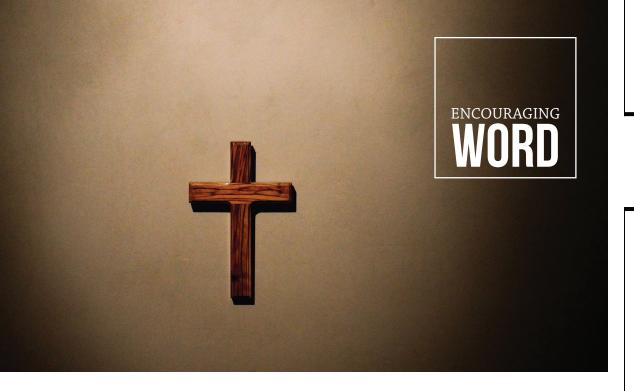
# THE ST LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR





### MAKING USE OF OUR FREEDOM

BY PASTOR KENT SPERRY

he Church in America has had it very easy. From our nation's inception we have enjoyed the freedom of religion. We've been able to worship the Lord, practice our

faith, and share our faith with great liberty.

Personally, I am grateful to God for this freedom. I'm grateful that we've been able to share the gospel not only among our fellow believers, but also among those who don't know Him. I'm grateful that we are able to share Jesus with our community, our nation, and the world with impunity.

This freedom, however, has caused us to feel shocked as we witness the suffering of believers in other parts of the world. We feel that they should possess the same freedom of religion that we enjoy. We feel that, like us, they should be able to worship freely, proclaim the gospel freely, and live out their faith freely.

We also experience the same sense of bewilderment as our freedoms are challenged here in our nation. We are shaken when others challenge our rights. We are shaken when our freedoms are contested.

We are surprised and we experience a sense of panic, even though this is to be expected. It should be expected because of what Jesus experienced. And it should be expected because of the warning He's given us.

In John 15:18-19, Jesus said: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

We shouldn't be surprised by what our fellow believers around the world are experiencing, nor should we be surprised when others attempt to curtail our freedoms, because the world hated Iesus. When Iesus came into the world, He was despised and rejected. When He came into the world He was not received.

The world continues to have the same response to Jesus even today. The world continues to despise Him and reject Him. The world will not receive Him any more now than it did when He walked this earth.

It's to be expected, then, that we will also be hated. Because of its hatred of Jesus, the world will naturally hate us. Our association with Christ will automatically bring this response.

Realizing this, we should make use of our freedoms while we have them. We must not neglect this freedom. We must proclaim Jesus with all fervency, realizing that we may not possess these freedoms forever.

Yet, we must also be realistic when it comes to the world's response to us. Although we don't generally welcome suffering, we shouldn't consider it an anomaly. We must understand that this is to be expected. And, like our brothers in faith around the world, we must continue to faithfully proclaim Christ, even in the face of hatred and persecution.

Sperry serves Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah, N.D.



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### sound bites

The idea that the service to God should have only to do with a church altar, singing, reading, sacrifice, and the like is without doubt but the worst trick of the devil. —Martin Luther Service is love made visible. —William Ward

Service without devotion is rootless; devotion without service is fruitless.

—D. Elton Trueblood

A believer does not perform good works to live but he lives to perform good works.

—William Secker

The Christian life is meant to be lived out among non-believers, living in such a way that they can see who we are and eventually glorify God. A Christian life lived inside a building will never accomplish that.

—Tim Archer

God has work to do in this world; and to desert it because of its difficulties and entanglements is to cast off His authority.

—John Owen



### "Are you going to teach us about God?"

A little boy looked at me, eyes eager. I smiled at him and answered, "Not today, but come again on Tuesday!"

No, I do not teach in a private, Christian school. And I am not being secretive about my faith, either. But every week at the public elementary school where I teach, close to 20 students learn about Jesus after school hours.

Four years ago I attended an outreach breakfast put on by Compass, an organization that supports Christian educators and parents in the public schools. It was very encouraging to see so many Christian teachers like me; God truly is present and working in our schools. One of the speakers shared about her experience in teaching a Good News Club in her school. The club uses Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF) curriculum to teach Bible stories, songs, memory verses, and games. I learned that there are clubs in many elementary schools in the Twin Cities.

Like many others, I was surprised that it was legal to have a Christian club in a public school. Too often assumptions are made about faith in the school systems without any investigation into the law. In reality, there are many ways that our faith can be brought into our schools. Once I realized that we could do this, I remember thinking that someone should start a club at my school. Yes, that someone turned out to be me. It felt very overwhelming to take on the task, but I knew I needed to see this happen.

Another organization, Tentmakers, also played a part in my story. I went to a weekend at the Association Retreat Center (ARC) where we set personal goals and had to start with the first step of reaching the goal. My first step was to talk with a fellow teacher who attended the church across the street from our school and had been finding ways to be a blessing to our staff. Previously, the congregation had provided breakfast and coffee in the morning after a week of late night parent-teacher conferences. These and other kind gestures had led to interesting conversations with staff members about faith and going to church. Through my conversation with my fellow teacher, I was put in contact with the children's ministry pastor, who was very familiar with CEF and eager to get a club going. The church committed to sponsoring and staffing our Good News Club that year.

When the decision was made to start the club, we wondered how we would get the word out. My school district does not allow any of the after school clubs to send flyers home with students, so we needed to find other ways to let people know about our club. The church announced it during their service, and I contacted other area churches to let them know. We made flyers with permission slips, and I kept them in my room for students to take if they were interested. If they ask me about the club, I am allowed to explain what we do in detail. Some students have taken extra forms to invite their friends. We also put flyers up on the community announcement board in some the local businesses.

