

THE 

MAY 2025

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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Our book issue.

The sermon text for Charles Spurgeon on a Sunday in 1863 was II Timothy 4:13, which reads, “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.”

I often skip over the personal greetings and instructions at the end of many of the New Testament letters. Spurgeon, the “Prince of Preachers,” didn’t. He found profound value in these simple words, writing, “The little things which are embalmed in the amber of inspiration are far from inappropriate or unwise.”

Spurgeon used the cloak to illustrate the dedication and sacrifice required of a servant of Christ. The second half of his sermon, however, focused on the books and parchments. Paul was a reader! Having been with Christ and inspired by the Holy Spirit to write much of our New Testament, Paul still treasured his books.

Spurgeon didn’t mince words: “The man who never reads will never be read; he who never quotes will never be quoted. He who will not use the thoughts of other men’s brains proves that he has no brains of his own.” Paul’s example of being well read encouraged Timothy, and Spurgeon extends that call to us. We should read widely and often—for instruction and pleasure, with discernment and charity. We should be readers!



This issue of the *Lutheran Ambassador* invites you to explore a wide range of reading. In the following pages, we spotlight a variety of books, both fiction and non-fiction, that are well worth your time. These books will enrich, inspire, and perhaps even challenge you. No matter your context or season of life, you will find some of these resources helpful.

And if you’re already an avid, broad reader? I challenge you to step beyond your comfort zone and try something unexpected. Consider diving into a genre you’ve never explored before. Learn something new. Proverbs teaches us, “in an abundance of counselors there is safety” (11:14), and, “a wise man listens to advice” (12:15).

We should be readers. But in his sermon, Spurgeon also highlighted the phrase, “especially the parchments.” This, to Spurgeon, meant the sacred Scriptures. This might be an exegetical stretch, but it is wise counsel, nonetheless. Above all else, prioritize the Word of God. This sermon likely inspired the famous quote, “Visit many good books but live in the Bible.”

Read widely, but treasure Scripture most.

Spurgeon wrote, “Read the books, by all manner of means, but especially the parchments. Search human literature, if you will, but especially stand fast by that Book which is infallible, the revelation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

—Pastor Andrew Kneeland

Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it.
It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life
requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the
deserts that our lives have already become.
[C.S. Lewis]

“

Some books should be tasted, some
devoured, but only a few should be
chewed and digested thoroughly.

[Sir Francis Bacon]

The reading of all good books is like conversation with
the finest men of past centuries. [Rene Descartes]

What people revere, they resemble,
either for ruin or restoration. [G.K. Beale]

Above all things and in all things, O my soul, rest
always in God, for He is the everlasting rest of the saints.
[Thomas à Kempis]

Every week I preach justification by faith to my people,
because every week they forget it. [Martin Luther]



SO
YOU
LOVE
TO
READ

Advice for reading well

By Joan Culler

Now and then you come across a book whose author strikes you as a true, kindred spirit. *Lit!* by Tony Reinke was that sort of book for me. As an avid reader rarely found without a book in hand, I was delighted to come across somebody else who reads more than one book at a time. Someone who believes that we can nurture our faith through reading, even reading books that aren't specifically Christian. Someone who writes in the margins of books and underlines them (the books you own, of course). Someone who contends that using an e-reader is not the same experience as reading a printed book.

Subtitled "A Christian Guide to Reading Books," *Lit!* includes lots of good advice for those who want to read books and read them well. Here are some of the topics covered:

- Why reading books should be a priority
- How to decide what to read
- The benefits of reading non-Christian books
- The benefits of reading fiction
- How to find more time to read
- Starting a reading group
- How parents and pastors can encourage reading

Like other skills, reading well takes time and discipline. Reinke emphasizes the importance of Bible reading to develop wisdom and discernment in choosing what else we will read. Having a Christian worldview allows us to separate the wheat from the chaff (Matthew 3:12) in the plethora of reading material available to us. He also recommends old books because such classics have stood the test of time. Reading books along with others is particularly helpful because, as Christians, what we read is meant to benefit the whole community. The author calls our reading "currency" we can trade with others. When we read with a group, others can support us when we become passionate about an idea or issue and correct us if we have missed the mark.

Reinke closes his book with a chapter on the five marks of a healthy, mature book reader. This type of reader:

- Values wisdom
- Cherishes classics
- Keeps literature in its place
- Avoids turning books into idols
- Clings to the Savior

Lit! is a short book, but it covers a lot of territory. If you're already a bibliophile, like I am, you'll find it fascinating (who knew there was a theology of books!) and affirming; if you're not, you'll find plenty of suggestions that will help you to read more and get more out of the books you read. You'll want to keep this one on your shelf to reread and refer to time and time again. Don't miss it!

Culler is a member of Alsace Lutheran, Reading, Pa.



Crossway, 2011

Wipf and Stock, 2024
Available at Ambassador Publications

The resistant legacy of the Haugeans

By Lars Walker

This was quite a long book, but I read it pretty quickly. Because it fascinated me. It's about matters near to my own heart and history.

When the old Hauge Synod, a small Norwegian-Lutheran church group, entered into a merger with other Lutheran groups in 1917, someone from another synod expressed satisfaction that they'd now be able to "gobble up" the Haugeans through sheer weight of numbers. Someone else replied that that might be so, but it was likely to give them pains in the belly. That's the inspiration for the title of *Pain in the Belly: The Haugean Witness in American Lutheranism* by Thomas E. Jacobson.

The Haugeans are my people. They were a movement of lay evangelism and pietism originating in Norway around the turn of the 19th century. They never left the state church in Norway but operated as an independent movement within it. When Norwegians began immigrating to America in the mid-1800s, the Haugeans, having no state church to react against, eventually gathered themselves into a loosely organized church body of their own (the first Norwegian Lutheran church body in America), which survived (with some splits) up until 1917, when they entered a merger with other Norwegian American Lutheran groups (for reasons that aren't entirely clear in the record).

Author Jacobson spends about half his book explaining this story to the reader. The information is available elsewhere but is necessary to set the stage for the general

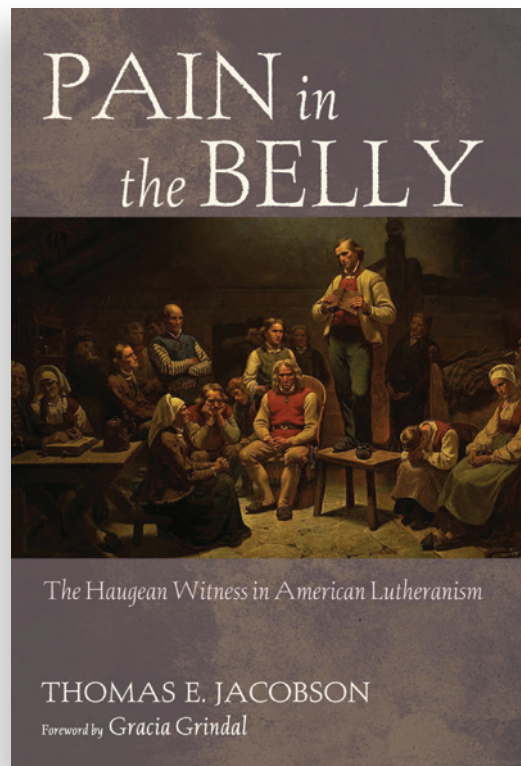
reader. The other half of the book involves more original scholarship, as Jacobson has gone through (sometimes meager) records to construct an account of how the Haugeans returned, in a sense, to their original situation, operating as an independent force within a larger church body—preaching, teaching, doing good works, and agitating for a more devoted Christian life.

