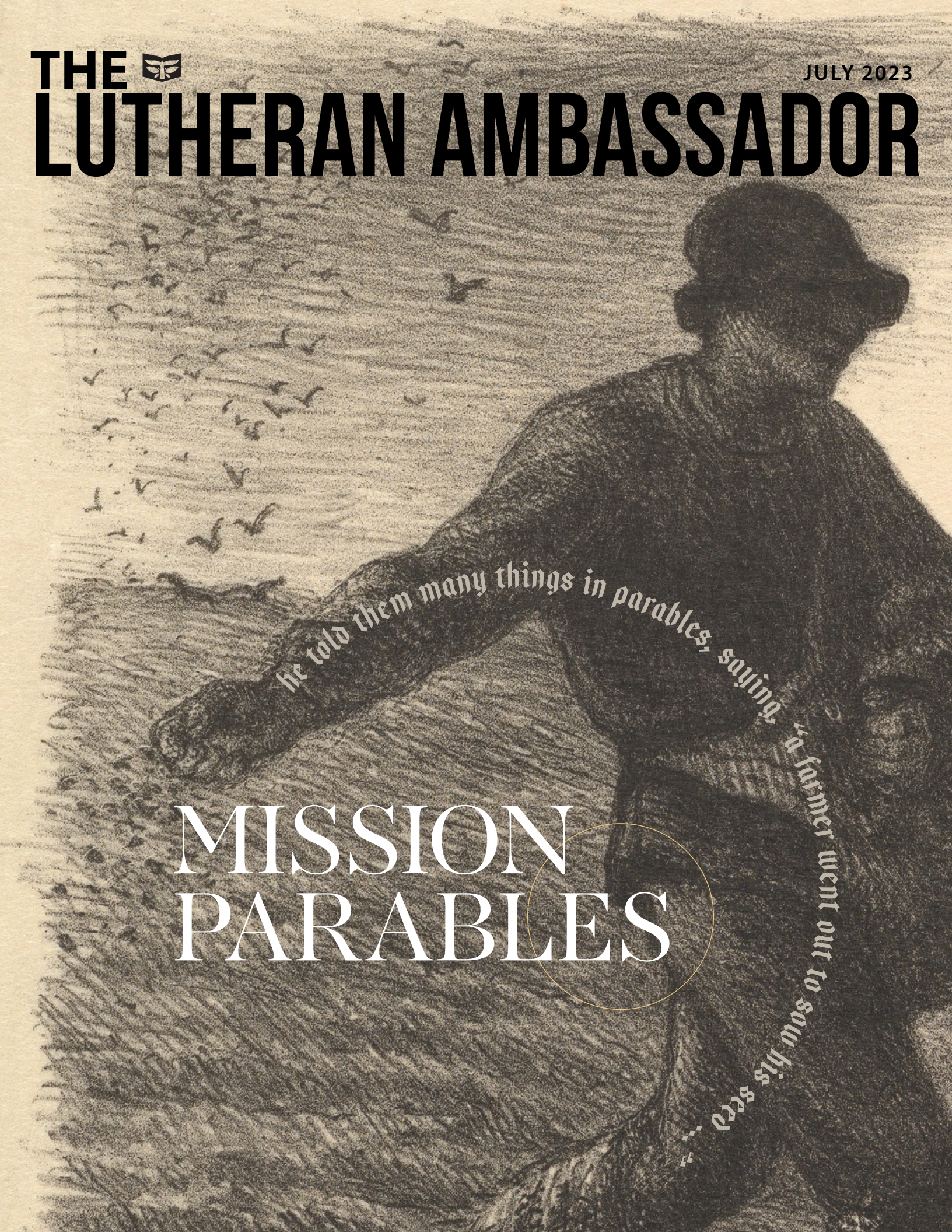


LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

he told them many things in parables, saying, "a farmer went out to sow his seed"

MISSION PARABLES





THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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RIGHT NOW, RIGHT HERE

BY PASTOR TIM HERSET

It may have been a Monday morning when a dad's eye caught his daughter beginning to cry, and the look on his face revealed the unchanging reality of God's love. Maybe it was Tuesday afternoon when the seventh-grade teacher spoke words of hope and care to the boy who had always thought he was broken and beyond repair. Was it on Wednesday when the quiet, listening presence of the Spirit opened the eyes and ears of that squinty-eyed, hard-of-hearing neighbor to the good news in the Scriptures? Thinking back, it turns out it was Thursday when the thought popped into her head that the same old story she had heard time and again was, in fact, true. For him, it was a good Friday when the overbearing burdens of failure finally gave way to the freedom of forgiveness found in the work of someone else. One woman said it was Saturday when she was reading the Bible and found her soul refreshed. Then there was the man who, one Sunday, started to pray, and it was the beginning of living life in a new way.

It does not matter the day, time, or place. The point is we can all encounter "amazing grace." Grace is what changes the world. It's the source of life and light. Grace fits like a glove for me and for you. Each of us is unique, but we've each got an

identical longing. Deep down in your soul, out of your control.

What about the real you, battered and bruised, well-worn and used? Is it the face you see in the mirror in the morning? Or that look at the end of the day that functions for your family as a warning? It could be a smile or a scowl, tears that are happy or sad. What Jesus wants is you, whether you feel good or bad.

Right now and right here, not tomorrow or someday. We don't know if *someday* will ever come to be. And that's the only real requirement: *to be*. It is honesty that allows me to simply be when all I want is to prove myself with what I do. There is no earning. Grace is a gift you're receiving. God's mercy is new, plainly in view—not hidden from sight.

Today is a new day, no matter where you're coming from or where you are going. What might God be stirring in your heart to keep your faith growing?

Herset serves as the co-pastor of Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont.

Faith does not eliminate questions. But faith knows where to take them.

—Elisabeth Elliot

Nothing is so powerfully effective against the devil, the world, the flesh, and all evil thoughts as to occupy oneself with God's Word, to speak about it and meditate upon it.

—Martin Luther, Large Catechism

When God calls us to himself, he does not remove us from the world, nor does he call us to abandon all human contact. ... Instead of isolating us from other people, he places us in significant relationships of love and service in families, friendships, communities, societies, and churches.

—Steven P. Mueller

The thing that makes a missionary is the sight of what Jesus did on the cross and to have heard Him say, "Go."

—Oswald Chambers

And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

—Mark 16:15-16

Mr. Michelangelo & Me

by pastor todd schierkolk

Miguel Ángel's first painting was of Sylvester the cat. He painted it as a boy on a wall in his family home in Juarez, Mexico, across the border from El Paso, Texas. His name is a Spanish derivation of Michelangelo, and the coincidence is noteworthy. He was recommended to me as an excellent painter by one of the "lost sheep" who grew up in our church in Jerez but gradually left our congregation. I initially contracted Miguel to paint a sign with our church's name, but that job led to another, a mural of the resurrection on the outside wall.

Miguel and his family moved from Juarez when he was a teenager because at that time it was the murder capital of the world. He later studied forensic medicine, but after three years, he decided that wasn't his path. He was made to paint.

He opened a shop in downtown Jerez and had a presence on the Internet. He sold his paintings all over Mexico. Business was good because *he* was good. But his success was also noticed by people who had no interest in painting. He received threatening calls demanding huge sums of money from people who knew where to find him and his family. He closed his store, took his Internet account offline, and found a new place to live. That was a tough turn of events for a young man who has painting in his DNA.

Christians have salt and light in their spiritual DNA. Our new life as God's children comes with many blessings, some of them listed in Jesus' words to His followers in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5). Jesus explained with metaphors the effect His people have in a world full of profound discouragement and darkness. "You are the salt of the earth." "You are the light of the world." God made us new people who make a noticeable difference that can be "tasted" and "seen."

The implicit exhortation is to watch out for anything that might keep us from being what we are made to be. Impurities, like in salt, can make us lose our taste and become bland and indistinguishable from the people around us. In contrast, Christians are like the taste test for Jesus so that others can "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). Christians "taste good." They are good to have in a community and in a family. Christians are like Mexican food, which is so good that UNESCO placed it on the worldwide Intangible Cultural Heritage list. Christians taste good *everywhere*.