We just finished our third year of hosting a Good News Club. Many of the children who participate come from families that attend church, but there are definitely others who do not, nor have they have any biblical instruction. Regardless of their church background, many of these kids did not understand that they need a personal relationship with Jesus. I have had a few students ask me to pray with them to receive Jesus as their Savior. It is exciting to see the students start to make connections between the Bible stories and applications to their own lives. As we start and end our time together, we pray for each other and our school. Modeling prayer has led to students asking to help lead this time. Now these students have more adults at school whom they trust, which seems to be a comfort to them when I see them in the halls.

For years I have taught Sunday school and VBS (vacation Bible school) at my own church. Good News Club has been an expansion of God's ministry in my life, and I am grateful and humbled that I get to be a part of it. God has not left the public schools, but there is still a battle for our children. Beyond the elementary level, I know that there are thriving student-led Bible studies held in public middle schools and high schools. Please continue to pray for and support the schools in your community. You never know what ministry is waiting for you.

Strand is a member of Emmaus Free Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn.

### A ministry of second chances.

2

Recently I had the great privilege to visit and study God's Word with five women in our county jail. They each have a story tell. They have regrets, hurts, pain, and shame that they bear. They are each full of emotions, including anger and fear, and they each have insecurities. But they each need the saving grace of Jesus.

These women are no different from you or me except that they are behind bars. For whatever reason, they made some poor choices in their lives and now are doing time. Do they get a second chance? How about a third chance? When is enough, enough?

I'm so thankful that Jesus is all about second chances. He is in the business of changing lives and to do so meets us right where we are at. Sometimes that place is a jail cell.

I think about the story of Saul in Acts 9. Jesus met Saul right on the road. Saul was on a mission to continue to persecute the Christians, and Jesus abruptly interrupted him and his mission. He took away Saul's sight and told him to go into the city of Damascus to see Ananias. After Ananias laid hands on him he could see physically and spiritually. The scales were removed from his eyes. He immediately began proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God. Despite his reputation and violent history, Jesus handpicked Saul, changed his life, and gave him a new mission, a second chance.

Sometimes we can't see because of the scales on our eyes. Sometimes we can't see because of the violence or drug abuse from our childhood. Sometimes we can't see because we have never been loved. Sometimes we can't see because the pain of hopelessness is too much. That's why I got involved with jail ministry. Too many people can't see Jesus. They have never been told of His great love. They have been hurt too many times;

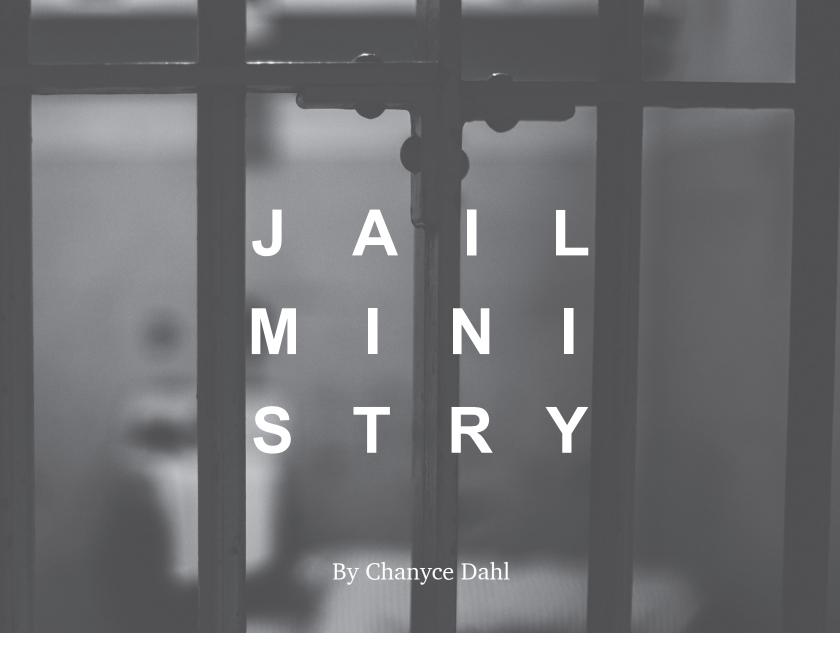
they have been scarred by a life of crime or addiction to drugs or alcohol. They have been abandoned by their parents and have been victims of crimes and now have chosen the same destructive lifestyle for themselves.

Currently there are more than 2.2 million men and women incarcerated in the U.S. That means that 2.7 million children have

Currently there are more than 2.2 million men and women incarcerated in the U.S. That means that 2.7 million children have a parent who is incarcerated. Many of us know someone who has been incarcerated or are affected by it in some way. Ninety-five percent of those prisoners will be released back into society. They will try to make it with a second chance, but as a culture we make it pretty hard for them to be successful. It is extremely difficult for someone with a record to find a job, to find a place to live (most property owners won't rent to a felon), and even to find a church family that will accept them.

The truth is, the church doesn't do a very good job of making former felons feel welcome because we are scared, we don't know what to say, we don't trust them, or we unknowingly judge them. This is called the second sentence. They have paid their debt to society by serving their time but still are not accepted (socially) back into society. Unfortunately, this causes many to go right back into the old destructive habits.

That's where we, the church, come in. We not only go into



the jail for programming, but a big part of our ministry is to come alongside those being released to help them be successful.

What does this look like? We have faithbased accountability houses they can apply to live at or we help them find a safe, healthy living environment. We also help them find employment with a felon-friendly employer. One of the biggest things we can do is make sure they know they are welcome and loved at our churches and simply be their friends. We are always weakest when we are alone, and without a support system it is easy to fail. The enemy knows when and where we are weak and wastes no time setting his snares.

Our city just built a new jail. The old jail wasn't big enough and it was simply a building to house men and women. Our city leaders realized that we need to invest in rehabilitating prisoners rather than just housing them. It is not costeffective to just house people and continue the vicious cycle without anything changing. With

the new correctional facility, city officials have granted our jail ministry between 15-20 hours a week of programming. This is an incredible opportunity to take God's Word into the jail each week. With this privilege we provide a weekly worship service, parenting classes, anger management classes, finance management classes and more. We truly want to love these men and women so that they can be released from spiritual bondage and be successful when they return to society.

