



2023 • Issue 2

News

The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations

Who We Are

THE OPEN BIBLE

God's Word is the foundation of faith and life.

•

THE ASCENDING DOVE

The Holy Spirit ascending is symbolic of the freedom of the congregation and the power and guidance of the Spirit.

•

THE GREEN VINE

The vine is the emblem of the living congregation bearing fruit for the Lord.





INCARNATIONAL SOUL CARE

Several years ago, a woman in her 90s visited the congregation I was serving, and after the service, we struck up a conversation about the challenges of leaving a congregation, or even a denomination, after investing decades of one's life in that group. I really sympathize with people in that position. It can be tempting to downplay the difficulty of a decision like that when we're not the ones in that position, and that can lead to some unloving attitudes. And yet, the conversation inevitably led to me making a comment about what matters most. I said something to the effect of, "I care about your soul, and the most important thing is that your soul is being fed the Word of God."

A few weeks later, that woman told our associate pastor that was the first time a pastor had ever talked to her about her soul. My heart broke when I heard that, and it was an important reminder of the nature of the service to which we are called. As Christians, we are called to serve and care for souls. Care and concern for one another's souls should be a regular part of our dialogue as the body of Christ. How is it with your soul today?

But here's the deal: sometimes we bristle at that language because we hear it in a judgmental tone or we think that there's an underlying implication that the health of our souls is dependent on our own abilities, or something similar. God forgive us when we do embed judgmentalism or works righteousness when we talk about souls. But I pray we don't lose our focus on what matters in fear of offending or being misunderstood.

"Soul talk" is intimate and personal (Hebrews 4:12-16). It ventures into the area of humanity's deepest need. And we care about that, because Jesus cares deeply about it. When we talk about our souls with one another, I pray that love and care is what is conveyed. Interestingly, a deeper understanding and appreciation for the incarnation has helped me with this. The Creator of the universe took on flesh. The King of kings stepped into the muck and mire of this world. God became one of us. He probably sneezed, snored, and sweated just like the rest of us. The humanity of Christ brilliantly displays his intimate and personal care and love for us, and the Bible is clear that he came in such a way because he cares especially for our souls.

We've all heard the famous words of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son ..." Did you know that Scripture emphasizes the word "so"? God *so* loved you that he sent his Son, who took on flesh, in order that he could sacrifice that flesh to bring salvation so that everyone who "believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life," fulfilling your soul's deepest need. The depth of Christ's love for souls is utterly astounding.

In other words, the whole purpose of Christmas, of Jesus coming to earth, was to care for your soul. Praise God for the incarnation! I pray that our words and actions in our homes, in our congregations, and even as an AFLC—would be marked by a distinct love and care for souls.



CONTACT

~Pastor Micah Hjermstad

Pastor Micah Hjermstad, President
763.545.5631 • president@aflc.org



Through various trials, we are **PRAYING FOR OUR BROTHERS**



Windstorms were never a part of my experience in Uganda until I got an urgent Facebook request for prayer from my friend and Ugandan ministry partner, Pastor Alex Wakibi, in the middle of one of my recent school weeks at the Free Lutheran Seminary. Alex was in grief and discouragement from two windstorms that had struck his church, Gideon, within one week of each other. Both windstorms occurred during Thursday afternoons while Alex's youth were meeting for their weekly Ambassador Institute lesson.

The first brought down a block from a house that struck and killed his newly appointed assistant pastor. The second brought down the entire church building. Alex had already sheltered the class in a neighboring home, but two pedestrians who took refuge in the church just before it collapsed received minor injuries.

Some in the community responded with blame on Alex and his congregation, seeing a supernatural signature.

Amongst these voices of discord comes even one inside of Alex, who asked me, "Is God speaking? Does he want me to stop my ministry?"

Does God want Alex to stop? This article is too small a space to enumerate the ministries that have occurred through Alex and Gideon Church. Gideon is located in a slum area, and many

who are connected with it are victims of alcoholism and the HIV virus. It's an area full of people looking for hope and hungry for the good news. But

let me mention just one ministry in particular. Alex is using the Ambassador Institute training in connection with a nearby sports program. I have seen firsthand how hard the Gideon youth have been working in the Ambassador Institute's memorization process. The sports program is administered by a Muslim, and many involved in the program are unbelievers. Alex has also enrolled the Gideon youth in the program. After the youth have engaged in a game of football, Alex has trained his youth to share the Scripture stories with their peers. Wonderfully, the Muslim administrator is delighted to have the Gideon youth share what they have been learning.

