

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



the evangelist

so faith comes from hearing

how are they to believe in him of whom they have never

How beautiful are the feet of those who preach

the good news

for in this hope we are saved

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors

Be reconciled to God

Christ in you, the hope of glory

do the work of an evangelist

a reason for the hope that is in you
the kingdom of heaven is at hand
trust in the Lord

unless one is born again he cannot see the ki

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation

For God so loved the world

that he gave his only Son

that whoever believes in him

should not perish but have eternal life

nothing is impossible with God

how are they to preach unless they are sent

the mighty one who will save

how are they to hear without someone preaching

I am the way, and the truth, and the life

for by grace you have been saved through faith



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DIVING IN

BY TIM HERSET

Sam stands with toes curled over the edge of the diving board on the old wooden dock. The wind whips off the water and gives him an indication of the temperature in the lake below him. “Slightly refreshing and slightly uncomfortable,” is his assessment. Eyebrows curl beneath the wrinkles on his forehead as he shakes his head in anticipation.

Looking down, Sam sees his friends waiting with enthusiasm. Looking back, he sees the comfort of a warm towel and a fire on the shore. The knot in his stomach feels like the rocks he can see on the bottom of the lake. The voices of Jake and David encouraging him to take the leap compete with the voices in his head telling him to turn back to dry land.

Sam’s scrawny knees begin to bend, and with one hand he grasps his nostrils while squinting his eyes and opening his mouth to fill his lungs with fresh air. In one explosive movement, he’s flying through the air for what feels like forever. The cheering of his friends is interrupted by a loud screech from Sam, which is suddenly muffled by the splash announcing his entrance to the party.

The silence under the surface is surreal. His previous feelings of fear and that nagging desire to turn back are completely gone. Floating back to the surface, his friends congratulate him for taking the leap into the lake.

While floating on his back, feeling the warmth of the sun, a wave of contentment replaces the rush of adrenaline.

When they climb back onto the dock, they excitedly say: “That was great! Way to go! How was that for you?”

In his slow, thoughtful way of speaking, Sam surprises them with his response, “If only it were that easy for me to jump in and follow Jesus with all my heart ...”

“Huh?” responds Jake.

“It was easy for you to jump in the lake without hesitation,” Sam explains. “You saw my struggle.”

David interrupts, “Yeah, but what’s that got to do with Jesus?”

“I’ve had a couple scary situations with water before, so it’s always a bit scary for me to jump in the lake,” says Sam. “Life’s been pretty tough too, so trusting Jesus completely is actually harder than jumping off the dock.”

Understanding him a little more now, they shrug their shoulders and say, “Oh. Okay.”

Sam finishes by connecting the dots for them: “I wasn’t able to do that on my own. Thanks for encouraging me and not giving up on me. You guys are like that ‘great cloud of witnesses’ the pastor mentioned this morning.”

In the moment of silence that follows, they understand Sam’s explanation. With a sudden shift in his weight, Sam pushes Jake and David off the dock. And with a deep breath, he follows them into the lake.

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

If the teaching of justification stands, the church stands.
If this teaching collapses, the church collapses.

—Martin Luther

God's work done in God's way will never lack God's
supplies.

—Hudson Taylor

The man who mobilizes the Christian church to pray will
make the greatest contribution to world evangelization
in history.

—Andrew Murray

You are more wicked than you ever dared believe and yet, you are more loved and
accepted in Jesus Christ than you ever dared hope.

—Tim Keller

I will sing of my Redeemer and His wondrous love to
me; On the cruel cross He suffered, from the curse to set
me free. Sing, o sing of my Redeemer, with His blood He
purchased me; On the cross He sealed my pardon, paid
the debt and made me free.

—Ambassador Hymnal #524 (Philip P. Bliss)

who is afraid?

Effective evangelism in post-Christian America

BY DAVID GRAVES

One of the most effective evangelists I've had the privilege to know and learn from was asked about overcoming fear. His answer is as honest as it is humorous. He admitted, "I have been doing this for over thirty years and I still get butterflies in my stomach. I just tell the butterflies, 'Fly in formation!'"

Declaring the gospel in a world enslaved to sin is our commission and privilege, yet overcoming our fear can be challenging. The thought of evangelism in a culture that has rejected a Christian worldview might seem overwhelming. It ought not be.

Many evangelicals today refer to America as a "post-Christian" nation. Just what does that mean? Most commonly it refers to a society in which Christianity is no longer the dominant religion. Yet, most Americans still identify as Christian, even though their daily lives may not show it. Many of the values of Christianity, such as sacrificial love, mercy, and human dignity, are still respected yet float untethered from their defining source—Christ. Consequently, we continue to witness a rapid redefinition (and perversion) of these concepts. If you will, a fossil (or form) of Christianity remains, yet the living body (or substance) has largely atrophied.

Until seven months ago, I lived and ministered in one of the most post-Christian regions in the nation near Seattle, Wash. Now I live in rural west Tennessee, where there is still a strong vestige of cultural Christianity—everyone is a Christian, even if they're not. I've found evangelism, in many ways, to be more challenging here. And while post-Christian America's rejection of biblical truth and dizzying descent into irrationality and debauchery is shocking to witness, it does expose the spiritually diseased human heart in desperate need of the gospel cure. Our society may boast of its superiority and scientific advancement, yet every generation is born with the same fatal flaw—sin. And there is only one solution for sin: the shed blood of Jesus Christ. He is the same Savior yesterday, today, and forever!

Consider what it was like to share the good news in a pre-Christian culture. Paul wandered the streets of Athens and was provoked in his spirit seeing a city so full of idols. Though our modern idols may not be carved in marble, they are just as numerous and worthless to save. The same gospel that Paul shared with the sophisticated Athenians so long ago is still the "power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes" today (Romans 1:16). The message has not changed, though it takes wisdom to present the gospel to a

cynical culture. Here are a few things I have learned:

First, you can't give what you don't have. Can you explain the good news in simple nonreligious language in 30 seconds or less? If not, learn to. As Christians, we are immersed in church culture and well versed in theological jargon. But to those outside the faith, much of what we may do or say is unintelligible. Paul used simple universal language to appeal to his listeners on Mars Hill. We should strive to do the same.

Whenever possible, ask questions and then listen. With practice you will learn to guide people through the landscape of falsehoods they have come to believe. One tactic that I have found very helpful is to ask people to define what they mean. For instance, if someone uses the word *love* you can ask, "I want to be sure I am not misunderstanding you, what do you mean when you say *love*?" Many struggle to define the words that they commonly use. This is especially the case with the small, important old words like *love*, *truth*, *hope*, etc. In this kind of dialogue, it is easier to share the biblical view of these concepts and the One who ultimately is their source and definition.