I have heard so many former inmates say that being in jail or prison saved their lives. When you hit rock bottom, you listen a little closer. You exchange your pride for humbleness, you break down barriers, and you have time to get on solid ground. Sometimes I pray that an inmate's sentence would be longer because transformation takes time. Many say that getting out is harder than serving time. The world is a hard place. The Church can step up with welcoming hands and offer a safe, non-condemning place to worship.

We can be a friend to the friendless and give our time.

I recently heard someone say, "Don't judge me for where I came from." A person's past does not have to dictate his future. The truth is that we have all sinned and deserve a sentence. Praise the Lord that my debt has been paid and I was given a second chance. No one is beyond Christ's love and power to redeem. "I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matthew 25:36).

Dahl, a member of Maranatha Free Lutheran Church in Glyndon, Minn., serves on the Clay County Jail Ministry board (a non-profit 5013c).

### Matching your gifts with a need.



I'm a member of St. Paul's Free Lutheran Church in Leitersburg, Md. Located in a small village, the congregation has grown smaller and the membership older over the years. In an effort to become a healthier congregation, we embarked this year on a program of revitalization called "Fanning the Flame." Our tenmember team has been meeting, studying, and praying for the Holy Spirit to guide our efforts. During this time of spiritual introspection, God has revealed our need to change our focus. We need to look outside of ourselves into our neighborhood, our community, and even the world. We are small, but God still has a purpose for us.

Many of our members participated in a spiritual gift assessment to learn how we, as individuals and as a group, are best suited to serve God. As Romans 12:6-8 says: "We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."

One of the most prominent gifts in our congregation is the gift of mercy. This gift is the special ability God gives to some members of His body to feel

empathy and compassion for other people who are dealing with physical, mental, or emotional problems, and to translate their empathy into deeds that alleviate suffering and reflect the love of Christ. (For a listing of all the spiritual gifts see Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and I Peter 4).

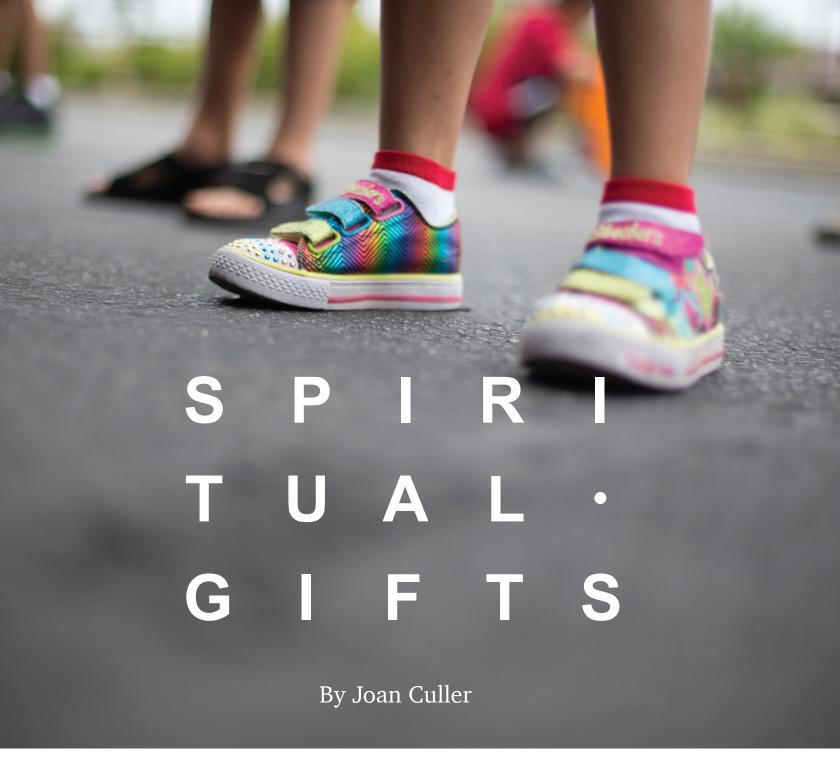
People with the gift of mercy are naturally attracted to caring ministries, ministries that help people meet all sorts of needs Caring ministries are also a great way to evangelize. Why? According to Pastor Harry Reeder, who developed Fanning the Flame, here's what can happen when a congregation undertakes mercy ministry:

- First, God is glorified because others see the gospel in action.
- Then, people are influenced by encountering authentic Christians.
- Last, church members are encouraged and edified, becoming better disciples as they participate in ministry.

Since more than 50 percent of our members have the gift of mercy, it seemed like a no-brainer. St. Paul's needed to invest in mercy ministry. Where do we start? We were already serving meals at a local mission in partnership with another AFLC congregation. A hospitality team formed to continue that ministry and began



at Brook Lane, a nonprofit organization that offers mental



health services. Beth has the gift of mercy and a passion for children. At Brook Lane she began working as a direct caregiver to adolescent girls in their residential facility. Many of these girls are wards of the state and live at Brook Lane due to a history of neglect or abuse. Some leave fairly quickly to live with foster families, some return to their own homes, but many are there for quite

The education program includes certified special education teachers, behavioral specialists, clinical social workers and nurses. Related services include psychiatry, psychology, art

therapy, addictions counseling, family therapy, and speech/language therapy. Part of Beth's job was to take the teens in her care to activities in the area—the YMCA, the local park, the movies, and so on. Our church had started a Little Free Library, and we are just a few miles from Brook Lane. I suggested that she bring her charges over for books.

Then a thought dawned on me: for years, our congregation had bemoaned our lack of young people. In years past large Sunday school classes filled the church each week. "Where are all the children now?" we asked? God answered: "Here are some of my children who need

you. Will you help them?"