I may sometimes be far from the Ugandan front lines where the Ambassador Institute continues in my absence; it is a challenge to not be anxious, but only to be patient and prayerful when I am informed of the hardships, the fear, and doubts that are at work in those dear to me on another continent. I can relate to the Apostle Paul who responds to the Thessalonians hardships, "But brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you ... so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them" (I Thessalonians 2:17, 3:3).

Please pray with me for all those in the Ambassador Institute, that we might share in Paul's joy in receiving this word, "But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news of your faith and love" (I Thessalonians 3:6).

~Michael Rokenbrodt, missionary to Uganda

CONTACT

Dr. Earl Korhonen, Executive Director
763.545.5631 • worldmis@afmc.org
afmcworldmissions.org



Our children come in **ALL SHAPES AND SIZES**

Serving families in need at the
Miriam Children's Home in Brazil

When you hear "Miriam Children's Home," what comes to mind? Rosie cheeked cherubs? We have them! Dickensian waifs longing for more food and a family to love them? We have them, too. To be honest, we have almost any archetype of a child you can imagine.

Betina qualifies for the cherub category. She came to us as a 1-year-old who didn't walk yet. In six months, we have seen her go from taking her first wobbly steps to being the dynamo who always seems to have someone at a trot trying to catch up to her! Betina has five older siblings, all removed from their family. She will also join a new family once the long process of removing parental rights is finished. In the meantime, we love having our angel with us!

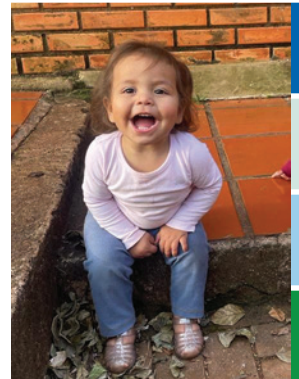
You want waifs? We have waifs! Charles Dickens couldn't have imagined the life stories of brothers Gilmar (12) and Isaque (10). I have been a part of their lives since Gilmar was in diapers and Isaque was, as they say, a glimmer in the eye. We have cared for these boys and all of their siblings through many family difficulties. We held up their family when they lost their home and the little they had to a fire. We mourned with them the loss of a sibling to random violence and the loss of their mother to grief and illness.

Their latest stay with us began a year ago when their mother died and their father gave up and left his children on their own. The boys arrived in survival mode; all disputes were settled with fists. Isaque struggled with a speech impediment. In his first month here, it was a 50/50 chance whether we would understand him the first time he said something, unless he was mad—then a string of profanities would leave his mouth without a stutter or lisp.

During their year with us, we have seen that their rock-hard exteriors covered still-tender hearts. Isaque received Jesus and has shown lovely growth in character. Though Gilmar has not made a confession of faith, he has shown openness to the Word of God and to correction. Mostly, he shows a desire to belong—truly—to someone.

Two months ago, the boys were finally legally free to be adopted. Within one week, Hugo and Cristina contacted us, asking to meet the boys. They are a Christian couple who see the boys as a gift from God. From the first video chat (lasting more than an hour), the bonding began. The change in the boys after just two visits (and an enormous number of video chats) is amazing. What made such a huge change? Hope!

There are many varied stories I could tell you about the children at our home, but all of them come down to one central point. For every child, no matter their size or shape, no matter where they came from, one truth stands: God knows the plans he has for them. Plans for good and not for evil, for a future, and for hope. Those of us working at the Miriam Home—and you as you pray—have the great joy of being part of that plan.



CONTACT

~Jonni Sliver, missionary to Brazil

Dr. Earl Korhonen, Executive Director
763.545.5631 • worldmis@afcl.org
afclworldmissions.org



Opportunities to SERVE OVERSEAS



Journey Missions has had a great 2023, and we continue to rejoice in the Lord for the many opportunities we've had. It's been truly a pleasure to be involved with our local congregations, missionaries, and our ministry team members and missionary assistants.

