

THE 

APRIL 2024

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



WHAT GOD SAYS

The Christian
& Forgiveness
Politics, Success

In, but not of?

In the words of the esteemed theologian Johnny Cash, are you so heavenly minded you are no earthly good?

Christians have always wrestled through the tension between their promised future life in heaven and their present life here on earth. What should our mindset and lifestyle look like? How should believers live in the world?

A popular phrase among Christians is that we are to be “*in* the world, but not *of* the world.” It’s not a biblical phrase, but it is a fine saying that can help us see our role as God-sent missionaries into a broken and sinful world. Paul writes in Philippians 3 that “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” We don’t adapt or conform to the sinful systems or patterns of the world, but we boldly share and model the gospel as a light in a dark room.

Easier said than done, though. Living in the world is often complicated. We know that God created the world, loves the world, and has put us into the world for a purpose. We cannot bury our heads in the sand and simply wait for Christ to take us home; he’s given us jobs, families, and responsibilities. Each of us has a vocation God has called us to fulfill. We are just as much of a Christian when we are in our church pews as when we are in the boardroom; God has called us to faithfulness when we are at the dinner table and when we are in the voting booth.

Sinful people who live with and around other sinful people are bound to butt heads. Our theme this month is “Christians in the World,” and we’ve included three longer articles offering practical wisdom for how we are to live in the world.

Pastor Tim Johnson opens this issue by looking at forgiveness. Many of us, including me, know what Scripture teaches but find it awfully difficult to apply to our real-life situations. Are we really supposed to forgive *everyone*? In the case of serious sin, is there a difference between forgiving someone and restoring them into your life? Pastor Johnson points us to Jesus to show us what forgiveness should look like for believers.

Sam Wellumson helps us think through another issue: how Christians should interact with politics. Does God care about the way you vote? Pastor Wellumson teaches us about the biblical framework of “The Three Estates” to show us what God thinks about politics and government and to help us see how believers and pastors should engage with today’s issues. Here’s a hint: if you think politics doesn’t belong in the pulpit, you might need to re-think your definition of politics. Pastor Wellumson writes, “Just because the world has labeled something as a ‘political’ issue does not mean that it is not also a biblical issue.”

Lastly, Sophia Lucht tackles the issue of success in her article this month. Is it wrong for a Christian to be wealthy or influential? How about having ambition or striving towards goals that are not necessarily spiritual? Looking at Scripture and the world around us, Sophia helps us understand what it means to be a successful Christian.

Christians are called to be in the world but not of the world. Don’t let the “not of” distract us from the “in,” though; it is important for us to wrestle through how to live in the world as Christians. We pray these articles are a blessing to you!

—Pastor Andrew Kneeland



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EDITOR

Pastor Andrew Kneeland
laeditor@alfc.org

MANAGING EDITOR

Ruth Gunderson
ruthg@alfc.org

CIRCULATION

Liz McCarlson
lasubscriptions@alfc.org

EDITORIAL BOARD

Monica Coyle
Pastor Jerry Moan
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3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Plymouth, MN 55441
763-545-5631
lasubscriptions@alfc.org

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you. [Lewis B. Smedes]



A pastor must not only lead to pasture by teaching the sheep how to be true Christians: but, in addition to this, he must also repel the wolves, lest they attack the sheep and lead them astray with false doctrine and error.

[Martin Luther]

And we, too, being called by His will to Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever. [Clement of Rome]

When you fear God, you fear nothing else. If you do not fear God, you fear everything else. [Oswald Chambers]

The Bible was not given for our information but for our transformation. [Dwight L. Moody]

You will never know the fullness of Christ until you know the emptiness of everything but Christ.
[Charles Spurgeon]



What God says about our hurts & restoration


TO FORGIVE

By Pastor Tim Johnson

The concept of forgiveness conjures up all kinds of questions. Do I have to forgive? What happens if I don't? Does forgiveness mean I have to forget? How do I forgive? The questions are numerous, and rightly so.

The act of forgiveness is always costly. While Jesus was nailed to the cross for the sins of the world, he said, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Forgiveness cost Jesus his life. Before he died, he called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Jesus entrusted his entire being to his Father. That's what forgiveness requires of us.

So, you've been wronged. Someone has hurt you badly. Perhaps you were embarrassed, misjudged, slandered, or cheated. Whatever it is, you are struggling with the hurt and anger, and perhaps considering your options for payback. Please take a deep breath and pause long enough to consider what is at stake. You are about to be deceived into a life of bitterness and deep pain if you go down the path of unforgiveness.



Unforgiveness is dangerous. At the heart level, it is idolatry, because ultimately, when a person sins, they sin against God. When King David was exposed for his sins with Bathsheba, he prayed in Psalm 51:4, “Against you—you alone—I have sinned and done this evil in your sight. So you are right when you pass sentence; you are blameless when you judge.” David’s sins of adultery, lying, and murder hurt many people, but finally, he acknowledged that his sin was against God.

Only God, who is perfectly holy, has the right to hold on to an offense. When a sinful person decides to hold on to someone else’s sin, let alone their own, they are doing only what God has the right to do. That is idolatry—making themselves God.

The First Step: Everyone Sins

The first step of forgiveness is to acknowledge that all sin is against God, and only he has the right to hold on to it. Matthew 18:21–22 says, “Then Peter approached him and asked, ‘Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?’ ‘I tell you, not as many as seven,’ Jesus replied, ‘but seventy times seven.’”

There is a release in this first step of forgiveness. Playing God is an impossibly heavy load, and we are not designed to handle it. To realize that life is not about me, but Christ, frees me to let God be God and me to be his child. Remember those carefree days of being a child? You didn’t have to worry about bills, jobs, relationships, etc. That was your parent’s job to handle. Well, in a similar way, you don’t have to worry and stew about someone’s sin toward you. That’s for God to handle.

The Second Step: Let It Go

The second step of forgiveness is to let it go. That’s easier said than done, right? Years ago, I had the pleasure of seeing a man named Wally ring the church bell before worship. Wally was an older man with a small frame, and we became good friends. I lovingly called him the church ding-a-ling. We laugh about that to this day. In order to


get the bell ringing, Wally had to literally jump on the rope and ride it down. It took all he had to get it started. Once the bell’s momentum kicked in, it rang much easier. The only way it would stop ringing was if Wally let go of the rope. It took a while for the momentum to slow, but it would eventually stop ringing.

Forgiveness is letting go of the rope. For some, their entire lives are about combating someone else’s sin. They constantly think up new arguments to justify themselves and to condemn the other person. It’s as if they have thrown themselves on the bell’s rope, and with everything they have, they ride the bell’s rope down and up, up and down. They rehash the words, the actions, and the hurt. Just let go of the rope.

