

THE 

MARCH 2020

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

Gospel =
Evangelism



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

MARCH 2020
VOL. 58 NO. 3

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THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

(ISSN 0746-3413) (USPS 588-620)
is published monthly by the
Association of Free Lutheran
Congregations,
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Plymouth, MN 55441
Phone (763) 545-5631
Periodicals postage paid at
St. Paul, MN and additional
mailing offices.

POSTMASTER

Send address changes to
The Lutheran Ambassador,
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Plymouth, MN 55441.

SUBSCRIPTION CHANGES AND INFORMATION

3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Plymouth, MN 55441.
763-545-5631
lasubscriptions@aflc.org

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

\$24 a year, Group, U.S.
\$25 a year, Individual, U.S.
\$27 a year, International

OUR STORIES ARE THE LORD'S

BY ELIZABETH NEUFELD

I am so grateful that God uses people, though we are sinful. He used Moses, who, when confronted with the task of public speaking, fumbled through a whole list of excuses to finally express his major insecurity: "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue" (Exodus 4:10-12). The Lord gave Moses a reminder of who created his mouth, gave him his brother, and sent him on his way, promising that I AM would be with him the whole time.

Rahab harbored a very difficult past and had only recently begun to trust in the God of Jacob. But He used this precious woman, along with her story, to rescue everyone with her in that precinct of Jericho's wall.

Our Lord chose Jonah, a stubborn and selfish prophet, to deliver a message of great salvation to the vilest people he could name. Despite his attempts to avoid God's will, he learned quickly that God's sovereignty is greater than his fears.

David's adultery didn't stop God from redeeming and claiming him as a man after God's own heart. Gideon doubted, but God created a triumphant army at his leadership. Paul's testimony included an awful past and thorn in his flesh, yet he became one of the greatest missionaries in history. Peter denied Jesus, and Zacchaeus was dishonest, but the Lord chose the small-spirited, gunky, most human of us all to change lives.

In the midst of their humanness, God drew

these people closer to Himself. He didn't need them to have an education, spouse, or shiny resume. He just needed their hearts.

"But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (I Corinthians 1:27-29, ESV).

God chose you. You don't have to be spectacular or the best to be chosen. No, as Paul wrote, "And because of Him, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord'" (I Corinthians 1:30-31).

None of us can claim that our successes have been our own; we are sinful and gross and difficult people. Our stories are the Lord's, directing us according to His good and perfect will. At the crux of our stories is the greatest story of all: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:8-10). Praise be to God for His sovereignty, using broken people like us to be a part of His perfect story.

Neufeld is a Home Missions parish builder serving at Calvary Free Lutheran, Mesa, Ariz.

The church that is content to live for self and is indifferent toward lost souls will, in seeking to save its own life, lose it.

—A.W. Knock

Any method of evangelism will work if God is in it.

—Leonard Ravenhill

If we understand what lies ahead for those who do not know Christ, there will be a sense of urgency in our witness.

—David Jeremiah

If he have faith, the believer cannot be restrained. He betrays himself. He breaks out. He confesses and teaches this gospel to the people at the risk of life itself.

—Martin Luther

We are God's fellow workers, and as such we turn to prayer to equip us for the partnership.

—Philip Yancey

Missions = Evangelism

By Pastor Andrew Olson

I Imagine: You are stranded on a desert island after a tragic plane accident. Everyone miraculously survived, but you and 150 other passengers are now waiting near the beach, hoping and praying that someone will find and rescue you. “HELP” is written in the sand, signal fires are lit, but to no avail. Days pass, then weeks ... hope is getting dim.

But then, a boat appears on the horizon. It is heading your way. Cheers erupt. You watch as the boat sails toward you. It inches closer. Ropes are lowered, and you and your fellow castaways pull the boat in to shore. You notice that it is full of wood, which is strange, but everyone is just happy to see their rescuers.

“Wow! This is it!” you think to yourself, “We’re finally going home!”

You wait anxiously for your rescuers to speak. Just then, they announce that they have not come to take you off the island, rather, they will construct a new lodge to make your stay more comfortable. The guests build a nice lodge and leave with smiles on their faces.

Maybe someone else will eventually come to the rescue, but that day hasn’t come yet.

It is an absurd story line, isn’t it? When missionaries fail to preach the gospel, it sounds just as absurd. Souls are lost at sea, as it were. People need rescuing with the gospel of Jesus. However, in the world’s oceans we navigate around social gospel warriors who are setting sail with boats full of wood looking to make nicer lodgings for people who desperately need rescuing.

This new mission model puts a high

value on the impact of the work being done and feeling good about it. Meanwhile, little consideration is given to what is of eternal value, namely, precious souls. Although this new model takes the name of “missions,” the foundation of its work is rather carnal and misplaced. People throughout the modern mission movement should honestly consider the final intended outcome of their work.

Objectives matter. Motives matter.

If we are building an orphanage, it is to serve Christ and be His loving arms to the orphans. If we are translating the Bible, it is so that people can hear His gospel call. If we are planting churches, it is to establish the kingdom of God on earth. If we are working with youth, it is to equip these souls to live boldly for Christ in their generation. If we are managing a radio station, it is to broadcast the hope of Jesus to all who will hear.

Evangelism and discipleship are the goals; mission work is the activity we undertake to accomplish those goals. Everything we do should serve Christ’s outcomes—ours must be secondary. Many missiologists refer to this as following the *missio Dei*: Latin for the mission of God. The question we should be asking when we step into the mission field is, “What is God’s mission here?”

The answer is in the Bible. “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15). The beauty of true mission work is the gospel-calling, soul-winning, eternity changing, disciple-making good news of Christ’s work on the cross. This wonderful gospel of hope lifts souls



from desperation. The importance of this work is why Paul reminds Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist,” even amidst the busy work of his ministry (II Timothy 4:5).

Evangelism isn't optional in mission work, it's foundational. It's not a side dish, it's the main course. In fact, if the end purpose of our mission work is anything other than bringing people closer to Jesus, we shouldn't be doing it.

I must applaud AFLC World Missions and Journey Missions for their radically gospel-centered approach to missions. Evangelism and relationships have ever been the essential hallmarks of our work abroad. May God keep us on this narrow way.

How do we keep this gospel centrality in our mission work for years to come? We have a great answer in the first of our AFLC Fundamental Principles, namely,

“According to the Word of God, the congregation is the right form of the kingdom of God on earth.” When mission work is done in service to the local congregation, it's guided by the vehicle which God has chosen and promises to use. A posture of servitude toward the congregation will receive God's guidance and blessing (Matthew 6:33).