I read with great interest, as almost every page mentioned places I know and institutions I'm familiar with. Also, people whose children I've met—or whose preaching I've heard. A few I've met personally over the years. (I myself am cited as a source, by virtue of the booklet, *Standing Fast in Freedom*, which I wrote for the AFLC.)

First of all, I want to say that the book is very well written. Jacobson, a pastor of the North American Lutheran Church, has a clear, lively style, most welcome in a historian. He is also admirably even-handed in dealing with controversies, in spite of a tendency to refer to any preaching involving law and morality as "dark and legalistic."

Pain in the Belly, alas, is probably unlikely to attract a large audience. But members of the AFLC, especially those interested in the contentious early history of the Lutheran Free Church, which plays a peripheral role in the story, will find much of interest here.

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



To be free Lutherans

By Leeanna Lunn

As an AFLC Lutheran with Baptist parents and friends, I am often asked by them what it means to be Lutheran. That's a question I can confidently answer. But other Lutherans have asked me what sets the AFLC apart from other Lutherans ... and I floundered. I always leave these conversations feeling dissatisfied with my answer; I am sure those who asked the question did, too. It is safe to assume that I am not the only person who has struggled to know what it means to be a member of the AFLC. Without an understanding of our identity, how will we continue to stand strong?

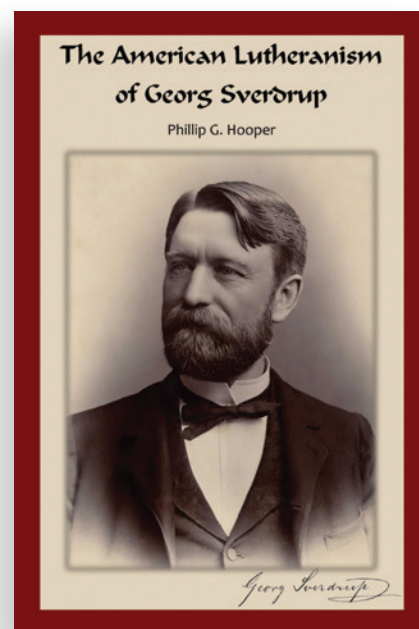
Dr. Phill Hooper starts his book, *The American Lutheranism of Georg Sverdrup*, by taking the long and confusing history of Scandinavian Lutheranism and making it easy to understand. All of the seemingly random and unrelated pieces are put together as a cohesive and mind-blowing whole that shows the threads of Lutheran belief and practice reaching from Luther's day until now. Hooper explains how Scandinavia has been unique in its equal emphasis on Lutheran doctrine and righteous living and how this belief bound its adherents, particularly Norwegians, together in a way nothing else could.

Hooper then explains in detail Georg Sverdrup's tireless work to bring this faith across the ocean from Norway to the United States; how he slaved to remind immigrants of the common beliefs that had bound their country together for generations. Hooper builds the picture of a man passionate for God and his Word who casts a vision for a free and living church: free to live according to the Holy Spirit's call without hindrance by council or hierarchy and use that freedom to serve Christ and his Kingdom. Hooper explains Sverdrup's convictions: how they are based on the *Barnalaerdom*—the Apostles' Creed, the Augsburg Confession, the Small Catechism, and Erik Pontoppidan's explanation of the Catechism—and then demonstrates one at a time how these convictions led to the principles that have served as the pillars of the AFLC and the founding of many of our institutions.

Hooper also manages the monumental task of showing how Sverdrup's beliefs are not simply a product of his Norwegianness but of sound doctrine and good practice that aren't just applicable to Scandinavians but to every nation and tongue, giving those in the AFLC plenty of reason to believe we can minister faithfully to our ever smaller and more diverse world.

Hooper wraps up his book by pointing out that Pontoppidan's Explanation—the very thing that held together Sverdrup's teachings, American Norwegian Lutherans, and arguably all of Norway—is noticeably absent from the works translated from Norwegian to English. He asks, “Can one truly have Sverdrup's congregationalism without having the confessional heritage that Sverdrup based it on?” He recognizes that the confessional and practical common ground that Norwegians had at the formation of the Lutheran Free Church is not currently present and wonders how much longer we can continue without it. The answer remains to be seen.

Lunn is a member of Word of Life Lutheran, Upsala, Minn.



Independent, 2024
Available at Ambassador Publications

Leading others well

By Wade Mobley

During my studies at the Free Lutheran Seminary (c. 2000), Pastor Jerry Moan taught a class on “Church Polity and Administration.” The course didn’t sound very “spiritual,” whatever I thought that meant at the time, and he once reprimanded me for a couple of offhand comments about needing to “do things right in church or they didn’t count.” The reprimand was well-deserved, and—if my memory is any indication—well-delivered.

Far from being a dirty word, administration is necessary in the life of a good and godly leader. I learned from my internship supervisor Pastor Bill Bartlett that “administration” means “to or for the benefit of ministry,” and I later learned from Pastor Bob Lee that without effective administration, little else happens. And, finally, I learned from several leadership mentors through the years that the administrative burden of a leader is unrelenting. I have found all of this to be true.

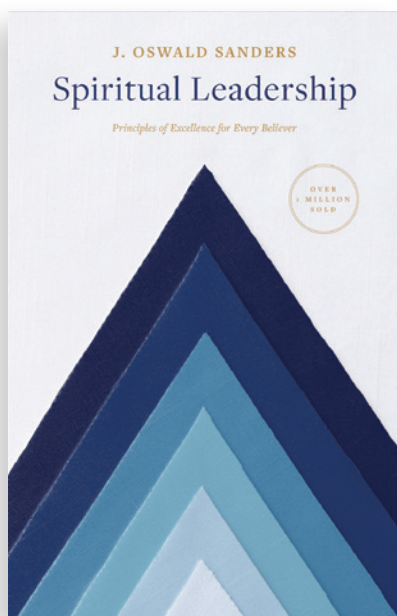
The reprimand was not the only thing I remember about Pastor Moan’s class. He introduced us to what has become one of my favorite books, *Spiritual Leadership*, by J. Oswald Sanders, published by Moody Press in many editions since about 1967. Pastor Moan had us read a smattering of chapters. Still dutifully circled in one of my copies is this: “We won’t have time to read this whole book, but I want to give you a taste of it so when you run into leadership struggles in the congregation, you will have someplace to turn.”

It didn’t take long for me to turn there, and I have since facilitated studies with individuals and groups totaling 250+ souls. It’s a short book but not a quick read—the material is too meaty to breeze through. A helpful study guide keeps students on track. Through the various editions, editors have attempted to contextualize people and places once common to Christian experience; but even if you do not recognize some of the names involved, you will benefit from the gems sprinkled generously throughout the text:

- Christ-centered servant leadership consists of servanthood and suffering.
- Servant leaders serve by leading and lead by serving.
- Are you at ease in the presence of your superiors?
- Can you exert discipline without flexing your power and authority?
- Do you hold a grudge? Leaders must have a short memory.
- If you want to humble a leader, ask about the quality of his prayer life.
- If you cannot lead yourself, you cannot lead others.
- The measure of a leader is often in what he or she gives up for the benefit of others.
- Failure to lead when called to do so is not a neutral endeavor: “The path to the spiritual lowlands is well-trodden.”
- Others may exceed you in intellect or ability, but nobody has more time.
- Read much, reading old books and new books, reading a few books deeply and often.
- A humble leader can learn from petty, even malicious, criticism.

