

THE 

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LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

CONGREGATIONAL SPOTLIGHTS

FEATURING
MINISTRIES
IN OUR AFLC
CHURCHES





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THE GREAT ADVENTURE

BY PASTOR TIM HERSET

W

hile it was still dark, three friends slowly crawled out of sleeping bags that had been stretched out under the stars in the high desert of Arizona. After lacing boots and throwing packs over shoulders, the friends began their descent into the Grand Canyon led by the light of the Milky Way galaxy. The crunch of each step set the beat for their breaths as they reached each new jaw dropping vista. With the sun rising over their shoulders, the soft morning light illuminated the nooks and crannies which led the way down to the Colorado River.

Every thousand feet of elevation they descended brought the temperature a few degrees higher; the thermometer at the ranch along the river read 116 degrees Fahrenheit. They sat in the creek and cooled their tired legs. Laughter echoed off the canyon walls as they threw bocce balls in the sand. Lost in the moment, they made memories to last a lifetime.

Two months earlier, this adventure had been merely an idea on a piece of paper next to a road atlas. Their anticipation led to expectations that were abundantly exceeded as their conversation about the great adventure was transformed into reality. Fewer and fewer words were uttered until words became useless. The silence seemed to best describe their experience in God's creation. They each knew, deep down in their souls, that their lives would never be the same.

The evening before they started hiking, they had perched on the edge of that great chasm considering the reality of their realities. God's Word guided them to this point. The Holy Spirit quietly whispered to them as they took in the grandeur of God's creation. With the subtle hues

of blue, indigo, violet, and orange leading to the deepest red on the horizon, they experienced a closeness to God that was only possible through Jesus' blood. Trusting in His grace, they set their hearts toward whatever might be next on their sojourn as Jesus' disciples. They were overcome with gratitude, knowing that moments like this were undeserved and could never be earned.

The inevitable climb out of the canyon would become a metaphor for each of their journeys of faith in the following years. With each step forward, the weight on their shoulders multiplied. Marriages began. Children were born. Career paths were carved. Houses were built and bought. Their adventures looked different than expected.

On that hike up and out, there was a point when none of them wanted to take another step. With hands on their hips, yet another water break was needed. But the water bottles had run dry. Then in the distance, there was a faint figure walking toward them. And a voice bouncing down the trail greeted them. An old friend came to walk alongside them, to lighten the load, and to lead the way. He brought hope.

Maybe you've had an adventure that created lasting memories and moments of closeness with God. What do you do with those memories? Where do you see them connect to your current spiritual life? Remembering this life-changing trip reminded me of God's love preceding my response to Him. God showed his love for us by Christ dying for us, while we were *still* sinners (Romans 5:8, emphasis mine).

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

If Christians do not develop their own tools of analysis, then when issues come up that they want to understand, they'll reach over and borrow someone else's tools. ...
"The tools shape the user."

—Nancy Pearcey, *Os Guinness*

Faith means believing what you don't yet see, and the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.

—Augustine

The gospel doesn't tell us to believe, it gives us Christ to believe in.

—Phillip Cary

Precious memories of past springtimes may be cherished in our hearts, but best of all is when they create a living hope that the promise of still another springtime might be fulfilled for our generation.

—Pastor Robert Lee

Church membership is a gift to be treasured.

—Thom Rainer

Spotlights

FEATURING
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I will never forget the picturesque sunset displayed over the Illinois cornfields as we were singing and worshipping God amongst thousands of people. So much unity was felt! It was simply a little taste of heaven. Helmar Palooza drew my family to Helmar Lutheran. Today, we continue to feel the one-of-a-kind experience we felt at Helmar Palooza, but instead of annually, we encounter it weekly with our new church family.

—Amy Benjamin now volunteers as a member of Helmar Lutheran

By Matt Greven



It is September 2021, and the number one song on the Billboard chart for Christian music is “My Jesus” by Anne Wilson. My daughter, Hannah, is a huge fan, and it just so happens that Wilson is going to be one of the featured artists at a new event at our church called Helmar Palooza. We quickly go online to order tickets to the event, which is open to the public. While most people at our church expect a couple hundred people to come, there are already thousands of tickets ordered. Helmar Palooza is going to be bigger than any of us ever imagined.

Helmar Palooza turns out to be different than most attendees would expect, as well. Everything is free: music, parking, and even the food, which includes a pork chop on a stick, brisket burgers, ice cream, and cotton candy. If you arrive early, you can play in a volleyball, basketball, or bean bag tossing tournament. At the end of the night, you can take a picture with your favorite artist. No free-will offering is taken and no one promotes our church. The focus is worshiping and praising Jesus.

The idea for Helmar Palooza started when Marlon Mathre, a life-long member of Helmar Lutheran, Newark, Ill., announced one Sunday morning that he had an idea to hold an outdoor event. He wanted to bring in a few Christian musical acts and have a day of family fun. Everything would be underwritten anonymously. He had no idea how many people might come, but everyone would be encouraged to bring their non-churched friends and neighbors. That Sunday a planning committee was formed.

To host an outreach event like Helmar Palooza, many volunteers are needed. Donations are also needed to cover the costs, but we want the event to be free for a few reasons. First, we want to be a blessing to Christians. Second, we want to have an event that can draw non-church goers to a relaxed, fun atmosphere. Last, we want people to know that even though an event like this does cost money, it's totally free for anyone who would receive it—a visual of grace and salvation.

“Helmar Palooza is special because it is 100 percent volunteer by a relatively small church,” said Angie Niles. “No one has experience in any of it ... it's just everyone pulling their interests and gifts together to create something special for the community.”

Niles noted that other churches in the area do offer music events, but those are large congregations with thousands in attendance. Helmar Lutheran averages 175 people on a Sunday. Of those, 100 people volunteer to put on the event, from sanitation to artist hospitality, and from social media promotion to prayer teams.

“To see so many people work together so smoothly and efficiently, you know it's the Holy Spirit and it is such a unifying thing to experience together,” said Niles.

Since that first event, artists such as Sidewalk Prophets, Colton Dixon, Micah Tyler, and Cain have headlined the event. This year, Helmar Palooza hosted an estimated 4,000 people.

Greven is a member of Helmar Lutheran, Newark, Ill. Submitted photos.

HELMAR PALOOZA





PASSION PLAY

By Tim Berntson

M

ore than a decade ago, in a discussion about how our congregation could better reach the lost around us, I sat with our then pastor, Steve Mundfrom, and we discussed an idea. Our men had for several years presented a Last Supper drama during our Maundy Thursday service. The drama was well received, and I remembered one responsive comment in particular: “It was like they were preaching to my eyes as well as my ears.”

What if we could reach out to the people of our communities by preaching to their eyes as well as their ears? In particular we discussed a Passion play, and *He’s Alive* was born. Since then, we have presented our *He’s Alive* Passion play each year over Easter weekend to 700-800 attendees, many of whom had never heard the gospel story. In many ways our passion play has taken on the feel of the old “special meetings” where people invite their friends and neighbors. We have found that people who are very resistant to coming to church are very open when asked to come to a play.

