

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

JANUARY 2023

WHO IS YOUR TEACHER?

II TIMOTHY 1
PAUL, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus,
2 To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.
3 I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.
4 Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy.
5 When I call to remembrance the undefiled faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.
6 Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.
7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.
8 Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;
9 Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,
10 But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.
11 Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.
12 For the which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.
13 Held fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.
14 That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.
15 This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me, of whom are Phileas and Hieronymus.
16 The Lord gave mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus, that he was not ashamed of my chain:
17 But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me.
18 The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and as he me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

TIMOTHY

CHAPTER 1

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Conduct to prize and shun

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CHAPTER 2

THOU therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same command thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.
3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.
4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.
5 And if a man also strive for glory, yet is he not crowned.
6 The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruit.
7 Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.
8 Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel:
9 Whereto I suffer trouble, as an evildoer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.
10 Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.
11 It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him;
12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:
13 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.
14 Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not for unprofitable words, but for the subverting of the hearers.
15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.
16 But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness, and shall entangle them that have believed, and shall bring in much grief.
17 And their word will eat as doth a canker of whom is Hyman and Phileas.
18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.
19 Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.
20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.
21 If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.
22 Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.
23 But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do generate strifes.
24 And the servant of the Lord

II TIMOTHY 2

12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:
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A SEASON TO RECEIVE

BY TIM HERSET

Is it really better to give than to receive? When it comes to gifts at Christmas, I'm fine *not* receiving more stuff and things. I love giving. I find joy in helping my kids think about gifts to give their mom, and I've discovered delight in tracing their hands on the card that goes with the gift.

The giving of gifts is great, but Christmas is not *primarily* about giving. The smiles and the sounds of a young child unwrapping a gift brings this into focus. Receiving gifts changes everything. We give with the understanding that someone is going to receive what is given. But it's not just about stuff and things. We've heard it before: "Jesus is the reason for the season." This Jesus is the gift we receive and the gift we get to give.

In the midst of Christmas, with all the giving of gifts and reminders of the reason for the season, I struggle with the tension in the saying, "It is better to give than to receive." Sometimes it seems better to receive. Could it be that there are seasons for giving and seasons for receiving?

You see, the gospel believed is a gift received. Sometimes I forget to receive that gift. I dwell on my sin rather than delight in my Savior. I get caught up in the work to do rather than focus on the finished work of Jesus. The good news seems too good to be true when my soul is askew.

Of all life's good things, the gospel is simply the best gift to receive.

The gospel is good news to be told. This good

news should not sit on the shelf growing old. This gospel is a gift to be given. Giving this gift is done by telling God's story as it intersects with your story, revealing God's glory.

This gift is the best of all the gifts that keep on giving. The gift of the good news gives mercy and grace, compassion and care, beauty and strength, forgiveness and freedom, purpose and power, love and life.

As Jesus sent out His disciples, He urged them to tell others the good news that the Kingdom of Heaven is near. He sent His disciples to heal the sick and raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and drive out demons. Why? Jesus simply states, "Freely you have received; freely give" (Matthew 10:7-8).

Some days are dark and dreary, dismal to the depths of our souls. This is the season for receiving. Listen to and receive Jesus' good news that the Kingdom is near. Then there are days filled with total contentment, joy, and confidence. This is the season for giving the love of Christ. Talk to someone and tell them the good news that the Kingdom is near.

What season is it where you are today? A season for receiving? A season for giving?

Herset is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont.

When Christ wished to attract and instruct men, he had to become a man. If we are to attract and teach children, we must become children with them.

—Martin Luther

It is tempting for parents to be very self-conscious about how they are raising their children. ... But the doctrine of vocation allows parents to relax, somewhat, confident that God is the main actor in child raising.

—Gene Veith

Creative Bible teachers recognize the necessity of teaching the truth of the Bible and the importance of strong content, but they also know that they teach students, not lessons. Student needs and student learning are a priority.

—Lawrence O. Richards and Gary J. Bredfeldt

Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.

—W.B. Yeats

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

—Proverbs 9:9-10



hat happened next?" Roland Deubner begged with anticipation as he waited to hear the resolution to the cliffhanger pause of the Bible story.

With decades of storytelling experience, Charlotte Qualley smiled, "Come back to VBS tomorrow, and I'll tell you about the next chapter."

As a gracefully aging woman of 75, my Grandma Qualley has now taught three generations of kids who have attended Faith Free Lutheran Church located in the vast prairies of eastern Montana. My grandma will probably never be on *USA Today's* women-of-the-year list. Yet, she has been faithfully planting spiritual seeds that give a better return than Simone Biles' gold-medal fame. The reason Grandma Charlotte has been so devoted to teaching Scripture to others is because it was the gospel message that changed her life. You could travel a 25-mile radius from the small country church, and you would still find people who have heard a Bible story from the lips of Charlotte Qualley.

Montana is the land of "amber waves of grain."¹ On a plot cut right out of these waves sits a tiny white building, my grandparents' congregation. It is the essence of a country church. The pastor asks the congregation for prayer requests, and without fail there is a petition for the weather, a continual reminder of this community's dependence on the land for their livelihood—something I can understand by observation, but never fully comprehend.

This congregation has loved and prayed for me throughout my life. Their hospitality is medicinal to us every time we come to visit. Marvin teases me about accidentally belting the

wrong verse of *The Old Rugged Cross*, Cheryl asks me with sincere interest how work is going, Donna passes me another helping of the caramel rolls she brought for after-church coffee time.

Grandma, Susie, Cheryl, Donna, and Carolyn have taught Sunday school, made meals for families, participated in Bible studies, and put on vacation Bible school for the farming community for longer than I have been alive. Our family came to help with VBS a few summers ago. From providing snacks to paints for the crafts, each member played a part to make the week a success.

The kids inched closer and closer as my grandma whispered to them about a treasure she had inside her wooden chest. Roland's eyes widen with curiosity, "Is it gold?"

Slowing lifting the lid, she opened to show them her well-worn Bible. After Grandma taught the theme verse of the day, we handed out pocket Bibles that the kids would take home at the end of the week. Taking a colored pencil, I helped them find and underline the treasure of truth they had just put to memory.

When I was still young enough to attend, the VBS story for the day was Jesus' Parable of the Sower. Teaching on the seeds of the Word planted in different soils, Grandma held a jar of wheat in her hand. "The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's Word and produces a harvest of 30, 60, or even 100 times as much as had been planted" (Matthew 13:23).