Hebrews 12:15 warns, “Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and defiling many.” The “root of bitterness” in this verse is an obvious allusion to Deuteronomy 29:18, “Be sure there is no man, woman, clan, or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations. Be sure there is no root among you bearing poisonous and bitter fruit.” Did you catch the context of idolatry leading to a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit? Bitterness is a poison. I’ve heard it said that unforgiveness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. It hurts you more than anyone else. Hence the reminder, “Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God.”

Remember, you don’t have the right to hold on to someone else’s sin. Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We have enough sin of our own to deal with, let alone someone else’s. First John 1:9 tells us, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” If a holy God can forgive all my sin, then who am I as a sinner to hold on to someone else’s sin? Again, let it go and let God deal with it.

Those who hold on to unforgiveness make praying the Lord’s Prayer very dangerous.



Remember the petition, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Praying this petition with unforgiveness in your heart is the same as asking God *not* to forgive you. None of us has any hope apart from God’s forgiveness.

So, does forgiveness mean I have to forget? The simple answer is no. The bell often keeps ringing, for a time, after you let go of the rope. But when you let go of the rope, the momentum is broken, the ringing will dim, and the memory will fade over time.

The Third Step: Prayer

Part of letting someone else’s sin go involves presenting that person to God in prayer. Second Corinthians 10:3–4 tells us, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.” Holding on to God’s Word and going to him in prayer are divinely powerful tools for overcoming unforgiveness and bitterness.

Standing on the Word of God, we pray, “Lord, help this person understand the hurt of their words and actions. Help them work through whatever is causing them to do these kinds of things. Help me to love them as you have loved me and to see them as you see them. Help me do to them what I would want done to me. May your grace and mercy prevail in my life and their lives.” Such prayer will affect you, and the ringing of what the other person did will fade. You may never forget, but eventually, it won’t matter.

Does forgiveness mean that I have to trust? Again, the simple answer is no. Obviously, if a person regularly does something that is hurtful, you are not going to repeatedly put yourself in the same situation. You might even have to create some healthy boundaries. If a dog bites you every time you feed him, eventually you will either stop feeding him or find a different way to feed him. Even Jesus had to sometimes confront or challenge the Pharisees and, at other times, avoid them. In regard to the Pharisees, Jesus instructed his disciples in Matthew 23:3, “Therefore do whatever

they tell you, and observe it. But don’t do what they do, because they don’t practice what they teach.” Jesus certainly came to die for their sins, but that didn’t mean he trusted them.

Does forgiveness mean that I have to like them? No, but you have to love them. As a disciple of Jesus, you are to seek to love as he loves. Romans 5:8 says, “But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” He first loved us while we were sinners. God even sends his Holy Spirit into believers to create the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. A prayer of response could be, “Lord, let the fruit of your Spirit blossom from my life.”

This doesn’t mean you’re going to be close to everyone or even like everyone. People have different personalities and backgrounds that are going to mesh better with some and not as well with others. Praise God for the variety. But Ephesians 4:32 says, “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

It’s always good to remind ourselves, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). Christ defeated Satan, sin, and death at the cross. He won the battle for our forgiveness. By his gracious Spirit, let us rejoice and live in that forgiveness.

Johnson serves Christ the King Free Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn.

Forgiveness
does not restore
trust. Healthy
boundaries are
important.

FAITH



Does God care about politics?

& THE STATE

By Pastor Sam Wellumson

For far too long, we have believed the lie that we can have two distinct lives—one religious and one secular. Many Christians today seem to think that Sunday morning is for their spiritual life. They go to church, sing, confess their sins and faith, pray, and fellowship with their brothers and sisters in Christ. They might even read their Bible and pray with their family. But Monday morning through Saturday night is, mainly, the time to do all the “non-spiritual stuff.” Work, drive kids to school and practice, and take care of responsibilities at home.

We easily forget that while Christians are redeemed solely by the blood of Jesus, we also live in God’s creation. When Jesus says, “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24), he obliterates the idea that your life can be divided into the “spiritual” over here and the “secular” over there. What you do with mammon (the things of this world) has spiritual ramifications. As a creature, you are body (physical) and soul (spiritual), so how you interact with mammon (physical) affects your soul (spiritual). This extends to all aspects of life in this world.

The Three Estates: Christian Life in God's World

Jesus said that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36); however, this world is where we still are and should be. We know we belong here because Jesus has kept us here, not “as orphans” but with His promised, abiding presence (John 14:18). As Christians, we live in God’s “right-hand kingdom,” where we are declared righteous by the gospel and are justified solely by grace through faith. At the same time, we also live in God’s “left-hand kingdom,” where God works through the governing authorities that he has established to maintain and sustain order in a fallen, sinful world (Romans 13:1–7).

This “two kingdoms” framework is helpful, but it can lead to the wrong idea that God’s right-hand kingdom is what is *really* important because it is

“spiritual,” while God’s left-hand kingdom is less important because it is “secular.” No! Both of them belong to God. Both are under his authority. Both are where God has placed you and called you to live as his child, where he has given you good works to do (Ephesians 2:10).

The scriptural concept of the “three estates” can help us avoid that error. This concept teaches that all life falls into three categories: church,

family, and state. God has established all three of these estates and gives us responsibilities within them.

God established the church to preach his Word (Matthew 28:18–20). The church exists to proclaim God’s law and gospel so people will repent, believe in the gospel, and receive eternal life. The family

was established to have dominion over God’s creation. God loves people and wants more of them (Genesis 1:28; 9:1, 7). God calls husbands and wives to have children and nourish temporal life. God established the state to maintain order in creation (Romans 13:1–7; I Peter 2:13–17).

The state is an extension of the family. The *Small Catechism* explains the fourth commandment: “We should fear and love God so that we do not despise our parents and superiors” (i.e., any authority that God places over us), “nor provoke them to anger, but honor, serve, obey, love, and respect them.” Before the fall, the state existed with only two people: Adam and his wife as a perfect family. We only know what the state looks like after sin entered creation. What the state would have been without sin remains an enigma to us, but Scripture is clear that after the fall, the state’s function and purpose is to punish wrongdoers and reward the just (Romans 13:2–4) which keeps creation from falling into chaos and anarchy.

In each of the three estates God has given individuals different callings and vocations. But it is important that each of these estates stay in their lane and operate within the boundaries that God has created it to exist. The church is called to proclaim God’s Word so that people can have eternal life. The family is called to have and raise children for temporal life. The state is called to support life and maintain order throughout creation by bearing the sword to punish the bad and reward the good (Romans 13:3–4).

Before we move to the topic of politics, we need to remember: the state can only support life. God did not establish the state to give life, either temporal or eternal. God wants the state to support temporal life given through the family by punishing liars, thieves, adulterers, and murderers. Ideally, the state will also recognize that it should stay out of the way of the church’s proclamation of God’s Word unto eternal life. So, the state *is* important. God gave and established the state as a gift, and we need it. But since the fall, the state’s function and role is to clean up the messes that sin brings into creation.

Both kingdoms,
the sacred and
the secular,
belong to God.

The Christian's Vocation in the State

Every Christian has a God-given calling to good works in the state. For some, that means holding elected offices or serving in the military. Article 16 of the Augsburg Confession on "Civil Government" is a good guide regarding those things. For the rest of us who don't hold an office, Scripture is clear that all people, whether they serve in elected positions or not, are called to the vocation of being subject to the authorities that God establishes.

So, pay your taxes (Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:7). Follow the speed limit and other laws established by the state. And, most importantly, pray for the individuals in positions of authority so we may lead peaceful and quiet lives, godly and dignified in every way (I Timothy 2:1–4).

Some Christians wonder, "Does God care about politics?" Because the word "politics" carries so much baggage, a better question is, "Does God care about the authorities in the [estate of the] state?" The resounding testimony of Scripture is, "Yes!" God has established those authorities for our good (Romans 13:4). The state will not know about its duties if the church is silent on issues that fall under the purview of the state.

One of the goals of demons is to silence people (Luke 11:14), especially when it comes to confessing God's Word. Demons do not want us to speak for the unborn, about marriage existing only between a man and a woman, or about the God-created differences between male and female. Satan wants us to think that moral issues like these are "merely political" issues. Abortion, marriage, gender issues, and many other topics that the state has gotten involved in are *not* political issues. If you think those are merely political issues, it shows that the demons have gained ground.

Christian, speak boldly and confidently on those issues because Scripture does. One of the loudest ways you can speak to the state about its duties is with your vote. Now, Scripture does not command us to vote, and there are no laws in America that require us to vote. But recognize the good gift God has given you in being able

to vote. You have the privilege of having a voice in determining who has authority in the state. Neglecting to use that privilege is sinful. No perfect candidate exists. Every elected authority is a sinner, but God has established those authorities over us to accomplish his purposes.

As you vote, remember that God calls us to love our neighbors. He calls us to be just and to show kindness to the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, and the poor (Zechariah 7:9–10). Use your vote to support the candidate(s) who will be most aligned with those principles.

Pastors, the political landscape in our country is, frankly, ugly. Because of that, it can be tempting to think that politics is too unholy to be addressed from the pulpit. That is simply not true. Just because the world has labeled something as a political issue does not mean that it is not also a biblical issue. Pastors, you should be preaching about these issues—not all the time, but when the text calls for it. Do this clearly and boldly because preaching God's Word will train people in righteousness and equip them for every good work (II Timothy 3:16–17). The saints in your congregation need that scriptural training in righteousness to help them navigate their responsibilities toward the state.

Believers should care about what happens in the state because God has called us to live in and carry out our vocations within it. When things in the state get ugly and depressing, take a deep breath. Remember that God is in control of everything that happens in the state (Proverbs 21:1). He will hold the authorities he has appointed accountable for their actions.

Neither neglect your duties in the state nor get overly focused on the state. Remember to do what God has called you to do in your family, where you provide for and train those in your household, and in the church, where you are called to hear and believe God's Word. Hold that Word fast with an honest and good heart, and bear fruit in all three estates with patience (Luke 8:15).

Wellumson serves Christ the King Free Lutheran, East Grand Forks, Minn.



**What God says about
pursuing fame, fortune,**

& SUCCESS

By Sophia Lucht

America is a country built on the promise of success. Throughout history, it has maintained the reputation of being a free country into which you can come with nothing but a dream and make a successful living and a name for yourself. James Truslow Adams, an early 20th century American writer and historian, wrote, “The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement.”

Though success may mean something different to everyone, each of us has a mental picture of things turning out “the way they should” or an idea of “happily ever after.” When we think about success, we see things ending in the right place, often with wealth, notoriety, and fame. Though not always visibly achievable, it’s something tangible. As ambitious Americans living in the land of opportunity and dreams, we often feel the seemingly imminent tangibility of success, and push ourselves in an attempt to achieve it, setting goals and doing whatever it takes to reach them.

Especially with the influence of social media, our highly modernized world drives us toward this kind of accomplishment. We are surrounded by pressure to do our best, come out on top, and embody perfection in every aspect of our lives. We are socially pressured to get the highest promotion, be a better spouse and parent, eat the healthiest foods, own the nicest house, etc. The list is endless.

The Paradox

This reputation and drive for success, however, come with a strange paradox. Though our culture screams at us to succeed, we are also constantly told that we are not good enough at anything we do. Unless we are successful, we are worthless. We can spend our whole lives striving toward one goal or another, but we will never be the best. And to a certain degree, this is true. No matter how good we are at something, there will always be someone better than us—someone to win the next Olympic title, someone who has just one more degree than us, someone to sweep in and take the next promotion. Though the push for success and achievement has been an inherent part of American society, the demand for perfection and the paradoxical deprecation of our efforts have steadily increased since the rise of the internet and the digital age. Needless to say, depression, anxiety, and suicide numbers have skyrocketed over the last 40 years.

In the midst of these pressures from every side of society, even some of the most powerful, worldly influences recognize the emptiness that comes with notoriety, money, fame, and tangible success. Actor Jim Carrey said in an interview in 2005, “I think everybody should get rich and famous and everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that that’s not the answer.” NFL quarterback Tom Brady acknowledged this in an interview shortly after his third championship win in 2001: “Why do I have three Super Bowl rings, and still think there’s something greater out there for me? ... There’s gotta be more than this.”

Many Christians understand the emptiness that comes with pursuing worldly things. Jesus himself says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ... but lay up for yourselves

treasures in heaven” (Matthew 6:19–21). In this world of sin, we find no satisfactory earthly answer for our purpose and drive. Our identity lies in Christ and not in our achievements, so we don’t have to worry about succeeding to find who we are. But we are called to be fruitful with our work and have dominion over the earth as we expand and cultivate civilization (Genesis 1:28–30), and success and influence can help us make an impact as we work to spread the gospel. This is why we must still ponder the question, “What now? Now that we’ve been chosen, redeemed, and called to be one of God’s people, are we allowed to pursue money, influence, and success?”