From digging wells to building orphanages, translating Bibles to planting churches, it seems as though the mission field is ripe with limitless possibilities. Whatever works of love we undertake, may we build all of these works upon the solid foundation of gospel ministry done in service to the local congregation.

Olson is an AFLC missionary on loan to Lutheran Bible Translators, serving in Ukerewe Island, Tanzania, where the Book of Luke has now been translated into Kikerewe.





Since childhood, I have always been a thief. I shoplifted whenever I could. I took change from our landlord's parked car. I walked into a house on my paper route and stole money off of the owner's night stand. As a busboy, I helped myself to portions of the waitress' tips. I robbed the register at the department store where I sold shoes. The list goes on and on.

My criminal career culminated when, at the age of 21, I robbed a restaurant cashier at gunpoint. Thankfully, I was caught immediately afterward in a high-speed chase with the Bloomington, Minn., police. I ended up serving four years in prison where a miracle occurred. Through the evangelization of both inmates and outside volunteers, I came to place my trust in Christ. The Lord transformed my life, and by His power and grace I have avoided trouble with the law for 26 years and counting.

Currently in the United States, there are more than 2.3 million people incarcerated in prisons and jails. Each of these prisoners has a network of friends and family members who have one question on their minds: When my loved ones are released, what will prevent them from offending again and going right back into jail?

To assist with this concern, the Lord led me to write *Get Out for Good*, a book that gives practical, biblical advice to released prisoners and their families. Drawing from my ministry experience of working with hundreds of prisoners, I know that implementing these simple habits into everyday life will exponentially increase a former offender's chances for success. Another goal of writing this book is to encourage those who would like to get involved in the evangelism process of prison ministry. You have a heart for men and women who have been dealt a bad hand in life. You long to see them experience a healthy family environment. But evangelism is not a one-time event. It is an ongoing process. As you read *Get Out for Good*, you will see that released prisoners deal with the same issues we all confront as we seek to follow the Lord. The book is divided into four sections, each dealing with a specific challenge inmates face.

Relationship Basics

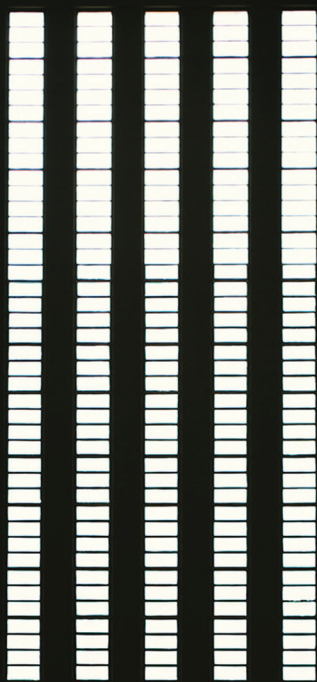
In healthy families, parents teach their children about the importance of knowing God, how to make friends, and the development of romantic relationships. Because my father abandoned our family when I was 4 years old, I needed help in understanding healthy relationships. God provided several spiritual fathers to mentor me in these crucial areas.

Most prisoners lack a solid mentor. One example of this deficiency in my life was the unhealthy way I approached the opposite sex. From the time I was in junior high school until about two years into my prison sentence, I was never without a girlfriend for more than a week. One man who led a Wednesday night Bible study in prison recognized that I lacked a basic understanding of how relationships are supposed to work. He and his wife invited me to live with them as they modeled God's intent for marriage.

Spiritual Growth

This part of the book focuses on Christian disciplines such as church attendance, daily devotions, and accountability. As we

Freedom



Free

By Pastor Scott Stroud

evangelize the lost, we don't just lead them to the point of conversion and then turn them loose to fend for themselves. We connect them with the Body of Christ so that they might receive the gifts God has provided for their edification.

Growing spiritually in a local congregation was a critical part of my transition. Many prisoners are lone wolves, necessarily isolating themselves from others for the sake of physical safety. As the church, we draw these lost sheep into the fold so that they might feed on the Word, gain protection from the enemy, and find shelter amid life's storms.

Life Skills

Getting out of prison can be scary for those who have been locked away for a long time. Many don't know the first thing about the internet, cell phones, obtaining a driver's license, or purchasing a home. This practical section helps them navigate the rocky river of life. You may find that one of the essential aspects of discipling those you have evangelized is assisting them in the same areas in which teenagers would need help to navigate as they leave the nest.

Many men and women have returned to prison because they couldn't figure out life in the real world. During their incarceration, most inmates were told what to eat, where to sleep, and where to work. On the outside, they might not have the first clue about creating a resume or applying for a job. Part of mentoring means walking them through the process and helping them gain confidence.

Leaving a Legacy

This final section deals with succeeding in the long run. Some former offenders do well in the first couple of years outside prison walls, but then flounder when they face the mundane, day-to-day marathon of Christian living. I encourage them to finish strong, give back, and get up when they fall. I have come to realize in my own life on the outside that perfection is not the goal. Like a mentor told me, "You only lose if you quit!"

My dream is to have ten copies of this book as a resource for prisoners in every chaplain's office in America. Each of the 15 chapters contains discussion questions for group study so prisoners can prepare for release, as well as tips for families, friends, and mentors.

Stroud serves St. Ansgar's Lutheran, Salinas, Calif. If your church would like to find out more about giving his book to prisoners, please visit his website at scottkstroud.com.

By Elise Kramer

MMy sister, Hanna, and I were so excited to have the opportunity to visit Israel in November. What made the trip even greater was the opportunity to witness for Jesus while we were there. When I found out that our team was going to be witnessing at a kibbutz (an Israeli community where land, food, and work are shared between the members), I felt nervous, but excited to see what God would do.

It was a joy to talk to Israelis face to face. The first person we encountered was an older lady who wanted to know what we were doing there. We began all of our conversations by stating that we were visiting Israel for a few days, and that we loved their country. It made the citizens more comfortable beginning a conversation. I believe she was a practicing Jew, because the conversation ended with her saying, “*Elohim* [God], yes. *Yeshua* [Jesus], no.” She spoke mainly Hebrew, but I could tell her views in those few words.

Another man had a very interesting story. His grandfather was one of ten men who had come years before and built the kibbutz we were visiting. He shared that he considered Israel his country but was not a practicing Jew, believing very strongly in the theory of

evolution. One member of our team was able to share his whole testimony with him, which was neat to witness.