The congregation at Faith has diligently sowed the seed. Pouring themselves out, their heritage of faithfulness to the Lord lives on through their children and grandchildren.

In the early spring of 2020, I got a call from my mom. Her voice was heavy, “Susie Hanson passed away this week, Madi.”

The Hanson’s pew is the one right in front of ours in the little country church. A wave of grief I was altogether unprepared for rushed straight to my eyes. Susie had been battling cancer for many years. Susie and Gary helped fund my mission trips and choir tours, but had invested into my life in more ways than just money. Like everyone in that farming community, they cared about me and about how I was living my life for the Lord. Those beloved people, that church, has been a constant home in my life of 11 military houses. Even though I was just a visitor coming only weeks at a time, they invested in me: teaching 5-year-old me to love Scripture by their example, encouraging 10-year-old me to use my talents always for Christ, inspiring 18-year-old me to try teaching VBS on summer teams. They have walked with me through life’s joys and sorrows.

When the time comes for the snow to melt, every farmer itches for planting season. The dark

earth will be worked over, turned like pages in a new book so that it can receive the small kernels. Jesus teaches in John 12, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” I see the character of Christ in the congregation of Faith—self-sacrifice in the hard work that they do. They have set an example of living out simple faith, trusting that God will bring the rain to the new seeds, quietly living with the conviction of the truth. With their example so vivid before me, I have had the privilege of learning the simple truths of life and faith. The seed that they have sown is fruitful.

Greven is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn. Artwork: “Cornfield,” by Frans Smitsaert, 1872-1944. Montana wheat specimen, Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History.

¹ *America the Beautiful,*
by Katherine Lee Bates.

BY MADISON GREVEN

PLANTING SEEDS





GIFTED TRAINED CALLED

BY PASTOR JASON GUDIM

There's a mistaken notion in the Church that is often applied to pastors. We are frequently mistaken or miscast as super-Christians, people who innately and automatically know how to be pious. This also extends to our ability to teach.

George Bernard Shaw once famously wrote, "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach." Regardless of the actual truthfulness and accuracy of this statement, it is analogous to your pastor (and all pastors) as both teachers and Christians.

We don't teach because we're super-Christians. Precisely the opposite is true. We struggle against our sinful natures as much as anyone else, and we need to repent of our sins just like everyone else.

If pastors are normal schlubs (so-to-speak) just like everyone else, then why do we teach? Scripture has a lot to say about this.

First, pastors teach because we are gifted to teach. This is not necessarily a measurement of one's talent or abilities, although I know several pastors who are very talented teachers. What I mean by this is that teaching is literally and actually one of the spiritual gifts mentioned in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4.

Romans 12 lists teaching as one of the gifts of grace given by the Holy Spirit. "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching ..." (vs. 6-7)

Now, just because someone is gifted to teach doesn't make one a pastor, and just because one has been trained and called to be a pastor doesn't make them a good teacher by default. But the gifting and equipping of the Holy Spirit is a good place to start.

It is also interesting that "teacher" is included in the offices that are given by Christ to the Church. "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12).

If you take these two passages together—the gift of teaching and the gift of the office of teacher—it makes a lot of sense that the people who are gifted teachers are placed by the Holy Spirit in positions where they have occasion and opportunity to teach in order to bless and edify the congregation. This primarily, but not exclusively, happens with pastors.

Second, pastors teach because we are trained to teach.

The Church throughout the ages has had to respond to an ever-present need for pastors. Consider that in the early church—the church of the New Testament—growth was far outpacing available and equipped pastors. Paul's answer to the growing need wasn't to find warm bodies to put in pulpits to fill vacancies. Paul's answer was to train more pastors: "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (II Timothy 2:2).

Timothy's task in response to the growing Church was to train pastors. Timothy himself had been trained by Paul, and his training extended back to the catechesis he received from his mother and grandmother (see II Timothy 3:10-17).

This is precisely the goal of our seminary. Not only are our pastors trained to teach, but they are trained in the content of what they ought to teach once they are called to a congregation.

Finally, pastors teach because we are called to teach. Being gifted to teach and being trained to teach still leaves us one step short of understanding why pastors teach. Ultimately, pastors teach because they are called to teach.

Teaching is mentioned as one of the requirements in lists that lay out qualifications for pastors found in both I Timothy and Titus. Paul simply mentions that an overseer must be "able to teach" in I Timothy 3:2. In his letter to Titus, however, he expands on this idea significantly. "He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (1:9).

The gift of teaching and the training to teach both come together in the pastor's call. In the call, the pastor is entrusted by the congregation to be a steward of law and gospel, preaching and teaching it in the parish while simultaneously guarding the congregation from error—all for the good of the flock.

Pastors are not super Christians by any stretch of the imagination. We simply teach because it's a part of how God has designed the office. He equips us through spiritual gifts and our seminary training so that we can faithfully exercise the calls our congregations extend to us.

Gudim serves Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis. Artwork: "Hands—Proportions in Attitude," John Ruebens Smith, 1775-1849, New York Public Library Digital Collections. "Study of a Man Reading a Book," Eduard Putra, 1905-1914, Slovak National Gallery.

MODELING GOD'S GRACE

BY ABBIE BERGE

If you are a parent, you are already a teacher. My mom always says that you are your baby's first teacher. And if you can teach them to talk, look at books, use silverware or a potty—and so much more—in those first few years of life, then you can teach them beyond that, too, little by little, one thing at a time. Our good Father will equip us. The Holy Spirit will help us.

Truly, there is one goal that stands above the rest for parents: that we teach our children how to come to Jesus.

To spill out all my thoughts to you about this, I wanted to address something that I feel is very important. The word that sums it all up is “pressure.” Parents feel a tremendous amount of pressure. We feel our children reflect us. When we have this view, we can start to feel responsible for every action they take. But in our desire to help or to do a good job teaching them, we end up controlling our children.

The Apostle Paul addressed this when he wrote, “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (Colossians 3:21).

Maybe this hasn't been you, but I know it

has been me. I knew I needed to have a second child quickly or I would wreak some havoc on my firstborn with my undivided attention. I have trouble holding my tongue. There are lots of ways to describe what I was doing: nitpicking, micromanaging, obsessively correcting, etc. It's easy behavior to fall into for all of us when we care so deeply. But is it the mark of a good teacher? And is it how our Father approaches us? Of course not!