God does not prohibit Christians from doing well in life. However, we must distinguish how believers are called to pursue success from how the world does it. Throughout Scripture, instead of seeking success as defined by the world, we hear a call to godly excellence. Consider Philippians 1:9–10, Titus 2:7, I Corinthians 12:31, and II Peter 1:2–4. In the Book of Daniel, the prophet himself is said to possess an “excellent spirit,” which allows him to do the work of the Lord (Daniel 5:12, 6:3). In Philippians 4:8, Paul tells us that even our thoughts should be trained toward excellence: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

Godly Excellence

Having defined success as the world sees it, we must step back for a moment and consider godly excellence, a quality that reflects God’s character. Scripture tells us to think about whatever is excellent and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8) and also to excel in love above all, as Jesus instructed us (John 13:34–35). Excellence is not perfection but a quest for spiritual maturity and godliness, powered by the work of the Holy Spirit. Success is something we have to work for. Excellence, on the other hand, reflects who God is and what he’s done for us. It’s about growing in our sanctification by God’s help rather than attempting to do well to prove our worth before God and mankind. Success

pursues the things and desires of this sinful world; excellence pursues dying to our sinful selves daily in order to live a life more like Christ.

Throughout Scripture, we are never called to seek success. Rather, success is always discussed in the context of God's mighty acts of salvation, his mercy on us, and the work he has done for us. We are told that our Christian journey will not be easy, but we are still given hope for our short lives in this world. Passages like Proverbs 16:3, Matthew 6:25–33, and Jeremiah 29:11 all speak of success for those living lives of faith. Worldly success does not come from our own hands. Rather, it comes from trusting that God has a plan for our lives and following where he leads us, living lives of faith and obedience to his Word. A wonderful example of this truth is Proverbs 3:3–6, which reads, "Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

God's Blessings

We will not always succeed in the things of this world, even if we try our best. It's impossible to force blessings on ourselves. But when we do well, the blessings and success come from God alone. They are a natural consequence of living lives of godly excellence and using our spiritual gifts in the way that he intended—in love. The Apostle James agreed with this when he wrote, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17a). The Lord uses and blesses us as he sees fit, not based on what we want, but according to what he knows is best for our lives, our spiritual wellbeing, and the salvation of those he has placed around us.

We are not, however, called to live puffed-up lives, exclusively seeking higher spiritual purity. From the very beginning, mankind has been called to be good stewards of what God has given us in this world and to work at cultivating, growing, and expanding the gifts and property he has given to each of us. In Genesis 1:28, God commands us to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and

subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." This passage could easily be misinterpreted to mean that we are called only to have as many children as physically possible, and live simple lives of farming and agricultural work. At its core, however, God is calling mankind to much more. Our roles of cultivation, expansion, and caretaking should extend not just to the home but also to the church and to the rest of society. Martin Luther writes extensively about this idea in his theology of vocation. He writes, "Every occupation has its own honor before God. Ordinary work is a divine vocation or calling. In our daily work no matter how important or mundane we serve God by serving the neighbor and we also participate in God's on-going providence for the human race" (*A Sermon on Keeping Children in School*, 1530).

Christian success should not and cannot be measured by our performance in this world, but that doesn't mean we are to detach ourselves from doing good and furthering the Kingdom of God. We are called to seek excellence by driving ourselves toward truth and love in every corner of our day-to-day lives, knowing that God will use us for his glorious purpose. And, when we mess up and again become obsessed with the world and its alluring pictures of success, we can fall back upon the never-ending mercies of God made manifest in the salvation brought through Jesus Christ. For that reason, "[w]hatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23–24).

Lucht is a member of Living Word Lutheran, Egan, Minn.

True success
comes from
God alone.



Birth of a new church.

BY MICHAEL ROKENBRODT

Twas the Sunday before Christmas, and all through Momma Rose's house, many church members were stirring, though I didn't see a mouse. Perhaps that was due to Momma Rose's hospitality. In her culture, it is said that unoffered hospitality results in rodent invasion. While Momma Rose is not given to superstition, she gave me this explanation when I accepted yet another plate of watermelon and glass of juice upon arrival at her house for Sunday worship.

Momma Rose is the chairwoman of Jinja C Zone of Uganda's Ambassador Institute. This zone has undertaken church planting, and the new congregation is currently being hosted weekly on her patio. It has given me the excuse to tease her with the name Lydia (who hosted the first church of Europe, Acts 16:14, 40). This patio has often been the site of Ambassador Institute classes and meetings, but now it is a sacred space for the worship of God's people since last June.

There were 18 in attendance alongside me and short-term missionary Randy Carlson that Sunday: two families, a half dozen children, a couple of young single adults, some widows, and Rose's grandchildren—perhaps not all that different from Lydia's church when it first began to meet in Philippi. Some were affiliated directly with the Ambassador Institute. Some were not. But I could detect the Institute's fingerprint when I heard one medical student comment after the service, "The reason I come here is that I hear the true Word of God at the center of this gathering."

The service began with singing, dancing, and clapping several well-known worship songs that alternated between English and Lusoga. All a cappella. Next, I was invited to give a Christmas message from Isaiah 9 and 60, which linked the coming of a child's kingdom of peace and justice to the gathering of the lost from all nations. Then some of the children were invited to exhibit some prepared music. This was followed by a time of testimony shared by several church members. Finally, prayer requests were collected and divided amongst the members, and we took turns leading the prayer. By the end of the service, I think all members, young or old, had been offered a moment of leadership or a chance to contribute.

Five days later, I met with the Ambassador Institute's five leaders: Godfrey, Aaron, Nissi, Rose, and Anne. Godfrey and Rose happen to be two of my first Ambassador students when I arrived in Uganda in 2015. Momma Nissi was my co-teacher and the one who trained me into the ministry. Aaron would be a later student. Anne is Rose's sister and the Institute's national treasurer. All five are a part of Jinja C Zone's eight-member leadership team. The five of them volunteered to take on the role of serving as the church's "council of ministers" and are currently rotating teaching and preaching responsibilities for Sunday mornings.

The council met with me to establish goals and visions for 2024. These included a desire to appoint ushers, intercessors, deacons, and separate leaders for men's, women's, and children's ministries. They wish to launch a new member's class using the Ambassador Institute curriculum as well as leadership training for themselves and future church leadership. Knowing it may not be too long before they outgrow the patio, they have a vision to rent or own property for a future venue that would be most convenient to the members with the highest transportation obstacles. But their more immediate purchase concern is instruments like drums or a keyboard for music. They also have intentions for hospital visitation, home visitation, compassion ministry, radio ministry, and even television evangelism (a goal for 2026).

This congregation is the second to adopt the name "Ambassador Church." Its sister church meets less than an hour's drive away in the village of Nabukosi, home of the Nate and Rhoda Jore family. Nabukosi's elders were in attendance during the Jinja C Zone's organizational meetings last May. We hope to encourage the association of these two congregations as we plan leadership training for Ambassador Church in 2024.