Next, there is no substitute for speaking the truth in love. If you truly care for the wellbeing of another, it will come through. And if you don't, it can't be hidden. Remember, we are ambassadors of Christ. We represent the Savior God and share His message in a world that is opposed to Him and yet desperately needs His salvation.

Most importantly, just do it! Will we proclaim the good news and give a defense of the hope that is within us perfectly? Not likely, but as we sanctify Christ in our hearts and engage with our neighbors, we will learn and grow and see God's saving power at work through His Word.

In Psalm 11, David was admonished by one who sought to sow doubt in his heart. He was warned, "Flee as a bird to your mountain ... if the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do?" David's answer, "How can you say this to my soul? In the Lord I take refuge" (vv. 1, 3). Our response should be no different.

So Christian, evangelize. And when the butterflies come, just tell them, "Fly in formation!"

The Lord is on His throne.

Graves serves as lay pastor at Ebenezer Free Lutheran, Humboldt, Tenn.

He will be with you
where the Spirit of the Lord is,
there is liberty

the Lord is the one who goes ahead of you
he sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom
of God and to heal the sick
always be prepared to make a defense

speaking the truth in love
do you not know that you are a temple of God
and that the Spirit of God dwells in you

behold, I stand at the door
and knock. If anyone hears my
voice and opens the door
I will come in to him

so that Christ may dwell in you
for God so loved the world
that he gave his only son

whom shall I send and who will go
I will fear no evil for you are with me
now these three remain: faith, hope,
and love

while we were still sinners
Christ died for us
seek His presence continually
behold, God is my helper

so that the world might believe
nothing is impossible
Immanuel, God with us

if we live by the Spirit, let us
walk by the Spirit

for it is not you who speak
but it is the Spirit of your Father
who speaks in you

the Lord is for me, I will not fear

if God is for us, who is against us?

for by grace you have been saved through faith

pause and reflect

the hope of the righteous brings joy

the mighty one who will save

therefore ... we never give up

so faith comes from hearing

nothing is impossible with God

on those who hope in His steadfast love

in His word I hope

we have our hope set on the living God

I will yet praise Him, my Savior

this veil is removed only by believing in Christ

May the God of hope fill you with all joy

trust in the Lord

he will not leave you or forsake you

for a helmet the hope of salvation

an eternal weight of glory beyond compare

Christ in you, the hope of glory

through the Spirit, by faith

he will deliver us

for in this hope we are saved

love hopes all things

now faith is the assurance of things hoped for

to give you a hope and a future



there is hope

BY PASTOR JOEL ROLF

How does a person come to a living faith in Jesus Christ? If you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, how did that come about in your life?

You may have been baptized as an infant, taught the Word of God, and prayed over from infancy. Maybe you don't remember a time when you were not trusting in Christ as your Savior, and you continue to trust Him today. If that is true for you, you are exceedingly blessed!

Others come to a living faith in their childhood, as a youth, or in their adult years through a variety of accompanying circumstances. Increasing numbers of people today have very little spiritual background or understanding of even the basics of God's Word. Many are growing up in a confused culture of not knowing who or what to believe or trust. There is hope in Christ for every person.

God's Word gives us great insight into how God softens hard hearts and minds and gives grace to turn to the Lord and trust in Christ. Second Corinthians 3:12-4:6 is a wonderful passage that gives us understanding into this process.

Notice, firstly, that by nature we resist God and don't trust Christ. "Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God" (4:4, NLT). In chapter 3, Paul describes this further, especially how it was for the Jews, "But the people's minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can only be removed by believing in Christ. Yes, even today when they read Moses' writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand. But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away" (vv. 14-16). It should not surprise us when people's minds are blinded, or they are deceived into trusting dead end roads that lead to destruction.

Notice, secondly, the glorious power of the gospel of Christ to transform hardened, veiled hearts. "Whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away" (3:16), "And this veil can only be removed by believing in Christ" (3:14). This should not surprise us. God, through His Holy Spirit's gracious work through His Word, shows us our sin and shows us our Savior Jesus Christ. In this process, the Holy Spirit, in His kindness, leads us to repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 2:4; John 16:8-11).

The word "turns" speaks of the repentance process of turning from sin and self to trusting in Christ and the sacrificial payment He made at the cross for all of our sin. We should be grateful for the Holy Spirit's work to give us grace to trust in Christ and to give us insight into His Word. "For God, who said, 'Let there be light in darkness,' has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Corinthians 4:6). God, by His Spirit, graciously shines His light in our otherwise dark hearts, giving us the light of life so that we might know God and Christ in His glory and grace, and also share it with others.

Notice, thirdly, that God desires to use you who know Christ as your Savior to lovingly and patiently listen to those whose minds, hearts, and lives have been blinded, bruised, and broken, and help them see the light of the glory of Christ. "Therefore, since God in his mercy has given us this new way, we never give up ..." (4:1). As we have received mercy from God, so God would give us His love, mercy, and compassion for others. He desires to give us hearts that come alongside others, hear their stories, and help them see and know Jesus. God gives everyone of us who know Him these kinds of opportunities in various ways each day, individually or corporately.

Every Tuesday morning is a special time in my week as men from our congregation and community gather at our church for breakfast and Bible study. One morning our study included a range of attendees from our congregation and six area churches. We studied Luke 19:1-10 where Jesus entered Jericho, saw Zacchaeus up in a sycamore tree and told him that He wanted to come to his house that very day. We are not told the content of their conversation, but it is apparent that any shady things Zacchaeus had done as a tax collector were brought to light and he came to trust in Jesus as his Savior. The evidence of the change in his heart became clear as he said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!" Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today" (Luke 19:8-9a).

Jesus set a great example for us to use opportunities each day to meet people where they are, listen to the concerns on their hearts, and help them find forgiveness, hope, and life in Christ. There is hope in Christ for every person!

Rolf serves Minnewaska Lutheran, Starbuck, Minn.

leading into outreach

An intentional culture can foster proactive outreach

BY MICAH JOHNSON

In J.R.R. Tolkien's book, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, a council of Middle-earth leaders gathers to decide who would embark on a long journey to destroy the One Ring in the fires of Mordor. At the conclusion of the meeting, the final team is selected and is proudly declared "The Fellowship of the Ring." Upon being selected, a somewhat ignorant Hobbit named Pippin asks, "Great. Where are we going?"

While comical to the story, the question, "Where are we going?" is vitally important when it comes to effective leadership. And church leadership is no exception. Far too often, well-intended church leaders unintentionally drift from their mission, vision, and purpose. Once that is lost, a church can quickly start to feel like it is just "going through the motions" without seeing many fruits of their labor.