We continue to give people opportunities to visit our AFLC World Missions ministries through short-term missions. This is an avenue to see and experience an AFLC foreign field that has been prayed for and supported over the years while personally participating in the work in a hands-on and tangible way. Whether on a short-term ministry trip or serving as a missionary assistant, the vision for this ministry is for people to serve our Lord Jesus cross-culturally.

Time and time again this year, I was reminded of God's faithfulness. In 2023, Journey Missions had four teams traveling to our mission fields. Throughout this year, Journey Missions took two Brazil trips (February and June), led a Mexico trip through the Free Lutheran Bible College (FLBC) cross-cultural ministry program, and offered an Israel trip led by Mike Anenson in May.

As we look at 2024, we have trips scheduled again for churches and congregation members to join. If there's an additional trip you'd like to take to one of our fields, we can have those discussions, too. We are here to serve our congregations and help our church members see the mission field.

This coming spring, Journey Missions will again lead the FLBC team to Mexico through the cross-cultural mission's program. This has been an ongoing blessing to see young adults plugging into international ministry and seeing how they have a place in missions.

Looking toward summer and later 2024, Journey Missions is planning a Brazil trip in June and is finalizing a schedule for an Israel opportunity in both May and November.

As I think about the people who are serving and who have served with and through Journey Missions, I praise the Lord for those who go, fulfilling the call the Lord has placed on their lives for this time. People are excited to travel and see the work the Lord has done; we're thankful that they have chosen to utilize Journey Missions.

I also rejoice as the Lord calls and sends out others through your finances and prayers. You have provided, and continue to provide, fellow believers with an opportunity to serve the Lord in a new and powerful way. We give glory to God and praise Him for you as senders; you are having a great impact on the world for Jesus! Thank you for your prayers and support of Journey Missions and those called to go for such a time as this.

~Jon Nelson

Prayer Requests

- Planning for upcoming ministry trips.
- Missionary Assistants to serve under our missionaries on our AFLC mission fields.
- Journey Missions' financial needs.
- Planning for 2024 trips:
 - Oaxaca, Mexico: March
 - Israel: May (10-person limit)
 - Brazil: June (open)
 - Israel: Fall (10-person limit)

CONTACT

Jon Nelson, Department Head
763.412.2042 • jon.nelson@afcl.org
afcljourneymissions.org



REDEEMED

Our identity card

What do you carry in your wallet? I carry a variety of items, depending on my destination. For a visit to Big Sky Resort in Big Sky, Mont., I carried only credit and debit cards. But our local produce stand will only take cash or a check.

Perhaps you could say that the WMF “wallet” contains the song of the redeemed, an identity card that is ready to be spent for the Lord’s glory and our benefit. The prophet Isaiah wrote, “Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away” (51:11).

This year held some unique challenges for the WMF, but I am reminded of our conference theme, “Rescued and Redeemed,” from Colossians 1, “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (13-14). Other Scripture echoes those promises. Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, reminded them that their victory over sin was won for them by Jesus, who died to satisfy their debt (I Corinthians 15:56-57). Our labor for the Lord is never in vain.

Jesus reminds us that in the last days we will face great trouble. “When these things begin to happen, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28). So what can we do?

Pray Fervently

Prayer is our great powerhouse! “We wrestle not against flesh and blood,” wrote Paul (Ephesians 6:12). Prayer is what we do. Some of the strongest women I know are prayer warriors. Paul exhorts the church in Ephesus to be “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

Give Generously

In 2023, more than \$120,000 was given to those projects the WMF holds near and dear. We wholeheartedly support our Parish Education department, the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, Home Missions, and World Missions.

Share Intentionally

What’s your story? Our monthly Bible study, *The Women of Redemption*, written by Tami Demo and Michelle Mobley, highlights ten women’s stories. Pray for new churches to join in this endeavor. Our website has several wonderful studies written by women of the AFLC from the past that you could use for individual or group studies (www.aflc.org/women/resources/bible-studies/).

All of us can testify. We might even have a picture in our wallet of what redemption looks like, even your photo identification. Women reaching women is what the WMF is all about.



Women
ministering
faithfully
through God’s
Word, missions,
and fellowship



~Lavonne West

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Linda Hensrud, communication sec.
Margie Lee, treasurer

CONTACT

Lavonne West, President
low2667@gmail.com
Dawn Johnson, Executive Secretary
ctk@wwt.net
aflc.org/women



GOD AT WORK

in Home Missions

The changing of the seasons provides us with opportunities to reflect on how the Lord has worked through individuals and congregations in the AFLC over the course of the year. The Lord continues to be deeply faithful to us. Here are a few of the new and exciting things happening in Home Missions.

