

THE 

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LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



RESTORED

FLY 2023

REV. 21:5-7



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LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

BY PASTOR TIM HERSET

After church a few Sundays ago, Jeff asked me to join him on a long bike ride from Kalispell out to and around Ashley Lake. It was a half-day bike ride: about 42 miles with roughly 3,000 feet of elevation gain. There was some trepidation and a little hesitation on our part, especially about the climb referred to as “The Wall” by local cyclists. But the cool weather forecast for Tuesday morning had us both excited for a little adventure.

A text message arrived on my phone that Tuesday at 7:21 a.m.: “Pretty windy. How much havoc will that create for us?” My response was optimistic and slightly hopeful that the wind would help us up the hills.

When Jeff and I started pedaling west into a stiff headwind, I made the comment I’ve made many times over the years: “I’d rather ride uphill all day than into the wind.” A few miles later, I was eating my words for fuel as we struggled up The Wall, still against the wind.

We crested the top of the pass and descended to the Caribbean-colored waters of one of northwest Montana’s most beautiful lakes. Cycling around it, we took some breaks while enjoying awe-inspiring views of the surrounding mountains. In the silence between telling stories and asking questions, my heart was brought into sync with my soul with each pedal stroke as we climbed to the pass to head back home.

Pointing our bikes downhill, we cruised

down The Wall, exceeding the posted speed limit for automobiles. We turned onto the bike path toward home and had a tailwind that left us coasting as we ran out of gears. The final miles faded away effortlessly. A high five and a “see ya soon” brought about the end of an adventure.

It was great to experience God’s glory in his creation with a brother in Christ. Even the wind brought a glimpse of that glory.

John 3 records a conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus about how we humans must be born again. Jesus described a new spiritual life. It’s the kind of life that brings actual life to our physical lives. To help Nicodemus understand this spiritual reality, Jesus said, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (vs. 8).

We make plans. We dream dreams. We set out on the adventure we know as life. But real life, life with Christ, comes from the Spirit. And in the same way that the wind came up that Tuesday morning, the Spirit can surprise us. When we go against the Spirit, it creates more havoc than riding a bike uphill into the wind. But with the tailwind of the Holy Spirit, we go in his power where he wishes, we hear the sound of his still small voice, and we live born-again lives.

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

From evening sessions at the 2023 FLY Convention:

Dead people can't save themselves. We were saved because God made us alive out of his good pleasure. We don't choose God. We don't conjure up faith. The whole kit and caboodle of salvation is God's gift to you.

—Pastor Ryan Patenaude

Christian hope isn't based on things going well. Christian hope is based on God's promises.

—Pastor Alex Amiot

Whatever might be stealing hope and joy from your life, whatever is making your soul thirsty, remember Jesus.

—Pastor Micah Hjermstad

A workmanship has to be completed before the good works can happen. You can't actually do good works unless you've already been created in Christ Jesus to do so. Good works flow from the heart of the believer.

—Pastor Adam Osier

In Jesus you and I are beautifully mended.

—Pastor Phill Hooper





RESTORED

2023 FLY CONVENTION

By Pastor Andrew Kneeland



One thousand six hundred and thirty-one campers from 24 different states, led by more than 250 dorm room leaders. A sea of folding chairs facing a 44-foot screen in the Longhouse. Thirty-three different preachers, speakers, and teachers sharing on the theme of “Restored” in a FLY Convention four years in the making.

It’s easy to talk about numbers. But the real story of the 2023 Free Lutheran Youth Convention, held July 3-8 in Estes Park, Colo., is the junior high school student who came to a new assurance of her salvation. It’s the senior high schooler who learned of God’s promise to restore her from her sin for the first time. It’s the young woman who found her value in Christ and the young man who is empowered and equipped to share his faith with his friends. It’s the youth worker who has a better grasp on the shifting landscape of youth ministry and the parent who is better equipped for conversations with their teen.

The theme of the convention was “Restored,” taken from Revelation 21:5-7. Our God can restore things that are broken. He brings the dead to life, gives hope to the hopeless, daily renews his children, restores our purpose and value, and promises to one day make all things new. Evening sessions, workshop times, Bible study hours, and the various elective offerings all centered on this theme of restoration.

Five AFLC pastors shared God’s Word during the evening sessions, each highlighting an aspect of God’s restoration. Pastor Ryan Patenaude (Kindred, N.D.) spoke on “Restored to Life,” establishing a foundation for the week. Walking through Ephesians 2, Patenaude painted a graphic picture of why restoration is necessary. The Ephesians were restored when they heard and believed the gospel message from Paul, and we are restored in the same way. “There’s something beautiful about something being restored,” Patenaude said. “Jesus desires to restore you to life.”

Pastor Alex Amiot (Thief River Falls, Minn.) preached Tuesday evening on the theme of “Hope Restored.” Looking at verses in II Corinthians 1, Amiot also shared personal stories to remind students that even though God allows us



to face more than we can bear, our circumstances are never more than God can handle. “The problem with relying on your own strength is it’s not enough,” Amiot said. “God restores your hope while things are hard by his promises.”

Pastor Micah Hjermstad (Plymouth, Minn.) shared Wednesday evening on “Daily Restored.” Speaking of baptism, Hjermstad taught about how Christ daily sustains us, refreshes us, and restores us. “The powerful working of Jesus Christ through his word goes with us when we go about our daily lives,” Hjermstad said. “God is doing powerful work on this mountain this week, and his work goes with us as we leave.”

Pastor Adam Osier (Plymouth, Minn.) preached Thursday evening on the theme of “Purpose Restored.” Looking at Ephesians 2:10, Osier spoke on vocation and the many different purposes we all have in our families, societies, and churches. Every created thing has a purpose, and we are God’s hands and feet to our neighbors when we love them in ordinary ways. “God spoke and you have life,” Osier said. “He has called you his workmanship. You are his masterpiece, and you have a purpose.”