I save that one for last because it is a great test of everything else. How you respond to criticism says more about your character than that of your critics. But for now, forgive me for skipping the obligatory paragraph of all book reviews: “No book is perfect; test everything by Scripture ...” There are certainly a few bones to spit out, but if you are looking for a text to guide you in your Christ-centered servant leadership, you would be hard pressed to find a better volume. So pick up a copy and read it. Feel free to contact me for more. A little tactical leadership wisdom goes a long way.

Mobley, president of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, is a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn.



Moody, 2017
Available at Ambassador
Publications

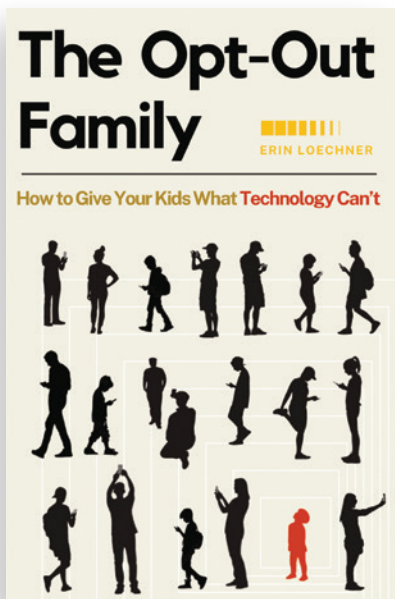
Useful practices for faith

NavPress, 2024



For a variety of reasons, discipline may not be the door we long to open. Donald S. Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life* offers the reader a door that may lead toward living, committed Christianity. Forwarded by J. I. Packer, who wrote, "If, then, as a Christian, you want to be really real with your God, moving beyond the stage of playing games with yourself and Him, this book offers practical help." If you are hungry for 13 disciplines able to strengthen your "gospel abs," this book delivers!

—Lee Hoops,
Grace Free
Lutheran,
Maple
Grove,
Minn.



FaithGateway, 2024

By Kristin Tanner

When I requested *The Opt-Out Family: How to Give Your Kids What Technology Can't* by Erin Loechner from the library, I had no idea how engaging this read would be. I thought I would skim it so that I could keep abreast of culture and take a break from reading fiction.

Loechner gives alarms on the harm that can come from technology, the internet, and social media, highlighting how big tech has changed algorithms to keep the masses on the apps. I was personally challenged to decrease my screen time, but Loechner's focus is geared towards families with children. I am a grandmother, so I read on with my grandchildren in mind—the oldest is becoming a teenager this year. As research and stats were presented, I was motivated to pray for my children as they parent my grandchildren, who are growing up with ever-present smartphones.

Thinking through tech use

Loechner gives first-person accounts of families that are facing the challenges of opting out of technology. She offers practical advice that is applicable to real-life scenarios. As she presents the tactics of big tech, she turns the tables for families to apply those same strategies in parenting as they opt in to wholesome values. In addition to modeling good device usage, she exhorts parents to be the influencers in their children's lives.

In her chapter on Chat GPT, Loechner encourages families to promote their own values with their own goals, principles, and truths. For a moment I thought that those were the words used to create the initialism GPT, but I was reminded (by a quick internet search) that GPT stands for Generative Pre-Trained Transformer. Loechner encourages readers to wonder more and not look up everything!

The book is filled with sidebars with headings like +Follow, Log Off, Selfie, Opt Out, and DM. These practical tips equip parents and encourage them to band together to raise children in a culture filled with technology and

social media. The +Follow points readers to the Opt-Out Family website (optoutfamily.com) filled with scores of resources. She promotes opting out at a high level but gives gradations to make positive changes if you are not ready to trade your smartphone for a flip phone or landline.

Loechner is not writing to Christians per se but includes a Bible verse at the beginning of each chapter as well as a secular quote. In addition, the wholesome culture she promotes for families aligns with a biblical worldview, including creativity, learning, and outdoor adventures for children.

Do you need a wake-up call to the big tech and social media agendas of today? Read this book. Do you want practical help to lessen technology and social media in your family? Read this book. Do you want your family centered in quality time that nurtures children? Read this book.

Let's apply Paul's words from Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

Tanner is a member of Living Word Free Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, S.D.

God's unmatched grace

By Craig Johnson

Suffering and grace have been two major themes in author Philip Yancey's writing. In his memoir, *Where the Light Fell*, Yancey provides insight into his interest in those themes.

When Yancey was born in 1949, his parents were planning to go to Africa as missionaries. While the family was preparing for the mission field, Yancey's father was stricken with polio. After two months of medical treatment, Yancey's father and mother decided to go against medical advice, remove his respirator, and pray for God to heal him. Nine days later, when Philip was just a year old, his father died. Philip didn't discover the details of his father's death and the spurning of medical advice for faith healing until he was a young adult.

Philip's childhood involved suffering of various kinds. His widowed mother, his brother, and Philip were quite poor and often recipients of charity and pity. Philip's mother taught the Bible at church and a lot of harsh, strict rules at home. This caused Philip to be a young boy with much anxiety. "My earliest memories all involve fear" (p. 33).

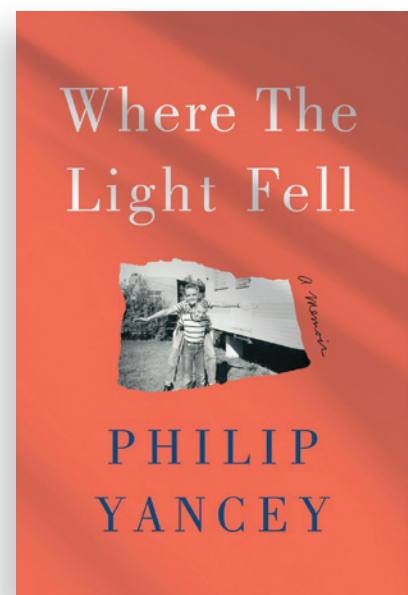
They lived in the deep South in the 1960s as the Civil Rights movement was going on. Their legalistic church made the wickedly false claim that the Bible taught that the white race was superior to the black race. The distorted teaching Philip received caused him to have a distorted view of God. "In the churches of my youth," he writes, "we sang about God's grace, and yet I seldom felt it. I saw God as a stern taskmaster, eager to condemn and punish. I have come to know instead a God of love and beauty who longs for our wholeness. I assumed that surrender to God would involve a kind of shrinking—avoiding temptation, grimly focusing on the 'spiritual' things while I prepared for the afterlife. On the contrary, God's good world presented itself as a gift to enjoy with grace-healed eyes" (p. 299).

After describing the harshness of his youth that caused him to wander away from God, Philip tells of how God graciously drew him back. "In the end, my resurrection of belief had little to do with logic or effort and everything to do with the unfathomable mystery of God. ... Someone is there who loves me" (p. 248). The Lord used the beauty of creation and classical music and the love of the woman who became Philip's wife to help Philip to see that God is good and gracious. God loves lavishly and is a "lavisher of gifts" (p. 233).

Yancey opens his heart to the reader with moving honesty and shares about the estrangement between his mother and brother. He also shares about his own difficulties with his mother and with his home church as he became a writer with a message about God's grace and God's love for people of all races.

Yancey has experienced suffering but has also experienced the unmatched beauty of God's grace. For that reason, *Where the Light Fell* offers encouragement and grace as we face the trials of life.