We're starting small. The plan is to host some of the children two evenings each month. We'll have snacks, library books to choose, and a program which will include a Bible study, and games or a movie. Our first meeting in mid-May was a success. The girls especially loved my peanut butter chocolate chip bars and they are interested in cooking classes to learn to bake for themselves. They'd like to come to church next Sunday. God is definitely at work. We don't know exactly where we're going or what will happen, but we know who's leading the way.

Culler is a member of St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Leitersburg, Md.



By Angela Norby



### The privilege of helping expectant mothers.

While meeting with a client who was pregnant with her third child, I noticed that she seemed to have something on her mind. I asked her what it was.

"My husband is becoming depressed," she answered.
"I don't know how to make him feel better. This pregnancy has him worried about finances; he feels like he needs to get another job. This will make it so he's not home and I'll be parenting alone."

"Can you tell me what exactly he feels will be a financial struggle for your family?" I asked.

"Diapers, formula, furniture, all baby care items," she answered.

I told her to consider where she was sitting and what was available to her at our center. Then I encouraged her to tell her husband that Options for Women | Cornerstone has them covered for at least the next two years. The relief and joy on her face was priceless.

When life brings us to a crossroad, where do we go? The active believer will go to prayer or call on faith-filled brothers or sisters for help. But what about those who are uncertain about their faith life or have no desire to know God? Add an unplanned pregnancy into the uncertainty. Pregnancy knows no denomination, financial status, or ethnicity. Pregnancy happens in all walks of life.

At OFWC, a non-profit pregnancy resource center, we believe in holistic care for women who are pregnant. Our licensed nurse manager presents our clients with

medical options for unplanned pregnancies; we withhold no information. This is her appointment. All of her questions about these options are answered by a medical professional.

Our staff cares about the woman's mind, body, and soul. We are there to build her up when she thinks that she cannot succeed with her pregnancy.

We are one of many pregnancy resource centers nationwide serving women, men,

and families in an unplanned pregnancy situation. We create a comfortable, warm, inviting atmosphere without judgment or shame. Our doors are always open regardless of the decision an expectant mother may make.

Our staff does not perform abortions, nor do we refer clients for abortion, but we do talk about the ramifications of abortion. Abortion is one of the most life-altering choices available to her. Abortion must be discussed. It's a matter of life and death, a matter of her mental, physical, and spiritual future. During this sensitive time while facing a sensitive matter, we gently encourage an expectant mother to choose life.

It would be foolish to assume that all of our clients will carry their babies to full term, although that is our prayer. A mother may walk out of our doors, never to be

seen again. But it is our servant's duty to bring her as close to hope and fearlessness of her circumstance as possible while she is here with us.

The services we offer, which are 100 percent free of charge, include medical grade pregnancy testing, limited obstetrical ultrasounds, STI (sexually transmitted infection) testing, and material assistance. We also provide education on parenting, basic life skills, the potential dangers of contraceptive use, and classes on natural family planning. We assist our clients with insurance applications, providing referrals for housing/financial assistance programs. We also partner with local maternity homes and post-abortive healing nonprofits. We offer referrals for addiction recovery/counseling, and mental and physical abuse recovery. And through it all, we offer love, the love of Jesus, at all times.

Although we are not licensed counselors, our medical staff are licensed and committed to protecting their credibility and the center's credibility. We are held to the same level of compliance through HIPAA as any other medical facility in the state.

Through our generous donors, we provide new and like-new clothing (both maternity and non-maternity), self-care products, pampering gifts and more for an expectant mother. For our client's children we provide formula, diapers, wipes, jar food, brand new and like-new clothing. We also make sure our clients have access to changing tables, bouncy seats, various toys, and blankets. If you can think of it, we provide it.

Beyond meeting their physical needs, we offer our clients simple gestures of time, love, and support to see them through tough times. It is a blessing to be invited into their lives and to continue as long as they will have us.

This ministry changes lives—the lives of the clients, their families, and our lives, too. This is not a job, it's a privilege. Privilege comes in ten little fingers and toes. It also comes in the fashion of a mother choosing to allow you so deeply into her life that she becomes a dear friend, almost like another daughter. Through this ministry I have witnessed lives changing, families growing, and hearts gravitating toward our center. I feel extremely blessed in knowing it has nothing to do with me. It is Christ they are drawn to through me and all of the other staff and volunteers at this amazing organization.

A client and her husband recently stopped at our center on the way home from the hospital with their newborn. "You have been waiting as long as we have to meet him," she said, "so we stopped here first."

Norby, the director of client services at Options for Women/ Cornerstone, St. Michael, Minn., is part of the church planting team for Resurrection Free Lutheran, St. Paul, Minn.





By Paul Anderson



### A ministry to the broken hearted.

When I started Broken Heart Ministries in 1994, I was 50 years old. One person said to me, "Fifty years old is a fine time to start a ministry. Don't you think it's a little late for you?"

At the time, I had worked as a salesman for 24 years. But I was burned out. I prayed and fasted and sought the Lord's guidance and will.

I told Him, "Lord, I no longer want to be in sales. Do you have something you want me to do?"

And then I wrote on a piece of paper, "Broken Heart Ministries."

I wasn't sure what that was all about until I wrote a mission statement for Broken Heart Ministries. The statement answered the question, "Where are the broken people in our world?" It became perfectly clear to me. Broken people are everywhere. You'll find broken people in prisons, homeless shelters, chemical dependency detox centers, and nursing homes, just to name a few.

God's Word to the broken hearted is found in Psalm 147:3, "The Lord heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds."

How exactly does He heal and bind their wounds? Through His people, you and me. Ministering to the broken hearted is part of God's call to each of His followers, though how we fulfill that call will be as different as those who serve Him. But the call remains the same: to follow Jesus in His ministry of compassion. He has called us to be Jesus in the flesh to hurting and broken people who so desperately need God's love, peace, hope, and forgiveness. He has called us to take the truth of God's Word and the light of His salvation into this dark world and to touch people with the gospel of peace. And He has called us to share life with the lost, to bind those who are bruised and broken, and to show people the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Because God gifted me with song, I knew that the main focus of Broken Heart Ministries would be to bring God's unfailing love to broken and forgotten people through a ministry of gospel music.