The last encounter was my favorite. A young man opened the door to our knock. After some small talk, he told us he was struggling with very bad tooth pain. Before we arrived, he said he had been praying to any power or god that would help him, including some Hindu gods. What an opportunity for God! We asked if we could pray for him in Yeshua’s name, and he said he would welcome anything that could possibly help. We laid our hands on him and prayed. Right away, I felt authority on our side, a power straight from Jesus. When we finished praying, we asked him how his tooth felt. He said he wasn’t sure about the tooth, but placing his hand over his heart, remarked that something inside of him felt a lot better. It was definitely a highlight. The next day we heard that he had contacted the missionary we were with to tell him that his tooth pain was gone.

Ministering during our trip helped me put a face on the people of Israel and showed me how I can continue to pray for them while back home. I hope that you will keep them in your prayers as well.



Witnessing = Joy

By Hanna Kramer

The Kibbutz I visited with my group was quiet the morning we went, so I only have a couple stories to share. The first person we had a conversation with was Monique, who was a searcher after truth. Having grown up on the kibbutz, she adopted the prevalent worldview in kibbutz culture: socialism or humanism. She believed in basic things such as good morals, but I could tell she wanted more. She confessed to praying to God occasionally, even though it was hard for her to believe. Our group leader, Mike, told her that God loved her and that she was fearfully and wonderfully made by Him. She was taken aback by this, not knowing how to respond. She then told us she had a son in the Israeli military, and that he wanted to stay in beyond the required two years of service. She was deeply worried for his safety. Mike prayed protection over her son and asked that God would reveal His love to her. She was so open to things of God, and I continue pray for her salvation.

Next we talked with Harold, a man who didn't appreciate strangers knocking

on his door out of the blue. Still, we had a nice conversation on his front patio. We explained that we loved touring Israel, and how incredible it was that this nation had survived—God must have had His hand on it. He scoffed at this idea, not believing supernatural power had helped form his country, since he didn't believe in God. There was only this world, and the things we could do in it, he said. Because of this, most of the conversation revolved around his and his children's accomplishments. I noticed a painting in his house called "The Milkmaid." I've always loved that painting, and he seemed to soften a little after I complimented it. We chatted for a while longer, and at the end of the conversation I handed him a tract, which I was surprised and grateful that he took.

At the end of the outreach, I laughed that I had been so nervous. It isn't a scary thing to share your faith when you do it in an organic way, weaving the gospel into an everyday conversation. It has made me more confident to witness where I live, because if I could witness to Jews, I can witness to anyone!



Hanna and Elise Kramer, Fergus Falls, Minn., traveled with AFLC Journey Missions to Israel last November. They are members of Grong Lutheran, Rollag, Minn. Pictured at left, the team prayed over the Jezreel Valley.



I moved to Kansas State University in the fall of 2015 with a desire to continue growing in my faith after graduating from the Free Lutheran Bible College. I knew I wouldn't find the same environment at K-State as I did at the Bible college, but I was determined to find community among other believers. I noticed several ministries hosting worship nights, outings, and meals the first weeks of class, so I thought I'd try a couple out. One particular group called Christian Challenge was hosting a worship night with free Call Hall ice cream, a classic at K-State.

I headed down to the lawn in front of Anderson Hall where they were hosting the worship night, grabbed some ice cream, and

decided I needed to meet some people. I was introduced to a young gal named Katelyn who would soon become my freshman Bible study leader. She immediately started asking me all the questions about where I was from, what I was studying, what year I was, etc. We got to know each other quickly and before the night was over, she had already invited me to an event the next night. Katelyn was on the leadership team along with many other students from various parts of campus. Some leaders were resident assistants in the dorms and were able to reach out to that demographic. Some leaders lived off campus and reached out to people in their apartment complexes. Other leaders had a role in student



Campus Outreach

By Christina Hoops

organizations and were able to reach students in that capacity.

One of the many things I appreciated about Challenge was the ministry's investment in the lives of those around them. Within the first week of class, they had four events planned for students to attend. The first was the free ice cream social, then a picnic at the park, swing dancing at the dorms, and a worship night. Before these events even took place, they set up booths across campus to advertise for the ice cream social. And who doesn't love some free homemade ice cream?

As I spent more time with Katelyn and got involved with my Bible study group, the events continued. For freshman, Challenge has a weekly get together with ice breakers, games, free food, and a short study. I loved these times because I was able to get to know even more people than I would have on my own.

During my second year with Challenge, I had the opportunity to join their leadership team and co-lead a Bible study with two other girls. At the beginning of each semester we were able to attend training sessions, which gave us tools to help lead well and reach out to students.

One particular analogy Challenge leaders taught me was to "build below the water line." They referred to the image of an iceberg; most of the ice is below the surface of the water and just a little bit shows above the surface. Similarly, in building relationships, it's important to not only meet others, but also create deeper connections with them. We can't just have surface conversations about the weather, classes, roommates, etc. We need to dig deeper, build below that surface, and get to know who they really are. Did they grow up in church? Are they questioning their beliefs? What's their family like?

What's the most difficult thing they've walked through? These questions begin the journey of lasting relationships. Building these relationships, however, takes time and effort, but it's worth it! Jesus did this with His disciples. He took them along on His journeys and they watched Him interact with those around Him.

Through Challenge, I was able to invest in several students and even now I'm able to continue those relationships as I live and work in Manhattan, Kan. I get to see where God is continuing to lead them and hear stories of how they're investing in other students.

While this sounds great, there are also stories of failure and heartache. There were relationships I built with students who aren't following the Lord and all I can do is pray that God is continuing to tug at their hearts. Students today have so many distractions pulling them in different directions. My prayer is that Christ would be so evident to them that those distractions fall to the wayside and they can find a life-giving relationship with their Savior. Their identity isn't found in their grades, what others say about them, what clubs they're involved in, or anything else. Their identity is found in Jesus Christ.

I'm thankful for the time I had with Challenge and the opportunities I was given. If you're also involved in campus ministry, I pray that God would give you the tools you need through all the highs and lows as you reach out to this generation. The enemy is hard at work and he is going to try and pull these young students away from their faith.

Hoops, a 2015 graduate of the Free Lutheran Bible College, lives and works in Manhattan, Kan.

Evangelism = Discipleship

By Pastor Matthew Quanbeck

Does the AFLC still value evangelism? In 2018, the AFLC Commission on Evangelism changed its name to AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship (AED). With that change, some people questioned whether the department was diluting its focus on evangelism. As Pastor Randy Nelson begins serving as the new director of the department this month, he is aware of that fear.

