

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

March 20, 1990



LIGHT on the WAY

meditations on God's Word

COVER PHOTO

The Crucifixion of Jesus
Roger C. Huebner, D.D.S.

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THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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Occasionally an event takes place that is so dramatic that the life of the person involved is permanently changed. This certainly was the case in the life of Moses when he saw the burning bush and heard the voice of God saying, "Take off your shoes, for you are standing on holy ground." Moses was a different man after that.

The Apostle Paul also had such a life-changing experience when, on the road to Damascus, he was struck down and heard the voice of Jesus saying, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Paul, too, was reborn and changed by Christ.

But there is one whose experience we hear little about. The Scriptures say little, but the implications are great. Simon was a member of a large group of Jewish people living in Cyrene in North Africa. Like all Jews, his ambition was to make at least one pilgrimage to Jerusalem at Passover to celebrate God's great deliverance of His people. Simon finally got to go to Jerusalem. But, as he neared the city, a large procession blocked the way. Three men were being led out of the city to be crucified. As part of the crucifixion, the prisoners had to carry the crosses on which they would die. One of them was exhausted. He repeatedly stumbled and fell. The soldiers, impatient to complete their task, seized a man from the crowd to carry the cross. This man was Simon of Cyrene. We don't know what happened after that, but being a devout Jew, he no doubt became convinced that Jesus was the true Messiah that they had been looking for.

The cross-bearer

We are told in Acts 2:10 that on the day of Pentecost there were people from many towns and districts present to hear what the disciples had to say. It was a remarkable time, for each man heard the Gospel in his own language. Among them were people from Cyrene. Was Simon in that delegation? We don't know, but we do know that for several centuries after Pentecost, the church in North Africa was one of the strongest in the whole church.

The cross of Christ is unique. Jesus alone could suffer and die for the sins of others. He alone had no sins of His own. So His cross was God's answer to the sin problem. Thank God, it is sufficient for us. Any cross we have to bear is nothing in comparison to the cross of Calvary.

The hymn by Thomas Shepherd expressed it this way:

*Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for everyone
And there's a cross for me.*



by Pastor
James Asp

We all choose

CHRIST or BARABBAS

Matt. 27:15-26

On a winter day in Washington, D. C., the justices of the Supreme Court handed down a justice-defying ruling. The court victimized an innocent party, granting the death sentence; on the other hand, they freed the criminal and empowered the criminal to perpetrate further crime.

"How could such gross mockery be made of justice?" we ask. The folly and tragedy of that decision is magnified at least 23 million times since the *Roe v. Wade* death sentence for preborn babies was enacted in January 1973. At least 23 million innocent, defenseless babies have suffered unjust execution in our beloved United States.

This, however, is not the first travesty of justice in the legal systems of the world. About 1940 years before *Roe v. Wade*, another court sentenced an innocent victim to death, while pardoning a notorious criminal. It was in Jerusalem at the Feast of the Passover. The dispassionate Pilate, governor of Judea, stands before a multitude, offering them the chance to do what he dares not do — for fear of the Jewish leaders — the chance to free the man called Christ, the man they had regally welcomed to Jerusalem just five days before. As was the Passover custom, the governor offered pardon for one Jewish convict. Pilate makes the choice simple, obvious. The innocent Jesus is the natural selection over the notorious criminal, Barabbas. Pilate, standing before the crowd, asks, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And, of course, just as he expects, they say, "Barabbas!" What? They want Barabbas? How, we ask, could they do such a shameful, cruel, horrible, despicable — even stupid — injustice? Just a few simple comparisons of the two men make obvious the folly of the crowd's choice.

But before we get too comfortable in our armchair evaluation of this traitorous mob, let us ask if we are any better or wiser than they. Every day, every hour, we face the same kind of decision: Christ or Barabbas? Righteousness or sinfulness? Good or evil? Whenever we have succumbed to the sinful desires of the world, the flesh and the devil, we have "freed Barabbas" and contributed to crucifying Christ.

Every sin you and I have committed puts us in the same crowd as those who shouted the sentence of the death of Jesus. I am as reprehensible as the riotous multitude. I, too, am guilty of condemning Jesus to crucifixion.

Just two simple comparisons between their choice and our choices show how much alike they and we are. For example, Barabbas was the popular choice; Jesus was unpopular. In our morally upside-down society, sin has become popular; Jesus is unfashionable. When tempted to follow the crowd on Sunday to the many pleasures and amusements of the world, do we bother to ask ourselves how Jesus wants us to spend our sabbaths? "Keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on My holy day." Rather, God wants us to "honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words" (Isaiah 58:13).

When tempted to follow the crowd and to divert to the state the responsibility for the care of aging parents, do we ask ourselves what Jesus wants us to do? When tempted to absorb the same immoral filth from the media that "everybody else does," do we ask what Jesus wants us to do? When we have money to spend for non-necessities, do we selfishly and thoughtlessly follow the crowd and buy more and nicer things, or do we ask what Jesus wants us to do? When we could cast a pall over someone's reputation by gossip, do we do what is popular or ask what Jesus wants us to do?

The multitude before Pilate stampeded to crucify Christ. Are you and I guilty of re-echoing their cry, "Barabbas!" Have we joined the stampede, or have we dared to be trampled by the world out of loving loyalty to Christ?

A comparison between Barabbas and Christ: Barabbas was known for harm to individuals and society; Christ was known for His help to people. To choose Barabbas was to choose destruction; to choose Christ was to choose assistance. Satan, as Barabbas, is destructive, even a murderer. To choose his ways is to speed along the thoroughfare to hell. Besides the awful eternity, those who follow Satan's route also suffer temporally. When a person chooses to follow the road to immorality, drug abuse ◇

**"But before we
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than they."**

*by Pastor
Reuben Unseth
Roseau, Minn.*

And when
He
had given
thanks
He broke
it...

Luke 22:19



CHRIST or BARABBAS

"To go against
Christ is to do
oneself harm
— both now
and for
eternity."

and alcohol, laziness, selfishness, status-seeking or materialism, he chooses destruction — eternal and often temporal. Marriages crumble, finances are shipwrecked, health erodes. To go against Christ is to do oneself harm — both now and for eternity.

Christ or Barabbas? Whom have you chosen? For all the times we have shunned Christ for the popular choices, Jesus calls us to come to that bloody cross of Calvary, where Christ suffered for our sin. For all the self-destructive decisions we have made, Jesus calls us to His cross. The Christ we have crucified with our sin is He who can forgive that very sin. Jesus, the perfect man and the infinite God, gave Himself to die so that we might live. Though we have sinned and chosen "Barabbas," yet Jesus still calls, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

How tragic it would be to see the folly and destruction of sin and yet to deny it! To see the forgiveness from Christ and to refuse it! God shows us the options: a blessing or a curse. Let us turn from self and sin and say, "Yes," to Christ.



