

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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MISSIONAL LIVING

AT HOME & ABROAD





THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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ENCOURAGING WORD

MY JOY, MY STRENGTH

BY PASTOR BOB RIETH

One of the favorite verses that my wife, Marion, and I shared is from the Book of Nehemiah: "The joy of the Lord is my strength" (Nehemiah 8:10b).

There is a difference between joy and happiness. We often feel happy because of something happening around us. We hear lively music or see a beautiful garden and we feel happy. We look at the faces of our loved ones and we feel happy.

Some people have a temperament that allows them to feel happy a lot of the time, others have to make an effort to be happy and put on a cheerful face.

Joy is a deeper emotion. Joy arises out of the inner fabric of our being. It is an inner assurance that is bestowed on us by our Lord when we acknowledge Him and all His greatness.

The feeling of joy is a gift from God, a product of the knowledge that God is in control.

It is possible to experience a joyful heart even in the midst of illness, trials, economic crisis, or strife if we place our trust and hope in Him. We can trust Him to care for us according to His wisdom.

Joy gives us strength. Sorrow, worry, and fear make us weak. Listen to what King David wrote, "Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul

and my body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak" (Psalm 31:9-10).

We also experience times when we are overwhelmed with distress and anguish. We get too troubled and weak to go on. In ourselves we do not have the wisdom or the strength to find the answers. Like King David, we must look to the Lord and trust in Him.

David also wrote, "The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song. The LORD is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation for his anointed one" (Psalm 28:7-8).

I pray that you may experience real joy and find strength in the Lord for the challenges of today. He is our strength and our shield, our fortress of salvation. Like the Apostle Paul, I pray that you might "be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer" (Romans 12:12).

The joy of the Lord is our strength.

Rieth, a member of Our Redeemer Lutheran, Kirkland, Wash., is the founder and president of Media Fellowship International. Adapted from "Pastor Bob's Two Minute Devotion," July 21, 2008.

The best remedy for a sick church is to put it on a missionary diet.

—David Livingstone

One can be an orthodox church in every way: great structure, good theology, excellent sermons and teaching, lots of giving; but if the Great Commission is not taught and obeyed, it is a heretical church.

—John Willis Zumwalt

Never pity missionaries; envy them. They are where the real action is—where life and death, sin and grace, Heaven and Hell converge.

—Robert C. Shannon

The concern for world evangelization is not something tacked on to a man's personal Christianity, which he may take or leave as he chooses. It is rooted in the character of the God who has come to us in Christ Jesus. Thus, it can never be the province of a few enthusiasts, a sideline or a specialty of those who happen to have a bent that way. It is the distinctive mark of being a Christian.

—James Stuart Stewart

His authority on earth allows us to dare to go to all the nations. His authority in heaven gives us our only hope of success. And His presence with us leaves us with no other choice.

—John Stott

MAKING HIMSELF KNOWN

By Josh & Ruthie Wagner

From Josh

We believe that God's Word speaks most clearly to people when they have it in the language of their hearts. When a person hears the Word of God in a language that is not one's first language, his or her mother-tongue, God feels somehow far away. This is common around the world, which hosts more than 7,000 languages. People go to church, and God's Word is read and preached to them in a language that wasn't spoken to them by their mothers. This is why we are happy to be working with the Themne people in Sierra Leone to help make God's Word accessible to those who do not yet have it in the language of their hearts.*

Many people here don't expect us to speak Themne, because English is spoken in schools and kids learn to read English. When we speak a bit of Krio, the trade language, their faces light up. But if we use Themne, it's like we reached in and blessed them somehow in a way they entirely didn't expect. You can imagine the impact when they hear God's Word—the blessings, the curses, the warnings, and the gospel itself—coming to them in a language that's so deep. It is an incredibly powerful thing.

**Mission Statement of Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT)*



From Ruthie

We see this work as a call to use the gifts God has given us in service and love for the Themne people, as well as others who have requested the technical and financial support of Lutheran Bible Translators. We, together with our Themne colleagues, are walking on a path that has been well-trodden by many who have gone before us. The first Themne New Testament was published in 1868, and the Themne Old Testament project began long before we moved in 2013 to Sierra Leone. At the request of the Bible Society of Sierra Leone, Lutheran Bible Translators sent us to provide technical assistance in Bible translation and Scripture use methods and implementation.

My favorite part of translation work is when the team wrestles with key terms in Scripture. How do they best convey colors which have no distinction in Themne? Or concepts with strong cultural implications in both the original and target languages that may or may not overlap?

Recently, we discussed at length the terms *temple* and *tabernacle*. The local church has traditionally translated these as “a house of worship” or some equivalent. In our discussions, the translators have come to understand that although people did go to these places to worship, it was God’s action that defined the place, not their own. God’s presence came to dwell among His people, and this is the way of our God. He came at Mount Sinai, then in the tabernacle, and then in the temple. In the New Testament, we see God coming near us in the incarnation. As seen by the tearing of the curtain, God’s presence is open to all, by His Spirit. Believers are now the temple of the Holy Spirit. God dwells in us because of Christ, and where we gather, there He is. The translators decided that a translation equivalent to “tent/house of God’s presence/dwelling” is preferable to “house of worship.” This changes the perceptions not just of church but of God Himself.

The team also debated over the translation of the word for *covenant*. In proofreading the drafted books, I saw that their translation for *covenant*,

which was *masekrane*, was appearing more often in contexts which didn’t have *covenant* in the source text. I took note, and when we met together, I questioned the deeper meaning of *masekrane*. It means a sort of “strong mutual agreement” made by two people. So, we discussed the terms for *agreement*, *promise*, *swear*, and *oath*. Talking about the distinct meanings of similar words can help uncover misunderstanding.

They explained to me that the term for *oath*, which was *theki*, was understood to be much more serious than *covenant*. Its ritual implications made it near impossible to break. Aha! I explained the Hebrew terms and their meanings, particularly the fact that God made covenants with people that spoke nothing of mutual agreement. Abraham was asleep when God covenanted with him. The translators decided their terms were switched, and they needed to revise their understanding of the English words *oath* and *covenant*. One of the translators stated that this will change their interpretation of the Bible. All along they have believed that *oaths* are stronger than *covenants*, and now they understand the seriousness of a covenant. I asked the translators what would happen if they used *theki* to describe a marriage covenant instead of *masekrane*. “Oh, that would make it much more difficult to break. We should use *theki*.” *Masekrane* is a strong agreement between two people—an *oath*; *theki* is a strong agreement with sacred and ritual implications and is not easily broken—a *covenant*.

Hebrews 9 speaks of redemption through the blood of Christ, the mediator of a new covenant. The passage references the deep ritual practices of the Old Testament that were instituted by God. This history helps us understand the sacrifice of Christ. “In the case of a will [covenant], it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will [covenant] is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. ... In fact, the law requires that nearly

everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:16-18, 22, ESV).