Our preparations begin each winter as nearly 100 members and friends of Grace Free work together to produce our original musical depicting portions of the earthly ministry of Jesus, the events of Holy Week, his crucifixion, and glorious resurrection. Over the years *He’s Alive* has continued to grow and change with our understanding of dramatic presentations. Currently our production contains 13 musical numbers ranging from solos to choral pieces.

One of the real challenges of sharing the gospel through drama is to find a way to provide commentary on the events people are experiencing. We learned this reality through feedback in our early years. We found that unchurched

people who attended were struck by the drama of the story but didn’t necessarily understand what was happening. To help them we thought about Nehemiah 8:8 where the priests “gave the sense of the reading,” and have since employed a second stage which functions as our narration or our explanation of what they are seeing. Our current narration is founded in Acts 26 where Paul testifies before Agrippa and explains the gospel. The stages alternate as we present and narrate the drama.

Another challenge we discovered is greater biblical ignorance among our audience than we anticipated. To account for this, we now open with an overview of history which includes creation, the fall, and the promise of a Savior. It is a challenge to walk our audience through the origin of mankind, our lost condition, the finished work of Christ, and how that work applies to us. However, this process is strikingly similar to gospel preaching and we continually use that comparison to measure and drive our work.

Looking back, it is easy to see the Lord’s hand in the conversation Pastor Steve and I had more than a decade ago. The Lord has been faithful as we have built a co-laboring team in the work of sharing the gospel. He has also been gracious in allowing us to celebrate the fruit of precious people coming to know their Savior.

If your church would like to explore the use of drama in the work of evangelism, our team would be happy to help you get started.

Berntson, a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Valley City, N.D., wrote the script for the He’s Alive Passion play. Photos by Tasha Glasman. The 2023 presentation is available at gracefree.com, click on “He’s Alive” at the top of the page.

CLASSICAL EDUCATION

By Brad and Sarah Bierle



Walk through Abiding Savior Free Lutheran Church at nearly any time of day and you will find almost every room, nook, and cranny filled with children. Daycare, after school programs, and summer care are all vital ministries of our congregation as we strive to serve our Sioux Falls, S.D., community. Nestled within these busy church walls during the school year is Abiding Savior Academy, which focuses on classically teaching more than 240 students from preschool through 12th grade.

When the leadership of Abiding Savior embraced the idea of starting a preschool more than 20 years ago, they trusted God to grow and expand the vision into a full classical Christian school. Today, the school has more than 30 teachers and support personnel who lead these young lives through a Christ-centered and Bible-based education. The classical model provides students with the unique opportunity to learn and memorize foundational knowledge in the Grammar School (kindergarten through fifth grade); order, understand, and question this knowledge in the School of Logic (grades six through eight); and develop and communicate independent thoughts in a respectful and engaging manner in the School of Rhetoric (grades nine through twelve).

All of this is done while focusing on Christian virtues and godly wisdom. The amazing teachers, staff, and pastors serving Abiding Savior Academy seek to model Christ's character as we support parents who raise children to know and love Jesus Christ. These individuals seek to teach biblical knowledge and emphasize that all true wisdom is from God and found in his Word and his world. This truth encompasses all learning, from math to music, and from literature to logic. A student in first grade may be proficient in reciting Genesis 1:1, but our teachers strive to catch the teachable moment through sharing and reflecting on the majesty and wonder of an awesome and powerful God. A science lesson about mitosis and meiosis provides the unique opportunity to ponder the knitting together of a precious soul in a mothers' womb from Psalm 139:13. Students from the School of Rhetoric may seek to compare and contrast a Marxist idea with a Christian worldview and practice how to clearly articulate the truth of the Bible to those within their circle of influence. Weaving biblical truth throughout the curriculum is a daunting yet exciting opportunity for our teachers, and we continue to grow as we develop this perspective and appreciation in ourselves, as well.

At its core, we trust that our students will not only be able to seek out that which is good, true, and beautiful, but effectively guide others toward these virtues, becoming faithful imitators of and influencers for Christ.

We have been blessed with the opportunity to contribute to this ministry and do not take lightly the awesome responsibility of Christian education. We are thankful for the support and vision of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran as we partner together to minister to the students and families through Abiding Savior Academy.

Dr. Brad Bierle is the principal of the Schools of Logic and Rhetoric, and Sarah Bierle is the principal of the Grammar School at Abiding Savior Academy, Sioux Falls, S.D.





ADULT FOSTER CARE

By Jill Rady



When members of our women's Bible study group reached out at Christmas with gifts for the residents at two adult foster care homes in our community, a connection was formed. They also sent birthday cards to residents, and soon we had an opportunity to offer a group Bible study at one of the homes.

Our greatest joy has been getting to know the residents. It took time to fine-tune our connection as residents are free to choose their activities. Meeting at 10 a.m. was found to be too early in the day, so we now meet every other week in the late afternoon.

Some residents have a background in church attendance and Bible study while others have been introduced to who Jesus really is through the lessons we offer. Using the book *120 Bible Stories* published by Concordia Publishing House, we created an outline to cover one or more lessons each session, allowing the residents to follow along in their own book and with their own Bibles. Those able to read aloud are encouraged to do so. Special treatment was given to Christmas and Easter during the past year. Residents also enjoyed a special Christmas concert in their home led by Stephen and Paige Moan. The home has a piano which allows us to sing together to close our study.

In addition, we take prayer requests and present them to our congregation during prayer time at our Sunday service. The women's Bible study group has also adopted the home for special prayer. The Spirit of God, his Holy Word, and his love is more fully recognized by staff, residents, owners and each of us who come to serve this wonderful group of people.

Rady is a member of Redeemer Free Lutheran in Ontonagon, Mich.

FRIENDSHIP CLUB

By Cris Finstrom



Our church has a unique ministry called Friendship Club. Families from our congregation who have young adults with special needs wanted to provide a regular Christian gathering for their family members and others. Several group homes in the nearby Fargo, N.D./Moorhead, Minn., area bring their clients to these gatherings each Wednesday evening. Some are non-verbal, some are high functioning, and some have behavioral issues.

Our congregation has a very busy Wednesday evening schedule beginning with supper from 5 to 6:30, followed by confirmation classes, kids club, youth group, and various adult Bible studies. Friendship Club meets in the library from 6:45 to 7:45. Each person comes with their staff, some of whom are unchurched, and some from foreign countries. So we are ministering to more than just our special needs friends. If everyone comes, plus their staff and our leaders, we have more than 30 people in our not-so-big room. Praise the Lord!

Our time together is divided into four sections that are led by four Maranatha women: singing, prayer time, Bible memory, and Bible story time. Once a month we have a craft or some other fun activities. During the Thanksgiving season, we asked each one what they were thankful for and wrote thank you notes to the ladies who serve us supper each Wednesday evening. The ladies were touched by their thank you notes.