“I understand that concern, I grew up an LEM kid, loved special meetings, and met my wife on an LEM team,” said Nelson of his time with the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement. “I very much feel that we need to proclaim the life-changing gospel of sin and grace, especially today.”

That was the heart of former Director Jim Rasmussen, noted Nelson, and the focus of the department its inception.

At the same time, Nelson recognizes that nurturing evangelism in the AFLC is more complex than simply encouraging more special meetings or promoting a specific evangelistic program. Since many churches are simply fighting to keep their doors open, a more holistic approach is needed. Encouraging evangelism must include fostering healthy congregations and pastors.

“What we have found is that churches and pastors are struggling,” explained Nelson. “We still intend to provide a list of evangelists and those who have those gifts. And we are going to encourage programs and things that have worked in the past that are still viable, like special meetings. But what we are seeing more and more is because of the pressure of the culture, there is less concern for others, and it comes back to affirming that the gospel is the center. And that is best promoted by the pastor and lay leaders in the congregation ... we want to come alongside and encourage them.”

Nelson realizes that he doesn’t have all the answers. Instead, he is looking forward to listening to pastors and lay people to find out how AED can best assist them. He also recognizes that many churches are without a pastor and he wants to explore ways to support lay leaders in those congregations. Healthy, outward-focused congregations are essential for more effective evangelism



An interview with Pastor Randy Nelson, the next director of AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship

disciple

efforts. Conversely, evangelism is critical to the health of a congregation.

Nelson observed, “We spend a lot of time trying to keep our current members happy, when really what I have found most energizing is when I’m ministering to people outside of my church. When they get saved and come in, they are fireballs.”

These new Christians bring new life and enthusiasm into the congregation, and Nelson pointed out that the long-standing members can be put to work discipling them. These discipling

relationships are mutually beneficial. Nelson explained that evangelism and discipleship are “the foundation of biblical congregational life.”

Nelson also believes that evangelism and discipleship cannot be separated. Evangelism is sharing the gospel. Discipleship nurtures spiritual life and “should drive further evangelism,” he said, emphasizing that relationships are foundational to both.

As the lost are saved through relationships with Christians, it is natural that those relationships turn into discipling relationships. This relational ministry is challenging in our culture because we are becoming more isolated from each other, noted Nelson, and we need to learn “how to engage people in conversations that are not perceived as being confrontational,” but instead share ideas in a way that won’t engage their defenses. This does not mean affirming faulty beliefs. Instead, as we build relationships, we earn the opportunity to communicate that we really are sinners in need of Jesus.

Earning the right to communicate the gospel often comes through caring for people’s physical and emotional needs. “It’s hard to do outreach when the image of your church in the community doesn’t reflect what you are saying,” said Nelson. “We should have caring ministries just as much as we should have evangelistic outreaches.”

This does not mean that we spread a social gospel that never calls people to repentance and faith, but it does mean that these are the things that show people that we truly care. When the gospel message is explained, they know it comes from concern and love for them.

The culture in which the AFLC operates has changed dramatically since the days of LEM. But Nelson sees God at work in the AFLC today, and he is excited to be part of what God is doing.

“I believe the Holy Spirit is still at work,” he said. “The fields are still white unto harvest, perhaps more today than ever. And I am praying for revival, first in us and our congregations, and then in our country.”

May we all join him in that prayer.

Quanbeck, who serves United Lutheran, Laurel, Neb., is a member of the AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship Board.



Andy Nelson,
Evangelism

Some people wonder why I am such a strong supporter of evangelists and evangelistic meetings. I could say it is because it is a biblical office, just as biblical as pastor (Ephesians 4:11). How I wish the AFLC still had a full-time revival meeting evangelist. Mostly, I support evangelistic meetings because they changed my life.

There was a time in my life when you could ask me if I knew I was going to heaven and I would say, “I hope so, but I doubt it.”

If you asked me what my hope of heaven was, I would say, “I am baptized, I go to church, Sunday school, and youth group, and I try not to say bad words or cheat on tests. So, I hope this makes me good enough to get into heaven.”

But at night I would lie sleepless in bed, sure I was on my way to hell. Then something changed.

During my first year of confirmation, our pastor left Coon Valley (Wis.) Lutheran Church (ALC). Our new funeral director was elected to the call committee. He grew up in the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and taught the teen Sunday school class right from the Bible, promoted Billy Graham crusades, and told teens about the imminent return of Christ. He contacted Pastor Laurel Udden, director of the

Lutheran Evangelistic Movement, to recommend a pastor. He suggested Pastor Leland Evenson, a former missionary to Zululand, graduate of the Lutheran Bible Institute (LBI), and current pastor of Red Oak Grove Lutheran, near Austin, Minn., where God was doing an amazing work of revival.

Pastor Evenson accepted the call to our church, and things got exciting. We started attending Bible camp at Lake Koronis, where we heard testimonies and had altar calls rather than going to our district camp where we rode horses, made crafts, and had rap sessions. And above all else, we started having LEM evangelistic meetings with evangelists Sterling Johnson, Nels Pederson, and Leonard Masted. We heard new phrases like, “knowing Jesus personally,” “you can’t earn salvation,” and, “Jesus only.” College students from schools like Seattle LBI, including Mike Annenson, Paul Pillman, and so many more, came and sang and gave their testimonies.

The LEM evangelists, night after night, pointedly showed us our sin and beautifully described the finished work of Christ on the cross. The altar was open for prayer. Hearing II Corinthians 5:21 gave me the assurance of salvation, “God made him who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, that in him, we might become

Gospel = Evangelism

By Pastor Tom Olson



the righteousness of God.” I finally knew for sure I was going to heaven and the key was “Jesus only.”

A rough-living, heavy-drinking milk hauler who came to the meetings got gloriously converted and became our youth director. We had a giant youth group in which we focused on Bible study rather than the former agenda of pizza parties, bowling, and roller skating. Converted youth challenged their unconverted parents to get saved. Some parents got angry. I can still hear the old Norwegian ladies saying, “To think those kids know they are going to heaven for sure, how proud! How do they know they are good enough to get into heaven?”

When Pastor Evenson left, the Bishop sent us a pastor who told us we were going to heaven because we were baptized, and the evangelistic meetings stopped. I was discouraged. Evangelist Sterling Johnson introduced me to Dr. Fran Monseth at an LEM midwinter youth conference. I was impressed and came to the Free Lutheran

Seminary where he served as dean.