Pastor Phill Hooper (Duluth, Minn.) wrapped up the evening sessions with a message from the convention theme of Revelation 21:5-7. Taking up the theme “All Things Restored,” Hooper spoke of a difference between now and not yet for those of us living as forgiven children of God. Like a cracked plate put back together, we are mended, but God promises to make all things new. “This is good,” Hooper said of our present condition. “But there is something better. There is being made new.”

Pastor Eric Rasmussen (Fergus Falls, Minn.) led the students and adults in daily Bible study, highlighting four Biblical characters who saw restoration in their lives. Through the biblical accounts of Joseph, Ruth, David, and the women at the well, Rasmussen showed that God brings restoration to our relationships, circumstances, and sin.

A more limited and targeted number of electives were offered each morning at the convention. Students choose four of 26 electives on topics ranging from dealing with loneliness and anxiety, understanding truth and love, and dealing with distractions and conversations with people who think differently. As a tool for local congregations and parents, the elective sessions were recorded and will be available on the FLY Convention website and podcast.

Students and adults were also given the opportunity to hear from two national speakers during the morning workshop hours. Dr. Christopher Yuan shared his personal testimony of being restored from a lifestyle of homosexuality and drugs and offered a biblical way of navigating the relationship between attraction, sexuality,





and identity. Dr. Walt Mueller also shared during the workshop time, teaching students about identity and social media. Mueller also led an elective track for parents and youth workers on how to best understand and teach God’s design for sex and gender.

Rain poured freely throughout the week in Estes Park, but students and adults enjoyed afternoons filled with recreation and activities. Students and adults participated in basketball, volleyball, nine-square, gaga ball, horseshoes, Ultimate Frisbee, disc golf, mini golf, creative arts projects, a talent show, and a concert from the Free Lutheran Bible College Ambassadors. Youth groups also enjoyed sunrise mountain hikes throughout the week. Other activities included a campus-wide photo scavenger hunt, a showing of the movie “Lifemark,” and clothing and swag available for purchase from the FLY Store.

Several national acts provided entertainment following the evening sessions on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. Ben Glenn, a veteran of the FLY Convention, shared Tuesday evening. He encouraged campers with stories from his childhood and a live chalk art performance. Wednesday evening’s entertainment was from Ben Fuller, a musician from Nashville who recently turned from a life of alcohol and drugs. His most commercially successful song, “Who I Am,” declares: “I’m a child of the most-high God and the most-high God’s for me.” Youth groups were given time together on Thursday evening, and the Bryan Drake Show performed during the Friday evening Late Hour. Combining illusions and testimony, Bryan and Karla Drake pointed the audience to Christ as the sure source of truth.

“God was heard through our speakers, seen in our staff, and His power was revealed through changed lives,” said FLY Convention Coordinator Daniel Keinanen. “God’s hand of restoration was ever present at FLY 2023.”

The 2023 FLY Committee included Pastor Gideon Johnson, Sharon Rykhus, Caleb Holt, Ruth Gunderson, Bryce Timmerman, Emily Goff, Daniel Keinanen, Adam McCarlson, and Chris Rasmussen. Behind the committee’s leadership, a team of dozens of coordinators and managers invested hundreds of hours to put this convention together.

During the week students elected the committee for the 2025 FLY Convention: Pastor Ryan Patenaude (Kindred, N.D.), Alex Monseth (Plymouth, Minn.), Ignacio Davalos (Minneapolis, Minn.), Ruth Gunderson (Maple Grove, Minn.), and Isak Olson (Plymouth, Minn.). The next FLY Convention is scheduled for June 30–July 5, 2025.

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



RESTORED

HOLINESS / IDENTITY

By Pastor Gideon Johnson

With the 2023 FLY Convention now behind us, it has been a great encouragement to hear the positive feedback coming from adults and students alike regarding the excellent content offered at this year's event. From the mornings to the evenings, every session, sermon, and study seemed to fit together with the theme "Restored" even better than any of us on the FLY Committee could have imagined or planned. What great evidence that God was at work in all this!

One of this year's offerings that was especially impactful to many were the morning workshops. We invited two excellent national speakers to headline these workshops. But it wasn't just the quality of the speakers that was notable. The impact they had was due to the timely topics they presented on.

For Tuesday and Wednesday mornings we had Dr. Christopher Yuan, who taught about holiness and human sexuality. Beginning with his own testimony, Dr. Yuan told of how the Lord worked through the prayers and witness of his parents and the power of the gospel to bring him from brokenness to wholeness; from living for himself, to living for Christ; from a life of homosexuality, to a life of holiness. With that, he shared with our students that God's call to all of us is not simply to be heterosexual, but to be holy. He also offered some practical tools in order that students might continue combatting the enemy's lies and graciously speak God's truth to people who are still lost and deceived.

Then, on Thursday and Friday, we had Dr. Walt Mueller with us, teaching about identity and the impact of social media. He spoke of how damaging social media can be to students in their perception of themselves and those around them, and how this can lead to bouts with depression and even suicide. He also touched on how students can use social media in a God-honoring and glorifying way, in a way that builds people up and doesn't tear them down.

Though there is likely no wondering or questioning why such tough topics were chosen, let me share some of the specific reasons.

First, because these topics are prevalent issues in our culture today and our students cannot avoid them. For example, how many of our students—ready or not—have already been forced to think on and wrestle through what is right and true regarding their sexuality? Regarding identity and social media, how many of our students have already found themselves, perhaps without even thinking about it, fabricating an online life in an attempt to cope with or feel better about their real life?