RESOURCES

- **Podcast**—Our new podcast, *The Lutheran Church Planter*, seeks to dive deep into the theology, philosophy, and practice of planting Lutheran congregations. Our desire for this podcast is to have intentional conversations that will inspire, challenge, train, and encourage everyone who listens. You can find new episodes every other Thursday on all major podcast streaming services.
- **Booklet**—A new informational booklet has been created that shares why we believe in planting new congregations, what that looks like in various communities, and how we are working to accomplish this task. We will be sending these out to all congregations shortly.

NEW PLANTS

- **Ankeny, Iowa**—In August, Pastor Matthew and Julia Pillman and their family moved to Ankeny, where they are seeking to develop relationships and connections in the community. They host a fellowship time at their home on a semi-regular basis.
- **Bismarck, N.D.**—A new gathering has been holding a study and prayer group with the intent to plant a free, living, and Lutheran congregation.

ALASKA MISSION

- **Missionary change**—Pastor Jeremy, Lacey, and Malachi Crowell have recently left the Alaska Mission with a new call to serve the Mission Aviation Training Academy (MATA) and a local congregation in Arlington, Wash. We praise the Lord for their years of ministry in Alaska and are excited to see how the Lord will continue to work through them.
- **Committee**—The Home Mission Board of Trustees recently established a new Alaska Committee that has been tasked with ministry oversight and development of this great mission field. This new committee will provide Home Missions greater organizational effectiveness and clarity.

We invite you and your congregations to join our support team to help reach people for Christ through the planting of new congregations. Find out more at aflchomemissions.org.

~Pastor Andy Coyle

BOARD MEMBERS

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CONTACT

Pastor Andy Coyle, Director
 763.412.2018 • homemis@aflc.org
aflchomemissions.org



Following GOD'S LEADERSHIP

God continuously works through staff transitions at Alaska Mission

The Alaska Mission has truly been blessed over the years. Remote, isolated villages are open to the Word of God, and faithful, called servants are happy to share it with them. These past two years, we have seen a transition in those who serve at the Alaska Mission.

We are thankful that Pastor Bob and Margaret Lee continue to serve at KAKN radio station for 14 years. Pastor Bob is faithful in broadcasting the Christian message over the airwaves. As the only station in the area, KAKN has a receptive audience.

Heather Hansen, after five years of serving on the Alaska vacation Bible school team, moved to Naknek full-time in September 2020. She helps year-round with church youth and summer VBS and also works as a public school teacher. Heather's always-pleasant demeanor makes her God's perfect helper for these positions.

Josh Fish accepted a full-time call to be our maintenance coordinator and pilot with the mission in July 2021. Since then, Josh is always ready for the task at hand, which is a great blessing. He has piloted most of the FLAPS flights during the last 18 months.

Pastor Jeff Swanson and his wife Jane moved to Kansas in April 2022 after 15 years of faithful service to the Alaska Mission. Though he has experienced some health issues, Pastor Jeff works half-time as the Alaska Mission coordinator. This is a position that can be accomplished well from their home in Kansas. The mission's outreach to remote villages grew in every way under the guidance of the Swansons. They are much loved and left a hole in many hearts with their departure.

On Sept. 20, Pastor Jeremy Crowell, his wife Lacey, and son Malachi moved from Alaska to Jeremy's new call as chief flight instructor at Mission Aviation Training Academy in Arlington, Wash. He also serves as the associate pastor at Atonement Free Lutheran in Arlington. For 13 years they had been such a blessing to the Alaska Mission. Whether it was flying the summer VBS team to a different village each week or greeting each visiting mission group that came up to help at The Net, the Lord's work was always cheerfully accomplished through their service.

It has been amazing to see God working through his chosen ambassadors. We now wait on the Lord to see who he will call next to continue reaching lost souls in southwest Alaska. Please pray with us for God to continue to call new disciples to serve his mission.



TOP: Josh Fish, Jeremy and Lacey Crowell, Margaret and Bob Lee, and Heather Hansen.
ABOVE: Jeremy, Lacey, and Malachi Crowell.