Jesus also says that we are light. That makes sense because, when are born again, the Light of the world lives in us. We shine because He shines in us, and the eyes of others are drawn to that light. Our good works reflect Jesus' good works both when He was here on earth and as He continues to live and love through us. Temptations abound to keep our light to ourselves, but the nature of light is to illuminate. To keep it from shining, you have to cover it up. That goes against its purpose.

The Apostle Paul correlates salt with our words (Colossians 4:6), and Jesus connects light with our works (Matthew 5:16). We are made for good words and good works. They're in the spiritual DNA of Christians.

And the place where our good words and good works are tasted and seen? Everywhere. Our daughter and her husband discovered a Mexican restaurant in Nepal called "The Lazy

Gringo"! Christians add salt around the world, too—especially to places that are tasteless and discouraging. They bring light to darkness anywhere they go.

Our town in Mexico has passed through some very dark times. Our church is next door to a house where a 30-minute gun battle erupted between rival drug cartel





members late last fall. Having Miguel Ángel paint a mural of the empty tomb on the church wall is a way for us to bring light and be a good taste in our neighbors' mouths after all the hard, ugly things they have experienced. The beautiful mural has a sunrise and salt-filled words from the Scriptures that point to the One who makes all things new.

And the painter? I picked up Miguel each morning to work on the mural and brought him home each afternoon after he had finished. In God's providence, I had recently

read a biography of Leonardo da Vinci, who also studied a kind of forensic medicine. The great Michelangelo himself was part of the story. So Miguel Ángel and I talked a lot about painting, the mural, the words he was painting, and the One who wasn't *in* the painting—lots of salt and light.

Schierkolk is an AFLC missionary serving in Jerez, Zacatecas, Mexico. Artwork: "Lighthouse in Breaking Waves," Hendrik Willem Mesdag, 1900-1907, Rijksmuseum.



a farmer went out to sow his seed. as he scattered the seed, some fell along the path



HEART of THE SOWER

by pastor ryan tonneson

I am a simple guy, and I don't often "read between the lines" well. Maybe that's why Jesus' Parable of the Sower, along with His straightforward explanation that follows, is one of my favorites. After the parable is given to the crowds, Jesus decodes it for His disciples in private. This parable reveals the heart of the Sower, who is intent on casting His Word to all—regardless of who they are.

"A sower went out to sow."

If I close my eyes, I imagine Jesus sitting in a boat beside the sea, teaching the crowds that are gathered on the beach. On a nearby hilltop, just in view of the crowd, a farmer is busy planting his crop for the season. Jesus captures that imagery to connect with the crowd.

Instead of sowing temporal crops like wheat or barley, the Sower in this parable plants an eternal seed: the Word of God. Or, as it's called in Matthew 13:18, "the Word of the Kingdom." We might summarize it as "the gospel." The Sower is spreading the saving message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

As He sows, some of the seed lands on the path. The seed struggles to penetrate the well-trodden road, so it becomes food for the birds, who quickly snatch it away.

Some of the seed falls on tough, rocky soil. I don't think Jesus was picturing the fertile fields of the Upper Midwest, where intermittent rocks need to be removed. Israel was, in general, defined by her rocky mountains and gravelly hillsides. Because they were shallowly embedded, the seeds scattered here would spring to life quickly—only to wither just as quickly in the heat.

Some of the seed is scattered among thorns, thistles, and weeds. This image reminds me of the recent time when the gas lines on our street were replaced. The project involved—to the delight of my young boys—tearing up part of our lawn with an excavator. When the work crew had finished, they reseeded those areas of the lawn. Unfortunately, none of the grass seed they scattered sprang to life. I now have patches of thistles and dandelions that choke out any effort to plant grass.

Jesus explains that the three "bad soils" correspond to the trifecta of temptation: the flesh, the world, and the devil. The devil (the enemy of both our Savior and our souls) steals the seed that landed on the road. He is ever vigilant for any opportunity to twist and distort God's Word. He does not want God's Word to play any part in a person's life. The world (the ungodly trends of culture and society) withers the seed that

fell on the rocks through tribulation and persecution. As our culture and society drift further from a Christian worldview, attacks against Christians will become more prevalent, causing some to leave the faith and embrace a life of ease. And our flesh (the old sin-nature inherited from Adam) chokes out the seed that was scattered among the weeds through sinful desires and a hungering for mammon—the "stuff" we stuff into our lives to try to find meaning and fulfillment.

As the Sower scatters His seed, however, some falls on the good soil, free from scavengers, rocks, and weeds. The result is what the farmer prays for every spring: an abundant harvest.

When we read this parable, we can tend to approach it with a legalistic or pharisaical attitude. "Be good soil! If you aren't, God can't save you or use you." To be sure, we ought to pray that God's Word would be well-received in our hearts and do His work in His way. But if we stop there, I believe we will miss two wonderful truths this parable offers.

First, if we view this parable through a legalistic lens, we overlook the process by which the good soil becomes good. In order to be good soil where the Word can take root, we must first be made into good soil by that same Word. The good soil of our souls isn't something that we manufacture; it isn't achieved by trying harder to be good. It must be produced in us by the Spirit working through the Word. Apart from Christ, we are spiritually dead. Yet Jesus revives us through His Word. It is He who enables us to bear fruit according to His perfect will.

Second, and most important, the legalistic interpretation obscures the heart of the Sower who indiscriminately sows the seed of His Word. In an age of computerized farming where no seed is wasted, the Sower's haphazard tossing of seeds seems reckless. But this action displays the heart of the Lord. His Word isn't made for perfect people who can do no wrong. The gospel is for all soils. The gospel is for those who are hurting. Those who are fighting depression. Those who are grieving. The broken. The sinful.

We don't have to be perfect for Him to call us. He calls us as we are: oppressed by our enemy, drawn away by the world, and enticed by the flesh. His Word washes us, renews us, and refreshes us. May His Word bring about an abundant harvest in due time.

*Tonneson serves Maranatha Free Lutheran, Glyndon, Minn.
Art: "Christ the Sower," by Jan Saenredam, 1602, Rijksmuseum.*

INVITE *all* YOU FIND

by pastor sam willard

Deciding who to invite to a wedding can be difficult. The size of the wedding is up to the bride and groom, and their preference matters. Cost and venue might restrict how many they can invite, so they might not be able to invite everyone they wish. Choosing who not to invite can be painful. On the other hand, it's disappointing to have an invitation declined.

Once the planning is completed, however, wedding celebrations are wonderful. At a wedding reception, family and the members of the wedding party often share stories about the bride and groom. These are times to honor and cherish them, filled with laughter and a few happy tears. June 4, 2022, was one such time for our church, with an outdoor wedding reception in our parking lot. It could not have been a better day. Everyone was delighted. The ceremony and reception were all about the bride and groom. The guests were there to honor them, and we were joyful for their sakes.

In Matthew 22:1-14, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast for a king's son. In verses 1-7, the wedding feast is prepared, and the king summons his guests—but those invited deliberately dishonor the king and his son. In verses 8-10, the king shows his desire to honor his son by filling his hall with guests who will honor him. For this wedding there is no limit on size or cost. The king places no restriction on the invitations. No one is to be left out. He tells his servants to go to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as they find. All who can be found will be invited. So the servants do exactly that: they gather anyone they find, good and bad. This means strangers, criminals, and even enemies come to the wedding. Who they were or what they had done is overlooked. All are invited to come and honor the son and share in his feast.

Those who come must honor the son. Verses 11-14 tell of a guest that the king casts out of the feast for not having a wedding garment. This was necessary; by not wearing the wedding garment the king had provided, the guest was dishonoring the son. Everything is about the son, and it should be because it's his wedding.

Jesus' message was clear: the Wedding Feast of the Lamb is all about God's Son. For His sake all are invited in, and apart from Him none can enter. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Many are called, and all who can be found are invited. But few are chosen. Not everyone invited will enter. The difference is whether they honor the Son or reject Him.