When I look back over my life, I see that God has been so gentle to convict me of one thing at a time. One thing. If I had all of my problems and filth laid out before me all at once, it would have become so discouraging. What a weight that would have been on my shoulders. I have never experienced this kind of correction from God. His work in my heart has been slow and steady.

Jesus said, “For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30).

Parents are a model, our children's first model. This is the most powerful way to teach—in our actions. And the most important thing to teach our children is God's grace. I have spent lots of time searching for how I can model grace to



my children. Asking them for forgiveness when I have been angry and yelled was hard to do at first. I didn't want to admit my faults to my children. It felt like a break in the chain of command.

I had to learn to do it without making excuses such as, "I'm sorry I yelled, but you made me angry when you___."

A good apology can be kept simple. "I'm sorry I yelled. It was wrong. Will you forgive me?"

I am modeling repentance so that hopefully they can turn to our heavenly Father, too, when they fail. I am also teaching my children that I'm not perfect. I am not Jesus. I must show them my own deep, personal need for Jesus.

I also strive to give them love and forgiveness when it is not deserved. This teaches them that they have worth beyond their actions. Once my older daughter, Jordan, hurt my younger daughter, Ahna. I decided I was going to give Ahna some chocolate to sooth her and to also teach my firstborn a lesson. Jordan cried, her eyes looking large in surprise and full of hurt. I quickly realized how manipulative I was being. That was not God's grace, and it was pitting my daughters against each other. So, they both got chocolate chips,

even though one of them really didn't deserve it.

My love for them *should not* be earned. As a pastor's daughter, I was taught confirmation classes by my dad. He developed a point system to get people to engage in class. We all assumed if you got a question right, you would get a point. "Earn" a point. I would be so annoyed when I answered a question correctly and my dad would say, "Correct," and then gave a point to another student in the class. A student might also answer the question wrong, and he would say, "Nope! 10 points." His lesson was simple: life is not fair. And God's grace is not fair. It's not fair that Jesus should die for our sins. And it's not possible for me to pay the price.

This is my wish for my children: that I will not put a great weight on them, and that they would know they do not need to hide their sin from me or from God.

Berge is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn. Artwork: "In Front of a House," by Teodor Jozef Mousson, 1920, Slovak National Gallery.

W

ho is your favorite teacher? Whether young or old, we all can point to people who changed our lives. But what made their teaching so impactful? Jesus' teaching certainly made an impact, but what made it great? John Calvin rose to prominence as a teacher through his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Luther's 95 *Theses* catapulted him to prominence and his continued writing was so prolific that the molds of his hands relaxed in death were as if holding a pen.

Certainly, our Savior's writings could have been more detailed and masterful than either of these men, yet Jesus chose not to teach through writing during His earthly ministry. Rather than write a textbook, Jesus invested His three years of ministry into the personal instruction of His disciples. He taught them while traveling, He taught them while performing miracles, and He taught them in private and in public. The emphatic point through all of it is that Christ was *their* teacher. Their reach-out-and-touch-Him, get-tired-and-dirty-next-to-Him teacher.

Why did Christ choose to teach twelve rather than write to billions? Books and videos can be great tools for delivering information, but true discipleship is best done in person. Christ taught in such a way as to convey all of what He was rather than simply what He knew about a subject, even one as important as theology. Christ sought to move His disciples beyond the knowledge of God into a life lived with God. Whole character discipleship only comes with personal interaction. This is central to God's plan for families—that godly fathers and mothers would shape their children's hearts through living life together (Deuteronomy 6). Talk to the leadership of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, and they will extol the virtues of in-person learning.

If this is true, where does this leave us? Are we all fated to a poorer Christianity because we cannot walk and talk with Christ in the same way the disciples did? If Christ's teaching was best delivered in person, what is left for us?

In John 16:7, Jesus tells His disciples that it is to their advantage that He leave, which begins to assure us that we are not fated to a destitute Christianity. But the Bible goes far beyond this one encouragement. Let's look at just two of the biblical truths that bring us to Jesus *our* teacher.

The first biblical truth is the doctrine of the means of grace. We often unconsciously fall into a lower view of the Bible. We talk of studying it, memorizing it, and connecting its themes and doctrines together—all of which are great things. Over emphasis of these great things, though, can cause us to view the Bible solely as the knowledge that will connect us with God. But this is not what the means of grace teach us. John chapter 1 shows us that the Word is Christ. More than a textbook or video lecture, your time reading the Word is akin to time seated by the sea discussing truth with your master. Read as He draws your focus to this aspect of the truth or onto that application in your life. An open heart and an open Bible is equal to being with Christ, even if you memorize nothing that day.

The second truth is focused outward: *you* can emulate one of the central aspects of what made Christ a great teacher. Many of us compare ourselves to the brilliant aspects of Christ's teachings and feel incompetent. We see Christ effortlessly turn the steel-jawed traps of the Pharisees into a broken-down version of Milton Bradley's Mousetrap and think, "I can't do that." The truth is that we cannot live up to that teaching standard on our own. But Christ's teaching was impactful because He was a teacher who lived with those He taught. This is something that is open to us all.

I have had the opportunity to read many great theologians, yet none would make the list of influential teachers in my life. It is your parents, your pastor, your youth group leader, your friend, and even your child who can teach you like Christ taught His disciples. Beyond the method of teaching is the more important truth: each believer is Christ embodied to you.

We want to walk and talk with Christ, and we actually do. When we interact with believers around us we are walking and talking with the body of Christ. Christ's incarnate teaching continues to this day; it just looks a little different than it did in the Gospels.

Handsaker serves St. Paul's Evangelical Free Lutheran Church, Cloquet, Minn. Artwork: "On the Way to Emmaus," by Harmen ter Borch, 1650, Rijksmuseum.

INCARNATE TEACHER

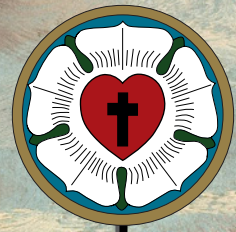
BY PASTOR DAVID HANDSAKER





EQUIPPING

TRAINING



WELCOME TO OUR

EDUCATION EXPO

Every year, members of the Northwest Minnesota District Christian Education Board plan an expo for the district with a goal of equipping people in our congregations to teach God's Word more effectively to all ages. The board, made up of three people, plans the expo, which includes a two-hour training session for anyone involved in parish education, from preschoolers through adults. In recent years the expo has been held on a Sunday near the end of August at one of our district churches.