So how do church leaders practice effective leadership? While not an exhaustive list, following are a few practical ways you can start modeling effective leadership for your congregation.

Self-assessment

First, pause and reflect. Yes, that's right. Take a step back (pause) and ask yourself if you are leading effectively. Maybe you need to ask some tough questions such as: Where are we going? Maybe you honestly don't know. Are we living out our mission? Do we have well-defined, intentional goals that drive the mission? Do we have proper policies in place to protect the ministry and those who serve? Most importantly, are we seeking God's will in fulfilling the mission?

A team's ability to properly evaluate itself is a critical step in effective leadership. Additionally, this is not a one-and-done step. It is a rinse-and-repeat process. As church leadership changes over time, the practice of evaluation benefits both the new board member and the seasoned veteran. When it comes to godly leadership, we are never done learning and growing.

As a practical application, this involves developing a yearly leadership evaluation plan.

The Apostle Paul gives us a biblical application of this step of leadership development in his letter to the

Corinthian church, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!" (II Corinthians 13:5).

Mission & Vision

Second, having clearly defined, biblically based mission, vision, and purpose statements are foundational to effective leadership. These statements are the driving force by which a church creates effective goals, establishes outreach programs, and resolves conflict. It also provides a simple, effective way for leaders to remain accountable and protect their team against mission drift. In other words, all activities, goals, financial decisions, conflict resolution, and policies should be vetted through the lens of biblically based mission, vision, and purpose statements.

Practically speaking, this means you should know your church's mission, vision, and purpose statements. If your church does not have any, develop them, always using biblical principles as your guide.

The Book of Proverbs holds many simple truths which can apply to this principle. Consider this, "Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails," (19:21).

Lead in Unity

Third, unity is essential. There are many stories of divided churches. Maybe yours is one. In almost all such cases, the church was divided because the leadership was divided. It is incredibly important for the spiritual health and safety of the congregation that leadership models unity. A leadership board is a great place for respectful debate, sharing of ideas, and passionate discussion—as long as everyone is committed to unity.

But what does unity look like? Leadership must be committed to leading as "one voice" and properly modeling unity to the congregation.

We can look to Psalm 133:1 for direction, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!"

Serve with Humility

Fourth, leadership requires humility. Church leaders are not perfect! However, we serve a perfect God and are

called to be guided by His Word and the Holy Spirit. The fact that God would use us to accomplish His purpose is an incredibly humbling thought in itself. Church leaders are called to be servant leaders. It is with this in mind that leadership decisions should be approached with great humility, prayer, and biblical wisdom.

A practical application would include integrating prayer into your meeting agendas. Don't just make prayer the bookends to your meetings. When there are big decisions to make, tensions, or praises, pause for prayer. Seek God's wisdom and guidance. Let Him lead.

The Apostle Peter counseled the fledgling early church, "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not

domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (I Peter 5:2-4).

What do these four principles have to do with evangelism and discipleship? Everything! Anthony Hilder, a pastor and church leadership coach, wrote, "A church with an intentional culture determines to proactively develop and cultivate these values in the lives of the people, knowing that they will manifest in actions that become the church 'normal.' This standard will determine whether the vision can happen, or if it is just a pipedream."

Johnson, a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., is the chairman of the AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship committee.



what is your mission, vision, purpose?

are we living out our mission?

church leaders are not perfect

we are never done learning and growing
practical application

cultivating values

where are we going?

leading into unity

well-defined, intentional goals
pause and reflect

dwelling in unity
serving with humility

applying principles to evangelism

passionate discussions

self-assessment

a rinse-and-repeat process

respectful debate

modeling unity

spiritual health

godly leadership

biblical application

integrating prayer into your agenda

what is God's will?

creating effective goals

pray for one another

serve others as faithful stewards

godliness has value for all things

so that you also may have fellowship

godly leadership

training in righteousness

give yourself to the work

I pray that out of His glorious riches

the right hand of fellowship

one approved, a worker who does not need

God loves a cheerful giver

God will supply every need of yours

justice, love kindness, walk humbly

I pray that all may go well with you

the laborer deserves his food

one for the other

all for Christ

look for able men from all the people

men who fear God

men who are trustworthy

with upright heart he shepherded them

I am the vine

you are the branches

Go into all the world and proclaim

esteem them very highly in love

our fellowship is with the Father

considered worthy of double honor

set an example by doing what is good

especially those who labor in preaching

Christ himself gave ... the pastors and teachers

if my people

who are called by my name

humble themselves

and pray and seek my face



bless your pastor

BY PAM OLSON

With seven pastors in my family, I am keenly aware of the surrendered heart in this man of God called “pastor.” He is the shepherd for the sheep. The pastor and the local congregation work together to serve the community as a lighthouse to the lost. They provide a refuge of encouragement and fellowship and a place of discovery and worship of Christ the King. One for the other. All for Christ.

In describing the church, the Apostle Paul wrote, “From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:16). This is Christ’s bride, the church, which is empowered by the Holy Spirit to do its work. It’s a beautiful thing in action. The prophet Jeremiah described the calling of those who would lead the church: “I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding” (Jeremiah 3:15).

Why, then, are pastors walking away from this vocational call of tending the church?

Pastoral ministry is uniquely depleting. Desiring to be servant-hearted, your pastor consistently pours himself out on behalf of you and your fellow church members. He lovingly sits through difficult counseling sessions. He endures criticism. In fact, he is his own worst critic. He spends hours preparing sermons and classes. The reality is, your pastor needs care just like you do. He needs regular refreshing. His spiritual, physical, and emotional tanks need regular refilling. If this doesn’t happen, the end result is almost always burnout.

According to Barna Research, stress, loneliness, and political division are the three areas where tension rises to the surface. More than half of pastors (56 percent) who have considered quitting full-time ministry say that “the immense stress of the job” has factored into their thoughts of leaving. The vast majority of pastors—90 percent—report working 55-75 hours per week. A strong majority of pastors—78 percent—have no close friends. Sadly, 97 percent of pastors have been betrayed, falsely accused, or hurt by their trusted friends. It should be no surprise, then, that 70 percent of pastors battle depression, and 80 percent of pastors feel discouraged. Maybe that is because congregational complaints speak louder than compliments by a ratio of 15:1. Currently, 7,000 churches close nationwide each year and 1,500 pastors quit each month.

These are devastating statistics. We, the congregation, need to remember to strengthen inwardly as we continue to reach outwardly. One for the other, filled with love, joy, and forgiveness. We need to support our pastors. Here are a list of

ways we can do just that:

Faithful prayer: Pray regularly for his intimacy with God, spiritual protection, marital love and unity (if married), time management, and leadership skills.