I considered the places where broken people could be found—nursing homes, homeless shelters, detox centers, etc.—and proceeded to call them and offer my services.

They asked me, "What do you charge for your services?"

"Nothing!" I answered.

Someone asked me, "If you don't get paid for your services, how will you make it?"

I said, "I don't know, but I believe God will provide for me."

And He has. I continued to work my sales job while I called on churches sharing Broken Heart Ministries' mission and seeking financial support. In 1998 I began full-time with the ministry, and in 2005, I became a licensed chaplain.

Broken Heart Ministries' primary purpose is to be Christ's hands and feet, bringing God's love, compassion, and hope. We use God's precious Word and His faithful promises along with gospel music to mend broken people.

We are motivated to help and encourage those who are suffering pain, loneliness, and despair. They need God's love and His touch. By reaching out to the broken hearted, we are serving them by being God's vehicle of grace.

Presently we minister regularly at a Christian men's shelter for drugs and alcohol; the Marie Sanvik Center, a Christian women's ministry which provides food, clothing, household items, and the gospel to the needy; the Union Gospel Mission's men's shelter; the Naomi Family Center's women's shelter; the American Indian Detox Center; the Hennepin County Juvenile Detention Center; Redeemer Health & Rehab Center, and Victory Care Center.

"Jesus Christ is our reason for being" is the theme of our message and song. And a portion of Scripture that we cling to is found in Matthew 25. Jesus, teaching His followers about godly living through a series of parables shortly before His own death, said, "As you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to me" (vs. 40).

For those of you who feel that it's too late for God to use you, please note that God called Moses into service at age 80. Always remember: What God leads, God feeds. Yes, God is our provision. He promises to supply all our needs "according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). God is not looking for our ability, but our availability! I believe that 90 percent of ministry is showing up. Come and join us in ministering God's love and grace to the forgotten people in our world.

Anderson, a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., is the founder and director of Broken Heart Ministries, Minneapolis, which will celebrate 25 years of ministry this July. Visit brokenheartministries.org for more information. hat would women gain by building relationships intentionally, around the Word of God, with one another? Considering all the demands on their time, would it be worth it?

When we come to faith in Christ, He uses the family of God to strengthen our own personal relationship with Jesus. Spiritual mentoring is a part of this process of growth as older women teach younger women from their own life experiences and the Word.

At the heart of spiritual mentoring is a life of abiding in Jesus, daily praying, "I'm available to serve You in any way You desire." In Titus 2: 3-4, we see God's specific call for older and younger women: "Older women ... are to teach what is good, and so train the young women."

Author Susan Hunt calls it "spiritual mothering" in her

book by the same name, and describes it this way: "When a woman possessing faith and spiritual maturity enters into a nurturing relationship with a younger woman in order to encourage and equip her to live for God's glory."

This past year at Grace Free Lutheran, we began small group mentoring for women. In August, older and younger women were invited to begin gathering in homes to consider the call of Titus 2 to be involved in one another's lives. In the planning stages, I realized our various stages of life, health issues, and general pace of life would complicate our ability to meet. I reached out to the women through mailed personal invitations, emails, phone calls, church announcements, and a book table at church. As the weeks passed, a number of women expressed interest. To accommodate various schedules, we planned an evening and a morning option. Three groups formed for a study on Titus 2 through the book Adorned by Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth. At the 90-minute gatherings, the women had time

for fellowship, viewed a teaching segment, and shared discussion and prayer together.

Through the program we saw that older women have the opportunity to come alongside and take the hand of a younger woman in the faith, sharing their lives, the Word, and prayer. Together we are strengthened to "run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus" (Hebrews 12:1–2).

I asked a few women to share their experiences of what God did in their lives through the book study and mentoring groups.

"I've seen the richness of God's beautiful plan to use each of us—in different seasons of life—to encourage, challenge, and learn from one another. It's been a growing season for me personally, as I really have considered how important this model of mentoring is for each of us women, our families, and our congregation."

-Karen (age 55)

"Our group quickly became a safe place for sharing, prayer, and encouraging each other to take to heart what we have been learning about God's idea for mentoring."

—Peggy (age 65)

"During the times we met, I was encouraged and shown that our identity is in Christ, not in our occupation, our struggles, or our appearance. The encouragement, wisdom, and support from the other women in the group has greatly impacted me, reminded me to live for Christ, and to share God's love with others."

-Katie (age 26)

"I have become more confident in what it means to be a Titus 2 woman, how to live my life to serve Him, and to grow to live in His likeness. God has helped me to be more diligent in my prayers and to become more confident in sharing my Christian beliefs with non-believers."

—Lauren (age 34)

"As a senior member, I listen to life experiences of women two or more generations younger than myself. My response to them often is, 'Been there, done that. Don't worry about it.' I suggest they rely on Proverbs 3:5–6."

-Mary (age 85)

"The deep sharing and honest questions made us all look forward to each time together. The value of open, loving relationships cannot be measured!"

—Linda (age 67)

"I loved meeting new women and sisters in Christ. Because there are several generations of women who attend, as a younger woman I have gained so much from the older women's wisdom. The Lord has used this study to grow me and my love for Him and others. It has also been a great tool to prepare me for what God has ahead in ministry."

—Anna (age 34)

"The relationships and conversations I've had with the women have caused me to meditate and act on the true purpose of womanhood as God designed."

—Bethany (age 25)

"The concept of investing one's life in another through the power of Christ within has spoken to me again and again. Through these gatherings I have experienced conviction, encouragement, freedom, empathy, and renewed vision. This study has deepened my friendships and prayer life with a desire to cultivate spiritually nurturing relationships with other women."