We sing familiar Sunday school songs with actions and learn new songs from a DVD. Friendship Club provides special music during one of our Lenten services, and our congregation is blessed by their enthusiasm.

Next we go around the room and get prayer requests from each one. We write that request on the white marker board and then we are ready to pray. As each student prays for another's request, that

request is erased from the marker board. Some of the students can pray without any assistance, and some need guidance with the words to say. We try to keep it simple.

This is followed by a short memory verse that is written on the marker board. We say it together and then erase one word at a time and keep repeating it until everyone has a chance to say it, sometimes with help on each word.

The Bible lesson is next. This is a short Bible story followed by questions or sometimes a simple object lesson with a message. We make it relatable to them and understandable. Our goal is to remind them how much Jesus loves them and how he cares for each one of us.

Occasionally, we have a party which includes playing bingo with pictures. Whoever gets five in a row gets a prize. We appreciate the staff as they help identify the items on the bingo cards. We keep playing until each one has gotten at least one prize. They love being able to pick out a prize. Before leaving they are given a small snack.

Every week we strive to make each one feel special and loved. We can tell they like to come from the way they seek out the leaders to give greetings and hugs. Our leaders enjoy it, too. I think our church has been blessed because of this ministry.

One young man from the Friendship Club whose family goes to Maranatha is in the foyer every Sunday and greets everyone as they come in, calling each one by name. We all look forward to his cheerful greeting and chuckle that he remembers more names than we do. Another young man sits with one of the Friendship Club leaders each Sunday morning at worship service. The Friendship Club has given our congregation a clearer sense of the needs of the handicapped.

Finstrom is a member of Maranatha Free Lutheran, Glyndon, Minn.



AIDING FAMILIES IN CRISIS

By Tracy Trussoni



The mission of Safe Families for Children (SFFC) is to keep children safe and families together. SFFC is rooted in faith and fueled by radical hospitality, disruptive generosity, and intentional compassion as we work to build a network of caring and compassionate volunteers to support families facing social isolation.

Our goals are to prevent child abuse and neglect, reduce the number of children entering the child welfare system, and support and stabilize families. The families we serve often face eviction or experience homelessness. They may be hospitalized. Or they may need short-term transportation support, daycare provision, a treatment program, or help fleeing domestic violence.

The entire family who seeks help from SFFC is surrounded by a circle of support within one of our partnering churches that can host their children, encourage parents over a cup of coffee, provide a ride to an appointment, bring a meal, or provide a needed item such as diapers. The help provided is completely voluntary, and the families entering the program do not lose custody of their child(ren) if they are partnered with a host congregation. SFFC La Crosse (Wis.) has had the privilege of serving 73 families and more than 120 children since August of 2020. We have 106 volunteers and are continuously recruiting more. La Crosse is just one of seven of our service areas in Wisconsin. Nationally, there are SFFC in more than 70 cities and internationally in Hong Kong, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Christ is Lord Free Lutheran Church (CIL) and SFFC have partnered for nearly three years. Two families who have been supported by CIL have built beautiful relationships with the congregation's volunteers, which has continued outside of our official referral. One host family hosted a child for 26 days and continues to connect with the mom and child for birthday parties, visits to the park, church attendance, and events at the church like vacation Bible school. Another host family served a mom and her child one day a week for a few hours a day as respite for the parent. When the mom needed surgery, the child was able to stay in the home of this host family while mom recovered. This host family has become surrogate grandparents and has regular visits and phone calls with this child. Both of these children recently attended vacation Bible school at CIL.

Being a part of this work is one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. I get the privilege of having a front row seat to witnessing the power that building relationships has in not only the family that is being served, but also in the volunteers' lives. The giftings that God has given the volunteers become so evident when I see them live out their call to serve others. These relationships are not possible without partnering churches, volunteers, and financial supporters.

If you would like more information about SFFC, to find out if there is a program in your area, or to donate to the work, visit our website at safefamilieswi.org.

Trussoni is the development director for Safe Families for Children, Wisconsin—La Crosse.



By Linda Lein and Pastor Eric Rasmussen



Calvary Free Lutheran in Fergus Falls, Minn., has provided adoption grants to 24 families who have adopted 33 children. Our congregation has given more than \$85,000 in adoption grants, plus more than \$20,000 to other orphan ministries and foster care needs.

When Pastor Eric Rasmussen accepted a call to Calvary in 2008, he and his wife Rachel had two children, Anna and Sam. Sam had been adopted into the Rasmussen home a month before the Rasmussens started. When Sam started to walk, I (Linda Lein), a Calvary member, said to Rachel, “When you are ready to adopt again, please contact me. I’m good at raising money.” Not long after that conversation, Pastor Eric suggested to me that instead of just raising money for their family we start a new adoption ministry. Together with three other Calvary members, they formed the Orphan Ministry Adoption Committee (OMA). They wrote guidelines, created a process for Christian parents to apply for grants, and began fundraising.

The OMA mission statement reads: Since God is the father of the fatherless, and since God sets orphans in families, Calvary Free Lutheran Church desires to be a Christian family that supports orphan ministry and adoption.

- We will seek to provide for the spiritual and physical well-being of local children in need.

- We will seek to support the needs of orphans worldwide through spiritual, physical, and financial means.

- We will seek to support adoptive parents spiritually and financially when they desire to adopt children.

In the early years, the fundraising began with music concerts and adoption testimonies, pint jar coin savings, and church offerings. Seeing the need to expand our fundraising efforts, we added a summer church rummage sale.

In addition to adoption grants, Calvary helps local children in need, pregnant women at Health Resources (our local pregnancy center), and foster care families in Otter Tail County.

The most important part of our OMA Committee is the spiritual aspect. When my wife and I (Eric Rasmussen) first started down the road to adoption, it was a definite call of God. We believe that adoption and orphan ministry is an act of obedience to God and His Word (James 1:27 and Psalm 68:5). Our family is blessed by God’s gift of adoption, and the OMA Committee is a huge reason why our family could afford three adoptions.

Because we value the spiritual aspect, our committee carefully screens the applicants through an interview process. We desire that each child be placed in a home that will offer him or her an opportunity to come to faith in Jesus. Beyond the direct impact of our work and our grant dollars, we have seen hundreds of people walk through our church doors, both literally and figuratively, through this ministry—each one a potential ministry opportunity.

Each adoption brings blessings not only to the family who adopts a child, but to the committee members as they watch how God provides a child with a forever home. If other AFLC churches want more information about this ministry, contact Linda Lein at Linda.F.Lein@gmail.com or Pastor Eric Rasmussen at ramussen64@yahoo.com.

Rasmussen serves Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn., and Lein is a member.

ADOPTION SUPPORT



SHEPHERDING MINISTRY

By Pastor Bryce McMinn



In a 2016 research project titled *Relationships Count: Engaging and Retaining Millennials*, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod found that their church body and Christian congregations in general are failing to faithfully shepherd congregation members who don't regularly gather within the four walls of their buildings. Churches are also neglecting those who are experiencing major life transitions like newlyweds, empty-nesters, new parents, recent graduates, people moving, and those experiencing marriage difficulties or those struggling with addiction. Other transitions include those who have lost a job or are starting a new job, as well as young families, and recently confirmed students. These are all identified in the study as people our congregations fail to faithfully shepherd.