Fondness: Let the pastor know how God is specifically using him to bless, help, and teach you to follow Jesus. Remember His birthday with a card or gift. Show appreciation for your pastor’s strengths and give grace in his weaknesses.

Fellowship: Prepare a meal or baked goods for him. Share produce from your garden or game from your hunting or fishing trip. Give him gift cards. Offer a respite at a cabin or tickets to an event. Offer babysitting, home or car repairs.

Freedom: If he has a family, give your pastor, wife, and children the freedom to be themselves, to find their own niche, and live out their spiritual gifts at the church.

Finances: Faithfully give to your church so your pastor can be properly compensated. Beyond the pastor’s salary, the Lord may prompt certain individuals to provide personal funding to help with a pastor’s specific needs.

Support: Enable him to find times of refreshing in the Lord. Give your pastor time to regularly read and study outside of sermon preparation. Give your pastor regular days off where he can step away from the cares of the church and be refreshed. Send your pastor to conferences so that he can be encouraged and sharpened by other pastors/leaders. Ensure that your pastor takes regular vacations. Allow your pastor to take a sabbatical for reflection, prayer, and solitude; consider giving a month, summer, or a full year off marking a “Sabbath rest” or the fiftieth “year of jubilee” (Leviticus 25).

Paul, writing to the church in Thessalonica, instructed, “Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Esteem them very highly in love because of their work” (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

What will motivate pastors in their work, to persevere in it, with patient endurance, never turning their hands from the plow? May there be a whisper of joy in their hearts as they do their work and encouragement that brings gladness to their steps. May there be those who work alongside them, committed to the life of the church—reliable co-laborers who are reading the Word and are faithful in prayer. One for the other, all for Christ. His Church will persevere to the end.

Olson is a member of Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn. Find more ideas on how to support your pastor at blessyourpastor.org.

What Stensvaag's message
means for the AFLC today

a message for



BY PASTOR RANDY NELSON

I recently realized that I have something that God doesn't—I have grandchildren! What a wonderful truth it is that we each come to God as His beloved children. We are His immediate family. It is also true that we each must have a personal relationship with Him. We cannot live through the relationships that our parents have with God. We each need to trust in Him as Savior and Lord and to learn what it means to be His disciple. We each need to grow in our relationship with Him, learning how to love Him with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind, and all of our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

The same is true for every congregation. Our churches cannot live through the relationships that those who have gone before us had with God. Each generation needs to trust God and follow Him, learning from those who went before them, but personally seeking and following the path that God has for them.

In 1948, at the centennial of Professor Georg Sverdrup's birth, Dr. John Stensvaag addressed the 52nd Annual Conference of the Lutheran Free Church in a message titled, "Do You Really Want the Congregation?" He sought to remind the

church body of the vision its founder had spent his life sharing and passing on to all who would listen—a vision of "free and living congregations," as he believed God intended, and a vision that we in the AFLC still hold to and seek to pass on to the generations to come.

I would like to highlight a few relevant points from that message for us today. This message can be found in the booklet *Do You Really Want the Congregation? Georg Sverdrup for our Day*, which can be purchased from Ambassador Publications.

As the AFLC passes 60 years of existence and the leadership of our congregations, in turn, falls to a new generation, these insights into what it means to be free and living congregations are a wonderful treasure from our past. They are also a relevant guide for today, and a valuable gift to pass on to the future generations of the AFLC. My prayer is that we will each personally contemplate them, put them into practice, and then pass them on, that we might truly be an association of free and living congregations.

Nelson is the director of AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship.

1

“First he taught that the congregation ought to be free. ... that the only form of the Kingdom of God that we find in the New Testament is the local congregation. ... it is bound to recognize one and only authority over itself—the Word and the Spirit” (p. 3).

2

“But there was another, more important sense in which the congregation needed to be set free. In many instances the congregation, as Sverdrup saw it, was little more than a mission field. It was not a fellowship of saved, liberated men. As a result, the congregation was bound hand and foot in worldliness. From these shackles of sin and unbelief the congregation had to be set free” (p. 3).

3

“How then did Sverdrup expect the congregation to be liberated? By direct, fearless, Spirit-filled preaching of the gospel. This would set the congregation free by leading some to an experience of salvation and by causing the unrepentant to withdraw” (p. 4).

the next generation

4

“But it would be a mistake to see this emphasis on evangelism as Sverdrup’s chief contribution American Lutheranism. ... He pointed out what the logical result of evangelism should be: the emergence of a living congregation. What did he mean by this? He meant that the congregation was to become a fellowship of believers in which every gift of grace was encouraged and given the fullest possible chance for expression. The pastor must never be content with a congregation of saved listeners but must seek to attain a congregation of saved workers” (pg. 4).

5

“What specifically did Sverdrup mean by lay activity? He made it clear, first of all, that the living congregation undergirds all its work with prayer. ... Next he stressed that the basic work of the congregation is witnessing. In this work every Christian must have a part. ... that meant frequent testimony meetings with many taking part. It meant personal evangelism—each individual believer speaking to other individuals in an effort to win them for Christ. It also meant lay preaching. Sverdrup saw this as one of the richest gifts of grace and sought to promote it in every way he could” (pg. 5).

6

“Sverdrup more than once pointed out that the real sign of a living congregation is love for souls, an earnest desire that all the lost be saved. Where this exists, the believers will of necessity be on fire for Christ and eager to do his work” (pg. 6).



presidential ministry associate
presidential ministry associate
presidential ministry associate
presidential ministry associate

BY PASTOR JASON HOLT

What *is the Presidential Ministry Associate?*

The question is natural. The title is new. I have received this question many times this year and I am grateful to have the opportunity to explain this role to our AFLC fellowship.

As he began his term, AFLC President Micah Hjermstad worked with members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee to clear up the confusion over the roles of “assistants” in the office of the president. Chanel Nelson, who serves as executive assistant, is his assistant. On occasion, she is referred to as “secretary,” but we have an elected AFLC secretary (Pastor Brett Boe). In addition, I serve as the Presidential Ministry Associate (PMA), which was formerly called the Assistant to the President. By official titles, we have an assistant and an associate.

The PMA is a servant-pastor representing the AFLC president’s office. This role is under the supervision of the AFLC president. The PMA gives a monthly report to the Coordinating Committee. Some of our congregations have associate pastors, so this parallel has benefited from making the leadership connection. Associate pastors have a congregational ministry calling and responsibility for the sake of Christ in the congregation. They work alongside the pastor (or senior pastor). As the PMA, I seek to fulfill the responsibilities of the AFLC president’s office under the direction of President Hjermstad. I have experience as an associate pastor in our AFLC, so I find the partnership very positive.

But what do you actually do?