What I love most about living here, besides our work, is our neighborhood community. God’s work is neither limited to nor completed by the publication of a Bible. Our mandate to love our neighbor dominates and informs our vocations as parents, husband and wife, children, colleagues, and participants in community. While our motivation for being in Sierra Leone is to see the publication and effective use of Scripture in Themne, our call to love is greater. We have found that the easiest ways to love those in our neighborhood are by speaking to them, welcoming them in our home, and sharing life with them—the joys and sorrows. This sharing sometimes happens in Krio and Themne, but sometimes just in being present. And we believe that this is what God has done for us by giving us His Word. He’s made Himself present, dwelling among us.

What a privilege it is to join Him, using this beautiful language to convey His Word, Jesus. Sometimes this means I sit in an office, working on my computer until I’m cross-eyed. Other times it means exchanging pancakes with honey for a spicy fish head sauce with my neighbor, stumbling over my Themne to see her smile. In both cases, I’m convinced that God dwells here, speaks and understands Themne, understands their culture, and makes Himself known.



Josh and Ruthie Wagner are AFLC missionaries on loan to Lutheran Bible Translators. They serve the Themne people in Sierra Leone along with their children, Elijah, Isaiah, Josiah and Elizabeth.

By Pastor Andrew Olson

THE ROAD TO UKEREWE

*There's a lot that happens between
a call to mission work and stepping
on the foreign field.*

Tell us about the road to get to this point:

My wife, Alexis, and I serve as AFLC missionaries on loan to Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT), and we've felt that God's grace has surrounded us in this transition into mission work. For me, this journey began when a recruiter from LBT visited AFLBS while I was a student in 2010. He spoke of the thousands of languages around the world that didn't have a Bible, and the millions of people who were waiting to know Christ. The Lord put a desire in my heart to reach these Bible-less people groups, which later led me to work in short-term missions in Uganda where I met Alexis, and eventually to pursue a degree at AFLTS.

After completing seminary in 2017, we were called to serve with LBT and went back to school for 34 credits in linguistics, app development, and Bible translation. It took another year of

school, but these classes have given us an important set of tools that will allow us to learn an unwritten language, build a new dictionary, and most importantly, translate the Word of God.

Once our training was complete, we embarked on a year-long journey to visit 51 AFLC churches to share about Bible translation. We are exceedingly grateful for the churches of the AFLC, which have seen the importance of this work and shared with us in the vision of reaching Tanzania for Christ. In this past year, we've learned to trust God's hand of provision, and we've seen Him faithful to raise up a support team.

Now, we're here! We flew to Tanzania on May 16, and are now studying Swahili under the thatch roof huts of the Morogoro language school. We take great comfort in knowing that God is going before us.





What are your hopes and fears about this work?

Ukerewe Island is standing at the edge of God's Kingdom in 2019. This is really the front line of where the Church has yet to grow and be established. On this island of 100,000 souls, there are entire communities which have yet to hear the good news of Jesus Christ in their own language. Even so, we know that this entire work is completely in God's hands. It's His desire that the Kerewe people of Tanzania would have His Word and come to the knowledge of the truth, and so we follow His leading here, even to this remote island.

The predominant religion here on Ukerewe island is called animism. It is a system which is driven by fear of the spirit world and teaches that the spirits must be appeased through ritual practices and sacrifices. There are appointed spiritual experts who communicate with the spirits, administer healing rituals, and instruct people on how to harness spiritual power for their own gain.

The unfortunate reality is that believers in animism don't realize that

they are being held captive to the prince of darkness. The spirits with which they are communicating are demons, and the powers that they are experiencing are not fake, but truly evil powers. We know from the Word of God that the enemy of our soul comes only "to kill, steal, and destroy" (John 10:9), and this system is doing that very thing to the souls of the people of Ukerewe Island.

We have hope that these precious souls will be set free through the power of the gospel and learn about the true Creator God who loves them and sent His Son to deliver them "from the domain of darkness and into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). We believe the work that is to be done among them is one of spiritual transformation—which only God can do.

Habakkuk 2:14 is a verse which gives us great hope, it says, "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." We believe that this Scripture is being fulfilled as the Word of God is translated into the world's final languages.

How can we pray for you right now?

Will you especially join us in prayer for revival among the Kerewe people? II Thessalonians 3:1 says, "Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you." Our prayer is that God's Word will be honored among them and "speed ahead."

For our family, please pray for our transition into life in Tanzania, and that

God would bring along good friends for our girls Mariah (2) and Selah (1). We are also searching for a place to live. Please pray that God will keep us safe throughout all the travels and connections we need to make in this transition time.

If you'd like to learn more about our work, please visit our website at theyneedthebible.org.



Andrew and Alexis Olson and their daughters, Mariah and Selah, are AFLC missionaries on loan to Lutheran Bible Translators. They are based on Ukerewe Island, located on Lake Victoria in northern Tanzania.



By Pastor Gene Enderlein

FORTY YEARS AGO

Marking 40 years after the start of a new congregation in Celaya, Mexico.

This past Easter was set aside by our AFLC sister congregation, Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Getsemaní in Celaya, Mexico, to celebrate their beginnings 40 years ago, as well as the entry of what was to be identified as the Central Mexican Lutheran Church (ILMC; *Iglesia Luterana Mexicana del Centro*) into the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations.

As I was serving as World Missions director at that time, I was approached by the pastor of the congregation, Milton Samuel Flores, to come and celebrate with them on Resurrection Sunday as they worshiped and commemorated both the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and their beginnings as a free and living Lutheran congregation. Pastor Del Palmer, outgoing World Missions director, and new director Pastor Earl Korhonen, and their wives, Karen and Joan, who were visiting each AFLC mission field this spring, were able to arrange their travel to attend the event.

The Sunday services began with an hour-long slide presentation of the beginnings of the work of the AFLC in this area, the state of Guanajuato, and the beginnings of the Getsemaní congregation in Celaya.

The State of Guanajuato is the geographical center of Mexico, which is marked by a mountaintop statue of Jesus Christ almost identical to the Christ the Redeemer, overlooking Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The area is described variously as old world, colonial, or Spanish Mexico. It is known as an area where most of the Catholicism practiced is ultra conservative and reminiscent of medieval Europe. The City of Celaya is known as an area where this is especially true.

In the center of the city you will find seven major Catholic churches, including the cathedral which has the smallest structure among the seven. It was directly across the street from one of these seven churches where God laid it upon the heart of a young woman and her father to invite Pastor Samuel Flores, Milton's father, to come into their apartment for Bible studies.

In April 1979 Pastor Samuel, who was serving a congregation in the city of Leon, some 80 miles to the northwest, began to hold monthly Bible studies in their apartment. The time came when the Bible study grew and organized into the Getsemaní congregation. I had the privilege as mission director to be present and share in some of these meetings.