Ruthfred has a reputation for keeping its pastors and interns busy with visitation. But like most Christian congregations, we have many shepherding challenges. Our homebound member list has 80 to 90 people who can't regularly attend services for various reasons—usually due to serious health challenges. They need regular visits and Holy Communion brought to them. Truthfully, it's more than our parish assistant, visitation volunteers, and I can handle.

True to the findings in the *Relationships Count* study, despite our shepherding efforts to our homebound members and those who faithfully gather at Ruthfred, many are unintentionally neglected.

There are also those who have vanished from our

fellowship. In one hallway at Ruthfred are photos of every confirmation class in our congregation's history. Many of those students disappeared shortly after their class photo was taken. They've rarely—or never—returned. In the same hallway is a room where large boxes are stored, each containing smaller boxes of offering envelopes. More than nine months ago we distributed those envelopes into personalized boxes with the name of an individual or family in our congregation. Dozens remain unclaimed. These people once attended Ruthfred but most now rarely or never gather with us.

The list of families with children and youth who are the ideal age for Sunday school and other activities is lengthy. Many people on that list hardly ever gather at church. Many members are currently attending colleges and universities. Have they found faithful congregations to attend near school? Do they attend? How are they doing spiritually? We honestly don't know.

While it's easy for Christians to wag our fingers at people who struggle to regularly gather with God's people, we must resist that urge. God's Word does instruct us to meet regularly (Hebrews 10:24-25). But we must remember Christ's teaching in the parable of the Sheep and Goats (Matthew 25:31-40). God's people, His sheep, struggle with many hard things. He lovingly entrusts his people into our care. Yes, some of His sheep are prone to wander. Nevertheless, he's called us to faithfully shepherd them through whatever difficulties they wander (Luke 15:4-7).

Pray for the congregation at Ruthfred as our elders and I launch a eucharistic lay ministry so others can help take Holy Communion to more people in need. Our recently launched Shepherding Committee is working with our staff to more faithfully minister to people we've traditionally failed to shepherd. There's much to do. It's more than we can handle. But with God, all things are possible. We want to shepherd His people well. We don't have all the answers, nor do we always know what to do or say. We often fail. But by God's grace, we seek to emulate our Good Shepherd. May God help us, and you. Amen.

McMinn serves Ruthfred Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa. The Relationships Count research project can be found on the Concordia Publishing House website (CHP.org).





PASSING ON THE FAITH

By Pam Twedt



We have had a growing interest in intentional discipleship at St. Paul's in Fargo. Over the last year I am aware of four groups of three to four people meeting weekly to grow toward greater maturity in Christ.

The "recipe" for discipleship groups isn't new or complicated. If you are interested in starting a discipleship group, I would encourage you to pray that God would lead you to two to three other people who would be interested in joining you. In my experience, a group of three seems to be ideal.

Our groups have formed in different ways, but be willing to reach out and contact those who you think might be a good fit. Frankly, I was surprised at how readily the two members of my group responded when I asked them to be involved. You may be surprised, too! Make sure to be upfront with those you contact that there will be commitment involved. Plan to meet regularly (attempt to meet weekly) for a minimum of one year and a maximum of two years. These groups are meant to train people to in turn disciple others. Food isn't a necessity, but it seems to be a good addition. My group rotates between homes, and we take turns providing supper for the group. If you are leading a college-age group, consider providing a meal for them regularly.

There are lots of possible resources available for your study, but one that has been used several times by those at St. Paul's is Greg Ogden's book *Discipleship Essentials*. It is designed especially for groups such as this and the format is very usable.

A great thing about these discipleship groups of three or four is that it works for churches of any size. All you need to get started is a leader and two or three other interested and committed people. My experience leading a group has been a big blessing in my life. We haven't done this perfectly at our church, but if you have any questions, feel free to contact me at St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D., and I would love to help in any way I can.

Twedt is a member of St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D., where she is employed as a parish worker. For more information on the discipleship program, you can reach her by email at parishworker@stpaulsfreelutheran.org.

MULTIPLYING CONGREGATIONS

By Dana Hagen



There are many means to evangelism, but the most effective way is planting new congregations. Is this true? If so, then why is this not a priority of every congregation?

When I was a child attending church and Sunday school in Lemmon, S.D., I instinctively assumed that our church had always been there—or at least since the time of creation itself. Little did I appreciate that a small group of faithful and courageous people started that church from nothing. To my surprise I recently discovered that my father had pushed many wheelbarrows of cement as part of its construction. The very church you are now attending was originally a church plant, without exception. Thank God for those who have gone before us to plant churches!

Practically speaking, the massive population increase in America could easily fill every pew of every church in America and there would still be a need for many more congregations. However, our desire for planting churches should not be reactionary. It should be centered on the profound theological principals of the gospel and the congregation.

The life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ is to be joyously spread to the lost, not hoarded. Jesus himself told his followers, “Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

The late Clint Clifton, a church planting missionary, wrote, “Church planting is important because the church is important.” Unless we understand the design, purpose, and beauty of the congregation, we won’t be compelled to see why more congregations are necessary. The congregation is where God’s Kingdom is manifested and experienced on earth. We desperately need more, not less, of God’s Kingdom on earth.

Church plants are uniquely and profoundly able to weave the gospel and the congregation together to reach the lost in ways not attainable by existing churches. But how?

Abiding Savior Free Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls, S.D., is a good example. A little more than 30 years ago, Abiding Savior was a small church plant, and by God’s grace they have planted churches across town (Living Word Free Lutheran), across the state (Shiloh Church in Black Hawk), and across the country (Trinity Lutheran, San Antonio, Texas). Understandably, not all churches are equipped to plant a new church independently, but they are still called. Forming co-ops of churches working in tandem with AFLC Home Missions to support church planters and new church plants is a great option.

The ministry of your AFLC Home Missions is to support and equip congregations, new gatherings, and church planters for the planting of free, living, and Lutheran congregations. We have developed clear processes for new gatherings and pastors to provide strategies, training, and care. In addition, we are coming alongside individuals and congregations to send and support planting pastors.

I would encourage you to visit aflchomemissions.org to learn more. This newly updated website provides many additional resources about the importance of church plants and the process.

Hagen, who is the chairman of the Home Missions Board of Directors, is a member of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.



PASSIONATE LEADERS

By Jason Brehmer



The idea of multiplication goes much deeper than simply giving someone the knowledge of how to duplicate something. If this idea worked, then teaching someone to sew would make them want to sew simply by taking a class. People learning to sew might know what to do, but that does not mean the passion to sew was created in them. Likewise, churches are good at teaching Scripture, but that does not necessarily mean that by sitting in a pew a person will be instilled with a passion to live out biblical principles.