Although our district had a Christian education board with elected members for many years, their duties were not very clear. Around 2008, board members decided to send a questionnaire to each district church to discover how the board could be of service to them. After gathering responses from the local congregations, we decided that a regional event, what we call an expo, could provide a meeting place to share ideas, resources, and training opportunities. Each year, we collect feedback in an attempt to meet the needs of each congregation.

Second Timothy 2:15 was selected at the theme verse at the first expo, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." It is our reminder that educators and leaders must continue to train for service. Each year, the expo focuses on one or more topics that are expanded upon either by people who are trained in teaching or lay people

who have been actively involved in teaching for many years.

For the past five years, the expo has been hosted in Thief River Falls. Having a consistent site, which is in a larger town, has been good for the volunteers. We plan the expo for the end of summer—good timing for most attendees who are planning for the new year of ministry. The expo can be a time to encourage and equip new or inexperienced teachers, and it is good for experienced teachers to be reminded of the basics and the importance of teaching God's Word. Christian education volunteers tend to be involved in many activities, so the yearly event keeps these topics "in mind" and available again if a volunteer has to miss a year.

Offering a district-wide event has been so important to our congregations. Talking with people from other churches who have been doing the same kind of ministry is encouraging and creates a synergy leading to further ideas. Conversations between people who have taught for many years and have gone through many of the same experiences and challenges refresh our members and help us all keep a biblical perspective.

We try to encourage each congregation to send a couple of representatives each year so they can pass on the information to their own members. Some churches send their Christian ed board members; others are teachers or parents/grandparents, with ages ranging from



20-somethings to 70-plus. We can learn from members with wisdom, while younger ones have a technology edge and enthusiasm.

Expo topics have included opening/closing exercises, Kids' Club, Scripture memorization, ways to present a Bible lesson, Bible memory games, missions, vacation Bible school, puppets, singing, orality training, Christmas programs, prayer, creative evangelism tools, digital resources in the classroom, mental health, and understanding children's love languages. Some of the teen topics covered every three years are "Wisdom for a Wild World," "Authentic Beauty," and a panel discussion of local youth leaders.

We can learn from others, and this event gives us a chance to get together with people from other churches and visit in person. This gives us a time and place to ask questions and to find out what has worked and what hasn't worked. Different speakers give us training, ideas, and information that is very valuable to teaching and leading kids/teen programs. Even though so much is available online, sometimes it's hard to find the right information. Attending in-person gives participants ideas that have been tried and found useful, with numerous new options. It's always good to connect with other churches and visit, catch up with old friends, and make new ones. Members of the body of Christ are encouragers, and who doesn't want to be encouraged? It takes a small committee a few hours of meeting to brainstorm and then a few phone calls, but it is

well worth the time.

In 2022, the expo was held August 21 from 5-8 p.m. at Abundant Life Lutheran in Thief River Falls. After a light supper, Pastor Kevin Hall (Westaker Lutheran, Newfolden) opened the expo with devotions. Marian Christopherson, director of AFLC Parish Education, led the main workshop session in which she shared about the importance of passing on the faith from one generation to another, based on Deuteronomy 5:15. She challenged us to remember God's story and how we fit into it. God's gifts to us include our identity, His commandments, prayer, our creeds, the Word, and songs. She also identified digital resources for parish educators, listing reliable sites and apps available for local congregations. Some resources were also useful for personal study, including apps to help with Scripture memory, commentaries, and study tools.

Her session was followed by round-table discussions where those present shared their ideas, tips, and other resources with each other. We wrapped up the evening in prayer.

We encourage other AFLC districts to consider holding a Christian education expo and discover the benefits of shared ideas and resources to teach the Word more effectively.

Written by Carla Bjorgaard, Lynn Strand, Tabatha Widner, and Brenda Leier. They are past and present members of the Northwest Minnesota District Christian Education Board.



THANK YOU

PASTOR ROBERT LEE

NOTING SIX DECADES OF AFLC MINISTRY

PASTOR

(1968-1992)

By Bob Christian

As the American Lutheran Church was changing, our church, Helmar Lutheran in Newark, Ill., was led by the Holy Spirit into the AFLC.

Our first contact with the AFLC was with Pastor Bob Lee, and he eventually was led to shepherd Helmar Lutheran. When he stepped into our congregation, we were still very new to the AFLC. He replaced our beloved Pastor Harold Masted, who had pastored Helmar for 18 years.

Under Pastor Lee's care we received a loving, well balanced view of law and gospel. He united the congregation through his care for people into solid members of the AFLC.

Upon being called to lead the AFLC as president in 1992, he made sure our congregation's needs were met. Sometimes he would travel the 850 miles round trip from the Twin Cities to Newark to lead us in worship and preach the Word. His love and care for our congregation were evident.

We know accolades are not what Pastor Bob and Gloria would want to bask in, but we thank God for the vital time they spent shepherding the flock at Helmar Lutheran.

Christian is a member of Helmar Lutheran, Newark, Ill.

FACULTY

(1979-1989, 1997-2021)

By Pastor Wade Mobley

Pastor Lee served as a trusted mentor for many of us at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, with value surpassing the institutional history we all admired. He knows our group well, and knows it from the beginning. Pastor Lee is kind, but not blind to some of our eccentricities and shortcomings. He taught us convictional Lutheranism with a charitable ecumenicity.

The death of Dr. Fran Monseth, dean of our seminary, shook Pastor Lee more than most of us. Pastor Lee lost what the rest of us lost, but he also lost his long-time friend and partner in ministry.

Pastor Lee had no desire to serve as interim dean of the seminary, but did so in a time of urgent need and personal loss. When I came on campus I could see his relief. What he did was costly and altruistic, and our seminary wouldn't be in the place it is today without his investment.

Mobley is the president of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, Plymouth, Minn.

EDITOR

(1990-1993, 2011-2022)

By Ruth Gunderson

Living through change can be hard. But when Pastor Lee took over as editor of our publication in 2011, the transition was smooth, thanks to his previous tenure in the role in the 1990s. I also knew him as our president when I joined the *Ambassador* in 2001. I knew working with Pastor Lee would be different, but it would also be good. Over our 11 years working together, the good has come in many forms.

Foremost has been a wealth of knowledge about our AFLC, from its congregational polity to its historical significance and potential to impact lives for the Lord. His love for the local congregation permeated every conversation we had as we planned issues and articles.

Good also came in his editorials. His convictions concerning the life of our fellowship were delivered in a firm but gracious voice—earned through many years of leadership service.