Pastor and Mrs. Unseth (Amy) with Josiah, left, and Nathan.

(The second of four parts.)

In the first installment of his paper for a class at Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Dr. Monseth briefly traced some history of the church in Norway and of the illustrious Sverdrup family, out of which Georg Sverdrup came. He told of his coming to America in 1874 and how he chose to be a part of the Norwegian-Danish Lutheran Conference, a group he saw as occupying a central position among Scandinavian Lutherans in the new world.

In an editorial in the first edition of the *Kvartal-Skrift* (a quarterly for the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America), Sverdrup, in agreement with his colleagues, Oftedal and Gunnerson, makes clear how he views the Norwegian and Eielsen Synods respectively. He sees the former as a "Catholicizing tendency" in the sense that the "true" congregation is dissolved in order to create a large church from the masses of people, an attitude that regards itself as "the orthodox church" and "the one saving church." The editorial states, "Clericalism, popedom, the forgiveness of sins for money, and all false tenets are only greater or lesser consequences of this great attack on God's congregation by the devil."¹⁹ This accusation pointed in the direction of the Norwegian Synod did not seem overly strong or unjust to Sverdrup and his fellow professors since they considered the outlook which they believed the Norwegian Synod contained was one of the most serious threats to the progress of spiritual life among the Norwegian people of this country. Sverdrup saw the Norwegian Synod as little more than a transplant of the spirit of high-churchliness he had grown to consider so detrimental to spiritual life in the state church system of Norway.

Representing the opposite extreme in Sverdrup's opinion was the Eielsen Synod which had been organized in 1847 around the leadership of the lay pastor, Elling Eielsen. Because Eielsen Synod's endeavor was to follow in the train of the Haugean Movement of Norway, Sverdrup felt much more appreciative of this group than he did

GEORG SVERDRUP

champion of the free congregation

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

of the Norwegian Synod. But because he believed the Eielsen Synod paid such scant attention to the organizational matters of the congregation and placed too little emphasis on the education of pastors and too much stress on individual piety, he saw this group also as a deviation from what he thought should be the proper development of Norwegian Lutheranism in America.

In contradistinction to both the Norwegian and the Eielsen Synods, Sverdrup saw the Conference as more closely achieving a proper and balanced approach. Concurring in this judgment of Sverdrup's, a Lutheran historian remarks, "Between the extremes of stressing primarily the individual believer on the one hand and the tendency to elevate the pastor to a position of dominance on the other, the Conference (Norwegian-Danish Lutheran) sought to stress the significance of the congregation"²⁰

Sverdrup: The Champion of the Free Congregation. Sverdrup was convinced that the prime task of the Norwegian Lutheran people of America be that of restoration of the congregation. He believed the true congregation had been buried under centuries of papal dominion and, later, state church control. He said, "The congregation, that fellowship which Jesus and the Apostles established and built, has been

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lost; it has been hidden under the papal church and the state church. The light was placed under a bushel."²¹ Though Sverdrup credited Luther with possessing the right understanding of the congregation and with making an attempt at its restoration, he thought most of Luther's positive contribution had been lost as state church control became characteristic of Lutheran lands and state church mentalities gained the ascendancy even in so-called free countries as America. The role and calling of the Norwegian-Americans was a great and difficult one, Sverdrup maintained. "It was to strive to re-create, to bring forth from the ruins, the outward form of apostolic Christianity. To settle for anything less would be a betrayal of the calling and opportunity God was giving them at this moment in history."²²

America afforded a unique and precious opportunity for the re-establishment of the congregation, in Sverdrup's opinion. He repeatedly gave expression to his cherishing of freedom of religion in America. Three years after coming to this country, he wrote,

"It was also a manifestation of God's grace that He led us to this new country where we had to begin afresh. We came to a country where the freedom of the congregation was respected by the state, a land where each individual could freely decide whether he wished to be a member of a congregation, without interference of law or loss of civil rights. We came to this land bringing only God's Word and our confessions, a land without ancient

church properties to cause quarrels, with no government to control church affairs, with no established clergy striving to preserve old class privileges. It was an unmerited gift to the congregations founded in America that they had at the beginning the greatest measure of freedom that human circumstances can offer."²³

The true model after which the congregation is to be patterned is the church of the New Testament, Sverdrup held. He did not believe the apostolic church was to be reviewed in passing as merely the most primitive form of church government which had adapted itself to its existing minimal needs and which was to await further evolution into a highly-structured ecclesiastical system. Rather he saw it as authoritatively-instructive for the effective administration of the church until the second advent. This was not to say that Sverdrup thought the New Testament presented a detailed outline of constitutional structure but it certainly did set forth the basic form that the congregation is to take, in his opinion. This matter was not one of indifference to Sverdrup. In holding such a position, it has been observed that Sverdrup thereby "deviated from the well-grounded doctrine of the Lutheran Church that church polity is an adiaphoran."²⁴ To his detractors, Sverdrup queried in response, "Is it really wrong, then, when the days are evil and the night is approaching, to lift up our eyes and mind from the confused and dwarfed present, and to turn to the true, real picture of the congregation which the New Testament gives?"²⁵

Though not claiming Luther as an ally in believing apostolic church polity to be *absolutely* incumbent upon Christianity and ever after to be emulated, Sverdrup did count Luther as an advocate of the true doctrine of the congregation. In an article written in 1898, Sverdrup discusses Luther's writing on the "Deutsche Messe" of 1526, wherein Luther makes a distinction between the basically conservative attitude in Wittenberg toward the forms and externals of the Sunday

continued on p. 16

Waiting on the Lord

My name is Jose Aparecido de Jesus Coelho. I am from the state of Minas Gerais and a town called Pecanha. I am 21 years old; my personality is a bit exacting, a bit nervous, and I like to practice sports.

I was converted in September of 1984, when I was invited to a Sunday service by a member of the Presbyterian Church. A schoolmate, who is a Christian with a good testimony, started evangelizing me and explaining passages in the Bible to me. I started participating in the youth meetings. After three months, I had made my profession of faith and was baptized, becoming a member of the Presbyterian Church. Today, five years after conversion, I feel fulfilled. Before, I sought happiness in things and places where I never would find it. Now I thank God for having given me the knowledge of Christ while still a teenager.

Even though am a member of the Presbyterian Church in Pecanha, I felt that I wasn't being nurtured spiritually as I would like to have been. I also had the desire to have a deeper knowledge of God's Word. As there are similarities between the Presbyterian and Lutheran Churches, I felt the desire to come to this Bible School, which is Free Lutheran. I knew about the Bible School because two of my church friends had already studied here, so I knew it was a place that would fulfill



Jose Aparecido do Jesus Coelho

my needs. I also knew that here I would receive the financial aid I needed. One of the reasons for being here at the Bible School is that I have had the desire to be a pastor. Although it is a difficult decision to make, and at times I have doubts, I am waiting on the Lord for confirmation. In the meantime I am becoming better prepared to be a faithful witness for God.

Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." I came a long way to study here at the Bible School. I know that, having left home with the purpose of studying God's Word, God has a special plan to fulfill for my life. He will reveal to me what He desires of me. Knowing God has plans for me, I will battle to reach these goals.

Jose participates in the Lar Parana Free Lutheran Church, where Cleodo Fruhauf is pastor. Jose is a teacher for the adolescent class and is helping develop a Sunday afternoon hospital visitation program.

How reassuring to believe that you can approach Jesus yourself, without any minister or priest to introduce you! For as the high priest entered the Holy of Holies with the blood of slain animals, so you enter heaven, not trusting in your own understanding or emotions, but relying on God's love, finding your credentials in nothing less than Jesus' cleansing, atoning, life-giving blood!

Dr. Walter A. Maier, Sr

from a pastor's study

ENDURING

by Pastor Henry A. E. Johansen
Willmar, Minn.

Webster tells us that Lent is the 40-day period between Ash Wednesday and Easter, observed in Christian churches by fasting and penitence to commemorate Jesus' fasting in the wilderness. In this latter part of March, we are about in the middle of the Lenten Season.

There is a common misconception that if something is of God it never involves difficulty. Whatever God calls us to do, He will allow us to do it with ease. Bruce Olson, a Minnesotan, was called by God to minister to the Molitone people in Colombia and Venezuela. After 28 years of ministry, in October of 1988, he was captured by Communist revolutionaries. During his seven months of captivity, he experienced highs of reaching some of his captors for Christ, to lows of inhuman torture and fantastic pain from internal illnesses. One night, while in terrific pain, a bird called a "mirlla" began to sing to him. This bird is not known to sing at night, yet it sang a familiar melody to Bruce, the Molitone tonal chant of the prophecies of the resurrection of Christ.

God's call does mean difficulty. His act of redemption in Christ meant difficulty to the Holy Family. For Mary and Joseph, there was reproach because of her pregnancy while unwed. For both of them there was the long trek to Bethlehem in obedience to a government edict, while in her third trimester. At the end of the journey, a stable served as a birthing room. Jesus was homeless during His public ministry (Lk. 9:58) and rejected by His own

people (Jn. 1:11). Isaiah wrote that He would be a "Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (53:3). When nailed to the cross, He could have called the angels to set him free, yet he counted Himself crucified, as God had counted Isaac sacrificed centuries before (Heb. 11:19). In the midst of difficulties was a lot of happiness, too, in healings, temporary resurrections, weddings, feasts, children, conversations, accepting the hospitality and ministrings of many, as well as the teaching of the things of God. Yet, when Jesus was called upon to endure the cross, He did so for the "joy set before him" (Heb. 12:1-3).

Endurance is the ability to last through whatever difficulty or temptation may come our way. In so doing, we develop character. We do not grow strong by saying "yes" to ourselves, but rather by saying "no" to that which might cause us to stumble. Enduring is the hardest work required by faith.

Endurance has three tenses which may be separate or simultaneous. The past is where we have taken our stand, the present is practiced in the here and now, the future is enveloped in the realization that things will not always be as they are now, that there is a rest coming for the believer (Heb. 4:9).

Endurance has four steps. The first is *wanting*. When Christians fail, it is not because we want to avoid doing what is right, but rather because we have not done what is needed to stand firm in our position as God's children in Christ. Our vision is to focus on the cross. It is our wrongs that put Jesus there. We need to want to do what is right, holy and just (Phil. 4:8).

The second step is *waiting*. After we have begun to make the choices that lead to a holy life, we often need

to wait. Abraham waited 25 years to the fulfillment of the promise of fatherhood. David waited many years between Samuel's anointing him as king of Israel and the fulfillment, though he had opportunity to gain it by killing his king. The disciples had to wait till Pentecost for the fulfillment of the promise of power. Bruce Olson had to wait through torture, illness and privation for his captivity to end. The Molitone people also had to wait for his release.

The third step is *walking*. While the Molitones waited for Bruce's release, they were obliged to walk with the Lord in a united front against godless communism. Isaiah wrote, "Although the Lord has given you bread of privation and water of oppression, He, your Teacher will no longer hide Himself, but your eyes will behold your teacher. And your ears will hear a word behind you, 'this is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right or to the left" (30:20, 21). So often, we "want to know." God does not tell us what lies ahead, around the bend or over the hill. All we need to know is that God will direct our paths. In obedience, we will learn the truth of Is. 29:24, "They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine."

The fourth step in endurance is *work*. The Hebrew word translated "work" also can mean worship and service. As we do all things unto the Lord (Col. 3:23), even the most mundane, distasteful task is a "divine service" and God is honored in the barn cleaning, floor scrubbing, car repair or whatever else is detested by you.

In these Lenten days, and in all our days, what makes our wanting, waiting, walking and working part of being set aside for God's purposes, in fact as well as in life? It is our decision to endure all for the glory of God. As we look to Calvary, to the perfect sacrifice in Jesus, once for all, we are awakened, our hearts are sensitized, we have a vision, we are no longer without restraint. Do you know Christ as your Savior from sin's penalty? If not, won't you place your trust in Him today as your Savior and Lord as well?

"...God is honored in the barn cleaning, the floor scrubbing, the car repair or whatever else is detested by you."

OUR PRESIDENT WRITES

Peniel, the place of blessing

In Genesis 32:29(b), we read, "And He blessed him there." These words are the focal point of the events in the life of Jacob as described in Genesis 32.

Jacob came from a godly family, a family for which God had great purposes and on which God had set His blessing. Jacob knew that he had inherited those purposes and that God had indeed a plan not only for his family and his descendants, but for himself. Jacob had also had a real and definite experience of God at Bethel. He saw the vision of the ladder with the angels of God ascending and descending on it. His expression at that time was that "surely the Lord is in this place."

The Bible tells us that Jacob also had a weakness. The very name Jacob means "guile." We see that his name portrayed his character. He cheated his brother out of the blessing. It was not something that he needed to have done, because it was God's purpose that Jacob should inherit the blessing. But Jacob's deceit and fraud smothered the faith that he might well have had in the promise that God had made concerning him. He deceived his aged father and was compelled to flee for his life. He feared that his brother Esau would want vengeance.

Now, in the 32nd chapter of Genesis, we find Jacob on the return journey to Canaan and word reaches him that his brother Esau is coming to meet him with 400 men. It was a crisis time for Jacob. He found himself wrestling with God through the night hours, the result of which is that God "blessed him there."