Those who honor the Son trust in Him as Lord and Savior, and those who have faith in Him will honor Him. These realities go together. Believers love the Son for saving them, but they also love Him for who He is, and they love seeing Him honored.

Where do we fit into Jesus' parable? Those who haven't accepted Jesus' invitation must consider both the fate of the unworthy guests and also God's sincere desire that they accept His invitation and come. He wants you there. Those who *have* believed in Jesus as Savior are both the stranger invited off the sidewalk and the servant sent out to invite others. God has sent out His servants to invite all who can be found, and He has spared no expense. He wants His hall filled with every possible guest who will honor His Son. Through His Son, God has provided forgiveness of sins. He passes over every trespass from the past and invites every person to "come to the Wedding Feast of my Son." God sends His servants to every road, and to the end of every road, to gather any people that will come.

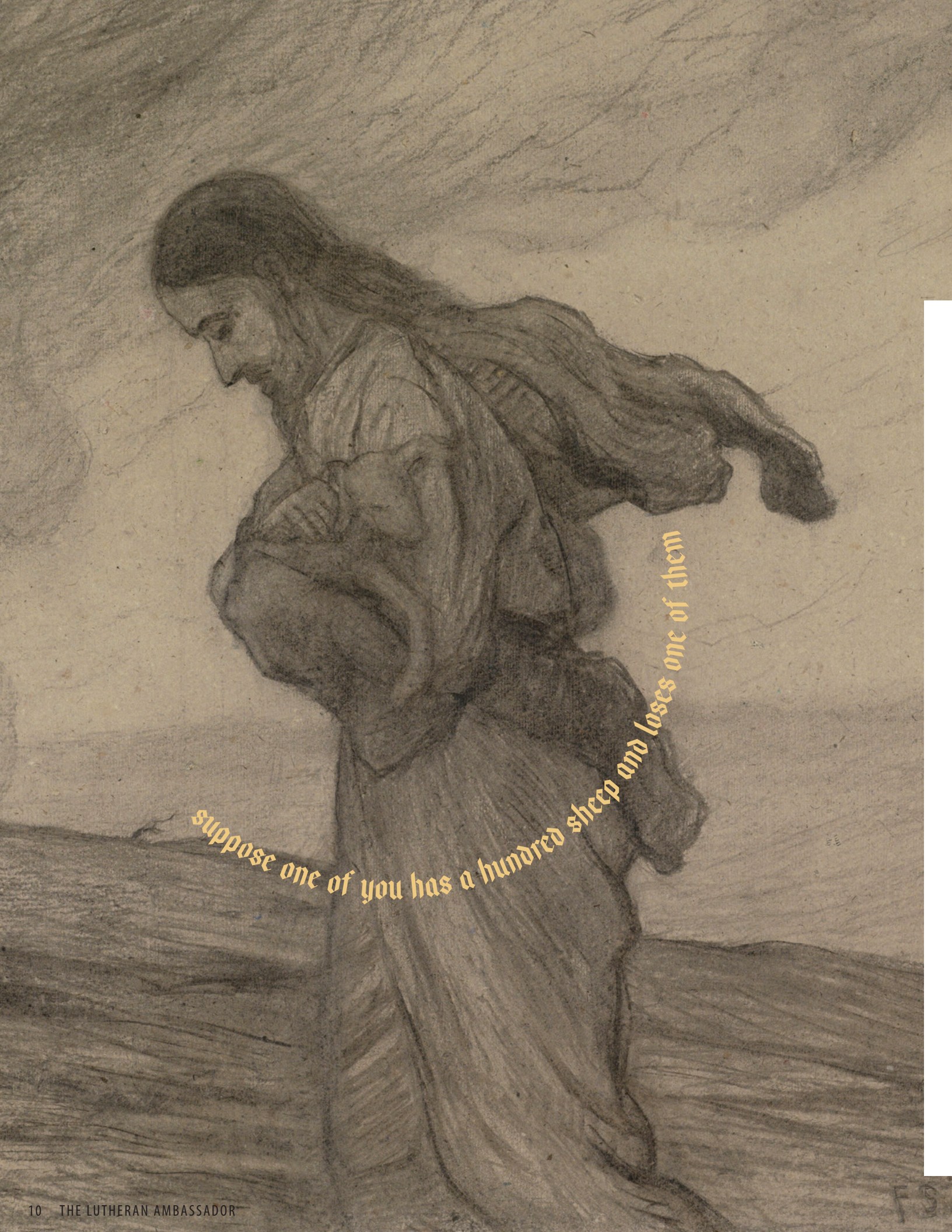
Strive, then, to make sure that all get invited. Look for anyone in your community that you can invite to know Jesus Christ, and encourage those who are going to the people you cannot reach. By praying for them and supporting them, you are helping them fulfill the purpose God has for all His servants.

Our invitations flow from our love for Jesus. As we long to honor Him, we will also long for others to discover His goodness and honor him, too. Whomever you find, good or bad, invite them to the Wedding.

*Willard serves King of Glory Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn.
Artwork: "Italianate Landscape with Pines," by Hendrik Voogd, 1795, Rijksmuseum.*



the kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son



suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them

CELEBRATE THE found

by michelle olson

With its catchy tune and upbeat melody, the Kool & the Gang song “Celebrate Good Times” was one of my favorites from high school choir. When the band released the song in 1980, they probably didn’t envision their lyrics as a party invitation to Christians. But if ever there were reason to celebrate, we can see it in Luke 15: “The lost is found!”

Luke 15 contains three parables that are familiar for a good reason: the lost is found. Verses 1-7 record the parable of the lost sheep, verses 8-10 the parable of the lost coin, and verses 11-32 the parable of the lost son. I appreciate that Jesus keeps the meaning simple for us by making it obvious. Three times He tells us about something valuable that is lost, and every time, the lost is found. Every time, there is a celebration. Twice might have been enough, but in case we still miss the point, He graciously tells us for the third time: the lost is found. Let’s rejoice and celebrate.

In fact, there is a lot of repetition in this passage. In verses 6 and 9, the shepherd says, “rejoice with me!” When the lost is found, we *all* get to rejoice. In verses 7 and 10, Jesus mentions joy in heaven. Not only is there celebration here on earth, but “there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels.” The party just keeps going and growing!

In verses 23, 24, and 32, we find the word *celebrate*. I especially appreciate verse 23, which says, “Let’s have a feast and celebrate.” Many of our own cultural celebrations include food. We had cake to commemorate each of our children’s baptisms. We recently recognized the confirmands at our church, and the celebration included cake. We had cake at our wedding. “Let’s have a feast and celebrate.” While this portion of Scripture is not a prescriptive command, I like to think a good celebration has food. As our lost friends and family members are found, let’s celebrate in all the best ways.

To better understand a passage, I enjoy looking at the original language. In this case, I looked at the Greek word for *celebrate*: *euphraino*. It means “to make glad.” Sometimes words near one another in a concordance are related because they have a similar root word. In this case, the surrounding words do give additional insight. The words near *euphraino* in my concordance mean “to be fruitful” and “joy, gladness, cheerfulness.” *Euphraino* carries with it

a sense of victory, that evangelism is fruitful and joyful. As Jesus finds the lost, we undeniably feel His victory and joy.

I looked up the word *rejoice* too (because if Jesus repeats something, I’ve learned that I need to pay attention—and probably the first time). The Greek translation *synchairo* seems to imply the idea of sharing God’s grace with another person (*syn* meaning “with” and *charis* meaning “grace”) so that both are rejoicing together. Romans 12:15 clearly supports this point: “Rejoice with those who rejoice.”

When I study any passage of Scripture, I also know that context is essential. Just prior to our Luke 15 passage is the one in Luke 14 about the cost of being a disciple. As readers, we progress from the statement “any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” to “rejoice with me,” “rejoice with me,” and “let’s have a feast and celebrate.” There is definitely a cost. But it is also definitely worth it. The “dead is alive again” (verse 24).

These parables help us reflect on our own lives. What have you lost? Have you lost hope? Peace? Assurance? Have you lost joy? Where have you experienced death? Jesus has the best promises for you. There is life.