Ambassador Institute

- **Mission:**

To come alongside pastors and congregations who desire to study God's Word and assist them in developing solid, biblical, and theological curriculum to train their leaders and pastors.

- **Website:**

aflcworldmissions.org/ambassador-institute

Rokenbrodt, a student at the Free Lutheran Seminary, is a part-time AFLC missionary.



Serving God overseas.

BY JON NELSON

Journey Missions gives 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, I have been reminded of God's faithfulness. In 2023, Journey Missions led four teams to the field: two Brazil trips (February and June), a Mexico trip through the Free Lutheran Bible College cross-cultural ministry program (March), and an Israel trip led by Mike Anenson (May).

In 2024, we have trips scheduled for congregations and their members to join. In March, Journey Missions led the FLBC cross cultural class to Tlacolula, Mexico, where they served at Foundation for His Ministry. This has been an ongoing blessing to see young adults plugging into international ministry and discovering their place in missions. Looking toward summer and fall, Journey Missions is planning a Brazil trip in June and is finalizing a schedule for a potential trip to Israel in November, Lord willing.

Journey Missions also works with congregations to plan and coordinate trips. If your congregation is interested in an additional trip to one of the AFLC's mission fields, we are very happy to have those discussions with you. We are here to serve our congregations and help our church members see the mission field.

In 2023, Journey Missions sent five missionary assistants to serve with our AFLC missionaries. The missionary assistant program gives volunteers opportunities to serve in missions for a longer timeframe than a typical ministry trip. These types of experiences are suitable for those at least college-aged through retirees. We hope to give people opportunities to invest in our mission fields in a way they wouldn't be able to on a short-term team. This past year, Casey McLoughlin, Jaelynn Kozicky, and Rose Zeltinger spent time in Brazil; Randy Carlson served with Michael Rokenbrodt in Uganda; and Kyle Gorman served with Pastor Matthew and Ednay Abel in Paraguay. We are thankful for each of them and their willingness to serve.

We had four missionary assistants on the field this spring. Zach and Carey Ritland and Logan and Trevor Blom served in Brazil and Paraguay. We are thankful for service with our missionaries.

As I think about the people who have served and are serving with 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, and we're thankful that they have chosen to utilize Journey Missions.

I also rejoice as the Lord calls and sends out these volunteers 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 those who send; 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" at such a time as this.



Serving Opportunities

2024 Short-Term Ministry Trips

- Brazil and Paraguay: June 13–July 2
- Israel: November (TBD)

Missionary Assistants

Serving with an AFLC missionary for one month or longer, missionary assistant opportunities are available in Brazil, India, Paraguay, and Uganda.

Webpage: aflcworldmissions.org/journey-missions

Nelson, a member of Faith Lutheran, Minneapolis, is the department head.



Making room for people.

BY MONICA COYLE

Remember that time you moved or started over in building a new community, and struggled to feel understood? Or maybe a life transition ushered in a season of isolation, where organic connections just don't happen naturally. Becoming a stay-at-home parent, taking a new job, moving far away from family, or becoming an empty nester could all leave you with, once again, that unwelcome feeling of loneliness.

I've found myself there more often than I want to admit. And while usually it is just part of life, there is one place where it just isn't acceptable—the church.

The community of believers is marked by love for one another, a spiritual fellowship that defies demographics and cultural division. When visitors, skeptics, new believers, and strangers are part of a new and growing church, there is a huge opportunity for hospitality.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the idea of hospitality is a clear command and distinguishing point for believers. The Greek word for hospitality is translated as “love of strangers” and is used in the New Testament three times as a command to all Christians. Paul puts it in the context of building a Christlike community: “Love one another with brotherly affection ... Contribute to the needs of the saints and *seek to show hospitality*” (Romans 12:10–13, emphasis mine).

Now, if hospitality as a requirement makes you feel a little nervous, you aren't alone! We might feel insecure about creating the perfect four-course meal when we can't find time in our schedule or wonder how we are going to get the house clean for company. But thankfully, biblical hospitality doesn't require those things.

Showing love to strangers can take different forms. Each believer's personality and spiritual gifts will reflect a unique way of emulating Christ's love. As we seek to build the Church, we are called to use our gifts for the good of others.

Maybe it looks like befriending a new visitor after church, hosting a new family at your home for a meal, meeting up with a young mom and her kids at the park, or meeting for coffee to hear more about someone's tough week. Or maybe it is an intentional commitment to keep an eye out for someone needing a friend and resisting the temptation to stay in the “safe zone” of our close friends at church.

I like to think of hospitality as “making room for people” in our homes, our hearts, and our schedules. When life is busy, it's all too tempting to use the margin for my own desires. In certain seasons more than others, it can feel like we are giving up limited free time and room in the budget. And yet, I've seen over and over that such time spent for others brings a return on the investment. Being cared for and prepared for creates a relational openness that gives way to vulnerable conversations, opportunities for the gospel, and a greater connection to the Church.

Loving strangers among us

- Pray for eyes to see and ears to hear. Individually, as families, and within the leadership structure, we can pray for the Lord to help us see the needs around us and respond with courage and love. Pray for the Lord to show us ways to connect with visitors at church as well as throughout the week as we interact with the souls God has placed around us.
- Commit to creating a culture of “making room for people.” In each stage of a church's growth, the challenges can differ, but the solution is always the same—meet others around us with Christ's care. Welcoming each new visitor, skeptic, church shopper, or newer believer extends far beyond the front doors of the building. Outside of church, we can encourage each other to make room in our hearts and homes for the precious souls around us.
- Trust the Lord to use our efforts and look forward with confident expectation to what he will do. As we bring our few loaves and fishes to Jesus, he multiplies our meager efforts because of his greatness.

Coyle, a member of the editorial board, is a member of Shiloh Church, Black Hawk, S.D.

• WMF DAY 2024

Exuberant joy.

BY LINDA HENSRUD

I am the grandmother of many little toddlers who are the perfect example of exuberant joy. They come running up to me with chubby arms outstretched for a hug or to be held. No matter what my mood is at the time, their joy warms my heart and makes my day. It's catchy from those little ones! As children of the Lord, we have so much to be joyful over. But sometimes we get overwhelmed by the cares of the world. We need to be reminded of the reasons we have to find joy in this world. Who doesn't need an extra boost of joy?

If you are a woman in an AFLC church, then you are a member of the Women's Missionary Federation (WMF) and are invited to come to our WMF Day on Wednesday, June 12, during the AFLC Annual Conference at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary in Plymouth, Minn. Our theme for our conference is based on Philippians 4:4–9, "Rejoice in the Lord always."