As the president’s office seeks to serve our more than 250 congregations and all of our pastors, the PMA is available to minister with congregations, congregational leaders, and pastors. Having served for almost 25 years as an AFLC pastor, I have been blessed by the Lord with many existing connections to our local congregations. In my first few months in this role, I have visited congregations that are looking for a pastor, congregations that are wrestling through a situation, and congregations that are celebrating what Jesus is doing in their midst. It is a joy to walk alongside our local congregations!

Another area of responsibility that President Hjermstad has given to me is working with the Fellowship Roster and the Licensed Lay Pastor Roster. These two rosters are in addition to our AFLC Clergy Roster. The Clergy Roster lists all pastors who were called to serve an AFLC congregation after completing training at the Free Lutheran Seminary (FLS) or completing the process of aligning with our church body. The Fellowship Roster

includes men who have completed seminary training from another church body. The Licensed Lay Pastor Roster includes men who have a range of different training in their backgrounds. When you include the permanently licensed lay pastors, these two rosters incorporate about 40 of our pastors. I walk with these brothers in Christ through their requirements with the Coordinating Committee and seek to encourage them in their vital ministry.

As we continue to pray to the Lord for more pastors, President Hjermstad and I are working with the Coordinating Committee on a lay leader training program, which would invite lay leaders to receive equipping throughout the year and invite those wrestling with a pastoral call to gain tangible skills. Many of those who fit this profile may be led to our seminary. The call to pastoral leadership is a call to prepare. I received phenomenal training at FLS and will encourage men to consider attending FLS. Other men with this profile may be led to the licensed lay pastor route. The Coordinating Committee guidelines will provide these brothers in Christ with training to be effective while they are serving a local AFLC congregation.

A third area of responsibility for the PMA is working with AFLC events. This area includes regular opportunities like being on the support team for Annual Conference or special occasions like a congregational anniversary. Another honor within this sphere would be the times that I am asked to install a pastor. When the Holy Spirit prompts a congregation to call and a pastor to accept, it amazes me to see how He fits shepherd and flock together for His purposes.

So what is your heart for the work?

The PMA is a role that exists to serve our AFLC. Jesus has richly blessed me in this church body. We often refer to ourselves in the AFLC as a family, which is correct in that we are the family of God, but we are first a fellowship. We correctly utilize the phrase, “free and living Lutherans,” to describe ourselves. Those terms define a rich biblical heritage. The PMA focuses on encouraging our congregations and equipping our pastors so that we may be who Jesus has called us to be. When we are rooted in a free, living, and Lutheran fellowship, then we encounter being the family of God. This combination is my heart for the ministry in Christ.



Holt

Holt, a member of Living Hope Church, Rogers, Minn., is the presidential ministry associate of the AFLC.

FLBCS hosts graduation

Four seminary, 44 college students receive diplomas

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, Plymouth, Minn., hosted a weekend of activities, culminating with a commencement service on May 6. Following a week of final tests and graduation rehearsal, a spring concert was held May 5 in the Student Life Center, featuring the Proclaim Choir,

Concert Choir, Wind Ensemble, and Handbell Ensemble. The commencement service was held the following afternoon, with four seminarians earning Master of Divinity degrees and 44 Bible college students earning diplomas in biblical studies. AFLC President Micah Hjermstad gave the address, and Mason Mitchell, FLBC student body president, gave a greeting. Members of the Proclaim Choir and Concert Choir each sang during the service.



Clockwise, from top: Dr. James Molstre gives FLBC graduate Joshua Fernandez his diploma. AFLC President Micah Hjermstad gave the commencement address. Dr. Wade Mobley congratulated Mason Mitchell, FLBC student body president. Graduates' family and friends filled the Student Life Center gym for the service. Ryan Erickson, Seth Zeltinger, and Caden Larson sang the closing song with the Concert Choir. Sophia Lucht is greeted by friends and family. Kassi Adkins, Lydia Baerbock, Stephenie Kelso, and Michelle Abel.



Clockwise, from top: Members of the second-year class of the Free Lutheran Bible College posed for one last group picture after running through graduation rehearsal. Four men graduated from the Free Lutheran Seminary, including (from left) Joseph Frech, Alex Woodworth, James Scott Pierson, and Joseph Larson. Graduates of the Bible college and seminary lined up outside the Student Life Center following graduation. Members of the Proclaim Choir sang during the commencement service.

WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION



L

adies of the WMF, would you ever consider having a rally centered on the theme of

ear piercings—ear candies, hoops, cuffs, studs, dangles, and drops and about a half dozen other forms of ear piercing? Most ear piercings are done using a piercing gun with a sterile needle and cute little stud earring. The ear lobe is numbed and the piercing gun is positioned at the designated spot close to the middle of the earlobe to insure an attractive placement of the bling that will one day grace that spot. Once positioned, the gun trigger is pulled, and the sharp end of the ear stud penetrates the ear lobe. Voilà! The ear has been pierced.

Decades ago, some piercings were done by placing a piece of apple behind the earlobe and then punching through the lobe with a sterile, needle-sharp stud earring. There was also a do-it-yourself method that involved a sewing needle and piece of thread, literally stringing it through the earlobe. Ouch.

For some, these descriptions may evoke memories—good and bad. The

TRUE FREEDOM IN CHRIST

BY CANDICE JOHNSON

process was painful, but the end result was worth the pain.

Why waste time and paper on such a trivial, vain, and worldly endeavor like ear piercing? What does any of this have to do with our spiritual lives, supporting our missionaries, or a deeper understanding of the Bible?

Let's focus not on modern ear piercing, but on the ancient and biblical rite connected with it, which conveyed a deeply personal and permanent message. This permanent piercing involved slaves.

The practice of slavery was evident in the Bible as early as Genesis 12 when the Egyptian Pharaoh gave Abraham slaves in exchange for his wife-sister, Sarai (Genesis 12:16). And the practice of permanently piercing slaves is addressed in Exodus 21:5-6: "But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, ... I will not go out as a free man.' Then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently."

If piercing with a sterile needle and a sparkling little earring sounds painful, consider the ancient use of an awl and a doorpost. Surely it was a painful procedure, but it must have been worth the pain to be permanently known as

belonging to a particular master.

This portion of law addressed such a situation in which a slave loved his master, and his master loved him. With an outwardly visible and permanently affixed hole in his ear, the slave made known to anyone he met that he owed his love and allegiance to his master. He loved his master, his master's ways, his master's protection, and his master's control. He wanted to surrender to his master's loving authority. He found enslavement to his master not burdensome, but true freedom.

True freedom is found through service to Christ. Consider praying these words written by Steve Croft:

Pierce my ear oh Lord my God;
Take me to your door this day.
I will serve no other god;
O Lord I'm here to stay.

You have paid the price for me;
With your blood you ransomed me.
I will serve you eternally;
A free man [or woman] I'll never be.

Johnson, Buffalo, Minn., attends Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.



THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

BY JON NELSON

During the first five months of this year, AFLC Journey Missions teams have had many mission experiences. In February, a team traveled to visit our AFLC ministries in Brazil, and in March, a team of 24 students from our Free Lutheran Bible College traveled to a ministry in Oaxaca, Mexico. We are thankful for the leadership of Mike Anenson, who led a Journey Missions team to Israel in May. We are looking forward to our June trip to Brazil and wrapping up the year with another full team traveling to Israel in November.

As for our missionary assistant program, at the beginning of the year, Casey McLoughlin returned to work at the Miriam Home in Brazil with Jonni Sliver. Casey traveled to Brazil in February with the team from Cannon Falls, Minn., and will be serving there until August. It was a blessing to have her serving alongside the visiting mission team.

Journey Missions has two other missionary assistants traveling to Brazil in June with the Brazil ministry team. Rose Zeltinger and Jaelynn Kozicky will also work at the Miriam Home under Jonni Sliver as well as with Pastor John and Hannah Lee's family. We are excited to see them take the opportunity to serve on the mission field for a longer period of time.

We are so thankful for these people who are seeking to serve God around the world. As each

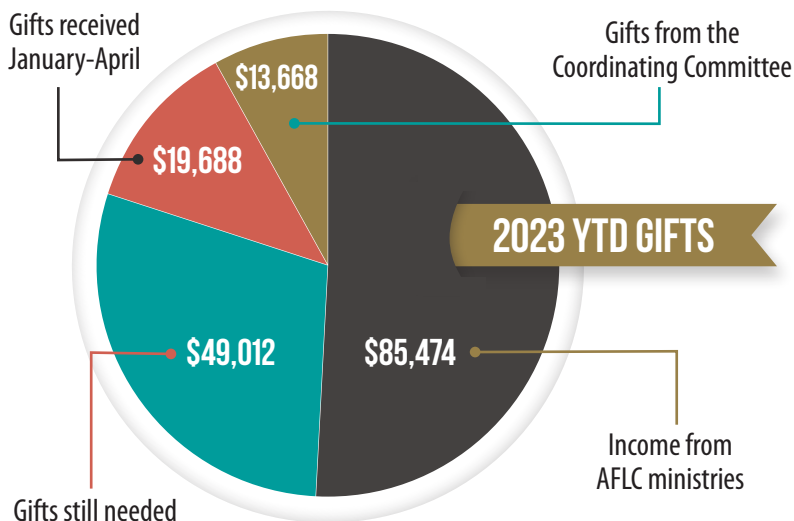
individual continues in the Lord's plan, the Holy Spirit continues to work in mighty ways. We have seen how the Lord uses the skills and abilities He gives to each person for His purpose. In turn, as we use those gifts, we do so as an act of worship so that God may be praised through Jesus Christ. How great and amazing is our God!

We continue to pray for more missionary assistants to help our international ministries. Opportunities are open for volunteers to be involved in ministry abroad, from biblical teaching and storytelling in Uganda, to ministering to kids and youths in Brazil, as well as church planting, vacation Bible school, and camp ministry in Paraguay. We also have requests for general maintenance help in Brazil and home school helpers/teachers in both Brazil and Uganda. There are several opportunities to serve, and we'd love to have those conversations if the Lord is leading you to go and be an international volunteer for a summer or longer.

We are excited about what the Lord is continuing to do through the ministry of Journey Missions. Would you pray for us as we continue to search for ministry assistants? Thank you for your ongoing prayers, and support of Journey Missions. We are so thankful for you.

Nelson is the department head of AFLC Journey Missions.

Ambassador financial update



Thank you to our readers who have given financial gifts to support the work of *The Lutheran Ambassador*.

The AFLC's monthly magazine has been free to subscribers for more than a year and we are thankful for God's provision. I write this update to help keep readers informed of the financial needs of *The Lutheran Ambassador*. Our subscribers have increased by 500 since we began offering *The Lutheran Ambassador* for free in 2022. At the same time, we have seen a 30-percent increase in our printing and postage costs from a year ago, mainly due to inflation. Because of these increases, we need \$49,000 in gifts for the remainder of 2023 to break even.

The cost to produce *The Lutheran Ambassador* for a year for one subscriber is \$53; factoring in the funding we receive from other AFLC ministries, the yearly cost is \$31. We have been encouraged to receive almost \$20,000 in donations year-to-date (through April), which is 28 percent of what is needed in gifts this year. If you would like to donate, please visit our website for more information: aflc.org/lutheran-ambassador.

~Katie Johnson, AFLC business manager

2023 SEMINARY GRADUATES

ALEX WOODWORTH

Oswego, Ill.

I was born in Aurora, Ill., on Sept. 5, 1991, to Mike and Ruth Woodworth. My childhood was spent in Oswego, Ill. In the years that followed high school, I attended Waubensee Community College (Sugar Grove, Ill.) until I moved up to Minneapolis to finish my undergraduate degree at the University of Minnesota—Twin Cities.



College was an important time in my life. It was a time that I looked to worldly things for fulfillment. It was in this time that the grace of God met me at my lowest point. I was blown away to find in Romans that "God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). I was amazed to see that He died for me.

As I grew in this truth, I began to consider what was next. One day, while doing laundry at a family member's house, I learned about the Free Lutheran Bible College. The door was opened to study the Word there. Through His Word, God continued to press upon me a need for grace and truth.

A few years later, my wife Rachel (Quanbeck) and I returned to campus as God led me to continue in the study of His Word in seminary. Some days were a joy, while other days were a challenge. I look back at each step of the way and see God's faithfulness. It's amazing how powerful the simple message of the cross is. This truth has deeply impacted my life.

A verse that continues to stir in my heart is John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." This is exactly what Jesus has done.

I served my internship at Emmaus Free Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn., under Pastor Nick Dyrud. While there, Rachel and I became parents to our son, Brooks. I have accepted a call to serve Helmar Lutheran, Newark, Ill.

JOSEPH FRECH

Grand Forks, N.D.

I was born on July 7, 1994, to Susan and David Frech in Grand Forks, N.D. As I was growing up, we occasionally attended church at a Roman Catholic parish, but I grew up largely unchurched. When I was a teenager, my mom began attending Christ the King Free Lutheran in East Grand Forks, Minn., which I consider to be my home congregation as that is the congregation in which I was baptized and confirmed.



Following high school, I attended the Free Lutheran Bible College from 2012-2014, after which I lived in a home next door to the school for a few years.

In 2016 I married my best friend, Danielle Helwig. Since then, we have had four children: Eloise, who is 6; Charlie, who is 5; Gwen, who is 3; and Rowan, who is 1. In June of this year, we are expecting number five and are praising God for his many blessings to our family.

Throughout my time in seminary, I have been blessed to gain knowledge not only in the various duties that a pastor has, but also how to study efficiently and properly, so as to best use my time and provide as much as I can to my congregation. In my internship at Grace and Zion Free Lutheran Churches in Valley City, N.D., I have been able to continue that education under Pastor Dennis Norby, to whom I can attribute a lot of my pastoral *habitus*.

Overall, I am very pleased to see how far God has brought me, a boy from North Dakota who was not even a believer until his late teens. I look forward to what God has for me in the years to come. I have accepted a call to serve St. John's Lutheran of Schwer, Milford, Ill.

CALLED TO HOLINESS

BY JESSICA SMITH

“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (I Peter 1:13-16).

I chose these verses for my church’s last youth group meeting for this school year.

I wanted to encourage our students to see themselves in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. For context, Peter wrote this letter to the Jewish exiles following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by the Roman Empire. Peter’s purpose was to encourage and uplift them during a very intense time in their lives. Their city was completely overrun, and their temple had been destroyed. Peter wrote that none of that mattered because their faith was in Christ rather than in anything made by man.

While we do not live in such a dire context, our lives

are constantly changing. And our students are entering new eras in their lives.

Our emphasis in youth group that day was the reference Peter makes to Leviticus: “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (21:8). We discussed how this is not a command to live lives of complete and total perfection. Instead, this a call to reflect our identity in the truth of the revelation of Jesus Christ. If we claim to be the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and if we hold that Christ has bought us by His own blood, then our lives and actions should truly reflect that reality.

When we go to the altar to receive the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, we hold it to be the true body and true blood of Christ. This implies that we take the holiness of Christ and have it dwell within us. If this is true, which indeed we confess it to be, then our lives should be marked with holiness. Our identity—our true reality—is grounded in Christ and his work of redemption. We are not perfect. We are not holy on our own. But we are saved by Christ, we are children of God, and we are the dwelling place of the Spirit. This trifold identity then spurs our faith

into action and our beliefs into fruition.

I asked our students to reflect on these verses, especially what it means to them that their identity is fully defined by who Christ is and what He has done. I am hoping our students are able to see that the gospel is meant for them. It is theirs to take hold of and the lens by which they can see that they are chosen by the God of the universe.

We want our students to find their identity in the one thing that never changes—the Word of God. As the temple of Jerusalem was destroyed, our own church buildings will not stand the test of time. But Christ is never failing, and His Word will endure forever.

I pray that our students will keep that truth in their hearts and minds through the next stage in life. May they be able to see themselves as Christ sees them: His children called to be holy because of their identity in Jesus.

Smith, a 2016 graduate of the Free Lutheran Bible College, is the daughter of Youth Board member Michele Smith, Brookings, S.D.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Joseph Frech, a 2023 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, has accepted a call to St. John's Lutheran of Schwer, Milford, Ill.

Alex Woodworth, a 2023 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, has accepted a call to serve as Family Pastor at Helmar Lutheran, Newark, Ill., alongside Pastor Steve Lombardo.

Colton Cox has accepted a call to serve as the youth director at Ruthfred Evangelical Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa., beginning in August. He currently serves as the youth director at United Lutheran, Laurel, Neb.

Pastor Jon Langness was installed May 7 at Shiloh Free Lutheran, Black Hawk, S.D., with Pastor Jason Holt, the AFLC presidential ministry associate, officiating. Langness serves alongside Pastor Andy Coyle, who also serves as executive director of AFLC Home Missions.

Pastor Todd Erickson has resigned from his call to Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., and has accepted a call to serve Rose Free Lutheran, Roseau, Minn., and Spruce Free Lutheran, Salol, Minn.

Pastor Jeremy Crowell has accepted a call to serve as the missionary pilot trainer of the Mission Aviation Training Academy (MATA), based in Arlington, Wash. Crowell currently serves as a missionary pilot at the Alaska Mission in Naknek, Alaska.

Correction: Pastor Larry Grove, who serves Hauge Free Lutheran, Kenyon, Minn., was approved by the AFLC Coordinating Committee as a licensed lay pastor in the summer of 2022. The information regarding his required course work was incorrect in the May 2023 issue. *Editor's Note:* An AFLC licensed lay pastor is approved by the AFLC Coordinating Committee and then begins yearly requirements to remain rostered, which could take several years to complete. Contact the AFLC president's office with questions.



LaVonne Johnson

LaVonne F. Johnson, 86, of Fergus Falls, Minn., died April 21 at her home.

Born May 14, 1936, in Audubon, Minn., she was the daughter of Oscar and Clara (Bergstad) Sjule. She married Roy Johnson in 1956 in Bottineau, N.D.

As a young girl, her family moved to a farm outside Bottineau, N.D. She graduated from Hillcrest Lutheran Academy, Fergus Falls, in 1954, and earned a bachelor's degree in music education in 1987 from the University of North Dakota. After her marriage, they were called into the ministry. After her husband graduated from seminary, they served congregations in Malta, Mont., Sidney, Mont., Dickinson, N.D., Fertile, Minn., Ortonville, Minn., Wichita Falls, Texas, Ortle and Webster, S.D., Roseau, Minn., and Northome, Minn. She directed worship and praise groups at church, led youth groups and Sunday school, and enjoyed playing organ and piano during services. She also served in Women's Missionary Fellowship (WMF), and she ran an interior design business for more than 30 years.

Surviving are her husband; five children, Rhonda (David) Freeh, Lake Park, Minn., Robert (Karla) Johnson, Cottage Grove, Minn., Richard (Barb) Johnson, Branson, Mo., Ryan (Heather) Johnson, Casselton, N.D., and Robyn (Aeric) Larson of Spring Lake Park, Minn.; two brothers, Gerald Sjule and Leland Sjule; 14 grandchildren; and 11 great-grandchildren.

The service was April 27 at Bethel Lutheran Church, Fergus Falls, with pastors Roger Viksnes, Ed Monson, and John Kilde officiating. Burial was in Audubon Cemetery, Audubon, Minn.

Seminary to host Summer Institute of Theology

The Summer Institute of Theology will be held Aug. 7-11 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, Plymouth, Minn. The plenary session, "History and Aims of the AFLC," will be taught by Dr. Martin Horn.

Two morning elective sessions offered Monday through Friday include "Philosophy for Faith" taught by Dr. Jonathan Strand, and "Studies in the Psalms" taught by Pastor James Johnson.