Johnson serves Triumph Lutheran, Ferndale, Wash.

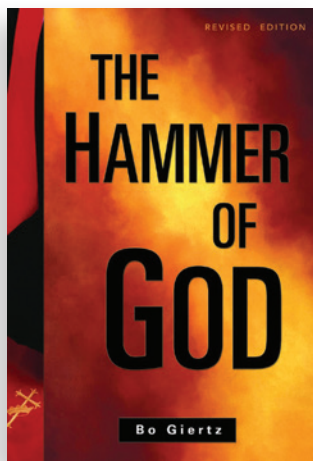


Convergent, 2021



Breaking hard hearts

By Susan Baker



Fortress, 2004
Available at Ambassador
Publications

The *Hammer of God* by Bo Giertz is an intriguing novel of spiritual rebirth. The English title derives from Jeremiah 23:29: “Is not My word like fire?” declares the LORD, ‘and like a hammer which shatters a rock?’” The Swedish title is *The Stone Ground*, referring to the human heart. The Word of God breaks hard hearts as he draws people to him.

The novel is comprised of three parts or novellas that are set in the town of Odesjo in southern Sweden over a period of about 130 years. Part 1 occurs during 1808–1810, Part 2 during 1878–1880, and Part 3 during 1938–1940. The topic of spiritual rebirth is timeless; the cultural winds that blow at different times affect pastors and laity alike.

In each novella, the main character is a young pastor who has finished his seminary training and is assigned to the church at Odesjo. Each one comes ill-prepared to deal with the spiritual needs of the church. In various ways, each is trusting in his own abilities and righteousness till he comes face to face with his own pervasive sin and the sin of others in the church.

In the first novella, Dr. Savonius is a product of the Enlightenment and rationalism. He is educated and worldly with a sort of spiritual belief—but not one grounded in Jesus Christ the Savior. He is assigned to visit a man named Johannes who is on his deathbed. Johannes is wracked by the guilt of his sin, although he has repented repeatedly over the years. He knows his heart is not clean of sin, and he fears dying. Savonius tells Johannes that he is a better man than most and that God is very good, but these statements do not comfort Johannes.

Finally, a woman named Katrina arrives, and she corrects the man’s thinking that he can, as a human being, ever have a clean heart. She tells him, “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” Johannes asks, “Do you mean He also takes away the sin that dwells in my unclean heart?” “Yes,” she said, “He atoned for all that sin when He died in your place.” He said, “But I still have it with me, don’t I?” She said, “Yes, as surely as Paul also still had it with him.” She quotes Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” The man is assured and trusts Jesus, and he asks the pastor for communion. The man dies knowing his Savior loves him, and Dr. Savonius leaves with a desire to preach the true Word of God.

In the second novella, the young pastor Fridfeldt comes to assist an old rector. As a person changed by a revival, Fridfeldt does not see the old rector as a true believer

Heroic Bible-like stories

and prays for his salvation. Fridfeldt is proud of his humility and that he is not worldly, as others are. Fridfeldt says he is a believer and has given his heart to Jesus, but the old rector tells him there are only two religions: relying on man to reconcile with God or relying on Jesus Christ's atonement, as stated in Ephesians 2:8–10: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

Under Fridfeldt's preaching, there is a sense that the Holy Spirit is at work saving people. But Fridfeldt proclaims that if people are saved, they have been victorious over sin. It is astonishing to Fridfeldt when some of the church members become publicly guilty of sin. He tries to help with the situation but is unable and only becomes angry himself. The old rector (surprisingly to Fridfeldt) is able—with God's help—to address all the issues using the Bible as a guide, and a just peace returns to the church and town. This makes an impact on Fridfeldt, and he begins to understand that the gospel is for sinners, even after they are saved.

I will not tell you how these stories end, nor about the third novella—you will have to read them for yourself!

Baker is a member of Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, Minn.

I could recommend Lars Walker's "Saga of Erling Skjalgsson" series, and *Hailstone Mountain* in particular, because they are enjoyable to read. I could recommend them because it's fascinating to imagine what life was like for the Vikings around the year 1000 when they were just beginning to convert to Christianity. I could also recommend them because I share his theological convictions as a fellow member of the AFLC. But I have a better reason to share with you.

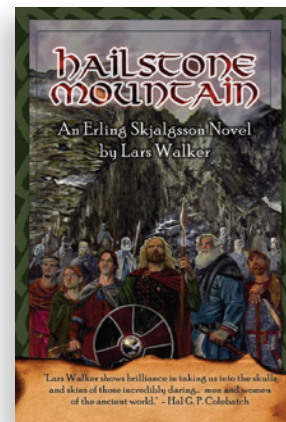
Sulpicius Severus

(d., c. 420) wrote a life of Martin of Tours (d. 397) that I read several years ago. It was terrible. The author openly set out to paint a saintly picture, to portray a man who had no faults at all. His goal: inspire others to imitation and striving after holiness by setting forth such a good example.

Martin Luther points out that the Bible does not write stories that way. Very few of the characters in Scripture are portrayed as perfect, as shining examples worthy of emulation in every way. Instead, as Luther explains, the Bible tells stories in which even the "good guys" have their flaws. Such stories may, in this or that instance, inspire us to imitation, but that's not the focus. The focus, the real hero of the story, is God himself, who is all the more impressive, powerful, and compassionate for his ability to use ordinary, bumbling people to accomplish his purposes.

The thing I love most about Walker's novels is that he captures this dynamic better than any other novelist I have encountered. He manages to make the characters both likable and realistic, simultaneously saint and sinner, wrestling against the evil around them and wrestling with themselves. Their lives are raw, sometimes offensively so, but also fully human. Like the Bible, the books are not rated G, but I would rate them five stars because somehow Walker manages to make God the hero and Savior rather than the human characters.

—Brian Lunn serves Word of Life Lutheran, Upsala, Minn.



Amazon Digital, 2013



Love transcends culture.

BY ELLIE UTECHT

Over spring break our team served the children and staff at Foundation For His Ministry in Oaxaca, Mexico. We were thankful for this opportunity to come alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Romans 12:10 says, “Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.” This verse displays the heart of God for us: that we might be quick to love and serve one another, and that God might show his love for us through his people. Our mission was to encourage the staff by aiding them in the maintenance of the property, to interact with the children in a way that reminded them we love them, and, most importantly, to show them that they have a Father in heaven who loves them beyond measure.

A good missionary friend told me that “love transcends culture,” and it was encouraging to see this phrase come to life as our team lived out Romans 12:10 by loving on the kids and experiencing God’s love ourselves. God’s love for each of us is so deep and wide that we may never fully understand it, but to get a glimpse of it is the greatest gift we can give or receive.

When we are living in a way that lines up with the heart of God, we will experience a fullness of joy that only he can offer. The love of God was evident and tangible throughout this week in each person we encountered, which not only encouraged the people in Oaxaca but our team as well. Praise the Lord for his unending love for us and his faithfulness to all his people. To him be the glory for this incredible week!



Utecht, pictured above with several children at the Oaxaca ministry, is a freshman at the Free Lutheran Bible College. She is a member of Shiloh Free Lutheran, Black Hawk, S.D.

Course Spotlight: Foundations of Christian History

• **Instructor: Andrew Kneeland**



By the time a student graduates from the Bible College, they have been equipped to describe God’s work in the past through his Church. This course introduces students to key people, events, and theology from the apostolic age to the present day. Along the way, they learn how to answer common questions related to the Nicene Creed, the impact of the Crusades, Martin Luther’s stand at the Diet of Worms, the origins of pietism, the rise of secularism, and much more. As they interact with history, they learn to engage with both charity and discernment. More than memorizing dates and names, students see how God has been faithful to his people. With this context, they gain confidence that he will continue to protect and provide for his Church.



• SPRING CHOIR TOUR

What we sing about.

BY MAX LARSON

Up in the mountains of Montana, I set out with a considerable group of students on a 6.8-mile hike. If you finished, you would reach an altitude of 6,500 feet. Being from North Dakota, I had rarely ever seen mountains, let alone actively hiked up one. Every so often we would reach a lookout point where we rested and looked out over God's creation. The higher we climbed, the better the view. Needless to say, the long hike uphill with thinning air was tough but worth it because there was the promise of beauty at the top. As we climbed to increasingly beautiful views, it made me think about the reason for the FLBC Choir tour.

During the spring Concert Choir tour, we traversed five states and visited 13 churches proclaiming the good news of the Triune God, our God of hope and help. So what exactly is the good news? As we continued our hike, I thought of Jesus, a man who 2,000 years ago also walked up a mountain. However, instead of being met with the beauty and joy of life, he was met with the sadness and pain of his death on a cross. This is what we sing about. Our song, "God of Heaven," proclaims the majesty and grandeur of God. The God of heaven, earth, nature, and power has come down to rescue his children from their bondage to sin and death. This is something truly worth singing about, and each time I lifted my voice on this tour, I was reminded of the sacrifice that gives our songs meaning.

Spotlight Media

This year's Missions Emphasis Week at FLBC featured Pastor Andy Coyle of AFLC Home Missions. Coyle led a series of workshops on a biblical understanding of the Trinity and how a clear understanding of God's nature impacts the way we do missions. After the event, students interacted with missionary organizations to learn how God might use them to share the gospel both in their own neighborhoods and around the world. You can watch Coyle's recorded messages on the FLBC YouTube channel or at flbc.edu/category/conferences/.



The author, center, chats with a resident at a nursing home visited by the choir on their tour.

Upcoming events.

- May 2: Spring concert
- May 3: Graduation
- July 25: Golf Scramble
- July 26: Disc Golf Scramble
- August 4–8: Summer Institute of Theology

Info and registration at flbc.edu/events

Larson, from Northwood, N.D., is a sophomore at the Free Lutheran Bible College.



Investing in youth.

BY ADAM MCCARLSON

Youth Workers Weekend (YWW) is a retreat and conference rolled into one. The planning team seeks to create an event that provides rest and encouragement as well as training and equipping for paid and volunteer youth workers. The planning process is well on its way for the next YWW set for January 2026. However, the event is stronger when there are more individuals and congregations who are aware of YWW's purpose and benefits to youth workers and the congregations who called them and the teens they serve.

Do you have a youth leader in your congregation who could benefit from YWW? Consider investing in them as a congregation by paying to send them to this event. Talk to your pastor or church council to see what it would look like for your congregation to take advantage of a training opportunity like this. At our last event in January, we had more than 60 youth workers in attendance who had an opportunity to connect with, sharpen, and encourage one another.

When asked about the value of YWW, Pastor Jon Langness (Shiloh Church, Black Hawk, S.D.) said, "We brought a carload of caring adults to YWW. It was a great opportunity to grow together in our understanding and philosophy of youth ministry while also being poured into ourselves. From a relationship standpoint, it was a blessing to reconnect with other like-minded youth leaders and to connect with new ones."

Funding for an event like this can be a challenge. The budgets in our congregations and youth ministries are tight. We seek to make YWW as affordable as possible while still maintaining a valuable and worthwhile event for youth workers. One way we can do this is by inviting individuals and congregations to consider giving toward the program costs of YWW. If you have a passion for helping youth workers receive quality training, consider contributing financially to offset the costs of bringing in various speakers and trainers. Please reach out to us if you would like to discuss this more.

The AFLC needs caring adults who are equipped and prepared to serve the teens in their congregations. Would you consider investing in youth workers across the AFLC by encouraging your youth leaders to attend and by considering what it may look like to give financially toward this event?



2026 YWW Planning Team.

Youth Worker Weekends will take place January 2026. The event is planned with the help of:

- Moriah Graham
- Nikki Hanson
- Pastor Scott Olson
- Madison Greven
- Pastor Dan Hurner (Youth Ministries networking coordinator)
- Adam McCarlson (Youth Ministries director)
- Pastor Ryan Tonneson (Youth Ministries Board liaison)

For more information, visit our website: aflc.org/youth

McCarlson, a student at the Free Lutheran Seminary, is the director of Youth Ministries.



Convention details.

BY ISAK OLSON

Details are coming together quickly for the 2025 FLY Convention planned for June 30–July 5 at the YMCA in the Rockies in Estes Park, Colo. As your church youth group prepares for the convention, there are a few special details and events to look forward to at FLY.

The first is a minor change to our elective schedule. Electives are a fantastic opportunity to dig deeper into a topic that you may find interesting and want to learn more about. Usually, electives are offered twice throughout the week. This year, several select electives will be offered a third time on Thursday in exchange for the workshop hour. The FLY Committee hopes that you will enjoy the opportunity to attend more electives at FLY.

Next, our afternoon recreational activities are always a blast. This year we will again offer basketball, volleyball, Ultimate Frisbee, and Gaga ball tournaments. For youth creating teams, a Google sign-up form (accessed by a QR code) will be used to help make the process easier. Our social media accounts will promote the sign-ups in June. Sign-ups must be completed by the end of the first evening session. And remember, teams are limited to one adult on the field at a time.

Another amazing afternoon activity set to make a return is ARTiculate, a fun opportunity to express creativity through arts and crafts during the afternoons at FLY. ARTiculate is moving to Ram's Horn. We're also excited to introduce a Board Game Extravaganza on Tuesday, with a second option on Thursday afternoon.

In further exciting news, the evening acts have been solidified. On Tuesday night, we have comedian Shama Mrema who took the world by storm with his song, "Veggie Tales Remix." On Wednesday night, we have musician Cade Thompson taking the stage to share his music. On Friday night, FLY is welcoming 321 Improv comedy, which is sure to create a unique, interactive experience for those at FLY.

These events are a wonderful part of FLY, but they only scratch the surface of all that happens during our one week in the Rocky Mountains. There is much more to look forward to at FLY 2025. As the week gets closer, we are excited to behold what God is going to do at FLY. Please be in prayer for the youth and their congregations as preparations are made for FLY. Pray for the students and God's working in their lives. Pray that all financial costs would be covered without burdens for those attending. Pray for the staff as they work alongside the students during the week. Pray for the speakers as they share the truth of God's Word. Pray that God's Word would go forth and not return void this year at FLY 2025: Behold.



Evenings at FLY 2025.

Evenings activities will be held in the Longhouse, beginning at 7 p.m. with the evening session. A break from 8–8:30 will be followed by the Late Hour acts on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. On Thursday, youth groups will meet during the Late Hour time.

- **Tuesday:** Shama Mrema
- **Wednesday:** Cade Thompson
- **Friday:** 321 Improv

Olson, a seminarian and youth worker at Living Hope, Rogers, Minn., is the devotional secretary of the 2025 FLY Committee.

Abundant Life

June 11–14 • Association Retreat Center
Near Osceola, Wis.

The AFLC Annual Conference will be held June 11–14 at the Association Retreat Center located near Osceola, Wis., under the theme, “Abundant Life,” from John 10:10. Registration is open (aflc.org/about-us/conferences). Prices are \$55/single or \$95/couple. To register for meals and lodging on site, visit the ARC website (arc-aflc.org/2025-annual-conference).

Online registration, which also includes nursery, vacation Bible school, and youth activities, will close on June 6. Walk-up registration will be available.

Nursery is available for children aged 3 and younger. A VBS program will be provided for children entering preschool through those entering sixth grade. The youth track is offered to those entering seventh grade through high school (aged 17 and younger). All activities will take place on site.

Conference committees will meet on June 11.

Rekindle the Fire, June 10

AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship will host Rekindle the Fire, a revitalizing and equipping event, 3 to 7 p.m. June 10 at Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis. With the theme, “You Shall Be My Witnesses,” the free event is open to clergy and lay members and will include a meal and a time of worship and prayer for the Annual Conference. Speakers include Pastor Tom Parrish, Pastor Eric Westlake, and Michael Rokenbrodt. Register at aflc.org/evangelism.

WMF Day, June 11

WMF Day will be held June 11 at the ARC with the theme, “The Light of the World Is Jesus” (John 8:12). The schedule begins with worship at 9 a.m. followed by devotions and recognition of missionaries in attendance. Workshops will be presented by Dr. Nathan Olson and Becky Abel (AFLC missionary to Brazil). After lunch, Linda Mohagen will present a session on chalk art. A memorial service and business meeting will close out the day. Pastor Paul Abel will speak at the Mission Festival service (June 12).

Registration (\$25/person before June 11, price increases to \$30) can be found online (aflc.org/women/wmf-day). You may register for the WMF Day meal (\$15) on the WMF registration site if purchasing just one meal. To include the WMF meal as part of the conference meal package, visit the ARC webpage (arc-aflc.org/2025-annual-conference).

ARC Corporation

(10 terms of five years each)

Velma Amundson, New Leipzig, N.D.
 **Roger Benson, Brooklyn Center, Minn.
 *Michael Coyle, Nicollet, Minn.
 *Nancy Langness, Ishpeming, Mich.
 *Jennifer Niemela, Greenbush, Minn.
 *Dennis Parsley, Pipestone, Minn.
 *Robyn Pelehos, Welch, Minn.
 *Roger Quanbeck, Hallock, Minn.
 *Brian Rice, White Earth, N.D.

11 more names needed

Home Missions Corporation

(10 terms of five years each)

*Darryl Askvig, Kalispell, Mont.
 Pastor Bill Buck, Sioux Falls, S.D.
 Pastor Will Cole, Millerstown, Pa.
 *Gene Finstrom, Buxton, N.D.
 Brad Folsland, Oldham, S.D.
 Jack Jordan, Honolulu, Ha.
 Richard Luebke, Parkston, S.D.
 Todd Marschner, Killdeer, N.D.
 *Pastor Kris Nyman, Grand Junction, Colo.
 **Pastor Joe Ocker, Frost, Minn.
 Pastor Greg Schram, Loveland, Colo.
 **Pastor Nick Schultz, Chamberlain, S.D.
 Allie Westebur, Grafton, N.D.

7 more names needed

Schools Corporation

(10 terms of five years each)

**Pastor Alan Arneson, Amery, Wis.
 *Pastor Brett Boe, Elk River, Minn.
 *Loiell Dyrud, Thief River Falls, Minn.
 *Pastor Kirk Flaa, Sioux Falls, S.D.
 *Pastor Mike McCarlson, Webster, S.D.
 Kenneth Quanbeck, McVile, N.D.
 Mark Quanbeck, McVile, N.D.
 Walter Rolf, Lisbon, N.D.

12 more names needed

World Missions Corporation

(10 terms of five years each)

**Pastor John Amundson, Lew Leipzig, N.D.
 *Dr. Peter Dyrud, Plymouth, Minn.
 Troy Hanson, Williston, N.D.
 **Dr. Lyle Mattson, Greenbush, Minn.
 Wonell Miller, Fosston, Minn.
 *Pastor Ken Moland, Graham, N.C.
 Pastor Barry Nelson, Tripp, N.D.
 Brent Peterson, Valley City, N.D.
 Pastor Jeff Swanson, Axtell, Kan.

11 more names needed



- * Incumbents
- ** Must be elected or reelected to corporation to serve on board or committee
- X Nominations not named by press deadline

BOARD & COMMITTEE NOMINEES

Association Retreat Center

Voted on by corporation members

- (One layman, five-year term)
- No nominees

Bay Broadcasting

Voted on by corporation members

- (One pastor, three-year term)
- **Pastor Joe Ocker, Frost, Minn.
- X

Benefits Board

- (One pastor, five-year term)
- No nominees

Budget Analysis Committee

- (One layman, three-year term)
- *Dan Aichele, Killdeer, N.D.
- X
- (One layman, three-year term)
- Samantha Ritter, St. Bonifacious, Minn.
- X

Coordinating Committee

- (One layman, five-year term)
- *Iver Berge, Fargo, N.D.
- X

Evangelism and Discipleship

- (One pastor, five-year term)
- Pastor Scott Stroud, Lake Stevens, Wash.
- X

FLAPS Board

Voted on by corporation members

- (One layman, five-year term)
- Brian Lee, Ray, N.D.
- X

Home Missions Board of Dir.

Voted on by corporation members

- (Two laymen, two-year terms)
- *Hans Tanner, Fargo, N.D.
- *Jeremy Zeltinger, Valley City, N.D.
- X
- X
- (One pastor, two-year term)
- **Pastor Nick Schultz, Chamberlain, S.D.
- X

Parish Education

- (One layman, five-year term)
- Hailey Narloch, Grafton, N.D.
- Sophia Lucht, Eagan, Minn.
- *Leeanna Lunn, Upsala, Minn.

Schools Board of Trustees

Voted on by corporation members

- (One pastor, five-year term)
- *Pastor Rodney Johnson, Buffalo, Minn.
- X

World Missions Board of Dir.

Voted on by corporation members

- (One pastor, two-year term)
- **Pastor John Amundson, New Leipzig, N.D.
- *Pastor Craig Johnson, Lake Stevens, Wash.
- (One pastor, two-year term)
- *Pastor Jerry Nelson, LaCrosse, Wis.
- X
- (One layman, two-year term)
- *Mark Riley, Bethel Park, Pa.
- X

Youth Board

- (One pastor, five-year term)
- *Pastor Ryan Tonneson, Cokato, Minn.
- X



2025 Annual Conference Schedule

Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis.



Helen Knapp

Helen Lenore Knapp, 96, of Willmar, Minn., died March 23 at home. Born Feb. 24, 1929, in Valley City, N.D., she was the daughter of Leslie and Agnetta (Johnson) Loucks. She married George Knapp on Sept. 19, 1948. He preceded her in death in 2019.

She graduated from LaMoure High School before attending one year of college. She was a member of High Prairie Lutheran Free Church of rural LaMoure, N.D. After marriage, they farmed near Fort Ransom, N.D., for 10 years. In 1958, they were called to the mission field in Brazil and worked in construction and then, for six years, served as houseparents for missionaries' children who were attending a school away from home. In 1969, they joined the AFLC and served 32 years as missionaries in Brazil, where Helen worked alongside her husband in church planting and evangelizing. She taught Bible school, organized vacation Bible school programs, Bible camps, and women's groups. After retiring in 1990, they moved to Willmar. She was active in the Women's Missionary Federation at Sunburg Free Lutheran, Sunburg, Minn.

Surviving are four sons, Charles (Joyce) Knapp, Halvor (Ginny) Knapp, Calvin (Terry) Knapp, and Carlos Knapp; three daughters, Karen, Cida, and Carol Knapp; 20 grandchildren; 56 great-grandchildren; and two great-great-grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held at a later date. In lieu of flowers, memorials to AFLC World Missions are preferred.

Tuesday • June 10

3 p.m. Rekindle the Fire, Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis.

Wednesday • June 11

9 a.m. AFLC ministry boards and committees meet at the ARC
Conference resolution committees 1–5 meet
WMF Day begins

Noon Lunch

7 p.m. Opening service and conference opening
Speaker: Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck; dessert reception

Thursday–Saturday • June 12–14

7:30 a.m. Breakfast

8:45 a.m. Devotions

9 a.m. Business session

10:25 a.m. Morning break

10:50 a.m. Business session

11:40 a.m. Prayer time

Noon Lunch; Foundation meeting (Thursday)

12:45 p.m. Corporation meetings (Friday)

1:15–2 p.m. Electives (Thursday: ARC & FLBC), (Saturday: AED & Home Missions)
Lecture (Friday)

2:15–3 p.m. Electives (Thursday: Coordinating Committee & Youth),
(Saturday: Parish Ed & World Missions); Lecture (Friday)

3:25 p.m. Worship and devotions (Friday)

3:45 p.m. Business session

5 p.m. Dinner; Pastor's banquet (Friday)

7 p.m. Mission Festival service (Thursday); Communion service (Friday)

Friday lectures

1:15–2 p.m. "Clothed in Christ: Biblical Traits of Leadership"
by Pastor Micah Hjermstad

2:15–3 p.m. "Discipleship Micro-groups for Congregations"
by Pastor Jeremy Larson

Seminarians visit Israel

Study trip lets students visit sites where Jesus ministered

The land of milk and honey speaks loudly of the promises of the Lord and his faithfulness to his people. Israel holds the framework of the Lord's creation and the foundation pieces of his ministry. How exciting to see those who are studying for the ministry have a chance to flip a rock and get some dust from Israel on their face. What a blessing to start this chapter of life with a visual concept of the people and places where the Lord walked and ministered his presence.

Since 2018, more than 40 Free Lutheran Seminary students have been gifted a trip to experience this life-changing adventure. This spring, five students were able to travel to the heights of the Temple Mount and visit the sights of Jerusalem, along with the City of David. They also traveled into the wilderness of the Dead Sea for a visit to Masada, Ein Gedi, and Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. To the north, the Sea of Galilee provided endless stories of the Messiah from Nazareth. The students enjoyed taking their own boat ride on the sea with visions of a Savior walking on



Pictured (from left) Mike Anenson, Caleb Korhonen, Troy Hanson, Dan Aichele, Alex Grimes, and Adam Erickson look over the Temple Mount from the Mount of Olives.

the water in the darkness of night. While journeying to the Mount of Transfiguration and Nazareth, students were provided a historical view of the Jezreel Valley with its many stories of Deborah the Judge, Gideon at the stream, and King Saul on Mt. Gilboa. Caesarea marked the spot to see Herod the Great's aqueduct, an engineering feat, as well as his campus complex

with his palace, harbor, and prison accommodations for the Apostle Paul.

It was a wonderful trip. As one student commented, "This trip has helped give vision to the culture, geography, and power of the Scriptures ... time to go again."

—Mike Anenson is a member of *Emmaus Lutheran*, Bloomington, Minn.



NWMN Men Alive retreat

Pictured, a group of men attended the Northwest Minnesota district's Men Alive retreat on April 5 at Galilee Bible Camp, Lake Bronson, Minn. Pastor Sam Wellumson, East Grand Forks, Minn., led two sessions on the "Three Estates: The Christian Life in God's World."



Bible College hosts Campus Days

The Free Lutheran Bible College hosted a weekend of events April 4–6 for prospective high school students. Guests attended a worship service, took sample classes, participated in recreational activities, and had the option to take part in a service project. They also interacted with the current student body.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor David Nelson, Marshall, Minn., has accepted the role of hospital chaplain at Avera Marshall Regional Medical Center.

Pastor Wayne Olson has resigned from Trinity Bethany Lutheran, Harvey, N.D.

Pastor Tom Gilman has retired from Redeemer Free Lutheran Church, Canton, S.D., effective in July.

Pastor James Haga has resigned from Faith Lutheran of Running Valley, Colfax, Wis.

Two 2025 Free Lutheran Seminary graduates have accepted calls. **Troy Hanson** has accepted a call to Skrefsrud Lutheran Church, Beresford, S.D., and Immanuel Free Lutheran Church, Centerville, S.D. **Mikey Meester** has accepted a call to St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Melvin, Ill. Both Hanson and Meester will be ordained May 17 at their home congregation, Grace Free Lutheran, Valley City, N.D., with Pastor Micah Hjermstad, AFLC president, officiating.

Pastor Del Palmer has accepted a call as interim pastor at St. Ansgar's Lutheran Church, Salinas, Calif.

Pastor David W. Johnson has resigned as interim pastor at Grace Free Lutheran, Edinburg, N.D.

Pastor David Jore has resigned from Maple Bay Free Lutheran Church, Mentor, Minn.

A team from **AFLC World Missions** will travel to Santiago, Chile, in May to visit Pastor Patricio Rivero Bravo, who was recently added to the AFLC Brazil clergy roster. World Missions is seeking support from the World Missions Corporation to ask the Annual Conference to open up Chile as an AFLC mission field.

**Pastor James Gerdeen**

Pastor James (Jim) Clarence Gerdeen, 87, of Columbia, Mo., died March 18, 2025, after a long battle with cancer and lymphedema. Born to Clarence and Barbara Gerdeen, he grew up in Escanaba, Mich. He married Wanda Larry in 1960.

He earned a Bachelor's of Science, a Master's of Science, and a PhD from Michigan Technological University (MTU), Ohio State University, and Stanford University—all three in mechanical engineering. He was a full professor and held leadership positions at MTU and at the University of Denver, Colo., teaching courses in mechanical engineering, polymers and plastics, and robotics until his retirement. He was internationally recognized for his research and expertise in pressure vessel design and structural analysis, metalworking manufacturing, and mechanical design. He was inducted into MTU's Academy of Mechanical Engineers in 2011. He earned a Master of Divinity and served Maranatha Free Lutheran, Houghton, Mich., as well as AFLC congregations in Pelkie, Mich., Maplewood, Minn., and Springfield, Mo.

Surviving are his wife; two daughters, Lori (Bill) and Sonya (John); one sister, Lola (Don); two brothers, Joel (Marilyn) Gerdeen and Bob Gerdeen; one sister-in-law, Jeannine (Don), one brother-in-law, Pastor David Fruehauf, six grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

A service was held March 22 at Memorial Funeral Home, Columbia, Mo., followed by an internment at Memorial Park Cemetery, Columbia. In lieu of flowers or monetary gifts, please show your pastor or favorite teacher how much you appreciate them.

**Priscilla Dutcher**

Priscilla Sophie (Wold) Dutcher, 78, died March 18 in Tucson, Ariz. She married Willard (Bud) Dutcher in 1988. He preceded her in death.

