyric from the stage musical *The Prince of Egypt* was incorrectly attributed to the animated film by the same name in "Zechariah's Miracle," written by Cody Quanbeck in the December issue.

Joe Frech, a middler seminarian at the Free Lutheran Seminary, Plymouth, Minn., has been hired as a part-time administrative assistant for AFLC Home Missions.



Pastor Walter Johnson

Pastor Walter Johnson, 98, of Shakopee, Minn., died Nov. 21, 2021, at Abbott-Northwestern Hospital, Minneapolis, Minn.

Born July 7, 1923, in Mount Sterling, Wis., he was the son of Thomas and Clara (Quamme) Johnson. He married Marilyn (Pries) Johnson on Sept. 4, 1949, in Chicago, Ill. He earned a bachelor's degree in 1946 from Luther College, Decorah, Iowa. He earned a theology degree in 1950 from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. He served First Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D. (1950-51), Beloit Children's Home, Ames, Iowa (1951-52), Gilbert Lutheran, Gilbert, Iowa (1952-55), Greenfield Evangelical Lutheran, Harmony, Minn. (1955-57), Lands Lutheran, Zumbrota, Minn. (1958-63), Westwood Lutheran, St. Louis Park, Minn. (1963-67), and St. John's Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn. (1967-84). He served the AFLC congregation of Faith Lutheran, Shakopee (1984-90). He retired, and then served as interim pastor at First Lutheran, Camarillo, Calif. (1991-94), and Calvary Free Lutheran, Mesa, Ariz., and other congregations. He was a pastor for nearly 70 years, serving the Lord faithfully throughout his life. He loved ministering to his congregations and especially enjoyed working with church youth by leading Bible camps and youth group trips. He was a certified water safety instructor. In his retirement years, he and Marilyn hosted numerous tours to Europe and the Holy Land.

Surviving are his wife, Marilyn; four sons, Mark (Cindy) Johnson, Gregory Johnson, Pastor David (Vicki) Johnson, and Stephen (Julie) Johnson; 17 grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren.

A service was held Nov. 27 at King of Glory Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn., with Pastor Del Palmer officiating and Pastor David Johnson giving the message. Burial was in Lands Lutheran Church Cemetery, Zumbrota, Minn. Memorials preferred to Wilderness Fellowship or the Orality Institute.

LBT missionaries to Tanzania medically evacuated to U.S.

Pastor Andrew and Alexis Olson, AFLC missionaries on loan to Lutheran Bible Translators, returned to the U.S. from Tanzania in November after Andrew developed a life-threatening infection and was evacuated from their island home via ambulance boat. After spending some weeks in African

hospitals getting stabilized, they were advised to seek further medical care. While Andrew's situation has improved, they aren't sure when or if they will be able to return. For now, they are continuing to support the Kerewe Bible translation program from the AFLC headquarters in Plymouth, Minn.

NOVEMBER MEMORIALS

All Departments

Robert Dymond

Alaska Mission

Pastor Paul Nash

Mary Nash

Bible College

Roger Kopperud

Evelyn Copes

Robert Dymond

Pastor Paul Nash

Development

Pastor Paul Nash

FLAPS

Pastor Paul Nash

Mary Nash

Harvey Hoops

General Fund

Doris Olson

Pastor Irvin

Schmitke

Lynn Ferguson

Home Missions

Pastor Paul Nash

Mary Nash

Lois Myhre

The Lutheran Ambassador

Roger Kopperud

Parish Education

Doris Olson

Seminary

Roger Dymond

Doris Olson

WMF

Gordon Twedt

Verlys Homme

Doris Olson

Vi Weyers

Mary Nash

Pastor Paul Nash

World Missions

Evelyn Copes

Mary Nash

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-November 30, 2021

FUND	REC'D IN NOVEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$33,428	\$366,593	\$341,193
Evangelism	7,951	119,256	115,522
Youth Ministries	9,781	183,356	124,041
Parish Education	9,352	176,773	131,729
Seminary	23,471	276,765	247,327
Bible College	26,629	403,274	315,481
Home Missions	78,647	625,493	342,321
World Missions	37,174	418,170	353,641
Personal Support	63,243	745,806	787,816
TOTALS	\$289,729	\$3,315,487	\$2,759,070

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

REMEMBERING WITH A PURPOSE

The AFLC was born in October 1962 during a conference in Thief River Falls, Minn., which means that 2022 is our 60th anniversary year. Though a new organization was established, with a name to be accepted a year later, it was very clear



Pastor Robert Lee

that founders saw this as a continuation more than a new beginning. It was clear that the new fellowship was determined to build on the convictions and principles of the 1897 Lutheran Free Church

whose congregations had voted by a strong majority to join a new merged church body.

Someone has suggested that the whole Old Testament might be summarized by the word “remember.” It certainly was a central theme for God’s people in the past, as well as for His people today, and remembering takes on a special significance during anniversary years. Not many of us remain who were there in 1962, and the October issue of our church magazine will highlight that first conference with a few remembrances from some pioneer AFLC people.