CONTACT

Kevin Lee, Executive Director
763.412.2018 • flaps@aflc.org
flapsministry.org

~Kevin Lee



NEW PUBLISHING PROJECTS

Thanks be to God for bringing to completion four printing projects in the past few months:

- *Love Your Neighbor*, the third quarter of Level 2 Sunday school curriculum, teaches young children about God's gift of the Ten Commandments.
- Correlating bookmarks on the Ten Commandments remind us of ways God calls us to honor Him and love and serve our neighbors.
- *1 Peter* Bible study shows readers that hope for the believer is sure and certain, no matter what trials we face, because our eternal hope is based on the sure foundation of God's Word.
- *Principles and Practices of Evangelism* by Francis W. Monseth encourages active participation for all, focusing on three themes: Our Heritage of Evangelism, Our Theology of Evangelism, and Our Practice of Evangelism. The Jerusalem cross artistically woven throughout the 40-page booklet symbolizes the four New Testament evangelists and spreading the gospel to the four corners of the earth.



Watch for a new, beautifully illustrated children's book coming soon! *Jesus A-Z* journeys through all the letters of the alphabet, connecting each letter to Jesus and Scripture through names such as Door, King of kings, and Light of the world. A companion coloring book will also be published.

NEW STAFF MEMBER

Join us in welcoming Aaron Arneson, our new part-time Customer Account Specialist. Aaron is a first-year student at the Free Lutheran Seminary. He attends classes in the mornings and works in our office in the afternoons helping customers in person and by phone and processing and shipping orders. Aaron and his wife, Rachel, have two children. Pray for Aaron in his new opportunities.



Congregational Visits

We give thanks for opportunities to be with the people of the AFLC in various congregations, sharing at local and district events. During the past few months, Director Marian Christopherson presented a Christian Education workshop at New Hope Lutheran in Jamestown, N.D., and also shared updates and resources at the Minneapolis District WMF Rally at Living Word Lutheran, Eagan, Minn., and at the Northwest Minnesota District Annual Meeting at Our Savior's Lutheran, Argyle, Minn. Board member Leeanna Lunn also presented a session on "Why Ambassador Publications?" at the West Central Minnesota District WMF Rally at Abiding Faith Free Lutheran in Ortonville, Minn. It is a joy to serve our congregations!

CONTACT

Marian Christopherson, Director
Ambassador Publications
763.412.2010
parished@aflc.org
ambassadorpublications.org

BOARD MEMBERS

Pastor Dennis Norby, Chairman
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LASTING IMPACT

As we begin a new academic year, my heart is filled with thankfulness to God. I have been at FLBCS for almost nine years now—long enough to see the long-term impact of what we teach to our students. Seasons of opportunity also come with challenges, and the last few years have been incredibly challenging for higher education. We have thrived through these challenges, emerging with good enrollment, excellent staff, and an increased focus on our mission. Thank you for being part of what makes “establishing students in the Word of God for life in Jesus Christ” possible.

~Dr. Wade Mobley, FLBCS President



BIBLE COLLEGE

At the Free Lutheran Bible College, the fall semester has begun with a renewed focus on discipleship and the challenging journey of faith. Our theme this year is “Refined by Fire,” based on Zechariah 13:9. This theme highlights the understanding that, though the process of refinement may be challenging and even painful at times, it ultimately leads to a renewed emphasis to call upon God and to rest assured that he hears those who belong to him.

This fall, we are excited to announce the hire of a Director of Discipleship, Pastor Jeremy Larson. Sharing with the students at the convocation service at the beginning of the semester, Jeremy noted the deeply challenging nature of his two years at Bible College, yet he wouldn’t trade that time of refinement for anything.

Recognizing the importance of this refining time, Jeremy has diligently worked to ensure that every student has a mentor and is part of a small group. The aim is to provide a nurturing environment where students can be mentored by another believer who cares for them, prays for them, and walks with them in the study of God’s Word. These groups are off to a great start. Pray for them as they walk this refining path together.



**Pastor Adam
Osier**
Bible College
Dean

SEMINARY

When you enter our FLBCS campus, notice the signs. You will see “Slow down for children” signs, and a new speed limit of 10 mph. Seminary housing is full—full of children. We have a large incoming first-year class studying at our seminary—eight students. The incoming class also happens to have several large families, accounting for 18 children, with one on the way in January.

