

THE 

AUGUST 2023

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



VICTORY
IN CHRIST

THE 2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE





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PRAYING LIKE A CHILD

BY PASTOR TIM HERSET

Basic human communication begins with hungry infants crying. Parents of a newborn baby quickly learn to discern the sounds of their little one's unique cry. The pitch changes when there is pain. The volume is different in the middle of the night. And the cry can be entirely unique when a fresh diaper is needed.

Eventually, children learn simple words to express their needs. A child's first words are often "mama" or "dada." But when kids grow older, they learn the nuances of communication as they ask questions like "why?" or "how?"

Somewhere along the way, communication gets complicated. Bigger, fancier words are spoken, sometimes even to posture oneself as more sophisticated than someone else. Folks figure out the "nice way" to say something mean. Or how to say "no" without using the word *no*. Some of us adults (this writer included) even tell our friends we've "got the gift of gab."

These aspects of human nature are just that, natural. But they can get in the way of learning to pray. In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He makes it clear that His followers are not supposed to pray like those who made a show of their prayers in public. "Truly, I say to you," He declares, "they have received their reward" (Matthew 6:5b). Jesus also points out that repeating empty words over and over is not the way to get God's attention. He says in verse 7, "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for

they think that they will be heard for their many words." This is because God the Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask Him (vs. 8). A keen parent can tell you at the first hint of a whimper what her baby needs and is ready with a bottle before the cry becomes a scream that wakes the entire house. If good parents know what their children need, God knows far more what we need even before we begin to pray.

Later in Matthew's Gospel account, Jesus' disciples were talking like adults. They wanted to know who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus placed a child in their midst and said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Matthew 18:1-5).

Becoming like a child might mean listening more than talking. It could also be asking that honest question you've yet to ask God. Or maybe it is simply crying at the feet of Jesus, trusting that the Holy Spirit is interceding on your behalf.

How might you pray today like a child?

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

From the 2023 Annual Conference reports:

The power of God's Word and the victory of the Word Made Flesh breathe life into us, and as we remain in Him, we are filled with confidence to move forward, to press on, no matter what winds of change might assail us.

—Pastor Micah Hjermstad, President

Even in the midst of economic decline and uncertainties, we are assured of God's victorious provisions.

—Pastor Michael Brandt
AFLC Foundation Board Chair

Though the struggle for us will not end until His final victory, we do not need to dwell in agony of defeat. God in Christ is giving victory over sin today as we live in daily repentance and faith. He will keep giving victory to the believer with even the smallest grain of faith, day by day, moment by moment.

—Marian Christopherson
Director of Publications and Parish Education

What is important is that each person, no matter the language they speak or the country they live in, gets a chance to be a part of a free and living congregation.

—Pastor Craig Johnson
World Missions Board of Directors Chairman

Our congregations are the mission instrument of God. It's where all the good stuff happens.

—Pastor Andy Coyle
Executive Director of Home Missions



VICTORY IN CHRIST

THE 2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE



By Pastor Andrew Kneeland

The 61st Annual Conference of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC) met June 14–17 in Sioux Falls, S.D., with sessions and services taking place at the Best Western Inn & Ramkota Conference Center. The conference theme of “Victory in Christ” was taken from I Corinthians 15:57: “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The last time the conference met in Sioux Falls was in 2011.

The regular conference sessions were preceded by the Conference Resolution Committees and the annual Women’s Missionary Federation Day, the latter of which met under the theme of “Rescued and Redeemed,” taken from Colossians 1:13-14. Michele Mobley led devotions, and workshop speakers throughout the day included Dr. Brent Olson, Tami Demo, and Michelle Olson.

AFLC Secretary, Pastor Brett Boe, Anoka, Minn., led the opening service on Wednesday evening, while Pastor Gary Jorgenson, Ramsey, Minn., brought the message, focusing on the conference theme. “That victory is Christ’s victory over sin, death, and Satan,” Jorgenson said, “and that victory is ours.” The Ambassadors, a summer music team from the Free Lutheran Bible College, provided special music for the opening service.

Pastor Micah Hjermsstad, AFLC president, opened the conference and Dr. Jason Holt, presidential ministry associate, led attendees in a service of remembrance for departed pastors, including Noel Vold, Norman Dornquast, Gordon Myrah, Robert Rieth, Walt Beaman, Richard Frederick, Martin Christensen, Mel Meyer, Wayne Hanson, Jerry Holmaas, David White, and James Olsen. Two seminarians from the Free Lutheran Seminary were ordained during the service: James Scott Pierson, who has accepted a call to Trinity Parish in Golden Valley and Dodge, N.D., and Alex Woodworth, who accepted a call to Helmar Lutheran Church in Newark, Ill.

Conference business began on Thursday morning, June 15, with Pastor Jeremy Larson leading a time of devotions. Pastor Dean Nelson, Vergas, Minn., led the devotion time on Thursday afternoon. Pastor Scott Pierson and Licensed Pastor John German, of Honolulu, Ha., led devotions on Friday. Joseph Larson, Pipestone, Minn., and Hjermsstad led devotions on Saturday. The conference also received greetings,



TOP: Pastor Brett Boe (AFLC secretary) and Pastor Micah Hjermsstad (AFLC president) led the opening conference session.

MIDDLE: Children participated in a week-long vacation Bible school program.

ABOVE: Glenn Urlacher from Glyndon, Minn., joined a group during prayer time.

LEFT: Mary and Pastor Steve Berntson, Jamestown, N.D., joined the worship during Thursday evening's lay service.