Second, these topics were chosen because our students need to hear what is true about both their sexuality and identity. And based on the focus and engagement we saw in our students in these sessions, they want to hear about what God says is true about these things. Let's face it, the world—including many so-called churches—the devil, and their own sinful flesh are leading young people to believe lies about their identity and sexuality all the time. But they're not all buying the lie.

Dr. Walt Mueller





Dr. Christopher Yuan

Therefore, though we may be tempted to just brush these tough topics aside, out of love for the truth and love for our students, what we can and must do is combat these lies by being steadfast in proclaiming what is true.

Third, these topics were chosen because the FLY Convention has the unique opportunity of presenting scriptural truths about these things to a greater number of students at one time than any one congregation could on their own. Furthermore, the FLY Convention, as an extension of our local congregations, is able to pay to bring in speakers who are well-studied in these topics and are able to speak God's truth against the world's lies.

Due to the nature of having national speakers with us, the unfortunate side of this year's workshops is that we aren't able to make their specific sessions available online to our students and congregations. However, because they have a national audience, these speakers have a plethora of resources available in multiple formats. This means that the content they presented at FLY and many other relevant

topics are readily available to anyone who desires to learn and grow more in these areas. Dr. Yuan, for example, has recently launched *The Holy Sexuality Project* (HolySexuality.org), which is an online—and very affordable—resource intended for parents to use with their students. Dr. Walt Mueller also has many of his own resources available in print and online through the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding (CPYU.org).

As those in attendance this year will attest, the FLY Convention workshops were deep and heavy topics, indeed. They were also very timely and appreciated. Now, our hope and prayer is that those topics and discussions started at FLY would be a foundation for stimulating further discussion and exploration both at home and in the local congregation.

Johnson, who serves Hope Free Lutheran, Killdeer, N.D., is the president of the 2023 FLY Committee.





RESTORED

ALL THINGS

By Pastor Phill Hooper

Revelation is the “weird” book in the Bible: it has dragons, beasts, plagues, world empires, and the like. Located at the end of the Bible, the Book of Revelation describes the end of this world. Nevertheless, it doesn’t just give the “secret timeline of the end” for future Christians to understand, it was written for God’s people in the first century. Revelation 2 and 3 contain letters to seven congregations, all needing to be encouraged in their faith and to ready themselves for what was coming. They were facing emotional and spiritual burnout. They were being threatened with persecution for their faith. They had to deal with false teachings, leading some into depravity. Some were tempted to simply take a break from their faith; others were becoming worn down by constant persecution. Perhaps most dangerously, some were so rich and comfortable that they didn’t feel the need for faith—they were growing lukewarm and apathetic.

To these congregations, Jesus sent exhortation. Freely translated and radically condensed, it amounts to a call to keep the faith: do not freeze up, chicken out, wander off, give in, die down, fizzle out, or fade away. To the thirsty, He gives the water of life—that is, Jesus gives spiritual renewal and sustenance.

Those congregations didn’t experience the end of the world, but they lived through events and problems that resembled it. We may not live through the end of the world, either, but we need that same encouragement, because this world will keep bringing the same kind of problems, until the end.

There will be conquest, war, pestilence, death, and martyrdom. There will be hail and fire, meteors, poisoned rivers, nightmare armies, Satan attacking, threats of one-world government, demons, broken homes, and sicknesses. Nevertheless: do not freeze up, chicken out, wander off, give in, die down, fizzle out, or fade away. To the thirsty, He gives the water of life.

Hearing about these soul-crushing things yet to come, we inevitably wonder why we should even bother. Why persist when this world keeps throwing this misery at us? Why not simply let ourselves be worn down, give up, and be done with it?

The answer is clear: don’t give up, look up! God has promised an ultimate, final restoration, and he is working to bring us there. Isaiah talks about this coming kingdom

as a peaceable one, where even animals don’t hurt each other: wolves lie down with lambs, lions and bears eat grass peacefully with other animals, a little child leads them (chapter 11). It’s like a sweet children’s book or mural, but it is actually a restoration of how God originally made things in Eden. This future reality is part of the restoration we are looking toward. In a messy, soul-crushing world, we need to look up to this restoration.

Revelation 21 reveals hope for God’s people themselves. Though we still struggle with pain and scars today, one day “there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain” (21:4). Our weak, failing bodies will be fixed up and made better than new. Our weak, injured souls, our minds with hurts and bitterness we can’t quite get past no matter how we pray, and the depressing reality of life in this world will also be gone. We will be transformed, finally enjoying wholeness that hasn’t been seen since the fall. One dear Christian lady, daily struggling with emotional scars, hurts, and depression, pointed out that her friends won’t even recognize her with that kind of transformation. Many of us may not be entirely recognizable—people will know who we are, but we will be blessedly, totally made new by God. In a world that keeps beating us down and breaking us, we need to look up to that restoration.

Most importantly, in that peaceable kingdom where we are finally made new, we will finally be able to live with God: “Look! God’s dwelling is with people. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God” (21:3). He is the one who wipes away all his people’s tears, even as he also heals them and makes them new. God used to walk with us in the garden in the beginning; one day he will once again walk with us and be close to us, when we no longer see “through a mirror dimly” (I Corinthians 3:12) but when we are at last face to face, welcomed home with a warm hug. In a cold, harsh world, we need to keep looking up to that most of all—to being finally, fully restored to life with him.

Until that last day, do not freeze up, chicken out, wander off, give in, die down, fizzle out, or fade away. To the thirsty, He gives the water of life—sustenance and hope, keeping us in faith until that day when we will be restored.

Hooper, who was the Friday evening speaker, serves St. John’s Free Lutheran, Duluth, Minn.



*Do not
freeze up
chicken out
wander off
give in
die down
fizzle out
fade away*

By Samantha Pehrson

At this year's FLY Convention, Pastor Alex Amiot focused on the theme of "Hope Restored" in his Tuesday evening session. The Lord used the study of this theme found in II Corinthians 1:7-11 to reveal several lessons to me. In this passage, we observe two things: hope lost in hardship, and hope restored by God's promises.