Now I am having a happy time promoting evangelistic meetings in our local church and going out to AFLC churches to preach at special meetings. Everywhere we go we see people (usually on the third and fourth nights of meetings) coming to the altar to deal with sin and receive the blessed assurance that our “sins not in part but the whole are nailed to the cross and we bear them no more” (“It is Well With My Soul,” by Horatio Spafford).

If you have not had evangelistic meetings in your church for a while, I would encourage you to have a series of four nights with daytime Bible studies, as well. Don’t worry about numbers, very few attended when I got saved. I love evangelistic meetings because that is where I met Jesus and found the assurance of salvation by grace.

Olson serves Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran, Lakeville, Minn.

Music = Gospel

By Tim Hager

From the absurdity of a talking donkey to the teenage Mary who birthed the son of God, we see that God seems to delight in using unlikely avenues to accomplish His work. This is another story of an unlikely avenue where God has bridged cultural and religious barriers with music used to proclaim the gospel of Christ from the plains of North Dakota to an island in the Pacific.

God called my son, Greg Hager, from a professional career to write and sing songs about life and faith that he learned while growing up on a farm near Valley City, N.D., where he milked cows and worked in the fields. Greg's personal faith in Jesus is expressed through his music, and he witnesses in unlikely places—rodeo arenas, fairs, festivals, concert halls, schools, and city concert series. This music declares the gospel in places where no preacher or missionary would be welcomed.

In the mid-1980s, a Japanese foreign exchange student lived with our family for 11 months. Thirty years later, this student unknowingly reached thousands of Japanese people and began an evangelistic work by asking Greg to sing a series of country music concerts in her home country. By faith, this cowboy singer went to share his love of Jesus, using interpreters to share gospel truths between songs. Many Japanese are fascinated by America and love the music of the West. They yearn for the gospel message of hope. Local missionaries invited Greg to provide an outreach to the community.

During three tours over three years, including 74 concerts and multiple radio and TV interviews, thousands of people were reached. Hundreds have stated, some through tears, that the music and message have touched their hearts. Language is not a barrier to the work of the Holy Spirit, and the translated words of the gospel music can produce eternal results.

Roughly 95 percent of the Japanese people have no understanding of Christianity. Unbelievably, a 30th generation Buddhist priest provided Greg with housing on his temple grounds during an outreach tour last November. He even arranged for Greg to sing in one of the temple meeting rooms. One morning, the priest and his wife proudly stated that they had been studying the lyrics to Greg's gospel songs so that they could understand the meanings. Who but God could orchestrate that? That Word would never have been heard had it not been delivered through music.



Because of Greg's experience in music ministry, he has been asked to be the music director for the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics outreach efforts in Japan with Lay Witnesses for Christ International, a group which has ministered to the world's athletes for the past 40 years. The ministry team will have access to Olympians and visitors alike and will also do outreach programs for the Japanese people.

It only seems unlikely that a North Dakota farm boy following his dream and praying for opportunities to witness through music would be used in this way. But God will use anyone who is willing to do what they can, with what they have, right where they are.

What does God have planned for Japan? Only He knows, but let us rejoice together for this unusual evangelistic opportunity. Let us pray for God's special anointing of Greg's gospel music to bridge the barriers and draw huge numbers of these people to Himself.

Greg is carrying on the legacy of several generations associated with Zion Free Lutheran Church in rural Valley City near his country home. You can follow him on social media, and find out more at his website (greghager.com).

Hager is a member of Zion Free Lutheran, Green Township, N.D.



MISSION PERSPECTIVE

BY HEIDI NELSON

When we were newborn babies, our vision was blurred and colorless. As we grow, our vision literally becomes clearer, sharper, and more colorful.

Likewise, God uses the people we meet, experiences we live through, circumstances we encounter, decisions we make, books we read, lessons we learn, and words we ingest to shape our spiritual perspective and mold us into the people He wants us to be. Sometimes He opens our eyes wider through simple daily activities, and other times our eyes are widened after being uprooted from our routines to experience something completely different on the other side of the world.

Short-term missions not only changes the perspective of those who go, but whole communities are impacted by the process of sending out, praying for, and receiving those missionaries.

The anticipation for my first mission trip began many years before my seventh-grade feet boarded a bus to Monterey,

Mexico. From kindergarten through eighth grade, I attended a little Christian school in South Minneapolis that sent seventh and eighth grade students with Youth With A Mission (YWAM) to Mexico every year. The whole school was involved in praying, fund raising, and equipping the team to go. Even as a kindergartner and first grader, I remember the small ways we were included in the preparations and being part of the special prayer send-off chapel service. I could hardly wait to hear the stories when the team returned home each year.

When it was finally my year to go, the week in Mexico went way too fast. I was so sad about returning home. My mom reminded me of all the hurting hearts in Minneapolis, too. My perspective changed. My eyes widened. I had a hunger to go, but also realized the need to share Jesus' love with friends, family, and neighbors around me at home.

But aren't short-term missions expensive? Wouldn't it be better to send money directly to the full-time missionaries and ministries? Several years ago, there was a small church in Kansas that raised money for a ministry in Russia. The Russian ministry actually told the church in the U.S. that they would rather have them use the money to send a team to help with some projects. So they went. This team was able to see the ministry and the culture in Russia, worship together, and experience joys and heartaches with new brothers and sisters. Those in Russia were so encouraged and those from the U.S. were encouraged, too. The church developed a long-lasting partnership and raised more prayer and



financial support than they ever would have if they had just sent money. Eyes were widened and perspectives changed.

Each time we leave our home, God has an important lesson for us to learn. Sometimes we learn through joyful days, and other times our eyes are widened and perspectives changed because of unexpected challenges or difficult situations. In the midst of it all, God is with us. He cares about our response. Lately my prayer has been that I would be so confident about where God is calling me that even when the hard things come I would trust God and His plan, without any regrets, second guesses, or fear of others' opinions.

Anything we try to do by our own agenda and not God's can be dangerous. However, if our goal is truly to join God's mission, there will be a long-lasting and far-reaching impact on all who are involved in the going, sending, and receiving. A mission trip is not the journey. Instead, it becomes one of the many pinpoints in the journey of life, where God uses a unique experience to widen our eyes and change our perspective. For now, we get a glimpse into heaven and all the cultures and languages worshiping together. Someday we will see the complete picture when we clearly see Jesus' face.

Nelson is a member of Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis. She travels frequently with her husband, Jon, who serves as department head of Journey Missions.