What makes someone want to live a Christian lifestyle and what does that look like? Simply being a good person is not enough. And some surveys show very little, if any, difference between the behavior of Christians and non-Christians. These are all questions that need to be addressed for someone to embrace what God is asking of us. I believe the reason we struggle to multiply leaders is the same reason the numbers of believers in God in America is shrinking.

We struggle to create passion for Christianity in people, both nonbelievers and believers alike. To instill passion, we first must believe it ourselves. It is very hard to sell something we don't practice. If someone said, "I will give you \$10,000 to walk across the street," and upon doing this you received the money, how many people would you tell and how excited would that make you feel?

When my wife and I attended a FamilyLife Weekend

to Remember marriage retreat, we learned that if you loved your spouse selflessly 100 percent of your time together, it would be very hard for him or her not to love you back. You want to create passion? Be intentional, be excited, and live it out. Similarly, if we want to motivate others, we must think and act differently than the rest of the world. This may seem foreign to a lot of people, but the more you practice passionately living for Christ, the more comfortable you will be. Just like in marriage relationships, some days you have to choose to love your spouse. As believers in God's Word, we are given practices to live by. Sometimes love for God starts by just intentionally obeying him.

At Hosanna, we have been praying in small groups, which has brought us closer together and motivated us to live passionately for Christ. We have heard public testimonies both of struggles and victories in our congregation. As leaders, we have intentionally starting asking people in our congregation to share about a subject they are passionate about. At first, people may not want to. But we ask, ask, ask. Our leaders are going to extensive lengths to share the love of God with others, in their homes, and through their lives. The church hears about their struggles, their successes, and their passion to pass it on is revealed.

Brehmer is a deacon at Hosanna Free Lutheran, St. James, Minn.



HOPE IN JESUS



By Linda Fugleberg



God's heart is for people, and he has given his children that same heart. Psalm 34:18 expresses his care and compassion: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." Many, both within and outside of the church, are brokenhearted and crushed with grief over the death of a loved one. How can we, in a Christ-centered way, minister God's heart to those who grieve?

Often Christian people in our churches provide wonderful support for grieving people at the time of their loss, and perhaps for a time beyond. There are meals, cards, phone calls, visits, etc. at first, but then they stop, even abruptly, as friends who care still must get on with their busy lives. Often, they don't know what more to do. But for the bereaved, the grief continues.

Sometimes the hardest seasons of grief are not in the days and weeks that follow a death, but in the months after—even in the years. How can we help for the longer term? How can we help them know they have permission to grieve? How can they be encouraged by the hope that is found in Jesus? How can they be helped to walk through their grief in a healthy way and not become stuck in it? How can we gently help those who have been told by others, or by themselves, that they just need to "get over it." And how can we extend this help to those outside the church walls, who have no support system and no one pointing them to Jesus, the God of all comfort and the healer of our souls?

GriefShare is a resource that we have found helpful in

ministering to these needs. This is now the third year our church, St. Paul's Free Lutheran in Fargo, N.D., has hosted this program for our congregation and surrounding community. My husband and I are privileged to serve as facilitators, and we are grateful for all who have come. Some have come from

our own congregation, but the greater numbers have come from our community. Some have attended the program cycle more than once. Attendees have ranged from those who love the Lord, to those who do not have an active spiritual life and are not followers of Christ. Their losses have ranged from natural death to murder and to suicide. Their needs would all be overwhelming were it not for the resources that GriefShare offers.

GriefShare is very user-friendly. It provides everything laypeople need to start and host a 13-week support group. The videos and curriculum feature respected Christian counselors and pastors who provide biblically sound advice and guidance for navigating grief, and real-life stories of people who have experienced losses. It points people to Jesus as our comfort and comforter in grief, and, most importantly, to Jesus as our Savior from sin and the way to eternal life.

We are blessed to have a part in helping the hurting. If you or your church are seeking a way of ministering to those who grieve, you may wish to take a look at griefshare.org.

Fugleberg, who facilitates a GriefShare group, is a member at St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D.



Alaska's last frontier produces images of snow-covered mountains, bears, salmon, tundra, and a vast and beautiful wilderness. The AFLC mission work in Alaska starts where the Naknek River empties into Bristol Bay. There sits an old fishing village, now home to several canneries. The fishing industry swells the small village's population from around 500 in the winter to 15,000 souls every summer. They come from around the world. It's a mission field whose fruits are shared with families both locally and in the many states and countries represented by the seasonal workers.

My daughter, Megan, and I traveled to Naknek in the summer of 2022. We were amazed with the love that was shown to us there and we left with a desire to show the love of Jesus with others through the Net coffee shop, through vacation Bible school, preaching, and helping with tasks.

The majesty of the Alaska Mission is not about the bay, the roads, or even the untamed wilderness. It is God's people. There are people in Alaska who love Jesus and people who need to hear about Jesus. Everyone needs to be reminded of Jesus' love for them.

AN OPEN DOOR FOR THE GOSPEL

BY PASTOR RON SMITH

Naknek and the remote villages served by the Alaska Mission have perceived limitations for sharing the gospel. For instance, it seems impossible to share Jesus when the villages are spread afar with a lack of roads and technology. Also, this mission field has different cultures and languages. Satan tries to make these challenges to discipleship seem impossible. But God's power is not limited. Psalm 147:5 says, "Great is our Lord, and abundant in power." The power of the gospel is not limited by roads, cultures, or languages.

The Alaska Mission has been blessed over the years with two missionary families who have recently stepped down from the work: Pastor Jeff and Jane Swanson and Pastor Jeremy and Lacey Crowell. They served Hilltop Christian Fellowship and the remote villages through FLAPS, impacting many people by preaching the truth of God's Word and serving these communities. Home Missions thanks them for their years of work and continues to pray for the work God has planned for these two families.

Men, would you prayerfully consider what the Lord is laying on your heart for Naknek? Would you consider committing two years or maybe more to the Lord to advance the work of the Alaska Mission? So many have already given their time and talents. The options for service are as vast as the Lord's creation.

Will you get out of your comfort zone, trust

Jesus, and consider being the vessel by which God blesses others—and you? The Alaska Mission's call committee would love to visit with you as either a lay person or an ordained pastor. Pray about the Lord's leading in your heart. To learn more about the ministry opportunities, contact Pastor Jeff Swanson (785-294-8923).

Please pray for:

- Josh Fish and for FLAPS as they continue the aviation work.
- Heather Hansen as she continues work with the kids and families.
- Pastor Bob and Margaret Lee with their continued work with KAKN Radio.
- The Alaska Mission call committee as they search for a pastor missionary for Naknek.
- The people served by the Alaska Mission, that they may be drawn to the light of Christ.
- Pastor Andy Coyle and AFLC Home Missions, that they may be prepared for an awakening of God's people and for the resources for our AFLC family to be mutually encouraged by each other's faith in this endeavor.

Smith, who serves Grace Free Lutheran, Bruce, S.D., is a member of the Home Missions Corporation.