And on the flip side: What have you found? The main point of our passage is salvation—I pray you have found salvation! What an incredible joy. Let us celebrate together. Sometimes we get so busy doing the work and counting the cost that we miss the important moment of celebrating. When we open our eyes, we can see that we serve a creative God who is joy and love and so much more. I imagine that He throws the best parties, and, as Kool & the Gang sing, it is “a celebration to last throughout the years” like we’ve never seen before. In Christ, we have ample opportunity and reason to rejoice and celebrate: we who were lost have been found.

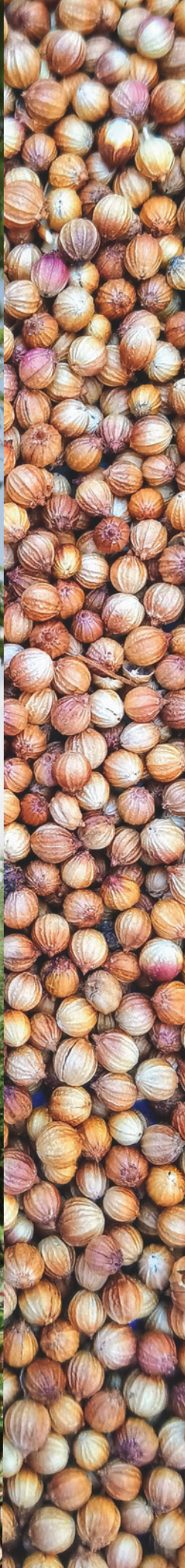
There’s a party going on right here!

A celebration to last throughout the years.

So bring your good times and your laughter too.

We gonna celebrate your party with you, come on!

*Olson is a member of Living Hope Church, Rogers, Minn.
Artwork: “The Parable of the Lost Sheep,” Frans Smissaert,
1872-1944, Rijksmuseum.*



ON MISSION in San Antonio & Beyond

by ruth gunderson

it is a clear spring morning in the northern suburbs of San Antonio. Gathered on a wide porch, adults chat in the easy way of long-held friendships, lingering in the fresh air blown in by an overnight storm. It's the children who press their parents for the task at hand—brunch. The aromas from the kitchen draw their attention: French toast, donuts, coffee, eggs, bacon, fresh fruit.

Once through the serving line, they settle in at formal and informal tables, satellites off the kitchen hub. It is a home built for company, centered on fellowship. Conversations flow from one room to the next, light and thoughtful, but deep with shared faith. Such easy connections belie the hard-fought years of grinding, the immense pressure to make connections, the innumerable hours of work to foster this communion of believers.

They are part of Trinity San Antonio, an AFLC church plant five years in the making.

"It's just a miracle that we are where we are," said Pastor Matt Ballmann the next day as I sat with him around one of those tables in his dining room.

"It's God's grace," agreed Natalie, his wife.

"It's sheer God's grace."

In the world of church planting models, parachute plants like Trinity carry the greatest risk of failure. The strategy includes jumping into a community without any prior contacts, making connections, casting a vision, and growing a fellowship of saints around a common understanding of the Kingdom of God. And yet, a parachute church plant is the only option in a geographical area where there are no AFLC congregations.

"Given the high risk for failure and the profound challenge, parachute plants should only be reserved for rare occasions," said Pastor Ballmann. "It should be really clear there is an open door and there is a strong match between a location and a planter."

I haven't walked with the Ballmanns through those first

hard years of planting in San Antonio, what Natalie calls "a lot of blood, sweat, and tears," when it was just the two of them. Nor have I observed the "split world" of church planting that Ballmann describes, where "the pressure is on you, and yet it's God who builds."

But what I do see is the fruit of that labor. Through those years, the fellowship at Trinity has grown to 28 families. On Sunday mornings, it is no longer just the Ballmanns setting up chairs and the altar, tuning the sound system, and prepping coffee and snacks as they gear up for worship. Now, a team of people who have joined the faith family at Trinity have taken on these roles and more, including leading Sunday school and hosting small group Bible studies. They are people from a variety of faith backgrounds, including some who had previously walked away from regular church attendance.

Trinity has also become a training ground for leaders. One of the couples gathered in the Ballmanns' home the previous morning were church-planting residents in training at Trinity—an AFLC pastor and his wife who plan to parachute into Ankeny, Iowa, in August and start that arduous process of planting an AFLC Home Missions church.

That would be Pastor Matthew Pillman and his wife, Julia. The Pillmans sensed a call into church planting within the first year after his seminary graduation in 2019. He was serving as associate pastor of Christ the King Free Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn., when, during the 2020 annual meeting, someone asked whether or not the congregation had considered planting a church.

"It caught our attention," said Pastor Pillman, who, together with Pastor Tim Johnson, began to research the idea for the congregation. But Pillman soon sensed a personal call to church planting.

Continued on page 14



TOP: Pastor Pillman leads the lesson during the Sunday school hour at Trinity Lutheran, San Antonio, Texas.

MIDDLE: Pastor Matthew and Julia Pillman and their three children, James, Benjamin, and Solomon.

ABOVE: Pastor Pillman speaks at a Home Missions elective session during the 2023 Annual Conference held in Sioux Falls, S.D.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Pastor Pillman follows Kirk Hein, who carries the cross during the recessional in a recent Sunday service.

As the internal call began to crystalize, the Pillmans contacted AFLC Home Missions in order to establish an external call. Early on in their contact, however, the department went through a transition in leadership. Pillman says that the Home Missions Board was still supportive. But without a guiding director or a systematic plan in place to assess and equip a church planter, he was ultimately encouraged by board members to work through Christ the King as a sending congregation.

Becoming church planters

And so, the Pillmans dove into the church-planting world. They read—there is no lack of literature on the subject—they took personality assessments, discerned core competencies, and attended a church-planting convention. They also reached out to Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., a church-planting congregation within their district. In fact, Abiding Savior is the Ballmanns’ sending congregation. Ballmann joined the Home Missions Board during this time; naturally, the church planter in San Antonio became a mentor to the would-be planters.

The Pillmans also shared the process with their church leadership. At the recommendation of Pastor Johnson, the elders, and trustees of Christ the King, Matthew and Julia presented their heart for church planting to their congregation in January 2022, two years after that momentous question was raised at the annual meeting. Their presentation included the importance of church planting as a response to the Great Commission and their hope to pursue further assessments and a residency program. They even named a community to which they both felt drawn—Ankeny. The elders then recommended that Christ the King send the Pillmans to be planters.

“Being a sending congregation doesn’t mean that they have to have all that figured out because they’ve never done it before,” said Pillman. “But what they can provide that is so much more important for us is being our congregation. ... they still provide that external call for us to go.”

Forty-nine days later, the congregation affirmed their request, agreed to hold their call, and supplied them with an Advisory Board with the understanding that the Pillmans would spend one year in “continued training and discernment on residency,” said Pillman.

AFLC Home Missions also approved the Pillmans for residency, agreeing to fund a portion of the program with a \$25,000 grant for the residency and \$5,000 for additional training.

Church planting residency

The year-long training began in earnest last August when the Pillmans arrived in San Antonio, thanks to Trinity’s invitation to host the residency. But how do you train a church planter? Is it similar to a seminary internship? Is there a curriculum?

The residency, developed by Ballmann, includes a lot of pastoral care: teaching, preaching, involvement in mercy



ministries, weekly meetings, and participation in the life of the church. Only, these ministries are taking place in a fledgling congregation, where any existing systems are still being formed.

“When we first arrived here, Matt was like, ‘We know you haven’t done this before but we’re going to pretend like you are just arriving at a church plant,’ and we have tried to replicate it,” said Pillman of the training. “We have to translate the picture back three years” in the life of Trinity.

The two pastors identified 10 places where Pillman could make connections with the community, places like the YMCA—where Julia has made several connections—or a coffee shop. Places where, “if you’re there the same time every week, you often see the same people,” Pillman said. “So even if the sky is the limit in how many things you can try, how do you regularly be around the same people, building relationships?”

It is strategies like these that Ballmann has employed since they first arrived in San Antonio in 2018. And, when the young congregation first began to meet weekly in early 2020, those strategies kept the congregation connected throughout the tenuous season of the COVID pandemic.