In verses 8-9, Paul wrote about the hardships he endured, "For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death." Paul gave his readers a part of his testimony in verse 8, telling them about his time in prison when he faced certain death. He also wrote about what it was like to rely on his own strength. We know that his own strength was not enough because he was crushed by the afflictions and burdens of the world. He despaired—to have a complete absence of hope—of life, not knowing whether he would live or die. This is Paul's hope lost in hardship.

The end of verse 9 leads to our second point and reads, "But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead." Here, Paul recognized that his burdens and afflictions served a purpose: to draw Him back to the Lord and rely on Him. Paul is restored through God's promise to raise the dead. Take note, God did not restore Paul's hope by fixing all that was wrong. Instead, God reminded Paul of His promises to care for him and of His sovereignty over all things while Paul was still facing afflictions. That's walking by faith, not by sight. Through God's promises, Paul's hope was restored.

This passage sparked my interest in the topic of

identity. It also deeply convicted me. So often, I have put my identity in worldly things and therefore have not relied on the Lord. I've put my identity in my academics, extracurriculars, hobbies, and friendships. And each time I did, I faced a burden while my identity was not in Christ. I was crushed; I buckled. I will never be strong enough on my own to face worldly struggles and burdens. The good news is that the Lord restores my hope through his promises, which are found in his Word. The importance of placing my identity in Christ is so evident.

The theme verses from FLY are packed with those promises: "And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' And he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son'" (Revelation 21:5-7). Verse 5 tells us that restoration is a process; note the present continuous tense, "making." The Lord is continually working in us, restoring us through his Word and his promises. For even when we are faithless, God is faithful.

Pehrson, a 2023 high school graduate, is a member of United Lutheran, Laurel, Neb.

HOPE

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PURPOSE

By Caleb Cox

I recently attended the FLY Convention in Estes Park, Colo., and spent a week hearing and learning about Christ's active restoration in our

lives. One specific session that stood out to me was on Thursday night with Pastor Adam Osier. He spoke on how our purpose in this life has been restored through Christ, and how that relates to good works in everyday life.

As I have grown and matured as a Christian, my understanding of good works has also naturally shifted and grown through time. However, my current grasp on good works in the life of a Christian is summed up between two verses, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9), and, "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself" (James 2:17).

At first glance, these two Scriptures confuse me. I would find myself asking, "If faith without works is dead, then how can salvation be gained by grace through faith and not be a result of works?" I have since learned that good works are a product of a living faith and Christ-centered life. The understanding of this concept then consistently led me to the same question, "Do I perform good works that exemplify a living faith in my life?" It was at this point that Pastor Osier's Thursday night session took place, reminding

me that a Christian's good works are not for the benefit of the one who performs them. Rather, good works are meant to benefit those who receive the work, and for the glory of the Lord.

Some of the main points Pastor Osier made throughout his session defined what good works are. I hadn't realized it, but I had held a rather warped understanding of good works. What fascinated me the most over the course of the entire lesson was that good works are a reflection of God in us. It turned out to be such a perfect explanation for why good works are a byproduct of our faith. After all, how could I possibly reflect God to others if He didn't hold a presence inside me first? Pastor Osier then continued to explain how good works aren't always incredible and grand events. He clarified that good works are often as simple as obeying your parents or showing up to work to serve others their breakfast. As I continued to listen, I realized that I had been over complicating my faith just as many had done before me.

At the FLY Convention, I learned and was reminded of many things. I am encouraged to look back and see how my spiritual maturity has grown as the years have passed. I am also enlightened as the purpose of good works was restored to me after I had trivialized them. But most importantly, I am reminded of the beauty and simplicity that waits for us through God's free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ and His sacrifice.

Cox, a 2023 high school graduate, is a member of Ruthfred Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa.





RESTORED

YOUNG LIVES

By Pastor Eric Johnson

There is an overwhelming feeling simply being up in the mountains of beautiful Colorado. But even so, it does not compare to walking into a room with 1,700 energetic students and staff, singing and worshiping our God. Even after a fatiguing drive to Estes Park, one is filled with excitement when surrounded by students with like-minded desires for a week of worship, godly learning, and incredible community.

It has been four years since the last FLY Convention, so it could be argued that the anticipation for this event was higher than ever before. My students talked about the trip regularly and kept asking me for details about FLY and the YMCA camp, even if I had already told them before. Due to their great expectancy, there was a real enthusiasm in our fundraising events, from as early as last October's fall festival coffee and food sale to our February Super Bowl pizza party, when the students made pizzas and put on their own wholesome half-time show. There was no need to coerce the students—they were eager to serve in anticipation for the trip to FLY.

And the event did not disappoint. Each day was filled with great worship and powerful speakers focused on the theme, “Restored.” At every session we were challenged to seek God’s purpose for our lives and be renewed by his indwelling Spirit.

Perhaps most surprising of the key speakers was a man who had previously lived the life of a homosexual and drug dealer, who served time in prison. All who listened were struck by Dr. Christopher Yuan’s powerful testimony of transformation. He spoke of the powerful prayers of his parents, which led him to faith in Christ while he was still in prison, changing the direction of his life. When he was released, he immediately enrolled at Moody Bible Institute and earned a Master’s in Biblical Exegesis and a Doctor of Ministry. He has become a national speaker, teaching the biblical principles of godly sexuality and holy living. He did not mince words as he spoke of the power of God to work in people who choose to follow Scripture’s teachings, especially when people find their identity in Christ and in nothing else.