—Ellen (age 78)

Jore is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.



By Elizabeth Jore

# AFLC Schools host graduation ceremony









TOP LEFT: Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck, chairman of the Board of Trustees, gave the commencement address. TOP RIGHT: Junior Isaiah Miller gave Ignacio Davalos a hug. MIDDLE LEFT: Andrew Hanson directed the combined choirs. MIDDLE RIGHT: Members of the graduating AFLBS class paused for prayer before heading over to the chapel. RIGHT: (From left) Graduate Allison Groleske was greeted by a friend, graduate Julia Aamot sang a solo during the song, "I Love the Lord," Emily Mulvey received a certificate from President Wade Mobley.











TOP: Members of the AFLBS 2019 graduating class gathered for one last group photo before leaving campus. ABOVE: The eight seminary graduates include Miao Zhao, Matthew Pillman, Kevin Czymbor, Israel Milton Vazquez Flores, Ryan Patenaude, Christopher Kumpula, Justin Nelson and David Niemela.

### Bible school graduates 33 students; 8 from seminary

Friends and family gathered on May 11 at the Free Lutheran Schools in Plymouth, Minn., to celebrate the graduation of 33 Bible school students and eight seminary students. The weekend of events also included a spring concert on Friday evening, featuring the AFLBS Concert Choir, Proclaim Choir, and Wind Ensemble. A ground breaking was held Saturday morning for a new student life center on the school's campus (see page 20).

The graduation service featured two songs by the combined AFLBS choirs, and a commencement address from Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck, chairman of the Board of Trustees. Michael Olson, a graduating senior, welcomed guests to the service, and seminary graduate David Niemela read the Scripture.

The weather was perfect for a receiving line outside the chapel following the service, where friends and family, as well as staff, greeted graduates.



s the AFLC Youth Ministries
Department seeks to minister to
youth and encourage those men and
women who work with youth daily,
we see a need to constantly seek out

training and education concerning youth culture. Today's youth live in a culture that is everchanging, fast-paced, and coming at them from every direction. Teen culture changes so quickly that adults can never really keep up completely, and it takes a lot of work to even try.

One of the buzzword ideas that has come out of a national study of youth culture is "moralistic therapeutic deism" (MTD). This term was coined by sociologist Christian Smith, who suggests it is the "de facto dominant religion among contemporary teenagers in the United States." For today's teen, religion—even Christianity—often boils down to MTD.

Moralistic means that a person often equates faith with being good or moral: what some might summarize as "being nice." Therapeutic means that the goal of faith is to feel better about yourself. Finally, deistic means that God exists but isn't involved in our world on a regular basis.

In his book *Soul Searching: The Religious* and *Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers,* Smith writes, "It is not ... that Christianity in the United

States is being secularized. Rather more subtly, either Christianity is at least degenerating into a pathetic version of itself or, more significantly, Christianity is actively being colonized and displaced by a quite different religious faith."

Even more troubling than the fact that MTD has crept into the faith-lives of teenagers is the reason why it has wormed its way in. This study, called the National Study of Youth and Religion, indicates that students have embraced MTD by mimicking what they are seeing acted out by adults in their lives. Adults might have a much better grasp of biblical Christianity, but the way their faith is lived out looks like MTD to other people. MTD stinks of relativism and individualism but only retains sniffs of a truly biblical worldview. The concepts of sin, punishment, mercy, grace, etc., have been lost. Instead, teens look for happiness and niceness.

What can you do about the trend toward MTD? Continued biblical teaching in our churches is important and foundational, but, in my opinion, this also must include the example of faith lived out by adults who care for teens. Teens in your church need you. These teens need to see your struggles with sin and brokenness. They need to hear that complete trust is hard for you, too. They need to know that you don't have

all the answers. They need to understand that God and His glory far outweigh our temporal problems. They need to be told that faith means trusting God, not a ticket to get you out of your problems or make everything better. No, faith in God is trust that He will carry you as you wade through your deepest problems. Teenagers need you to be an open letter for them. "And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (II Corinthians 3:3).

Rasmussen, who serves as associate pastor at Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn., is the chairman of the AFLC Youth Board



**BRAZIL'S OPEN DOOR** 

BY PASTOR JONATHAN ABEL

nce again, we were worshiping the Lord, singing praises to His name with the doors open and the curtains pulled back. Through the windows of the church, anyone outside could see and hear clearly what was going on inside the building on that clear night.

In church were believers and non-believers, people of low income as well as the rich, and everyone in between.

Among them were law officials, such as a judge, a deputy sheriff who is in charge of 26 counties in our area of Brazil, policemen and women, and others of different careers who came to hear the Word of God and praise Him.

This privilege to worship the Lord freely is a blessing that we have in Brazil. Some years ago, I was at a gathering for pastors to hear the two candidates who were running for governor of the state. The two candidates, one representing the far left, and the other from left of center, had come to answer questions the pastors had regarding their plans for government. At the time, Reverend Sun Mjung Moon, founder of the Unification Church, was establishing one of his largest centers in the world in our state of Mato Grosso do Sul. A pastor asked the candidates, if they were elected, what they would do about Reverend Moon. Both candidates said that Moon had a right to establish his center there and spread his ideologies as long as he did not violate any of the laws of Brazil. Brazil recognizes the freedom to practice any religion. To my surprise, the pastors were not happy with the politicians' shared answer.

The right to religious freedom is a gift of a true democratic society that we must take advantage of to share our faith, since those of the other faiths are not wasting any time in sharing theirs. In Maringá we have a large mosque, a few Buddhist temples, several Mormon tabernacles, many Jehovah Witness halls, and spiritist centers (not to mention all the liberal humanistic universities), with the most predominant religious presence being the Roman Catholic Church. Each

one of these are spreading their "gospel."

One recent morning I was talking to one of my elders, who is a cop. He told me, "Pastor, this is a beautiful but very corrupt city. It is corrupt from top to bottom. It is almost impossible to find good people in this city. It's like Sodom and Gomorrah."