The day will begin with worship through singing together, led by Ben Webb and musicians from Emmaus Lutheran in Bloomington, Minn. Angie Lombardo, of Helmar Lutheran, Newark, Ill., has written the 2024 WMF Bible study, *Philippians—Exuberant Joy*, and will lead us in devotions. Workshop speakers will be Pastor Jerry Moan, who taught the Book of Philippians at the Bible College; Emily Raan, AFLC missionary to Uganda home on furlough; and in the afternoon, Shiney Ramnarain, daughter of Pastor Luther Dasari of AFLC-India, will have first-hand information about how the ministry is doing in that country. In between these speakers, Angela Hanson, Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., will share praise through interpretations of the Psalms on her violin.

We also have a time of remembering the women who have faithfully served and have now gone on to their heavenly home, led by Mia Presteng of Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D.

The Mission Festival Service will be held Thursday evening, June 13, led by Pastor Earl Korhonen, executive director of World Missions, with speaker Pastor Jeff Swanson, the Alaska Mission coordinator, and music from the FLBC Ambassadors summer team.

We look forward to you joining us and ask that you please be in prayer for the speakers and all who are involved in putting this day together. So come and join us on June 12 for a day of "exuberant joy" as we worship and fellowship together.

WMF Day

- **When:** June 12, 2024
- **Where:**
Free Lutheran Bible College
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.
Plymouth, MN
- **Online Registration:**
aflc.org/women/wmf-day
*Register for WMF Day meals at
flbc.edu/conference2024.
- **Mission Festival Service:**
7 p.m., June 13
Speaker: Pastor Jeff Swanson

Hensrud, a member of Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D., is the communications secretary for the WMF.

Annual Conference registration open

Register for meals, VBS & youth, WMF and Rekindle the Fire event

The AFLC Annual Conference will be held June 12–15 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary in Plymouth, Minn. Registration is now open (aflc.org/about-us/conferences). Prices are \$45/single or \$75/couple. To register for meals, child, and youth activities, visit the FLBC website (flbc.edu/conference2024).

Online registration will close on May 29. Walk-up registration will be available for the conference, nursery, VBS, and youth.

A vacation Bible school program will be provided for children entering pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. The youth track is offered to those entering seventh grade through high school. Registration includes optional afternoon activities (at a cost) on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.

Campus housing (\$250) is available by request by emailing events@flbc.edu or calling 763.944.9501. On campus housing includes a continental breakfast. Provide your own bedding.

For other housing options, visit the FLBC website for links to local hotels.

Conference committees will meet on June 12. The conference schedule and nominees will be included in the May issue.

Rekindle the Fire, June 11

AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship will host Rekindle the Fire, a revitalizing



A Conference Committee met prior to the opening of the 2023 Annual Conference in Sioux Falls, S.D. The 2024 committees will meet on June 12.

and equipping event, on June 11 at Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis. With the theme, “One Mission, Many Members: Empowering Lay Leaders in Your Church and Community,” the event is open to clergy and lay members. The event will include a meal and a time of worship and prayer for the Annual Conference. The event is free. Registration can be found at aflc.org/evangelism/events/rekindle-fire.

WMF Day, June 12

WMF Day will be held prior to the conference opening on June 12 in the

Student Life Center with the theme, “Rejoice in the Lord Always.” The schedule begins with devotions at 9 a.m. led by Angie Lombardo, who wrote the 2024 Bible study, *Philippians—Exuberant Joy*. Workshops will be presented by Pastor Jerry Moan (Book of Philippians), Emily Raan (AFLC missionary), and Shiney Dasari Ramnarain (AFLC-India). A memorial service and business meeting will close out the day. Registration (\$25/person) can be found online at aflc.org/women/wmf-day.

Register for WMF Day meals on the FLBC webpage at flbc.edu/conference2024.

Summer Institute of Theology

Registration will open soon for the Summer Institute of Theology, which will be held August 5–9 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary in Plymouth, Minn. The Institute is offered annually as an opportunity to learn with other pastors and church leaders on the FLBCS campus.

This year’s featured speaker is Dr. Harold L. Senkbeil, adjunct professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind., and executive director of DOXOLOGY, the Lutheran center for

spiritual care and counsel. Senkbeil will speak on “The Care of Souls.”

Other speakers and topics include Pastor Steve Mundfrom (Means of Grace in the Congregation), Pastor Adam Osier (Romans), Pastor Brian Lunn (Lutheranism in Scandinavia), and AFLC youth and family ministry leaders.

A testimony service will be included in this year’s schedule.

Register at flbc.edu/events/sit2024. A 50-percent discount is offered on a second registration (for a spouse or another member of your congregation).





Pastor Earl and Joan Korhonen talk to members of the Concert Choir about Norwegian culture. Korhonen is the executive director of AFLC World Missions.

Choir preps for Scandinavia tour

Members of the Free Lutheran Bible College Concert Choir will tour Denmark and Norway April 29–May 18. The tour will begin with three days in the Faroe Islands and several days in Copenhagen before continuing on to Norway, where they will visit Stavanger and then make their way up the North Sea coast to Bergen and Trondheim before returning south to Oslo.

A Companion Tour of FLBC alumni and friends will join the tour in Bergen

on May 7. Stops of interest include the Hans Nielsen Hauge Birth Museum on the 200th anniversary of his death, a Lutheran Bible school near Stavanger, Bryggen Warf, Fantoff Stave Church, and the Syttende Mai parade in Oslo.

The choir is directed by Andrew Hanson and will be accompanied by Marian Christopherson. FLBC Dean Adam Osier will travel with the tour.

Follow social media posts with the hashtag #korturné.

FLBCS celebrates 60 years with events

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary will mark its 60th anniversary in 2024. The Free Lutheran Seminary was founded in 1964, and two years later, the Bible College opened with 13 students. Supporters and alumni are invited to attend campus events throughout the summer and fall.

To kick off the anniversary celebrations, FLBCS will host a celebratory reception during the AFLC Annual Conference on its Plymouth, Minn., campus on June 12–15.

The culminating celebratory event will be a 60th Anniversary Gala on Thursday, Nov. 14, in the FLBCS Student Life Center. Dr. Philip Dearborn,

president of the Association of Biblical Higher Education (ABHE), will keynote the event.

“What keeps me motivated is the thought of families, congregations, and communities impacted for Christ through the faithful service of the more than 3,000 souls established in God’s Word through these 60 years,” said Dr. Wade Mobley, president of FLBCS. “I am thankful to God for his faithfulness through generations of men and women who have dedicated their lives to this mission.”