Dr. Walt Mueller spoke to us about the incredible but sometimes hidden dangers of social media and the negative effects it can have on even the most well-intentioned user. He challenged students to focus on their identity in Christ

and not in our past hurts and traumas, and certainly not on an identity formed around what social media falsely claims to offer us. Dr. Mueller also spoke on the deceiving claims that the thought of suicide might offer, and how to see our lives as a gift from God.

After the main morning sessions that included a time of worship and Bible study, the students were able to choose from numerous elective classes to attend on key topics such as truth, joy, how to have conversations with non-believers, leadership, forgiveness, and many more.

In the afternoons, students had their choice of various activities, such as volleyball, basketball, mini golf, and hiking the beautiful mountain trails. Because it rained almost every day, students either enjoyed activities in the rain or joined activities offered indoors. These moments, combined with the long lines for meals, actually created some of the most memorable times at FLY, as students were forced to socialize and join into the fellowship that spending a week with like-minded believers offered. Though many of these teens live on opposite sides of the country, they found that conversations with new friends came easily and naturally, emphasizing that we are one family—one body in Christ Jesus. Even the late-hour sessions with musician Ben Fuller, illusionist Bryan Drake, and chalk artist Ben Glenn gave the students more time to soak in the fellowship of the saints.

Numerous students responded each evening to the speakers in a tangible way, electing to stand up and meet with volunteers ready to talk with them about anything the Holy Spirit was working in their hearts.

The drive home was in many ways different than the drive there. There was a greater feeling of fatigue as students strove to sleep as much as they could. But I also got the opportunity to see some of our teens, who usually barely speak in social situations, now laughing with fellow students and leaders and conversing about the various life-changing topics we had been digging into all week. The event left an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of our students that will not end any time soon, and perhaps never will. My students later videoed their thoughts from the week to create a report to our congregation. It was clear that they were grateful for the experience. Hearts and lives have been restored to Christ.

Johnson serves The Source Church, Mesa, Ariz.





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STEWARDING THE MINISTRY

BY SHARON RYKHUS

I had the opportunity to lead an elective on stewardship at this year's FLY Convention. This is not a topic most students think about often. But my hope was that if even a few students came away with the goal of using one's whole life to serve God, it would have been worth the time it took to prepare for the session.

Preparing for and leading this elective reinforced my thoughts on the ministry of the FLY Convention. For the past 12 years I have had the privilege of serving on five FLY Committees. I count it as one of the joys in my life. As I reflected on serving, I recounted the friendships that I have made, the miles I have driven to and from meetings—roughly 30,000—and the time I was able to give to the ministry

of the FLY Convention. It was worth every minute. But more importantly, I thought of the students who attended the conventions, even my own sons. Over the last five conventions, 5,315 students have attended. Praise God! And the total attendees, including staff, adults, and children during the past four conventions is 8,929!

Perhaps you were part of that number. What an impact the FLY Convention is having. More importantly, there is a number that only God knows: the many students who came to a saving faith in Jesus while attending a FLY Convention in the past 12 years. God uses the ministry of the FLY Convention to win, build, equip, and multiply youth for His Kingdom. I am grateful that God allowed me to serve him in this way.

Because of the length of time that I was able to serve, I learned much about what it takes to plan and carry out a FLY Convention. Each convention takes roughly 150 staff and 270 dorm room leaders who are willing to give a week of their time to serve at the YMCA of the Rockies, not to mention the time they spend in preparation before and debriefing after the convention. Each two-year cycle, the budget changes, but it costs roughly \$900,000 to plan and host the FLY Convention. All the time, effort, and

money to hold the FLY Convention is worth it, though, if even one student surrenders to Christ as a result of their time at FLY.

I am reminded that while putting on the FLY Convention is a huge undertaking financially, it is also an opportunity to exercise stewardship. I have watched committees grapple with raising registration rates, strive to control costs, and postpone the convention due to a pandemic. We also faced the possibility of being unable to secure a deposit for the next convention, putting the future of the FLY Convention itself into jeopardy. The budget was that short.

As I leave the FLY Committee, I'm praying that we as an association of congregations would pray for the next committee who will steward the ministry of the FLY Convention, consider serving at FLY, and, if God leads, pray about gifting financially to the ministry of the FLY Convention. What are you called to do to support the FLY Convention ministry?

Rykhus, who served as the first vice president of the 2023 FLY Committee, is a member of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.

FLS hosts Summer Institute



The Free Lutheran Seminary hosted 51 students at the Summer Institute of Theology Aug. 7-11 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. Featured classes were taught by Dr. Martin Horn (center), Dr. Jonathan Strand (right, second from top), Pastor Jim Johnson (bottom right), and Dr. Jason Gudim (right). Teaching one-day seminars were Pastor Micah Hjermstad (below left), Dr. James Molstre, and Dr. Wade Mobley.





W

hat a joy it is to be back in the United States. Our family left Uganda in May and we are in

the midst of our first year-long furlough.

It is exciting to hear all the talk about church planting in the AFLC. Church planting is a high priority not only in World Missions but also in Home Missions, whose logo is of a young church being born out of a parent congregation. What a powerful force in the Kingdom of God is a living congregation whose disciples teach other to be disciples of Jesus.

We have spent much time in prayer, study, contemplation, and conversation about church planting since World Missions reassigned us to plant churches when we moved to the village of Nabukosi in 2016. We asked ourselves, “If a church is a gathering of disciples, then how do you make a disciple?” Jesus’ answer to that question comes alongside his command to make disciples: baptize them and teach them.

Following this example, we started a small discipleship group. Together we studied a new story from the Word each week and then encouraged our members to go and share that

LESSONS IN CHURCH PLANTING

BY PASTOR NATE JORE

story with others, beginning with their families. With time, the members and their families began gathering together regularly to study the Word, pray, worship, and fellowship. This was the first church plant in Nabukosi.