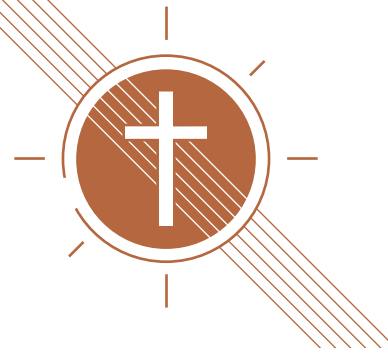


TOP: Home Missions staff and committee members pray for Pastor Jeremy Crowell, who is stepping down from the Alaska Mission.

ABOVE: Ignacio Davalos leads the youth program.

RIGHT: Marilee Johnson follows the Scripture reading in her Bible.

OPPOSITE PAGE: (from top) Pastor Brian Lunn takes notes during a conference session. Adam McCarlson is introduced as the new director of AFLC Youth Ministry. Kids made crafts during the vacation Bible school time. Debra Olson talks with a group of friends during a break in the conference business.



either in person or through a presented letter, from Pastor Greg Schram of Two Kingdoms Ministry; Pastor Jeff Duncan of Lutherans for Life; Pastor Jason Siemens, president of AFLC Canada; and Dr. Cary Larson, presiding pastor of the American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC).

Hjermstad offered an opening presentation on the value and purpose of annual conferences and a reminder of our structure and polity. Together with the Home Missions department, the president's office put together a summary of the AFLC identity and defining characteristics. The AFLC is "free, living, and Lutheran." According to Hjermstad, these marks can be used to help clearly communicate to new generations "what the AFLC is, why it matters, and why we can be excited about it." The president's report also included information about congregational vacancies, with roughly 20 percent of the AFLC's 255 congregations currently in a time of transition or pastoral need. He is encouraged, though, by improving seminary enrollment and the continued development of a lay training program.

Members of the Credentials Committee reported a total of 413 adults at the time of the opening session, including 266 lay people, seven visiting lay people, 137 pastors, and three visiting pastors. That number grew to 474 by the final day of conference, with 309 lay people, seven lay visitors, 155 pastors, and three visiting pastors. Many children and youth were also present throughout the week in childcare, vacation Bible school, and youth activities led by volunteer staff and directors, along with VBS teams from the Free Lutheran Bible College. The afternoon children's activities also included rented bounce houses and a mobile petting zoo.

A highlight of the conference was the announcement of the hiring of Adam McCarlson as director of AFLC Youth Ministries. McCarlson and his wife, Emily, have five children, and he will soon begin his second year of seminary training at the Free Lutheran Seminary. He was able to share more about himself and Youth Ministries on Saturday afternoon during the department electives. "I'm excited to show teens the beauty of who we are as an AFLC: both in terms of our congregational life and practice, and also how our Lutheran confession of faith drives us to find confidence in Christ," McCarlson said. "One of my priorities will be identifying or creating good resources for our AFLC congregations to use as they pass on the faith to the youth in their midst."

Nominations were presented Thursday morning for the boards and corporations of the AFLC. Several departments presented electives on Thursday afternoon, including the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship, Ambassador Publications, and the Coordinating Committee. Pastor Kirk Flaa, Sioux Falls, S.D., led the conference in times of prayer throughout the week.

The Pastors and Wives Banquet was held Thursday evening at 5 Oaks Venue in southeast Sioux Falls. A communion service was held later that evening at the conference center, with Pastor Tim Johnson, Pipestone, Minn., leading the service. Licensed Pastor Clayton Wilfer, Fountain Hills, Ariz., preached the message from Matthew 16. "The darkness and hatred toward Christians is as great as it has been in many, many years," Wilfer said. "[But]



through the gospel, God has called you to be His Church for such a time as this.” Esther Rabenberg, Nicole Olson, and the conference praise team sang “He Will Hold Me Fast” as special music for the service.

On Friday, Jorgenson was re-elected to his position of vice president and Boe was re-elected as AFLC secretary. Beginning Friday morning, the five conference committees presented their resolutions and prayer requests regarding the various ministries of the AFLC. Committee no. 1, with a scope that included the president’s office, Coordinating Committee, and Association Retreat Center, offered thanks to individuals working in these ministries on behalf of the conference. The resolutions adopted by the conference floor included an encouragement for the Coordinating Committee to move forward with the training and licensing of lay men to help with the current pastoral vacancies. The conference also affirmed biblical principles of identity, gender, and family and resolved to pray “for homosexual and transgender-identified men and women to come to a knowledge of God’s free gift of forgiveness to the sincerely penitent.” The conference also resolved to make use of available resources from Ambassador Publications, including the *For the Congregation* series and *The Gospel in the Congregation* study on the Fundamental Principles.

Committee no. 2, covering the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, presented their prayer requests and resolutions on Friday afternoon. After thanking the staff and supporters of the Free Lutheran Schools, the conference floor adopted resolutions affirming the resources produced by the Schools and its continued emphasis on discipleship. They also affirmed the Bible College’s pursuit of an Associate of Arts (A.A.) and Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Bible and Ministry programs and encouraged the members of the Board of Trustees and administration to continue to pursue methods to keep the Bible College affordable.

Committee no. 3 expressed thanks for the staff and ministries of Home Missions, World Missions, and the Women’s Missionary Federation. The conference floor affirmed that church planting is central to how the AFLC does mission work both at home and across the globe, and also adopted a resolution that assigns the Alaska Ministry a designated time during future Annual Conferences to give a report on its ministries.

The four corporations of the AFLC had their annual meetings on Friday afternoon, and the rest of the conference took in a two-part lecture series. Daniel Keinanen, FLY Convention coordinator, shared a session entitled “Making the Shift from Traditional to Generational,” encouraging congregations to focus on relationships before programs. Colonel John Eidsmoe, Barry Nelson, Fay Fisher, and Pastor Ray Ballmann led a panel discussion on the several different options parents have for schooling their children, noting each option’s disadvantages and opportunities.