Ambassador
PUBLICATIONS

Resources

These titles and others are available from Ambassador Publications, the Parish Education ministry of the AFLC. To order or to search for additional publications, contact them at:

Website:

ambassadorpublications.org

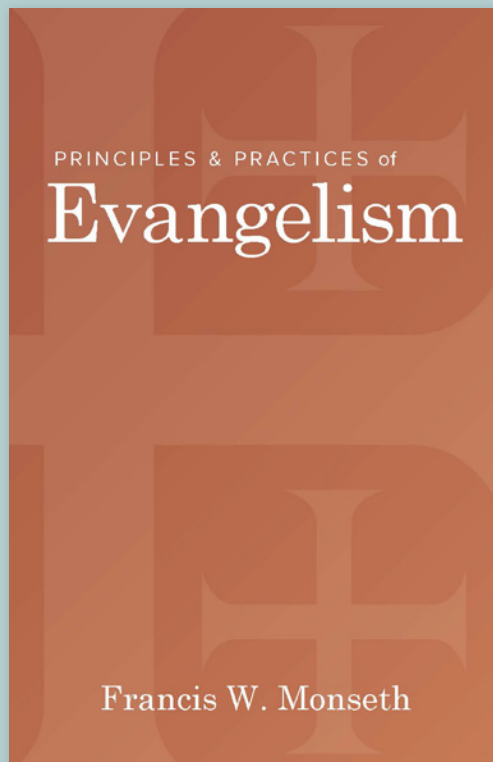
Email:

parished@aflc.org

Phone:

763.412.2010

New resources now available



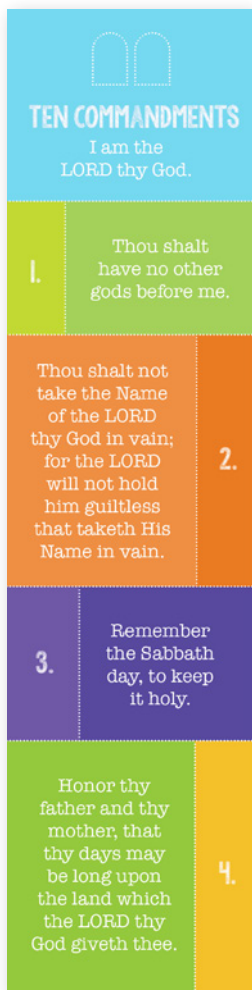
How can we engage the vital mission of evangelism? Written by Dr. Francis W. Monseth, this 40-page booklet encourages active participation, focusing on three themes: Our Heritage of Evangelism, Our Theology of Evangelism, and Our Ministry of Evangelism. \$5 each



The world is longing for hope. But only hope based in God's Word is sure and certain. First Peter was written to remind us of this truth and to center our hope in Christ. Then no matter what trials we may face, hope will keep us encouraged. This Bible study includes 13 lessons with study notes. \$8 each

Ten Commandments bookmark available

\$1/each or \$20 for 25



Third quarter of level two curriculum published



Love your neighbor! That's the theme of the last 12 lessons in this 36-lesson series for children on God's gift of the Ten Commandments. Children are not too young to love and serve God by loving and serving their neighbors. These colorful Bible

lessons with original illustrations and creative activities help children understand and apply God's truth. Ideal for Sunday school, kids' club, or home school Bible teaching.

Available for \$8 each.

Financial planners ask questions about how much risk one is willing to take in order to grow their investments. In spiritual terms, we are confronted with similar questions. Should I play it safe or step out into risky situations? If you have entrusted your life into God's keeping, your investments are protected for eternity, but there are sure to be some ups and downs along the path of invested living. Decisions concerning just about everything in our lives make all the difference in the outcomes.

"Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee" is a risky hymn to sing and even riskier to live out. How about deciding to follow Jesus or responding to His call to missions? Or marrying a man who was called to spend his life in ministry, raising four children intentionally to serve the Lord? And then opening our home, planning camps and ministry outreach, being available for people, deciding to believe, to love, to smile, to sing, to persevere? Let's consider the outcomes: a confident faith in God, four churches established in Brazil, a Bible camp ministry that has touched countless lives, our next generations (children and grandchildren) serving Jesus, and many people brought to faith and encouraged to invest their lives in kingdom living. This is missional living.

Adriana is a vibrant

TAKING RISKS IN KINGDOM WORK

BY BECKY ABEL

Christian who did not come from an evangelical home but met Jesus in her late 20s and married one of our "adopted sons" who had lived with us for many years. Adriana faced many challenges in deciding to dedicate her life to Christ and live for him faithfully in the midst of situations where many others would have given up. Early this year she discovered life-threatening infections in her body and was faced with a very difficult decision. She could either keep treating the infections with high doses of antibiotics and debilitate her body to the point of organ failure, or she could opt to undergo a surgery to remove her vocal cords and depend on a tracheotomy and nasal feeding. In faith, Adriana came to her church family and asked God for a miracle. As a church we laid hands on her, anointed her with oil, and prayed for God to intervene. We prayed together all week at camp, calling out to Jesus



Adriana

to touch her body. Her exams in August confirmed the miraculous touch of the healer!

How about you? What kinds of risks are you willing to take as you invest in kingdom growth? Our faith is revealed in the decisions of everyday living: making a phone call to encourage and pray with someone, witnessing to someone who is not yet a Christian, opening our homes to host and bless people, praying for people near and far, or writing a check to help kingdom work happen in other places.

Jesus invites us into missional living in Mark 8:34, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." It's worth taking the risk.

Abel is an AFLC missionary serving in Curitiba, Brazil, with her husband, Pastor Paul Abel.

Home Missions launches podcast

AFLC Home Missions launched a podcast in September. Titled *The Lutheran Church Planter*, the podcast will promote the work of Home Missions by offering a robust conversation about the theology, philosophy, and practice of planting Lutheran congregations. According to Pastor Andy Coyle, director of Home Missions, there is a void in these types of conversations amongst church planting podcasts, of which there are many.



The first two episodes, which launched on Sept. 15, dig into the motivations for church planting: the gospel and the congregation. Featured in the podcast are Coyle and Pastor Matthew Ballmann, a church planting pastor at Trinity Lutheran in San Antonio, Texas. According to Coyle, Home Missions' goals

in launching the podcast are threefold: to inspire people to see the need for church planting, to train planters and congregations, and to encourage those doing the challenging work of planting a church.

"The big reason we are investing in this platform is because it gives us the greatest reach ability into the everyday lives of our people. It strategically multiplies our efforts," said Coyle.

The podcast is currently available on the podcast website (thelutheranchurchplanter.com) and will be available on Spotify, Stitcher, Google Play, and Apple Podcasts.

Upcoming Bible College and Seminary events

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary will host several upcoming events on their Plymouth, Minn., campus.