One of our goals in church planting is reproducibility. We want those whom we are discipling to be able to do what we do: to go and make disciples. This was a priority for Jesus. When he sent out the 72 disciples in Luke 10, he told them to preach that “the kingdom of God has come near you” (vs. 9). This was a message Jesus preached (Matthew 4:17), and now his disciples were imitating him. Perhaps they shared some of the “kingdom of God” parables that they had heard from him. They were commanded to heal the sick, and they also cast out demons as they had seen Jesus do on many occasions.

Paul’s commission of Timothy emphasizes this reproducibility: “The things you have heard me say ... entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others” (II Timothy 2:2).

So, what does church planting look like in America? From what I have gleaned, the ingredients in the current model are an ordained pastor to lead, some core families/individuals, a place to gather, and the cash to salary the

pastor and pay rent for as long as it takes to get up and running. This is, of course, not a wrong model, but is it the best model? And is it easily reproducible?

One challenge that I see in this model is personnel. We are already in short supply of pastors. If we plant 20 congregations next year, won’t that leave behind 20 churches that have released their pastors to the new church plants? Is there another way? What is the role of the lay people? What if we equipped our laity with a new Bible story each week that they could go and share with others? What if church leaders were devoted to raising up and equipping new leaders through mentorship examples like Jesus and Paul? What if we started gathering in homes, as they did in Acts, instead of waiting on buildings to be funded and built? These are just a few questions to consider and to pray through as we vision together and continue our task of making disciples. May God’s kingdom continue to grow!

Jore is an AFLC missionary sent to Nabukosi, Uganda. He is currently on furlough with his family. Pictured is Rob (in red, foreground), a Nabukosi disciple, teaching the Bible story for the week.

Congregations celebrate anniversaries with events

- Members of Immanuel Free Lutheran, Centerville, S.D., planned to celebrate the congregation's 125th anniversary on Aug. 20. The event included the ordination of Lay Pastor Mark Ostrem as this is his home congregation. Pastor Gary Jorgenson, AFLC vice president, officiated. Ostrem serves Trondhjem Free Lutheran, Volin, S.D. Immanuel Free Lutheran is served by Pastor Jarrod Hylden.

- Members of Freedom Lutheran, Ottawa, Ill., celebrated the congregation's 175th anniversary Aug. 24-27 with a series of special services with Pastor Micah Hjermsstad, AFLC president, speaking on the historic solas of the Reformation. The congregation is served by Pastor Dana Coyle.

- 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 with Pastor Micah Hjermsstad, AFLC president, speaking. A noon dinner will be offered, followed by an afternoon program to mark the anniversary. The congregation will also dedicate a new fellowship hall. Buffalo Lake Lutheran was established in 1897. The congregation is served by Lay Pastor Paul Kosel.

- Members of United Free Lutheran, Greenbush, Minn., will celebrate the congregation's 50th anniversary during their annual special meetings Oct. 21-23. Pastor Jason Holt, AFLC presidential ministry associate, will be the featured speaker. United Free Lutheran was formed in 1973 with the merger of Bethania Lutheran (est. 1896), Pauli Lutheran (est. 1902), and Zion Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran (est. 1901). The congregation is served by Pastor David Niemela.

- Members of Zion Free Lutheran, Wadena, Minn., will celebrate the congregation's 50th anniversary on Nov. 19. Pastor Jason Holt will represent the AFLC president's office. The congregation is served by Pastor Todd Klemme.

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@afcl.org. Or, visit our website at afcl.org/lutheran-ambassador, where you can find a link to give online.



Leader's Training Program launches

In conjunction with the AFLC President's Office, members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee began the inaugural year of the Leaders' Training Program (LTP) in August. In this first year of the multi-year program, the President's Office has started to work with licensed lay pastors and other lay leaders to refine program details so that it is accessible and helpful to those participants, as well as the congregations they serve. Spearheading the program is Dr. Jason Holt, AFLC presidential ministry associate.

The AFLC has always placed a high value on lay activity, and its members embrace a polity that emphasizes lay people in leadership. We also believe that the congregation has the authority to call a layman into the pastoral office if the Lord so leads. When that happens, we rejoice with the congregation and the called layman, and we affirm the Apostle Paul's call to "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). Part of the role of members of the Coordinating Committee and the President's Office is to encourage and support AFLC congregations, and so it is our desire to provide training and equipping opportunities for lay pastors who are called to "shepherd the flock" (I Peter 5:2) and "rightly handle the Word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15).

The LTP is uniquely designed to support both licensed lay pastors as well as other lay leaders. Those interested in licensure have historically had certain requirements to meet in order to achieve and maintain that status. Those requirements are built into the LTP schedule, which will help to clarify expectations and keep a level of accountability for those pursuing licensure while also being mindful of the reality that most or all these men are working in other vocations.

For other individuals not interested in licensure, the LTP provides a taste of training. They are welcome to participate in as much of the program as they are interested in or able to do. The program offers in-person training settings such as the Summer Institute of Theology (SIT) and remote sessions through recorded content and other materials. The program's design invites interested lay leaders to join at any time and take advantage of these equipping opportunities as they are able.

"Our valuable history of lay pastors as an Association translates to encouraging them in their vital role through this unified effort," explained Holt. "We rely on the Word of God and the Spirit of God in our congregations. By directly offering biblical training to lay leaders as a national fellowship, we pray by the power of Christ that this will have an impact of strengthening our spiritual movement as an AFLC."

For more information, please contact the Office of the President by phone (773-545-5631) or email Holt at jasonholt@afcl.org.

—By Dr. Jason Holt, presidential ministry associate,
and Pastor Micah Hjermsstad, president

WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION

INTRODUCING BOARD MEMBERS

Margie Lee, treasurer

I am completing my first term as treasurer for the national WMF and I am looking forward to starting a second three-year term. I enjoy being on the board with such faithful women who are willing to serve our WMF ladies in whatever way they can. It is a joy when we gather online for our board meetings and an even greater blessing when we get together for WMF Day, Annual Conference, and for all boards every fall.



I have been amazed at the faithful giving from our WMF groups throughout the AFLC as they generously support our four projects: World Missions, Home Missions, WMF General Fund, and Christian education. I often receive Bible verses and notes of encouragement along with offerings,

which are an inspiration.

My husband, Kevin, and I are proud grandparents to five granddaughters and one grandson. They range in age from 12 years to 1 year old. They bring us much joy. We recently moved one mile away from our home that we have lived in for more than 40 years so that we have fewer steps to deal with. I would list my hobbies, but the most recent activities have been packing and unpacking! I continue to serve as treasurer at Prince of Peace Lutheran in Beulah, N.D. I am also the coffee lady on Sunday morning, and both jobs seem to be equally appreciated.

We recently were at a district family camp with five of our grandchildren. I think there were around 56 adults and 58 children, so it was great to see families enjoying fellowship and God's Word in a camp setting! Our Bible study was on Ecclesiastes, which I haven't studied much, so it was good to have 12 teaching/preaching sessions to try and gain some wisdom. I especially appreciated this verse, "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, ESV).

Liz McCarlson, second vice president

I was born and raised in Webster, S.D. I was baptized as an infant and cannot remember a time I did not trust in Jesus as my Savior. There have been times when I doubted my salvation or questioned doctrinal truths, but the Lord has always been faithful, never leaving nor forsaking me. He continually uses his Word and his people to teach me—correcting me with his law and bringing me comfort and assurance in the promises of his gospel. I know my eternity with the Lord is certain, so I have the freedom to love and serve my neighbors according to God's will.



I attended the Free Lutheran Bible College (FLBC, formerly AFLBS) from 2001-2003, after which I received a bachelor's degree in K-12 music education. In 2009, I moved back onto the AFLC campus in Plymouth, Minn., to serve as a dorm assistant at FLBC for one year, after which I transitioned to women's resident head and remained in that position until 2017. I am currently employed at the AFLC administrative offices as receptionist, administrative assistant, and subscription manager for *The Lutheran Ambassador*. I am also a member at Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis, where I serve as Christian education director, deaconess, and president of our local WMF.

I look forward to continuing to serve on the national WMF Board. Since I was first elected in 2020, I have learned a great deal about the WMF and have loved meeting with AFLC women's groups to share about our ministry. It is my desire that all women of the AFLC would have regular opportunities to meet together for fellowship around God's Word and to pray for each other and our AFLC ministries—primarily in their local congregations, but also at district and national events.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Lay Pastor Jeremy Larson has been hired as the director of discipleship at the Free Lutheran Bible College, Plymouth, Minn. Larson will begin his first year at the Free Lutheran Seminary this fall.

Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee removed **Vision of Glory Lutheran**, Plymouth, Minn., from the congregational roster at the congregation's request.

Pastor Gary Jorgenson, Ramsey, Minn., has accepted an interim call to serve Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.

Pastor Joel Rolf, Andover, Minn., has resigned from Minnewaska Lutheran, Starbuck, Minn. He will serve the congregation through September and will be available for pulpit fill as time allows.

An installation for **Joe Frech**, a 2023 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, was planned for Aug. 27 at St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church of Schwer, Milford, Ill., with Pastor George Winston, Heath, Ohio, officiating. Frech accepted a call to serve the congregation this spring.

Pastor Joe Larson, a 2023 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, will be installed Oct. 1 as the associate pastor at Christ the King Free Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn. Pastor Kirk Thorson, who is the South Dakota District president, will officiate.

Correction: Pastor David Johnson accepted a call to serve Living Faith Lutheran, Larimore, N.D. He previously served Living Faith Lutheran, Boyertown, Pa. The information was incorrect in the August issue.



Four siblings baptized

Pastor Curt Emerson had the privilege of baptizing the four children of Kyle and Amanda Kirk on July 16 at St. John's Free Lutheran, Newark, Ohio. This was a first time Pastor Emerson has baptized four children at one time in one family. It was a wonderful day of experiencing the grace and the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ through baptism and welcoming them into the family of God. (Submitted photo/story)

Pastor's Conference, All Boards scheduled for October

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.

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. Pastor Micah Hjermstad, AFLC president, will speak at the opening service on Oct. 3. Sessions held on the morning of Oct. 4 include "Stewards of God's Word" by Dr. Jerry Moan and "Stewards of Sheep" by Pastor Terry Olson and Pastor Jon Langness. Electives offered include a tutorial on using the ATLA (American Theological Library Association) database in pastoral ministry by Pastor Andrew Kneeland, a session on retirement benefits by Timothy Fugleberg, and "Clergy Tax 101" by Bob Overmoe. Two morning sessions on Oct. 5 include "Stewards of Time" by Pastor James R. Johnson, and "Stewards of Resources" by Pastor Tonnes Pollestad.



A schedule of events and link to registration through the ARC are available on the AFLC website at aflc.org/pastorsconference. Registration closes Sept. 25.