Let us look at some of the things that Jacob had to experience before he could receive the blessing of God at Peniel.

Peniel was a *place of crippling*. The first thing that God did with Jacob when He met him was to cripple him, to weaken him. Jacob was in fear that Esau might still be nursing a grudge and he began to scheme with presents and strategies. Now Jacob was helpless before God. It has been said that God sometimes has to break us before He can make us.

Peniel next became a *place of clinging*. Jacob's thigh was out of joint. He no longer could resist. He began to cling to God, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Perhaps many of us are also like Jacob; it takes a time of suffering for us to learn to cling to God and to make us dependent only on God.

Peniel was also a *place of confession*. God's question to Jacob was, "What is thy name?" His response was to give his name. In those days a name meant something. To confess that his name was Jacob was to admit that he was a deceiver, a trickster and one filled with guile. That confession was necessary before he could have the blessing of God. You and I, too, need to confess who we really are before God before we can know His blessing.

Finally, Peniel was a *place of conversion*. God changed Jacob's name. From a name that meant guile, he now had a name that meant "for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." It is only God who can write a new name upon our hearts. That can only come when there has been submission to God and an owning up to our need and sinfulness. Then the blessing of God comes.

I wonder, dear reader, are you in need of a new Peniel in your life? God wants to bless you there.

—Pastor Richard Snipste

AFLC Wilderness Camp plans

Bible Camp work has always been dear to the heart of the AFLC. Several different types of facilities are used, from the more resort-type as the ARC,

TWO ALTARS

Golgotha is the altar of the sin-offering, Gethsemane the altar of the burnt-offering, whose sweet odor ascends in the words of the prayer: "Thy will be done" (Matt. 26:42).

Wilhelm F. Besser

to the more primitive, as the Wilderness Camp near Lake Park, Minn.

The grounds for the Wilderness Camp were given to the Association by Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Dahlgren. There has been a modest development of these grounds and the facilities are enjoyed by people who enjoy a more unstructured and camp-like atmosphere. Some folks who are using these facilities are desirous to build a modern shower and restroom facilities at the camp and will supply much of the labor and materials needed. The Board realizes that the camp desperately needs such facilities and know they would greatly increase usage of the camp. Such a project would require an

outlay of about \$5000.00 and the money is not presently in hand. It would be sad if these concerned people would be discouraged from such a project.

The board is appealing to our AFLC folks to support this project by prayer and send contributions to the camp treasurer, Mr. Roland Peterson, 1325 N. 4th St., Fargo, N. Dak. 58102. The wilderness Camp is not on the AFLC budget. If there are any surplus funds, they will be used for further camp development. The board is planning several drive-through camp spots for RVs before camp-time.

Our thanks to you for responding.
The Wilderness Bible Camp Board

ARTICLE IV

Members of the organized congregation are not, in every instance believers, and such members often derive false hope from their external connection with the congregation. It is therefore the sacred obligation of the congregation to purify itself by the quickening preaching of the Word of God, by earnest admonition and exhortation, and by expelling the openly sinful and perverse" (*The Guiding Principles*).

The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, as the Lutheran Free Church before it, has been more bold to assert that all members of local congregations may not be true followers of Jesus Christ than many another Lutheran Church body. That is, her position has always been that it is dangerous to assume that all people who belong to an organized congregation are presently living in a state of personal fellowship with Jesus, no matter what their previous spiritual experiences may have been. And therefore there is the need for the type of preaching mentioned in Article IV, "quicken- ing preaching."

To reiterate, it is not our church's position that just because a person has his name on a church membership list or has come inside a church building or subscribes to *The Lutheran Ambassador* (good as these things may be) that he is therefore a child of God. Thus it is that the Word of God needs to be rightly divided at every opportunity in order that spiritual needs can be met.

People become members of congregations in various ways: infant baptism, confirmation, as transfers from another Lutheran congregation, adult instruction (and baptism). Pastors and councils endeavor to be careful lest they be guilty of merely adding names to a roster. Time goes on. Some who followed Christ grow lukewarm. Faith may die out entirely and yet membership in a church is retained. Even where there is still a grain of faith, spiritual life is at a low level. Paul could not mask his disappointment in the members of the church at Corinth whom he described as "men of the flesh" (carnal) and yet he generously still referred to them as "brethren" (I Cor. 3:1).

While there aren't as many Lutheran theologians speaking or writing about the baptized lost today, it is gratifying to know what one of them has said. Dr. Trygve Skarsten, in three articles reprinted in the *Ambassador* in the fall of 1983, stated in one of them, "It does no good to tell an unrepentant and unbelieving person 'you have been baptized' and thereby give the impression that God's grace will make everything alright. That's like giving a sleeping pill to a comatose patient."

Dr. Skarsten maintained, "While it is true that in baptism God adopts us as His children and, in one sense, we are always His children because He never turns His back on us, nevertheless we can turn our back on Him and renounce our adoption." He goes on, "It is not whether I was born again through baptismal regeneration when I was baptized" (as Dr.

Skarsten believes), but whether I am living in that born-again relationship with Christ today."

Finally, this from Dr. Skarsten: "How can you who have been baptized continue in sin and unbelief? Repent, and believe the Gospel! Renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways in your life. Come back. Return to the Lord. Walk in newness of life." (All the above quotations are from the article "The Evangelization of the Baptized," *The Lutheran Ambassador*, Nov. 22, 1983.)

The last paragraph is an example of the preaching Georg Sverdrup felt was needed for the cleansing and renewal of the congregation and he listed the preaching of John the Baptist, Jesus and the Apostles as our guide. He lamented, "But the following of their example is so poorly done. They preached the Word without fear or favor; entire and true, personal and direct, without regard of persons."

Sverdrup continues in reference to *quicken- ing preaching*: "And that is the main thing: Light, light and still more light in the church (kirke). It will never get too light or light enough. And it is on having this that the true prosperity (or growth) of the congregation depends. Through light from God it will do well, at the same time as that which is bad will be hindered. In God's truth there is food for the soul that is seeking it; in God's truth there is also harsh judgment on all false and hypocritical hearts. Let the truth sound out fully and there will be both contrition and opposition, both faith and hardening (of hearts), both love and hate.

"But the truth is Jesus Christ. Only where there is true preaching of Christ can there be a congregation. Let that ring out and the congregation is built up and grows and becomes strong; put anything else in its place, however popular it may be, and the congregation stagnates and becomes corrupt and loses more and more of its real essence and its real strength.

"This is the struggle for life in the congregation. It must be kept up the whole time, as long as the church is here below. It never ends, except where spiritual death takes complete control.

"And God, who is rich in mercy, has been gracious and guided us so that even there where everything has seemed to be dead and asleep, He has awakened or sent people who have kindled the fire again, where it had been out."

Article IV has something to say about the painful end of church discipline, the expelling of the "openly sinful and perverse." Little of that is done in our day. It is never an easy procedure. Jesus gave the steps which must be followed whenever it is practiced, Matt. 18:15-18. It should be noted that the objective of any discipline procedure in the church is to save and retain the erring brother or sister, never his or her expulsion. The latter result is to come only after every appeal to conscience and reason is exhausted.

Article IV as originally written contained the word "hypocrite" in the first sentence, as "Members of the organized congregation are not, in every instance, believers, and such

◇



We experience some crowding

AFLC headquarters is a wonderful place to work. I consider my fellow workers to be Christians of the highest caliber. The work we share is exciting as we see the Lord leading and blessing.

Until recently, office space at our headquarters has been very adequate, but with expanding ministries and workers being added to the staff, we are now experiencing some crowding. It is not always easy to find a quiet place to meditate and pray or to visit privately with people that come into

our offices. I look forward to the day when every department has adequate and comfortable office space wherein to do the work to which God has called us. As we plan for and gather funds for a new Administration Building, I have one very real concern and I share it with you so that we can pray together about it. My concern is that we always remember that our first priority is the ongoing ministries of the AFLC and that we never allow a building project or anything else to take the place of that highest priority, including the budgets approved by annual conference

for our ministries.

The building project ahead of us, together with approved budgets, is the largest goal we as an AFLC have ever faced. We are not able in and of ourselves to meet that goal, but our God is able to provide for whatever He wills. Every one of us will have to put into practice with a spirit of obedience and sacrifice the stewardship principles that the Scriptures teach in order to reach the goal before us. May God be glorified.

— Elden Nelson
Home Mission Director

THE CROSS

The symbol of the Christian Church is not a burning bush, nor a dove, nor an open book, nor a halo round a submissive head, nor a crown of splendid honour. It is a cross. "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."

W. M. Clow

EDITORIALS

hypocrites often derive false hope..." The word *hypocrites* was replaced by the word "members" in 1956 in Fargo, N. Dak.

Some felt that changing Article IV should not be done. Others felt it no violence to *Guiding Principles* to do so. The pastor who made the original motion (H. C. Caspersen) had had Sverdrup (Sverdrup died in 1907 at the age of 58 years) as his teacher and could thus be thought of as knowing the mind of the man.

There may well be individuals in congregations who are not assured believers, but who are also not members out of mischievous or malevolent intent, such as the word "hypocrite" would imply. For some there may be a lack of understanding, still others are what is called "seeking souls." The sincere preaching of the Law and Gospel are what they need and thereby the Holy Spirit can do His good work. The AFLC has always held to this position.

Let us close today by hearing something from a man who was also a student of Sverdrup at Augsburg Seminary, later was his colleague for two years at the same institution and eventually his biographer, Andreas Helland:

"...but there were also those who did not openly deny Christ and who could not be said to be living grossly sinful lives, although their lack of spirituality formed a serious dead-weight in the congregation. What was to be done with such? His answer was: Let the Word of God be preached in all its heart-searching power, and let the spiritual members in the congregation work the more intensely for the Kingdom, and the result will be that those who are asleep will either be awakened, or the pace will be too much for their carnal

minds that they will withdraw from the fellowship. He favored tolerating such members in the congregation as long as possible, even if they were far from measuring up to the ideal of a true Christian, rather than to expel them. And by the same token he advised Christians to remain as long as possible in a worldly congregation, even if it should cause them much spiritual distress. — Yet he did not thereby mean that either congregation or individuals should be content with undesirable conditions" (*Georg Sverdrup: The Man and His Message*, 1947.)

BLESSED LENT

The days of Lent, 1990, are swiftly drawing to a close. Holy Week is nearing, and after that, Easter, the day on which we remember the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

But today we are still in Lent, blessed Lent. We are, in these days, following the Savior on His painful journey to the cross. We are drawn to this Man not because we recognize that He endured terrible suffering, but because we know that He went through all that agony for our sins and was accomplishing atonement for them.

Furthermore, we realize that the drama of Gethsemane and Calvary, yes, and of the empty tomb, mean life and hope for all who believe in Jesus, the Son of God.

Do you, dear reader, so believe? It is for such that Lent is a blessed time, a time when one feels sorrow for one's sins and joy in the love of God revealed in the obedience of God's own Son, the Lamb of God for sinners slain.

Warroad, Minn.



Warroad Free Lutheran WMF has seven new Cradle roll members. Pictured are: Becky Johnson and Kara; Laurie Baril and Kory and Cindy Steinhauer and Charles. Not pictured are: Christopher Mattison, Aaron Mitterling, Justin Skibicki and Chad Erickson.

an idea

...I pray for one missionary for a whole month. I find that makes me offer more concentrated prayer. I also find myself thinking about that family in more personal ways. Consequently, I bought a pile of aerograms (39c) and decided to write to my missionary during the month. I've received wonderful replies: more fuel for prayer!

—Jeanne Brandt

Women's Missionary Federation

In memoriam gifts

Mike Sawka, Piney, Manitoba, Can.
Inga Haugen, Everett, Wash.
Alma Woods, Ottawa, Ill.
Phillip Church, Osage, Ia.
Arthur Wasland, Wallace, S. Dak.
Nora Baslie, Tioga, N. Dak.
Orville "Norin" Hilleren, Tioga, N. Dak.
Olga Overlid, Warren, Minn.
Isabelle Erickson, Oklee, Minn.
Sharon Davis, Glenville, Minn.
Kalvin Davis, Glenville, Minn.
Hazel Vatnsdal, Greenbush, Minn.
Alma Hodnefield, Story City, Ia.
Nicholas Myhre, Wahpeton, N. Dak.
Gordon Hendrickson, Wahpeton, N. Dak.
Elder Kinneberg, Wahpeton, N. Dak.
Ronald Peterson, Tioga, N. Dak.
Velma Hanson, Salol, Minn.
Mrs. Minnie Nelson, Ortiey, S. Dak.
Arlene Barta, Hot Springs, S. Dak.

Blessed are
those who die
in the Lord



Minnesota, N. Dakota ladies continue Bible studies in Mesa, Arizona

You do not have to be home to attend your local WMF meeting! Some Mesa, Arizona "Snow Birds" have enjoyed the WMF Bible studies and fellowship throughout the winter at various homes. The January meeting was hosted by Verna Peterson, Minot, N. Dak. Ladies in attendance were: Mrs. Orville Olson, Fergus Falls, Minn.; Phyllis Rensland, McIntosh, Minn.; Bernice Brandvold, Greenbush, Minn.; Mrs. John Strand, Remer, Minn. and Clara Johnson, Minot, N. Dak. They plan to meet through April.

DeKalb, Illinois



Grace Free Lutheran Church WMF recently gave Mrs. Esther Rumpf an Honorary Membership Pin

Announcements

Women's Retreat

There will be a Women's Retreat May 4 - 6 at the ARC in Osceola, Wis. The theme will be "Exploring the Old Testament" and the speaker will be Lori Sorenson Welke.

A craft demonstration and silent auction will be held. Everyone is welcome to bring crafts to sell. Proceeds donated to the ARC.

For more information, contact Mrs. Rachel Anderson, 826 Scott St., Shakopee, Minn. 55379. (612) 445-4465.

Minneapolis District WMF Rally

The Minneapolis District WMF Rally will be held April 21, 9:30 a.m., at Medicine Lake Lutheran Church, Plymouth, Minn. Speakers will be Rev. Tom Olson and Rev. David Barnhart.

Southwest Central Minnesota District WMF Rally

The Southwest Central Minnesota District WMF Rally will be held May 1 at 9:30 a.m., at Zion Free Lutheran Church in Willmar, Minn. Rev. and Mrs. George Knapp and Carol will be the speakers for this event.

Illinois District WMF Rally

West Lisbon Lutheran Church, Newark, will host the spring rally on Saturday, April, 21. Missionaries George and Helen Knapp will speak.

Annual WMF Convention

WMF Day will be Wednesday, June 13 at the Days Inn Hotel in south Minneapolis. Morning Bible study leader will be Mrs. Lois Oscarson, and Mrs. George Knapp will speak at the afternoon session.

The WMF Prayer Breakfast will be held Thursday, June 14, at Days Inn, with Miss Carol Knapp speaking.

The WMF Festival Service will be Thursday evening, June 14, at Kennedy High School, Pastor Herbert Franz speaking.

Meet the other team members

In the last *Ambassador* we met the two ladies who will be on the 1990 Luther League Gospel team, Michele Dawson and Kari Lane. This time we meet the two men, Jeff Dahl, team leader, and Andrew Webster.

Jeff Dahl is a member of Spruce Lutheran Church of Roseau, Minn., Larry Severson, pastor. He is a music teacher at the Motley/Staples (Minn.) Schools. Jeff has been involved in the music program of his local church in Roseau and is now presently involved in the music program of a congregation in Brainerd, Minn.

Jeff wrote in his application: "I find myself thinking a great deal about the opportunity to be used in changing lives with the Luther League team and I get excited."

Andrew Webster is a student at St. Cloud (Minn.) State University. He is employed by the Center for Business Research and Development at the University. He became a dedicated Christian through the ministry of Gree Lake Lutheran of Spicer, Minn. Andrew, together with friends, has written music which has been distributed through the Youth Resource quarterly. He plays the guitar. Andrew will be the assistant leader of the team. Andy attended AFLBS and was employed as a manager for J. C. Penney Company in Brainerd and Mankato, Minn.

At this writing, there are some weeks available. The team will come to your parish or congregation ready to lead in Bible studies which will be of benefit for young people. Studies will concern themselves with planning, fellowship, outreach and Bible science.

The team will take its orientation at Grace Lutheran in DeKalb, Ill., and will begin its ministry there. It will teach two weeks of Vacation Bible School at Helmar Lutheran Church of Newark, Ill., Robert Lee, pastor. While at Helmar, they will be working with the Luther League as well.

Each church will organize a learning activity to complement the study.



Andrew Webster

Please contact Pastor Dennis Gray, our AFLC Youth Director, if you are interested in having the team in your area.

The team is planning to go to South Dakota area churches first, ending its travels on the first week of August at Tioga, N. Dak.

Please pray that the Lord will bless this effort. It is believed the team will reach our youth for Christ, develop leadership and be a positive influence for the Lord.

—Pastor Gray

Luther League Federation Leadership Conference

July 16 - 19

AFLBS campus
Minneapolis

YOUTH CAMP AT FAITH HAVEN

"Trusting Jesus" was the theme for the 1990 Spring Youth Camp for the West Central Minnesota District. It was held at Faith Haven Camp, Battle Lake, Minn. The theme verse was Proverbs 3:5, 6.

Guest speakers were Pastor and Mrs. George Knapp, our retired missionaries recently returned from Brazil.

AFLBS students were the counselors. Pastor Rodger Olson, Fergus Falls, was the inspiration leader. Pastor Henry Johansen, Willmar was the dean with Pastor Merle Fagerberg the assistant dean.

—Corr.

from here and there

Eastern North Dakota

Grand Forks, N. Dak. — The men of Trinity Lutheran served a pancake supper on Feb. 9. The proceeds went to a need in the church.

Minnewaukan, N. Dak. — Rev. Philip Rokke, Trinity, is serving Christ Lutheran in Devils Lake during the vacancy there.

S. Dak. - Neb.

Bruce, S. Dak. — A Sweetheart-Friendship banquet was held at Grace Lutheran on Valentine's Day at 7 o'clock. Dinner was by candlelight and a fine program was presented.

Canton, S. Dak. — An evening of music was held on Sun. night, Mar. 11, at Redeemer Lutheran.

Southwest Central Minnesota

Dalton, Minn. — Lenten services are being held in the parish together with four neighboring Lutheran congregations. General theme is "Reflections on the Psalms." Three pastors are conducting the round robin series.

Canada committee plans 8th annual Vernon Youth Festival

The festival committee started in August, 1983, so 1990 will be our 8th year. From its conception, the committee has sought to bring in special dynamic speakers and musicians each year. And each year we retain 'feedback' sheets from every registrant and refer to that information as a guide to what the youth and leaders would like to see happen. God has blessed the faithfulness and trust the committee has put in prayer for guidance and direction each year.

The reason for the dedication of the committee and why we even have a yearly festival is to provide spiritual feeding along with fun, learning and companionship. Some youth keep returning year after year and bring new friends. The youth leaders come and bring youth and the news spreads.

Seven years of stories can be told

Minneapolis

Minneapolis, Minn. — The annual church Valentine party for Faith Lutheran was held at Le Cafe Bilitz on Chowen Ave. So. It was a progressive dinner with courses being served in various rooms of the cafe.

The annual men's spring breakfast for Medicine Lake Lutheran will be held on Saturday (24th) at Bishop's Buffet in the Knollwood Shopping Center. Rev. John Abel will speak.

In memoriam

Key: The name of the town was the address of the deceased. Following that is listed the name of the deceased, age, date of death and the church in which she held membership.

MINNESOTA

Greenbush

Mrs. Melvin (Irene) Melby, 74, Jan. 30, United.

NORTH DAKOTA

Langdon

Mrs. Mathilda Soli, 91, Feb. 18, Aspelund, Vang.

by each member and youth of how God has worked mightily. But I for one, as a committee member from the start, have been richly rewarded at every festival. It's worth all the dedicated planning efforts that continue the whole year long. As soon as one festival is over, planning begins for the next. In December, 1989, we had our first festival committee Christmas party with spouses.

The 1990 V.Y.F. will be held August 16 to 19 on Silver Star Mountain Resort with our guest speaker returning for the third time. Tom Bache-Wiig, Minneapolis, Minn, has an incredible appetite for the spiritual well-being of youth as well as being a super funny man whom we all enjoy and love. Our musician is Michael Hart who hails from Vancouver, B. C., and he is returning for the second time. Watch for brochures and posters advertising our 1990 V.Y.F. See you there!

Heather Lyseng

West Coast

Everett, Wash. — Among Calvary Lutheran's residents at Bethany Home in Everett are two pastors' widows, Mrs. Hattie (Christopher) Mohn and Mrs. Elvera (Arvid L.) Hokonson.

Illinois

Morris, Ill. — "Lift High the Cross" is the theme for the Lenten services at Bethlehem Lutheran this year.

TEACHERS WANTED

Medicine Lake Lutheran Academy, an AFLC school with grades kindergarten - 8th, is accepting applications for teaching positions for 1990-91. Degreed teachers for either elementary or middle school grades are encouraged to write to Mrs. Eugene Enderlein at 6300 Walker St., St. Louis Park, Minn. 55416.

Preaching missions

Newfolden, Minn.

Westaker Lutheran Church

LeRoy Flickinger, pastor

Apr. 1-4

Rev. Christian Oswood, Minneapolis, Minn., speaker

St. Paul, Minn.

Victory in Christ Lutheran Church

Wayne A. Hjermstad, pastor

Apr. 22-24

Rev. John Rieth, Amery, Wis., speaker

Cokato, Minn.

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Ralph Tjelta, pastor

Apr. 22-26

Rev. Elden Nelson, Minneapolis, Minn., speaker

Bagley, Minn.

Grace, Rice and Alida Lutheran churches, Bagley, Minnesota, are gearing up for their 1990 "I Care" Crusade. Pastor Herbert Franz of Dollar Bay, Michigan, will be speaking in one of those churches each evening from April 18 through April 25.

Pastor Lyle Twite, serves the Message of Hope Parish.

Thanks to the working of the Holy spirit, Pastor Franz's crusade in the Message of Hope Parish in 1989 saw many men and women led to salvation and renewal of their faith. Please pray fervently that this year's crusade will be a blessing to even more people.



Front row: Sam Penner, Keith Dashuba, Terry Stach; second row: Carol Penner, Pastor Gerald Gettis, Heather Lyseng; third row: Gert Kashuba, Heather Johnson; fourth row: Cori Novakowski, Agnes Kurbis, Chris Kashuba; missing: Cheryl Tkocz and Erna Edwards.



Partnership in the Gospel
Philippians 1:3-4

Register now for the

1990 AFLC Annual Conference June 13-17, 1990, Bloomington, MN

Make this year's Annual Conference a special event in your family's life. Why not come early and see the Minnesota Twins play Tuesday night or plan a day to visit Valley Fair, the Minnesota Zoo, the Science Museum or just to shop.

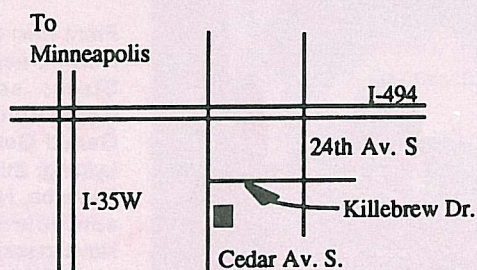
Registration Deadline is June 1st
Send to: AFLC Annual Conference
3110 Medicine Lake Blvd.
Minneapolis, MN 55441

This registration form is for the whole family. All conference activities are on this form, for example, WMF, children's program, and AFLC Men's Organization. Your registration will be made available to all organizations so you will not need to contact them about your plans.

All registration costs are payable in advance. Cancellation with full refund will be accepted through June 9th. Refunds after June 9th, will be reduced by any costs incurred by the AFLC for that delegate. Allow a month to process refund.

Location

• Days Inn is easy to find. It's adjacent to the old Met Stadium, presently the construction site for the Mall of Americas. It is 1/2 mile south of I494 at the intersection of Cedar Av. & Killebrew Dr.



Meals

• Special meeting and event meals will be served by Days Inn staff in the room where the meeting will be held, not cafeteria style (items A1, A2, and B4). By selecting these meals you will automatically be registered for the meeting.

• In addition to the Special meeting and Event meals, if you desire to eat at Days Inn, breakfast and lunch buffets are offered to delegates and their families on a reservation basis (item B3). Super buffet meals will also be offered, but reservations will not be required to allow delegates more flexibility in meal choices. Days Inn also has an excellent restaurant. An area restaurant list, with price ranges, will be available at the conference.

Overnight Accommodations

• We have negotiated a very attractive room rate with Days Inn: \$40 per night for an air-conditioned room with either a queen bed or two double beds. There is no extra charge for additional persons sharing the room, but all room guests must be registered. Don't forget your swim suit; there is a pool and whirlpool. A free shuttle is available to and from the airport.

• Emmaus Lutheran will seek to find homes for those who would prefer this form of accommodation, but, we can't assure a place within a home. Contact Alfie Whitaker, Emmaus Lutheran, 8443 2nd Ave S, Bloomington, MN 55420; 884-4751.

• We are in the process of securing rooms at the Bible School. The Bible School is about 40 - 45 minutes driving time from the conference site during morning and evening rush hour. Contact Rev. Don Greven at the Bible School.

• There are a dozen other hotels and motels within three miles of the conference site. RV Parks are 12+ miles away. If other than Days Inn accommodations are desired, please contact the hotel directly. A representative list (for two persons including sales tax) includes;

Marriott Hotel	\$133.20	612 854-7441
Thunderbird Hotel	\$74.37	612 854-4311
Sheraton Airport Hotel	\$93.24	612 854-1771
Friendly Host Palm Plaza	\$44.40	612 854-3322
Exel Inn	\$44.35	612 854-7200
Super 8 Motel	\$46.49	612 888-8800
Backstretch RV Park	\$19.06	612 445-1044
Town & Country RV	\$15.90	612 445-1756
Yogi Bear RV	\$19.06	612 445-5074

June 13 - 17, 1990, WMF and AFLC Conference Registration

Registration deadline is June 1, 1990 - Full refund for cancellations through June 9, 1990

Send Registration to: AFLC Annual Conference, 3110 Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55441

Name: _____ Phone: (____)____-_____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

This Registration form should be used to register for WMF, AFLC Conference, for children's program, all special meetings, meals, & overnight accommodations. Please indicate number of persons to attend each event & the total cost.

CONFERENCE EVENT

Number Cost for one Total Cost

A. Women's Missionary Federation

1. WMF Conference Registration - Wednesday, June 13th _____ x\$1.00 \$ _____
2. WMF Luncheon - Wednesday Noon, June 13th _____ x\$5.50 \$ _____
3. WMF Breakfast - Thursday 7AM, June 14th _____ x\$5.00 \$ _____

B. AFLC Annual General Conference

1. Conference Registration \$15.00 prior to June 1st. _____ x15.00 \$ _____
Registration will increase to \$20.00 after June 1st. Registration includes annual report, evening worship and all general business sessions.

2. Children's Program Registration Offered Wednesday thru Saturday

- a. Nursery during day sessions at Hotel for under 2 1/2 yrs; no lunch. _____ Freewill offering
- b. Fun in the Sun for 2 1/2 yrs - sixth grade. 9AM - 5PM _____ Children Names _____
includes a trip to the Zoo and lunch each day. _____ Freewill offering
- c. Rally for 7th grade & up. Activities include Bible study, a Twins _____ Children Names _____
Game, the Zoo & Valley Fair. Bring money for snacks & lunch. _____ x\$30.00 \$ _____

3. Conference Meals (These buffet meals are optional. Tax and gratuity included)

- a. Breakfast Thursday 7:30AM, June 14th _____ x\$5.00 \$ _____
- b. Lunch Thursday Noon, June 14th _____ x\$6.50 \$ _____
- c. Breakfast Friday 7:30AM, June 15th _____ x\$5.00 \$ _____
- d. Lunch Friday Noon June 15th _____ x\$6.50 \$ _____
- e. Breakfast Saturday 7:30AM, June 16th _____ x\$5.00 \$ _____
- f. Lunch Saturday Noon, June 16th _____ x\$6.50 \$ _____

4. Special Meetings and Event Meals (These staff-served special event meals may be at the same time as the meals in item B3 above. Tax and Gratuity included.)

- a. Builders Fellowship Thursday Noon, June 14th _____ x\$7.50 \$ _____
- b. Schools Corporation Thursday Evening, June 14th _____ x\$9.50 \$ _____
- c. Missions Corporation Friday 7AM, June 16th _____ x\$6.00 \$ _____
- d. Youth Board Friday Noon, June 15th _____ x\$7.50 \$ _____
- e. Pastors Banquet Friday Evening, June 15th _____ \$11.00 \$ _____
- f. AFLC Men's Organization Saturday 7AM, June 16th _____ x\$6.00 \$ _____

C. Total Conference (WMF and General) Cost Checks payable to AFLC \$ _____

D. Overnight Accommodations

Days Inn Hotel Reservations \$40 per night per room, single or double. No need to send Hotel money now; rooms will be held until 6PM the day of arrival for registered delegates and families. You do not need to contact the Days Inn directly.

Arrival Date: _____

Departure Date: _____

SVERDRUP

and externals of the Sunday morning public worship on the one hand and the type of service that Lutherans would like to see instituted on the other. Sverdrup comments that "Luther saw as a matter of course that if it was necessary to return to the apostolic teaching of salvation, it was not less necessary to return to the apostolic concept of the congregation and the government corresponding thereto."²⁶ In another article Sverdrup states that "zeal for the salvation of his soul and an unquenchable thirst for liberty drove Luther to both work and suffer for the Christian truth of the congregation."²⁷ This gives substance to the opinion that "this effort to restore the congregation is viewed by Sverdrup as a renewal of that which Luther sought to do."²⁸ For Sverdrup, America offered the ideal setting in which to commence the restoration.

The meaning of "Congregation."

"The Congregation is the right form of the Kingdom of God on earth."²⁹ This oft-repeated statement of Sverdrup's contains the essence of his thinking in terms of the congregation. By "congregation" he meant the local church. The organized local congregation was for him the only quantity entitled to the name "church" (ekklesia). This is not to say that he considered all other ecclesiastical structures as superfluous. He saw the need for church bodies which would aid and assist the local congregation, though carefully maintaining a subordinate role. In an article written early in his theological career, Sverdrup commented, "It is quite unjustifiable to assert that congregations should not organize themselves into church bodies because such organizations are not found in the New Testament. At the same time we emphasize that it is entirely unwarranted to make the church organization an entity of a kind superior to the congregations themselves."³⁰ Sverdrup believed he could demonstrate in a review of history that wherever the church organization has been considered superior to the congregations themselves, it has corrupted both the church organization and the congregation. He believed the Lutheran Reformation clarified anew the definition of church and/or congregation. "For Luther, it was clear," he

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.

Minneapolis, Minn. 55441

Second-class

said, "that the church (ekklesia) was nothing other than the congregation."³¹

If the church finds its true expression in the congregation, what is the composition of the congregation in Sverdrup's understanding? He believed the congregation is "a gathering of people whom God has justified by faith in his Son, reborn into spiritual life, given a family relationship, a heritage in heaven and an eternal life of love in the Spirit."³² However he was not unmindful of the possibility that within the congregation are those who are "dead members." He recoiled at attempts he noted within Norwegian-American Lutheranism to establish a "pure church" of a Donatist variety. It is because one cannot with certainty discern another's heart that he acknowledged that "many will enter who do not wear the wedding garment."³³ However his ideals were high in admitting members to the congregation. "to gather a congregation is not simply a matter of inscribing names in a book. To join a congregation is to say, 'From now I shall be a witness for Jesus Christ. He bought me with his blood'"³⁴ (To be continued.)

Note: Readers who are interested in pursuing any or all of the footnotes contained in Dr. Monseth's article are invited to write to him for further information. He may be reached at 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minn. 55441.

You have a free will

Willingness comes from the Holy spirit.

A lady argued with me that her salvation was her own decision. She said, "My conscience bothered me and I was afraid of God, but I fought against the idea. I tried to block it out of my life. One day I heard a sermon and a call to decision was given. Finally, I decided, 'Okay, God, come in to my heart.'"

"You see?" she said. "It was up to me. I had to decide. I had to be willing."

I responded in this way: "So the barriers were finally overcome?"

She said, "Yes."

And I asked, "Who built the barriers, and who took them down? Why did you finally become willing?"

The answer was apparent: God overcame her unwillingness. God patiently worked, called, convicted until she was changed. Her willingness was achieved against her will. It was the work of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit had not done it, it would never have been done. In claiming credit for it herself, she was robbing God of His glory, and this she set her will to do. It bore sad fruit in her life.

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God...Who were born not...of the will of man, but of the will of God" (John 1:12-13).

—Anonymous