For more information on events throughout the 60th anniversary season, visit flbc.edu/events.

2024 FLS GRADUATE

SCOTT OLSON

Minneapolis, Minn.

I was born in Watertown, S.D., on May 11, 1995, to Mark and Dawn Olson. I was baptized into the faith, which the Lord has

sustained me in ever since. My dad served as an AFLC pastor at three different locations while I was growing up: Arlington, S.D.; Tioga, N.D.; and Lakeville, Minn.



After high school, I attended the Free Lutheran Bible College and

graduated in 2016. God used this time to really strengthen me in my faith and equip me for ministry. After graduating from FLBC, I spent a year working with youth at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Camarillo, Calif. At the same time, I attended Crown College online, where I received my bachelor’s degree in the spring of 2020. I began seminary in the fall of 2020.

I sensed the Lord calling me into ministry in high school. Despite some of my own hesitations at times, I determined that if the Lord was calling me to be a pastor, I would follow him and trust that he would provide what I needed to do so. I have seen time and again the Lord’s provision for me financially and in gifts necessary for ministry.

My time in seminary was unique. I am the only student in my class. This at times led to a few shifts in my class schedule so I wouldn’t have to take a class all alone. I also started seminary in the midst of the pandemic. Despite the challenges that I faced at times in seminary, the Lord has never once left me wanting. He has never left my side. And I know that wherever he may call me, he will be right there beside me.

I served my internship at Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church and Reiner Lutheran Free Church in Thief River Falls and Goodridge, Minn., under the supervision of Pastor Alex Amiot.

- Olson has accepted a call to Grace Free Lutheran, Bagley, Minn.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Terry Culler has accepted a call as interim pastor of Alsace Lutheran, Reading, Pa.

Pastor Mark Antal has accepted a call as interim pastor of Faith Free Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn. He currently serves Redeemer Free Lutheran, Ontonagon, Mich.

Pastor Michael Onstad has accepted a call to serve as associate pastor of St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D. He currently serves Valley Free Lutheran, Portland, N.D.

Pastor Iran and Janisley Goes will visit AFLC congregations in the Northwest Minnesota District on April 15–30 and attend FLBCS graduation. Goes is the president of AFLC-Brazil and dean of Setell, its seminary.

Pastor Del Palmer, Shakopee, Minn., has accepted a quarter-time role with AFLC Home Missions as a communications coordinator. The administrative role will communicate with congregations and oversee field representatives. The field representatives, currently being recruited, will visit congregations, sharing with them the work of Home Missions and how they can partner with other congregations in mission for Christ.

Jeremy Larson, a student at the Free Lutheran Seminary, and his family will serve at the Alaska Mission in Naknek this summer. Jeremy will serve as pastor to the area congregations, at the NET, and with vacation Bible school teams.

Two senior students at the Free Lutheran Seminary, Plymouth, Minn., have been assigned internships for their final year of study. They begin on June 1. **Mikey Meester** has been assigned to Our Savior's Free Lutheran and First English Lutheran, Stanley, N.D., under the supervision of Pastor Erin Tormanen. **Troy Hanson** has been assigned to Emmanuel Free Lutheran, Williston, N.D., under the supervision of Pastor Jon Wellumson.

FEBRUARY MEMORIALS

Bible College

Ruth Claus
Greg Schmitke

Bay Broadcasting

Greg Schmitke

FLAPS

Greg Schmitke

Seminary

Louise Ballmann

World Missions

Eloda Knutson
Pastor Alvin & Frances
Grothe

... in honor of

Bible College

Rebecca Moan



Pastor Glenn Frecks

Licensed Pastor Glenn Louis Frecks, 87, of Holdrege, Neb., died Dec. 18, 2023, at Phelps Memorial Hospital in Holdrege.

Born June 17, 1936, in Hildreth, Neb., he was the son of John and Helene (Johnson) Frecks. He married Karol K. Beard on Oct. 7, 1962, in Axtell, Neb. She preceded him in death.

He grew up in the Franklin, Neb., area and attended school at Franklin High School, graduating in 1954. He entered the Air National Guard, serving from 1958 to 1964. The family made their home in Minden, Neb., where he was employed by Stadler Feed Co., later moving to Axtell. He joined the AFLC roster as a licensed pastor in 2004 and served Faith Free Lutheran, Bertrand, Neb. He was a member of Bethany Lutheran Church in Minden and Bertrand Evangelical Free Lutheran.

Surviving are one son, LaMonte (Michelle) Frecks, St. Augustine, Fla.; two daughters, Kamala (Jeff) Carlsen, Lexington Park, Md., and Tracy (Bob) McDuffee, Lake In The Hills, Ill.; eight grandchildren; and one great-granddaughter.

The service was Dec. 22, 2023, at Bethany Lutheran, Minden, with Pastor Donald Hunzeker officiating. He was buried in Minden Cemetery with military honors.



Bergit Goodman

Bergit Goodman, 88, of Bemidji, Minn., died Feb. 12, 2024.

Born Oct. 21, 1935, in Bemidji, she was the daughter of John and Emma (Froirak) Nelson. She married William Goodman Aug. 28, 1965, in Bloomington, Minn. Goodman is a member of the AFLC clergy roster.

She attended Bemidji High School, graduating in 1954. She earned a degree in Christian education from the Lutheran Bible Institute in 1957. She worked at Christ Lutheran, Cottonwood, Minn., as a parish worker and youth director. She attended Augsburg College and graduated from Bethany School of Missions in 1965. After her marriage, she worked at Louis F. Down Co., and recorded an album, "Sing Praise." She also worked as a chiropractic assistant for her brother, David.

Surviving are her husband; one son, Joel (Nana) Goodman, Lino Lakes, Minn.; one daughter, JoyAnn (Steve) Dahl, Plummer, Minn.; two brothers, Edward Nelson and David Nelson; six grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

The service was held on March 9 at Bethany Free Lutheran, Bemidji. Burial was in Aardahl Lutheran Cemetery, Bemidji. Memorials may be given to Bethany Bible Camp, Bemidji.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-February 29, 2024

FUND	REC'D IN FEBRUARY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% OF SUBSIDY	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$48,176	\$96,896	21	\$79,078
Evangelism	7,955	23,224	17	19,400
Youth Ministries	15,424	29,099	19	26,114
Parish Education	65,654	78,029	42	20,461
Seminary	32,429	64,100	22	51,643
Bible College	37,326	81,103	17	72,124
Home Missions	31,410	68,082	16	56,934
World Missions	37,393	84,264	17	66,057
Personal Support	86,779	154,152	20	120,622
TOTALS	\$362,547	\$678,950	20	\$512,433

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



Christ brings the growth.