Conference welcome, information

June 9-12 • Association Retreat Center

BY KIRK RAUTIO

Along with our staff, I invite you to come to the 2020 AFLC Annual Conference June 9-12 at the Association Retreat Center (ARC), located near Osceola, Wis.

The ARC is about a one-hour drive from the Twin Cities metro area. It also is near some well-known recreational places such as Taylors Falls, Wis. The property was purchased by the AFLC in 1979, and a retreat center was established out of the former radar base facilities. The camp continues to be a place of rest for many.

We are excited for all to come and share in the blessing of our 2020 conference through fellowship and spiritually uplifting speakers. The theme of the conference, “Will He Find Faith?” comes from Luke 18:8, “... However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

The conference hosting committee has been busy meeting regularly and they are excited to offer many options for adults, children, and youth attending the AFLC conference. The schedule will offer something for the whole family, including a full morning and afternoon nursery, vacation Bible school for children, and youth activities while adults are in session.

Registration

The place to begin planning for the Annual Conference is by visiting the conference registration page (aflc.org/about-us/conferences). There you will find the conference registration form, as well as a link to the ARC conference brochure. The registration form can be filled in and paid for online. For questions about the registration form, please contact Chanel Pederson at chanel.pederson@aflc.org.

Food and Lodging

Your food and ARC lodging needs must be submitted by calling the ARC at 715-294-2877. Because of the recent heavy activity in registration, the earlier you call the better we can secure your lodging selections and assist in the preparations that are needed to host persons attending. Please register by May 29 for ARC meals and lodging.

Committees

If you are serving on a 2020 conference committee or if your AFLC board is meeting at conference and you need a room for that meeting, please call the ARC at 715-294-2877 to reserve a meeting place. Also, please give us the day, time, and how

Off-site housing options

If you are planning to stay off of the ARC campus, following are a list of hotels options to consider.

Osceola, Wis. (8 miles)

• River Valley Inn & Suites: 715-294-2877

St. Croix Falls, Wis. (13 miles)

• Holiday Inn Express: 715-483-5775

New Richmond, Wis. (13 miles)

• AmeriVu Inn and Suites: 715-246-4606

• AmericInn by Wyndham: 715-246-3993

• Best Western Plus: 715-243-5600

Amery, Wis. (18 miles)

• Forest Inn: 715-268-4100

Chisago City, Minn. (20 miles)

• Comfort Inn & Suites: 651-213-3400

Stillwater, Minn. (25 miles)

• Water Street Inn: 651-439-6000

• Lora: 651-571-3500

• Comfort Inn & Suites: 651-275-1401

many persons are attending.

If you haven't been to the ARC in a while, please come back and visit as several changes may have occurred since you last drove onto our campus. It will be a joy to see you.

Rautio is the executive director of the Association Retreat Center.

WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION

VICTORY IN JESUS

The WMF Day for 2020 is set for June 9 at the Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis. Our theme this year is "Victory in Jesus," taken from I John 5:4-5, "... This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

We invite you to come to WMF Day 2020. We look forward to hearing from Pastor Iran Goes, who serves as president of the AFLC Brazil. Pastor Paul and Becky Abel, current AFLC missionaries serving in Curitiba, Brazil, will serve as translators. Workshops throughout the day will include presentations by Pastor Andy and Monica Coyle, Summerset, S.D., who are serving as church planters in the Black Hills of South Dakota; Natalie Ballmann, who is serving as a church planter with her husband in San Antonio, Texas; and Joan Korhonen, Plymouth, Minn., who

serves alongside her husband, Earl, who directs AFLC World Missions.



Pastor Iran Goes

We know our ARC hosts, hostesses, and volunteers, along with the Minneapolis district ladies, will work tirelessly to make you feel at home. There will be food to nourish your body and feed your soul, as well. This time of fellowship with the ladies of our AFLC family is such a treat. For those of you who love to sing, please plan to join Anne Presteng as she leads our WMF Day choir. Invite your friends, get those registrations in, and we will see you there.

2020 WMF Day • June 9 • Association Retreat Center • Near Osceola, Wis.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Home congregation (city and state): _____

Item	Cost	#	Total
*Registration	\$20		\$

Have you registered with the ARC for the luncheon on June 9? If so, how many will attend? _____

Have you registered with the ARC for the breakfast on June 10? If so, how many will attend? _____

Please list children by name and age who will need childcare for WMF Day _____

The registration fee is required for all attending the convention. Please register by May 29. Register for meals and housing with the ARC (see page 18 for more information). **Make checks payable to "WMF of AFLC" and mail to: WMF Treasurer, Deb Benson, PO Box 23, Morris, IL 60450.*

PACCT to help hurting pastors, congregations

Ministry team founded, includes trained counselors and mentors

BY ANDREA CHRISTENSON

An upswing in awareness of pastoral burnout and congregational crisis management recently caused members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee to look into ways to provide support for hurting people and churches. From this effort the Pastoral and Congregational Care Team, or PACCT, was born.

As a group PACCT exists to nurture healthy pastors, ministry families, and congregations, coming alongside them to provide a listening ear, a caring heart, and a supporting hand.

In an effort to assist pastors, PACCT seeks to accomplish this by pursuing relationships with pastors and supporting them in their call, helping them establish healthy boundaries, and walking with them in ministry and life. PACCT also focuses on intervention care, bringing support to pastors and their families who are experiencing an immediate need or crisis. Lastly, they come alongside pastors, wives, and their families for recovery care, encouraging health, healing, and stability after experiencing a hurt, hardship, or failure in life or ministry.

These efforts are mirrored in PACCT's desires for healthy congregations. They seek to pursue relationships with congregation and ministry leaders, supporting them in their care for their pastor and the ministry of their church. Intervention care in a congregation includes supporting churches who are experiencing an immediate need spiritually, physically, or relationally. Finally, they wish to come alongside congregations to encourage recovery after experiencing a hurt, failure, or a hardship in ministry.

The PACCT ministry team currently includes Pastor Jerry and Kristi Nelson, Pastor Lee and Carol Hoops, Pastor Eric and Andrea Christenson, Pastor Randy and Brenda Nelson, and Tom and Linda Mathre.

For more information, please visit aflc.org/pacct. To contact PACCT call (877) 604-1544, or email pacct@aflc.org.

Christenson is a member of Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis.



Spotlight on missions

Pastor Andy Coyle (above) was the featured speaker for the Free Lutheran Bible College's spring Spotlight conference on missions, held Feb. 10-11. Coyle, a former missionary to Ukraine, led sessions focused on recognizing the challenges faced by those called to mission work. Pictured at right, students Libby Borg and Sophie Burtman talk with Heather Olson during a session.



AFLC Youth Ministries hosts weekend equipping event

AFLC Youth Ministries held its annual Youth Workers Weekends (YWW) Jan. 17-19 at the Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis. The guest trainer for Saturday was Bo Boshers, president of LEAD222, which is a national youth leader coaching community. YWW attendees included volunteers, youth directors, pastors, and parents as well as other caring adults.

"We were very grateful for the involvement across many walks of life," explained Pastor Jason Holt, AFLC director of Youth Ministries. "The equipping and encouragement this event provides are for anyone concerned about passing on faith in Jesus to the next generation."

Sessions were also taught by AFLC leaders that included emphases on testimonies, prayer times, and strategies for making disciples with today's teenagers. New to the 2020 event was specific rates for the Saturday seminar, for one overnight stay, or for the full weekend. The next YWW has been planned for January 2021, but congregations and districts are invited to ask for training to come to them from Youth Ministries.



Bo Boshers was the guest trainer.



FLY

FREE
LUTHERAN
YOUTH

RESTORED

BY PASTOR GIDEON JOHNSON

W

hat is the weather like in your neck of the woods? Since a majority of AFLC congregations are located in the Upper Midwest—as is mine—I am hoping that by the time you read this there will be clear and evident signs of spring either present or on the horizon. However, if the presumed floater in your eye is actually snow falling out of the sky, have no fear, spring will come (Genesis 8:22).

Spring is one of my favorite times of year—not because I hate winter and not because I thoroughly enjoy seasonal allergy flare-ups, rather, because spring is the season of rebirth, resurrection, and restoration. Spring is, as Andrew Peterson says in his song “Risen Indeed,” when “the winter dies with a blast of icy wind; like a mournful cry, it’s giving up the ghost again. ... [When] the flowers bloom like a song of freedom; [where we] behold the earth is new [again], if only for a season.”

Spring is when we are especially reminded that “all this darkness is just a small and passing thing” (again quoting Peterson). In other words, spring is the season when we are given a preview and foretaste of the truth and reality that when

Jesus stepped into our world of brokenness, He came not only to save us from sin, death, and the power of the devil, but, in doing so, He also came to restore us and all things to Himself—to restore us to life and into the people we were made to be. This is why I think it is so fitting that Easter takes place in the spring—the season of restoration—because that is what Jesus’ death and resurrection are ultimately all about. This event was the first step in His work to restore all things—a work that will ultimately come to completion at His return.

Over the last six months, the members of the 2021 FLY Committee have been busily planning the next FLY Convention, a tool for winning the lost, building the believer, and encouraging student disciple making in the local congregation. Of course, in the planning process, one of the key elements is settling on the theme and text which will give a clear focus to this biennial youth gathering.

After prayerful consideration, members of the 2021 FLY Committee are excited to announce the FLY 2021 theme of “Restored.” Our theme text is Revelation 21:5-7, in which the Apostle John writes, “He who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ Also he

said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ And he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.’”

We are excited to see what the Lord will accomplish at the 2021 FLY Convention. Like the restorative work that Christ is accomplishing, the FLY Committee’s work is not yet complete. Therefore, we would covet your prayers as we press on toward July 5-8, 2021.

Johnson, who serves Hauge and Emmanuel Lutheran, Kenyon, Minn., is a member of the 2021 FLY Committee.

PEOPLE & PLACES

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary has hired **Pastor Eric Christenson** as facilities director. Christenson has served in a variety of capacities in the AFLC, most recently as a pastor at Amery Free Lutheran Church (Amery, Wis.) since 2005. He also serves as part-time networking coordinator for AFLC Youth Ministries and was the president of the 2019 FLY Committee.

As facilities director, Christenson will be responsible for the care, maintenance, and improvement of buildings and grounds on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. He will begin his duties on June 1 in anticipation of the planned December retirement of Wayne Floan.



Ford installed at Mansura, La., congregation

Licensed Pastor Peter Ford Jr. was installed Jan. 5 at St. Paul's Lutheran, Mansura, La., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating. Pastor Ford is the first AFLC pastor in Louisiana. Pictured are (from left): Pastor Lyle Aadahl (Hayfield, Minn.), Pastor Lawrence Porter Jr., Licensed Pastor Peter Ford Jr., AFLC President Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, and Lay Pastor Larry Robertson.

Seminary announces internship assignments

Internship assignments were announced for Free Lutheran Seminary seniors who are planning to serve in an AFLC congregation. The internships will be served beginning in June and end with graduation in 2021.

Joe Dombrowski: assigned to St. Ansgar's Lutheran, Salinas, Calif., with Pastor Scott Stroud, supervisor.

Lance Morrison: assigned to Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn.,

with Pastor Nick Dyrud, supervisor.

Michael Onstad: assigned to Our Saviour's Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn., with Pastor Alex Amiot, supervisor.

Kyle Smith: assigned to Living Word Lutheran, Eagan, Minn., with Pastor Nathan Olson, supervisor.

Patrick VandenBos: assigned to St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D., with Pastor Micah Hjermstad, supervisor.



District pastors, wives meet

Pastors from the North Central MN District gathered for a post-Christmas celebration. How we need the support of our brothers and sisters in Christ serving the Lord. Thank you congregations for praying and loving your pastors and their families. Pictured (from left) are: David and Judith Jore, Kevin and Monica Larson, Joel and Lisa Kangas, Alan and Lisa Arneson, Karl and Debbie Anderson, Luke and Jeanette Berntson, Arlo and Ginger Feiock, Todd and Miriam Klemme, and Michael and Isane Flechsig. (Submitted by Pastor Alan Arneson.)

JANUARY MEMORIALS

Bible College	Wes Holter
Ruth Claus	Duane Erickson
Gladys Haugen	Jim Bortnem
Joel Johnson	Pearl Erickson
General Fund	Vision
Pastor Gerald Gettis	Lee Helwig
Seminary	WMF
Dot Oines	Gladys Haugen
Dorothy Skovlun	World Missions
Cora Kasdorf	Richard Kroepel

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-31, 2020

FUND	REC'D IN JANUARY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$46,431	\$46,431	\$62,249
Evangelism	9,152	9,152	20,169
Youth Ministries	10,948	10,948	17,422
Parish Education	11,907	11,907	25,185
Seminary	30,682	30,682	36,632
Bible College	39,798	39,798	63,389
Home Missions	34,377	34,377	49,789
World Missions	44,930	44,930	100,473
Personal Support	70,669	70,669	55,852
TOTALS	\$298,894	\$298,894	\$431,158

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

20/20 EVANGELISM

You may have already grown weary, dear readers, of valiant attempts to adopt the unusual numbering of our new year to assorted themes (“Facing ____ with 20-20 vision,” etc.). Yet I still present the following thoughts for our prayerful consideration, without apology, due to the crisis created by the lack of a crystal clear 20/20 evangelistic



Pastor Robert Lee

vision in the church world today.

The *Christian Post* recently reported the results of a Barna survey of marks of congregational vitality in two large mainline Protestant

denominations, and the mark that received the lowest rank was evangelism. This is true of most American denominations, suggests Kevin Palau, president of the Luis Palau Association. He suggests that most American Christians are “skittish about evangelism.”

“They hope someone else will do it, they hope the pastor will do it. They really don’t want to do it themselves,” he is quoted as saying in the *Christian Post*.

Dr. D. James Kennedy once spoke of a woman who visited his congregation and said she was looking for an evangelistic church. “Wonderful,” he responded, “you’ve come to the right place! Let me sign you up as part of a team making evangelism calls.” The woman almost fainted. “I think I meant that I was looking for a church with an evangelistic pastor,” she said.

Here are a few hindrances to a 20/20 evangelistic emphasis:

- **Universalism:** the belief that everyone will be saved, or is already saved, or doesn’t really need to be saved. Our hearts may wish at times that this was true, but Scripture is clear that those who reject Christ are eternally lost.

- **Sacramentalism:** the belief that all baptized people are saved and that this

salvation cannot be lost. “There cannot be a more effective obstacle to conversion than the ceaseless preaching that every baptized person remains a child of God” (Gisle Johnson). A high view of baptism does not mean that the evangelization of the baptized is unnecessary.

- **Evangelism redefined as social justice.** A theologian in one of the denominations mentioned above declared that “the evangelical notion of the church” needs to be turned down so that we can turn to our true calling, “doing justice, showing mercy, and walking humbly with God” (Micah 6:8). A pastor in a liberal Lutheran denomination told me several years ago that his bishop had been instructed to emphasize all that their church was doing for world hunger when concerns about theologian erosion were raised. It is false to suggest that this is an either-or proposition, for to believe God’s Word and be committed to the need for evangelizing the lost certainly does not mean a lack of concern for the hungry or other human needs.

Many of us have found evangelism training programs to be helpful, but we recognize, too, that there may be a scriptural gift of evangelism (Ephesians 4:11) that enables some to be unusually fruitful in this ministry. This does not excuse all believers from witnessing, however, anymore than excusing all from giving who do not have that gift (Romans 12:8).

There is an old story worth repeating about a man who suffered under great conviction of sin but refused to surrender to the Lord due to a fear of witnessing. Finally, he dared to speak with a pastor about this, and the pastor with Spirit-wrought

wisdom assured him that he could come to Christ and not have to tell anybody about it. That very day he knelt at the altar with the pastor, confessed his sins, and prayed to receive Christ. Afterward he walked out from the church and said to the first person he met, “Today I received the Lord as my personal Savior, and I don’t even have to tell anybody about it!”

Sadly, the call to evangelize is too often proclaimed as a word of law, leaving many of us feeling guilty that we aren’t doing more. “You shall be My witnesses” (Acts

Sadly, the call to evangelize is too often proclaimed as a word of law, leaving many of us feeling guilty that we aren’t doing more.

1:8) is a word of promise, not of law. A true 20/20 evangelism emphasis flows from a growing relationship with the Savior whom we proclaim.

“Draw near to the Lord and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8). How do we draw near to Him? By meeting Him in His Word, and it is there that we are empowered for His service. We hear Him speak to us, and we speak to Him in prayer, for evangelism is really all about Jesus who paid the price at Calvary to bring us into His forgiven family.

This is the great, good news that becomes more central in our lives as we grow in our relationship with Him. This is true 20/20 vision. Look to Him to give us opportunities to prayerfully tell this good news to others.

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

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

something to share

TASTE AND SEE

BY ANGELA LOMBARDO

W

hen our dog Jax is a good boy (or even if he isn't, we're softies!), we give him a doggie treat. He especially likes bacon-flavored ones.

One day when The Husband offered Jax his treat, he sniffed it, and then walked away. That's not like Jax. The Husband told me that the treats felt as hard as nails. We agreed they must have been stale.

Later, when I went to replace the stale treats, I discovered that the "treats" were really dried pears I had placed in the same drawer as the doggie treats. No wonder Jax refused. Bacon tastes better than dried pears any day.

What have you been tasting lately? "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" (Psalm 34:8).

The verb "taste" is a metaphor for a personal experience. The Psalmist is saying that he has tasted the goodness of the Lord and is satisfied. What you eat reveals that for which you hunger. Don't just take a little

nibble; take a big helping of God's Word and the result will be praise to God for His bounteous provision in every circumstance of life.

There are times when life tastes sour and even bitter. Not every life experience is good. That's reality. Just remember, Jesus drank the bitter cup for all. When you taste the Lord in every life experience, whether good or bad, even the bad experiences become sweet in Him. That's the key. He turns bane into blessing, pain into pleasure.

The Psalmist also says, "How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth" (Psalm 119:103). The Word is of utmost importance to the Psalmist. The Word has life, gives life, and nourishes life. It truly is sweeter than honey.

It's been said that a meal isn't complete without dessert. Even if you're full there's always room for pie. For many it's a known fact that you should eat dessert first—not a bad idea when it comes to "eating" God's Word. Develop an appetite for the

Word. Taste it, savor it, meditate on it, and eat to your heart's content. Enjoy the nourishment.

One of our grandsons is a picky eater. He won't even try pizza. Who doesn't like pizza? Foolishly, I thought I'd be able to persuade him to taste a small slice. After several rounds of negotiations, I finally cajoled him into trying a teeny-weeny piece the size of a postage stamp. I had to promise him that if he didn't like it, he wouldn't have to eat it, but he had to at least taste it. After all, to taste pizza is to experience it.

Don't miss out on a fantastic feast by opting for "dried pears" that will never satisfy. Only Jesus satisfies and all it takes is a taste. You'll never go hungry.

Taste and see. The Lord is good!

Lombardo is a member of Helmar Lutheran, Newark, Ill.