JULY MEMORIALS

Bible College

Ferne Liebsch
Miles Mondt
Ruth Claus
Arley Hartsoch
Fred Adrian

Home Missions

Pastor Paul Nash
Irene Zillmer
Earl Hanson

Seminary

Vernon Vedvei
Arley Hartsoch

WMF

Donna Skistad
James Prather
Chet Wolla

World Missions

Elise McCarrison

... in honor of

Parish Education

Pastor Dennis
& Dawn O'Neil

Bible College

Pastor Adam Osier

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-July 31, 2023

FUND	REC'D IN JULY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$25,386	\$226,760	\$251,437
Evangelism	7,436	68,259	80,113
Youth Ministries	8,185	85,213	92,788
Parish Education	17,976	85,082	107,899
Seminary	20,387	164,526	160,110
Bible College	51,320	244,863	270,562
Home Missions	17,310	167,467	206,639
World Missions	18,913	219,716	254,379
WM Personal Support	48,565	438,270	439,857
TOTALS	\$48,478	\$1,700,155	1,863,784

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

WATER THAT RESTORES

I have only been to the Grand Canyon a few times, but it is one of my favorite places in the world. It doesn't matter how many pictures you see or how much research you do beforehand, there is no way to prepare yourself for the magnificent sight of the 18-mile-wide canyon. Pictures truly can't do the Grand Canyon justice.



Pastor Andrew
Kneeland

The theme of the Free Lutheran Youth Convention this summer was "Restored," and campers spent a week hearing about the restoration offered by Christ through the gospel.

Be sure to check out the highlights in this issue, but I'm reminded of a time when restoration took on a personal meaning for me.

I was 17 years old the first time I hiked the Grand Canyon. Early one summer morning my dad and I shoved our backpacks full of granola bars, extra clothes, camping supplies, and a small tent. At 4 a.m. we hit the trail.

An opposite experience from most hiking adventures, the first half of the hike was downhill. We navigated the endless switchbacks, stopped a few times to take in the sights, and reached the bottom at about 9 a.m. It was already over 100 degrees, so my dad and I dropped our bags at our designated camping spot, bought two ice-cold lemonades from the shop, and sat in a small creek that ran off from the Colorado River.

The restorative power of that water was remarkable. Our aching limbs were quickly refreshed, and our weary spirits revived.

Our plan was to spend the night at the bottom of the canyon and hike out the next morning, but we realized that a night of poor sleep on uncomfortable mats would mean waking up stiff and sore. The two of us re-packed our backpacks—including

the unused tent and sleeping mats—and energetically started the return hike. But in the heat of the day, we soon realized that we had made a mistake: we didn't pack enough water.

The return trail was shorter and steeper, an elevation gain of 5,000 feet in six miles. We slowly sipped and savored the few water bottles we had filled at the bottom and kept trudging upward. Other hikers kept passing us as our breaks became more and more frequent. Before long it was dark and we were completely out of water. About a mile from the top dad started to stumble and sway as the dehydration became critical.

I had him sit down and somehow managed to jog ahead about a quarter mile to a German couple who could have been the last people on the trail that evening. They gladly gave me a bottle and I brought it back to my dad. We shared that precious water, regained our strength, and made it safely to the top.

That was 14 years ago, and to this day nothing has tasted as good or been as refreshing as that lukewarm water from two helpful German hikers. It restored us.

The Bible has a lot to say about water. Physical water can refresh and revive our physical bodies, but Christ's living water can restore our souls. Jesus stopped by a well in Samaria to teach a woman about this restorative water in John 4:1-26. Jesus said, "If you knew who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water."

This got the woman's attention. She thought Jesus was talking about physical water. She had probably made this trip to

the well every day for years, working hard to get this safe, healthy water. If there was another way, an easier way, she was all ears.

She said, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where do you get that living water?"

Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

My dad and I ran out of physical water that day in the Grand Canyon. But as thirsty as we were and as dire as our situation was, our need of Christ's living water is so much more. Our spiritual thirst has been

Physical water can refresh and revive our physical bodies, but Christ's living water can restore our souls.

quenched by the once-for-all sacrifice of the Lamb of God who freed us from our sins and restores us to life.

Martin Luther wrote: "Through baptism we are restored to a life of hope, or rather to a hope of life."

Christ clothes us with his righteousness through the water of baptism. We receive his promise of forgiveness and salvation and share in his resurrection. Jesus gives restoration.

something to share

KEEPING A RECORD OF GOD'S PROMISES

BY ANDREA CHRISTENSON

I like to keep the notebooks I've filled up from year to year. If you flip through the pages, you'll wonder why I consider them valuable. They aren't journals filled with my adventures, and I don't jot down wise thoughts along the borders—at least, not usually. What these college-ruled, spiral-bound, beat-up pages generally contain are lists.

In my notebooks, these lists serve as a reminder of past years. They show all aspects of life, the good and the bad, the joy-filled and sorrowful. Over on this page is a list of items to remember to pack for a day at Walt Disney World. Two pages later is a list of food needed for a friend's funeral. A list for the vegetables growing in my garden this year, and a list of clothes for growing daughters. There are lists of chores that need doing, gifts that need buying, and letters that need writing. In one of my oldest notebooks is scrawled one of the best lists ever—things to bring to the hospital,

including a car seat and newborn clothes. Turns out, we needed that list twice.

My husband keeps his lists color coded, but I don't possess that level of sophistication. Mine get jotted down using whatever is close at hand—a pen, a pencil, a crayon stub. I love lists.

I think God loves lists, too. After all, the Old Testament is full of lists: lists of rules, lists of families and their roles, lists of what is needed for the tabernacle and then the temple. In Proverbs we find several lists: things that are detestable to the Lord, things that are never satisfied, things that are amazing, and more. Even the account of God's Son coming to earth is preceded by a list of his family members.

There is comfort in the list of promises God gives us.

- I will never leave you.
- I will forgive all your sins.
- I will wash away all your tears.

My favorite list by far is the list God gives us of things that can separate us

from him found in Romans 8:38-39: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

It is a list consisting of nothing. Zip. Zero. Zilch. Nada. There is nothing that can separate us from God. His love always reaches us. His presence is always with us.

Tomorrow, as I tally up the items I need to grab at Walmart, I pray God will remind me of the lists He wrote in his Word on my behalf. When you cross off the final chore on your honey-do list, I pray God will remind you of the null list of things that separate you from his love.

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