While working in the Guanajuato state governor's office, Milton Flores accepted the call to serve this group as lay pastor, offering weekend worship services. During this time the Lord laid the call heavily upon Milton's heart to return to school and further his education in our AFLC seminary in Minneapolis. Following his ordination in 1990, Pastor Milton returned to Celaya, where he was installed as pastor of the Getsemaní congregation.

After a time, the congregation was able to purchase a beautiful tract of land in one of the northern *colonias* (suburbs). The property is situated at the entrance to a beautiful development of homes. The congregation has been able to construct on the property a simple one-room, all-purpose building which serves all their activities. Although they have had legal approval for some time from the city fathers to build a sanctuary on this site, there is very strong

sentiment locally against an evangelical church being built at this location.

During the Easter anniversary worship service, attendees filled all of the available space within the building. Pastor Milton Flores recognized the senior member of the congregation *Senorita* Granados, now in her 90s, in whose apartment the work began. Pastors Palmer and Korhonen shared greetings and blessings with the assembled congregation after which I shared the joyous great news of the resurrection of Jesus from Matthew 28:1-8.

Following the service, everyone recessed to a large tent set up adjacent to the building for a time of fellowship.

Upon my return home to Minneapolis I had another blessing in participating in the ordination service of Israel Milton Vasquez Flores on May 12. Pastor Israel, who graduated from the Free Lutheran Seminary in May, is both the grandson of Pastor Samuel Flores and nephew of Pastor Milton. Upon his return to Mexico he has taken up the work in the city of Leon where his grandfather had previously pastored.

Please pray for this ministry in Leon and Celaya and for other opportunities in the state of Guanajuato. Pray for our missionaries, Pastor Todd and Barb Schierkolk and their ministry in Jerez in the state of Zacatecas. And pray as both AFLC World Missions and these congregations in Mexico seek to prayerfully re-establish the work in the city and state of Aguascalientes.

Pastor Gene Enderlein, who currently serves as the visitation pastor at Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, served as director of AFLC World Missions from 1980 to 2002.

By Pastor Matthew Ballmann

THE FIRST YEAR

*Just how do you approach
launching a church
from scratch?*

A year ago this August, our family of five (now six) set out from Sioux Falls, S.D., to San Antonio, Texas, with the mission of establishing a free and living congregation in a metro area of some 2.5 million souls. We were drawn to plant in San Antonio for multiple reasons, including its large size and rapid growth, the presence of no AFLC congregation, and the lack of Bible believing Lutheran congregations—only 1.7 percent of the population is Lutheran.

Getting Started

Upon moving, we used the settling process to begin meeting people and learning about the city. The goal of all Word and sacrament ministry is to share with people the life of God that comes through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Before we could ever share God's life with them, we had to first share *our* lives with them. This meant finding ways to enter into the lives of our neighbors and community and generously invite them into ours.

We sought to do this by seeing our daily activities as ways to connect and serve. I coached little league soccer this past winter for my son's team and joined a Toastmasters club. I also began serving as fire department chaplain and attended chamber of commerce meetings. I joined a cycling club, networking events, and started leading weekly worship services at an assisted living home.

In addition to these more formal opportunities, we started many conversations at the playground, connected with people at coffee shops and with local business owners, hosted a barbecue for our neighbors, and made a lot of time for evening chats on the sidewalk.





Pastor Matthew Ballmann is married to Natalie and they have four children: William (6), Evelyn (4), Wesley (3), and Emma (4 months).

Gather, Preview, Launch

We spent the first six months in San Antonio building relationships and hosting a weekly gathering in our home around food, fellowship, and God's Word. On Easter we held our first public worship service with 75 people in attendance. Praise God! This first service was the transition point from the gathering phase to the preview phase in which we now meet monthly for a worship service. In May we met for our second service at a local elementary school and had about 25 people in attendance.

We are continuing to meet weekly in our home and over the next three months will meet monthly for Sunday morning services until September, at which point we transition into the launch phase and begin weekly services. We praise God that from last October when we started from scratch, we now have eight households that are either engaged with or fully committed to being part of Trinity.

Starting a Church from the Ground Up

One of the images we often use in church planting is the idea of starting with a sapling tree of the gospel, planting it, watering it, and tending it to, by God's grace, grow forth into a fruit-bearing tree. The illustration sounds simple, and while planting trees *can* be easy work, the reality is often far more challenging than the illustration leads us to believe.

Take my current backyard as an example—it has four inches of rocky topsoil on top of solid rock. In order to plant a tree, I have to use a jackhammer. This better illustrates the challenge of church planting: planting a tree in solid rock. Sound impossible? Not at all. For us this is a daily reminder that we do not build the Church, God does. He does so on the Cornerstone and Rock of Jesus Christ.

Challenges and Blessings

What hard soil do we face? We face the same things every congregation faces: finding ways to connect with people, sharing the gospel with them in ways that connects to their hearts and minds, and inviting them into the community of sinners saved by grace. There is no shortage of people who are not believers and who do not have a church home. The shortage comes in our time, relational connections, resources, energy, and finances. However, praise be to God that our Maker, Redeemer, and Sanctifier has no shortage of love, grace, power, and provision. Our God is the life-giving God who has graciously invited us into the work of sharing His life with the world. We continue in ministry not in our own strength but in His strength and provision.

Alongside the challenges are also many blessings. We love having the opportunity to interact with and have into our home those who don't know Christ. It's easy in an established church

to focus almost completely on our fellow believers to the exclusion of the unchurched and formerly churched. Church planting has provided us with the important time and motivation to go beyond this. At the same time, we have also been so blessed to see the body of Christ pull together and use their gifts as we meet together in our home, and particularly as we have begun worship services. There is hardly a member of our group who hasn't served in some capacity each Sunday, even the children. Watching God use the gifts He has given to individuals to serve the church as a whole is a beautiful blessing.

We also want to thank many of you, our fellow AFLC congregations and members, for your partnership in this missionary work. A huge thank you to the following congregations: Abiding Savior (Sioux Falls, S.D.), Calvary (Everett, Wash.), Christ the King (Pipestone, Minn.), Shiloh (Rapid City, S.D.), Living Word (Sioux Falls, S.D.), Word of Truth (Glen Rose, Texas), Calvary (Arlington, S.D.), Skrefsrud (Beresford, S.D.), Redeemer (Canton, S.D.), Grace (Bruce, S.D.), and Faith (El Campo, Texas). We would not be here doing this work without your ongoing support, and we are so grateful for your partnership in the gospel. If your congregation or you as an individual are interested in supporting the mission congregation of Trinity San Antonio, we invite you to visit our website (trinitysa.org).

Images by Grace Ballmann.