The good I personally experienced came in our monthly chats. Pastor Lee never rushed into business, but had an apt story (or three) to share. And he always ended our meetings in thankful prayer for the Lord's leading. His presence on campus is dearly missed.

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



PRESIDENT

(1992-2007)

By Pastor Elden Nelson

Serving more than five terms as president of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations is just part of the ministry years in the illustrious career of our friend and leader, Pastor Robert L. Lee. It has been a privilege to know and work with Bob over the years.

As our president he received the respect and love of people from across the country. A memory of names and places seemed to be an automatic with him. That gift never ceased to amaze us. His winsome chuckle came often in his conversations with people as he traveled and carried out his responsibilities with deep love and devotion for his Savior, the church, and the people he served.

Bob's love and devotion were not only shared at the office, but were clearly evidenced in his relationship to his wife, Gloria, and to their children and grandchildren. His work and ministry as our president will long be remembered as he, in obedience to the Lord, served us as the "pastor to pastors" who carefully and lovingly cared for his flock. Thank you Pastor Lee!

Nelson, Prinsburg, Minn., served as AFLC president from 2007 to 2013.

FRIEND

By Pastor Connely Dyrud

Robert Lee and I developed a close friendship over the years since meeting during seminary in the 1960s, when the AFLC was in its infancy. From then on I have known him as my friend "Bob." Because there were so few pastors at the time, seminary students had to serve congregations while continuing their studies. We shared that difficult experience with little or no pastoral supervision, but with God's help we managed to survive.

Our paths took different, yet similar directions. Bob continued pastoring AFLC congregations and teaching in our AFLC Bible school and seminary. I left for the mission field, pastoring congregations and teaching in our AFLC Brazil Bible school and seminary.

As president of the AFLC, Bob came to Brazil twice. First, in 1993, he spoke at our AFLC Brazil Annual Conference and dedicated the new Miriam Infant Home in Campo Mourão. His second visit was in 2000 when he was invited to speak at the conference with Rev. Artur Vilares of Portugal. It was a special occasion in Brazil as we were commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Portugal's presence in South America.

In 2004, when Carolyn and I returned to the U.S. after finishing 35 years in Brazil, Bob welcomed us home. And after Carolyn's unexpected death in 2005, I turned to him to be the speaker for her funeral. In the immediate years that followed, we both sang in the Norwegian male chorus, Nordkap. It was at those times his friendship was most appreciated as he helped me through the grieving process.

Today, Bob and I meet regularly with fellow pastors for fellowship and prayer at a nearby coffee house. This winter, however, Bob and Gloria have left Minnesota, but I am looking forward to their return next spring to continue those coffee meetings.

As I think back over our 60 years of friendship, I cannot resist sharing one of my favorite stories. Years ago, when we were driving alone through a dark night in Brazil, we came to a stop sign in the country. I slowed down and rolled through without stopping.

Bob looked straight ahead, cleared his throat, and asked, "What does a red octagonal sign with the word *Pare* mean in Brazil?"

"Stop," I said, "however, in Brazil, where robbers hide in ditches ready to jump out and rob cars stopping at intersections, we never make a complete stop at night."

Bob answered dryly: "Sounds to me like situational ethics."

Dyrud, a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., is a former AFLC missionary to Brazil.



FLBCS hosts annual Christmas concerts



The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary hosted a weekend of Christmas concerts Dec. 2-4 on its Plymouth, Minn., campus. Featured were the symphonic wind ensemble (opposite page, bottom), the Seminary Chorus (above), the Proclaim Choir and Concert Choir (pictured above, with alumni), and a hand bell choir. Pastor Wade Mobley (left), president of FLBCS, gave a brief meditation during the concerts, with the theme, "The World's Redeemer." The concerts were directed by Andrew Hanson.



TOP LEFT: Seminarian Mikey Meester sings a solo in "Child of Bethlehem." TOP RIGHT: Victor Hembree, Ellen Dalager, and Paris Eslick accompany the combined choirs as they sang "Hope for Resolution." ABOVE MIDDLE: Members of the combined choirs sing "Once in Royal David's City." ABOVE: Members of the Proclaim Choir sing "Savior of the Nations, Come."

Do you have a passion for missions and desire for your congregation to be more engaged? Have you wondered how you can help your congregation step into the mission of God? Here are five ways that can help you nurture missions in your congregation.

Know

The Scriptures are clear that God's heart is to save the lost and disciple the found through Christ. He has given us means to accomplish this in His Word and sacraments and the blueprint of the congregation where these means are implemented. The congregation is God's mission plan. Because of this, our Lord is deeply interested in the establishment of gospel congregations across the globe. The implication is that regardless of size, every congregation is called to be a part of church planting in some way. This is a key truth that is the foundation for any movement toward missions. Church-planting leader Ed Stetzer writes, "When the apostles and disciples heard the Great Commission, we might consider what they did in response. They did not just evangelize. They congregationalized. When the disciples heard the Great Commission, they planted churches. So should we."

Understanding the mission heart of God will always lead to a desire to see more congregations planted across the globe.

Pray

A heart for missions is also a supernatural work. As you grow in understanding God's plan for missions and how that involves the congregation, I invite you to be very intentional in prayer. Develop a prayer team



NURTURING MISSIONAL HEARTS

BY PASTOR ANDY COYLE

that is specifically designed to pray for spiritual renewal and vitality in your congregation. Pray that your people would see the mission opportunities that exist daily in their vocations and in their communities. Start intentionally praying for missionaries and church plants.

Learn

Understanding the gospel heart and plan of God is essential. Developing a heart of prayer for missions is crucial. I would also encourage you to start exploring what it would look like for your congregation to be involved in this great mission work of planting. Perhaps you could be a sending church that nurtures and sends a launch team. Perhaps you could be a partnering church that supports a plant through prayer, finances, and ministry help. It is a great misunderstanding for congregations to think they have to be huge to be involved in church planting. Learn how your congregation is situated to participate in God's plan.

Share

As you grow in your understanding of

God's mission plan for the world and His plan for congregations, take every opportunity to share those truths with your congregation. Share publicly. Share resources. Share stories. Engage in conversations. Be persistent in helping shape the mission culture at your congregation.

Wait

This is the hardest. Sometimes it simply takes time. Work hard. Pray hard. Learn much. Be faithful. Yet wait patiently for the Lord to capture the hearts in your congregation for God's mission.