Residency has also included visiting area congregations, especially church plants, and the pursuit of continued learning opportunities. Pillman said one of the unique learning experiences at Trinity is walking with the congregation through the chartering process. The Pillmans also strive to maintain communication with their Advisory Board (five members of Christ the King), their congregation, Home Missions, and their supporters. Last, Pillman says they continue to “prayerfully strategize the church plant.”

Self-assessment

That prayerful strategy has included several difficult tasks, the first of which has been an honest self-assessment. Beyond their personality types and giftings, do the Pillmans understand what it will take to be successful church planters? Because church planting is arduous, and parachute planting the most demanding, the Ballmanns want to be sure the Pillmans are prepared for the challenges ahead.

“That is the beauty of residency,” said Natalie. “You can observe and have those conversations and say, ‘We see this could be a possible pitfall for you. Let’s talk about it.’”

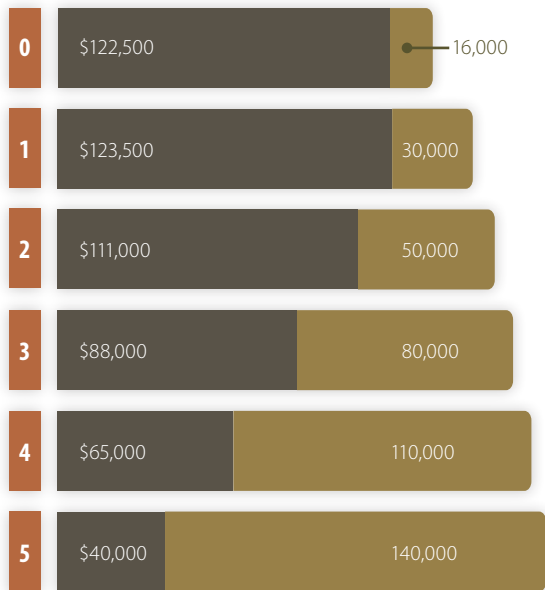
One of those conversations, according to Ballmann, has been on the definition of success.

“If success is 150 people in five years, I’ll just shoot straight, you’re not going to be successful,” said Ballmann. “If success is showing up and being faithful and being willing to take a second job when you’re not making budget, hey, praise God! ... I don’t think they could have had that conversation apart from experiencing [the residency].”

It is advice that the Pillmans are absorbing as they envision jumping into the fray. They have a general timeline, taken from best practices formed by church-planting ministries. These six phases will begin with six months of community engagement and transition to another six months of preview services before they launch a regular meeting. But “Matt has often said that the first year is actually the most intense because you’re sitting there, you don’t know what’s going to happen, and you’re trying to spend every spare moment in the community,” said Pillman.

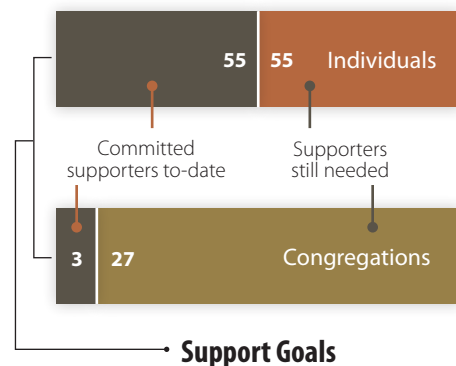
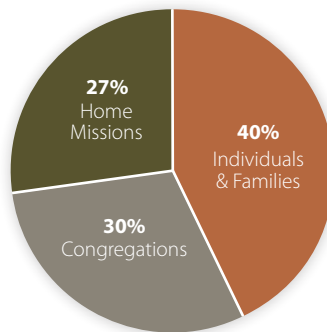
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Ankeny Church Plant Budget Summary



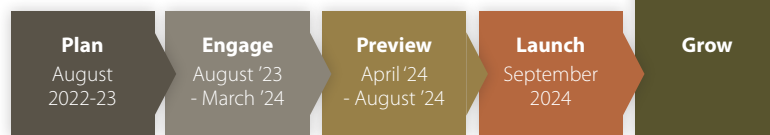
■ Year ■ Subsidy ■ Plant Tithing

Projected Funding Sources



Support Goals

Church Planting Process



Website: emmanuel.lutheran.church

Email: mjpillman@gmail.com

“Church planting is less measurable than even starting a business. You try to predict and know, but anything can happen. ... Which was a big reason why, when we got here, that Matt and Natalie were like, ‘Rethink this a little.’”

Confirming the plant site

This is when confirming the location became their second difficult task. They were asked to consider other church-planting sites besides Ankeny, options that would include the benefit of a core group of people dedicated to supporting a plant. Places like Bismark, N.D., where a group of people are asking the AFLC to plant a congregation, or Fargo, N.D., where St. Paul’s Free Lutheran has also begun the process of launching a daughter congregation.

“They encouraged us to be honest with ourselves,” said Julia. “If it fits with our personalities. If we could handle it.”

“And you are still going?” I asked.

“I know we feel more and more crazy for it all the time,” said Pillman, laughing.

“That’s just where God’s called us, though,” said Julia. “There’s peace in that.”

“I don’t think we’d end up in Ankeny if it was purely a business decision,” said Pillman.

And yet, through the residency process, and with the help of a church-planting coach through Always Forward—the church planting arm of the Anglican Church in North America—the Pillmans say their call to Ankeny has solidified.

Home Missions agrees. When the Pillmans’ residency comes to an end in August, they will parachute into Ankeny

with the full support of Home Missions, which has approved the Pillmans as church planters and will fund the Ankeny plant with a \$150,000, five-year diminishing grant. And, importantly, they will have been as prepared as they can be for the challenge ahead of them in Ankeny, where, prayerfully, God will one day build a church.

“This is, ultimately, the greatest assessment tool in the entire toolbox,” said Pillman of the residency. “We could put feet to our learning, be coached actively along the way, and work to grow our areas of weakness.”

Home Missions’ strategy

The residency is, as Ballmann terms it, a pilot program for Home Missions. And it is one part of Home Missions’ developing plan under a new director to train planters and plant churches. Though it will not be required, as it is in many of the larger church-planting agencies, the residency process can do the hard work of sifting and refining would-be church planters, measuring competencies and giftings, pointing out areas needing improvement, and developing hard and soft skills necessary for the venture ahead.

“This is intentional church planting,” said Ballmann. “We want to multiply ourselves and invest in leaders. One of the ways we do that is by hosting a church planter. This is what ministry is. It is always investment.”

That investment has the potential to bring more people into the Kingdom, whether by an existing congregation mothering a new church with the support of a group of believers, or seasoned church planters willing to share their experiences, their hopes, and their wisdom with the next generation.

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



WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION



‘W

hat in the world are you doing?”

We may have heard this question from our earthly

parents a time or two. Pastor Jeff Swanson was posed this question by his parents after he painted the the family pump house with red, white, and blue stripes when he was growing up. But in classic pastoral fashion, he used this analogy to remind us that our heavenly Father is asking us this question as well.

Thirty-four women from the Pacific Northwest WMF gathered in March in Arlington, Wash., under the theme “I Will Follow Him” (Mark 8:34). Pastor Swanson, the coordinator for the Alaska Mission based in Naknek, Alaska, was our Bible study leader. Betty Blacken led our devotions interspersed with songs. She illustrated the concept of our following Jesus by using the image of a U-turn.

As we talked and listened, we were reminded of God’s heart for the world and for us as individuals. His desire is to see the world reached, whether that is Alaska or our own corners of the globe. Our fallen world is broken, but those who follow Jesus have hope. My notes include these points:

- *The Lord is near to the brokenhearted.*
- *He welcomes the brokenhearted.*
- *He heals and mends*

WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU DOING?

BY LAVONNE WEST

broken hearts.

This is what God is doing in the world.