By Pastor Jim Johnson

EFFECTIVE CHURCH PLANTING HABITS

*A look at what works well when it comes
to mission work on the home front.*



During the past nine months, I have been learning everything I can about church planting. I'm reading books, quizzing mentors, following blogs, and studying pastors who are working in the field. My wife, Linda, and I are starting our own personal graduate school of church planting, just for us as a couple. We are asking God to teach us.

Our coursework has taken us to new churches and where we compare notes about what effective planters are doing.

We are learning from godly planters and examining their practices in light of the New Testament. A summary of what we have learned so far about effective church planters can be encapsulated in one tight sentence: They think like missionaries.

That makes sense; the ministry of Home Missions should require missionaries. But we are also observing three other truths. First, planters are rare; it's a unique God-given gift.

Second, planters need support; they require a good team around them. And last, they are not always pastors. Some are ordained, some are not, some are married to pastors, some are single, and some are friends who come alongside of a planter couple who are committed to the mission work of planting new congregations.

Among other observations, we are seeing the following trends among effective church planters.

They use what they have.

Planters don't complain about not having a church building and not enough volunteers. They find places to gather and use the people who come. As church plant blogger Carey Nieuwhof says: "Give a dying church \$10,000, and they'll think they're broke and need to conserve it. Give \$10,000 to a spiritual entrepreneur, and he'll see it as seed money to start something big."

They invite people into their homes.

"Hospitality is central to our ministry," says Pastor Matthew Ballmann, who is starting a new church in San Antonio, Texas. Pastor Ballmann and wife, Natalie, try to invite a new family into their house every week. But it goes beyond having people in the house. "It's more of an attitude of relational generosity toward others," says Ballmann. "We can't share God's renewing life with them unless we first share our lives with them."

They focus on the gospel.

Pastor Rick and Barb Long didn't start Atonement Free Lutheran in Arlington, Wash., but they helped it grow after it was planted. Atonement's gospel-centered ministry has been a draw. "We live in a pocket of relative conservatism in an otherwise very liberal state," says Pastor Long. A commitment to teaching and preaching God's Word has been the greatest factor for growth for the church. Atonement was a plant of 30 people in the early 1990s. More than 300 attend now. Pastor Long typically preaches 30-minute expository sermons on Sunday, drawn from a single passage of Scripture, and also holds a Wednesday night Bible study, "generally a verse-by-verse walk through a book of the Bible," says Pastor Long.

They start connection groups.

Brady Arneson's congregation in Honolulu grew as a congregation when the gathering added a men's night on Mondays and a ladies night out on Tuesdays, with groups of six to ten. On Friday nights once a month, the Waikiki church holds a worship and testimony night with a potluck at a local apartment building. "We need to hear each other's stories," says Arneson, whose congregation of 25-50 meets at a Waikiki Beach park outdoors at 4 p.m.

They meet more often than Sunday mornings.

"Families grow best when they spend time together," says Pastor Michael Brandt, who has planted four AFLC congregations in western Washington, Wisconsin, northern Minnesota and, most recently, Abiding Savior Free Lutheran in Sioux Falls. "To be a free and living family of God, it has to be more than just a Sunday morning gathering." Pastor Brandt, now the director of a ministry called Shepherding the Shepherds, tried to plan monthly fellowship events and regular outreach events in his church plants. "Churches need time around the dinner table," continued the pastor-mentor, "time in the living room, time in the prayer closet united in praise and intercession, time in the kitchen ministering with and to each other, time in the family room enjoying each other, time in the yard openly ministering before and to others."

They see neighbors as friends, not foes.

Steve and Mary Berntson have been a part of a Hope Free Lutheran Church in Jamestown, N.D., a city of 16,000, for three years. The congregation began

under AFLC Pastor Frank Cherney with three couples around a coffee table in 2011. Now the church gathers 140-150 people in their second-hand church building by the river. "I learned from my father," says Pastor Berntson, of his veteran ministry patriarch Gordon, "to love the people around you. Dad used to say, 'Steve, love the alcoholic.' Some people have no other people to love them. I learned to honor, not to discount the people of the community." Missionary pastors have a habit of fascination with culture and society. They build communities; they don't break communities down. Though they are sinners, like us, "you have to see people as golden," says Berntson.

They find mentors to help them learn how to plant.

Pastor Andy Coyle was fresh off of the mission field in Ukraine when he and his wife, Monica, were called to plant a new church in the Black Hills area of Rapid City, S.D. "It didn't take me long," recalls Coyle, "to realize three things: First, I didn't have a clue what I was doing. Second, many of my ideas were terrible. And third, I needed help." He found a veteran mentor and began building friendships with other planters, attending conferences together and taking notes. "Talking frequently with other planters helped me have greater perspective, correction, clearer strategic thinking, and encouragement for the soul." His congregation, Shiloh Church in Blackhawk, S.D., recently purchased a fixer-upper church property. This spring Sunday services were drawing between 40 and 110 for worship.

Pastor Jim Johnson, Otsego, Minn., is the director of AFLC Home Missions.

By Ron Jorgenson

WHEN A CHURCH PLANT BLOSSOMS



Looking back on how God brought about major growth for one congregation after years of declining membership.

It happened overnight—a church of nine people in western North Dakota blossomed into a thriving congregation of more than 200.

During our first ten years we had our ups and downs. Our first four years seemed so promising when worship attendance reached nearly 50. But within a few years we dwindled down to nine. We said that if things didn't change in six months, we would close the doors. God in His faithfulness did not allow that to happen.

The Bible says, “weeping may last through the night, but joy comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5). For so long we thought morning would never come. But in September 2003, the same day we were celebrating our 10th anniversary, the local mainline congregation was voting to leave its affiliation. The vote failed, leaving a group of more than 200 believing members wanting a new church home. Suddenly we were a brand-new congregation with more than 200 people overflowing our meeting spaces with lively church services, a gospel-preaching pastor, and an influx of young families, veteran Christians, and new believers coming to faith in Christ. By the following Easter God provided a new building that now facilitates our membership of more than 400.

What are the lessons we learned?

Pray and listen to God.

During our early struggles, we would often call Pastor Elden Nelson, director of Home Missions at the time, and ask for direction. He would pause and ask us if we had prayed about it yet. I remember thinking, “Come on Elden, just throw me a bone, we need help here!” But Elden was right, we needed to pray.

Be a positive influence in the community.

It's common for new AFLC starts to be the result of what was wrong in nearby Lutheran churches. Neighbors see you as the church that is against something rather than being for something. Be sure your church's primary

objective is clear and positive in the community: a church that is for Jesus. At Prince of Peace, we felt that all those dissatisfied Lutherans would come flocking to us. God allowed that stigma of standing against something for many years, until we realized that He needed to be our primary focus.

Find partners.