Regardless of your size and your perceived strength, being a part of God's mission to reach the lost and disciple the found through planting more congregations is an amazing privilege our Lord invites us into. Home Missions would love to come along side your congregation to help in any way that we can.

Coyle, director of AFLC Home Missions, serves Shiloh Free Lutheran, Blackduck, S.D.

**WMF**WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION**A**

glorious red sunrise greeted six of us as we headed to Valley City, N.D., to meet

with other ladies in our Eastern North Dakota district for the fall WMF rally. Our theme, "Trusting God in Troubled Times," and theme verse from Isaiah 26:4, "Trust in the Lord forever for the Lord God is an everlasting rock," were needed words of encouragement to us.

My dear friends traveling with me have lived through many troubled times. Like so many others, we had concerns for family members who do not know the Lord. We experienced loss and grief, illness, and financial hardships. I was troubled for my grandchildren who face a culture of changing moral values.

After greeting us, Kya Shroeder, president of the Valley City WMF, reminded us that such struggles are nothing new as the WMF was born in "troubled times." The first district WMF rally was held in 1963, a time when the truth of God's Word was also in jeopardy. It was important then and now to come together to encourage one another and get equipped with spiritual tools to live in such unsettling times.

FOR OUR TROUBLED TIMES

BY ANNE PRESTENG

"In Times Like These," our theme song, was a powerful reminder that Jesus, our Rock 60 years ago, is still our Rock today. The ladies from Valley City blessed us with beautiful music throughout the day.

Pastor Jeff Swanson shared on the theme, "Blessed to be a Blessing." His message was from Psalm 67, often called the Missionary Psalm, "May God be gracious to us, and bless us, and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations" (vs. 1-2). Pastor Swanson shared his experiences as a missionary to Alaska for the last 15 years. The AFLC Alaska Mission, based in Naknek, has three categories of mission work: local Naknek ministry, KAKN Christian radio, and mission aviation. As we saw the beautiful pictures of Alaska we also learned about the isolation and needs of the people. The amazing beauty of Alaska's mountains and wildlife is in great contrast to the darkness sin has caused in many lives. The answer to this darkness is Jesus, who brings light into the world. This light is shared through preaching and teaching God's

Word and through children's programs such as vacation Bible schools. Many of these isolated communities are accessed only by plane. We learned about the radio broadcast and the Net coffee shop, also powerful ministry tools.

What a blessing to see how the Lord has used Pastor Jeff and Jane Swanson, Pastor Bob and Margaret Lee, and Pastor Jeremy and Lacey Crowell, along with many volunteers and VBS teams, to live out the words from Psalm 67. The Swanson and Lee families are both facing medical difficulties, leaving the ministry shorthanded. We were challenged to pray, remembering that God will supply all our needs and that troubled times overwhelm us when we lose our focus on Jesus.

We were affirmed in our mission that we can work together to promote the gospel, as written in II Corinthians 3:17, "Where the spirit gathers believers there is the spirit of God."

Presteng, a member of Bethel Lutheran, Grafton, N.D., is the first vice president of the WMF.

Holt accepts presidential ministry associate role

The AFLC President's office has announced the hiring of Dr. Jason Holt as the new presidential ministry associate. Pastor Holt, who has served as the director of AFLC Youth Ministries for the past 15 years, will transition into this new role at the beginning of February 2023.

As the presidential ministry associate—formerly “assistant to the president”—Holt will work alongside AFLC President Micah Hjermstad on the AFLC campus in Plymouth, Minn.



He will be responsible for tasks such as overseeing the AFLC's licensed pastor program, assisting congregations during the pastoral search process, working with the Conference Committee to plan the Annual Conference, and representing the president's office at various events.

“Ministry administration and leadership support are areas that I am motivated in by God's grace, so I am humbled and grateful to the Lord for how He has led,” said Holt. “Serving our local congregations' efforts with youth and families has given me a burden for all AFLC congregational leaders. I'm eager for the opportunity to encourage them in their vital Kingdom roles, while representing the [AFLC] president's office.”

“I'm so grateful for Dr. Holt's 15 years of faithful ministry to the youth department,” said Hjermstad, “and I'm excited to see how God will use him in this new role.”



Pastor Rodney and Candice Johnson were honored Nov. 20 for their years of service to Our Savior's Free Lutheran and First English Lutheran of Lostwood, both of Stanley, N.D. Johnson has retired and they have moved to Buffalo, Minn.

Seminary Symposium to focus on study of early church fathers



The Free Lutheran Seminary will host a Seminary Symposium Jan. 11-13 on their Plymouth, Minn., campus.

Replacing the January term format, the symposium is a continuing education opportunity for pastors, seminary students, and interested lay people. The conference will feature presentations on various topics. The 2023 theme will focus on Jesus Christ in the early church, specifically focusing on the early church fathers, an area of study called “patristics.”

The featured guest instructor is Dr. Daniel Janosik, a John of Damascus scholar and adjunct professor of apologetics and Islamic studies at Southern Evangelical Seminary, Columbia International University, Erskine Seminary, and Veritas

Seminary. His session is titled, “New Insights into the Origins of Islam.” Other guest instructors include Pastor Matthew Ballmann, AFLC church-planting pastor in San Antonio, Texas, who will lead a session titled, “A Case for Reading Holy Scripture with the Early Church;” and Pastor Andrew Kneeland, PhD candidate at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, who will teach on “Holy Book, Holy Readers: An Introduction to Biblical Interpretation.” Also offering a session titled, “Was Origen's Christology Heretical?” is Pastor Steve Mundfrom, FLBCS faculty.

The symposium will conclude with the Georg Sverdrup Society Forum.

For those unable to attend in person, a livestream option is available for a fee. For more information, visit flbc.edu/events.

Upcoming events at FLBCS

- Feb. 8-10: Spotlight: Missions with Pastor Michal Klus
- Feb. 9-10: Andrew Peterson concerts
- March 13-14: Spotlight: Gender and Worldview with Nancy Pearcey

FLBCS hosts first Lutheran Study Room

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary hosted the first Lutheran Studies Room at the Evangelical Theology Society meeting Nov. 14-17 in Denver, Colo. Dr. Nathan Olson, FLBCS faculty, moderated presentations on the theme of holiness. Dr. Mark Mattes gave a presentation on “Lutheran Delight in the Law of God,” Dr. Joel Biermann spoke on “Lutheran Virtue Ethics,” and Dr. Jordan Cooper spoke on “Two Kinds of Righteousness.” The presentations can be found online at flbc.edu/conferences.