How true! The day before I had watched the local news twice. At noon the news reported four car accidents in our city with multiple deaths, all because of drivers who broke the rules of the road. In the evening the news reported five assassinations, one victim being a cop on his way home from work. I thought the news sounded like Jerusalem in the days of Isaiah. The only hope for this city is in the One who holds the key to life, Jesus Christ. He is the one who brings true change to individuals, families, societies and nations. We must share Him boldly while we have an open door, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Abel is an AFLC missionary serving in Maringá, Brazil.

### Ground is broken for future student life center





Friends and family gathered on May 11 at the Free Lutheran Schools in Plymouth, Minn., to watch the ceremonial ground breaking for a new student life center on the school's campus. The AFLC Schools staff and members of the building committee hope to complete the facility for occupancy in the fall of 2020. The project cost is estimated at \$8M, with \$3.2M currently raised in cash and pledges.



TOP: Representatives from the Board of Trustees, the building committee, staff and Kinghorn Construction broke ground for the new student life center on May 11.

ABOVE: Current students, alumni, and friends of the Schools who were on hand for the ground breaking ceremony bowed in prayer. LEFT: Wanda Jacobson, alumnus, former basketball coach and member of the building committee, addressed the audience during the ground breaking.



your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well" (II Timothy 1:5).



hen the women of the Minneapolis district met for a spring rally on March 30, hosted

by members of Living Word free Lutheran in Eagan, Minn., "Sincere Faith" was the theme of their studies.

After registration, we were treated to breakfast served by the ladies of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn. The first session was opened by district president, Ruth Rautio. We had a time of singing and devotions before a Home Missions update and Bible study by Pastor Jim Johnson, AFLC Home Missions director.

For the second session. some of us chose to hear AFLC

# A FOCUS ON SINCERE FAITH

BY LIZ MCCARLSON

missionary Andrew Olson (on loan to Lutheran Bible Translators) share on the Bible translation work that is waiting for his family in Tanzania, while others chose to attend the "Across the Table" elective where they were challenged to be missionaries in their everyday lives: at home, at work, to friends and neighbors, etc. The little women of the AFLC (young girls who came with their mothers for the morning) also had a session with activities planned especially for them.

After the elective session, an offering was taken and there was a time of prayer for the missionaries and ministries supported by the WMF. A brief business meeting was held and the rally concluded with lunch served by men from Living Word.

It was a blessing to gather with so many women and to be encouraged by the Word of God and the actions of others. As I reflect on what was

heard and experienced throughout the day, I am reminded that sincere faith is faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This faith is a gift from God, created in our hearts as we hear the sweet gospel of Jesus Christ, on the cross, in our place, for the forgiveness of our sins. This faith gives us the hope of life eternal. This faith is sustained by God as we go through the great joys, frustrating hardships, and deep sorrows of life. This faith leads us to love the people around us with our actions and words and to repent when we fail to love God and others. I pray that sincere faith would be evident in my life just as I have seen sincere faith in the lives of many women I have known throughout my life.

McCarlson is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis.

## Retreat center celebrates 40 years

BY KIRK RAUTIO

his year marks the Association Retreat Center's 40th year of service as a mission field. In 1979 a group of AFLC people with a vision set forth to secure a place where people could "come away and rest awhile," digging deep into God's Word, spending time alone with Him, meeting Him for the first time, or just fellowshipping together with other believers. Today we can say with certainty this continues to be the mission and vision of the ARC. We exist to glorify Jesus Christ by providing a place where people can be equipped to make a positive difference in their lives, homes, churches, and communities.

During this 40th year, members of the ARC staff plan to celebrate all the wonders that God has done, and we look forward to the wonderful things He has yet to do on our mission field. As the psalmist proclaimed, "Many, Lord my God, are the wonders you have done" (Psalm 40:5).

We hope to see all of you at our AFLC family camp, which is scheduled for July 28–Aug. 3. Camp will include Bible study, fellowship, and an auction that will include opportunities to bid on items, even if you are off site this year. Evening services, with guest speaker Pastor Michael Brandt, will be live streamed.

On July 31, a catered buffet dinner will be served in the ARC gymnasium, fully underwritten by generous donors. If you are already registered for family camp with an "adult registration," you are registered for the anniversary dinner and fund raiser. If you are not attending family camp but want to attend the dinner, please register by visiting the ARC website (arc-aflc.org) and follow the link under "Family Camp 2019." Register for an adult space for anyone 18 years old and older. Register by July 7 to help us to plan accordingly. Check-in starts at 5 p.m. and the doors will open at 5:30 for the dinner, followed by a prayer and serving at 5:45. Those 17 years old and younger will be fed in Manna Inn followed by child care and activities for each age group during the dinner and the



evening program.

All funds raised during the dinner, and any funds received from May 1 through August 4 and earmarked for the 40th anniversary will be designated 10 percent to tithe, 50 percent to capital improvements at the ARC, and 40 percent to debt reduction.

Just before he went home to be with Jesus, Bob Dietsche and I sat down and talked. It was his personal goal and hopeful prayer to see the debt reduced to nothing by the close of the ARC's 40th year. We know that Bob believed that God could accomplish this miracle. We echo this request, bending our knees to God who is in control, and keeping our hearts attuned to His voice. We believe that the Lord has great things planned for the ARC that will help us remember what He has done and give us hope for what He has planned for the next 40 years. With this in mind we continually seek His guidance for what He has planned for those who will encounter Him at the ARC in the years to come.

Rautio is the executive director of the Association Retreat Center.