A second set of seminars on "Congregational Leadership" offered Monday through Thursday afternoons include "The Board Chair" taught by Dr. Wade Mobley, "Embracing Conflict" taught by Pastor Micah Hjermstad, "What Servant Leadership Means" taught by Dr. James Molstre, and "Emotional Health for Congregational Leaders," taught by Dr. Wade Mobley.

For more information on the curriculum and to register, visit flbc.edu/events/.

APRIL MEMORIALS

Bible College

Elijah Finstrom
Fred Adrian
Pastor Jerry Holmaas
Ruth Claus
Martha Duff
Marian Brandon

Home Missions

Vernon Vedvei

Seminary

Pastor Jerry Holmaas

WMF

Lavonne Ward

World Missions

Jean Nelson
James Marcusen
Betty Gauger

... in honor of

General Fund

Wayne & Sylvia Swenson

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-April 30, 2023

FUND	REC'D IN APRIL	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$30,315	\$139,881	\$169,651
Evangelism	15,446	47,525	47,960
Youth Ministries	10,015	57,126	63,591
Parish Education	11,197	41,054	56,511
Seminary	24,998	95,564	94,695
Bible College	31,971	132,594	155,658
Home Missions	23,768	104,714	136,566
World Missions	35,294	138,656	173,736
WM Personal Support	63,300	259,835	282,514
TOTALS	\$246,304	\$1,016,949	\$1,180,881

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

WHAT A GENEALOGY CAN TEACH US

Do you know who your great-grandfather was? How about your great-great-grandmother?

Family trees and genealogies are not the most exciting things in the world, and I imagine many of us couldn't trace our family lineage back more than three or four generations. To many of us, reading through a list of names and dates is only something

we would do if we were struggling to fall asleep. After all, who cares about people you have never heard of who lived in places you have never been?



Pastor Andrew
Kneeland

Have you ever read through the Book of First Chronicles? It's an appropriately named book because the first nine chapters contain many detailed genealogies of the Israelites; more than 400 verses of one hard-to-pronounce name after another, after another. It's not exactly engaging reading material.

But there are good reasons for us to care about the genealogies in the Bible. For one, they show that the events recorded in Scripture are actually rooted in history. Though they lived thousands of years ago, the names in these verses were actual people who actually lived. They had real families, real challenges, and a real hope in a promised Savior.

Pick a verse at random and imagine what might have made this person smile. How did they get along with their neighbors and extended family? What did they think about as they drifted off to sleep? Each name has a face, each verse is a story.

It's good to be reminded that the pages of Scripture are real history because our faith needs to be real history. As Paul wrote: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (I Corinthians 15:14). Detailed genealogies—like the ones in First

Chronicles or the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew—show us that our faith is *not* in vain. These events truly happened.

Reading genealogies can also give us a sense of pride and belonging. We belong to this family of faith and those of us who trust in Christ can count these men and women as brothers and sisters. We trust the same word from the same God and live in confident hope of the same promised end.

There have been several amateur genealogists in the Kneeland family, and we've been able to trace our history back to Scotland in the 1200s. Alexander Kneeland was born in 1235 in central Scotland. He was a parson and became an uncle of William Wallace by marriage, who is remembered for leading the charge for Scottish independence. Over the centuries there have been many other Kneelands who have lived remarkable and God-honoring lives. I'm proud of my family history, but I'm more proud that I can be a part of the family of faith.

Every family history has its share of embarrassing stories. Our biblical family tree is filled with people who made bad choices, who cheated and lied, even those who committed adultery and murder. But God uses imperfect people to accomplish his perfect plans.

Paul also wrote that God chooses things that are foolish, weak, low, and despised to reveal God's grace (I Corinthians 1:27). Our bodies and our lives are imperfect and sinful, but God is patient and merciful. Reading through the long genealogies in Scripture remind us that God's grace is sufficient for even you and me. If God can forgive and use people like them, he can certainly forgive and use someone like you.

The best reason to care about biblical genealogies, though? They're all about Jesus and how he keeps his promises.

By themselves, these genealogies would be simply trivia, but the opening verse of Matthew's Gospel reminds us of the bigger picture: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." The long and complicated genealogies in the Old Testament track the family trees of Israel's history, including its royal and priestly lines.

God has been working his redemptive plan in our history through long years of waiting. Jesus is the son promised to Abraham in Genesis 12 who would bring blessing to all the nations. Jesus is the

*We trust the same word
from the same God and
live in confident hope of
the same promised end.*

offspring of David in II Samuel 7 who would be a king who is established forever. The priests listed in Chronicles and elsewhere were sinful and needed to repeatedly offer sacrifices for sin. Jesus is the priest described in Hebrews 7 who is far different and far better than any of the human priests descended from the line of Levi. Jesus offered a once-for-all sacrifice.

Next time you come across a genealogy in your Bible reading, don't just glance through it. Remember that every name has a face, and every face is a part of God's story of your salvation.

something to share

FOLLOWING THE LEADER

BY ANDREA CHRISTENSON

One of my daughters developed a habit that drives me crazy. When we are walking together anywhere, she will always trail behind me by a half step or more. On the rare occasions that she gets ahead of me, or I've stopped to look at something or talk to someone, she will wait for me to pass her before continuing on. She dislikes entering a door first and will pause to the side if she happens to be the first one to an entrance.

"Just go ahead," I tell her. "I'll catch up." Nope. Not gonna happen. She waits for me every time. It's my least favorite game of follow the leader ever.

Recently my taller-than-me husband and I were walking through a crowd. I was unsure of how to get to our ultimate destination, but he knew just where to go. I followed behind him a half step, keeping my eyes on him and the scenery around us much more than on the route we were taking. I didn't have to be concerned about

anything other than keeping him in view. That walk was so relaxing.

Lightbulb moment.

The comfort and safety I felt while trusting my husband to do the navigation in a crowded space must be how my daughter feels when we are walking together. She doesn't need to know where we are going or try to find the path herself. She only needs to trust in someone who knows the way.

Sometimes knowing how to navigate a difficult situation in life is a lot like how my daughter feels when we are going places. It can be lonely, intimidating, and confusing. Thankfully, we don't have to worry about getting lost, pushing our way through a crowd unprotected, or not knowing how to open a door.

We can trust the One who goes before us. "It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 31:8).

From the account of the Jewish nation

leaving Egypt and following a pillar of fire in Exodus, to the disciples learning to follow the Messiah in the Gospels, throughout the Bible God proves Himself to be a trustworthy and capable leader.

We may not always understand the path the Lord leads us on, but what a comfort to know that He is the one walking ahead of us, showing us the way. And, as the Psalmist reminds us, "He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Psalm 23:2b, 3).

I told my daughter about the lightbulb moment I experienced and now when we walk "together" we share a knowing smile at the reminder of the Lord's care for us. And I feel a little less annoyed.

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