FLBCS has been approved as an ETS Lutheran Studies Program Unit for the next three years.



Dr. Mark Mattes (pictured, from left), Dr. Joel Biermann, and Dr. Jordan Cooper were featured speakers in the Lutheran Study Room at the Evangelical Theology Society held in November in Denver, Colo.



A

rguably one of the greatest tasks that God used Martin Luther to accomplish was

to translate the Latin Bible into German, bringing the Word of God beyond the bounds of the priesthood to the lay person. I was reminded of this as I read through the story of Jesus' temptation, which is lesson 30 within the Ambassador Institute material. It is interesting that even the devil came to Jesus with Scripture in hopes of having Him disobey the Father. That leads to a few questions: How well do we know the Word of God? Can we spot the Word of God being used in a way that it is not intended? And, do we hunger for the Word of God?

It has been so beautiful to see so many Ugandans hunger for God's Word. In one of our classes near Gulu, we found out that a group of people are

HUNGRY FOR GOD'S WORD

BY PASTOR BRENT RAAN

walking up to three hours each way in order to receive teaching through the Ambassador Institute. When they arrive, they sit for a seven-hour class. Would we walk six hours to study the Word of God every month?

A blind lady is led to this class by others. When she arrives, she always sits down in the front and has a smile on her face. She is thrilled to be able to spend that time soaking up the Word. I had the pleasure to help her through our written exam back in November, and I witnessed her joy in knowing the Word of God in her mind and in her heart with every question I asked her.

The teachers also travel far to participate in this class—one for three hours and the other for eight. They leave their homes on Friday, teach all day on Saturday, and head home again on Sunday. These two teachers don't seek payment, nor recognition, but only receive money for transportation and housing while here in Gulu. They always arrive with an eagerness to proclaim the truth according to the Word of God.

This list of dedicated servants of the Lord

also includes the leadership team, all of whom have walked with the ministry through its formation from day one. We are so thrilled that we have been able to send multiple Ugandan team members to Malawi and Ethiopia to instruct nationals there on the methods of the Ambassador Institute. Some of them have given a month of their time to help lead these trainings.

I pray that these short examples would work to challenge and encourage each one of us to seek the Lord through His Word. We are thrilled and humbled to be a part of a team that brings the Word to such hungry people. Please pray for the work here as His Word continues to go out through the Ambassador Institute within Uganda and abroad.

Raan is an AFLC missionary serving in Gulu, Uganda.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Gary Jorgenson, Ramsey, Minn., has completed his role as assistant to the president of the AFLC. He currently serves as vice president of the AFLC.

John German, Waikiki, Hawaii, was approved for the licensed pastor roster by members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee. German accepted a call to serve as associate pastor of the Waikiki Beach Gathering.

Pastor Jarrod Hylden, who serves Skrefsrud Lutheran, Beresford, S.D., earned a doctor of ministry degree on Dec. 9 from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ken. His ministry project was titled, "Equipping the Leaders of Skrefsrud Lutheran Church of Beresford, South Dakota, to Lead Prayer Meetings Based on the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms."

Pastor Norman Dornquast, 88, of Mountain Home, Ark., formerly of Weslaco, Texas, died Dec. 18, 2021, at White River Medical Center, Batesville, Ark. The belated information was recently relayed to the AFLC president's office.

Pastor Brian Lunn, who serves Word of Life Free Lutheran, Upsala, Minn., has been hired as adjunct professor of the Free Lutheran Seminary, where he will teach Hebrew classes beginning in January.

Pastor Jesse Kneeland, Saint Michael, Minn., has been removed from the AFLC clergy roster at his own request.



Pastor Mel Meyer

Pastor Melvin Martin Meyer, 85, of South Bend, Ind., died on Dec. 13, 2022. He graduated from Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, with a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering, and from Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Ill. He was married to Elizabeth (Bunny) Meyer for 60 years.

Pastor Meyer served in vocational ministry for 40 years with both the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, serving congregations in Beulah and Zap, N.D.; Waukegan, Ill.; Fox River, Ill.; Amery, Wis.; and Milford, Ill. After retiring from the full-time pastorate, he served another nine years as a vacancy pastor for congregations in transition, including congregations in Winamac, Ind.; Knox, Ind.; Berrien Springs, Mich.; Rochester, Ind.; and North Judson, Ind. His passion was to serve the Body of Christ and point people to Jesus for healing, forgiveness, and eternal hope. A particular affinity for children's and youth ministry was evidenced through his work as a camp director in his younger years, teaching confirmation classes to middle schoolers, leading children's programming at family camp, annual vacation Bible school programs, and teaching Bible at Covenant Christian School, Mishawaka, Ind., during his retirement.

Surviving are his wife; one daughter, Melanie (Joe) Zuiker; three sons, Michael (Laura) Meyer, Matthew (Jodi) Meyer, and Mark (Kem) Meyer; 13 grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

The service was held Dec. 16 at Gospel Center Missionary Church, South Bend, Ind. Memorials are requested to Gospel Center Missionary Church for enhancements to the children's ministry.



Jensen installed Dec. 4 at Ishpeming congregation

Pastor Steve Jensen was installed Dec. 4 at Hope Free Evangelical Lutheran, Ishpeming, Mich., with Pastor Micah Hjermstad, AFLC president, officiating. Pictured, the congregation's children and youth join Pastor Jensen in praying for Hjermstad's ministry as president.

NOVEMBER MEMORIALS

Bible College

Ruth Claus
Marcee Folsland
Karen Dalager
Charlotte Fruehauf

General Fund

Charlotte Fruehauf

Lutheran

Ambassador

Charlotte Fruehauf
David Salvhus

FLAPS

Larry Kensinger

Home Missions

LeRoy Sletten

Seminary

Russell Ward
David Salvhus

World Missions

Karen Dalager
Harriet Rolf
Pastor Milo & Edith
Gudim
James Larson
Rhoda Hawkinson
Ervin & Burnette
Mickelson

WMF

Randall Moe
Marjorie Postovit
Donald Sillerud
Lew Pederson
Mary Normark
Deb Ford
Floyd Kasdorf
Leo Engberg
George Perry
Carroll Chapin

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-November 30, 2022

FUND	REC'D IN NOVEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$37034	\$396,301	\$366,593
Evangelism	5,760	110,009	119,256
Youth Ministries	11,856	139,011	183,356
Parish Education	20,477	162,439	176,773
Seminary	16,771	236,594	276,765
Bible College	45,058	414,260	403,274
Home Missions	41,085	360,347	625,493
World Missions	50,150	430,249	418,170
WM Personal Support	64,572	669,150	745,806
TOTALS	\$292,762	\$2,918,361	\$3,315,487

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

CHURCH & STATE: TWO ARMS OF GOD

When it comes to church fathers, Ambrose gets a bad rap.