When we include the middler and senior classes, we have 27 children represented in our seminary, with half of them being 5 years old and younger. This is a great joy, but also a challenge. How do we all meet together? Our orientation picnic was at a local park with one of the largest playgrounds I have ever seen. Our seminary families “took over” the playground and had a great time. In three or four years, God willing, these families will be coming to a congregation near you. God has certainly provided in His time. Please pray for these families as they prepare for ministry. And if you happen to be visiting our campus, please slow down, as there will likely be children at play.



**Dr. James
Molstre**
Seminary
Dean

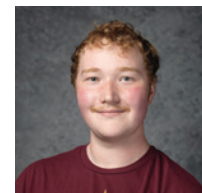
GRATEFUL FOR SUPPORT

at the Bible college and Seminary



Finding excellent fellowship

My first year at the college came and went far better and quicker than I had hoped and imagined, and my only regret is that I cannot go back and relive that time with those who have either graduated or will not be returning. I was blessed by supportive instructors and staff who listened to me and made me feel welcome, I was blessed with my peers' genuine friendships, and I was unironically blessed with the best roommate I could have possibly hoped for as a first-year student. This experience gave me something I had longed for while I was in middle school, high school, and in college, and that was good Christian fellowship with people who I could call friends and mean it.



Matthew Hooper
FLBC
class of 2024

Building a strong foundation

I currently teach four piano students and plan to follow this as a career after a strong foundation in my faith is built. Many members of my family have attended this Bible College, and I have been able to see the change in their lives. I am extremely excited to get to spend two years learning about God's promises and unconditional love towards us!



Elsie Twedt
FLBC
class of 2025



HOW TO GIVE

To see ways you can support the mission of FLBCS financially, visit flbc.edu/donate.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Dec. 1–3: Christmas Choir Concerts
Jan. 17–19: Seminary Symposium
Jan. 30–Feb. 1: Spotlight: Missions w/ the Jores
Feb. 2–3: FLBC Homecoming
Feb. 23–25: NIAC Basketball Tournament
Mar. 12–15: ACCA Basketball Tournament
April 12–13: Campus Days
April 26: Spring Concert
April 27: Graduation

Info and event registration at flbc.edu/events

CONTACT

Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary
3134, 3120 East Medicine Lake Blvd.
Plymouth, MN 55441
763.544.9501 • flbcs@flbc.edu • flbc.edu

Strategic planning update

If you've been keeping up with news at FLBCS, you've probably heard the words "strategic planning" and "bachelor's degree." Last year, members of our Board of Trustees began pursuing a three-year rolling strategic plan to help the institution better accomplish our mission of establishing students in the Word of God. Here's an update:

Strategic Goal No. 4—Enhanced Offerings

By June 2026 FLBCS will be offering an AA and BA in Bible and Ministry and will graduate its first BA cohort.

FLBC continues to move toward offering an Associate of Arts and Bachelor of Arts in Bible and Ministry. These additions have been approved by TRACS, our accrediting agency.

Associate of Arts in Bible and Ministry

With minimal change to our current program, we will begin offering an Associate of Arts in Bible and Ministry to most students who attend FLBC for two years. An associate's degree will aid in credit transferability for degree completion at other institutions. Students who do not need or want an associate's degree will still be able to pursue a Bible education at certificate level.

Bachelor of Arts in Bible and Ministry

This program is for students who want more of what we already offer. Bible and ministry are all FLBC does, and this program gives students the opportunity to take advantage of the full scope of the curriculum offered at FLBC. Students who enter with college credit could complete this degree in two or three years at FLBC.

Some options for degree emphasis will include:

**Advanced
Theological Studies**
Designed as a
pre-seminary degree

**Youth
and Family
Ministry**

**Worship and
Music Ministry**

**Cross Cultural
Ministry**

For a full list of strategic planning goals, visit flbc.edu/strategicplan





A publication FOR THE LOCAL CONGREGATION



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aflc.org/lutheran-ambassador

CONTACT

Ruth Gunderson, Managing Editor
763.545.5631 • ruthg@aflc.org
aflc.org/lutheran-ambassador

The Lutheran Ambassador is a monthly magazine published by the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. Each month features a specific theme, carrying articles both practical and devotional. Our writers—all volunteer lay people and pastors from our local congregations—are a key feature in our publications. Our magazine also includes monthly columns geared toward building a strong devotional life, tackling the basics of our beliefs, and sharing life experiences in order to build up the Body of Christ. All of our articles and columns center around biblical, Lutheran doctrines and heritage.