BY PASTOR ADAM OSIER

We tend to approach certain problems in the congregation as unique to our time. But “there is nothing new under the sun,” says the Preacher of Ecclesiastes (1:9). Congregational immaturity and dysfunction aren’t new problems. In I Corinthians, Paul proves that it is an ancient one. There’s a time to prod spiritually immature believers to right theology and practice, and this is what Paul does in I Corinthians 3. He points them away from their earthly criteria for successful church growth. Instead, he points them to Christ, who is the only one who can truly bring growth.

It’s noteworthy that he addresses the Corinthians as “brothers” (v. 1). Paul begins this chapter by calling out the immaturity and wrong beliefs of *believers*. He does the same in 1:2, where he addresses the congregation as “sanctified” and “saints” with whom he shares a common Lord. It was to *Christians* that he addressed this letter. Yet, these Christians were “infants in Christ” dependent on milk long after they should have been receiving solid food (v. 2). As one commentator put it, they were still on the cradle roll when they should have been leading Bible study. Immaturity snares even those in Christ.

Their issue was that they were “still of the flesh” (v. 3). The singular Greek word Paul uses for “of the flesh” doesn’t refer to their physical makeup, but to being characterized by the flesh, as though that’s all they were. It refers to the pattern of thinking that mimicked the teaching of the world rather than the teaching of Christ. Specifically, this worldly thinking manifested

itself in placing their identity in their leaders, rather than the Savior. They enjoyed debating about the “wisdom” the world had to offer (1:20) rather than embracing the “foolishness” of the cross (1:22–25). Like believers today who identify their congregation with their pastor, they failed to recognize the Church’s true head, Jesus.

Paul is careful not to diminish the importance of quality shepherding. He eschews self-deprecation. He played a part in planting the congregation through the faithful proclamation of the Word of the gospel (1:17), and Apollos built on that teaching from the Word (v. 6). But they were the servants. God was and is the transforming agent (v. 6). Because God promises to work through his Word, even uninspiring preachers faithfully proclaiming it can see growth because it is the good message—rather than the good messenger—that matters (2:1–5).

When the Word takes root in believers, a new creation is formed. This chapter uses three pictures to describe this change. They are God’s field and building (v. 9), and they are the temple where he dwells (vv. 16–17). These images, taken together, describe a singular, living, multiplying structure fueled by the indwelling presence of the Almighty. What a description of the congregation! The congregation exists to proclaim Christ, who is its foundation (v. 11). Without that foundation, there is no congregation.

Paul calls on the Corinthian leaders to rightly build on the foundation of Christ. To do so, they need to use the right materials that will stand on the day “where each one’s work will become manifest” (vv. 10–15). There are many interpretations of this

section. The text offers clues to its meaning, but it lacks specificity. What is explicit is that this building with either class of materials is done “upon the foundation” (vv. 10, 12). This means it is done upon Christ and thus isn’t a salvation issue (v. 15). Nevertheless, some of that work will not survive when tested on the Day of Judgment, implying a wrong way to build on the right foundation.

Perhaps vv. 18–21 offer insight on how best to build, and not to build, on the foundation of Christ. Again, as in 1:18–25, Paul contrasts the wisdom of men with the foolishness of God, which is the message of the cross. Good building consists of cross proclamation. That message is the power of God (1:18, Romans 1:16). That message points out our sin and the salvation won by Christ. That message brings faith (Romans 10:17). That message informs and motivates our service to God through love of neighbor (I Corinthians 12–14).

Congregations don’t need a TV-preacher-worthy persona in the pulpit, endless lists of programs for members, a minimum number of small groups, a bouncy house at the church picnic, or any other such trappings for this to happen. These aren’t necessarily bad tools, but they must always be used in service of the proclamation of the gospel. The congregation that has this as their focus can say “all things” are theirs. Teachers, life, death, the present, and future all belong to them, and they belong to Christ (vv. 21–23).

Osier, who is dean of the Free Lutheran Bible College, Plymouth, Minn., is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.

SOMETHING TO SHARE

Piety as spiritual poverty.

BY KIRSTIE SKOGERBOE

A few weeks ago, my husband called me on the phone only minutes after leaving our apartment. A Venezuelan family—dad, pregnant mom, and 11- or 12-year-old son—was asking for help with a sign at the stoplight nearest our house. He had spoken with them briefly as he waited out a red light on his way to school, and he told me that they seemed kind. He asked if I would bring them our leftover lunch.

I'm a homebody and introvert, so it took some self-hype and prayer to muster up the courage to walk to this family and introduce myself. (The prayer, I think, was more influential.) I packed a backpack with cold spaghetti, some apples, granola bars, a bilingual *Jesus Storybook Bible*, and (at the last second) one of my two jars of prenatal vitamins.

With my puppy in tow, I made my way to the train stop and squatted down alongside the mother and son at the base of the light pole. The boy's eyes lit up at the sight of Willa, my dog, and I immediately set her in his gentle arms. The mom looked tired, but also perseverant. They'd been in the States for a week, she told me, and on this median for a few hours, looking for money and work. I unloaded the snacks and Bible, and I offered her the prenats. "I just ran out of mine!" she said. We chatted a little longer and asked God for housing, work, and protection for the baby. Then, I walked back to my two-room apartment—to heating and furniture and prenatal appointment reminders on my wall calendar.

I wouldn't trade, I thought.

It's tempting for me to think the same way about spiritual

life. I'm embarrassed to remember how many times I've thought I was better than another Christian because I didn't sin so blatantly, or because I had prayed for 15 whole minutes that morning, or because I had found fulfillment in a book of the Bible that somebody else found boring. I think that way often. There's a well-worn groove in my mind for subliminal beliefs about how God likes it more when I get better at piety than when I trip up and ask him for help. I want a fully furnished spiritual apartment, not a panhandling spot on the median exposed to the wind. I wouldn't trade with beggars.

But the Word shows us that piety *is* begging. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Jesus says, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). David prayed, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit" (Psalm 51:17). When the Pharisee and the tax collector pray in the temple, the man who beats his breast in sorrow and petition is the one who is justified (Luke 18:14). And what do the beggars say who call to Jesus on the street? "*Kyrie eleison*," which translates, "Lord, have mercy" (Matthew 20:30–31). Piety is acknowledging more and more readily until we die that we cannot meet our own needs, that every spiritual blessing comes from God, and that we are most blessed when we are most dependent on Christ.

Let your heart rest on the median with Jesus. Let him love you with his free gifts. At the moment you think you've run out of what you need, he will give you himself.

Skogerboe, the digital communications coordinator for the AFLC, lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.