The fourth-century bishop is usually remembered for two things: being Augustine's mentor and using too much allegory. Both of those are probably true, but Ambrose also had a good handle on the right relationship between church and state.



Pastor Andrew Kneeland

We don't live in fourth-century Italy, but we certainly still deal with the tension between church and state. The biblical—and dare I say, Lutheran—wisdom of Ambrose can help us here.

Throughout early Roman history there was never much separation between the church and the state. In 27 B.C. Augustus became Rome's first emperor and took the title, "*Pontifex Maximus*," or, "Greatest Priest." The state and the so-called church were collapsed into one, with the emperor leading both.

Not much changed through the first few centuries of church history, even when Emperor Constantine famously converted to Christianity in 312 A.D. After generations of imperial persecution, Christians were suddenly showered with money, privilege, and favors. But there was still no distinction between the church and the state.

Ambrose became a pastor about 50 years later. He appreciated the benefits these newly Christian emperors were giving to believers, but he thought there should be a clear distinction between church and state. And the emperor certainly should not be the head of both.

When the emperor unexpectedly died in 395, Ambrose was asked to preach his funeral sermon at his church in Milan. In the sermon he told a story about Emperor Constantine's mother, Helena, that showed how Christian rulers ought to rule.

Helena visited Jerusalem shortly after her son took the throne. She supposedly found the nails used in Christ's crucifixion and had them shaped into two objects: a crown and a bridle. She gave them to Constantine, telling him that the cross should always be on his mind and should curb any pride or arrogance. The story might be more fiction than fact, but Ambrose believed it represented a model Christian ruler: he should promote and favor the true faith, and he should live and act righteously.

Ambrose also had instructions for his congregation. Transfers of power were never straightforward in those days, and the heir to the Roman throne was just 10 years old. But even with the threat of instability looming as he delivered the funeral sermon, Ambrose called his people to respect and honor the emperor. Believers were to honor their rulers. But they were to also call their leaders to repentance, something Ambrose had also modeled. When rulers sin, believers should boldly remind them about Helena's holy crown and bridle, calling out their sin and encouraging biblical virtue.

The writings of Ambrose were on Martin Luther's bookshelf in Wittenberg, Germany. Luther agreed that the realms of church and state shouldn't be collapsed into one. They are distinct, he said, but not divorced. He believed God was behind both realms and that He designed each one to provide for us in different ways: The state uses the sword to bring peace; the church uses the Word to bring faith. One is not holier than the other; one is not more valuable than the other. The church and the state work together as the two loving arms

of our Heavenly Father.

And like Ambrose, Luther believed that rulers should honor God's Word, give special privilege to the true faith, and act with fairness and justice (I Peter 2:13-14). Christians also have a duty to pray for their rulers, extend them charity, and obey them eagerly unless a command goes against Scripture (I Timothy 2:2, Romans 13:1). And believers, especially pastors, are responsible to admonish our leaders for their sin (Psalm 82). The church's duty is to speak God's Word lovingly and firmly to her leaders; the state's duty is to provide for and protect the faith.

Of course, that's not the situation we see around us. Most of our leaders have long since shed Helena's holy crown and bridle. Our political leaders should favor and privilege Christianity, but they often do the opposite. They should restrain and frustrate false teaching, but they often

instead fly the banner of so-called tolerance.

But the faithfulness of one realm does not depend upon the faithfulness of the other. For every example of leaders neglecting their duties are

scores of believers who are neglecting theirs, failing to respect or failing to rebuke. The church is to respect, honor, and obey her earthly leaders just as she is obligated to speak God's word of admonition and exhortation to them.

Much has changed since the days of Ambrose. The "separation of church and state" is firmly entrenched in our American context. Learning from Ambrose and Luther, though, we should see these two realms as the two arms of God. The two ways God provides for our needs.

The church and the state work together as the two loving arms of our Heavenly Father.

association retreat center

MAKING AN IMPACT FOR THE KINGDOM

BY KIRK RAUTIO

I love vacation and I am assuming you do, as well. The ability to just relax a bit more than usual and absorb some extra minutes to recharge and hang out with loved ones is something that we should not take for granted. Getting the chance to taste new foods and treats makes it all the better. Embrace these times, however short they are.

I was able to get away with my wife (I call her Mamma ARC) for a few days recently. It was a great opportunity for sure. But the outcome of this mini vacation was not something I saw coming at all. I found myself up late one evening thinking about the next season at the ARC, the calendar that is filling up, and our crew.

I love the ARC staff and pray for them daily. We are blessed with a small yet effective group of individuals. Late one evening I found myself wondering when God is going to bless us with another strong long-term pillar member to come along side of us in ministry. It was in that moment that I was reminded quite bluntly

that everything and everyone has a season. Some are short, and some last years upon years. It is my job to take what we are provided with and do the work with the same intensity and focus as I would if I had everything I thought I needed. It is also my task to educate and train the individuals I am in ministry with.

This was the big take away from my time away—remain steadfast in Him. No matter what we do, or how many staff we have, God's Word reminds us to "stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (I Corinthians 15:58). In other words, have steadfast hope in Him.

Going into this next season, I am continually grateful for whomever the Lord brings my way. We will provide them with an education in whatever part of the ministry they are called to be a part of. We are so blessed to have had individuals with us for a season or two who then move on to whatever the Lord had planned for them. It is an honor to know that we had a small

part in their training and provided a place for them to get focused and hear the Lord's call on their lives.

It is that calling that matters. Whether people are with you for a moment or a lifetime, your Kingdom impact on their lives is imperative. At the ARC, we are called to directly impact those who come for a season or for longer. And that impact is much more than refining their skill set. It will hopefully reach those around them through the act of serving as the hands and feet of Jesus.

Working in an environment like the ARC is something that cannot be replicated. It is hard to describe how ministry here affects your outlook, both in direct and indirect ways. Please pray for our crew. Pray for our future crew. Pray that we can be effective in training them for whatever God has planned.

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