Remembering can be an interesting journey in and of itself, but remembering with a purpose takes on a new and important dimension. Our former church body lasted less than a century, as the convictions of the founders were forgotten and forsaken; some are convinced that a process of decline begins earlier and may accelerate after 50 years. Thus, remembering takes on a new and vital importance.

A new beginning was not an easy step to take. Friendships were strained or even shattered, and at times even family ties were wounded. For some it meant walking away from congregations where there were generations of connections and making costly new beginnings that were often misunderstood. Yes, there were tears, too, as well as hasty and thoughtless words (on

both sides) flowing more from the flesh than the Spirit.

What deserves to be remembered of the convictions and concerns that motivated our AFLC forefathers and foremothers 60 years ago?

A commitment to a distinctive polity or church organization was certainly central. Our free church founders championed a biblical view of the centrality of the local congregation in God’s plan, which, if not clearly comprehended, can be understood merely as an unwillingness to have any churchly authority tell us what to do. We should be very grateful to the efforts of the Georg Sverdrup Society (and more recently the doctoral studies of Pastor Martin Horn) to make available for new generations the teachings of the founder of the free Lutheran movement in America. Hopefully the Co-ordinating Committee will provide for our congregations this year the biblical study of our principles that has been long awaited.

A second central concern was piety. Waves of spiritual awakening swept through the Lutheran churches of Germany and the Scandinavian countries, inspiring evangelistic efforts, an emphasis on personal devotional life and instruction, a heart for world missions, as well as care for the unfortunate and needy. It seemed to our founders that this heritage was weakening in the merged church, but still worthy of being preserved and promoted.

The third concern that motivated those who established the AFLC was theological, a threat to the life of the church that most were only starting to see, and some found hard to believe. We believed that the Bible is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God. A new approach to Holy

Scripture, however, was taking root at our church college and seminary, emphasizing what were called the human aspects of the Bible and willing to accept errors in it, and with so-called “Sunday school religion” sometimes held up to derision. “We ... see the time-honored principle of ‘let Scripture interpret Scripture’ endangered in the new approaches to the Bible.”¹

The above comments are merely a brief introduction to the convictions that led to the formation of the AFLC, and each is deserving of purposeful remembering by 21st century AFLC members. Do I understand them? Do I agree with them? Perhaps some have found a home among us because of the third—that we are a conservative Lutheran church fellowship—without truly comprehending and appreciating the other two.

Let’s pray that this anniversary year might be a time of genuine spiritual

Remembering can be an interesting journey in and of itself, but remembering with a purpose takes on a new and important dimension.

awakening among our congregations as we remember with a purpose.

Postscript: I have informed the Co-ordinating Committee that the procedure for securing a new editor for *The Lutheran Ambassador* should begin. The Rules for Work state that the annual conference nominates and the committee elects, so the prayers of our church family for this process are requested.

¹ Annual Report 1963, p. 77.

association retreat center

CONSIDERING IT PURE JOY

BY KIRK RAUTIO

The ringing in of a New Year springs life into the steps of young and old alike. As I walk into this new year I am encouraged with the theme of “Consider it Pure Joy” taken from James 1:2. The following verses go on to say that we are to consider it pure joy when we face trials of various kinds because it is these trials that test our faith, and through this testing of our faith, perseverance is produced.

As I write this I am overwhelmed by these thoughts. With the spring of this year, I will be entering my sixth season at the Association Retreat Center, and I am continuously blessed by the refinement process that God has brought me through during these years. I am brought to my knees time and time again by my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ both here at the ARC and in my daily life. Through the testing of my faith, I realize that He, and *only* He,

brings about perseverance in my life. And it is He who calls all of us to “consider it pure joy” as we live through every season of life.

The passage from James continues to show how, through this faith, through this perseverance, we are refined, matured, and not lacking in anything. In my humanness, it is all too often that I find myself lacking, whether in my abilities, my understanding, or my needs. But in and through these verses, these statements right here, God shows me that He is refining me, calling me, and strengthening me through the process of life. Thus, through every life experience He is also enabling me to consider it pure joy to live every day. Now, each time the refining process happens, I will admit that I do not always feel joyful. But knowing that I He is refining me, renewing me, and helping me walk closer to Him through it all—what greater joy can anyone know?

I pray that as you focus on Him and Press Onward (the ARC 2022 theme) into

this new year, you will allow the Lord to refine you further and deeper. And through this process may you find joy. The staff at the ARC are praying for you. If you are able to “Come and Rest Awhile” with us at our facilities located near Osceola, Wis., this year, we would love to connect with you on a deeper level. We also pray that in your sphere of influence that you would seek to make a deeper kingdom impact this year right out your front door and everywhere you go. We ask that you pray for us as we open our doors this new year and as we consider it pure joy to serve, that God would continue to refine, stretch, mold, and deepen our ability for kingdom impact in this year.

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