### MARCH MEMORIALS

### **AFLBS**

Ruth Claus Norma Solquist

### **AFLTS**

R. Ritter Verland Kruse George Hupp Sr.

### **Development** Addy Hokkanen

Evangelism

### Pastor Gordon Berntson

**FLAPS** 

Ramon Mieth

### **Home Missions**

**Beverly Clausen** 

### Vision

Pastor Orville Heipler Aini Myking

### **World Missions**

Pastor Einar Unseth

### **WMF**

David Keller Arthur Howe

... in honor of

### **Home Missions**

Jayce Hall

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-April 30, 2019			
FUND	rec'd in April	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$28,702	\$155,692	\$163,848
Evangelism	8,629	44,187	36,625
Youth Ministries	10,916	42,392	44,491
Parish Education	31,522	74,011	59,788
Seminary	20,706	104,260	102,764
Bible School	74,733	206,791	196,955
Home Missions	33,389	134,376	156,888
World Missions	31,295	180,638	153,021
Personal Support	62,701	211,855	284,881
TOTALS	\$302,594	\$1,154,202	\$1,199,262
For additional financial information for each department, go to www.aflc.org/giving			

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# WHERE IS YOUR CHURCH?

he question of a church's location is easily answered by us, and we certainly should be able to quickly provide the address of where the building stands or directions on where to find it. The same question, though, would have been a



Pastor Robert Lee

puzzling one for the early Christians. "Where is my church? Well," one might have replied, "there's Lucius who sells fruit in the marketplace, and Martha, at home with the children, and Cornelius the woodsman, and ..."

Do you catch the difference? Christians during the first centuries did not have church buildings, and so they could not think of their congregations in terms of one physical location. Their churches were their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Several definitions given for the word "church" sometimes make it difficult to understand what we mean when it is used. "We're putting an addition on our church." "There will be church outdoors in the park next Sunday, weather permitting." "I belong to the Lutheran Church. What church are you?" The first refers to a building, the second to the worship service, and the third to one's denomination.

A simple children's song, however, expresses it correctly:

> The church is not a building; the church is not a steeple, The church is not a resting place, the church is a people! I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together! All who follow Jesus, all around the world! Yes, we're the church

(Ambassador Hymnal #349)

together.

This song, of course, speaks of what we call the Church universal ... the Holy Christian Church that we confess in the Apostles' Creed. This church takes a form on earth, and that form—of which we are a part, where the Word is proclaimed and the sacraments administered—is a local congregation.

So, the question still stands. Where is your church? Probably it is safe to assume that almost all of our readers belong to congregations that own or rent buildings in which they meet. We occupy these buildings for a few hours every Sunday and perhaps one or two days during the midweek. Maybe there is an office that is open during regular business hours, too.

But if the Church essentially is the people, God's people, where is the Church the rest of the time?

This is the theme that our current issue of *The* Lutheran Ambassador seeks to amplify. The open doors for the Church are opportunities for God's people to serve Him and others, often outside of the walls of the buildings where we are privileged to worship and apart from our regular programming of services and

classes. The Church is where God's people are, entering the doors that He opens in our neighborhoods and communities.

A clear connection can be seen between the articles in this issue and some in the May issue. Last month we were encouraged to read about one congregation and its food pantry, and the story of one couple who were moved after the death of a child to start a program for others who were grieving. It was interesting, also, to learn of the man and his family who turned an old barn into a place for evangelistic outreach.

The Apostle Paul wrote that a wide door for effective service had been opened for him (I Corinthians 16:9), and he warns us that there are many adversaries that may come with open doors. It is good to be reminded from the Word that God is the one who opens doors (Acts 14:27, Colossians 4:3), and that no one will be able to close the doors that He opens (Revelation 3:8).

It is our prayer that the Spirit of God might use some of the articles in these two issues to open the eyes of readers to realize open doors that He may be placing before some of us. One should not miss, either, from Paul's account in II Corinthians 2:12-13, that the apostle had no rest for his spirit

The Church is where God's people are, entering the doors that He opens in our neighborhoods and communities.

> until he entered that open door, and so it is with God's people today, as well.

Some years ago we read of new congregations with a commitment to never own a building, so the fact that the Church is people would not be forgotten. No, it's certainly not necessary to give up the sacred spaces with which God has blessed us. But maybe we all need to heed the message of a sign on the wall over the main door of a church I once visited. You could only see it when you were leaving, and it said: "You are now entering your mission field."

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

### Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

### something to share

# AND THIS IS LOVE

BY SARAH NELSON



y husband and I welcomed our first grandchild in April. Nothing could have prepared us for the joy of watching our firstborn and his wife

welcome their firstborn. Even though many people who are grandparents told us how life-changing it is to be called grandpa and grandma, we would not know the extent of the amazing love we would feel until we held our grandson in our arms.

The evening of his birth, we were blessed to be able to hold this precious gift of life so that our son and daughter-in-law could get some much-needed rest. We did not stop smiling as we rocked our grandson in our arms, delighting in his tiny fingers, toes, and chubby little cheeks. As much as we love our grandson, how much more amazing to know the love that God has for each of us! A love so amazing that He gave

His firstborn and only Son to die for each of us. It is a thought that we as humans cannot fully understand. It is a divine love.

Each morning we wake up wondering how our grandson is doing. We long to be with him, to know him, to study him. I am challenged to have that same longing to spend time with Jesus every day. To read His Word. To come to Him in prayer. To tell Him how much I love Him.

We informed our parents, church families, and closest friends of our grandbaby's arrival. It was a joy to be able to tell them that Baby was healthy. We shared the details of his height, weight, the color of his downy hair, and the resemblances to his parents that we saw in him. Again, it was a reminder to me of how I want to share what Jesus has done on our behalf with those around me. Do I do so under compulsion, or with gratitude of all He has done for me?

Do I ever tire of the sweet story of salvation, or do I relish in its timeless telling?

My prayer is that our grandchild will grow up knowing how very dearly he is loved by his grandparents, but much more so, by his heavenly Father. May our grandson, may I, may we, know this truth from I John 4: 9-11: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Nelson is a member of the Badger Creek/ Oiland Lutheran parish, Badger, Minn.