Spotlight: The Word

Author Kieth Ferrin and YouTuber and podcaster Matt Whitman will be guest speakers at the fall Spotlight: The Word conference, held Oct. 10-11. Both speakers will encourage students to trust, read, enjoy, and memorize Scripture. Ferrin, the founder of BibleLife Community, will speak at the opening session, 7 p.m., Oct. 10, with the theme of enjoying the Word. He will lead two sessions Oct. 11 (8 and 9 a.m.) on I Peter and Jonah. Whitman, who hosts the Ten Minute Bible Hour Podcast and Matt Whitman YouTube channel, will lead sessions at 10 and 11 a.m., and a third session at 6:30 p.m.

UpClose and Alumni tournaments

Junior and senior high school students and recent graduates are invited to attend a free two-day preview event in which they will be welcome to sit in on classes, attend chapel and vesper services, play volleyball and basketball, and meet current students and professors. The event will take place Oct. 19 and 20.

The Alumni tournaments will follow, beginning at 6 p.m. Oct. 20 with the women's volleyball tournament. The women's and men's basketball tournaments will begin at 8 a.m. Oct. 21 with lunch served at noon. Individual registration is \$20 (women) or \$40 (men). The men's tournament team fee is \$300. Register online at flbc.edu/alumni-tournament-registration.

FLY Convention elective recordings available

The Free Lutheran Youth Convention (FLY) and AFLC Youth Ministries are making available recordings of the electives given at the 2023 FLY Convention. The recordings can be found on the FLY Convention website (flyconvention.org) and on the Youth Ministries app.

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 /s/ Ruth Gunderson, Managing Editor



WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION

HOW THE WMF SERVES YOU

BY DAWN JOHNSON

Have you wondered what members of the Women's Missionary Federation Committee do for you? You elect them to these positions, and here is how they are serving you as your national WMF officers.

First of all, know that the WMF prays for the women of the AFLC. Our desire is that you walk in a personal relationship with our Lord and Savior. We are here to serve you, to come alongside you should you need help or encouragement, to meet you where you are, and to share ideas with you.

Each year we provide a solid Lutheran Bible study written by AFLC women. What a wonderful uniting this is, that AFLC women across the United States can be studying the same topic.

We keep a website available for you (aflc.org/women), where

you will find a monthly article from the WMF president and a devotional. The "About Us" page will explain how the WMF works in its various areas, how we function, and our purpose. On the "Resource page" you will find a copy of our WMF resource manual, which can be accessed easily. You will also find various WMF Bible studies listed, which are available to order, and the projects that are currently supported by gifts to the WMF.

On our Facebook page (facebook.com/WomensMissionaryFederation/) we share Scripture art nearly every day. We also share district news such as WMF rallies or AFLC women's retreats or gatherings. We are also on Instagram ([wmfafcl](https://www.instagram.com/wmfafcl/)).

The *Helping Hand* is our published newsletter which we print and mail out twice a year. This newsletter includes articles pertaining to each of our four projects: Parish Education, Home Missions, World Missions, and WMF General Fund. We also have started an electronic newsletter to share things in between the printed version. Contact WMF Executive Secretary (see author bio) to join the email newsletter list.

The WMF also puts together a program for our annual gathering preceding the Annual Conference and our mission festival service and WMF breakfast during the conference. This

includes picking a theme, setting up speakers, and attending to all of the details to make these gatherings a time of blessings and encouragement to all who attend. We also find committee members each year who are tasked with creating the resolutions and nominations for the various offices that are up for election.

The national WMF meets almost monthly to conduct the business at hand. Your WMF officers assist in writing or securing writers for various publications and social media sites. Officers keep in contact with our missionaries and World Missions and Home Missions departments to keep informed so that we can share pertinent information with you. The officers who are comfortable with speaking will represent the WMF at local meetings, district rallies, AFLC ministry events, or at other events.

This is just a glimpse of how your national WMF serves you. If we can help, please contact us. We stand together in our service to the Lord!

Johnson, a member of Christ the King Lutheran, Wilson, Wis., is the WMF executive secretary. Email her at ctk@wwt.net to join the newsletter list.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Micah Klemme has accepted a call to serve Minnewaska Free Lutheran in Starbuck, Minn., his home congregation. Klemme has served St. Peter's Lutheran, Melvin, Ill., since his graduation from the Free Lutheran Seminary in June 2020. Klemme will begin his new call on Oct. 15.

Pastor Ron Wik has accepted a call to Christ is Lord Free Lutheran, Onalaska, Wis., where he will serve as visitation pastor. He previously served as pastor at Living Word Free Lutheran, Mankato, Minn.

Pastor Martin Horn, St. Michael, Minn., is serving as interim pastor at Living Word Free Lutheran, Mankato, Minn.

Jeremiah Bang, 2022 graduate of the Free Lutheran Bible College, has been hired as the youth director at Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn.

Kyle Scott will be installed as the new executive director of World Mission Prayer League on Oct. 8 at Trinity Lutheran Church of Minnehaha Falls, Minneapolis.

Seminary Symposium Jan. 17-19

The 2024 Seminary Symposium is scheduled for Jan. 17-19 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Seminary, Plymouth, Minn. Sessions will be held featuring the theme of "Ethics," beginning Wednesday evening with an opening session led by Dr. Wade Mobley, president of FLBCS. Thursday morning sessions, "The Three Estates and the Christian Church," and "Virtue Ethics in the Church," will be taught by Dr. Joel Biermann, professor of systematic theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo. Afternoon sessions will be led by Pastors Micah Klemme, Nick Schultz, and Dr. Nathan Olson.

Friday morning sessions will be held in conjunction with the Georg Sverdrup Society, with Loiell Dyrud, Pastor Steve Mundfrom, and Pastor Terry Olson speaking. For more information, visit FLBC website: flbc.edu/events.

AUGUST MEMORIALS

ARC
Mary Hesterberg

Bible College
Kari Abel
Grace Claus
Ruth Claus
Richard Huster
Brad Haugen

WMF
Ann Tucker
Elocile Uran

World Missions
Pastor Alvin & Frances
Grothe

Vision
Mary Hesterberg



Letter to the editor

Greetings from Bismarck, N.D., where work has begun to start a new AFLC church in the Bismarck-Mandan, N.D., area. The communities of Bismarck, Mandan, Lincoln, and the surrounding area have grown substantially. That growth amplifies the opportunities to help others come to know Christ—friends, neighbors, co-workers, and others.

As members of the Bismarck-Mandan communities, we have formed a small prayer group is meeting regularly to discuss how we might spread the gospel. We want to reach out to those who don't know Jesus, start holding regular Bible studies, grow the body of Christ, and if it's God's will, start a new church. We need your help. Here are several ways you can help us.

First, spread the news. If you know anyone in the area—college students, recent high school or college graduates, families looking for fellowship, or anyone else who would be interested—let them know about our fellowship and give them our contact information. We'd love to meet them and hopefully work together to further God's Kingdom.

Second, please keep those in your congregations up to date. As we spend more time praying and working in this new challenge, we hope to start sending regular updates to our fellow congregations. We believe that working with our fellow AFLC churches, encouraging one another, and letting you know what we are doing can help strengthen and encourage us. If you would be willing to pray for us during services and post this letter so others may know about our hopes we would be grateful.