Our magazine also features news and information from our local congregations, schools, and AFLC departments.

DEVELOPMENT

PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

1: God doesn't need your money. He already owns everything.

Scripture makes it very clear that God owns everything. "The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded the world and all that is in it" (Psalm 89:11).

2: God's stewards manage His resources for His benefit.

God created us to be stewards of His creation. Stewards do not own what is entrusted to their care; they simply manage it on behalf of the owner. In the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), Jesus teaches us that we are to be wise stewards of what God entrusts to us, including time, talents, and treasures.

3: God will provide for every need of those who trust Him.

God will also provide for us. Jesus teaches, "But seek first the His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

4: God wants your offerings to reflect your faith in Him.

Since God does not need anything to accomplish His will, our offerings to Him accomplish a different purpose: to build our faith in Him. It takes faith to trust that God will do what He says. Proverbs 3:9 says, "Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce."

5: Committing in advance to give back to God demonstrates faith in His provision.

God wants us to return to Him what He has entrusted to us as a demonstration of our faith in Him. II Corinthians 9:7 says, "Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

6: Material things will eventually vanish, but they can be invested to reap eternal rewards.

Material things have a place in our lives, but they are temporary and limited. The harder we attempt to hang onto them, the quicker they seem to disappear. Matthew 6 tells us not to lay up treasures here but to lay up treasures in heaven.

Let us then be good stewards, growing in our faith and ability to be used by God to advance His Kingdom.

~Pastor Tonnes Pollestad



CONTACT

Pastor Tonnes Pollestad, Director
763.545.5631 • tonnes@aflc.org



The REALITY of the HARVEST

One of the images that sticks in my memory from serving Peace Lutheran Church in far northwest Kansas is the beauty of the wheat fields that went on as far as you could see. How striking they looked as they turned from green to gold to almost white at the end of harvest time. I also remember both excitement and urgency building as farmers were busy getting everything ready for the right time when harvest could begin. Even though it is a joyful thing to see the harvest coming in, there is a need to complete the task as soon as possible to avoid the consequences of dangerous weather that could come at any time. It grieves me even still to think of the times I have stood with men next to a field that was, just hours before, a golden-white meadow of wheat but was now razed nubs, like some giant blade had cut it clean and blown it all away. It is because of this harsh reality that the farmer carefully prepares, and then, when the time is right, will work even late into the night to bring in the harvest before it is lost.

As I read John 4:35, I am reminded that we, too, are in a time when the fields are white for spiritual harvest, before the judgment comes, and all are left to face the consequences of their unbelief in God's one and only Son, Jesus Christ. But there is still time. There are those who are coming to faith and many more who are hungry for truth—hungry to know the forgiveness and grace that God offers to all who will hear. How will they know this good news if we don't get out in the fields and show them the love of Christ in our words, actions, and lives?

AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship is committed to “encouraging, equipping, and assisting our AFLC congregations and pastors in making and equipping disciples who make and equip disciples.” We want to help our fellow laborers as we work together in the Lord's harvest. Please visit our website at aflc.org/evangelism to learn more about the different ways we can help you and your congregation meet this desperate need. Please also consider supporting this ministry by designating your gift to AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship. Or you can give online at aflc.org/donate. Thank you so much for your partnership with this ministry. Together, we can make a difference in the days we have left.

~Pastor Randy Nelson



Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.

~John 4:35 (ESV)

BOARD MEMBERS

- Micah Johnson
- Michael Lynnes
- Pastor Matthew Quanbeck
- Ignacio Davalos

Pastor Randy Nelson, Director
763.412.2021 • evangelism@aflc.org
aflc.org/evangelism

CONTACT



Encouraging the LOCAL CONGREGATION



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Pastor Dan Hurner, Networking Coor.
Daniel Keinanen, FLY Convention Coor.
Jordan Langness, Training Coordinator
Chris Rasmussen, Administrative Coor.
Adam McCarlson, National Youth Dir.