Encouragement is of utmost importance within your group. Encouragement also comes from external sources—for us it was from our district pastors and congregations. One congregation put Prince of Peace into their budget, the district WMF sent us Bibles, many members sent encouraging cards and money, and lay preachers brought many warm greetings from their churches. Discouragement is a big issue in a church plant. Encouragement does come from within—Jesus is in you—but we need the help of others, too.

Meet more than on Sundays.

Your group needs to be like-minded, supporting one another in prayer and in action. Picture the church in Acts. Your congregation needs to grow together in Christ, rallying around His Word as you dive deeply into Bible studies outside of Sunday mornings. The congregation will become your new best friends.

Are you a missionary family called to start a new congregation? Don't forget, Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” We are praying for three churches to start new congregations. Home Missions is here to help. “Those who sow in tears,” says Psalm 126:6, “shall reap with joy, bearing precious seed.” Don't give up yet. The harvest may come overnight.

Jorgenson, Lidgerwood, N.D., is a member of the Home Missions Committee. He helped start Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah, N.D.

THE ONE WHO MAKES IT POSSIBLE

By Pastor Dan Hurner



I've recently been thinking about how God works through individuals in impossible circumstances throughout the Bible. A pattern tends to emerge in each circumstance: first, we recognize that something needs to be done or be changed. God then gives instruction to people on what they ought to do, which is usually when said person pipes up with questions, uncertainty, or reluctance to be obedient. Once he or she is compliant with God's plan, what was formerly an impossible task is accomplished through the power and intervention of God. Sounds like a pretty good formula for a movie, book, or show, doesn't it?

What we read in Scripture is more than just a compilation of amazing stories; they are accounts of how God has been actively at work in His creation.

The first example that comes to my mind is Moses. Having lived in the desert for 40 years after killing an Egyptian, God gave him the impossible task of leading the nation of Israel out of Egypt. What was impossible about this task was not so much the coordination of a mass migration of people as it was pulling them out of the most powerful nation in the world at the time. It's no wonder Moses did not want to do it. He gave God every excuse he could think of and, almost comically, God did not deny how unqualified Moses was. He was a bad speaker; he was old, he doubted people would listen to him. God did not try and pacify Moses' ego but instead told him that He would do the work through Moses. After some back-and-forth between the two, Moses submitted to God's will and ultimately led the Israelites out of a devastated nation.

Another example of this is the judge, Gideon, as he went against the Midianites. God met him as he was attempting to secretly grind his wheat in a wine press. Through various signs which affirmed God was with him, Gideon assembled an army of around 30,000 men to go against what scholars suggest is a force of about 130,000.

Not great odds. After eliminating even more of his forces through various tests, God gave him the green light to go against the army of Midian with 300 soldiers—nothing short of impossible. Yet, miraculously, God utilized confusion and chaos to give Israel the victory in battle.

Finally, we have the example of a man named Ananias in Acts 9. God appeared to him in a vision and told him to go and heal Saul of blindness and to preach the gospel to him. Ananias didn't want to because Saul had been public enemy number one for the early Church. There was arguably no one more opposed to the early Church than Saul of Tarsus. And yet Ananias complied with God's will and went. Saul was healed, baptized, and later went on to become one of the greatest missionaries in the history of the Church under his new name, Paul.

It seems a little odd that God would give people impossible tasks to accomplish, especially since He's all-powerful and could do it Himself without any help or assistance from any of us. Why does God use people to accomplish His will? Cards on the table: I don't know the exact answer to that question. But I do know that through imperfect people, He accomplishes His perfect will. Through weaknesses, He shows His strength. And through insecurities, He shows us His love for His creation.

When you have a chance, pause and consider the impossible circumstances through which God has brought you. How did God work in that circumstance? What do you suppose God taught you through that time in your life? This is the power of your testimony—to be able to look back on your life and your spiritual development and, through personal experience, remind yourself (and tell others) what God has done in and through you.

Hurner is the pastor of youth and family ministries at the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish, Dalton, Minn. "Moses Choosing the Seventy Elders," Jacob de Wit, 1736-37.



Sunday school project focuses on tabernacle

By Betsy VonMuenster

Our fifth and sixth grade Sunday school class at Christian Free Lutheran, Wheatland, Iowa, has been studying the Old Testament this year, using curriculum from AFLC Ambassador Publications. One of our lessons was on the tabernacle, the portable church God had given Moses instructions on creating after delivering His people from Egypt. The children of Israel used the tabernacle for more than 400 years until King Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem.

It was such an interesting lesson for the kids as we talked about all the different objects that were in the tabernacle, and the purpose for each item. After finding a bag in the storage room with the word “tabernacle” on it, I was intrigued. It was a miniature, handcrafted tent and poles from years ago, when our former Pastor Tim Carlson had done a Lenten series on the tabernacle. The tent and poles had been made by one of our beloved departed brothers in Christ, Paul Reidesel.

This got us thinking that maybe we could do a hands-on project and study the place where God dwelt with His people. After a trip to local stores for modeling clay, paint, and other crafting accessories, we dug in. Each student was given an article to work on. We looked to the Word of God and read about each item. We also had a book with lots of pictures and paintings of what the tabernacle items may have looked like.

The items we molded and shaped were the bronze altar, the bronze laver, the golden lamp stand, the golden table of showbread, the golden altar of incense, the golden ark of the covenant and the golden mercy seat or the seat of atonement, with two golden cherubim. We also crafted the items that were found in the ark of the covenant, and the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, where the ark and mercy seat rested. We then made



Pictured (from left) are Lily VanderHeiden, Danny and Dean Dickel, Vivian Swenson, Rachel Sons, and Dave and Betsy VonMuenster.

a tent for the Holy Place and Holy of Holies.

One of the things we try and stress in our Sunday school classes is to look for Jesus in all of our lessons. We did the same with this study. It was a wonderful opportunity during Lent and Easter for our kids to learn that the tabernacle was a “shadow of things to come” (Colossians 2:7). Our kids saw Christ in the tabernacle, the items, and all that went on in the tabernacle. We frequently turned to the Book of Hebrews and talked about how Christ is greater than all of that. We talked about the veil, how it was torn from top to bottom by God after Christ died, and how we now can go with boldness before the throne of God. We learned about the High Priest, who once a year would go into the Holy of Holies with blood sacrifices to atone for the sins of himself and the people year after year. We talked about Jesus dying and

shedding His blood once and for all for our sins and never having to repeat that sacrifice again.

We moved our model tabernacle to the foyer of our church, where the adults were encouraged to look at the handiwork and ask questions of the students. The kids did most of the talking; they seemed to gain a good understanding on our lesson.