Most importantly, please pray. We want to follow the Lord's will. If it's in his plan for us to start a church, we need his wisdom and guidance to do so. Please pray that we might know whether this is the time and place for a new church. Ask him to guide us and give us the strength, knowledge, and people to begin this work.

You can let us know if you or someone you know is interested in joining in our Bible studies and church planting work by contacting us as bismarckchurchplant@gmail.com or calling/texting Caleb Sperry at (701) 955-5833. We thank you for your prayers and support.

~ Bismarck Church Plant Committee (Joel and Jackie Zeltinger, Ron Dahle, Nathan Kinneberg, Caleb Sperry, and Bria Larson)

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-August 31, 2023

FUND	REC'D IN AUGUST	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$42,031	\$268,791	\$295,656
Evangelism	8,855	77,115	89,871
Youth Ministries	8,630	93,843	108,834
Parish Education	17,838	102,920	124,629
Seminary	19,682	184,208	160,110
Bible College	25,632	270,495	325,723
Home Missions	28,699	196,166	250,242
World Missions	26,217	245,933	298,145
WM Personal Support	60,895	499,165	500,124
TOTALS	\$238,480	\$1,938,635	\$2,153,335

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

DON'T FORGET ABOUT THE CHURCH LIBRARY

Church libraries don't have the best reputations. Often what comes to mind is old, dusty books, shelves of VHS tapes, and a sheet claiming *The Purpose Driven Life* was last checked out in 2007 and never returned.

It isn't anybody's fault that church libraries have fallen into a general state of neglect. Pastors have a thousand things to do, and donations and volunteer time are

often wisely spent on more pressing issues. But imagine with me for a minute what your church library *could* be.



Pastor Andrew
Kneeland

A father and mother in your congregation have a child who can't seem to control his temper. They have spoken with their

pastor and another couple but are looking for more resources and support. Dad stops by the church library after work one day and checks out a book on Christian parenting. They spend a few evenings reading through some relevant chapters and prayerfully think through some of the practical things they and their child can try.

Or imagine there is a high schooler who has spent weeks listening to her science teacher talk about evolution. She swings into the church library before youth group one night to check out a book on apologetics and evolution. After sifting through some material on creation she feels much more confident in her faith as she serves in her vocation as student.

Or picture the lay leader in your congregation who was asked to preach a sermon during Lent on Jesus calming the storm. He sits down in the church library one Thursday, opens his Bible to Mark 4, and spends the morning taking notes as he digs through research and commentaries. The sermon he gives a few weeks later is a clear message from the text that both convicts and encourages.

The church library can be a place where these precious members of your

congregation are blessed and equipped. If you already have a vibrant church library, there is doubtless someone working behind the scenes to make that possible.

Paul instructs the churches in Ephesians 4:12 to "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." A well-maintained and regularly updated church library can be one of the ways your church is equipped for ministry.

Depending on your context, here are some examples of what might be good to have on the shelves of your church library:

A copy of the *Book of Concord* and John Theodore Mueller's *Christian Dogmatics* can give any member help with a theological question. These books would essentially serve as theological encyclopedias, a first place to look when you have a question and a resource that will point you to the Scriptures.

It would also be good for your church library to have at least one complete commentary series. If someone has a question about the meaning of a particular verse, they can look up an expert's opinion. One of the best—and most readable—commentary series I've come across is the *People's Bible Commentary*, published by Northwestern Publishing House. The *Concordia Commentary Series* from Concordia Publishing House is much more expensive and spends more time working through the original languages but is one of the gold standards in Lutheran commentaries.

For history, the two-volume *The Story of Christianity* set by Justo Gonzalez is very good. *The Church from Age to Age* by Concordia Publishing House would also be good to have in a church library. It is a massive book, but very affordable and gives a comprehensive survey of every point in Christian history. Also, missionary

biographies can be both encouraging and convicting. I know the *Christian Heroes: Then and Now* set contains well-written accounts of dozens of faithful missionaries.

Talking With Your Kids About God by Natasha Crain, and her other books on the family, are must-have resources for your church library. Gene Veith's *Family Vocation* and *Post-Christian* are helpful.

I know I'm missing many from my must-have list, but there is no end to the amount of Christian literature available today. If you don't know where to start, ask your pastor. He has the training and expertise to know which resources might be most helpful to your setting. Our Ambassador Publications also maintains a list of excellent books available for purchase on their website. A copy of the newly published *Gospel in the Congregation* should be in every Free Lutheran church library, and they also keep

A well-maintained ... church library can be one of the ways your church is equipped for ministry.

an inventory of books used in the Bible College and Seminary that could be useful.

In addition to regular acquisitions, though, a good church library also consistently culls its collection. Many books don't stay relevant forever, and some books raise more questions than they answer. Hoarding books is not a virtue; feel free to recycle and keep your church library updated.

There are many ways a church's money should be faithfully spent: providing for the pastor and his family, building maintenance and repairs, missionary support, and community outreach. But for the sake of equipping and encouraging the flock among you, don't forget about the church library.

association retreat center

FEELING ALONE? HE IS WITH YOU

BY KIRK RAUTIO

This has been a season that will go into the books as another opportunity for the staff at the Association Retreat Center to learn from unforeseen circumstances and stretch our abilities to react and meet challenges.

We were blessed with a full calendar this summer and our contracted camps are up 47 percent as of September. Couple this with a few staff members being called to other adventures in life, and the resulting effects have created areas in which we have learned new ways to accomplish the daily tasks associated with running a camp. Through this we have continued to come together and our team has become even tighter knit than before.

Now that we are coming out of the busy part of the camping season, we all are realizing the full extent of what we have just been through. In this time of reflection, which honestly has been very

short, I realize that I personally experienced moments in which I felt completely alone. This feeling was present multiple times throughout the summer. I wondered why this was happening when at the time I was focused on the work God called me to do. Why was that not adequate activity to fill the emptiness? Why was that not enough to prevent this feeling? In those moments, it was encouraging to remember that God was always there saying, "Hey, I am still here. You want to hang out for a moment before you go back out?" Yes, this is how he sounds in my head sometimes.

I must assume that you have had similar moments when you have been surrounded by people and yet felt completely alone. If you have not felt that way, God bless you! For the rest of us, though, I believe it is a common experience. In fact, it has been made very apparent to me in this last season that these feelings of solitude have been a wake-up call. God

was allowing me to feel this way to remind me that he is here and that there is a good chance that I had forgotten that. He has been reminding me to spend time with him in prayer and reading his messages to me through his Word.

God, in his wisdom, does not put us in any situation that is not for our benefit. He always provides adequately for every situation, even when we feel alone.

When times like these arise, accept the challenge he has given you. Take this opportunity captive and use it. Take this emotion captive and use it. Draw closer to him. Immerse yourself in his truth. You are never alone, never forgotten, and never left behind. You may have lost focus on what is truly important, but you are not alone.

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