She grew up in Abercrombie, N.D., and was a member of Bethany Lutheran Free, rural Abercrombie. She graduated from Hillcrest Lutheran Academy, Fergus Falls, Minn., in 1965. She attended the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, Plymouth, Minn., and Moorhead State College, graduating with a degree in library science. She accepted a call to serve with the Brazil Inland Mission and later AFLC World Missions, teaching missionary children. After marriage, they worked in group homes in the Wahpeton, N.D., area before moving to Sun Sites, Ariz.

Surviving are her brother, Jim (Cheryl) Wold (N.C.); a niece; and a nephew.

A service was held April 10 at the Church at Sunsites. Burial was in the Southern Arizona Veterans Memorial Cemetery.

MARCH MEMORIALS

Bible College

Sandy Baier
Ruth Claus
John Rolf

Home Missions

Pastor Paul Nash

Lutheran**Ambassador**

Elhue Castle

WMF

Karla Hinze

Parish Education

Viviann Christenson
Linda Nelson

World Missions

Deb Benson
Kenneth & Vivian Brage
LeRoy Peterson
Priscilla Dutcher
Helen Knapp

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-March 31, 2025

FUND	REC'D IN MARCH	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% OF SUBSIDY	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$47,472	\$154,074	35	\$130,210
Evangelism	10,904	32,380	23	29,774
Youth Ministries	15,608	38,766	25	38,441
Parish Education	20,823	41,636	23	66,592
FLBCS	73,427	198,089	25	199,740
Home Missions	34,667	88,963	21	86,300
World Missions	54,025	121,700	24	101,793
Personal Support	49,246	155,041	20	212,555
TOTALS	\$306,127	\$830,649	24	\$865,405

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

My vows.

BY CLARA GUNDERSON

I am 14 years old, standing before my church family, surrounded by my fellow confirmands, all robed in white. My pastor reminds me that I have been baptized and that the Lord, through his Holy Spirit, has granted me a living faith; what I have been taught in confirmation will guide me as I live for Jesus.

He asks, “Clara, do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways?”

“Yes,” I answer.

“Do you believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?” he asks.

“I do,” I reply.

“Do you promise to remain faithful to the teachings of the Christian church and the use of the means of grace?” he continued.

“I do,” I answer, thus making my first vow before the Lord and his church. The class stands, and together we sing, “O Jesus, I Have Promised,” a hymn chosen by our class. Do you know this moving hymn, number 287 in the *Ambassador Hymnal*? Sing with me the first stanza:

O Jesus, I have promised
to serve Thee to the end;
Be Thou forever near me,
my Master and my Friend!
I shall not fear the battle
if Thou art by my side
Nor wander from the pathway
if Thou wilt be my guide.

• • •

I am 16 years old, sitting in my church on a Sunday evening. Testimonies are being given, and Bible verses are shared. In a lull, my pastor looks at me and asks, “Clara, do you have a verse to share?” Reluctantly, I shook my head no.

I was just learning about having my

own private devotions, but it was still a sporadic discipline in my life. Now, I asked the Lord for a special verse, one that would be my witness for him. Psalm 116:1–2 is what the Spirit gave me. It reads, “I love the Lord, because He hears my voice, because He has inclined His ear to me. Therefore, I will call upon Him as long as I live.” He has reminded me of this declaration—the vow—many times over the years. It is my mantra.

• • •

I am a young bride, standing at the altar of my church with my bridegroom holding my hand. My father has walked down the aisle with me; we have both of our parents’ blessings. This is a deeply moving service. The pastor reminds us that marriage is a “holy estate ordained by God” and intended for life. Matthew 6:33 is the Scripture, chosen by the two of us, intended to be our life’s guidance. The time of the vows comes, and we both promise to love and cherish each other unto death, for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. With God’s benediction, we begin our life together.

• • •

We are searching for the Lord’s will. We have both sensed a call from him for overseas missionary service. But where? How? When? In our search, we made a point of attending special mission services. One Sunday evening our hearts were touched by the message we heard. Following the presentation, the offering was announced, and the pastor exhorted us, if moved by the Spirit, to put our very lives in the offering plate. We did just that, making

ourselves committed to full-time service. Our lives were in his hands.

• • •

We were now a pastor’s family. Vows of faithfulness in preaching God’s Word in all its truth had been made as Dick was ordained. We sit before our church family as pastors and others place their hands on us, sending us off to Bolivia. They promise prayer support; we promise faithfulness and diligence to the work of bringing the gospel to those we meet.

And the Lord promised us his faithfulness. He said, “I will never leave you or forsake you, nor will I ever abandon you ...” (Hebrews 15:5).

I am sitting in the congregation with fellow believers. The pastor reads from Matthew 6, our wedding verse. A promise made, a promise kept by his grace alone. My heart is full of praises to my faithful Father. I think about my 14-year-old self all those years ago and the declaration I made to call upon him always, thankful that in his grace and mercy he has daily reminded me of my vows and caused me to seek his strength.

Sing with me another stanza of “O Jesus I Have Promised”:

O Jesus, Thou hast promised
to all who follow Thee,
That where Thou art in glory,
there shall Thy servant be;
And, Jesus, I have promised
to serve Thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
my Master and my Friend.

Gunderson lives in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho.

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

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

BUILDING THE BASE \ \ THE LORD'S PRAYER \ Part 3

The God who provides.

BY PASTOR NICK SCHULTZ

Give us this day our daily bread.

The purpose of this petition is twofold. First, that we would recognize that all that we have is from God. And second, that we would give God thanks for all that we have.

One of my favorite exercises I go through with my confirmation classes is to talk about the bread we use to make a sandwich. We trace all the steps that it takes to get a piece of bread on the plate. We talk about the grocer who sells us the bread and the bakery that combines the ingredients and bakes it. Then we must choose an ingredient, so let's follow the flour. Flour comes from a miller. They get the wheat from a farmer who planted a seed and harvest the wheat. The seed comes from the creator. Even if it is from a seed manufacturer—the seed producer did not create the seed—God created the seed.

The purpose of the exercise is to show how God uses the seed, the farmer, the miller, the baker, and the grocer to bring you bread. But there is more to the exercise.

When we buy bread, God is using us to provide for the farmer, the miller, the baker, and the grocer. And this is true whether you are a Christian or not. So, whether we are farmers, millers, bakers, grocers, or consumers, God provides our daily bread because it all begins with God creating.

The fourth petition deals with far more than bread. When we pray for our daily bread, we are praying that God would supply what we require and not what we desire. Daily bread includes food, drink, clothing, a house, a home, health, and a godly spouse. Because of the connections to work that we saw above, when we pray for our daily bread, we are praying for the work we do to prosper and succeed as well.

Whenever we pray for our government, for God to preserve our spouse or our children, for good weather, for an end to conflict, for protection from disasters, and so much more, we are elaborating on this petition. It applies to everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body. That includes our family, our home, the weather, our neighbors, and good

government. When we lack these things, the necessities of life are more difficult to obtain, and we suffer.

This prayer is also directed against the devil. Martin Luther wrote that the devil's whole purpose and desire is to take away or interfere with all we have received from God. Not only does the devil want to destroy the right-hand kingdom of God—the church—by leading souls astray through lies, but he also wants to undermine the left-hand kingdom of God—civil authority—by causing natural disasters, war, and contention between neighbors.

God provides for all of our needs. The psalmist sings, "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Psalm 145:15–16, ESV). All this he does out of his fatherly goodness; for this it is our duty to thank and praise, serve, and obey him.

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