We also included samples of a grain offering, a Jewish sacrifice offered as thanks to God for all His provisions. The curriculum lesson on sacrifices encouraged us to make pie dough and spread with butter, sugar, and cinnamon, as this would be similar to the grain offering made out of fine flour, oil, and incense. We passed these small offerings out to the congregation as they looked at our miniature tabernacle.

VonMuenster is a member of Christian Free Lutheran, Wheatland, Iowa. “Construction of the Tabernacle Led By Moses,” Jan Luyken, 1705.



AFLC-Canada hosts annual conference

AFLC-Canada held its 36th Annual Conference April 5-7 at Bethel Lutheran Church, Elbow, Saskatchewan. The theme for the weekend was, “And now Lord ... grant to Your servants to continue to speak Your Word with boldness,” from Acts 4:29. Fifty-one registered for the conference, including AFLC President Pastor Lyndon and Linda Korhonen.

Twenty women gathered for the WMF annual meeting Friday afternoon. Linda Korhonen shared a message entitled: “A Miracle of God’s Grace.” President Shannon Hundebly led the business meeting. Janice Scrimbitt was elected as the new treasurer.

Ken Bush, president of Bethel Lutheran congregation, led the Friday evening service. Pastor Lyndon Korhonen shared a message entitled, “Boldness for God,” based on Jeremiah 15:19-21. The congregation shared in Holy Communion. Pastor Kelly Henning, president of AFLC-Canada, officially opened the conference.

During the Saturday morning Bible hour, Pastor Rob Lewis, recently-retired director of World Mission Prayer League

in Canada, shared on Luke 2:6-39. Pastor Charles Jackson, new director of WMPL Canada, gave a report on WMPL later in the day. Devotions on Saturday were shared by DarWin Taylor, who does mission work in northern Saskatchewan, and Pastor Doug Lutz, who serves East Kootenay Lutheran Parish in British Columbia.

Elections included Pastor Al Pinno as vice-president, Linda Lee as secretary, and Ken Bush as a lay member of the Coordinating Committee. We were pleased to note that Pastor David Hesje was just added to the fellowship roster of ordained pastors at the coordinating committee meeting the previous day. Pastor Hesje serves the host congregation, Bethel Lutheran.

The Saturday evening banquet was held in the church fellowship hall. After the meal and a time of praise singing led by Pastor Al Pinno, Daniel, son of missionaries working in Central Asia, shared about his time of waiting for the Lord’s direction and provision for him to work in another country in Central Asia. At the evening worship service, Pastor John Attwood

shared a message entitled, “Pass the Salt,” based on Acts 4:23-31. At the close of the service Pastor Pinno gave thanks to God for Pastor Gene Sundby, the first president of the AFLC-Canada, whose passing to glory took place three years ago on April 6. Gene’s widow, Sylvia, played a piano tribute of “In the Sweet By and By” and “When the Roll is Called Up Yonder” and read a poem entitled, “He Maketh No Mistake”.

On Sunday morning, Pastor Manfred Kurschner led the devotional and prayer time. Pastor Pinno’s message was entitled, “Proclaiming JESUS Fearlessly through Confidence in God’s Word, Christ’s Blood, and our Resurrection Hope.” Pastor Henning installed the newly-elected officers before closing the conference. We were greatly blessed by the times of worshiping together, hearing God’s Word, sharing Holy Communion, taking part in the business meeting, and fellowshiping together. To God be the glory.

By Pastor Al and Dorothy Pinno. Pastor Pinno serves Bethlehem Lutheran, Hawarden, Saskatchewan.



EEMN PARTNERSHIP

BY PASTOR ROBERT LEE

The East European Missions Network (EEMN) held their annual spring banquet on Friday, April 26, in the AFLC Schools' Heritage Hall in Plymouth, Minn. The speaker for the evening was Daina Zandberga, headmistress of the Strīku School (*Strīku Pamatskola*) in Latvia, and a time of group singing was led by AFLBS student Marika Ivsina who is also from Latvia. The remodeled school is transitioning to a Montessori teaching method, and the Christian focus of the school has been strengthened under the leadership of Pastor David Michael Carrillo, an EEMN missionary who is the campus chaplain.

Pastor David Breidenbach, executive director of EEMN,

reported on the upcoming camps this summer in Ukraine, Latvia, Albania, Slovakia, and Estonia. Those in attendance were asked to indicate if they had ever participated in one of the camps, and almost everyone responded positively. The director announced that EEMN is consulting with Monica Coyle and her Navigate Creative Company to develop a brand to more clearly identify the focus of the ministry, and the theme of spiritual orphans will be at the heart of it. Monica and her husband, Andy, served for several years as AFLC missionaries on loan to EEMN in Ukraine.

EEMN was established in 1992 under the leadership of AFLC Pastor Don Richman, who has currently taken on the role of founding director. The vision of the organization has been summarized as *Engage, Reclaim, Transform: Through Christian Missions Engaging, Reclaiming, and Transforming lives in Christ!* To accomplish this, opportunities are provided for North American volunteers to serve on short-term mission teams that connect with people in former communist and Soviet-bloc countries in Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Balkans. A major activity



has been sponsoring the cross-cultural English language Bible camps for children, teen camps, and adult Bible studies, and many AFLC people have been blessed by participating in some of them.

Plans are already in place for the summer of 2020, and more than 60 people will be recruited to serve as team members. For information, contact EEMN.org.

Lee, editor of The Lutheran Ambassador, is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.

AFLC Schools faculty visit Israel

Four faculty members from the AFLC Schools, Plymouth, Minn., along with Pastor Nick Dyrud and trip leader Mike Anenson of Emmaus Free Lutheran in Bloomington, Minn., had an opportunity to experience an eight-day trip to Israel this past May. During their visit they stayed within the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, at times walking in the very places that Jesus and His disciples would have been at during His earthly ministry.

This trip marked Mike Anenson's 40th time visiting Israel, and his love for the country and the people was contagious. Some of the time he led the faculty to other places of great significance outside of Jerusalem such as Bethlehem, the Dead Sea, Masada, the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth, and the Mediterranean Sea. It was the first time that each of the faculty members were able to visit Israel, and they look forward to applying what they learned and experienced as they teach the students at the seminary and Bible school.



Pictured (from left) are Pastor Jerry Moan, Pastor Steve Mundfrom, Dr. Mark Olson, Pastor Nick Dyrud, and Andrew Hanson.

SIT to focus on church planting and revitalization

The AFLC Schools will host the Summer Institute of Theology (SIT) August 5-9 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus.

Sessions offered will include:

- "Small AND Significant," by Karl Vaters. Vaters will discuss the biblical definition of success in ministry, principles of effectiveness, vision-casting, church health, and leadership development in the context of a small church.
- "Principles of Church Planting and Revitalization," by Pastor Andy Coyle and Pastor Matthew Ballmann. In this class students will gain a high level view of planting and revitalizing principles as well as an understanding of specific systems to put in place, learn why having a clear congregational identity and purpose is necessary, and explore how to exegete local culture for maximum effectiveness.
- "Ecclesiology and the Fundamental Principles of the AFLC," by Pastor Stephen Mundfrom. Any effort to plant a church needs a clear, biblical vision of the church that will be planted. This course in ecclesiology will answer the question, "What is the church?" Care will be taken to honor our Lutheran and congregational heritage in this endeavor.