In our business meeting, Sue Oshe was re-elected as president and a co-treasurer position was chosen for Eddi Walty and Maria Overman. My friend Karen Berosik said she would help with the nominating committee. (She also offered a trip to Montana, but folks were wary about crossing the passes in the winter. The comment from the back was, “but don’t you still have snow?”) Another woman named Myrtle Davis from Calvary Free Lutheran in Everett, Wash., agreed to help her, so the nominating committee involvement is high. We would still love a representative from Our Redeemer Lutheran in Kirkland, Wash., however. Together, we all raised more than \$800 for our Alaska Mission and World Missions. What a blessing!

After a delicious lunch, we reconvened for a more informal time with Pastor Swanson. He showed pictures of Naknek, told us about the work of FLAPS and KAKN radio, and encouraged us to continue to pray for the needs of those ministering in the Alaska Mission. He reminded us that we have a Savior who invites us to come to



Maria Overman (center) and Sue Oshe are installed by Pastor Rick Long (left).

Him, who changes our lives and gives us purpose. His closing story went like this: a father who was heading home with his child was following a lamplighter. As the lamplighter lit one lamp after another to light the dark street, the young child commented, “Daddy, that man is punching holes in the darkness.” That’s our calling as the WMF and as followers

of Jesus.

In the memorial service that followed, Barb Long presented eleven names of women who have passed away from their Arlington congregation in the past year. It was sobering to me, and a reminder to always ask ourselves, “What in the world are we doing?” Whatever mission work we do in the world comes from God’s mission: “For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Let’s go punch some holes in the dark.

West, a member of Stillwater Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont., is the president of the Women’s Missionary Federation.

AFLC Youth Ministries calls McCarlson as next director

New director will start in July & continue to attend classes at Free Lutheran Seminary

Adam McCarlson has accepted the call to serve as director of AFLC Youth Ministries. McCarlson, who has completed his first year at the Free Lutheran Seminary, will begin in his new role on July 1.

"I'm excited to walk alongside AFLC congregations, youth workers, parents, and pastors as they strive to pass on their confession of faith to the teens in their midst and welcome them to be part of their local congregation," said McCarlson.

A former youth leader, McCarlson served as director of youth and young adult ministries from 2011 to 2018 at Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D. He currently serves on the AFLC Youth Board, as well, and will step down from that position this summer after serving one term. On the Youth Board, he served as the liaison to the 2023 FLY Committee, which

plans the 2023 FLY Convention. McCarlson has been involved in various ministries and youth events, including the Pickerel Lake Lutheran Bible Camp (an AFLC district Bible camp east of Grenville, S.D.) and various South Dakota district youth events. He has also been involved in the AFLC Youth Ministries equipping events of FLY Beyond (for youth) held every other year and Youth Worker Weekends (for youth workers) held yearly.

McCarlson and his wife, Emily, and their five children moved to Plymouth, Minn., last fall so that he could begin classes at the Free Lutheran Seminary. He will continue in his studies there as he takes on this new role.

"We are confident that, by God's grace, Adam will be able to balance his time and energies between his family, seminary studies, and the duties and responsibilities of



serving as director," said Pastor Ryan Tonneson, chairman of the Youth Board. "There's also precedent for allowing directors some time to pursue continuing education. We see Adam's enrollment in seminary as just that."

McCarlson fills a role vacated by Pastor Jason Holt, who accepted the position of presidential ministry associate of the AFLC.

"We are grateful to Jason for his sixteen years of faithful, humble leadership of Youth

Ministries," said Wendy Greven, a member of the Youth Board.

Members of the AFLC Youth Board began searching for a new director in February, when 11 candidates were recommended for the position. Of those, four were invited to apply. After the candidates filled out an initial questionnaire, they were each interviewed via video conferencing. The four candidates were culled down to two finalists

who were interviewed in person. Members of the Youth Board then met on May 30, and unanimously voted to call McCarlson.

"This task is never an easy one for any board, but we are confident in the Lord's leading and guiding, and are thankful to you, the broader AFLC, for upholding us in this time," said Tonneson, who then urged the AFLC to continue to pray for the board and McCarlson as he begins this new role.

President's office to offer leader training program

During the 2023 Annual Conference held June 13-17, the AFLC President's Office and members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee provided an update regarding the August 2023 launch of the Leaders Training Program. This program offers ways for lay leaders and licensed lay pastors to build on their ministry skills.

Repeated requests prompted the AFLC President's Office to develop a program that focuses on equipping laymen to preach, teach, shepherd, and serve within a local congregation. The program will give new and existing licensed lay pastors expanded avenues to fulfill their yearly rostering requirements throughout the calendar year, and will also offer remote options in addition to the established in-person methods of the Summer Institute of Theology and the AFLC Pastors and Wives Conference.

For further details, please contact Pastor Jason Holt, presidential ministry associate, at jasonholt@afcl.org.

Journey Missions team travels to Brazil

An intergenerational team of volunteers traveled to the AFLC mission field in Brazil for three weeks in June.

The team included Jonas Fairrow, Isaiah Miller, Andrew Carlson, Joshua Roeske-Carlson, Cassidi Hale, Dean Feistner, Wonell Miller, Lydia Rieschl, Megan Steele, Tabitha Bandy, Isaiah Quanbeck, Norabelle Kozicky, Judah Kozicky, Caleb Richardson and Jon Nelson, department head for Journey Missions.



Also traveling with the group were Jaelynn Kozicky and Rose Zeltinger, who will be serving this summer as missionary assistants in Campo Mourao.

“How then can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how will they hear if there is no one to preach? And how are they to preach, if they were not sent? as it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace; those who bring glad tidings of good things”
(Romans 10:14-15).

Four years ago, Julia and I heard the Lord’s call to ministry. At the time, we didn’t know each other. I had to leave my job and my studies, and Julia was about to start college. But when God called each of us, we listened and left our families and our homes to attend the Brazilian Free Lutheran Seminary and Bible School: Seminário Teológico Luterana Livre, or SETELL.

Julia and I became great friends and three years later, we were married. The first two years at the Bible school were difficult because it was at the height of the pandemic. Some Sundays, only four people could attend services—Julia, me, and two other students. Evangelism declined, visits to other Free Lutheran congregations declined, and our family members who live far away got sick. Julia got COVID, but we didn’t give up. Classes at SETELL continued. There were just a few students, but our teachers didn’t get discouraged. It was a time God used to mold us, and even though it was difficult, we understood that His grace is sufficient. After the pandemic, we were eager to do

WE WANT TO BRING THE LIGHT

BY JAKSON HERMES

His work.

During this season, God awakened our spiritual gifts and provided ministry opportunities where we could manifest His love and power to other people. Now in our last year at SETELL, we are serving in two congregations on internship: Jardim Esperança and Cohapar. We’ve developed an enormous love for these churches. I have been preaching, teaching Sunday school, serving the citywide youth group, and counseling younger seminarians to see God’s will through His Word. I also help with maintenance—it seems like there is always something to fix!

Julia has used her gifts to teach Sunday school and Bible studies. She uses YouTube and Instagram to evangelize broadly. She also creates Christian content in sign language for the deaf community. She served a year and a half at the Miriam Home, bringing the love of Jesus to the children who desperately need Him. Now, she serves at the home of Pastor John and Hannah Lee, where she homeschools their children.

One of our favorite jobs at the seminary is DRELL—our Brazilian Free Lutheran Publishing project. I edit the books and content that DRELL creates, including biographies of Philipp Spener



and Johann Arndt and Dr. Francis Monseth’s *Servant Pastor*, and I am currently working on a devotional by Carl Rosenius. Julia designs many of the book covers. She also runs the DRELL Instagram page, publishing content that reaches people with a Christian worldview. While we’re working, we also have great discussions with Pastor Fernando Hunhoff and Pastor Lee, with whom we have developed a wonderful friendship.

As we finish up our time at SETELL, we ask, “what are our next steps?” We have a missionary heart and the will to preach the gospel wherever we go and in whatever ways God wants us to use our gifts. We want to be vessels in His hands and do His will, not ours. We know the world needs Jesus. The verses from Romans brought us to SETELL. We want to announce the gospel of peace wherever we go and whatever the cost. We want to be used to share about Him wherever He is needed. We are pilgrims, and we live by faith. Today we are looking to the future and we are asking, “Where can we be the light of Christ?”

Hermes and his wife, Julia, are students at SETELL. He is currently serving his seminary internship.

FLBC to host alumni picnics

The Free Lutheran Bible College will host a series of alumni picnics this summer, including:

- July 16, Twin Cities: 5-7 p.m. at the Lions picnic pavillion, 12951 Weaver Lake Road, Maple Grove, Minn.

- July 30, Thief River Falls, Minn.: 4-7 p.m. at Oakland Park, 124 Baken St.

- Aug. 5, Arlington, Wash.

For more information and to register for a picnic, visit flbc.edu/events.

Golf Scramble benefits scholarships

The Free Lutheran Bible College will host an annual Golf Scramble Aug. 14 at The Refuge Golf Club, Oak Grove, Minn. The driving range and putting green will open at 10:15 a.m. and a shotgun start will begin at noon. All golfers participate on a free will donation. Sponsorships include \$300/hole, \$500/clubhouse, \$1000/event, \$2,500/partnership. For more information and to register, visit flbc.edu/event.

Spotlight conference: The Word

The Free Lutheran Bible College will welcome back Keith Ferrin as the featured speaker at the fall Spotlight conference Oct. 10-11. Ferrin, founder of the BibleLife Community, equips people to read, study, and enjoy the Bible. Also featured will be Matt Whitman, host of the “Ten Minute Bible Hour” podcast. For more information visit flbc.edu/events.



Team sent out to Alaska villages

The AFLC Alaska Mission has sent out four members who are serving on a vacation Bible school team. They include (from left) Heather Hansen, Jennifer Albright, and Katy and Zach Kupser. The team is traveling each for seven weeks to a remote village in southwest Alaska where they are teaching summer Bible classes.



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 who is serving as interim pastor at Christian Free Lutheran, Wheatland, Iowa. This session, held daily at 8:30 a.m., will examine the history of the AFLC, including its roots in Norway and the founders of the Lutheran Free Church movement, Georg Sverdrup and Sven Oftedal. Horn will also cover the emphases and concerns of the AFLC, including the inerrancy of Scripture, Lutheran confessionalism, and piety.

Two morning elective sessions will be offered at 10:30 Monday through Friday. The first, “Philosophy for Faith,” will be taught by Dr. Jonathan Strand, professor of philosophy at Concordia University, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. This course is an introduction to the insights and conceptual tools of philosophy that are useful for the understanding, articulation, and defense of the Christian faith. Reference will be made to how these tools can be applied to current controversial issues—such as those regarding sexuality and gender.

The second, “Studies in the Psalms,” will be taught by Pastor James Johnson, who serves Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn. Each session will be dedicated to the study of a particular psalm, including psalms of praise, lament, imprecation, and prayer. The classes will be interactive, studying and applying the psalms for both personal life and ministry.

Dr. Jason Gudim will teach an afternoon session on “The Systems of Systematic Theology,” which will explore the themes and specific paradigms within Lutheran theology that help students think better and more biblically about theology. Gudim will cover the topics of the cross, tension and paradox, the structure of the catechism, law and gospel, two kinds of righteousness, and the two realms.

A set of one-day seminars on “Congregational Leadership” will be offered Monday through Thursday afternoons from 1:15-3 p.m. On Monday, Dr. Wade Mobley will teach a session on “The Board Chair,” on Tuesday Pastor Micah Hjermsstad will lead a session on “Embracing Conflict,” on Wednesday Dr. James Molstre will teach on “What Servant Leadership Means,” and on Thursday Mobley will conclude the series with “Emotional Health for Congregational Leaders.”

To register for the event or for more information on the curriculum, visit flbc.edu/events/. The cost is \$160/one session, \$275/two sessions, and \$365/three sessions. Discounts are available for spouse and/or more than one registrant per congregation. Housing and noon meals are also offered for a fee.

GOING WHERE JESUS GOES

BY PASTOR ANDY COYLE

Missions have always been deeply embedded into the DNA of the Free Lutheran movement. It is the natural response and life of a redeemed child of God. Georg Sverdrup's heart was captured by the gospel of mission. Here is an excerpt from his 1904 writing as he considers Jesus with the tax collectors.

If we are going to walk in those footsteps, we must not stand around half doubtful, half timid when we come face to face with the needs of the heathen. No, in Jesus' attitude [to aide us], there is no doubt, no doubt to spare. Jesus died for those lost ones, whether they are black or white, and there is no uncleanness so great that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cannot cleanse from it.

"But what about the work here at home?" someone will say. Well, the truth is the work here at home is no different from the work over there in that here are plenty of the lost whom Jesus desires to be saved. But if the work here at home bears its proper fruit in true, genuine, living Christianity, that

is precisely the assumption we can make about heathen missions.

When Jesus saves a person, it is his intention both to make a soul happy and blessed and to have another worker in his vineyard, a fisher of men who can help to pull in the net.

Think a little on that! Give this consideration some thought. If I am saved by grace, through faith, where then is that love which is poured out in hearts by the Holy Spirit? For, after all, Jesus wants us to learn that the Lord delights in mercy, not in sacrifice.

We cannot give God anything other than an unclean heart in order to have it cleansed. But the Lord desires that the gift he gives us, the Spirit and love, shall express itself in a glowing, fiery zeal for our fellowmen's real benefit. And that zeal does not show itself primarily in standing apart from sinners, but much more through our willingness to go in among them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the remedy for their uncleanness.

Jesus is with us in that work. He does not allow His own to go alone. Let us, therefore, go where Jesus goes both before us and with us. [...]

It is an inordinately glorious mission to

participate in bringing Jesus and sinners together by the service of the Gospel. And that is our mission and our calling, as surely as we are His congregation and His body. [...]

That is the task heathen missions must accomplish among the tax collectors and sinners. It seeks to gather them at Jesus' table so that they will be His guests at the great Feast [Communion] which will be celebrated by all the saved, both in this world and the next, forever.

Let us first learn by experience that joy that Jesus experienced when he ate with sinners. Then it will be our good fortune to be among the happy ones who are privileged to gather more and more guests at Jesus' Table of grace. (*Sverdrup Journal*, Vol. 6, 2009, pg. 105-106)

May the Lord continue to capture our hearts to His mission in bringing sinners to His table through planting new congregations.

Coyle, who serves Shiloh Church, Blackhawk, S.D., is the director of AFLC Home Missions.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Joseph Larson, a 2023 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, has accepted a call to serve as the associate pastor of Christ the King Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn.

Tim Herset has accepted the call to serve as co-pastor of Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont. Herset has recently been accepted onto the AFLC's Licensed Lay Pastor Roster.

Pastor Joe Frech, a 2023 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, was ordained June 4 at Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis, with Pastor Micah Hjermstad, AFLC president, officiating. Frech serves St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church-Schwer, Milford, Ill.

Pastor Jim Ritter has resigned from Faith Free Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn., and has accepted a call to serve Joy Lutheran, a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregation in Cambridge, Minn. He also served on the AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship Board.

Kyle Scott was named as the new executive director of World Mission Prayer League. Scott previously served as the executive director of LAMB hospital in Bangladesh.

Pastor Troy Tysdal was named as the new president of the Lutheran Brethern Seminary, effective August 1. Tysdal has served the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as its director of communication and prayer since 2014. He is scheduled to complete a doctorate in Strategic Christian Ministry from Liberty University in July.

Rose Zeltinger and **Jaelynn Kozicky** are serving as AFLC Journey Missions missionary assistants in Brazil. In June, they joined **Casey McLoughlin** at the Miriam Home in Campo Mourão. **Kyle Gorman** is serving as a missionary assistant to Matthew and Ednay Abel in Villarrica, Paraguay.



Arley Hartsoch

Arley Ray Hartsoch, 73, of Ray, N.D., died May 15, 2023. Born Oct. 7, 1949, in Williston, N.D., he was the son of Earl and Ara Hartsoch. He married Cheryl Kallunki on Aug. 7, 1970.