The Home Missions Corporation, with 31 members present, received updates on the ministry in Alaska and Living Stone Chinese Lutheran Fellowship on the campus of the University of Minnesota. In addition to elections, the corporation formed a call committee to find a missionary pastor for Alaska. The World Missions Corporation, with 34 members present,





TOP: Pastor Shane McLoughlin (right) talks with his wife, Paula, and daughter, Abigail, and Kristi Swenson (left) during a break.

ABOVE: Pastor Micah Hjermsstad (center) confers with parliamentarians.

LEFT: Ned Bulman reacts to a conference report.

OPPOSITE PAGE: (from top) Licensed Pastor John German reacts to a speaker. Licensed Pastor Clayton Wilfer spoke at the Thursday evening service. Samantha Norby and a friend chat during a break.



TOP: Pastors pray for newly ordained seminary graduates Alex Woodworth and Scott Pierson.

ABOVE: Kari Haugen chats with Lisa Arneson.

RIGHT: Kids participated in a craft in daily VBS.

MIDDLE: Pastor Jeremy Larson prays with a group during the devotional time.

OPPOSITE PAGE:

TOP: Pastor Thomas Reagan listens as Dr. James Molstre speaks to a resolution.

MIDDLE: VBS students play during a morning session.

BOTTOM: Michele Mobley presents a devotional during WMF Day on the theme verses from Colossians 1:13-14.





held elections and heard greetings from Jonathan and Tamba Abel, Nate and Rhoda Jore, Michael Rokenbrodt, and Steve Kvale. The corporation also passed a motion that clarifies that all corporation members, including women, are eligible to serve on the Board of Directors. Required changes to by-laws will be discussed in an August meeting of corporation officers and will likely be brought to next year's corporation meeting. The ARC Corporation, with 22 members present, held elections and discussions regarding the vision and facilities of the retreat center. The Schools Corporation had 34 members present for its annual meeting, received updates and feedback on its strategic plan, and held elections. The corporation also amended the by-laws to clarify that the president of the Schools is elected by the Schools Corporation.

Also presenting Friday afternoon was Committee no. 4, covering the ministries of the Board of Publications and Parish Education and the Youth Board. After expressing thanks for board members and others involved in the ministries, the conference floor encouraged congregations to use the resources and materials made available by Ambassador Publications and AFLC Youth Ministries. The conference also resolved to utilize the online resources of the FLY Convention, including elective recordings and the FLY Convention Podcast.

Conference business was recessed on Friday evening for the Missions Festival Service. Pastor Andy Coyle, director of AFLC Home Missions, led the service, and Pastor Nate Jore, missionary to Uganda, preached on Colossians 1:13-14. The service included video greetings from AFLC missionaries throughout the world. It also featured a time to honor Pastor Jeremy Crowell for his family's many years of service in Alaska and pray for him as he transitions to a role at Mission Aviation Training Academy in Arlington, Wash., and associate pastor at Atonement Free Lutheran, Arlington.

Committee no. 4 concluded their resolutions on Saturday and were followed by Committee no. 5, covering the ministries of the Benefits Board and AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship. All congregations were encouraged to implement in-person training workshops to equip their members in disciple-making skills and to utilize the materials and resources available on the AED website.

In the final minutes of business on Saturday, the conference took up general resolutions dealing with the process of separating the Home Missions Corporation and World Missions Corporation, as well as a resolution that would change the length of a term on the Colloquy Committee from one year to five years. After some floor discussion noting the advantages of continuity and disadvantages of the longer commitment, the resolution, along with an amendment to make it a three-year term, was tabled and will be picked up by Committee no. 1 at the 2024 Annual Conference. Hjermstad adjourned the 2023 Annual Conference on Saturday morning and encouraged participants to attend department electives from World Missions, Youth Ministries, Home Missions, and the Association Retreat Center.

The 2024 Annual Conference will be held June 12–15, on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary in Plymouth, Minn.

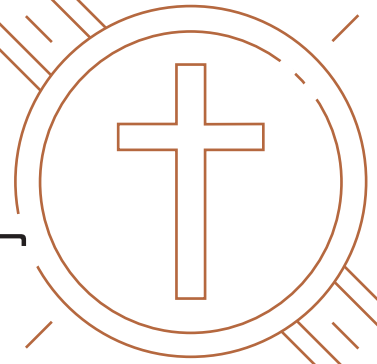
Kneeland, a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, is the editor.



Mr. Ken Slatton
10 years from Lutherans
Dan, MN
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VICTORY IN CHRIST

By Pastor Kirk Flaa



I often fondly recall raising our boys Eli and Elliot, especially the evenings that we gathered for a game of Old Maid, Pit, or Battleship. But also distinct in my memory is the fact that our eldest, Eli, frequently tarnished this time because he *had* to win—and if he didn’t, he was a lousy loser. For a time, we refused to play any game with him.

This memory came to mind during our annual conference week in Sioux Falls, S.D., whose theme, taken from I Corinthians 15:57, was “Victory in Christ.” Hearing and speaking about this victory impressed upon my heart that every believer is free from the fear of defeat. Being a “loser” need never be a concern for a believer, for in this verse and the next (v. 58), Paul declares that we are all winners in Christ, and that in Him, there are no

“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (I Corinthians 15:57-58).

losers. In fact, so complete is this victory that in it we see implications for our past, present, and future.