• "Challenges and Opportunities," by Pastors Andy Coyle, Jim Johnson, Matthew Ballmann, and James Molstre. The final session of each day will feature a different teacher and topic, including the call of the church planter, church revitalization, loving your neighbor, and starting a church from scratch.

For more information, or to register, visit aflbs.edu/event.



Pictured (from left) are Eli & Elizabeth Neufeld, Megan Thonsgaard, Tyler Wiesbrook, Haley Thrumer, Zachary Lynnes, Regan Johnson and Heather Hanson.

Home Missions sends out Barnabas teams

AFLC Home Missions has sent out two summer mission teams to serve AFLC congregations in the continental United States and the Alaska Mission. All team members are AFLBS alumni, having served on previous summer teams or in short-term missions.

Serving on the South Barnabas team are Zachary Lynnes (Leonard,

N.D.), Regan Johnson (Fosston, Minn.), Haley Thrumer (Roseau, Minn.), and Megan Thonsgaard (Louise, Texas). The Alaska Barnabas team includes Heather Hansen (Abercrombie, N.D.), Tyler Wiesbrook (Yorkville, Ill.), and Eli and Elizabeth Neufeld (Mesa, Ariz.). The teams, which trained in Dalton, Minn., will serve for 10 weeks this summer.

WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION

*"It is good to praise the LORD
and make music to your name,
O Most High, proclaiming your
love in the morning and your
faithfulness at night."*

Psalms 92:1-2



I

magine sitting in
a room, singing
praise songs led by
talented musicians
playing violins,

a piano, and a cello and being
surrounded by sisters in the
Lord. If you were at the 2019
Women's Retreat, hosted by the
Association Retreat Center on
April 26-28, no imagination is
necessary.

The Snipstead sisters—
Karen Floan, Ann Presteng,
Gwen Berge, and Wendy
Westlake—led our weekend
together in a way that our
hearts were truly blessed. They
shared their talents during the
praise and worship times as
well as allowing the Lord to
speak through them as they
opened up the Scripture from
Psalms 90-93. Each sister took
a turn sharing from a Psalm
and relayed what the Lord had
laid on her heart to share with
us. Some of the challenges we
heard were: No matter where
we are in time, He is there. God

FELLOWSHIP AND PRAISE

BY DAWN JOHNSON

is eternal and has no boundaries and He is with us
wherever we go. Learn who God is and share with
others who He is. God can be our dwelling place
and we can choose to abide with Christ.

We were also challenged to ponder if we are
living for the moment or for eternity. We need to
know what Jesus wants us to do, and then do it.
We were reminded that the Lord is mightier than
the evil around us and our own personal storms
and that He is our refuge and strength.

It was a great weekend where God's Word
was shared, praise and worship was sung, existing
friendships were bonded even stronger in the
Lord, new friendships were made, and fellowship
was enjoyed. The ARC staff and volunteers were
great. The food was delicious and plentiful.
Thank you to all who had a part in making this
wonderfully blessed weekend happen.

There were 34 ladies in attendance at the
2018 retreat, and we were challenged to pray that
God would bring double that amount for this
year 2019. In answer to prayer, this year there
were more than 70 ladies in attendance. We pray



again that we can see the numbers double for
next year. Ruth Rautio announced that the theme
for the 2020 women's retreat is going to be on
the Proverbs 31 woman. Begin planning now to
attend this very special time together as women.

*Johnson, a member of Christ the King Lutheran,
Wilson, Wis., the executive secretary of the WMF.*

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Jim Rasmussen has announced his intention to step down as director of AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship (AED). Members of the AED board have begun their search for a new director.

Pastor Ken Thoreson has announced his retirement. He preached his last sermon in October 2018 at Newark Lutheran, Newark, Ill. He and his wife, Marilyn, have moved to Washington Island, Wis.

Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee accepted **The Source Church**, Mesa, Ariz., to the AFLC congregational roster. The congregation is served by **Licensed Pastor Eric Johnson**, who was added to the AFLC Fellowship Roster.

Pastor Craig Johnson earned a Doctor of Ministry degree on April 27 from Western Seminary, Portland, Ore. Johnson serves Bethany Lutheran, Astoria, Ore.

Pastor James Westgate, who serves St. Matthew Lutheran, Millerstown, Pa., announced his retirement.

Pastor Dean Iverson retired on April 28 from Triumph Lutheran, Ferndale, Wash. He has moved to Williston, N.D.

Jordan Langness accepted a half-time position with AFLC Youth Ministries as coordinator of the Youth Worker Apprenticeship Program. Langness is a youth worker at Hope Free Evangelical Lutheran, Ishpeming, Mich.

Schools Corporation votes on name change



Pastor Kirk Thorson, chairman of the Schools Corporation, announced the new name at the Annual Conference.

Members of the Free Lutheran Theological Seminary Corporation voted 24-1 to adopt the name “Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary” at their annual meeting held June 12 at Spruce Lake Retreat Center in Canadensis, Pa. Known commonly as the Free Lutheran Schools (FLS), the Corporation operates a two-year college-level school of the Bible known as “Association Free Lutheran Bible School” (AFLBS) and a four-year, master’s-level pastoral training program known as “Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary” (AFLTS).

Due to consistent input that the name of the institution was confusing to those not already closely connected to the Schools, members of the Schools’ Board of Trustees surveyed 2,500 alumni and 50 corporation members. The survey revealed strong consensus that a name

change was needed.

According to Pastor Wade Mobley, president of the Free Lutheran Schools, “A vast majority wanted to keep ‘Bible’ and ‘Free Lutheran’ not just in our description, but in our name. The Schools exist to establish students in the eternal and inerrant Word of God for a life of faith in Jesus Christ and faithful service in His kingdom. ‘Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary’ accurately describes the history, mission, and practice of the Schools. We believe that this name change will make it easier to invite students from the Minneapolis/St. Paul area to consider us as a place to study God’s Word for two years as they continue their academic pursuits.”

“Free Lutheran” refers to the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC), the church body that operates the Schools. “Free” describes both the congregational polity of the body and the freedom and spiritual life created by the gospel of Jesus Christ. “Bible” emphasizes the primary source of teaching at the Schools, where a majority of classes study books of the Bible at a collegiate and graduate level. “College” differentiates the undergraduate program from secondary institutions commonly known as high schools.

For more information, contact Mobley at wade.mobley@aflbs.edu.