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Emily Goff, Treasurer

CONTACT

Adam McCarlson, director
763.545.5631 • youth@afcl.org
afcl.org/youth

The first phrase of the AFLC Youth Ministries' mission statement goes like this: "AFLC Youth Ministries exists to encourage local congregations ..." It goes on to share more of *what* we are encouraging congregations to do: "to WIN teens to Christ, to BUILD teen believers in God's truth and love, to EQUIP teen workers to live and share their faith, and to MULTIPLY maturing disciples in Jesus Christ."

Encouraging local congregations lies at the heart of why we exist as a ministry, because it is there that God uses pastors, parents, youth workers, and caring adults to give, sustain, and strengthen the faith of our teens through the ordinary means of grace. With the congregation's ministry to teens in mind, AFLC Youth Ministries has two upcoming events that we invite AFLC congregations to consider.

FOR TEENS:

FLY Beyond is an event designed to equip teens to live and share their faith. Our programming follows four emphases, which you can see on the FLY Beyond Propeller Logo—Apologetics, Theology, Training, and Teaching from God's Word. We invite those AFLC congregations who are looking for an opportunity to equip teens to live out their faith in the various vocations God has called them to, like their families, congregations, schools, and communities, to consider being part of this intentional time of equipping teens at FLY Beyond.



We are always looking for adults to be part of the planning and teaching or to serve as small group leaders and dorm staff at FLY Beyond. If you have a passion for equipping teens to live and share their faith, this event could be a great place where God could use you. Please reach out to us if you would like more information about opportunities to get involved in FLY Beyond as an adult.

FLY Beyond is for students in grades 7–12 and will be held July 14–18, 2024, at the Association Retreat Center (ARC) near Osceola, Wis. More information and registration at afcl.org/youth.

FOR LEADERS

Youth Workers Weekends (YWW) is a retreat designed to provide a place for youth workers, pastors, and other caring adults to refresh and refocus so they can return to their local congregation ready for the work God has called them to. Whether you are looking for time to take a break from the busyness of ministry or you are seeking opportunities to be equipped and trained, we encourage you to consider coming to be part of YWW.



If you are a pastor or member who is looking for ways to encourage and equip those adults who are caring for the spiritual lives of the teens in your congregation, please consider making an investment in them by sending to or encouraging them to attend YWW, which will be held Jan. 12–14, 2024, at the ARC. More information and registration at afcl.org/youth.

~Adam McCarlson

The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441
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ASSOCIATION RETREAT CENTER

PRESSING ONWARD

The ARC staff is starting to see the camp move into a new stage of operation as we move slowly out of survival mode and into growth mode. We have also had a big change in personnel this season. With new additions to the crew comes new energy and new ideas. These additions are creating an atmosphere of creativity that will push the ARC into the next 40 years of ministry.

The ARC is experiencing growth on multiple fronts. More groups are reaching out to us, and these group sizes are significantly larger—450 to 600 people—than those we have hosted in the past. The 2024 calendar is already filling up, and we are having to turn groups away during the busy season. Our donor base is increasing in size as well, as we see a steady increase in unique donors as well as the frequency of donations. Our volunteer base is increasing in size, and they are vital to the operations of the ARC.

These changes are presenting new and exciting challenges. Having new staff challenges our current thought processes and forces candid conversations for ministry development. The increase in groups and their sizes are presenting challenges in hosting them. We are looking at our three- and five-year plans and reassessing what projects are going to need to happen based on much different information than we had a year ago. This is exciting, to say the least. As donors answer God's call to give to the ARC, our opportunity to make these changes increases, allowing us to develop our facilities and ministry programming. It also gives us the responsibility of protecting and properly using these resources.

As we approach the end of another year, we are already putting our theme for 2024 into our hearts: "Call On Him," taken from Psalm 17:6. We are already calling on Him, asking for His guidance through these changes, growth, and challenges that we get to experience. We pray that you, our ever-growing group of ARC supporters, and the wider AFLC ministries will be doing the same. Call on him. He will answer.

~Kirk Rautio, Executive Director



ARC 2024 Events

Side x Side & Sno-Daze:

February 2–4

Women's Retreat:

April 26–28

Family Work Weekend:

May 24–26

Fire Up & Onward:

June 23–27

Family Camp:

July 28–August 3

CONTACT

ARC • 715.294.2877
info@arc-aflc.org
arc-aflc.org