He attended the Wonderlic country school and Beaver Creek Church. He graduated from Ray High School in 1967 and attended the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, Plymouth, Minn. After graduating from NDSU in 1973 with a degree in agriculture, they moved to Tioga, N.D., where he served as assistant pastor at Zion Lutheran Church and the surrounding country churches. In 1976, they moved to Minnesota. He attended the Free Lutheran Seminary, and then decided to move back to the family farm. He served as the View Township assessor and was a chairman, trustee, deacon, and youth leader of Beaver Creek Church. He also served on the AFLC World Missions Board.

Surviving are his wife of 52 years, Cheryl; three sons, Brent Hartsoch, Apache Junction, Ariz., Daniel (Amanda) Hartsoch, Alexandria, Minn., and Erik (Amy) Hartsoch, Ray, N.D.; one daughter, Sara (Jason) Peterson, Alexandria, Minn.; six grandchildren; his mother, Ara Hartsoch, Tioga, N.D.; two sisters, Maureen (Larry) Severson, Roseau, Minn., and Debbie (Jim) Jacob, Burns, Wyo., and a foster brother, Dennis (Patty) Marmon, Williston, N.D.

The service was held May 22 at Beaver Creek Church, Tioga, N.D., with Pastor Jon Wellumson officiating. Burial was in Beaver Creek Cemetery.

Pastor Morris Vaagenes, 93, of Shoreview, Minn., died May 8, 2023. Vaagenes, former missionary to Madagascar and pastor emeritus of North Heights Free Lutheran, Arden Hills, Minn., served as the interim pastor of Vision of Glory Lutheran, Plymouth, Minn. A service was held May 13 at North Heights Lutheran.

Susan Bartholomew, 69, of West Lafayette, Ind., died April 14, 2023. She was the wife of Pastor Richard Bartholomew, former member of the AFLC Clergy Roster. A service was held April 19 at Redeemer Lutheran, West Lafayette.

Pastor James Olson, 70, of Fargo, N.D., died April 27, 2023. Olson, who is a former member of the AFLC Clergy Roster, served Zoar Lutheran, Hatton, N.D. A service was held May 7 at Triumph Lutheran Brethren, West Fargo, N.D.

Pastor David White, 63, of Mineral Wells, Texas, died April 21, 2023. Olson, a former member of the AFLC Clergy Roster, served Abiding Word Lutheran, Deshler, Neb. A service was held April 28 in Mineral Wells.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-May 31, 2023

FUND	REC'D IN MAY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$30,052	\$169,933	\$193,664
Evangelism	8,029	55,555	58,239
Youth Ministries	8,459	65,585	74,354
Parish Education	10,885	51,939	65,500
Seminary	21,266	116,830	121,143
Bible College	25,533	158,127	188,933
Home Missions	21,673	126,387	160,029
World Missions	37,789	176,445	212,128
WM Personal Support	61,803	321,638	330,344
TOTALS	\$225,489	\$1,242,438	\$1,404,333

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

MAY MEMORIALS

Bible College

Ruth Claus
Fred Adrian
Elaine Jorgenson
John & Barbara Wire
Luverne Pearson

Seminary

Luverne Pearson
WMF
Luverne Pearson
Debbie Iverson
Jeanette Swanson

Evangelism & Discipleship

Mary Hesterberg

ECHOES OF THE GREATEST STORY

As a parent to three young children, I've been exposed to plenty of kids' TV shows. Small dogs providing emergency services, a health clinic staffed by stuffed animals, a family of English-accented pigs. In shows, movies, and books, new trends come and go each month, and most of it is forgettable.



Pastor Andrew
Kneeland

I'm not opposed to fiction! But I know that the best stories reflect the Greatest Story.

Some of the best and most memorable stories through world history follow a similar three-act structure. The story opens

with *Creation*, introducing the characters and describing what this make-believe world looks like and how things work. Then comes the *Fall*, where we meet the problem; the character or situation that needs to be fixed. But every good story also includes *Redemption*, where the problem is solved, and things can go back to the way they are meant to be.

This is the story of everything, originating in the pages of Scripture. At creation, our entire universe was perfect, and everything worked the way it was supposed to. The disobedience of our first parents brought the fall, where conflict is introduced into our story. We meet the villain and see his evil plot to wreak havoc and cause destruction. He would have been successful, too, had it not been for the heroic and sacrificial actions of Christ who brought redemption to us.

Echoes of the gospel are everywhere, and that's not by accident. Jim Ware, author of the short book entitled "God of the Fairy Tale," writes: "Fairy tales whisper to us of our deep need. The best fairy tale is a story you *wish* would come true."

The creation-fall-redemption structure

has been hard-wired into all of us. Even unbelievers are drawn to these stories because God has imprinted us all with a sense of the sacred. We want the good guys to beat the bad guys because we want it to be true for *us*. The best writers write what they know, and we *know* there can be more; we deeply long for redemption to be true. G.K. Chesterton said, "Mythology is a search; it is something that combines a recurrent desire with a recurrent doubt." Men and women tell stories to satisfy the yearnings of their hearts: doubts that this world is all there is and desires for more.

In both structure and elements, the stories that have endured the test of time are dim shadows of the Greatest Story. The elements we love to read about in stories—heroism, sacrifice, redemption, honor, loyalty, love—are things that Christ wrote into the Book. The Bible is the most gripping adventure story ever written; it's the best love story, the greatest mystery with the most satisfying ending.

Echoes of the Greatest Story are everywhere. Jim Ware gives some examples of beloved children's stories that echo the Gospel, the greatest of all stories. The nearly-300-year-old tale of *Beauty and the Beast* tells the story of love that transforms what was ugly and loathsome into something beautiful and perfect. Cinderella is a lowly maiden who is chosen to be married into the royal family. The story of *Ali Baba* shows how powerful words can change the course of your life.

We could look at more recent works, too. You don't have to look hard to find the creation-fall-redemption structure of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Or *Star*

Wars. Or *Harry Potter*. Or *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Shadows of the gospel can be found in film and literature from every corner of the globe. We're drawn to these stories about courage and redemption because there is a part of us that wants them to be true.

And I think the order is important here: God didn't write the Greatest Story because we like that kind of story. We like that kind of story precisely because the Greatest Story has been planted in our hearts.

The Apostle Paul noticed the sense of the divine among the pagans in Greece and said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of

Even unbelievers are drawn to these stories because God has imprinted us all with a sense of the sacred.

your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." We know why people enjoy stories, even if they don't. Nobody can be saved by reading *Great Expectations* or watching *Iron Man*. But our love for good stories can point us and our friends to our Redeemer, who wrote the pages of Scripture.

association retreat center

BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST

BY KIRK RAUTIO

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: if either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).

This spring, I was blessed with the opportunity to travel south to visit a congregation of brothers and sisters for a few days. I will never forget our time together. I was able to share about the Association Retreat Center and even more about the opportunities God gives us every day to minister to others. Being with a group of likeminded Christians who are invested in their community and doing everything they can to make an impact encouraged me greatly.

God planned other gospel encounters for my visit. I had a conversation with a

local business owner where I could feel the Spirit at work. Even having my flight canceled was a blessing because I was able to attend an in-home Bible study that was nothing less than God-centered. This candid assembly of believers was focused on God and God alone. Through our shared faith, we are brothers and sisters. Love, community, accountability, gentleness, and a fierce steadfast hope in Christ filled every encounter I had.

As I have reflected on this trip, I've started taking a personal inventory of those in my life who I would consider fiercely hopeful brothers and sisters in Christ. These are the ones who hold me accountable, who uphold me in prayer, and who I know I can call on when needed or fight alongside should they need me. The family of God is a treasure. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 tells us that companions makes us stronger. They also provide a constant source of reproof. If we

are blessed with loving brothers and sisters, we need to hold on to them, fight for them, and most of all remember that it is God who makes that relationship possible.

As we all enter our busy summer schedules, remember that those who hold your feet to the fire are the ones who help you draw near to the throne of God. Take time to encourage one another, to learn with one another, and to be together around God's Word. Additionally, take time to pass it on—build new groups together, share with one another, and uphold one another. This is our calling, to go and be a brother or sister to someone. In time, you will discover that they are yours as well.

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