In the preceding verses of I Corinthians 15, Paul has mounted a rousing defense of the historical reality of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Much is made today of “fake news” and “truth.” For believers, these verses are comforting because they speak clearly of the historical reality of the basis of our faith. Our faith is not empty nor something we merely hope to be true, but something that *is* true and that we know to be true. Our confidence is secure because it rests on an event that Christ accomplished some 2,000 years ago.

Our confidence and encouragement do not end here, however, but extend to our present. This victory, won by Jesus at Golgotha, is now given to us by God. Take a moment to savor the word *gives*. This word is significant because even though the victory is His, God

graciously bequeaths it to us through faith in Christ. Jesus accomplishes the victory, but we receive it. Hence, any notion that we could do something to earn this victory or to contribute to it in any way must be banished. We indeed “gain” the victory, but He “gives” it.

For me, one of the conference’s most powerful statements regarding this text came from Pastor Gary Jorgenson, who made the vital connection that this verse applies to our present lives: we move and live from a position of victory, not defeat. The word *gives* in the text is in the present tense, which means God continually applies this victory to us, signifying that we are victors and not victims. Regretfully, it seems that often we move and live from a position of defeat—myself included—rather than with the confidence of a victory that is already ours. This

victory means that sin, death, and the devil have been robbed of their power. Praise the Lord! As a result, verse 58 reminds us that all of our work and living unto Christ and his Kingdom are never undertaken in vain. We are victors and not victims, enabled to be “steadfast, immovable, and abounding in the work of the Lord.” Paul succinctly summarizes our

battle cry in the words “press on” (Philippians 3:12, 14) as we move forward in faith and the work of the Lord.

Finally, our confidence and encouragement are applied to our future, as well. Paul speaks at great length about our “imperishable body” (v. 42) and bearing “the image of the heavenly” (v. 49). In all of this we are called to a sure confidence and trust that our eternity is also made secure in Christ. The perishable will be raised imperishable and the mortal raised to immortality. Truly, death has lost its sting, and the grave has lost its grip.

In view of this glorious victory, then, we possess through faith a supreme confidence that applies to our past, our present, and our future. And as such, we are enabled to live a life of thanksgiving (v. 57a) unto God.

Flaa serves Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D. Wen Chen and Pastor Holmes Zhao pray with Ken Sletton.

ELECTION RESULTS

20
23

20
23

2024 COMMITTEES

One-year terms, serving at the Annual Conference, June 12-15, 2024, at the Free Lutheran Bible College & Seminary, Plymouth, Minn.

Committee No. 1

Pastor Luke Berntson, Northome, Minn.
Pastor Shane McLoughlin, Minot, N.D.
Mikey Meester, Plymouth, Minn.
Thomas Asfeldt, Sioux Falls, S.D.
Keith Sprecher, Corsica, S.D.

Committee No. 2

Cory Buck, Sioux Falls, S.D.
Flint McLoughlin, Osceola, Wis.
Pastor Brandon Marschner, Culbertson, Mont.
Isak Olson, Rapid City, S.D.
Suzanne Johnson, Burtrum, Minn.

Committee No. 3

Pastor John Amundson, New Leipzig, N.D.
Zach Lynnes, Leonard, N.D.
Ethan Zeltinger, Fargo, N.D.
Madi Demo, St. Michael, Minn.
Jeremy Nelson, Shakopee, Minn.

Committee No. 4

Pastor Phil Hooper, Duluth, Minn.
Phoebe Olson, Rapid City, S.D.
Luke Pedersen, Cannon Falls, Minn.
Sophia Lucht, West Fargo, N.D.
Malena Twedt, Portland, N.D.

Committee No. 5

Pastor J. Christian Andrews, Springfield, Mo.
Richard Luebke, Parkston, S.D.
Pastor Jerry Peterson, Durant, Okla.
David Strand, Kindred, N.D.
Leanna Lunn, Upsala, Minn.



NOMINATING COMMITTEE

One-year terms

Central Tri State

Pastor George Lautner, Clarion, Iowa

Eastern

Mason Mitchell, Bethel Park, Pa.

Eastern North Dakota

Ashley Blake, Grand Forks, N.D.

Illinois

Henry Haugenbuch, Utica, Ill.

Lake Superior

Wanita Sletten, Duluth, Minn.

Minneapolis

Carissa Eikom, Maple Grove, Minn.

Nebraska/Kansas/Colorado

Pastor Ken Hart, Fairbury, Neb.

North Central Minnesota

Pastor Karl Anderson, McIntosh, Minn.

Northern Michigan

Jordan Langness, Ishpeming, Mich.

Northwestern Minnesota

Don Balmer, Thief River Falls, Minn.

Pacific Northwest

Lois Grothe, Astoria, Ore.

South Central

Samuel Quanbeck, Granbury, Texas

South Dakota

Donna Picek, Corsica, S.D.

Southwestern

Pastor Patrick VandenBos, Salinas, Cal.

West Central Minnesota

Caleb Dahl, West Fargo, N.D.

Western ND/Eastern Montana

Mark Gustafson, Dickinson, N.D.



OFFICERS One-year terms

Vice President

Pastor Gary Jorgenson, Ramsey, Minn.

Secretary

Pastor Brett Boe, Elk River, Minn.

BOARDS, COMMITTEES, ETC.

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- Layman, five-year term
Kevin O'Neil, Beresford, S.D.

Bay Broadcasting

- Layman, three-year term
Loren Tungseth, Fergus Falls, Minn.
- Layman, three-year term
Rodney Scheel, Fergus Falls, Minn.

Benefits Board

- Layman, five-year term
James Rolf, Moorhead, Minn.

Budget Analysis Committee

- Layman, three-year term
Leo Brackel, Mott, N.D.
- Layman, three-year term
Danielle Joyce, Anoka, Minn.

