

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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THE
missions
ISSUE



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The missional draw of a gospel life.

If you were to pin a label on me, you'd probably say, "Andrew's an Early Church guy." I'll wear that badge with pride. The early centuries of our faith are hidden mines brimming with treasures waiting to be explored.

I've been captivated by the Early Church for years. Centuries separate us on a timeline, but we're bound by a shared faith: Christ crucified for our sins. Isn't it amazing that we pray to the same Jesus, read the same Scriptures, and cling to the same hope of resurrection?

This connection compels us to listen to their voices. We'd rightly challenge anyone who dismisses Christians in another part of the world, like Eastern Europe or Central Africa—those are our brothers and sisters! Dismissing church history is no less arrogant and prejudicial. Early Christians were as flawed as we are, but as C.S. Lewis noted in his *On the Reading of Old Books*, their mistakes often differ from ours. Our mothers and fathers of the faith offer fresh perspectives, revealing cultural blind spots that we might miss otherwise.



I wonder if one of these fresh perspectives is evangelism and missions. In the first centuries of Christian history, evangelism and missions often took on forms distinct from today because the world looked very different—or did it? Christians faced social ostracism, cultural scorn, and even violence for their "peculiar" beliefs. Pagans around them chased pleasure and personal gain, dismissing Christianity as a backward religion steeped in superstition.

Yet, without parachurch agencies, paid missionaries, or flashy advertising—no fog machines or clever slogans—the Early Church grew. And it grew rapidly. Historians call it the "patient ferment" of the Early Church.¹ The secret? The magnetic pull of lives transformed by the gospel. No gimmicks, just the quiet testimony of ordinary Christians: kindness in workplaces where cruelty was the norm, generosity toward neighbors instead of selfishness, and peace in place of anxiety.

Michael Green described these same "informal missionaries" of the Early Church:

Their community life, though far from perfect, as Christian writers were constantly complaining, was nevertheless sufficiently different and impressive to attract notice, to invite curiosity, and to inspire discipleship in an age that was as pleasure-conscious, as materialistic, and as devoid of serious purpose as our own. Paganism saw in early Christianity a quality of living, and supremely of dying, which could not be found elsewhere.²

As new creations in Christ, each of us is a missionary. Having heard the Word of truth and being ready to share the hope that is within us, each of us is an evangelist.

Today, our home and world missionaries embody this same attractive, gospel-transformed life. This issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador* features several articles on missions. As you read them, I pray you'll reflect on the rapid growth of the church in the first few centuries and consider how we can live gospel lives that point our friends and neighbors to Christ crucified.

—Pastor Andrew Kneeland

¹ See Alan Kreider's excellent book, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing, 2016).

² Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 274–75.

The nearer we get to [Christ], the more intensely
missionary we become. [Henry Martyn]

“

The history of missions
is the history of answered prayer.

[Samuel Zwemer]

I will venture to go down but
remember that you must hold the ropes.

[William Carey]

As long as I live, I shall never let go of the rope.

[Andrew Fuller]

The growth of the church in the early centuries was a
product of the church's worship. [Alan Kreider]

Hark! the voice of Jesus calling, "Who will go and work today?
Fields are white, and harvests waiting, who will bear the sheaves away?"
Loud and long the Master calleth, rich reward He offers thee;
Who will answer, gladly saying, "Here am I; send me, send me?"
[Daniel March, *Ambassador Hymnal* #306]



LIVING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION

BY DAVID OLSON

GO THEREFORE AND
MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL
NATIONS, BAPTIZING
THEM IN THE NAME OF THE
FATHER AND OF THE SON
AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT,
TEACHING THEM TO
OBSERVE ALL THINGS THAT
I HAVE COMMANDED YOU.

MATTHEW 28:19-20

As a teen, I wrestled with the Great Commission. I don't know where I got this idea from, but I thought to really follow Jesus, you had to leave the country. Spreading the gospel meant becoming a missionary overseas.

I felt tension. I wanted to follow God. I also had zero desire or sense of call to foreign missions. What now?

As I grew both in my study of the Scriptures and in my observation of life, I realized that the tension I felt was a result of me narrowing the work of God into only a tiny sliver of vocations—overseas missions. I was missing the bigger picture.

Missionaries are important, but they also depend on financial support. Where did that come from?

Further, if the only way to make disciples was to go overseas, then the whole congregation I was in should have left long ago for other lands. And then ... how would I have ever heard the gospel?

God absolutely calls some to leave behind all that they know and follow him into the unknown of distant lands and cultures that need to hear the gospel, and praise God for that. Indeed, none of us would have heard the gospel but for someone who long ago left behind homes and friends to bring the gospel to our forbears.

Yet not everyone is called to that. Many are called to go about their God-given vocations where they are. Consider these words of Paul to Timothy and Titus: "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all

who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (I Timothy 2:1–4).

Why do we pray for our rulers? So that we may live quiet and peaceful lives. Why does God find this good and acceptable? Because he desires all men to be saved. The Great Commission is furthered by believers living faithfully in their vocations.

“A bishop [i.e. pastor] then must be blameless ... one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)” (I Timothy 3:2–6).

To be qualified pastors, God requires men to raise their own children well. For most of us, the evangelizing of our children is the greatest mission field we will ever have, and that is accomplished through the faithful daily vocation of father and mother. This is a vocation that ought to take precedence even over the vocation of pastor.

I consider this often lately as I feel the time slipping away from me with my oldest, who is 10. Only eight more years until she becomes an adult. Yet I consider, what other discipleship opportunities have I ever had as great as this? And what are the chances that I will encounter anyone else with whom I have so great a chance to share the gospel than my children? I have the opportunity to deeply disciple four precious souls. I say this with fear and trembling. But also joy.

My first mission field is here when I wake up every morning.

Paul also says, “Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things ... showing good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things” (Titus 2:9–10).

Why are these believers called to show fidelity? That they might “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.” Bondservants were not going to be missionaries in foreign lands. But by performing their vocation admirably, they were said to be making the message of the gospel and the teachings of our Savior beautiful.

These truths do not diminish the importance of direct evangelism—the actual spreading of the gospel in words. The gospel is not what we do; it is the message of what Christ has done, and we are called to be prepared to give an answer for the hope within us (I Peter 3:15–17).

Rather, these truths point out that God calls us all to participate in the Great Commission daily in our vocations. When we are faithful in difficulty (a bondservant was a type of slave), we are adorning the teachings of Christ. Leading peaceful and quiet lives in faithfulness contributes to one of the ways God seeks to save the lost. Training our children (including grandchildren, nieces, and nephews) is the greatest discipleship opportunity most of us will ever have.

Olson, chairman of the AFLC Coordinating Committee, is a member of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.





THE LORD'S GOOD WORK

PLANTING A CHURCH IN ANKENY, IOWA

BY PASTOR MATTHEW PILLMAN

God has a way of turning difficult things into beauty. The year 2020 is a great example. For many, that year was especially challenging—but for us it was the beginning of our church planting journey. It was 2020 when some members of Christ the King Lutheran (Pipestone, Minn.) encouraged the congregation to consider planting another church. Things moved slowly at first but started to take shape two years later. In March 2022, the congregation gathered for a special meeting. The result of the meeting was to send our family to prepare to lead a church plant in Ankeny, Iowa.

Following our church plant residency in Texas, we moved to Ankeny in July 2023. When we arrived, there was no church gathering. We had connections with five households that represented 15 people. Everyone's expectations for a new church were varied—just like the individual giftings. That first fall, we began a Bible study in the Gospel of John. It was significant. It was hard. Often there was just a small handful of our initial launch team present.

By the spring of 2024, we had met a handful of people from the community who were interested in gathering with us. The weekly meals and Bible studies began to grow. Our

very first service was Ash Wednesday, Feb. 13. On April 28, we gathered for our first Sunday morning service. From April through October, we held services once a month. The summer of 2024 provided good community engagement through the Ankeny parade, vacation Bible school (VBS) in the park, and doing life together with our neighbors. In the fall, we split the Bible study into two groups.

In November and December, we increased our services to every other week. Then, beginning the first Sunday of January, we launched weekly services. We praise God for these regular times of fellowship and for his provision of new families in our midst. This Easter, roughly a year after our first Divine Service, we welcomed 66 individuals. They represented about 30 households. Week to week we average just more than 50 individuals. More importantly, we have seen firsthand the miracle and beauty of lives changed and nourished by the hope of forgiveness through Christ Jesus our Lord.

From the 10,000-foot view that I have just given, much of this story might seem like smooth sailing. In reality, God used many difficult conversations, prayers, and twists and turns along the way. But this is how God works. (Consider the children of Israel on their way to Canaan.)

God's faithfulness to his promise becomes abundantly evident through the testimony of lives impacted. The following is a testimony written by Amy, pictured at right with her family, who is a regular member of Emmanuel:

"I was laid off from my job in April. Over the summer, I was going back to my original job of babysitting and wrote a little ad on a local homeschool website. Matthew reached out to ask me about babysitting for church, and I was interested in helping out, since I just had a part-time babysitting job over the summer. I came for a visit and then started to come help with the nursery. Matthew invited my daughter to come to VBS, and we decided to come. My daughter really enjoyed it, and I loved how friendly the people were. I also love that children are very welcome. I have always wanted to include my kids in church as much as possible so they know how things are as an adult in church."

Other testimonies include that of a young man we had the privilege to bring to the Lord in baptism at one of our first services. Another young man had just lost his job when I knocked on his door back in February 2024. We stayed in contact, but it wasn't until almost a year later that he accepted the invitation to join us for worship. Now he comes regularly together with his girlfriend and her five kids. What more can we say than, "The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad ... Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy" (Psalm 126:3, 5).

Would you continue to pray for Emmanuel? Pray for our VBS in the Park (June 16–18). Pray for our teaching/discipleship opportunities. Pray for God to provide the needed gifts in his body (especially musical gifts). Pray for our family and each of the church leaders—that we would have endurance, wisdom, and spiritual maturity to lead well. Pray for the continued spread of the gospel through the church planting efforts of the AFLC (and beyond).

Thank you for your prayer, support, and ongoing encouragement! If you are ever in the Des Moines area, let us know. We are always glad to break bread together and share the beauty of God's faithfulness.

Pillman is a Home Missions church planter serving Emmanuel Lutheran, Ankeny, Iowa.



New social media accounts are being created by members of Bible-less languages in the world's most rural areas. Just think about that for a second. Crazy, right? There are parts of the world where people are getting smartphones for the first time, and now they are online. As they venture into that space, I pray that they will find the Lord Jesus and his Word.

In 2015, global smartphone users numbered 1.2 billion. By 2025, that number had reached 4.7 billion (Statista). That's a substantial increase of nearly 400 percent in the last decade alone.

If you had told me a decade ago that I would be able to push a few buttons on my phone and connect to someone from a Bible-less island in Indonesia, I probably would have shaken my head in disbelief. Yet here we are. We have the tools to do that now. You can push those buttons, I can push those buttons, and we can meet these people. What an opportunity!

So, I got together with some of my closest friends, and we started praying, planning, and researching. We prayed and then would go looking for people. We looked for speakers of languages that didn't have the Bible. We looked in persecuted areas. We looked in areas reported to be "100 percent Muslim" or "100 percent Buddhist." The prayers of God's people seemed to destroy mountains that stood in our way. God allowed us to find them. Then, we started sending friend requests and text messages—and they replied. In one case, I met one of only 300 *Huauulu*-speaking people on the planet. I still have to pinch myself that this happened.

These Bible-less people were genuinely interested in knowing more about Jesus. (And we were genuinely interested in sharing!) We started translating John 3:16 into each new language we encountered, along with a basic dictionary. By the grace of God, over the next three years, we went on to translate John 3:16 into 100 languages! We would then put audio recordings of these translations onto YouTube and watch as people would discover God's Word for the first time. Entire communities now had "breakthrough access" to God's Word.

From there, we referred our new friends to connect



PURSUING THE UNREACHED A DIGITAL HARVEST

BY PASTOR ANDREW OLSON



with Bible translation agencies. Many were given opportunities for further training so that they might become Bible translators in the traditional sense. In 2025, we launched five new Bible translation programs in partnership with Lutheran Bible Translators, and I had the chance to visit Indonesia in February to meet with these translators. It was a very joyful moment to finally meet in person. We've organized a ministry around this technology-for-missions concept and call it They Need the Bible. We focus on getting God's Word to Bible-less people. My wife, Alexis, and I serve as AFLC missionaries on loan through this agency.

That's our story. It's how God opened doors through technology for mission work. I wonder what your story will be. How will we be found using these tools when our Lord returns? What do these technological shifts mean for the kingdom of God and the Great Commission?

How will we choose to use technology? These tools, which can be used for evil, can also be used powerfully for good. We have the choice. "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life that you and your offspring may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19b).

So long as we have this choice, I want to use technology to further the gospel. To the best of my ability, I want to work to harness and steer it in the direction of God's objectives. The direction of life! Consider the wheel, the printing press, the steam engine, the radio, and modern aviation. All have been used as vehicles for gospel tidings to reach further than ever before. May every tool, even the smartphone, be bent into a sickle, for the harvest is ripe.

Let us also not forget to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out more workers into his harvest field (Matthew 9:38). Remember, brothers and sisters, that God chose you to be born for this generation. He chose you to participate in these very challenges and opportunities. He chose you for this time. We can trust the staff of our Good Shepherd as he leads us through the valley of the shadow of death. We will not fear evil. He is with us always, to the end of the age.

Olson, a member of Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn., is an AFLC missionary on loan to They Need the Bible, serving unreached people groups through Bible translation. Learn more at theyneedthebible.org.

LEARNING ABOUT THE GREATNESS OF OUR GOD

BY GRACE NYSTUEN

When I think back to my time in Oaxaca, Mexico, in March with the Free Lutheran Bible College's Cross Cultural Ministry class, I think primarily about the people and how I had the pleasure of participating in this trip two times. I was blessed to be a part of a ministry that shares my love for the Lord and cares deeply for God's children. As the 26 of us students and staff drove back toward the airport in Oaxaca after a long but fruitful mission trip at the Foundation for His Ministry children's home, I spent the hour-long drive reflecting on my time there.

All my life, I knew that there were missionaries in other countries and people going places to spread the gospel to those who did not know it. But witnessing every day the church at the Foundation for His Ministry home and the staff who fear God and love his children had a lasting effect on me and left me feeling greatly encouraged. The theme that the children's home was focusing on while we were there was the idea that "God cares," and that he is a God who watches out for the lowly and loves everyone. God is just and righteous in that he doesn't neglect the less fortunate and disadvantaged.

Seeing how God has blessed this particular children's home reminds me of the universal church and the body of Christ that is ever growing. Our God cares and loves everyone. The first time I went on this mission trip last year, I approached the trip with a mindset fixated on the things I needed to accomplish. I wanted to be able to make deep relationships with the kids, do well at evangelizing, and astronomically change the people's lives that I encountered. At first glance, this mindset doesn't seem like a bad thing. But when I started focusing more on my importance than God's importance, it became a problem. It didn't matter what



I said to those kids or how many work projects our group accomplished. At the end of the day, the only person who can truly change people's lives is Jesus. I'm only a messenger, not a message.

I am so grateful that I got to go back to the same children's home a second year in a row and further deepen the relationships that I have with many of the children there. My first year in Oaxaca, I remember the drive back to the airport being heartbreaking. But driving back to the airport this second time, even knowing that I have no guarantee of returning for another year, I found peace and comfort. In the days leading up to our departure, almost anything could lead me to tears: seeing the faces of the kids I love so much as they shouted for me to come near to play a game or to tell me something, a kind gesture shown to me by a staff member, or a hug goodbye followed by an "adios" that could be for the last time. Something that I reminded myself of to help me is that although our entire group really did enjoy investing in and playing with the kids, we weren't the ones who brought Jesus to them. We are not the ones who have the ticket of salvation. The organization does a great job of raising these children in the faith and pointing them to the gospel. Although we live on opposite ends of the continent and have language barriers in the way, I know that if I don't ever make it back down to Mexico, I can have faith that I will be reunited with these kids someday in heaven, with zero language barriers holding us back.

During last year's church services, I remember singing the song "Cuan Grande es Dios," or "How Great is our God." Having the song be so familiar but sung so boldly in a different language from my own stood out to me in a deeper way. How great is our God? He is greater than any language barrier, greater than any cultural differences. At that church service, in that moment, we were all praising the same God, a God who is greater than it all.

Nystuen, a member of Emmanuel Lutheran, Kenyon, Minn., graduated from FLBC in May.



BY PASTOR JOHN LEE



I grew up in the 1990s in Bangladesh, next to India, as the youngest of Robert and Margaret Lee's four children. I grew up immersed in Santal culture, speaking the ancient, well-preserved, and complex Santali language, reading the very phonetic Santali Bible, and singing from the *Seren Puthi* (the Santal hymnbook)—just like my mom. Like me, she was born in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is nestled at the top of the Bay of Bengal with a four-month monsoon season and rivers coming down from the Himalayas that flood the flat land. At 25 degrees latitude, its climate is much like the Florida Keys, very hot and humid. The missionaries often quipped that the temperature was measured in the number of showers you had to take in a day. I remember spending evenings on the veranda of our missionary bungalow—reminiscent of the poetry of Rudyard Kipling. My sisters and I would lie on the cool concrete and watch the fireflies flicker in the lush growth; sometimes we would run and catch them.

Then Dad would call us in for songs, devotions, and praying the Lord's Prayer together. Many nights we would crowd around to listen to Trailblazer Books or other stories. During the day, Mom would have a tea cart ready for company—our house was always bustling with traveling pastors, missionaries, foreigners, or neighbors. One young, single Danish missionary would always stop in to visit on his trips to congregations and mission stations and would take time to talk with me. Sometimes he brought me a small Lego set from Denmark. Our family would also do visitations together, traveling to villages, and I remember consuming what must have been dozens of cups of chai, cookies, lychees, and mangos. My mother was very involved in women's meetings, and there were many lay evangelists. When we got bored, we would go climb trees with the crowds of village kids or walk in the mango groves.

At Sunday services, we would remove our shoes out of respect for the Lord. Women would cover their heads with their saris and sit on one side, while the men sat on another. There was also a kids' section on the floor up front. I remember one Sunday, I had to sheepishly confess to sneaking out of church and mischievously hiding all the congregation members' shoes.

My days were spent mostly with other Santal boys, shirtless, eating fruit in trees or playing some variant of hiding, sneaking, holding our breath, making noise, or tag. I also remember butchering chickens and planting my own corn—I was very proud of that.

But I never was a real Santal. I had a foreign Americanness to me. The same was true when I got back "home" to the United States; I wasn't quite American either. I didn't have history or shared experiences with my cousins or friends. Sometimes, I acted in eccentric Santal ways—a conundrum many missionary kids find themselves in. They don't fit completely into their "host" culture or into their "home" culture: they are "third culture kids," something military kids or immigrant kids can relate to as well. It wasn't until I was older that I fully appreciated that we Christians are sojourners like Abraham, dwelling in Canaan and looking ahead to the Promised Land where our dwelling will be with God. And like Jesus, who grew up in Egypt, I have come to appreciate being born "between" cultures and sensitive in some ways to differences.



THE LIFE OF MISSIONARY CHILDREN

It's a heritage I share with my mom. John and Lois Ottesen—her parents—decided to strike out and continue the work of Lars Skrefsrud in the Santal Mission. I knew my Grandpa John as a gentle, humble man—full of the Holy Spirit, a love for the Lord, and a love for his Word, and leading the life of an evangelist. Every time we went out, we prayed before we left, and he would wander away from the group to pass out tracts and evangelize. Even in Bangladesh, he traveled from village to village. I loved spending time with Grandpa, and our time was always characterized by memorizing a Bible verse, working on *Luther's Small Catechism*, or reading a devotional. My parents and my grandparents regularly prayed with me and for me, and from a young age, I had a sense that the Lord wanted me to teach in a seminary overseas.

When I first met with Pastor John and Ruby Abel (former AFLC missionaries to Brazil) in 2017, my wife, Hannah, and I had two kids and a new call to AFLC World Missions. We are both pastor's kids and missionary kids, and we wanted to be like our parents and honor the Lord with our lives. Pastor Abel reminded me so much of my grandfather, and after much prayer and counsel, we decided to join and continue the AFLC's work in Brazil, pioneered by the Abels and upheld by its mother congregations in the United States. What a wonderful heritage we have. What an honor to share what God has done for us in Jesus Christ with our brothers and sisters in Brazil and our kids, who are now also missionary kids, growing up in the harvest.

Lee is an AFLC missionary serving in Campo Mourão, Brazil, with his wife, Hannah, and six children.



LEAVING A LEGACY OF FAITH & OBEDIENCE

BY BECKY ABEL



Priscilla Dutcher



Helen Knapp

This spring, two former AFLC missionary women left this earth to join the saints in heaven. They each left a legacy, an example to be followed. Priscilla Wold Dutcher spent seven years teaching missionary children in Brazil, while Helen Knapp dedicated 32 years of her life to missionary service. I had the privilege of knowing both women. They were ordinary yet remarkable people who lived their lives in obedience and service to the Lord. Their passing gives us an opportunity to reflect on their lives and consider the kind of legacy we will leave someday.

• • •

The new Brazilian AFLC president, Pastor Elizeu Bosa da Silva, wrote a beautiful testimony about Helen. He was just a young boy when Helen served as a missionary in Brazil, but Helen's legacy is a part of who he is today.

"Helen arrived in Brazil in February 1958, alongside her husband, Pastor George Knapp, and their first four children. Their fifth child and two more adopted children were added to the family in Brazil. In 1969, they became a part of the team of missionaries who laid the foundations of the Brazilian Free Lutheran Church. Since then, her life has been marked by simple, faithful, and profoundly transformative discipleship.

"She was not only a missionary but also a spiritual mother to generations. Helen was a constant and encouraging presence as a teacher at the Bible School and promoter of women's meetings, strengthening youth and women with biblical teaching and pastoral care. With her inseparable flannelgraph and painting canvases, she enchanted the children in the vacation Bible schools (VBS) with visual stories full of color and meaning. Her creativity left its mark not only on our eyes but also on our hearts.

"Today, in my teaching moments, I use visual resources that I affectionately call 'Aunt Helen Moments,' as a tribute to this affectionate, sensitive, and inspiring pedagogical legacy passed on to me through VBS when I was a young boy.

"Her simplicity hid a rare spiritual depth. Her gentle voice, her attentive gaze, and her heart focused on the Word and on people built the faith of many. The impact of her life is reflected in the churches she helped to plant, the families she supported, the women she encouraged, and the children she taught with tenderness and truth.

"We celebrate with gratitude the certainty that she completed her calling, kept the faith, and now contemplates, face to face, the One whom she served with love and dedication throughout her life."



Other Brazilian friends wrote:

“An incredible woman, a servant of God with contagious faith ... an excellent teacher ... always coming up with ideas for crafts and teaching others ... a woman of deep faith in her Savior ... a prayer warrior ... a person who cared for us and for our country and brought us the best news of all—life in Jesus.”

My husband, Paul, remembers his teen years with the Knapp family in Campo Mourão. I remember visiting Brazil in 1981 and getting to know the Knapp family and Priscilla Wold. Things were very “basic” back then, and I admired their dedication to living sacrificially and investing in the work wholeheartedly. Although the Knapps retired five years after we came as full-time missionaries, their example and encouragement have been a blessing to us throughout the years—always praying, encouraging, and exemplifying a life of dedication and service to God. Quite a legacy!

Many people only think about the material side of a legacy—what goods they will leave to their children. It is far more important, however, to leave a spiritual legacy for the people we love.

I want to be intentional in loving Jesus and his Word, investing in my loved ones, and reaching out to others with the good news of salvation in Jesus. It is one thing to *say* that we are Christians and that Jesus is important to us, but it is our living example that will really make a difference in the lives of our children, grandchildren, and people who are watching us. Like Priscilla Wold and Helen Knapp, I want to live a life that points to Jesus and lights the way for others.

I love the words of Steve Green’s song, “Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful. May the fire of our devotion light their way. May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe, and the lives we live inspire them to obey” (“Find Us Faithful”). For more details about the early mission work in Brazil, read the Ambassador Publications book, *Footprints of the Faithful*.

Abel is an AFLC missionary serving in Curitiba, Brazil.





What to expect at Annual Conference.

BY PASTOR MICAH HJERMSTAD

I'm looking forward to the AFLC Annual Conference this month! I'm excited to see so many of you there. If you haven't done so yet, consider making plans to attend this wonderful event June 11–14 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis.

This is such an important event in the rhythm of the life of the AFLC. We rightly value the independence of the local congregation, but a healthy AFLC also recognizes that a level of interdependence is essential. In other words, congregations need each other. Fundamental Principles 7–9 explain that free congregations “gladly accept” assistance from other congregations so that they are “mutually edified” and work together “for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.”

There are a lot of ways this can happen, locally and at the district level. It happens at the national level, too. In fact, this is a primary reason for the existence of our national ministries: to support the congregations working together to accomplish “such tasks as exceed the ability of the individual congregation.”

It's impossible to expect our ministries to know how to best serve 252 congregations and approximately 35,000 members based on individual conversations, so the Annual Conference serves as the place where congregations and members can gather together and have their voices heard. It's where we gather to worship, pray, and seek the Lord together as the Body of Christ.

This year, we have many things to celebrate. We're commissioning new missionaries. The president of AFLC-India will be here to give a greeting—did you know that they recently started a Bible school? We're praising God for increased enrollment in our own Bible college and seminary, progress made on church plants, plans for the FLY Convention, and the list goes on.

There will also be important matters to discuss. Two, specifically, come to mind. First, the World Missions Board of Directors will be asking the conference for approval to open a new field of mission work in Chile. This is a good example of this subtle but important distinction that I alluded to earlier. The World Missions office does not dictate where we go and demand the congregations' cooperation. Instead, they present opportunities that they are uniquely equipped to find, and then they rely on the voice of the congregations, through the Conference, to direct their next steps.

The other matter is the question of whether the Coordinating Committee should be open to admitting to our clergy roster certain men who have been divorced. Last year, the conference tasked the Coordinating Committee with forming a group to conduct a biblical study of this topic. That has been completed, and the study will be presented at the Annual Conference. The study is not intended to become the formal position of the AFLC. There has always been a diversity of opinion on this matter within the AFLC, and that will continue—and that's a good thing. It's also true that the Coordinating Committee needs policies to function in an orderly manner, and so if the Conference wishes to see the Coordinating Committee change their current policy, the people will have to formally state that request.

I encourage you to pray about these matters. Very simply, “May God's will be done!” Like I said, consider attending the Annual Conference, too. It's a joy to gather with brothers and sisters from all over the country (and even the world!) under this banner of shared faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.



Pre-Conference book.

To view the pre-conference book which includes the annual reports from AFLC ministries and the biblical study on clergy divorce and remarriage, visit aflc.org/conferences. An email that includes a PDF of the book will also be sent to all conference registrants.

Hjermstad, a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., is the president of the AFLC.



Ministry update.

BY PASTOR JASON SIEMENS

Greetings brothers and sisters in Christ! I am excited to give you an update on the Lord's work in Canada, as well as the challenges we are facing.

We concluded our annual meeting at the beginning of April with Dr. Jason Gudim, AFLC Schools faculty, as our guest speaker. Our theme verses were from I Peter 3:13–16, "Defending our hope in Christ." We changed our schedule this year, getting the business done on Thursday and Friday and leaving Saturday open for Dr. Gudim to give us the goods. We want to reflect that the Annual Conference is indeed the spiritual powerhouse of the AFLC, and thus the change.

Our mission work in Saskatoon is reaping rewards as our missionary to the Persian and Afghani people has seen 12 people come to faith in Christ, with more than 30 attending his weekly outreach meetings. Praise the Lord for mission work in our own backyard that is bearing fruit! We decided to fund the work full-time, so our missionary will be quitting his job and working with this group daily. Please be in prayer for this work among the diaspora. The discipleship ministry material being used is based on training the next leaders who will rise to share the gospel. Our missionary has reached a level where he has begun the process of training the next generation of missionaries. It is very exciting to see!

We have had a sense that we should be seeking the Lord to plant a new church in Alberta. We are patiently but eagerly seeking the Lord's direction to see where that would be. Would you join with us in prayer about this work? We want to honor the Lord's call to "go make disciples." I would appreciate your prayer for us in this as the Lord leads you to pray.

On a sadder note, the church plant that we had been working on in Diamond Valley, Alberta, will have been dissolved as you are reading this. There are a wide range of emotions connected to this. Wolves in sheep's clothing entered the flock, and now I better understand the Apostle Paul's frustration with the Judaizers in his letter to the Galatian church. We have learned from this as we seek a new work for our church planters to consider.

I am hoping to attend the AFLC Annual Conference again this year, Lord willing. I am always refreshed by my time with you, and so I am looking forward to it.



AFLC-Canada Leadership.

- **President:** Pastor Jason Siemens
- **Vice President/Treasurer:** Pastor John Attwood
- **Secretary:** Leslie McKay
- **CC Chair:** Dale Hundebey
- aflccanada.org

Siemens, Leduc, Alberta, is the president of the AFLC-Canada.



Cradle roll ministry.

BY MARIAN CHRISTOPHERSON

♪ JESUS LOVES ME, THIS I KNOW, FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO ♪

Do you remember the first time you heard that song? It may have been in cradle roll. If you grew up in a Christian family or going to church, God may have been writing this biblical truth on your mind and heart since infancy. Children are never too young to hear the beautiful truths of Scripture spoken, sung, and prayed.

Jesus loves children and gives the gift of faith in baptism. When we bring our babies to the Lord in baptism, our desire is that they continue to grow in their Christian faith and grow up always knowing and loving Jesus. Parents have a great responsibility to spiritually nurture their children, but the congregation serves as a corporate godparent. The Christian community of the congregation can come alongside parents and support them by providing encouragement, teaching, and resources.

The ministry of cradle roll is one way for a congregation to care for young children and their families. Cradle roll is a ministry for parents of infants and toddlers following their baptism and serves as a bridge between infancy and about age 3, when many congregations begin to provide Sunday school classes. Educational resources are provided for children at regular intervals during those first three years. Some congregations also host a cradle roll class held at regular intervals, anywhere from twice a year to meeting monthly, where families can learn together.

A cradle roll testimonial by Rachel Mattson

Cradle roll ministry at my church is taken on by the WMF, and a point person is nominated to be in charge of dispersing the materials. The WMF orders a packet for each child baptized into membership with our church, and upon baptism, the parents and sponsors are given books and pamphlets on baptism and raising children in God's Word. Throughout the next three years, the children are given cards or books a couple of times a year, including on their baptism birthdays. Another way my church uses this ministry is to encourage fellowship amongst young families through a yearly program. Each year, a program is held for children in cradle roll and features a Bible story, songs, an activity, and the graduation of 3-year-olds into the Sunday school.

Cradle roll has involved my young kids in the purpose of the church and has been a source of timely encouragement for me. Over the past few years, I have come to appreciate cradle roll's consistent encouragement in my life as a parent. Every pamphlet I get helps to remind me of my ultimate goal as a parent: to make disciples who love God and his Word. It also became apparent how important it was to my kids when my 3-year-old got a postcard invitation to begin Sunday school. Every day, he would find it and say to me, "I get to go to Sunday school!" This excitement has been built over the years with the cards and books that cradle roll has provided. I'm grateful for this ministry and its impact on the next generation! Why not start this ministry in your church?

Cradle roll resources.

Watch for an upcoming Education Spotlight about cradle roll on our website. Cradle roll packets are available for purchase in our Parish Education offices and online bookstore.

- ambassadorpublications.org

Christopherson, a member of New Luther Valley Lutheran, McVie, N.D., is the director of AFLC Parish Education.

Mattson, a member of Our Savior's Free Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn., is a member of the Parish Education Board of Publications.

Caring for others.

BY JANE SMITH

In Hannah Hurnard's preface to *Hind's Feet On High Places*, she writes about Song of Solomon 2:8 inspiring her allegory. Watching gazelles bounding up the mountainside of Mount Gerizim, she was amazed at their grace and agility and reflected that "there are no obstacles which our Saviour's love cannot overcome, and that to him, mountains of difficulty are as easy as an asphalt road!"

I Peter 5:7 says, "Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you." It sounds so simple. On a good day, it's easy. On days when difficulties are plentiful, not so much. How do we care for each other in our daily lives? Parents with young children could make a long list in short order. Pastors who visit those who are hospitalized can see many opportunities for caring. And sometimes we may need someone to care for *us*. Last summer, I had an emergency appendectomy and was grateful for my caring husband, who took on many little tasks while I recovered—unasked and willingly. An unexpected visit from neighbors while I waited my turn for surgery in the hospital helped the time pass more quickly.

When life seems to hand you lemons, how do you make lemonade? Sometimes you need a recipe—and calling a good cook is the best way to start. (Lemon meringue pie is good, too.) If or when your role as a leader gets more complicated than you know how to handle, calling someone with a listening ear and some experience with leading through turbulence makes a whole lot of sense. If or when conflict erupts in your church family, understanding how to proceed in a helpful manner can be overwhelming and difficult—unless you are willing to seek assistance. If you need a listening ear to help you cope, the AFLC's Pastor and Congregational Care Team (PACCT) is only a phone call, text, or email away. We are here to connect with you.

PACCT's desire is to come alongside pastors, pastors' wives, and congregations to provide encouragement, a listening ear, a caring heart, and a supporting hand as we serve Christ together. Ministry can be difficult—but you are not alone. PACCT is standing with you. We look at obstacles in life and rejoice in the knowledge that none of them are beyond our Savior's reach and that he guides us on our cracked sidewalks, rocky paths, dusty gravel roads, and flat interstates to make difficulties more manageable. We are inspired by Habakkuk 3:19: "The Lord God is my strength; and He will make my feet like hinds' feet, and He will make me to walk upon mine high places ..." May it be so!



PACCT members & ministry.

- Pastor Scott and Mary Stroud
- Tom and Linda Mathre
- Roger and Lindsay Benson
- Wayne and Jane Smith
- Additional team members being added soon

A new PACCT ministry aimed at encouraging pastors' wives is in the works. Stay tuned for more information.

Smith, a member of Christ the King Free Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn., is the PACCT leader along with her husband, Wayne.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP: Bible College graduates line up outside the Student Life Center as they prepare to greet family and friends. Members of the Proclaim Choir sing “Behold Him” during the graduation ceremony. Family and friends filled the gym in the Student Life Center as they supported the graduates. Julia Presteng, a graduate of FLBCS, greets family and friends after the ceremony. Seminary graduates Mikey Meester and Troy Hanson.

FLBCS school year ends with concert, graduation

The Free Lutheran Bible School and Seminary hosted a weekend of events May 2–3 on its Plymouth, Minn., campus to cap the end of the 2024–25 school year. On May 2, the schools presented a final concert with performances by the Concert Choir, Proclaim Choir, and wind ensemble, and testimonies from graduates Brittney Fritz and Julia Presteng. The concert concluded with Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" from *The Messiah*.

A commencement service was held May 3, which included graduates from the first class of the bachelor and associate program. The ceremony honored two seminary graduates who earned Master of Divinity degrees, four Bible College graduates who earned Bachelor of Arts degrees in Bible and ministry, 38 students who earned Associate of Arts degrees in Bible and ministry, and 11 students who earned a diploma in Bible and ministry.

Dr. Jarrod Hylden, who joined the FLBCS faculty this year, gave the commencement address from Matthew 13:44–52. Bible College graduate Sam Davis welcomed family and friends as he represented the Bible College graduating class. Both the Concert Choir and Proclaim Choir sang anthems from their spring tours. Following the service, the graduates lined up on the campus quad to greet family, friends, faculty, staff, and guests.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP: Bible College graduate Brittney Fritz shows off her diploma following the service. Dr. Jarrod Hylden brought the commencement address. Bible College graduate Veronica Nessa shakes hands with FLBCS Board of Trustees Chair Philip Johnson. Pastor Steve Mundfrom greets graduates. Max Larson and Cort McDonald react to a speaker during the service.



PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor George Lautner has accepted a call to serve Alsace Lutheran, Reading, Pa. Lautner, who currently serves Holmes Evangelical Lutheran, Clarion, Iowa, will begin his new call at the end of June.

Good Shepherd Lutheran, Lincoln, Ill., has closed.

Pastor Mark Molstre was installed May 3 at Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., with Pastor Micah Hjermstad, AFLC president, officiating.

Pastor Dana Coyle will be installed June 1, at Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah, N.D., with Pastor Andy Coyle, director of Home Missions, officiating.

**Pastor Ted Kennedy**

Pastor Ted Kennedy, 77, of Nogales, Ariz., died May 11, at home. Born

March 5, 1948, in Nogales, he was the son of Ted and Amelia (Torres) Kennedy. He married Karla Dynneson on Aug. 30, 1969.

He graduated from Nogales High School in 1966, and from California Lutheran Bible School, Los Angeles, in 1968. He earned an associate's degree from Los Angeles City College in 1971. He attended California State University at Los Angeles, earning a bachelor's degree in 1973. He attended the Free Lutheran Seminary, Plymouth, Minn., graduating in 1979. He was ordained later that fall and served Triumph Lutheran, Nogales, for 40 years. He earned a master's degree in counseling in 1998 and worked as a guidance counselor at Desert Shadows Middle School.

Surviving are his wife; two sons, David (Maria) Kennedy, Nogales, and Matthew Kennedy; one sister, Sandra (Pancho) Carrillo, Nogales; and one brother, Larry (Isabel) Kennedy, Tucson, Ariz.

A memorial service was held May 24 at Triumph Evangelical Lutheran, Nogales.

APRIL MEMORIALS

FLBCS

Ruth Claus
Ernest Satren

**Lutheran
Ambassador**
Judith Drew

General Fund
Gloria Lee

Home Missions
Jan Gudmundson

WMF

Linda Nelson
Jan Gudmundson
Marilyn Jacobson
Harvey Schmiginske
Jonathan Knutson

World Missions

Helen Knapp
Pastor Alvin & Francis
Grothe
Priscilla Dutcher

**Gloria Lee**

Gloria Jeanne Lee, 81, of Crystal, Minn., died on April 24. Born in Eau Claire, Wis., on Sept. 21, 1943, she was the daughter of Carol and Fay James. She married Robert Lee on June 3, 1967.

She grew up in Crystal and New Hope, Minn., and graduated from Robbinsdale High School in 1961. After employment in the business world and a short time as an airline hostess, she was employed in 1964 as secretary to Pastor John Strand, president of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, a position that included all the office work for the seminary and Bible school, as well as maintaining the subscription list to *The Lutheran Ambassador*. Later she served for several years as secretary to the director of AFLC Home Missions. After her husband graduated from the seminary in 1968, they served AFLC congregations: Zion Lutheran, Tioga, N.D.; Grace Free Lutheran and Zion Lutheran, Valley City, N.D.; and Helmar Lutheran, Newark, Ill., before returning to the Twin Cities in 1992.

Surviving are two children, Adam (Annett) Lee, Auerbach, Vogt., Germany, and Amy (Joshua) Skogerboe, Prescott Valley, Ariz.; two sisters, Arlene (Gaylin) Laabs, and Gwen (Thomas) Skiff; eight grandchildren; and one great-granddaughter.

The service was April 30 at Hauge Chapel, Free Lutheran Schools campus, Plymouth, Minn., with Pastor Gary Jorgenson officiating. Burial was in Glen Haven Memorial Gardens Cemetery, Crystal.

**Barbara Keippela**

Barbara Jo Keippela, 75, of Linwood, Minn., died April 29. Born July 5, 1949, in Cloquet, Minn., she was the daughter of Howard and Marian (Barney) Sunnarborg. She married David Keippela. He preceded her in death.

She grew up in Esko, Minn., and graduated from Esko High School. She earned an LPN degree. After marriage, they lived in Bemidji, Minn., where they began their life together. She worked at the Ishpeming Nursing Home. As David's career led him to become a pastor, they served several churches, ultimately settling in Stacy, Minn., where David was pastor at Sunnyside Free Lutheran Church for more than 25 years. She opened her own home-based shop, Barb's Bee Hive, selling quilts, paintings, needlepoint, and other crafts.

Surviving are two sons, Jason Keippela and Jeremy Keippela; two grandchildren; one sister, Bonnie Rae Prouty; and one brother, Timothy Sunnarborg.

The service was held May 23, at Sunnyside Free Lutheran, Stacy, Minn. Interment was at Linwood Township Cemetery.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-April 30, 2025

FUND	REC'D IN APRIL	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% OF SUBSIDY	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$31,731	\$185,805	42	\$164,850
Evangelism	7,507	39,887	28	40,620
Youth Ministries	13,715	52,481	34	64,535
Parish Education	12,056	53,692	29	78,110
FLBCS	83,126	281,215	36	258,635
Home Missions	28,562	117,525	28	126,127
World Missions	29,651	151,351	30	133,237
Personal Support	66,265	221,306	29	294,542
TOTALS	\$239,612	\$1,070,261	31	\$1,160,656

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



The meek.

BY PASTOR BRANDON MARSCHNER

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).

Have you ever tried to be humble because of this verse? It is very difficult; we usually end up in the convoluted position of being proud of our humility. Indeed, we are called to be humble, but thankfully working to be humble is not really what this verse is about. Let’s take a closer look and enjoy the comfort that this verse extends to us.

This verse, just like all the Beatitudes, is short but packed full of meaning. In order to understand it, we need to look carefully at the words and make sure we know what each of them means. When we understand it correctly, this verse should be a source of comfort for us that gives us hope for the future. And this hope gives us confidence in this life even when we look small in the eyes of the world.

The first key to understanding this verse is to understand the word *meek*. A better translation than the word *meek* might be *lowly*, which emphasizes position rather than attitude. This nuance might sound complicated or technical at first, but it is essential to understanding this verse. Is this verse commanding us to be humble? Or is this verse comforting those who are “lowly” in the estimation of the world? I would suggest the latter because of the connection that this verse has with Psalm 37. In Psalm 37:11, the same phrase is used as in Matthew 5:5. Psalm 37 is contrasting those evildoers who seem to have it all in this life

with the lowly who are “poor and needy” (36:14). That idea should be extended to Matthew 5:5. The lowly are those of lowly position from the world’s perspective, not those who are humbler than average.

And so the “meek” of Matthew 5:5 are essentially parallel with the “poor in spirit” of verse 3. Those people who are lowly in the eyes of the world are often the ones to realize that they are spiritually lowly or poor in spirit as well. All people truly are “lowly” and “poor in spirit,” and those who recognize it “mourn” (v. 4). They are those who are blessed by the Lord. This is the same as confessing that we are sinners and trusting in the Lord for our righteousness. Christ’s righteousness that we receive is the blessing of the lowly.

When we recognize our lowliness, we are blessed. To be blessed, in the Gospel of Matthew, is essentially the same thing as being saved. Jeffrey Gibbs notes, “The adjective *makarios* [blessed] in Matthew has strong connotations of present and future salvation. It does not mean ‘happy,’ but something much stronger, tantamount to ‘saved,’” (*Concordia Commentary on Matthew*). When we are saved, we are in the position of receiving the spiritual blessings of God, which includes inheriting the earth.

The blessing we receive from God is his inheritance. A child receives the inheritance not because he has earned it, but because of who he is. By faith we are made children

of God. John 1:12 says, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” By faith we are made God’s children and consequently his heirs. And our inheritance is the earth.

“The earth” reminds us that our final destination as believers is not a realm of disembodied spirits floating around clouds, but the recreated earth. The physical earth is good even now, but it is tainted by sin. When God recreates the new earth, it will be the inheritance of those who recognize their lowliness and trust in Jesus. For believers, our experience after death will probably be a lot more like this current world than we might imagine. We will live in a physical world again. But it will not have the corruption of sin and death. This is a great hope that we have.

When we put all these words together, we hear Jesus speaking words of gospel comfort in Matthew 5:5. “Blessed are the lowly, for they shall inherit the earth” (Legacy Standard Bible translation). Perhaps today you are feeling “lowly” because of your sin. I hope you are. Because when we realize just how lowly, how weak we are in our sins, then we are ready to hear and believe this wonderful pronouncement that Jesus makes: blessed are you.

Marschner is the church planting pastor at St. Paul’s Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D.

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Periodicals

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SOMETHING TO SHARE

Getting down to the bones.

BY RENAH THOMPSON

I heard once that the Beatles really only played one song, and then I learned that's true of most music. Three or four basic chords repeated in a few different patterns and keys, an occasional switch between major and minor—and there you have most of your top 1000 hits. It's astonishing. A simple central structure for countless iterations of beauty, love, sorrow, lust, longing, worship, and rage, all of them a thousand variations on one song.

I listened recently to the testimony of a Bible school student on choir tour. Her story was just like mine of 20 years ago. I was raised in a Christian home. I knew Jesus but didn't always follow him well or understand the gospel. I had a few crises. As I came through them, I was sure my newly renewed faith would be the final answer. All was now well! I was ready to embark on life with my spiritual situation sorted. And ... then came the next question, the next hurt, the next wandering. It wasn't sorted. All was not well. My testimony is now something like this: my faith is nothing. I have been dogged by loneliness and doubt almost constantly. I have no certainty, no one great moment of being saved, no eyes opened once and for all: only daily being made to trust, only daily clinging to grace. I am being held when I cannot hold.

If you're anything like me (that is to say, if you're a human being), you will fail at faith—more than once—and fail again.

You may never get it “right.” Trusting God is not something you can do one time. What happens when everything goes wrong in the most spectacular and terrifying way, or when you are tired to the bone of praying for unmet needs? When you have in fact decided that there *is* no hope, or deliberately walked far away? Well, don't forget about that pesky verse, “His power is made perfect in weakness.” You will likely—hopefully—come to find out that you are very weak. In fact, if God has his way, you will learn it again and again. It may be the very thing that turns your sorrow and doubt into a river of joy.

There are many things I do not understand. (Actually, make that “I understand almost nothing.”) The only thing I'm absolutely sure of is that Jesus is mine and I am his. He is my only hope. Only his loveliness, only his beauty and kindness and deep, steadfast mercy keep me. The church often confuses and confounds me. Morality is an empty shell, theology sometimes seems more like a thing to fight than a thing to rest in, and my knowledge shrinks every time I think I've learned something for certain. But Jesus remains. Ageless, unchanging, terrible, a judge and a ruler—but for me, friend, my first and truest love, my life.

This is the only song I know.

Thompson is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont.