

The background of the entire cover is an impressionistic painting. The upper half features a sky with swirling, textured brushstrokes in shades of light blue, teal, and white. The lower half depicts a lush green field with dense, curved brushstrokes in various shades of green, from light lime to deep forest green, with some yellow highlights suggesting wildflowers or sunlight. The overall style is reminiscent of J.M.W. Turner's 'Rain, Steam, and Great Bridges' or Vincent van Gogh's 'Olive Trees with Yellow Sky and Sea'.

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

AUGUST 2025

ABUNDANT
+ LIFE +

THE 2025 ANNUAL CONFERENCE



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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Unity in Christ.

"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:19–20).

Paul had much to share with his church plant in Ephesus. The apostle had spent three years with this congregation and wanted to remind them of God's grand plan of salvation, the work Christ accomplished on their behalf, and their gracious adoption into heavenly citizenship. He declared, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (2:13).

But as he shifted from discussing the truths of salvation to a believer's response, Paul emphasized another key message for his Ephesian friends: they are united in Christ.

We, too, are united. The Son of God won this unity through his atoning death and victorious resurrection, and the Holy Spirit delivers it to all believers. Though we might think differently or worship differently, our common faith in Christ unites us. This unity is not earned by our actions nor maintained by our purity—it is a gift from God.

We will experience this unity perfectly one day, but our Annual Conference is a regular reminder to me that even now we are united in Christ. Congregations that God has joined together can accomplish tremendous things.

The seventh of the AFLC's Fundamental Principles states: "A free congregation gladly accepts the mutual assistance which congregations can give one another in the work for the advancement of the Kingdom of God."

This "mutual assistance" was on full display at the Association Retreat Center this past June. Historically, one of the first items on the agenda at each Annual Conference is the presentation of ministry reports. Dozens of our AFLC ministries share about current projects and highlight areas where prayer or financial support might be needed.

The reports can be a lot to digest—indeed, how can you capture a year of ministry in a six-minute report?—but don't lose sight of the bigger picture. God is working mightily through our small Lutheran church body. Books are being distributed, students are being educated, and missionaries are being sent as our congregations collaborate to advance God's Kingdom.

I encourage you to revisit the conference booklet containing these ministry reports. Consider using 90 seconds of a worship service to summarize a report and pray for an AFLC ministry or incorporate this practice into your family or personal devotions.

Looking ahead, take time to review the ministry reports before next June's Annual Conference in Fargo, N.D. They will be published well in advance of our gathering.

United in Christ, our church body is empowered to fulfill his mission. Let us continue to support and pray for one another, advancing God's Kingdom as one body in faith.

"We cannot all do work of the same kind. Everyone must do his or her own kind of work ... But one should teach that there should be one mind and many works, one heart and many hands" (Martin Luther).

—Pastor Andrew Kneeland



We believe the congregation is “the right form of the kingdom of God on earth” (Fundamental Principle No. 1), and among other things, that means that the essence, or the heartbeat, of the AFLC is found in the local congregation. I think that’s beautiful, and it’s essential to maintain that identity. [Pastor Micah Hjermstad]

“

The Good Shepherd has not come to take what is not His. He has come to give us what is not ours.

[Pastor Dennis Norby]

I see people living in the joy of eternal life throughout our congregations. I hear of the preaching of the gospel throughout our congregations. I pray that God is gracious to us in that we never stop hungering and thirsting after this life and that he never ceases to satisfy us in Jesus Christ. [David Olson]

God is at work today doing new things. The good news of Christ is going forth to lives that seem like a wasteland. New spiritual life is springing up in deserts. [Dr. Craig Johnson]

We have such a unique balance of evangelical fervor that is rooted in a robust historic tradition. This is us, and it is powerful, beautiful, and needed today in mission. [Pastor Andy Coyle]



ABUNDANT LIFE

THE 2025 ANNUAL CONFERENCE



By Pastor Andrew Kneeland

Though sin and death still linger through our lives, Christ promises the believer abundant life. There is perfect abundance to look forward to, but even now we enjoy every gift God graciously offers. He gives us forgiveness, purpose, and perfect peace, but he also gives fellowship and the opportunity to cooperate with other believers in Kingdom work.

Our church body came together at its annual conference earlier this summer to deal with several significant topics—the commissioning of new lay missionaries, a presidential election, the opening of a new international mission field, discussion on clergy rostering, and changes to corporation bylaws to name just a few—and did so with grace, charity, and eyes fixed on Christ.

A total of 423 adults (276 lay, 147 clergy) and dozens of children gathered June 11–14 at the Association Retreat Center near Osceola, Wis., for the 63rd Annual Conference of the AFLC. The theme of the conference was “Abundant Life,” taken from John 10:10.

Before the conference, the AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship (AED) department hosted Rekindle the Fire, an annual equipping event at Amery Free Lutheran Church in Amery, Wis.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11

The Women’s Missionary Federation (WMF) also hosted its annual gathering with sessions led by Dr. Nathan Olson and Becky Abel, and a chalk art presentation from Linda Mohagen. Vicki Johnson led the women in devotions, and Vardhini Dasari of AFLC-India gave a greeting.

The opening service of the Annual Conference was held Wednesday evening. Pastor Alan Arneson led the service, and Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck (AFLC vice president) preached a message from John 10. Reflecting on the theme, he said, “Abundant life is only to be found in relationship with him.” An offering was directed to the ARC, Coordinating Committee, and Schools corporations.

The FLBC Ambassadors provided special music during the evening services, and two other FLBC summer teams led the kids in vacation Bible school.





LEFT: Pastor Erin and Jen Tormanen take part in a time of worship during the opening service.

TOP: Seminarian Adam Erickson holds his son, Isaac, during a worship service.

MIDDLE: Pastor Dennis and Samantha Norby react to a conference speaker.

ABOVE: Joanne Herset and Jeannette Benson listen to Pastor Quanbeck as he speaks at the opening service.



Dr. Jason Holt led the conference through a time of remembrance for departed pastors on Wednesday evening, including Pastor Jan Horne (88, of Robins, Iowa), Pastor Roy Johnson (88, of Fergus Falls), Pastor James Gerdeen (87, of Escanaba, Mich.), and Pastor Ted Kennedy, Jr. (67, of Nogales, Ariz.).

There were no ordinations during the opening service, as both seminary graduates were previously ordained together in their home congregation in Valley City, N.D. Pastor Troy Hanson has accepted a call to Skreftsrud Lutheran Church, in Beresford, S.D., and Immanuel Free Lutheran Church, in Centerville, S.D. Pastor Mikey Meester has accepted a call to St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Melvin, Ill.

THURSDAY, JUNE 12

Meester led the conference in devotions from Revelation 19 on Thursday morning. Following brief greetings and nominations to the various corporations, Pastor Micah Hjermstad (AFLC president) and Pastor Brett Boe (AFLC secretary) led the conference through ministry reports. The printed reports of the ministries of the AFLC were available in advance and can be reviewed on the AFLC website (aflc.org/conference). These annual reports give financial updates and information on current ministry projects.

Hanson shared a testimony of God's abundant provision during seminary and his internship in Williston, N.D. Several AFLC departments shared more specific information on their ministries during breakout electives on Thursday and Saturday. These smaller contexts encourage more detail and interaction.

Pastor Matthew Ballmann led the Mission Festival service on Thursday evening, and Pastor Paul Abel spoke from II Corinthians 4:5–7. He pointed to the sufficiency of Christ, saying, "You may feel unworthy or unqualified, but God shines brightly through broken vessels."

A highlight of the conference was the commissioning of lay missionaries Zach and Carey Ritland. The couple will join Pastor Matthew and Ednay Abel in Paraguay. They are members of Salem Lutheran Church in Radcliffe, Iowa, and previously served in Paraguay as missionary assistants through Journey Missions. They anticipate reaching the mission field in September and will begin learning the language and culture in earnest.

The service also included a recognition for the ministry of Pastor Bob and Margaret Lee in Alaska. The Lees began their service at the KAKN radio station in 2010 and recently returned to the lower 48.

FRIDAY, JUNE 13

Ministry reports continued Friday, along with greetings from Lutherans for Life, AFLC-India, and 2 Kingdoms Ministry. Licensed Pastor Gary Maxwell shared his testimony. All three AFLC officers were reelected with overwhelming majorities, with Hjermstad elected to a second three-year term as president and Boe and Quanbeck both to one-year terms.

Corporations met over lunch on Friday, while the rest of the conference enjoyed lectures from Hjermstad and Pastor Jeremy Larson. Hjermstad shared on "Clothed in Christ: Biblical Traits of Leadership," and Larson taught on "Discipleship Micro-groups for Congregations."

The Home Missions Corporation elected new members and heard reports from Pastor Andy Coyle (director) and on the Alaska Call Committee, Alaska Mission, Bay Broadcasting Company, and FLAPS. Diane Brubakken was introduced as the ministry's new executive assistant. Hans Tanner, Jeremy





CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM: Pastor Lowell Watt listens to a speaker during a conference session. Pastor Dan Hurner and Pastor Jason Holt chat with Adam McCarlson. Jacob McCarlson and Ezekiel and Ben Nordvik sing during the opening session of the conference. Pastor Martin Horn submitted the Clergy Divorce and Remarriage Biblical Study report. Conference committee members listen to Pastor Brett Boe give instructions on writing resolutions. Pastor Nick and Miriam Schultz prepare to vote for the AFLC president. Pastor Alex Amiot, a member of the Clergy Divorce and Remarriage Biblical Study Committee, responds to a question during an elective hour on Thursday afternoon. Clayton and Morgan Christensen read resolutions from Committee No. 5 on Evangelism and Discipleship.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Michele Smith prays with a group during the morning prayer time. Pastor Craig Johnson and members of the World Missions Board pray for Zach and Carey Ritland as they are commissioned as AFLC missionaries to Paraguay. Pastor Silvio Santos Paes, of Brazil, takes notes during the Mission Festival Service. Luther and Vardhini Dasari bring a greeting from AFLC-India. David Olson, chair of the Coordinating Committee, answers a question during the committee's elective hour. David Moeller checks the screen for nominees during a business session. Pastor Paul Abel, missionary to Brazil, spoke at the Mission Festival service.



Zeltinger, and Pastor Nicholas Schultz were elected to the Home Missions Board of Directors on two-year terms.

The World Missions Corporation heard reports from Pastor Ray Ballmann, Dr. Craig Johnson, and Pastor David Handsaker. Johnson, Pastor Jerry Nelson, and Mark Riley were all reelected to the World Missions Board of Directors, with Johnson serving again as chairman. Bill Sheldon was elected to the board on a partial term. Following discussions on term lengths and a potential advisory committee open to both men and women, the corporation received prayer requests and greetings from several AFLC missionaries.

The Schools Corporation also met on Friday, hearing updates from Dr. Wade Mobley and members of the FLBCS administration. The corporation received reports from subcommittees formed to address two questions: whether “have been ordained” should be added to the definition of clergy for positions on the Board of Trustees, and whether women could serve on the Board of Trustees. The corporation voted to not change the definition of clergy and voted to permit women to serve on the Board of Trustees. Several bylaws were also adjusted to clarify the relationship between the corporation, the Board of Trustees, and the administration. Pastor Rodney Johnson and Erling Langness were elected to the Board of Trustees.

The ARC corporation celebrated improvements to facilities, including a new roof for the gymnasium and a new serving line in the Mana Inn cafeteria. Additionally, the debt burden is now \$275,000, down from nearly \$1.5 million nine years prior. In addition to discussing staffing needs, the corporation elected new members and praised God for a calendar booked with events through Thanksgiving of 2026.

Pastor Dick Gunderson shared at the annual Pastor’s Banquet, held in nearby Scandia, Minn. Pastor Jonathan Unverzagt led the communion service on Friday evening, with Owen Parsley sharing a message from Ephesians 2. Relating the verses to the conference theme, Parsley said, “We were dead and hopeless, and Jesus breathed abundant life into us.”

SATURDAY, JUNE 14

Lay Pastor Troy McNear led the conference in devotions on Saturday morning. The conference considered resolutions on this final day of business and approved ministry subsidy requests, affirmed ministry projects, and discussed policy changes.

Much of the discussion centered around a resolution from Committee No. 1 (Coordinating Committee) regarding clergy rostering. The full text of the resolution is below:

WHEREAS the Coordinating Committee has been honoring a Conference’s request not to roster any man who has been divorced for any reason;

AND WHEREAS the Conference asked for a Biblical Study on the topic of Divorce and Remarriage as it relates to the Pastoral Office;





THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
 Pastor Dan Giles takes time to pray during a session.
 David Hartmann prays with Pastor Scott Erickson and others during morning devotions.
 Aaron Johnson counts ballots.
 Marilee Johnson listens as Pastor David Johnson speaks during a conference session.
 OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM:
 David Hein chats with a group during a break time.
 Mary Jo Jackson catches up with Pastor Wade and Michele Mobley during a break.
 Pastor Michael Brandt and Pastor Andy Coyle promote the Home Missions fun run planned for Friday morning.



AND WHEREAS the Biblical Study has made a faithful case that it may be appropriate in some instances for a previously divorced man to hold the Office of Pastor:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Coordinating Committee should carefully consider the circumstances of a divorce and the man's present character who is seeking the Pastoral Office on a case by case basis instead of automatically rejecting all men in this category.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Coordinating Committee create guidelines for rostering divorced pastors and inform the 2026 Conference of their guidelines.

After discussion, the conference voted to postpone the resolution until the 2026 conference. The above-mentioned biblical study is available in the conference booklet and will be mailed to each congregation for further prayer and study.

Committee No. 2 (Schools) presented resolutions encouraging congregations to support the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary and for the school to wisely balance the financial needs of scholarships, facilities, and debt.

Committee No. 3 (Missions) brought a resolution to open a new mission field in Chile. The conference approved the resolution and encouraged the World Missions department to work with a local pastor, Patricio Rivero Bravo, who was recently approved for the clergy roster of AFLC Brazil.

From Committee No. 4 (Parish Education and Youth), the conference floor thanked the Board of Publications and Parish Education for providing helpful resources to the congregations of the AFLC. A resolution was also passed that encouraged congregations to become familiar with online resources and educational training opportunities offered through Parish Education. The conference also resolved to encourage congregations to cooperate in the discipleship of the teens in their midst.

Finally, Committee No. 5 (Evangelism) offered several resolutions to encourage congregations to make use of materials and training resources offered by the Evangelism and Discipleship department.

Following the election of Colloquy Committee members, Hjermsstad closed the conference with devotions from John 6:11–13.

NEXT ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The 64th Annual Conference will be held June 10–13, 2026, in Fargo, N.D., hosted by St. Paul's Free Lutheran and the Eastern North Dakota District. It has been 49 years since the conference last met in Fargo, though it was the location of the first Annual Conference in 1963.

Information on registration and housing will be published as it becomes available.

Kneeland, a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, is the editor.



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THE ABUNDANT LIFE

+

By Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck

"The thief comes only to steal and
kill and destroy. I came that they may
have life and have it abundantly"

(John 10:10).




It was my privilege to speak on the conference theme of
"Abundant Life" from John 10:1–11. There Jesus declares
that abundant life is only to be found in a relationship
with him and that it is the very reason he came to earth,
"that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (v. 10).

According to Jesus, there are no other ways to find true
spiritual life here and now and eternal life in heaven than
through him. He illustrates this with a couple of different
word pictures.

First, he says that he is the "Door of the Sheepfold."
A sheepfold was a stone-walled, open-air pen with only
one entrance. When shepherds had their sheep out in a
remote pasture, at night they would herd them through the
doorway and into the sheepfold, where they would be safe
from wolves and other predators.

Since most sheepfolds would not have an actual door to
open or close but just a doorway to pass through, when the
sheep were inside for the night, the shepherd would act as a
gatekeeper, camping himself in the doorway entrance to the
sheepfold, thus preventing any sheep from going out and
any predators from easily getting in.

Then, he says that he is the "Good Shepherd." A good
shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired hand
won't do that because he doesn't care about the sheep like
the owner does. He isn't willing to risk losing his life for
mere sheep.



A good shepherd knows each sheep by name, and they know his voice. There might be several shepherds using the same sheepfold at night, but in the morning when a shepherd gets up and calls his sheep by name, they come, and he leads them out to pasture.

A good shepherd leads the sheep in and out, finding good pasture for them. They are dependent on him for their sustenance, and he comes through for them each day.

In contrast to a good shepherd, thieves and robbers have a self-serving interest in sheep, either to steal and sell them or to kill and eat them. And they are determined to get into the sheepfold another way than through the door.

I draw from this text six things about this abundant life that Jesus offers. First, we experience abundant life as we enter his fold through the door and are saved. Verse 9 says, “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved.” By describing himself as “the door to the sheepfold,” Jesus claims to be the exclusive way of entrance into the Kingdom of God, and thus to being saved. Jesus saves us from the control and the consequences of our sin. Because of our sin and rebellion against our creator, we lack abundant life on this earth and are heading for eternity in hell. But because Jesus willingly laid down his life for us and then took it up again, all who believe that his death and resurrection were for them may find full forgiveness of sin and entrance into his eternal Kingdom.

Second, we experience abundant life as we rely on his provision for our needs. Verse 9 continues, “... and will go in and out and find pasture.” As a shepherd leads his flock to good pasture, thereby daily providing physical sustenance for the sheep, so Jesus wants us to learn to rely on him for abundant provision of our daily needs.

Third, we experience abundant life as we live in a daily personal relationship with him. “... the sheep follow him because they know his voice” (v. 4). Jesus knows each of his followers by name, and they know his voice. Jesus has sent his Holy Spirit to draw believers into a daily personal relationship with him. He speaks to our hearts through his

written Word, and we can freely talk with him in prayer. And as we do so, he calms our hearts even in the midst of difficult trials.

Fourth, we experience abundant life as we are protected from those who would do us harm. Jesus said that “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (v. 10). The ultimate thief or robber, the devil, is continually throwing temptations our way, working in cahoots with the world and our own flesh to entice us away from a personal walk with God. But our Good Shepherd guards and protects us through Word and sacrament, where he teaches us truth so that we will be on guard against Satan’s lies.

Fifth, we experience abundant life as we live in community with fellow believers. Sheep are part of a flock! Yes, we have individual relationships with the Good Shepherd, and he goes after the one who strays away. But he does so to bring him back to the flock. Christianity is never meant to be lived in isolation. Jesus blesses our lives richly through the fellowship of believers gathering for corporate worship to hear God’s Word preached and gathering in smaller settings where we encourage each other through Christian fellowship.

Last, we experience abundant life as we help others come to hear his voice. “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd” (v. 16). The abundant life that we experience in relationship with Jesus is too good to keep to ourselves. The Good Shepherd is concerned for others who are not yet a part of the flock, and so we befriend them and we invite them with hopes that they, too, will hear God’s Word speaking to their hearts and calling them into a personal relationship with him.

Quanbeck, the vice president of the AFLC, serves Maranatha Free Lutheran, Glyndon, Minn. Artwork: “Green Wheat Fields, Auvers,” by Vincent van Gogh, 1890, National Gallery of Art.

ELECTION RESULTS

20
25

20
25



2026 COMMITTEES

One-year terms, serving at the Annual Conference, June 10–13, 2026, in Fargo, N.D.

Committee 1 • Administration

Phil Mundfrom, Maple Grove, Minn.
Pastor Barry Nelson, Tripp, S.D.
Hannah Peterson, Glenfield, N.D.
Pastor Greg Schram, Loveland, Colo.
Rachel Woodworth, Newark, Ill.

Committee 2 • Schools

Adam Dalager, Fargo, N.D.
Pastor Scott Erickson, Dickinson, N.D.
Matt Haugstad, Moorhead, Minn.
Pastor John Kiehl, Eugene, Ore.
Seth Skogerboe, Santa Fe, N.M.

Committee 3 • Missions

Pastor Steve Berntson, Jamestown, N.D.
Pastor Charles Knapp, Mason, Wis.
Flint McLoughlin, Berthold, N.D.
Madison Trost, Hastings, Minn.
Ethan Zeltinger, Fargo, N.D.

Committee 4 • Pub., Parish Ed. & Youth

Nikki Hanson, Fergus Falls, Minn.
Vicki Johnson, Larimore, N.D.
Ron Jorgenson, Lidgerwood, N.D.
Pastor Scott Pierson, Golden Valley, N.D.
Miriam Schultz, Chamberlain, S.D.

Committee 5 • Evangelism & Benefits

Pastor John Amundson, New Leipzig, N.D.
Shelby Greven, Plymouth, Minn.
Becca Mundfrom, Wayzata, Minn.
Pastor Tom Reagan, Wahpeton, N.D.
Jacob Zacha, Fergus Falls, Minn.

OFFICERS

President

Three-year term
Pastor Micah Hjermstad,
Plymouth, Minn.

Vice President

One-year term
Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck,
Moorhead, Minn.

Secretary

One-year term
Pastor Brett Boe, Elk River,
Minn.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

One-year terms

Central Tri State

Pastor Larry Grove, Kenyon, Minn.

Eastern

Jodie Riley, Bethel Park, Pa.

Eastern North Dakota

Caleb Holt, Kindred, N.D.

Illinois

Jeff Jacobi, Wheatland, Iowa

Lake Superior

Pastor David Handsaker, Cloquet, Minn.

Minneapolis

Shelby Greven, Plymouth, Minn.

Nebraska/Kansas/Colorado

Pastor Ken Hart, Fairbury, Neb.

North Central Minnesota

Wonell Miller, Fosston, Minn.

Northern Michigan

Scott Rady, Ontonagon, Mich.

Northwestern Minnesota

Emory Flaten, Newfolden, Minn.

Pacific Northwest

Lavonne West, Columbia Falls, Mont.

South Central

Michael Jackson, Stover, Mo.

South Dakota

Jim Keller, Webster, S.D.

Southwestern

Christie Friestad, Camarillo, Calif.

West Central Minnesota

Tom Caouette, Nisswa, Minn.

Western ND/Eastern Montana

Pastor Gideon Johnson, Killdeer, N.D.



BOARDS, COMMITTEES, ETC.

Colloquy *

- Five-year term: Pastor Alex Amiot, Thief River Falls, Minn.
- Four-year term: Pastor Nick Schultz, Chamberlain, S.D.
- Three-year term: Pastor Tim Johnson, Pipestone, Minn.
- Two-year term: Pastor James R. Johnson, Ontonagon, Mich.
- One-year term: Pastor Sam Wellumson, East Grand Forks, Minn.

Association Retreat Center

- Layman, five-year term
Brian Rice, White Earth, N.D.

Bay Broadcasting

- Pastor, three-year term
Pastor Joe Ocker, Frost, Minn.
- Layman, three-year term
Brad Tollerson, Fergus Falls, Minn.

Benefits Board +

- Pastor, five-year term
Pastor Tim Johnson, Pipestone, Minn.

Budget Analysis Committee

- Layman, three-year term
Daniel Aichele, Plymouth, Minn.
- Layman, three-year term
Samantha Ritter, St. Bonifacius, Minn.

Coordinating Committee +

- Layman, five-year term
Ivar Berge, Fargo, N.D.

Evangelism & Discipleship +

- Pastor, five-year term
Pastor Scott Stroud, Lake Stevens, Wash.

FLAPS Board

- Layman, five-year term
Brian Lee, Ray, N.D.

* A resolution from the 2024 conference increased terms for Colloquy Committee members from one to five years.
+ Nominations pending Coordinating Committee election.

Home Missions Board of Directors

- Layman, two-year term
Hans Tanner, Plymouth, Minn.
- Layman, two-year term
Jeremy Zeltinger, Valley City, N.D.
- Pastor, two-year term
Pastor Nick Schultz, Chamberlain, S.D.

Parish Education +

- Layman, five-year term
Leeanna Lunn, Upsala, Minn.

Schools Board of Trustees

- Pastor, five-year term
Pastor Rodney Johnson, Buffalo, Minn.
- Layman, four-year term
Erling Langness, Ishpeming, Mich.

World Missions Board of Directors

- Pastor, two-year term
Pastor Craig Johnson, Lake Stevens, Wash.
- Pastor, two-year term
Pastor Jerry Nelson, LaCrosse, Wis.
- Layman, two-year term
Mark Riley, Bethel Park, Pa.
- Layman, one-year term
Bill Sheldon, Ray, N.D.

Youth Board +

- Pastor, five-year term
Pastor Ryan Tonneson, Cokato, Minn.

CORPORATIONS Five-year terms

ARC Corporation

Roger Benson, Brooklyn Center, Minn.
Ernie Hilbert, Wheatland, Iowa
Justin Hunt, Rapid City, S.D.
Madi Johnson, Plymouth, Minn.
Nancy Langness, Ishpeming, Mich.
Jennifer Niemela, Greenbush, Minn.
Denis Parsley, Pipestone, Minn.
Robyn Pelehos, Welch, Minn.
Roger Quanbeck, Hallock, Minn.
Brian Rice, White Earth, N.D.

Home Mission Corporation

Darryl Askvig, Kalispell, Mont.
Adam Erickson, Grafton, N.D.
Gene Finstrom, Buxton, N.D.
Jack Jordan, Honolulu, Ha.
Todd Marschner, Dickinson, N.D.
Pastor Kris Nyman, Grand Junction, Colo.
Pastor Joe Ocker, Frost, Minn.
Pastor Nick Schultz, Chamberlain, S.D.
Brad Tollerson, Fergus Falls, Minn.
Allie Westerbur, Grafton, N.D.

World Mission Corporation

Pastor John Amundson, New Leipzig, N.D.
Pastor Ray Ballmann, Kopperl, Texas
Andrew Carlson, Minneapolis
Dr. Peter Dyrud, Plymouth, Minn.
Terry Korhonen, Fargo, N.D.
Dr. Lyle Mattson, Greenbush, Minn.
Pastor Ken Moland, Graham, N.C.
Brent Peterson, Valley City, N.D.
Wanita Sletten, Duluth, Minn.
Pastor Jeff Swanson, Axtell, Kan.

Schools Corporation

Pastor Alan Arneson, Amery, Wis.
Pastor Brett Boe, Elk River, Minn.
Tami Demo, St. Michael, Minn.
Loiell Dyrud, Thief River Falls, Minn.
Gary Erickson, Fergus Falls, Minn.
Pastor Kirk Flaa, Sioux Falls, S.D.
Aaron Johnson, Maple Grove, Minn.
Pastor Mike McCarlson, Webster, S.D.
Mark Quanbeck, McVile, N.D.
Walter Rolf, Lisbon, N.D.

Two-year terms
Adam Erickson, Grafton, N.D.
Erik Lucht, Fargo, N.D.

The state of the College & Seminary.

BY DR. WADE MOBLEY

A summary of President Mobley's report to the 63rd AFLC Annual Conference. Read the FLBCS reports in full at flbc.edu/annual-conference-report-2025/.



FLBC student Haley Hornish's map project (*The Wilderness Journey*) on display at her church, Living Word Free Lutheran, Eagan, Minn.

For more than 60 years, FLBCS has been committed to establishing students in the eternal and inerrant Word of God for a life of faith in Jesus Christ and faithful service in his Kingdom.

The seminary continues to train approximately 20 future pastors annually, emphasizing in-person discipleship, original biblical languages, and verse-by-verse Scripture study. The Bible college offers a two-year, on-campus program focused on intensive discipleship and practical ministry training. This year marked the first graduates of the new Bachelor of Arts in Bible and Ministry, with plans to expand into youth, missions, and worship ministry tracks.

Students are thriving academically and spiritually, with increased engagement and joy in learning. The college's unique focus on Bible and ministry—rather than a broad array of majors—makes it the largest institution of its kind, preparing students to be faithful citizens of both God's Kingdom and the world.

Despite being a “best-kept secret,” FLBCS is working to increase visibility, especially in the Twin Cities area, and is building partnerships to reach more students. The school remains committed to affordability, charging significantly less than the actual cost of education thanks to generous donor support. Financial health has improved, and more students are paying in full or needing less financial aid.

FLBCS operates without state or federal funding, relying on an annual fund to support operations. Strategic planning is ongoing, with a focus on financial stability, student recruitment, and campus development—including potential debt reduction for the Student Life Center.

FLBCS continues to be a place where young people are grounded in God's Word and equipped to serve wherever he leads.

Upcoming Events.

- **Move-in Day:** Aug. 25
- **UpClose Preview:** Oct. 16–17
- **Alumni Tournament:** Oct. 17–18
- **Confirmation Refresh:** Nov. 21–22
- **Christmas at FLBCS:** Dec. 5–7
- **Seminary Symposium:** Jan. 14–15

Info and registration can be found on our website:

- flbc.edu/events

Course Spotlight: History & Geography of the Biblical World

- **Instructor: Dr. Brent Olson**



This course offers FLBC freshmen a foundational framework for further study of the Bible. Students learn to identify significant eras, events, regions, and nations of the biblical world. One notable assignment asks students to create a map illustrating the geographical background of their favorite Old Testament story. The map must include a compass, scale, legend, and at least 25 geographical

features relevant to the chosen story. For example, if a student chooses David and Goliath, they would need to depict the geographical features that aid in understanding that narrative (Valley of Elah, Gath, Philistia, etc.). This course helps students connect with the texts and prepares them to defend the historicity of Scripture in the public square.



My time in seminary.

An interview with Micah Moan (pictured at right), class of 2026. The transcript is edited for brevity. Listen to the full interview on YouTube (@flbcs).

- **How did you come to the decision to attend seminary?**

I'd say a lot of people poured into my life ... pastors, youth leaders, [and] my parents. In between my two years of Bible college, God really worked in my heart over that summer [on a VBS team] to have a heart for people to know Jesus. Seminary seemed like one of the best opportunities to learn more and to be better equipped. Even when I started, I wasn't entirely sure I wanted to be a pastor, but God has continued to confirm that call.

- **What does a typical day look like?**

Typically classes are Monday through Friday in the mornings. We have devotions at 7:40 and classes from about 8 to noon. In the afternoons, I work ... I deliver paint, and it's a good gig while I'm in seminary. Others have similar part-time jobs or will help out at churches with pulpit fill. Evenings are largely for studying, which can be a commitment, especially for classmates with families, but I found it to be a very rewarding thing.

- **What are the differences between Bible college and seminary programs?**

Bible College provided a really good foundation. However, in seminary you have a specific focus on pastoral ministry. We're taking these classes thinking, "Okay, how do we apply this pastorally? ... How can I preach well?" I found learning the original Greek and Hebrew languages to be challenging, but it's probably one of the things that is most rewarding because you start to appreciate the depth of God's Word.

- **What have you learned about the responsibilities of a pastor?**

I would just highlight some of the terms that we see in Scripture ... overseer, servant, shepherd, teacher. Ephesians 4:11–12 says we are not to be the only one just doing the work of ministry ... but part of the call as a pastor is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry.

- **What is the value of in-person learning?**

We just had our senior banquet, and one of the guys said, "I was surprised by how well I've been pastored." That stuck out to me because obviously they're teachers, and they're not in the pastoral office right now, but the intentionality, the care, and the willingness to sit down and chat and get coffee. He felt that, and I think we all have felt that from our professors.

- **What are your hopes for your internship year?**

I'm really excited to just go out and apply. I'm excited to learn more about what I don't know. There are ups and downs throughout seminary. I'm sure there are going to be ups and downs with [an] internship. But I'm looking forward to being in a congregation and trusting God to work through the Word.



Annual Campaign Update.

The first ever Annual Fund Campaign for FLBCS has reached 100 percent of the targeted \$1.3M for the 2024–2025 fiscal year. FLBCS praises God for these gifts. The Annual Fund includes all gifts that are not otherwise directed (for example, to debt reduction on the Student Life Center). Annual Fund gifts fund the Conqueror Grant, budgeted scholarships, music, athletics, and many other areas of emphasis.

Gifts to the Annual Fund reduce the cost of attendance at FLBCS dramatically. As FLBCS receives no federal or state financial aid, many students would find attending Bible college or seminary outside their financial ability. The 2025–2026 Annual Fund has a target of \$1.5M.

- Learn more at: flbc.edu/give.



Praying for our youth.

BY ADAM MCCARLSON



This past June, AFLC Youth Ministries provided a bookmark to those in attendance at the AFLC Annual Conference. This bookmark is part of our efforts to provide resources to AFLC congregations to help them care for the spiritual lives of the teens in their congregation. The bookmark provides loving and caring adults with a reminder and prompts to pray for teens. While these bookmarks could be helpful for the pastors, youth workers, or volunteers who help with Wednesday night youth group or plan youth events for teens, the intended recipients are the adult members of congregations. Every adult in a congregation plays a vital role in shaping and caring for teenagers as valued members of the whole body of Christ. This bookmark opens the door for these adults to have spiritual conversations with teens and to invite teens to share about the needs and worries in their everyday lives.

The first prompt is aimed at assurance of salvation for teens. Many teens (and adults!) struggle to have certainty of their spiritual standing before the Lord. This prompt invites adults to pray that teens would not find their identity in the things they do or what other people think of them, but that they would find confidence in the identity given to them in Christ.

The second prompt is focused on a teen's family. This prompt invites adults to lift up parents or guardians to the Lord as they strive to cultivate relationships with their teens that are open and that point to Jesus. Pray that families would be intentional about discipling teens to trust and follow Jesus.

The third prompt is for the congregation itself. Teens are important members of the body of Christ. When we read in Ephesians 4 about the saints' work to "build up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God" (vv. 12–13), congregations should have eyes to see the teens in their congregation as a necessary part of their unity in the body of Christ. Pray that teens would see how they can serve and find belonging amidst the intergenerational congregation.

The fourth prompt is for a teen's community. Whether it's school, sports, music, part-time work, drama club, volunteer opportunities, or simply being a good neighbor, this prompt invites adults to help teens engage in their community with intentionality. Pray that teens would resist any temptations that come their way and live out their vocations as employees, friends, classmates, students, and teammates, to love and serve their neighbor, and to give a reason for the hope they have in Christ.

The last prompt is for a teen's future. The disciple-making process doesn't end when a teen graduates out of your youth ministry program. We pray that the intentional time a family and congregation take to teach and build up teens in God's Word will be fruitful for the rest of their lives. We pray that teens will have lifelong faith in Christ wherever they find themselves in the future.

Bookmark prayer tool.

If you'd like copies of these bookmarks mailed to your congregation so you can give them to the adults in your men's Bible study, adult Sunday school class, or local WMF chapter, reach out to Adam in the AFLC Youth Ministries department.

- adamccarlson@afc.org

McCarlson, who is serving his seminary internship at Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis, is the director of AFLC Youth Ministries.

A rekindled focus on discipling.

BY PASTOR RANDY NELSON

The AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship (AED) Department exists to encourage, equip, and assist our congregations in the biblical call to make and equip disciples who then make and equip other disciples. This year we have expanded our reach and sharpened our focus on providing a variety of resources for churches to carry out this mission more effectively in today's cultural context.

One of our key initiatives is Rekindle the Fire, an annual equipping event held just prior to the AFLC Annual Conference. This free gathering is open to both pastors and laity and is designed to refresh and refocus our commitment to evangelism and relational disciple-making. Through Scripture-centered teaching, real-life testimonies, and interactive sessions, attendees are encouraged and equipped to share Christ with clarity and compassion in their local communities.

The focus of this year's event came from Acts 1:8 and Jesus' call to "Be My Witness." We had three teaching sessions. The first was presented by Pastor Tom Parrish on "Living Out the Call to Be a Witness." The second session was shared by Pastor Eric Westlake on "Equipping and Empowering Members to be Witnesses," and the third session was a demonstration by missionary Michael Rokenbrodt on using the oral discipleship method to train laity for ministry in the local congregation. All three of these sessions are available to watch on our website.

New in-house resources

We've also developed and updated several key resources to support discipleship and outreach in local congregations:

- *Discipleship Manual*: A revised, AFLC-specific manual that reflects our unique Free Lutheran and biblically rooted perspective on evangelism, discipleship, and congregation life.
- *Preparing to Share Your Faith*: An accessible evangelism resource revised for our current cultural context that encourages believers to engage in meaningful spiritual conversations with those around them.
- *Baptism is Not Magic*: A clear, concise resource explaining the Lutheran understanding of baptism. It is intended for parents, sponsors, and those preparing for baptism, offering both theological clarity and practical encouragement.

Online ministry tools

Our digital presence has become a vital part of our equipping strategy. Key ongoing efforts include:

- *Living as a Disciple* podcast: Now in its second season, you will hear interviews with believers from a wide range of backgrounds who reflect on what it means to follow Jesus in everyday life.
- *Monthly email newsletter*: Regular updates offering encouragement, ministry stories, and practical tools for local church leaders and members.
- *Monthly online prayer meeting*: A virtual gathering where participants across the AFLC unite to pray specifically for evangelism and discipleship in our churches and communities.
- *Social media and YouTube channel*: These platforms provide access to current AED events, ministry tools, workshop recordings, interviews, and training clips that help equip believers across the AFLC.



How to pray for AED.

Please join us in praying ...

- That God would stir boldness and love among AFLC believers to share the gospel.
- For continued wisdom as we develop and distribute new resources.
- That hearts would be open to the gospel through the ministry of our local churches.

Resources are available on our website:

- aflc.org/evangelism

Email Pastor Nelson at:

- randy.nelson@aflc.org

Nelson is the director of AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship.

More AFLC Annual Conference photos



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Owen Parsley was the speaker during the layman's service on Friday evening. FLBC summer teams led a vacation Bible school program for kids. Pastor Brett Boe gave instructions prior to the conference committee meetings. Women attended the WMF Day. Luke Dryburgh served on Committee No. 4.



Storm damages Bethany Bible Camp

In the early morning hours of Saturday, June 21, a storm rolled through the Bemidji, Minn., area. It was the last night of Bethany Bible Camp's middle school camp, grades 6–8. At about 1:30 a.m., through the quick work of staff listening to God's moving, our leaders knocked on the doors of the cabins, and all the students were moved to the bathhouses that also serve as a storm shelter.

As the storm came through, approximately 32 trees were toppled. There were trees down on just about every building, and a girl's cabin, Sara, sustained the largest blow, as the building was slightly twisted and heavily damaged due to the direct hit of a tree. The driveway had many trees down over it, which made it impassable; it took several hours to clear the debris.

Through the protection of the Lord, all our students and staff were safe. There were no injuries, and all were in the hand of the Lord. Thank you, Jesus!

That morning was pickup day for the middle school camp, and many campers and parents made a trek through the woods to get to their vehicles. Senior high camp, hosting grades 9–12, which was supposed to start that day, was canceled until further analysis could be made of the damage to the buildings. (A day later, leaders at AFLC Wilderness Bible Camp, Lake Park, Minn., graciously

volunteered their facilities to host the senior camp.)

Later that day, about 50 volunteers with four skid steer loaders and flatbed trailers showed up to begin cleaning up the trees. By Sunday, what had looked like a disaster zone was cleared so that leadership could take a closer look at the damage. The Sara cabin was indeed destroyed, and there were holes in the roof of the cafeteria/kitchen and the chapel and other buildings sustained damage to the eaves of the roofs.

A week later, on June 28, another workday was scheduled, and the Sara cabin was knocked down, loaded on a trailer, and hauled out. Thanks to many volunteers, the upended trees were dug out and cleaned up, and there was much raking, splitting of wood, and moving of brush to piles.

As of right now, the summer schedule of events is continuing to go on, with the camp being in very good working shape for our guests. As a board, we are waiting for the insurance report to be able to make decisions for the camp and seek God's vision. I always believe that God replaces what was taken with something better than what we had; we are excited to see his provision and plan.

—Don Edlund, Bethany Bible Camp Board president



Submitted photos show damage to Bethany Bible Camp's property from a storm on June 21, including Sara cabin (top right and above). No students or staff were injured. Volunteer crews helped to clean up the damage on June 21 and 28.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Josh Johnson, Robbinsdale, Minn., will serve a year-long seminary internship at Maranatha Free Lutheran, Glyndon, Minn., under Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck, beginning on February 1, 2026. Johnson completed his three years of seminary classes in 2021 before taking a role as the director of communications for the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary.

Pastor Craig Benson has resigned from St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Jewell, Iowa, and Salem Lutheran Church, Radcliffe, Iowa, effective Sept. 8.

Pastor Bob Lee, who serves the Alaska Mission as station manager of KAKN Radio, in Naknek, Alaska, will retire this fall.

**Karla Dynneson Kennedy**

Karla Dynneson Kennedy, 76, of Nogales, Ariz., died June 19, 2025, at home. Born July 7, 1948, she was the daughter of Pastor Lawrence and Gola Dynneson. She married Ted Kennedy on Aug. 30, 1969. He preceded her in death on May 11.

Karla grew up in Nogales, where her father served Triumph Evangelical Lutheran. She graduated from Nogales High School in 1966, where she was a member of the National Honor Society. She was also a member of the musical group The Misfits. She attended the University of Arizona. Following their marriage, they lived in Los Angeles and then Minneapolis while he attended the Free Lutheran Seminary. Upon his graduation in 1979, they returned to Nogales, where he took a call at Triumph Evangelical Lutheran, serving the congregation for 40 years.

Surviving are two sons, David (Maria) Kennedy, Nogales, and Matthew Kennedy, Nogales; and three sisters, Miriam Ramse, Pauline Eardensohn, and Lois Haag.

The service was held June 28 at Triumph Evangelical Lutheran, Nogales. Burial was in Nogales Cemetery.

Pastor's conference, all boards

The **AFLC Pastor's Conference** will be held Oct. 7–9 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis. The theme of the conference will be "The Diligent Leader," from Romans 12:6, 8: "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly ... he who leads, with diligence." Members of boards and committees of AFLC ministries will meet Oct. 6–7 for the **All Boards Conference** on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, Plymouth, Minn.

**Heidi Wilfer**

Heidi Wilfer, 71, of Fountain Hills, Ariz., died June 14 in Fountain Hills. Born Nov. 6, 1953, in St. Paul, Minn., she was the daughter of Lynn and Jane (Rowe) Gieseke. She married Clayton Wilfer on March 9, 1991.

She graduated from Murray High School, St. Paul, and from William Mitchell College of Law, St. Paul. She also earned a medical secretary certificate from St. Paul College and degrees in both paralegal studies and aging studies/elderly advocacy from the University of Minnesota. She worked as an office manager, legal assistant, and legal secretary for several firms before working as a volunteer patient and family advocate at St. John's Hospital, Maplewood, Minn. She then worked as an administrative assistant at the Minnesota Council of Churches and Xcel Energy. They moved to Arizona, where her husband served JOY Church in Fountain Hills. She founded Sisters of JOY at JOY Church.

Surviving are her husband, Pastor Clayton Wilfer; one daughter, Laura Wilfer; two sisters, Judy Lanning and Carol Gieseke; and one brother, Sam Gieseke.

The service was held June 20 at JOY Church, Fountain Hills, Ariz., with Pastor Tom Parrish officiating.

JUNE MEMORIALS

AED

Arthur Arneson

FLBCS

Arthur Arneson

Gloria Lee

Dennis Strand

Larry Moan

Ruth Claus

Lutheran**Ambassador**

Arthur Arneson

Gloria Lee

Mary Kjersten

Home Missions

Tom Saurer

Pastor Jan Horne

Parish Education

Gloria Lee

Colleen Peterson

WMF

Gloria Lee

Delores Ames

Joyce Benson

Helen Nelson

Vicki Rydberg Geise

World Missions

Arthur Arneson

Helen Knapp

Roger Tollefson

... in honor of

Lutheran**Ambassador**

Pastor Raynard

Huglen

Home Missions

Raul & Mary Jo

Rodriguez

World Missions

Pastor David

Handsaker

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-April 30, 2025

FUND	REC'D IN JUNE	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% OF SUBSIDY	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$25,847	\$248,840	56	\$225,089
Evangelism	19,177	68,237	49	67,813
Youth Ministries	8,566	79,694	51	86,763
Parish Education	15,950	82,233	45	106,397
FLBCS	37,495	325,841	42	339,517
Home Missions	17,668	152,734	36	166,475
World Missions	33,268	218,872	44	194,096
Personal Support	53,075	328,289	42	441,693
TOTALS	\$211,046	\$1,504,739	44	\$1,627,843

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



Truly satisfied.

BY PASTOR DAVID HANDSAKER

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6).

First impressions and questions for study:

Why did Jesus use the words *hunger* and *thirst* to describe this desire rather than *longing* or some other thought-based word? Can this righteousness be defined? In what ways will this person be satisfied? How are *blessed* and *satisfied* linked/related in the text?

Deeper Study:

A. Hunger and thirst suggest something more basic than wants or desires. Since hunger/thirst arises uncontrollably from my body's needs, does this desire for righteousness do the same? Yes, my desire for righteousness is uncontrollable because righteousness is essential to my life just as food is to my physical life. This need itself is currently a blessing to me according to the text. It is God's gift to me that I hunger for righteousness.

B. The text uses the “standard” word for righteousness (δικαιοσύνη). But which righteousness is described: before God, in conduct, or in the world around me?

- Righteousness before God fits best with the idea of hungering/thirsting because righteousness from God (justification) is what begins/sustains my spiritual life. This would mean the blessing most in view would be new/eternal life.
Scriptural basis: Titus 3:5–7
- Righteousness in my own conduct also fits because every believer deeply desires to not sin. The active righteousness of works also fits a little more with Matthew's emphasis.
Scriptural Basis: Romans 7:15ff
- Righteousness in the world also fits the text. All people desire to see justice done in this world, even if only when they are the

ones wronged. Believers feel this desire more deeply because this world unjustly hates us, just like it hated our Savior.
Scriptural Basis: Revelation 6:9–11

It seems best to consider all of the above in our definition. Each option fits the text, the context, and the full testimony of Scripture. When God gives righteousness, he gives it abundantly!

C. The term *satisfied* carries the idea of a need completely met. This is not a snack to tide me over. The verb is future tense and passive. The future tense is a small argument against seeing this as the righteousness of justification because justification is always fully given. But because such satisfaction is not fully realized in this life, the future tense does not exclude justification in this verse. There is massive comfort in knowing that every desire for righteousness will be fully met one day. There is also terror for those outside of Christ. The passive tense points clearly to God as the actor who enacts this righteousness. This fits well with all three views of righteousness, as each is ultimately God's work.

D. God's blessings are to fully bring righteousness to this world. Even though this will mean judgment for many, for the believer this is all good news. What a joy to stand in such a state that full judgment of all unrighteousness leaves me untouched and in possession of eternal life. Blessed in Jesus Christ, indeed.

Life Application:

My desires for righteousness are an essential part of spiritual life, and God will fully meet them one day to my benefit.

Handsaker serves St. Paul's Lutheran, Cloquet, Minn.

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

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

SOMETHING TO SHARE

Don't forget, Jesus is really alive.

BY RENAH THOMPSON

Perfect love casts out fear. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (See I John 4:18.)

My brother and his family visited last week. He and I sat up late, meandering through current events and theology and theory in our usual attempt to solve the problems of the world. We came (also as usual) to the only possible conclusion: the world is broken beyond all hope of human repair. The list of “things to fear” is endless, from global to individual, from temporary to epochal. Add your own entries to the list. Maybe someone you love is very sick, maybe WWII frightens you so much you can't think about its possible reality, maybe you picture the death of your children every single time they leave the house. It's all fodder for the monster.

I've been realizing that fear is a corrosive force in relationships. It leads to attempts to control, manipulate, and force. It leads to lies and hiding and works in concert with shame to keep us disconnected from others and from God. And that's just the relational cost. What about when fear colors our entire view of the world? This happens so easily for me. The tense cadences of anxiety tighten my voice and my body, and gradually the idea of trusting God seems laughable at best. I hunker down, hoping only to sneak through life without a mortal wound.

Isn't it true that what we really fear, hidden inside every other fear, is death? The emotional death of being hurt by someone we love, the end of hope in this or that circumstance, or actual physical death. Frail, naked, shivering creatures that we are, how can we do

anything but tremble? Profoundly vulnerable, we are prey to both the systems of evil and the everyday fallenness of our own lives. Death surrounds us.

So anyway, my brother and I were sitting there, talking in circles, chewing on sorrow. It was around midnight, and both of us were feeling more than a little hopeless when I suddenly realized we had forgotten this single essential truth, the truth that illuminates everything:

We are living in a world where the resurrection has already happened.

This is the unbearably beautiful promise, made real by the resurrection: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new! Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true” (Revelation 21:4–5).

In our profound vulnerability, God has met us. He opened himself to the terrifying possibilities of the fallen world and allowed himself to be wounded and killed. And then, in the most powerful picture of trinitarian love imaginable, he conquered death. Jesus—made perfect in love—has gone before us in death and in life. Death is swallowed up by life, and he is bringing his kingdom, making everything new. Do not be afraid.

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