Coordinating Committee

- Pastor, five-year term
Pastor Martin Horn, Crystal, Minn.

Evangelism & Discipleship

- Layman, five-year term
Ignacio Davalos, Minneapolis

FLAPS Board

- Layman, five-year term
Jordan Rumohr, Monticello, Minn.

COLLOQUY One-year terms

- Pastor Rodney Johnson, Buffalo, Minn.
- Pastor Elden Nelson, Prinsburg, Minn.
- Pastor Ken Moland, Graham, N.C.
- Pastor Nick Schultz, Chamberlain, S.D.
- Pastor Sam Wellumson, East Grand Forks, Minn.

Home Missions Board of Directors

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- Layman, two-year term
Jeremy Zeltinger, Valley City, N.D.
- Pastor, two-year term
Pastor Nick Schultz, Chamberlain, S.D.

Parish Education

- Layman, five-year term
Rachel Mattson, Thief River Falls, Minn.

Schools Board of Trustees

- Layman, five-year term
Nathan Dalager, Argyle, Minn.
- Pastor, five-year term
Pastor Steve Snipstead, Kalispell, Mont.

World Missions Board of Directors

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Pastor Craig Johnson, Lake Stevens, Wash.
- Pastor, two-year term
Pastor Jerry Nelson, LaCrosse, Wis.
- Layman, two-year term
Ken Sletten, Duluth, Minn.
- Layman, two-year term
Karen Palmer, Shakopee, Minn.****

Youth Board

- Layman, five-year term
Michelle Olson, St. Michael, Minn.

CORPORATIONS Five-year terms

ARC Corporation

- Pastor Karl Anderson, McIntosh, Minn.
- Tami Demo, St. Michael, Minn.
- Doug Hertlein, Carroll, Ohio
- Dr. Steven Johnson, Upsala, Minn.
- Amy Kylo, Byron, Minn.
- Pastor Shane McLoughlin, Minot, N.D.
- Stephen Moan, Ontonagon, Mich.
- **Jennifer Niemela, Greenbush, Minn.
- Chad Rieschl, Brooklyn Park, Minn.
- Jennifer Thorson, Sioux Falls, S.D.
- Roger Van Someren, Amery, Wis.

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- Regan Johnson, Honolulu, Hawaii
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- Zach Lynnes, Leonard, N.D.
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- Sarah Meester, Valley City, N.D.
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- Rodney Scheel, Fergus Falls, Minn.
- *Pastor Brian Westerbur, Grafton, N.D.

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- Pastor Brian Davidson, Ashby, Minn.
- Pastor Connely Dyrud, Maple Grove, Minn.
- Ken Graham, Camarillo, Calif.
- Pastor David Handsaker, Cloquet, Minn.
- Mary Jo Jackson, Stover, Mo.
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- Linda Peterson, Beresford, S.D.
- Kristin Peterson, Valley City, N.D.
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- Greg Tanner, Sioux Falls, S.D.
- Alan Twedt, Portland, N.D.
- Pastor Cal Willard, Everett, Wash.

*One-year term **Two-year term ***Three-year term ****Requires by-law change

RESCUED & REDEEMED

• BY KAREN FLOAN •

One hundred and fifty-nine women attended the 61st annual Women's Missionary Federation Day on June 14, held at the Best Western Inn and Ramkota Conference Center in Sioux Falls, S.D. Lavonne West, president of the WMF, opened the day with a welcome and prayer. Tamba Abel and Rhoda Jore shared missionary greetings, and Julie McCarlson from Webster, S.D., gave a welcome and devotional from Psalm 121.

Michele Mobley, one of the authors of the Bible study, *Women of Redemption*, shared a devotional based on the theme verses from Colossians 1:13-14. After her devotional, a praise and worship time was led by Ryan Egan of Living Word in Sioux Falls.

Throughout the day, skits were performed on four women of the Bible: Hagar, Sarai, the woman at the well, and Mary Magdalene. The text for the skits was taken from Lashelle Thompson's book, *God Came Near*.

The first workshop was presented by Dr. Brent Olson, who shared how patterns of salvation are seen in the Old Testament and carried over to the New Testament. For example, we find a new David and a new Exodus in the New Testament, which are greater than those of the Old Testament. Dr. Olson shared how in Luke 9:31, during Jesus' transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, the Greek word used for *departure* is *exodus*. These are fulfillments of God's words through the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, I am going to do something new, now it will spring up; will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, rivers in the desert" (Isaiah 43:19).

Tami Demo, co-writer of the Bible study, presented the second workshop on her own personal redemption story. She spoke about her journey to assurance of salvation as a teenager, her battle with thyroid cancer, and her daughters' battles with cancer. She referenced II Corinthians 4:16-17: "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer person is decaying, yet our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

During the offering, several women sang the Sovereign Grace Worship song, "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus." Jenn Thorson, Sioux Falls, S.D., led a memorial service, sharing how women with a testimony of faith impact their families. Jenn shared that even though her grandmother has Alzheimer's, she still displays her faith as she prays for

her family using a "special people" photo album. Jenn read the names of AFLC women who have passed on to glory this last year.

The third workshop was presented by Michelle Olson of St. Michael, Minn. She shared that Paul starts his letter to the Colossians by defining himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Michelle asked the women to consider how we define ourselves and how God defines us. When we know how God sees us, we can pray with the gospel's power and give thanks to God even in times of hardship such as Paul experienced while he was in prison.

Following the workshop, the women broke into prayer groups and prayed for the 2023 prayer list: AFLC leaders, WMF officers, Home and World Missions missionaries, and Christian education departments (Parish Education and the AFLC Schools).

The total WMF Day offering reported by treasurer Margie Lee was \$4,081. Half is designated to the WMF general fund and the other half to Christian education (divided evenly to Parish Education, the Free Lutheran Bible College, and the Free Lutheran Seminary). Eight gift certificates of \$25 for the Parish Education bookstore (provided by a Thrivent grant) were given out.

President West called to order the business session. The 2022 reports of the president, recording secretary, and treasurer were reviewed, with highlights given. The report of the treasurer for the 2024 budget proposal was then presented, and a motion to receive it was made, seconded, and carried by Deanna Larson and Jeanette Benson.

Following the reports, Liz McCarlson and Margie Lee were re-elected to their positions as second vice president and treasurer, respectively. Several resolutions were then passed to help the WMF remain committed to proclaiming the rescue and redemption of Christ by using various resources and supporting the AFLC's Christian education and missions departments.

The WMF thanks the Sioux Falls area congregations for hosting so graciously and providing for our needs during the conference. The next WMF day will be held in June 2024 at the Free Lutheran Schools' campus in Plymouth, Minn.

Floan, Andover, Minn., is the recording secretary for the WMF.



Scenes from WMF Day, including workshop leaders Tami Demo (top center), Michelle Olson (above), and Dr. Brent Olson (far left). The women spent time in prayer (above center) and in discussion groups (top left).



More photos from Annual Conference



TOP: Kids registered in the vacation Bible school during conference were treated to a presentation by the Great Plains Zoo's Zoomobile, a mobile petting zoo. Kids had a hands-on experience with a tortoise, skunk, hedgehog, and snake. TOP RIGHT: A worship team from Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, led the Mission Festival service. ABOVE: There was lots of time for fellowship (left and center), as well as workshops. RIGHT: Conference committees (near right) met preceding the business.





Missionary church planting is our family's calling. We aspire to be a blessing, to shine the light of Jesus through our lives of gospel proclamation. One of the various forms this ministry takes is showing compassion, even to those who don't deserve it.

This past May was an exceptionally rainy one, and the roof of our house had some leaks. Lucila's house did, too. Lucila and her 6-year-old daughter, Lucia, have been attending church as well as kids' club for the past several months. Their house—one square room approximately ten feet by ten feet—had a roof with several holes.

Lucila has holes in her life, too—a sad and all-too-common story. After years of alcoholism and abuse, her husband left her and moved to Argentina. But Lucila, too, has a drinking problem. Along with her alcoholism, she is overweight and has several health issues. Limited income, no running water, no fridge, no stove, and raising a small child add even more difficulties to her life.

Motivated by compassion, we have been helping her by donating a basic food basket to her each month. We additionally set out to give her

BECAUSE GOD LOVES THEM

BY PASTOR MATTHEW ABEL

home a new roof in June, but found that the task would be impossible. Before we could even get the old, roach-filled and mouse-infested thatched roof off, the rotten and termite-eaten structural posts of the house broke, and the walls collapsed.

We ended up building her a new house, a simple but much nicer structure than anything she ever had. Now it has a tin roof, brick walls, a concrete floor, and even a window.

As we worked on the house, I invited her neighbor's kids, Toby and Matias, to our kids' club. They came and then also brought their mother, Wilma, to Sunday school. They have been coming to all of our programming for nearly a month. Currently both Wilma and Lucila are participating in one-on-one Bible studies with my wife, Ednay, and their children are enrolled in Sunday school.

But Wilma didn't understand our compassion for Lucila. She commented to my wife, "Why are you helping Lucila? She doesn't deserve any help. She's mean, lazy, and a drunk."



Compassion doesn't depend on merit. The gospel doesn't depend on merit. God's love is demonstrated in that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8). We don't help Lucila because she deserves it; we help her because God loves her, and she needs God's love.

I believe that through compassion, God is working in the lives of Lucila and Wilma as well as their families. Perhaps there are others watching and being touched by compassionate examples of undeserved favor.

Unconditional love and unmerited favor are powerful, counter-cultural, and divine forces. We endeavor to proclaim the gospel message along with tangible demonstrations of the gospel in life, trusting in God to work the miracles of salvation and transformation.

Abel is an AFLC missionary serving in Villarrica, Paraguay.



AFLC Pastor's Conference scheduled for October

The 2023 AFLC Pastor's Conference will be held Oct. 3-5 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis. The theme, "As Good Stewards," comes from I Peter 4:10. A schedule of events and registration form will be available on the AFLC website at aflc.org/pastorsconference.

The AFLC boards and committees will meet Oct. 2-3 on the AFLC Schools campus, Plymouth, Minn. The various boards and committees will meet separately on Oct. 2, with a combined meeting on the morning of Oct. 3.

Buffalo Lake congregation to celebrate 125 years

Members of Buffalo Lake Lutheran, rural Eden, S.D., will celebrate the congregation's 125th anniversary with a weekend of events on Oct. 14-15. All are welcome to attend. A bazaar and pie social will be held at 2 p.m. on Saturday. On Sunday, the congregation will have a 10:30 a.m. service, noon dinner, and afternoon program to mark the anniversary. The congregation will also dedicate a new fellowship hall. Buffalo Lake Lutheran was established in 1897.

FLBCS 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.

Your gifts support our magazine

The AFLC's monthly magazine, *The Lutheran Ambassador*, is free for all subscribers. The ministry is subsidized by your gifts. For more information on giving to our ministry, contact us via email at lasubscriptions@aflc.org. Or, visit our website at aflc.org/lutheran-ambassador, where you can find a link to give online.



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.

The seeds of service that eventually sprouted and grew into my calling as a chaplain were planted in my childhood home. Caring Christian parents who practiced their faith through hospitality taught my family to welcome others and made our home a welcoming place.

My late brother, Bob, was in the first class in our AFLC seminary; I followed seven years later. We both answered God's call to the ministry with our parents' blessing.

The call to become a pastor has always been at the heart of my life, and over time, it led to my calling as a chaplain. Though the call to chaplaincy involved a more specific context for ministry, it still contained the same message of redemption and reconciliation with God.

Two life experiences drew me more fully to my call as a chaplain. In 1981, my wife, Jan, was diagnosed with infectious hepatitis. She spent 37 days in the hospital before she recovered. Then, in 1984, at the age of 37, she was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. It was during that eight-year journey of countless appointments and four recurrences of cancer that



LIFE LESSONS IN CHAPLAINCY

BY PASTOR JOHN RIETH

we encountered others who needed someone to listen to their own story, to care, and sometimes, to pray. We decided early on that we would live with the cancer, whatever the cost, and not let it kill our spirits.

In April 1992, God called Jan home. I had sought to comfort many bereaved spouses over the years as a pastor but knew nothing of what it meant to draw from God's well of comfort myself. Jan and I had partnered in life from college days on, and now that was at an end. Through those ministering to me, I found that God's comfort was there for me, too.

I continued to sense God's call to ministry and was drawn to hospital chaplaincy. In the fall of 1993, I transitioned from parish ministry and began two life-changing years of residency in Clinical Pastoral Education at Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis. I worked as a staff chaplain during my third year at the hospital, and during this time, I married Pat.

In the spring of 1996, I was hired as a staff chaplain at United—a year later to become Altru—Hospital in Grand Forks, N.D. Several other AFLC pastors had taken Clinical Pastoral

Education training, and as we began to visit together, the AFLC's Division of Institutional Chaplaincy took on new life. Pastor Jerome Nikunen, Pastor Kerwin Sletto, the late Pastor Walt Beaman, and I made up our board. What followed were many years of rich fellowship and education.

As simple as it may seem, the most important lesson I learned during my clinical education was how to listen empathetically. The account of the disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24) is a wonderful example of empathetic listening. Jesus listened to their account of the events in Jerusalem, and even asked leading questions, before revealing what Scripture said about himself. In the 19 years I worked full-time in the Altru Health System, there were countless opportunities to hear people's stories, and then share the love of Jesus through his Word.

Rieth, who retired in 2015, is a member at Christ the King Free Lutheran, East Grand Forks, Minn. He provides pulpit fill during pastoral vacancies and volunteers as a chaplain at Valley Senior Living.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Seth Moan has accepted a call to serve Calvary Free Lutheran, Arlington, S.D. He currently serves as the associate pastor of Emmanuel Free Lutheran, Williston, N.D.

Pastor David Johnson has accepted a call to serve Living Faith Free Lutheran, Larimore, N.D. He currently serves Living Faith Free Lutheran, Boyertown, Md. He will begin his new call in September.

Pastor Matthew Nelson has accepted a call to serve St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D. He currently serves Salem Lutheran, Radcliffe, and St. Paul's Lutheran, Salem, Iowa.

Joe Larson, a 2023 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, was ordained July 16 at Abiding Faith Free Lutheran, Ortonville, Minn., with Pastor Jason Holt, AFLC presidential ministry associate, officiating. Larson has accepted a call to serve as associate pastor at Christ the King Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn.

Pastor Jeremy Crowell has accepted a call to serve as part-time associate pastor at Atonement Free Lutheran, Arlington, Wash. Crowell, who has resigned from his role as missionary pastor pilot to the Alaska Mission in Naknek, Alaska, will serve as the missionary pilot trainer at Mission Aviation Training Academy in Arlington.

Pastor Gerald Steele, who serves St. Petrie Lutheran, rural Leland, Ill., has announced his retirement. His last Sunday will be Aug. 27.

Pastor Alex Woodworth will be installed Aug. 6 at Helmar Lutheran, Newark, Ill., with Pastor Micah Hjermstad, AFLC president, officiating.

Members of Bethel Lutheran, Grafton, N.D., will celebrate the 50th anniversary of **Pastor Terry Olson's** ordination by honoring him on Sept. 24. All are welcome.



Seminary graduates James Scott Pierson (left) and Alex Woodworth (center) were ordained during the opening service of the 2023 Annual Conference, June 14, in Sioux Falls, S.D., with Pastor Micah Hjermstad, AFLC president, officiating.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-June 30, 2023

FUND	REC'D IN JUNE	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$31,441	\$201,374	\$226,723
Evangelism	5,269	60,824	73,430
Youth Ministries	11,443	77,028	84,620
Parish Education	15,167	67,106	79,255
Seminary	27,309	144,139	141,880
Bible College	35,416	193,543	241,265
Home Missions	23,769	150,156	183,015
World Missions	24,358	200,803	234,727
WM Personal Support	68,066	389,704	388,976
TOTALS	\$242,239	\$1,484,677	\$1,653,890

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

JUNE MEMORIALS

Bible College

Ruth Claus
Lyman & Norma Lee
Arley Hartsoch
Ferne Liebsch

Seminary

Laverne Pearson
Lyman & Norma Lee

World Missions

Arley Hartsoch

Lutheran

Ambassador

David Salvhus
Karen Zimdars

THE GOD WHO WAS BORN TO DIE

I read two verses in Hebrews recently that made me reflect on why Jesus was able to save me: “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Hebrews 2:14-15).



Pastor Andrew
Kneeland

We know that Jesus is fully God and fully man. But why should that matter to us?

Back in the fifth century, a pastor named Nestorius arrived in Constantinople and found that the people in his new church had customs and traditions that were different from back home in Antioch. The most frustrating to him was the habit of calling Mary the “Mother of God.”

This title was wrong to Nestorius not because of what it said about Mary but because of what it said about Jesus. In his mind, and from his schooling in Antioch, referring to Mary as the “Mother of God” was mixing up the human and divine natures of Jesus. He knew Jesus was fully God and fully man but thought the two natures should be kept separate. The human side of Christ was born, ate, slept, and was tortured and killed. The divine side of Christ walked on water, healed the sick, and was raised from the dead.

Nestorius preached a series of sermons where he gently suggested replacing “Mother of God” with “Mother of Christ.” Nestorius tried to change that one word, but the Christians in Constantinople passionately disagreed and continued to use the term “Mother of God” in their life and worship. They knew exactly what their deeply established tradition said about Jesus and weren’t willing to compromise. Soon, the debate spread across the Christian world.

Were they right, though? Was one little word worth making such a fuss?

It can be tempting to gloss over these ancient arguments and shrug them off as unimportant for our everyday lives. But how we think about Jesus matters deeply, because our salvation rests on both His human and divine natures.

That baby in a manger outside Bethlehem was truly man and truly God. Humanity was enslaved by sin and condemned to death, so God became human to save humanity and restore it to what it was originally designed to be. In a sense, Jesus made it possible for us to be truly human again—perfectly restored creatures with a perfect relationship with our Creator. But the price for our atonement was so great that no mere man could bear the burden. Someone not human needed to die, but dying was something the divine could not do. Only Jesus, the God-man, could have saved us.

Cyril thought this was important, too. The bishop of the Egyptian city of Alexandria thought Nestorius was making the two natures of Christ *too* separate, dividing into two what the incarnation had united into one. There was a difference between the human and the divine natures, but Nestorius was inadvertently making two Sons. A human dying on a cross would have been tragic but insignificant. God dying on a cross would have been impossible. Cyril knew that Christ could only save us if both His human and divine natures were fully involved.

Nestorius and Cyril exchanged a few letters (you can find these online if you’re interested) but couldn’t come to an agreement. Cyril asked a third bishop, Celestine of Rome, to help settle the issue, and he sided with Cyril. Nestorius then appealed to Emperor Theodosius II,

whose palace was just a stone’s throw from Nestorius’ church in Constantinople, and the emperor called a worldwide council to resolve the issue once and for all.

The Council of Ephesus was held in 431 and, although muddled by political intrigue and drama, ultimately affirmed the use of “Mother of God” and removed Nestorius from his church in Constantinople. At this council, and at another one 20 years later in Chalcedon, the early Christian church discerned the right way to talk about the two natures in Christ.

The issue was important, and *is* important. It’s important to know that Jesus Christ is one person, not two. There is one Son of God, not two. Jesus being fully and

Jesus is fully man and fully God because he needed to be for you.

completely human and fully and completely divine is not some complicated theological fact that should only be found in dusty old textbooks. Jesus is fully man and fully God because He needed to be for you.

Jesus has a human nature so He can be our brother and take our place. Jesus has a divine nature so He can completely satisfy God’s wrath against sin and defeat the enemies of sin, death, and Satan. And these two natures are perfectly united in the one person of Jesus so He can be the Savior we need Him to be.

The union of the two natures in Christ is certainly not the easiest theological topic to grasp. But exploring what Scripture says about who our Savior is and what our Savior did is a special task and blessing for every believer.

building the base

REDEEMED

BY PASTOR MICAH KLEMME

Recently, I was able to reconnect with some of my high school classmates and reflect on our shared education. In one of our literature classes, we read together some of the most beloved books of the Western canon. Our conversations today usually reference that time when we struggled to bridge our experiences with what we were reading. But the struggle was worth it. Those books changed our outlook on life and helped form who we are today.

One friend noted that our sports injuries opened our eyes to value the classics because we realized that injuries were only a taste of the deeper hardships we would face in life. In the classroom, we were learning to reflect inwardly, acknowledge our limitations, and face suffering with courage. Talking with these friends has been uplifting because I notice that they have taken these lessons to heart.

The difficulties I had back then were far more than physical. I had a crisis of faith, believing that the mercy of God was

no longer available to me. The burden of continually failing Him always weighed on my mind. My cheerful demeanor disappeared when I was alone, and I believed that my melancholy was further proof that God had abandoned me. I consigned myself to a prison of my own dark thoughts.

As the spring of my senior year of high school rolled on, I thought about a character from the classic novel *Crime and Punishment*. Convicted of a crime and sent to prison, he had hope even as a prisoner. If the author imagined that a criminal could have hope, maybe I could, too. Reflecting on this truth brought me out of my self-appointed confinement to a place where I could catch a glimpse of the outside world.

During those days, the light of the gospel reached me. I understood how Christ had delivered me from my own sin. Although I remained depressed for some time, I knew the hope given to me was greater. I may have felt like a prisoner, but God said I was redeemed. The authoritative Word of the Lord overruled my deceptive thoughts, forming a new courage within me to face despair. My outlook on life had been changed because my redemption was made certain.

The word *redemption* in Scripture

means purchasing someone out of captivity. Colossians 1:13–14 says, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Christ accomplished my redemption. He accomplished yours. I cherish that reality, especially in difficult times.

I am grateful to preach this reality every Sunday. Scripture is efficacious, able to bring you from darkness to light, from sinner to saint, from captivity to redemption through the blood of Christ. Whatever hardships come your way, whether in mind or in body, take courage in His finished work for you. May the Scriptures shape you today to treasure the Savior’s gift of redemption.

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (II Corinthians 4:16–17).

*Klemme serves St. Peter’s Free Lutheran,
Melvin, Ill.*