AFLBS Alumni Association hosts summer barbecue events in Fargo, Minneapolis

The AFLBS Alumni Association invites alumni, family, and friends of the school to regional barbecue events in Fargo and Minneapolis, featuring fun for the whole family and a time to reflect on the many ways God has blessed the AFLC Schools.

- Fargo, N.D., event: 5 p.m., July 14 at Lindenwood Park main shelter
- Minneapolis, Minn., event: 5 p.m. July 20 at North Mississippi Regional Park, shelter C (4900 N Mississippi Dr.).

MAY MEMORIALS

AFLBS

Ruth Claus

AFLTS

Pastor Gordon Berntson

Home Missions

Elaine Jacobsen

Vision

Ralph Johnson

World Missions

Pastor Gary

Rokenbrodt

Martin Knudsvig

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-May 31, 2019

FUND	REC'D IN MAY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$35,024	\$190,716	\$202,528
Evangelism	11,758	55,945	45,708
Youth Ministries	10,194	52,586	59,255
Parish Education	11,654	85,666	103,446
Seminary	17,495	121,755	126,839
Bible School	51,736	258,528	256,610
Home Missions	40,076	177,577	177,665
World Missions	32,698	213,336	176,153
Personal Support	50,356	262,211	354,125
TOTALS	\$260,992	\$1,418,320	\$1,502,330

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

A MISSIONS PARTNERSHIP

Our church family has been blessed with an active worldwide outreach since our new beginning in the 1960s. Missionary John Abel attended the first annual conference and presented the opportunity and challenge of establishing



Pastor Robert Lee

congregations in frontier Brazil. Not long afterward we adopted the ministry of Lawrence and Gola Dynneson on the Mexican border at Nogales, Ariz. Today AFLC World Missions includes men and women

serving in Brazil, Uganda, Mexico, and Paraguay, plus some on loan with Lutheran Bible Translators, Josiah Venture, and Wycliffe. Also, we value close relationships with the AFLC-India and the East European Mission Network.

There is a scriptural foundation for missionary partnerships. The Apostle Paul thanked the Philippian believers for their “partnership” in the gospel (Philippians 1:5). This interesting and common Bible word, *koinonia*, can also be translated as fellowship or communion. Paul used the word to describe Titus as his partner (II Corinthians 8:23), as well as his relationship to Philemon (v. 17), and it is significant to see it at the heart of his explanation of the Lord’s Supper (I Corinthians 10:16).

Certainly, a central aspect of this partnership is prayer. The reminder to pray for our missionaries is not a new or surprising one, and it’s good to remember that it is scriptural. “I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me” (Romans 15:30).

The first two things in the early Church and its deepest alliance, writes Robert Speer, were prayer and missions, “Pray for us,” the Apostle Paul wrote to

the Thessalonians (I 5:25, II 3:1), even as he wrote of his prayers for them (II 1:11). The Corinthian believers were thanked for joining him in his labors through their prayers (II Corinthians 1:11). He believed in the effectiveness of this prayer partnership, convinced that the prayers of the Philippians (1:19) would work toward his deliverance. He asked Philemon to prepare lodging for him, trusting that “through your prayers I shall be given to you” (v. 22). The Colossian congregation was requested to specifically pray for an open door for the Word (Colossians 4:3). The writer of Hebrews (13:18) also mentions a specific request, to ensure that his conduct is honorable and his conscience is clear.

Perhaps we all need a reminder to be more specific in our prayers. This was laid on my heart recently after reading an account from the ministry of Hudson Taylor, pioneer China missionary (d. 1905). It seems that one mission station was seeing considerably more fruit than others, and the missionaries wondered if there was any explanation for this significant gospel breakthrough. During one of his speaking tours in England, Taylor met a man who seemed unusually well acquainted with the work in China, especially with the area making such amazing progress. He knew of all the challenges and difficulties, as well as the names of the workers, the serious inquirers, and the new believers. It seems that this man and the missionary had covenanted together as co-workers, and this partner in the gospel at home was kept well informed on all phases of the ministry, which he brought before the Lord in fervent prayer. Taylor was convinced that this prayer partnership was the secret of the success of this mission.

We are grateful for all the efforts that our busy missionaries make to inform us of their challenges and blessings on the fields where the Lord through our AFLC has placed them. I especially think of Jonni Sliver’s excellent and frequent letters from the Miriam Infant Home in Brazil, inviting us to pray specifically for the children by name who are residents there. It is good, too, when we remember that communication is a two-way street. Many years ago I sent a missionary something that I had read and that impacted me spiritually; he later let me know that it was exactly what he needed for his own walk with the Lord during a discouraging time. (I recently sent a humorous Bible translator story to one of

Perhaps we all need a reminder to be more specific in our prayers.

our missionaries, and that’s okay, too.)

A familiar aspect of our missionary partnerships, of course, is the financial one, but some may be surprised to learn that this is also scriptural. In the closing chapter of Paul’s letter to the Philippians we learn that the support of the believers helped make it possible for him to carry the gospel to new areas (4:15-16), so monetary gifts given by believers today individually and through our local congregations provide for missionary partners and their endeavors around the world. We truly share in their work through our support.

Brothers and sisters, let’s explore and expand our missionary partnerships as the Lord leads and provides.

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

association retreat center

RELATIONAL MISSIONS

BY KIRK RAUTIO

S

ince I first stepped foot on the Association Retreat Center property near Osceola, Wis., my family and I have looked at the ARC as a mission field.

Our property isn't the type of mission field that you have to get a visa or passport to visit in order to do the work of the Lord. Rather, the ARC is a mission field that is right out our front door.

At the ARC, we host people who come onto this property looking to "come away and rest a while" and find moments with Jesus. These are exactly the opportunities for which our mission field exists. Our mission field is focused on relationships and friendship evangelism. Over this past calendar year, we have had the opportunity to serve more than 10,000 guests. All of our guests have been offered the opportunity

to have intimate times with Jesus, either building their relationships with Him or making commitments to Jesus for the first time.

In our 40th year we plan to celebrate all the wonders that God has done and look forward to the wonderful things He has yet to do with the mission field of the ARC. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus gave His followers this command, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." As we focus on relational ministry and become the hands and feet of Jesus on our mission field at the ARC, we pray that visitors will be impacted by the gospel, become disciples themselves, and

deepen their walk with Jesus.

We realize that you don't all live at the ARC with us (however, we hope you all get the opportunity to visit us—we would love to have you). But we all have the same kind of mission fields in our neighborhoods, right outside your front doors. Mission fields are all around us, and ever growing in the day in which we live—both foreign and domestic. To which mission field is Jesus calling you to serve? It may not require a passport, but it does require a willing heart and a first step to help a hurting friend. Will you be open to serve wherever Jesus is calling you?

Rautio is the executive director of the Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis.