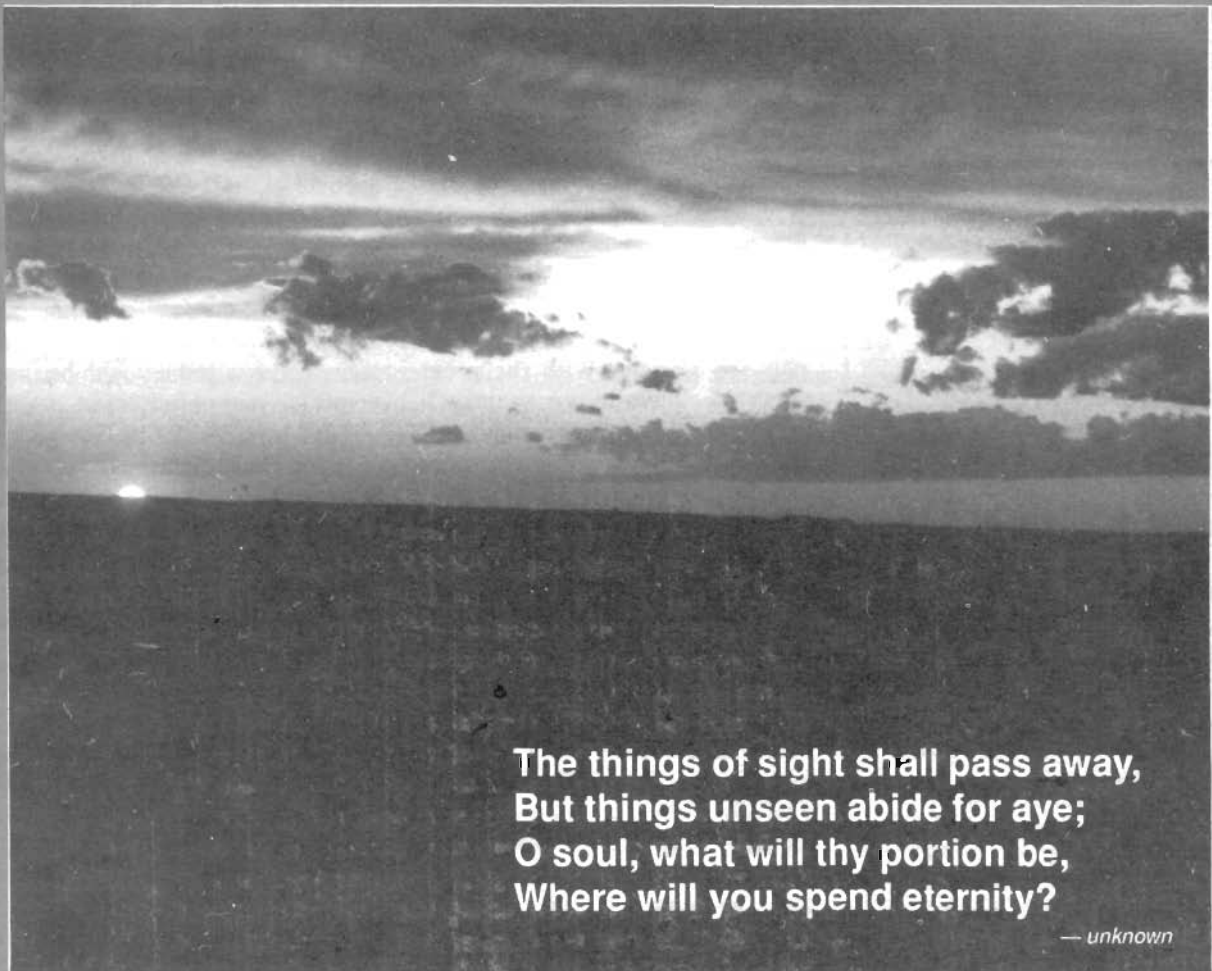


THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

January 7, 1992



The things of sight shall pass away,
But things unseen abide for aye;
O soul, what will thy portion be,
Where will you spend eternity?

— unknown

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

January 7, 1992 • Vol. 30, No. 1

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

is published biweekly (except for the second issue of July and the second issue of August) by the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441.

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COVER PHOTO

by Solveig Hjermstad

Subscriptions: \$12.00 per year.

Write to:

The Lutheran Ambassador
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

Send all communications concerning this magazine to: Solveig Hjermstad, Assistant to the Editor, Box 423, Faith, South Dakota 57626. Phone (605) 967-2381. Fax (605) 967-2382.

USPS 588-620 ISSN 0746-3413

Second-class postage paid at Minneapolis, Minnesota, and additional mailing office.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *The Lutheran Ambassador*, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441.

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Light on the Way

The Old Becomes New

In January of 1989, my wife and I bought the first new car of our married life. It was a big decision and when I brought it home to Williston from Minneapolis, it captured the whole family's attention for quite a time. What wonderful intentions we had to keep that car like new for us as long as we owned it.

It sits outside now as I write and looks, to any who see it, anything but new. With four young children, heavy vehicle use and a busy schedule, we are unable to spend the time necessary to remain faithful to our intentions. Certainly the term "new" no longer applies to our car. Now it is only practical transportation and a necessary expense.

In Ecclesiastes 1:9 we read, "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun." Everything on this earth gets old and is replaced by something new which gets old and is replaced. New things under the sun for a while give great pleasure but they all get tiresome and eventually the process of new to old gets wearisome. With the great wealth we have in our country, a great many people have grown apathetic with life and have given up on ever finding happiness again.

Unfortunately this apathy has crept into the church as well. Somehow what used to be new and fresh has become, to many, old and routine. Christianity seems not to deliver what it promised at one time. Our once precious faith can become simply another part of this world that grows old with time along with everything else.

How hard it is to understand com-

mands from God's Word then that say things like rejoice always (Philippians 4:4) or give thanks in all things (I Thessalonians 5:18). How foreign the praise Psalms and the songs of praise in Revelation can sound when our faith has "grown old." With everything else we know of in this world growing old and unfulfilling, we can so easily accept that this is all we can expect from Christianity.

But we read in God's Word, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:4). Notice its not **have** a new life that gets old like all other things, but **live** a new life like it is always new and never gets old. There is, nor can there be a greater promise than this!

How is it that our faith can seem to become stale then? Basically, our faith takes the wrong place in our lives. We look to Christianity or church to be the thing to fulfill our lives making our fulfillment the central objective. "I" becomes the center of my universe and my faith becomes simply a means of fulfillment.

Jesus says, "Seek first God's Kingdom and God's righteousness and all these things will be added ..." (Matthew 6:33). May we spend some time for the next eleven issues in something very old, Luther's Small Catechism, so that God may make our faith new again? Lord, let it be so.

—by Rev. Jon Wellumson

Martin Luther once said, "I would not give one moment of heaven for all the joy and riches of the world, even if it lasted for thousands and thousands of years."

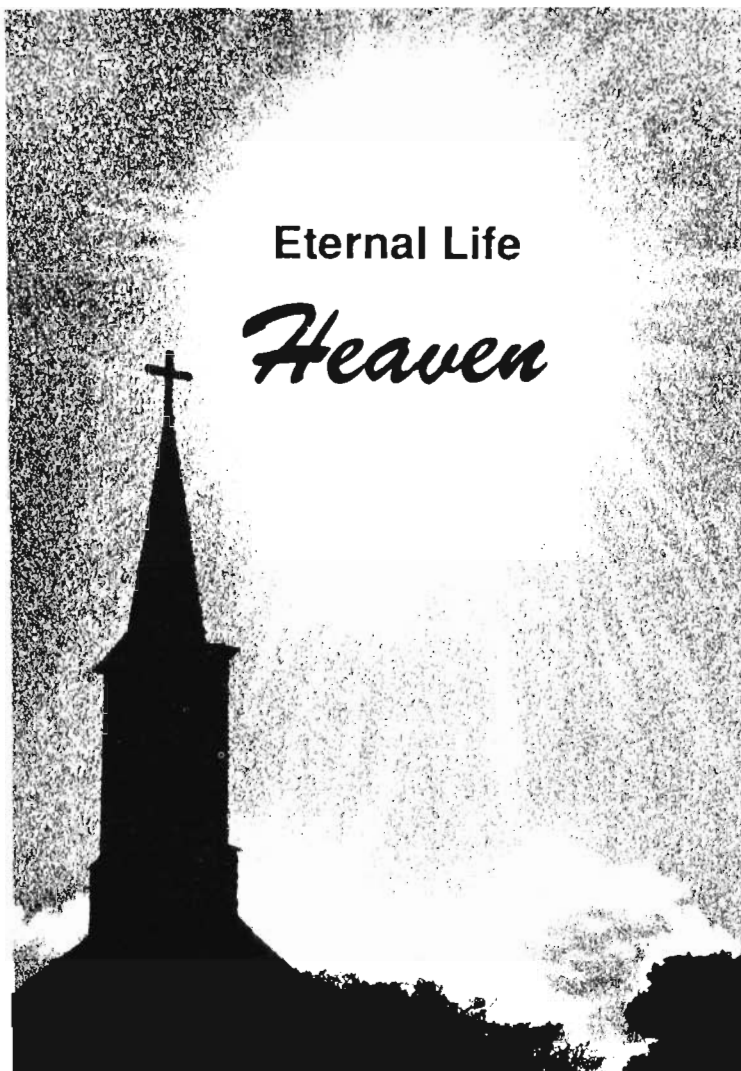
Was Luther overstating it a bit? He said he wouldn't trade **one moment** of heaven for thousands of years of joy and riches on earth. Heaven can't be **that** great — can it?

Where There is Perfection

"Perfect" is the way the Bible describes heaven. Scripture reveals that those entering heaven will be "transformed ... into conformity with the body of His glory" (Philippians 3:21). The Christian's body in eternal life will be like the body of our glorified Savior, Jesus Christ. The Bible points out that our bodies were once "perishable, weak, and dishonorable" because of sin. But part of the blessing of heaven is that God will give us bodies that are "imperishable, powerful, and glorified" (I Corinthians 15:42, 43). These bodies that are free from sin are bodies that are perfect. They are bodies that will not have pain (Revelation 21:4), they will not die (Luke 20:36), and they will have no sorrow (Revelation 7:17). Let us note a great blessing of heaven, namely the blessing of a perfect body.

I Corinthians 15:49 states that "just as we have born the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." This heavenly image includes the blessing of a perfect spirit. A spirit that is at peace (Luke 16:25), that has joy (Luke 15:7), and is partaking of glory (Romans 8:17, 18). Truly there is a blessing in heaven of receiving a body and spirit which is perfect in the very likeness of Christ Himself.

Heaven, as a place, will also be perfect. Scripture has little to say about heaven as a place, but what is revealed gives the believer a small taste of what is to come. The Bible speaks of heaven as a place that will need no light. That doesn't seem too significant until we find out why heaven doesn't need light. We are told that the "glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp" (Revelation 21:23). Heaven is described as having streets of gold and gates of pearls. There will be robes and crowns in heaven. But the best part of heaven is that Jesus, the one who loves us and died for us, will honor us with his presence there. Jesus told us, "I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3). Eternal life will be a blessing to the believer because heaven is a place of perfection. This perfect heaven is most clearly seen when Scripture declares that Jesus will be there.



Eternal Life

Heaven

Where There is Fellowship

God continues to reveal the blessings of heaven with the promise of fellowship. This fellowship begins with God and His Son, Jesus. Hallesby comments on the blessing of fellowship with God by saying, "eternal happiness consists in a complete life with God; for the Bride it is important to possess the Bridegroom, not his gifts. The association with the Lord is the soul's all in all, the soul's eternal happiness." For the believer living on earth, a fellowship with God is through faith by the means of His Word. I Corinthians 13:12 suggests that this earthly fellowship is imperfect and that only in the eternal life will God and Christ be fully known. A blessing of heaven will be when the believer shall have a fellowship with God as Adam and Eve had before the fall. To see God just as He is and to always be with Him (I Thessalonians 4:17).



— by Rev. Mark Molstre,
Larimore, North Dakota



HELL

Eternal Death

II Thessalonians 1:5-10

One of the most unpopular topics among people today is that of hell. Recent polls indicate that a growing percentage of people do not believe there is a literal place called hell where evildoers are punished for their sin. In addition, even among people who do believe in hell, the vast majority are convinced that it is a place for people other than themselves. Even in the Christian Church, hell is an unpopular topic for many. Pastors and lay people alike are often hesitant to speak openly about hell for fear of turning people off or of coming across as too negative. Consequently, hell is a neglected and forgotten topic in many places within the Church of Jesus Christ. But regardless of its popularity, hell is a topic that must be dealt with by people today because the Bible speaks of it as an eternal reality.

The Apostle Paul, though not specifically calling it by name, speaks of hell in II Thessalonians 1:5-10 as he describes the eternal destiny that awaited the people who had been persecuting the Thessalonian believers. Acts 17:1-9 identifies these persecutors as some Jews who

HEAVEN

This blessing of fellowship also includes a fellowship with angels. In the eternal life, we are told that angels will remain in heaven to continue their ministry (Hebrews 12:22). This is another blessing in heaven, the fellowship that the believer will have with heavenly angels.

Matthew 8:11 reads, "And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." In heaven, the blessing of fellowship continues in the perfect relationships that all believers will have with each other. No fighting, no gossip, no cold shoulders, no backbiting, only "reclining at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" in perfect fellowship. Truly blessing of heaven!

Where There is Contentment

Consider contentment as another blessing of heaven. Theologian John Mueller has described this blessing upon the believer as having "supreme bliss so that the blessed will never desire any other happiness than that of seeing God, the Supreme Good and Source of all perfect enjoyment." Whatever questions there may be about heaven and its glory, the answer will always be as King David prayed, "As for me I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I will be

satisfied with Thy likeness when I awake." (Psalm 17:15).

We can point out from Scripture the blessings that God has revealed about eternal life in heaven. Yet, God has chosen to give us only a taste of the coming glory. Therefore, no matter how much we study the subject of heaven, we could never truly understand what God has in store for us. As this is the case, keep I Corinthians 2:9 in mind, "No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him."

Let us look back to Martin Luther's comment. He believes that thousands of years of earthly riches and joy are not worth exchanging for one moment in heaven. Of course he is right. However, let us remember that no one will live thousands of years on earth let alone with riches and joy. Let us also remember that heaven is not for a moment — it is forever. With that in mind let us ask ourselves: Why are so many willing to trade a forever in heaven where we are given a perfect body and spirit, given a perfect place to live, where we have perfect fellowship with God and His people, and will be perfectly content. Why are so many willing to give that up for the **one moment** we live in this disappointing world?

were angry when Paul had persuaded others to believe in Jesus as the Christ. These angry Jews immediately began persecuting the Thessalonian believers by dragging Paul's host, Jason, and some other brethren before the city officials who made them pay a pledge before they could be released (Acts 17:5-9). The persecution of these believers continued in the days to come (see I Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14-16) and is the reason that God caused Paul to pen the words of II Thessalonians 1:5-10.

A close look at this text shows that the Apostle Paul clearly describes why these Jews were destined for hell and what kind of punishment would be delivered on them once they arrived there. In looking at the horror of hell that was to be experienced by these angry Jews it is very important to realize that multitudes of people today are facing the same destiny for the very same reason.

I. The People Destined for Hell

In verse eight, Paul gives two clear reasons why these angry Jews were destined for hell.

First, they were destined for hell because they "did not know God."

The word "know" used in this verse speaks of having a full knowledge of God. It means more than just knowing some general facts about God or about His Son or about His Word. It means to have a personal knowledge of God — to know Him by personal experience. This is possible because God has sent to earth His Son, the Lord Jesus, to be a personal Savior who can be known. This was the message that Paul shared in the synagogue — that Jesus was the living Christ and could be known.

Sadly, this is a picture of multitudes of people today in our world. People who are destined for hell because they do not know the Lord Jesus in a personal way. They may know a great deal about Him and His works while He walked this earth but they do not personally know Him as Savior!

Second, these angry Jews were destined for hell because they "did not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."

These Jews made a tragic mistake. When they rejected Jesus as the personal Christ they were rejecting God's only appointed way of salvation — the gospel. The gospel is the good news of salvation through Christ! It is the good news that there is forgiveness of sin and eternal life for all who believe in Jesus! The Jews who were persecuting the believers in Thessalonica were angered when they heard this good news of Jesus and they quickly rejected it. In doing so, they rejected the only way of salvation!

Once again these unbelieving Jews are a picture of countless people today who are destined for hell. Our world is full of people who have heard the gospel and have rejected it with the mistaken notion that there is some other way to heaven. But God's Word is crystal clear. The gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes ..." (Romans 1:16) To reject the gospel is to reject salvation itself and to assure oneself of being destined for hell!

II. The Punishment Delivered in Hell

The apostle Paul, as he tells of this coming retribution on these unbelieving Jews, shows two things about the punishment to be delivered in hell.

First, hell is an eternal punishment.

Paul says that those who were persecuting the Thessalonians would "pay the penalty of eternal destruction ..." This speaks of an unceasing torment and anguish of soul. Every soul that enters eternity without a saving faith in Christ will experience an everlasting suffering in that place where there will be constant weeping and the gnashing of teeth — the lake of fire! Hell offers no second chance to be saved. There are no more opportunities to turn to Jesus in repentance and faith.

Second, hell is an eternal separation from the Lord.

It is a tragic and horrifying thing to be separated from the Lord. On the evening that God saved my soul I realized this frightening truth. As an unbeliever, I sat at an evangelistic service where the Word of God was being preached in its truth and purity. As the Law of God was shared that evening I came face to face with the reality of my sin and its terrible consequences and I realized for the first time that my sin had separated me from God. This tragic truth brought an unbearable grief and despair to my soul! But then I heard the precious call of the gospel just a few minutes later and the Holy spirit moved my heart to respond in repentance and faith and this terrible burden was lifted as I became a child of God! My separation from the Lord was temporary.

The separation that Paul speaks of in this text, however, is eternal. It is an everlasting separation from the only one who can bring eternal peace to the soul — the Lord Jesus Christ. Tragically, there are millions of souls today who, unless they repent and believe the gospel, are going to face this soul-tormenting separation from the Lord.

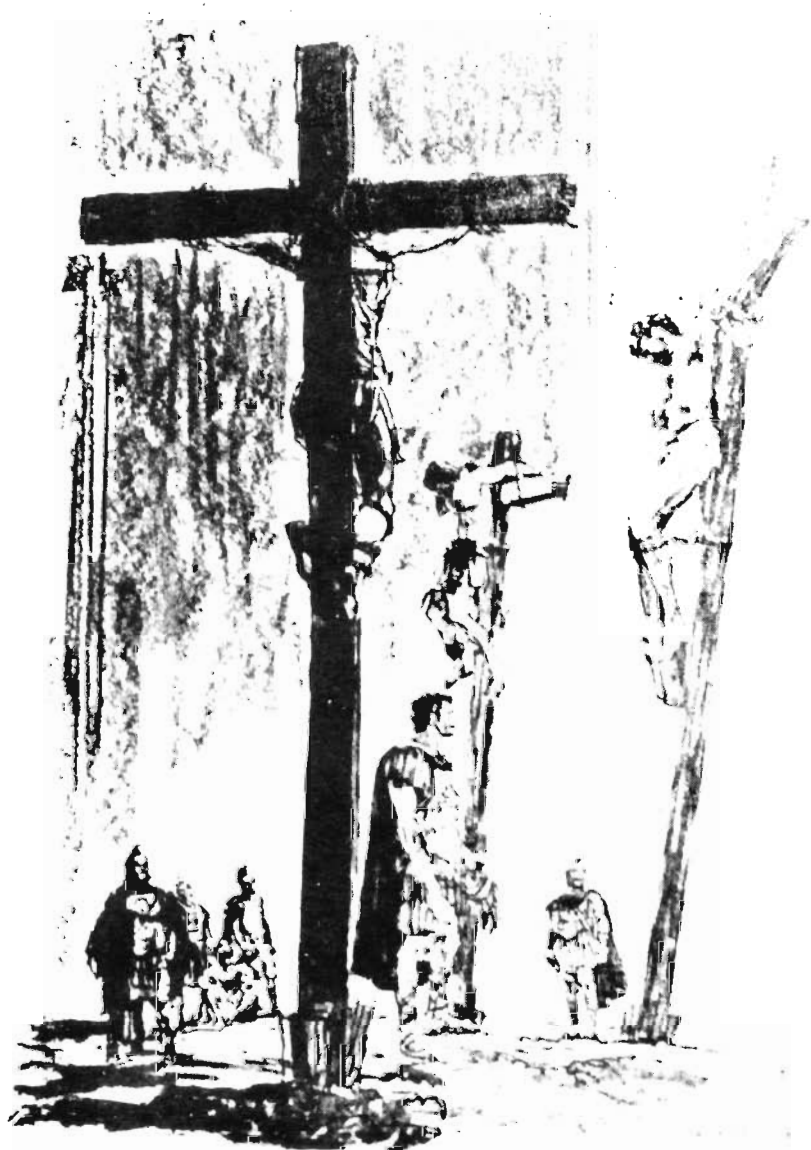
Dear believing friends, the horror of hell is real. May we all pray and labor for the salvation of souls while there is still time!

"It is a tragic and horrifying thing to be separated from the Lord."

*— Rev. Brian Pearson
Arlington, South Dakota*

Between Death and the Resurrection

What about “Soul-Sleep”?



*“... today you shall be
with me
in Paradise”*

Luke 23:44

What happens at the moment of death? As a person's soul leaves his body, does it continue in an unconscious existence awaiting the day of resurrection at Christ's return, or is the soul fully conscious? The question of the state of the soul after death has been frequently discussed. There are some who conclude that death ushers in a period of “soul-sleep.” They find support in biblical allusions to death as a “sleep.” Is this what the Bible teaches? How should we understand this matter on the basis of God's Word?

Torment or Comfort

One of the helpful accounts in Scripture regarding the question of existence immediately after death is that our Lord's teaching regarding the deaths of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31. When Lazarus died, Jesus said he was “carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom” (v. 22). When the rich man died, he went to the place of “torment” (v. 23). Both individuals are described by our Lord as fully conscious. The rich man communicated his personal agony as well as his anxiety for his five brothers. Lazarus is observed as in a state of comfort (v. 25). It is clear that the occurrence of these deaths are before the resurrection since the rich man's brothers are still living on earth in his father's house.

Paradise Today

As our Lord was dying on the cross, He told one of the thieves who was dying beside Him, “... today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). There is no suggestion of an unconscious state here but rather an immediate departure for heaven. The apostle Paul equates Paradise with heaven in II Corinthians 12:2-4; thus, the dying thief was promised eternal life in heaven beginning in its realization at the moment of death.

The Presence of Christ

While Stephen was being stoned to death for his testimony for Christ, he saw heaven open and Jesus “standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55). As he was dying, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” (v. 59). It seems obvious that Stephen expected to be in the presence of Christ right after his death. God's Word declares what this “presence” means in Psalm 16:11: “In Thy presence is fullness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever.”

At Home with the Lord

As the Apostle Paul wrote from his prison cell, perhaps aware that he would be beheaded soon by the Roman authorities, he expressed the desire to "depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better" (Phillippians 1:23). His expectation was that at death he would be with Christ in whose presence, as has been noted, there would be fullness of joy. He has the same outlook in II Corinthians 5:8 where he rejoices: "We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord." To die, to be "absent from the body," is to be in heaven with the Lord. There is no suggestion of any intermediate state of unconscious existence in his expectation. Rather, death will usher in a time when his soul will be away from the body and with the Lord in anticipation of the resurrection day when soul and body will be reunited forever.

It seems evident from the several passages cited as well as others that the Bible clearly teaches us to expect a conscious existence after death. We do not believe that the interval between death and the resurrection is a mere neutral state, in which there is neither happiness nor suffering but only a waiting for the second coming of our Lord when He will render the verdict regarding either salvation or damnation. Rather, it is evident from God's Word that the intermediate state is one of torment for the unsaved and by the grace of God, one of blessedness for the believer in the presence of Christ.

Beyond the reality of conscious existence of the soul after death, the Bible reveals very little more. This paucity of comment perhaps should serve to keep our focus on the central verities regarding last things. The most precious and the most heartening truth of all is that Jesus is coming again! His coming will transform existence forever. For the believer, that is indeed the greatest prospect of all. In the meantime, God has entrusted His Church with a very special purpose — to bear witness to the lost and dying that there is eternal salvation in Christ for all who believe. May God renew us all in this urgent mission!



— Dr. Francis Monseth, Dean
Association Free Lutheran
Theological Seminary

He who would valiant be
'Gainst all disaster,
Let him in constancy
Follow the Master.
There's no discouragement
Shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent
To be a pilgrim. ...

Since, Lord, thou dost defend
Us with thy Spirit,
We know we at the end
Shall life inherit.
Then fancies flee away!
I'll fear not what men say,
I'll labor night and day
To be a pilgrim.

— John Bunyan
in *Pilgrim's Progress*

Annual Schools Christmas Concert



The Choral Club, Marian Christopherson, director.

Photos by J. L. Johnson

Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary in Minneapolis has recently received \$935 from Lutheran Brotherhood's IMPACT/IMPACT PLUS programs (Inviting Member Participation in Aiding Lutheran Colleges and Theological Seminaries). The latest payment covers ten gifts of Lutheran Brotherhood members made during the third quarter of 1991.

The IMPACT/IMPACT PLUS Programs match Lutheran Brotherhood member's gifts of \$25 to \$100 per year to Lutheran institutions of higher education nationwide.

Since the beginning of the IMPACT matching gift program in 1979, \$54,213 in IMPACT/IMPACT PLUS funds has been received by Association Free Lutheran theological Seminary. During that same period, Lutheran Brotherhood has allocated more than \$14.5 million on behalf of the 69 participating Lutheran colleges and seminaries.

Inter-Term 1992

Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary

History of Preaching — January 6-17

A biographical and sermonic survey of Christian preaching from apostolic times into the twentieth century. The purpose of the class will be to apply insights from the history of preaching so that we might, by God's grace, improve our preaching for this age. —Steven Lombardo, Instructor.

Principles of Church Growth — January 6-17

This is a study of biblical principles relating to building "free and living congregations." An examination of possible hindrances to sound growth is also included. —Elden Nelson, Instructor.

History and Aims of the AFLC — January 27-31

Consideration is given to the history of the AFLC, its unique position in American Lutheranism, and its vital mission in these days of apostasy and unbelief. Special attention is given to the "Fundamental Principles" in its discussion of the nature of the local congregation. —Richard Snipstead, Instructor.

Thesis Preparation — January 6-31

Consideration is directed toward the planning, preparation and writing a thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completing the Master of Divinity program at AFLTS. —Ralph Tjelta, Instructor.



Ruth Gunderson, Lake Stevens, Washington



Erika Brandt, Sioux Falls, South Dakota



The final selection of the December 8, 1991, concert was the traditional performance of the Hallelujah Chorus. Singers from the audience joined the AFLBS choirs for a thrilling conclusion.

You Can Make a Difference

Dear Friends,

What a wonderful record we have in the Scriptures. Exodus 36 and 36 tells us that "Moses said to the whole Israelite community ... 'Everyone who is willing is to bring to the Lord an offering ...' and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to the Lord. ... all Israelite men and women who were willing, brought to the Lord freewill offerings for all the work the Lord through Moses had commanded them to do ... Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp. 'No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering ...' and so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work."

Hallelujah, God is good! We have sent out the cry and you have responded. At least half of our goal has already been met. I just wish this could be a letter saying, "send no more!" but unfortunately we are not there yet.

Recently I received a letter from Headquarters stating that the monthly needs of our AFLC World Missions program are \$31,142.91 but our average has only been \$21,228.79 per

month. Friends, we can turn this around! Think about it!

Recently I noticed that, at \$200 a month, 60 of our churches could support four missionary families. Therefore, if among our 210 churches we could average \$200 per month from each church, we would be able to support some 12 missionary families (we now only have seven) and many missionary projects. And our income would go up from \$21,220.79 to \$42,000 per month. This means that your \$10 to \$30 a month contribution is very important and can make all the difference.

You are the AFLC, and the AFLC World Missions projects are your projects. If we all work together we can turn things around and accomplish the things that God has given us to do. I am excited for the future. I trust you are too! God is calling many lost souls to Himself and He wants you to be part of the harvest.

May God richly bless you as you serve Him.

*Sincerely yours in Christ,
Missionary Jonathan Abel*

letter to the editor

Let's Keep Our First Love

I was much moved by your article editorial in the October 1, 1991 issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador*.

It is with great sadness that I have watched the demise of the LBI program in various places. I have also observed the growth of AFLC Bible School. The answer is deceptively simple.

Revelation 2:4 teaches of having forgotten the first love. With no sour grapes in mind, the salient point is that the failed groups have forgotten their first love: That of being a bible institute. Our Lutheran Church has a multitude of colleges and universities all in various stages of wellness. But the one thing that is needed by the laity who will be often the nonprofessional Christian, is a place to study the Scripture in depth be it for one session, one week, one what ever.

The seeds which are planted in AFLC Bible School are those which will germinate in future attendees are the souls of those who never cease to hunger for the true word.

Please note, I am not preaching to the choir, I am prayerfully asking that AFLC Bible School does not forget its first love.

—Rev. Francis E. Jeffery
San Jose, California

Aboard the ARC

1992 Highlights at the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wisconsin.

Pastors' Conference

Date: January 21-23

Speakers: Dr. Craig Jennings, Rev. Terry Olson, and others

Snow Days

Date: January 31-February 2

(For confirmation age through senior high youth.)

Theme: "Standing Firm — Fully Assured"

Speaker: Rev. Terry Wold, LLF President

Cost: \$46 (Reservations needed by Jan. 27)

Men's Retreat

Date: February 21-23

Speaker: Rev. Vincent Will

AFLC Annual Conference

Date: June 17-21

Family Bible Camps

Theme: "We Have An Anchor" (Hebrews 6:19a)

Date: June 28-July 4

Speakers: Rev. Robert Lee and Rev. Harry Gimberg

Date: August 2-8

Speakers: Rev. Lyndon Korhonen and Rev. Brian Pearson

Ask your pastor for one of the 1992 ARC brochures.

14. Now compare the life under the Law (works) and under grace (faith).

Law (Works)

Gal. 4:23

v. 24

v. 25, 26

v. 28, 31

Grace (Faith)

v. 23

15. How is the Christian's birth similar to the birth of Isaac? Galatians 3:28, 29; John 3:3, 5

16. Why then is turning to the Law for salvation so dangerous? Galatians 5:1, 2, 4

17. Today circumcision is no longer an issue. (5:2, 3) Is it possible to make the same kind of error today? Explain your answer.

Life Response

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free ..." Galatians 5:1 From what are we free? What is our motivation for doing "good works?" Since we are free in Christ, does that mean we can do anything we want? (5:13) What is the only law we must follow? (5:14) Are there any ways in which we can stifle another Christian's freedom?

Why do you think it is easy to live by works?

To Sum It Up

Sarah's laughter of doubt turned into the laughter of joy and finally the laughter of faith. Hebrews 11:11 confirms that faith. "By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised." (NASB) Lord, give us this kind of faith!

"Sarah and her husband had had plenty of hard knocks in their time, and there were plenty more of them still to come, but at that moment when the angel told them they'd better start dipping into their old age pensions for cash to build a nursery, the reason they laughed was that it suddenly dawned on them that the wildest dreams they'd ever had hadn't been half wild enough." (Frederick Beuchner)

Women of Wisdom and The Word

SARAH

Study Verses: Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7

"There are a couple of chapters in the Book of Genesis that positively shake with it. Sarah was never going to see 90 again, and Abraham had already hit 100, and when the angel told them that the stork was on his way at last, both of them almost collapsed. Abraham laughed 'till he fell on his face' (Genesis 17:17), and Sarah stood cackling behind the tent door so the angel wouldn't think she was being rude as the tears streamed down her cheeks. When the baby finally came, they even called him Laughter — which is what Isaac means in Hebrew — because obviously no other name would do." (Frederick Beuchner)

When Abram was 75 years old, God gave him this promise: "and I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you. And make your name great ..." Genesis 12:2 (NASB) Abraham believed God. But 11 years passed and no baby was born. Finally, Sarai took the matter into her own hands. After all, she wasn't getting any younger. (Her biological clock had quit ticking, in a manner of speaking.) The time you are impatient with God is often the time when you make your biggest mistakes. Sarah gave Hagar, her servant, to Abram as a wife. She gave birth to Ishmael. Abram was 85 years old. (Genesis 16:16)

But God had other plans. Thirteen years later, when Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to him (17:1) and reaffirmed His promise. God changed their names. (17:5, 15) Now, for the first time, Sarah was included in the promise. In that culture, the giving of a new name meant that god was going to do something new and different in that person's life. Abram, which means "great father," was changed to Abraham, which means "father of a multitude." Sari was changed to Sarah, which means "princess." She was now to be known for her character as well as her beauty.

The Laughter of Doubt — Genesis 18:9-15

The Lord appeared to Abraham in human form (along with two other angelic visitors).

1. What was the Lord's promise? v. 10

Sarah was in the tent (v. 9) but she was no doubt listening to their conversation.

2. How did Sarah react when she heard the news? Why did she react in such a manner? v. 11, 12

Sarah laughed the laugh of doubt.

3. What was the Lord's response? v. 13
4. Why was this no laughing matter?
5. The Lord continued with a rebuke followed by a promise. State the rebuke and the promise. v. 14
6. What was Sarah's immediate response? v. 15
7. How does the Lord's response encourage us? Psalm 130:2, 3

LIFE RESPONSE

Is there a problem that you are facing that makes faith difficult? How can these verses, especially v. 14a, encourage you? Jeremiah 32:27 is another verse of great comfort. "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh, is anything too difficult for Me?" Remind yourself that the God who made the universe, who called the planets into being, and yet knows each hair of your head, cares for you. **But** He not only cares for you, He alone has the capability to answer your deepest need. **Indeed, is anything too difficult for the Lord?**

The Laughter of Joy — Genesis 21:1-7

A miracle occurred. A baby was born and Sarah laughed for joy. The happiness is especially sweet, for in those days it was a reproach not to have any children. (Genesis 30:23; Luke 1:25) God told Abraham to name the baby Isaac, (Genesis 17:19) which means *laughter*. (Who says God doesn't have a sense of humor?)

8. Name two miracles in connection with Isaac's birth.

It has been said that God is rarely in a hurry but He is never late.

9. Twenty-five years had passed since God had first promised Abraham a son. Why do you think God waited so long? Psalm 90:4; Isaiah 55:9; Hebrews 11:1, 2, 6, 13

In accordance with what God had said, Isaac was circumcised when he was eight days old (verse 4). Circumcision was the sign of the covenant God had made with Abraham. It was as if God had "marked" the child as His own.

Typical of Eastern cultures, Isaac was weaned at around age three or even possibly as old as five years. On that day, Abraham made a great feast for the event. But all was not well in the tent of Abraham and Sarah. Once sown, the seeds of disobedience produced the bitter fruit of heartache.

10. What did Sarah observe in verse 9?

We know that Sarah was known as a holy woman of God who was submissive to her husband (1 Peter 3:5, 6) but she took a bold step and gave Abraham an order.

11. What was that order? v. 10

12. Sarah discerned something Abraham failed to recognize. What was that? Was Sarah right in her request? v. 10b, 12

From the very beginning, the relationship with Hagar had been in the flesh. The flesh cannot inherit spiritual things. So, too, you can only come to God on the basis of faith, not by fleshly works.

The Laughter of Faith — Galatians 4, 5

Paul used the story of Sarah and Hagar as an illustration of the doctrine of grace, i.e., justification by faith alone. The Galatians were tempted to turn to the Mosaic Law for their salvation instead of relying completely upon grace. So Paul wrote the book of Galatians. It is truly the "Magna Charta of Christian Liberty."

13. Briefly compare the historical facts surrounding the story of Sarah and Hagar as found in Galatians 4:22, 23

Bond Free

1. 1.
2. 2.

Looking Back and Ahead

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater (II Thessalonians 1:3).

On January 29, 1990, an informational meeting was held by the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations at the Detroit Lakes Technical College. Being frustrated with the direction of the church where my wife, our family, and I had been members for 25 years, I decided to attend.

There was a number of people at the meeting, and most who attended I did not know. Rev. Elden Nelson, Director of Home Missions, made a presentation, and answered numerous questions. He also offered information such as the fundamental principles of the Association of Free Lutheran congregations and other literature on the church body.

Following the meeting, there was a time of fellowship, and I was invited to a mid-week Bible study where a group had been meeting at the home of Gary and Jean Krause. On February 22, we had a meeting, called by Les Peterson, to form a Steering Committee, and this

was the beginning of what is now Faith Free Lutheran Church of Detroit Lakes. On March 4, our first worship service was held at the home of Curtis and Karen Johnson, with Bob Thompson of St. Paul's Lutheran in Fargo, serving as our interim pastor. In April, 1990, we began renting facilities from the Seventh Day Adventist Church for Sunday worship services and educational activities.

On September 23, our congregation chartered with 30 baptized members. Thanks to the financial assistance, we began receiving through the AFLC Home Missions Department, we were able to call Rev. Paul Larson to serve as our full-time pastor. He began serving our congregation the first of October, 1990.

On July 15, 1991, our congregation purchased a seven and one-half acre parcel of land just west of Detroit Lakes for a future building site. A Planning and Building Committee is currently at work on ideas for a permanent home for our congregation.

We are aware that many AFLC members have been praying for us as the Lord led us to start a new congregation in Detroit Lakes. We are very grateful for the AFLC Home Missions

Department and how they have assisted and advised us in getting organized. Many AFLC members from outside our congregation have offered personal financial gifts, others have participated by giving through their churches. Thank you for your financial support and for your prayers.

We praise God for how He has moved us to where we are now. Our church continues to grow in membership. Our Evangelism Committee is organized and working to canvas the city and our mid-week Bible study attendance and interest remains strong.

God has really blessed my family and me as we become a part of a church that recognizes the Bible as being inerrant and the authority in all areas of life. We also appreciate being a part of a Spirit-filled church family that recognizes the teaching and preaching of God's Word as the main task of the church.

—Richard E. Duffney,
Detroit Lakes, Minnesota

Rev. Paul Nash, Warroad, Minnesota, who has served a Home Mission congregation, Warroad Free Lutheran Church, in this northern community since 1985, resigned and accepted a call from one of our southern most Home Mission congregations, Christ Lutheran Church, Wichita Falls, Texas, where the Nash family will move after the school year ends in May.



Park River, North Dakota, Victory Free Lutheran Church received 26 adults and children into membership on Sunday, October 20. As a result, this Home Mission congregation can



now claim a four generation family as members (as pictured): Fred and Eva Nottestad, Art and Mary Ann Erickson, and Terri and Bethany Sundvor.

In memoriam

Funeral services for **Aldon Enstad**, Redwood Falls, Minnesota, were held on Wednesday, December 4. Mr. Enstad, who had served for many years as AFLC accountant, resumed his association with the church body during the past year on a consultant basis, traveling to Minneapolis from his retirement home in southwestern Minnesota. Delegates to the 1991 Annual Conference will remember his report, as well as the moments spent in prayer for his wife, who died in July.

Rev. Walter Beaman, Edmore, North Dakota, has resigned as pastor of Living Word Church, Edmore, and Zoar Church, Hampden, in order to accept a call from Our Savior's and Alma Lutheran Churches, Argyle, Minnesota. He will begin to serve his new parish on February 1, 1992. His address will be Box 261, Argyle, Minnesota 56713.

Rev. Henry O. Rowoldt, 6035 Rob Roy Road, Oak Forest, IL 60452, has been welcomed to the AFLC Clergy Roster by action of the Co-ordinating Committee. Rev. Rowoldt, a retired pastor who serves in an interim capacity at Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Ever-

green Park, Illinois, was previously on the roster of the ELCA.

Roseau, Minnesota— Rose and Spruce Church congregations conducted an adult Winter retreat at the Patch Motel, Warroad, on November 15-16. The parish also reports that their youth group has selected a new name, "Wednesday Night Alive." Rev. Larry Severson is the pastor of the two rural Roseau congregations.

Bloomington, Minnesota — The Emmaus Church congregation was joined for a Thanksgiving Eve service by members of four other AFLC churches in the Twin Cities area: King of Glory Church, Eden Prairie; Faith Church, Shakopee; Living Word Church, Eagan; and Minnesota Valley Church, Lakeville. Dr. Steve Lombardo, AFLC Schools' faculty member, presented the message, and a joint choir from the five churches sang Thanksgiving anthems.

Jon Benson, a 1991 graduate of AFLTS, has accepted the call to Ortley Free Lutheran Church, Ortley, South Dakota. He will begin his ministry in February. Mr. Benson will be ordained at this home congregation, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, rural Kenyon, Minnesota, on January 12, 1992.

Astoria, Oregon — Bethany Church, Astoria, will host the 1992 District Mid-Winter Bible Conference on February 29-March 1. The theme for the conference is "Hearts Set Free" (Galatians 5:1, 13), and the guest speaker will be Missionary Dan Giles. Several district pastors, including Rev. Ken Moland and Rev. Craig Johnson, will lead Bible hours. For further information, contact the host pastor, Rev. Martin Horn, (503) 325-2925.

Cumberland, Wisconsin — A mid-winter Bible conference for congregations in the Minneapolis District will be sponsored by Section Ten Church, rural Cumberland, on January 24-26. The speaker will be Rev. Todd Klemme, Wadena, Minnesota, who will focus his messages on the theme, "Reconciliation." The host pastor, Rev. Thomas Olson, may be called for further information at (715) 822-2020.

Wadena, Minnesota — Special meetings were held on October 13-16 at Zion Free Lutheran Church, with Rev. Lynn Wilson, Roslyn, South Dakota, as the guest speaker.

"It is impossible to have real joy in the hope of Heaven and still be deeply engrossed in the pleasures of earth."

— unknown



Virginia, Minnesota, Eight new members were received by Good Shepherd Lutheran Church on Sunday, November 17. They are: (back row, left to right) Howard Stevens, Todd Grantham, Gordon Holkko, Ed Kinnunen, and Pastor Don Norr; (front row) Janice Stevens, Ilma Niemi, Lorraine Kinnunen and Taimi Virta. A fellowship dinner was served in their honor after the morning service.



Tioga, North Dakota, Norman Free Lutheran Church received a new couple, Clyde and Ella Strahan, in membership on Sunday, September 29. Pictured are: Pastor Stephen Odegard, Deaconess Hazel Germundson, Ella and Clyde Strahan, and Deacon Wayne Nygaard. Norman congregation, a part of the rural Tioga parish, is served by Pastor Odegard, together with Beaver Creek Church.

WITH ETERNITY IN VIEW

Eternity's destinations — heaven and hell — do not seem to be the most popular topics for Christians to contemplate in our modern day. Some say that we hear few sermons about the fires of hell anymore; the same should be said about the bliss of heaven. A brief study of the revisions in Lutheran hymnals over the years suggests that we are even singing less about eternity ... and how often do we use the hymns that are available? One author mentions, too, "the strange vacuum in recent Christian literature" about the promise concerning eternal life and death.

Is it true for you? If so, what is the explanation for this failure of God's people to keep eternity in view? Is it because we have it so good here? Is there a fear of sounding "so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good"? Is there a lack of conviction in the Word's authority or in personal spiritual certainty?

If it appears to you that this editorial is asking more questions than offering answers, then you are encouraged to read and reread some of the articles in this issue. May they drive you to the Word from which they are derived, even as they bring your view of eternity into sharper focus. You may discover that your view of this life will be brought into sharper focus, too.

PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

Last month all AFLC pastors received a letter from the headquarters office in Minneapolis providing a detailed explanation of the state of our president's health, in light of difficulties that have developed during the past year. The Co-ordinating Committee released him from all responsibilities during December in order that he and Mrs. Snipstead, who has also been recovering from an ongoing medical problem, might do some recuperating away from the pressures of the office.

The letter also mentioned the condition of Mrs. John (Jan) Rieth, the wife of our pastor at Amery, Wisconsin. Recent reports on the health of Missionary Tom Baker's father, as well as Patti Baker's possible need for surgery, indicate a temporary return from Brazil in the near future. The medical problems of Chaplain Mark and Ruth Antal's little daughter, Gretchen, were cited in a current prayer letter, and many are aware that Pastor Chris Oswood is waiting for word regarding a heart transplant.

These are only a few of the personal concerns that we share as a church family. Perhaps each congregation could multiply this list many times over by including those who are facing financial woes this winter together with the ones who bear the burdens of poor health. Our church body still waits for a resolution to the India lawsuits, and watches to see how the needs will be met for the various ministries that we sponsor.

Let us pray for one another, brothers and sisters, for the prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective (James

5:16). Our burdens need to be shared with one another so that we can bear them for one another (Galatians 6:2). Cast all your anxieties on Him, for He cares about you (1 Peter 5:7). Our needs are great, but God is greater, and He loves to answer when His beloved children come to Him in prayer with their petitions and praises.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. This milestone occasion will be observed in various ways during the coming months, including the production of a special "yearbook" featuring all of our churches and pastors. An anniversary issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador* will also be published in the fall. It is good to recall our roots and rededicate ourselves to the challenges of the future.

Perhaps the best response, however, would be a renewed commitment to prayer. Each landmark anniversary is a witness to what the Lord has done as well as to what He will do, a call to thanks and trust, an invitation to dedication and discovery, and each phase of the observance points us to prayer. May our multiplied burdens and His multiplied mercies compel us to come boldly before His throne of grace!

CLERGY BEWARE!

A courtroom is the wrong place for the clergy to learn about IRS laws! Pastors, deacons, and treasurers, are now responsible for the new tax laws concerning your church!

These were the headlines on a "special bulletin alert" recently received by our congregation and others across the country. "Please route this brochure to the person you feel could benefit most from this life changing conference," it stated below the name and address on the back. "You could be responsible for saving a church!"

The alarmist tone of this advertisement hopefully sets off an alarm in the minds of those who receive it. The seminar seems at first glance to be over-priced and over-promoted, and one wonders about the ethics of such scare tactics to enlist enrollment. Yet the problem is real, as well as the need for correct and current information.

Media attention on the scandalous excesses of a few television evangelists will no doubt fan into flame again the cries for increased regulation of church-related ministries, and even established church bodies and local congregations should not expect to be spared. Innocence is not a guarantee of freedom from scrutiny.

Let all things be done decently and in order. "Cutting corners" as far as the law is concerned cannot be an option for a Christian congregation. Pastors and lay leaders, read a current tax guide, or attend an available seminar, so that you may be confident that there is nothing to conceal in your financial life and testimony.

WORLD WATCH

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

Second-Class

Chicago, Illinois (EP) a federal appeals court has agreed to reconsider its ruling banning a series of religious paintings from display in a public park. Judges for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit agreed October 22, to rehear arguments in *Doe v. Small*, a case involving the display of 16 paintings of the life of Christ in a city park during the Christmas season.

Last May, a three-judge panel issued a split decision banning the paintings from the park, although the display carried a disclaimer saying that the artwork was owned and maintained by a private civic group, the two-to-one decision held that allowing the display constituted government "establishment" of religion.

"The decision to rehear the case suggests that the judges consider the case to be of major importance and have concerns about the earlier decision," said National Legal Foundation director Robert K. Skolrood, who has directed the defense of the paintings. "I am very pleased that ruling has been vacated and now the entire panel of circuit court judges will give the case their full consideration."

Skolrood said the case underscores the "absurd posture" of the federal government toward art and expression. "In Normal, Illinois, the National Endowment for the Arts used taxpayers money to pay for a public art exhibit which denigrated Jesus Christ. Yet just a short distance away in Ottawa, Illinois, the federal judiciary has ruled unconstitutional a series of privately-funded paintings which picture Christ reverently."

Washington, D.C. (EP) In its first month of session, the U.S. Supreme Court heard cases dealing with the controversial issues of abortion and school prayer.

The abortion case, *Bray v. Alexandria Women's Health Clinic*, springs from a federal judge's order forbidding Operation Rescue-type demonstrations at an abortion clinic in Alexandria, Virginia.

In arguments heard October 16, the pro-life activists affected by the order said that the state courts, not the federal

courts, have jurisdiction in the case, and that the federal judge improperly asserted federal authority in issuing the injunction.

Jayne Bray, whose husband spent four years in prison in connection with the 1985 bombings of Washington, D.C.-area abortion clinics, argued that as a woman she opposed abortion, and added, "The only people that are really being discriminated against as a class ... are the babies."

No decision in the case is expected before summer.

Justices heard arguments November 6 in a school prayer case from Rhode Island. The case involves a Jewish family who opposed a graduation ceremony invocation offered by a rabbi. In the case, *Lee v. Weisman*, a Rhode Island school board and the U.S. Justice Department are asking the Court to develop a new test for determining if a government activity is an unconstitutional establishment of religion. They suggest that such a test ask whether individuals are being coerced into religious observance.

Solicitor General Kenneth Starr argued that prayer in classroom is different from prayer at a civic ceremony. He called the invocation of God during ceremonies "as old and as enduring as the republic itself," and added, "We believe ourselves to be one nation under God."

Wheaton, Illinois — Needs of civil war, earthquake and storm victims in Yugoslavia, Guatemala, and the Philippines have been met by World Relief during the past few months.

Responding to a request for aid from Yugoslavian Christians, Dorcas Aid International (the Netherlands), with support from World Relief, has shipped food, clothing, and blankets to a Hungarian village just ten kilometers from the border where food and diapers are also being distributed to a refugee camp in the area, where almost 2,000 people are gathered, mostly young mothers, older women and infants.

Hundreds of homes in Guatemala were destroyed as a result of an earthquake last fall, and World Relief is helping families to rebuild.

World Relief has also provided emergency assistance to victims of tropical storm Thelma which brought devastating floods and landslides to the Philippine islands of Negros and Leyte in November, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 6,000 people. Relief teams are targeting 10,000 families for aid consisting of food, blankets, mats, water containers, medicines and cooking utensils.

Contributions to World Relief can be channeled through the AFLC offices.