

THE LUTHERAN 

APRIL 2007

AMBASSADOR



"The field is the world ..." (Matthew 13:38). Missions, both home and abroad, has long been referred to as God's field. Here are a few stories from those fields.

in the *field*

The pasture

BY PASTOR TIM HINRICHS

“He makes me lie down
in green pastures”
(Psalm 23:2a).

Everyone loves a feast, especially when hunger strikes. Have you ever noticed that the Good Shepherd begins His duties in Psalm 23 by feeding His sheep? There is no journey first. Instead, the Lord provides the essentials from the start. He knows His sheep need to be fed, and He gives them the best food possible.

King David, the writer of this psalm, lived in Bethlehem, where it's rare to find green pastures. Most of the year the pastures are yellow or even brown. But our Shepherd promises to give us a rich meal every day — His Word. It's right here for the taking — a virtual thanksgiving meal. Unfortunately, we often take just a bite or two, or maybe settle for some old hay. We snack on the stubble when God wants to fill us to overflowing.

Others of us enjoy the feast and its sweetness — it's so rich! But then we don't lie down in the green pastures. This command doesn't make any sense — we've eaten and now we need to lie down? Aren't we supposed to go to work? The word used here does not refer to sleep, but “rest” in contrast to “work.” It is usually a word applied to animals. Actually, the Hebrew word is taken from a word related to

stable — a place an animal rests.

What is the first need I have? To be filled and rested. The Shepherd is such a blessing to His flock that He finds not only a green pasture for food, but lets them lie down on it! But the strange thing is that sheep are usually not willing to take this rest — for he “*makes me lie down.*”

Many believers who serve the Lord don't know when to stop. We feel guilty that we're never doing enough. We feel we owe the Lord so much that we better give Him 101 percent. But in this psalm we find out that the Lord's priority for us is to give us His food and then to make us lie down. Sometimes it seems the Lord has to *force* us to rest in the promises found in His Word because we're too concerned with continuing the work.

When is the last time you lost track of time while spending it with the Lord? It happens all the time with friends, but why not the Savior? Because we have better things to do! So again, the Lord must make us lie down in those green pastures.

The best rest we can ever have is spending time in the presence of the Lord — through meditation, prayer, and praise. Psalm 149:5 says that the saints “sing for joy on their beds.” What a beautiful way of expressing this feast of rest. Simply loving our Lord is the best rest we can receive! Without the feast and the rest there can be no service. Let's get our heads down into that pasture and relish in the feast!

Hinrichs, a missionary in Poland, is an AFLC pastor on loan to the East European Missions Network.

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I'm encouraged by the call of Jesus to reach the least, the last, and the lost.

— Rich Nathan

If Jesus Christ be God, and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.

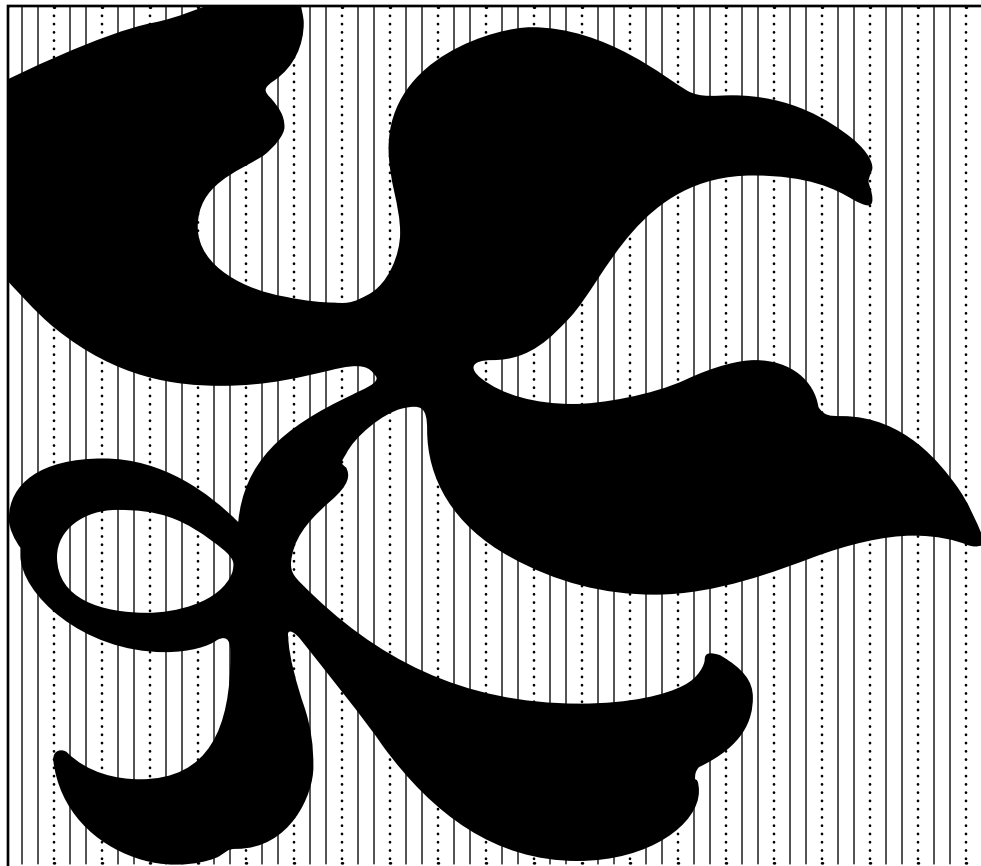
— C.T. Studd

[Most of the unchurched have never been invited to church. And most of them would attend if invited.]

— Thom Rainer

God's love for the world never changes. Jesus' authoritative command to "go" never changes. The Holy Spirit's power to "call, gather, enlighten and sanctify" never changes. And the way to fruitfulness is still the same — the Way of the cross.

— Margaret Lindell



in

BY PASTOR JIM JOHNSON

Some of my close friends wondered when they heard I left the Bible school ministry to work as a home mission pastor in Camarillo, Calif.

“That’ll be different,” my friends would say, using that understated Minnesotan phrase that expresses grave reservation in the cloak of Midwestern reserve.

But God spoke and, nine months later my wife, Linda, and I have found two things to be true: One, I have a lot to learn; and two, planting a young church in Southern California is a lot like working with college students.

The biggest surprises for Linda and me since moving here were three:

Southern California is more rural than I thought.

Living and serving in Camarillo is a lot like living in Fosston, Minn., where I once served a congregation.

Ventura County is 60 miles from Los Angeles and 35 miles from Hollywood. To get to Camarillo, you drive over the mountain pass near the LAX Airport and travel up and over an apparent barren wilderness into “The Valley.” That’s the strongly suburban-flavored San Fernando Valley, the place where Valley Girls, according to that 1980s classic, droned on about values both “tubular” and “grodey.” There are plenty of fine churches there, but we’re still driving to the farms and flatlands.

Drive 30 more minutes over another mountain pass, and you find the Oxnard Flats that spread out from the

ocean. I see tractors and field hands every day. Row crops, citrus groves, and strawberry fields lie vast before my eyes as I visit, preach and teach.

“This is rural,” I say to Linda, as we look out our bedroom window into an avocado grove and a field of cilantro.

Did you know that California leads the country in farm production? If it were a country and not a state, the Golden State would still be the largest farm-producing nation in the world.

At Good Shepherd Lutheran, where 70 to 80 of us gather on Sundays and at midweek, I preach and teach the same way I taught at AFLBS, the same way I taught in Fosston. God’s Word works anywhere.

“The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars,” I read in Isaiah 29:5 in devotions today. “Yes, the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars in Lebanon.” Yes, it even works in Southern California.

People are the same.

My first fears here in ministry were intimidation. How can I reach these upscale people on the border of farmlands, city and ocean? Can the name of Jesus work as powerfully among my neighbors in southern California as it did among my Bible students?

The Holy Spirit is enough to make the transition, I sensed God saying.

He knows people; He made them. He sent me to the ones He wanted me to serve.

the valley

From 1,500 miles away, the people seemed different. I smile when I cruise alongside the Hummers, Corvettes, Range Rovers and BMWs of Ventura County, looking at the farm fields to my left and the \$900,000 midrange tract homes, Spanish-Revival style, to my right. But as I get to know them, as I knock on their doors, as I sit down with them for breakfast, as I play volleyball and softball with them, as I gather them for prayer, as we have picnics with their families, as we share testimonies and Bible studies with them, I find the people to be the same.

Before our family moved, God reminded me in Isaiah 41:9, "You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its remotest parts and said to you, 'You are my servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you.' Do not fear, for I am with you." I'm sticking with it.

Besides, I'm finding that most of us come from someplace else anyway. Mechanical engineers who work in the aviation industry, or chemical engineers who work at Amgen in pharmaceuticals, smart sales reps with great people skills, or enterprising farm boys who moved from North Dakota — under the sunglasses and beneath the skin, when they step out of the Escalade or the Range Rover, they look just like the JV baseball player I graduated with from high school.

That reality stirs me as I share the good news of Jesus. Everyone needs a Savior. "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost," says Luke 19:10. "There is none righteous," says the Word. "No not one." Everyone needs

the Lord's restoration.

Kids, Kids, Kids.

The most impressive observation I've made about the people here is the children. Their name is Legion. They are many. California may produce strawberries in abundance, but their most important harvest is kids. What a great place to learn children's ministry. According to the 2000 census, at least 20,000 of Camarillo's 60,000 people are under the age of 18.

Linda and I find such pleasure in serving families with children. My intern, Jim Noreen, has made it his focus. Our church people at Good Shepherd love to reach kids.

I was sitting with an 8-year-old boy named Colin in a coffee shop the other day. He thinks God may be calling him to be a pastor. We were reading a verse from his Bible together that day and it struck me: "Don't be afraid of the people," says Jeremiah 1:7. "You must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you."

AFLC Home Missions Director Paul Nash told me being a church planter here would be a lot like being a pastor in Fosston where I once served a small-town church — and loved it. I think he's right.

Johnson, who served for 10 years as AFLBS dean, now serves Good Shepherd Lutheran, Camarillo, Calif., an AFLC Home Missions congregation.



chili

BY SARAH TONNESON

miracle

Do you ever read about the incredible things God did for His people in the Old Testament and think, “How awesome would it be to have been a part of that?” What about Jesus’ miracles? Do you ever wish you could travel back in time and see them happen? I know that over the years as I’ve read God’s Word, I definitely wish I could have been around to see some of those amazing things take place. This past summer, I got to see God’s phenomenal power firsthand and experience a miracle ... without time-traveling.

June 2-11 found me in a new country for the first time in my life. I was in Monterrey, Mexico, with about 48 others from my youth group, working alongside Youth with a Mission. For an entire week we did God’s work, serving the people of Monterrey. Our service came in many different ways, such as door-to-door evangelism, food and Bible distribution, ministering to a kindergarten class, visiting a hospital and cerebral palsy orphanage, and holding a soup kitchen. It was so awesome to see God working in so many different ways, and all for the glory of His name!

One of the most amazing ways I saw God working was at our soup kitchen. I don’t know about you, but when I think of a soup kitchen, I think of a building where people come in, are handed a plate of food, sit down on picnic-table benches and eat their food. That’s not quite how our soup kitchen went. Our big white bus pulled up into the poorest neighborhood I’ve ever seen. I was amazed at what these people’s homes were made out of; it looked like an American junkyard.

On the menu for lunch that day was some chili-dog mix, oranges, and chips. We had one of those five-gallon coolers filled with the chili-dog mix, and we estimated that we could feed about 150 people that day. To distribute the food, then we made a sort of assembly line: Inside the bus, the mom chaperones of our group were in charge of putting together the plates of food. The plates were then passed down to us, who then handed them out to the waiting people. All of the people were standing in three different lines — all the women were in one line, all the girls in one

line, and all the boys were in yet another line. (I’m assuming the men were all at work.)

Starting off, we were feeling really confident, so we decided to give the women two chili-dogs in addition to their oranges and chips. That turned out to be a not-so-great idea. Within about half an hour, we began to realize that our five-gallon cooler filled with chili-dog mix wasn’t bottomless. The people just kept coming; they were flocking to our bus. At one point one of the men in our group looked out at the crowd and exclaimed, “The entire elementary school is coming!”

We started to worry; we were running low on chili-dog mix and the crowd was not thinning out. I prayed — along with many others in our group — that God would perform a miracle for us like He did with the fish and bread, multiplying a little bit of food to feed a large crowd. And He did! It was absolutely incredible! Somehow, God multiplied our little bit of chili-dog mix to feed the people in that Monterrey neighborhood.

We didn’t get an exact count of the number of people we gave food to that day, but our estimates are about 350-400 people. The best part was that we never ran out of food! Our five-gallon cooler of chili-dog mix eventually ran out, but we had some sandwiches in the back for our lunch later that day. We gave them to the people as well, and the last sandwich went to the last person there. How cool is that?

So the next time you hear someone say that God doesn’t work the same way today as He did back in Bible times, or you find yourself wishing you could experience a miracle, just remember that God never changes. The same God who multiplied our little bit of chili-dog mix is the same God who parted the Red Sea for the Hebrews. His power is the same, His greatness is the same, and His love is the same. If we make ourselves available to Him, He can use us to show that power, greatness and love to the world.

Tonneson, a junior at AFLBS, is a member of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.



the tree that withered away

BY PASTOR AMOS DYRUD, as told to Loiell Dyrud

“A-ough! A-ough!” Adolphe Santinely heard it again. It was the sound of someone coughing outside his door. But he was in prayer, and the owner of the house, Andre, was not home. Adolphe ignored the disturbance.

“A-ough! A-ough! A-ough!” Realizing whoever was at the door was not going away, Adolphe relented and opened the door.

“Did you want Andre? He’s not here right now,” he said. It was a woman he had not seen before in Votovoatavo.

“My name is Kalovary,” she said shyly, “I live in Behera about two hours away. I came here because I heard about the meetings you were having. I was told I could find you in this house. They said you and the *ny vazaha* (the foreigner)

are holding meetings here, telling about a powerful Creator God who is a kind God. Would you come to our village and tell us about him?”

Adolphe watched her. She was dressed in a pink-flowered *lamba* and looked down at her hands while she spoke. Her voice was sincere and pleading. He thought for awhile, and then he answered. “Yes, we will try to come tomorrow afternoon. But first I must talk to the others.” Kalovary looked up, smiled, and then hurried away without another word.

Adolphe turned back to the table where he had been praying and thought how similar she was to the shy, young woman he used to teach in Ampanihy. As a young Malagasy teacher, he felt the call to full-time service and had left his promising teaching career to become a pastor.

Ninety years earlier, Lutheran missionaries had brought the light of the gospel to this island nation off the southeast coast of Africa. Congregations were started. Bible schools and seminaries were established. National pastors and workers were trained to go with the missionaries into remote villages and preach the Word of God. Adolphe, especially, had a gift of ministering to people and had been disciplined for several years by the missionaries.

After his ordination, Adolphe worked mainly in Ampanihy with several young catechists (Bible school graduates) bringing the gospel to the surrounding villages. At the time, they were holding three-day meetings in Votovoatavo. Meetings like these were held every three months around the district.

Later that afternoon, Adolphe, together with the missionary and the catechists, gathered for prayer. As they knelt, they knew tomorrow would be difficult — impossible if they were to rely on their own power. Behera was a village where the gospel had never been preached. The forces of darkness had been in control for centuries.

The people of Behera were enslaved by their traditional, animistic religions. They had built shrines or altars to various spirits and, in some cases, to their ancestors. At these altars, villagers prayed and offered sacrifices to appease the spirits. Sometimes the shrines were rocks, sometimes strange looking trees, but always the Malagasy people believed that the spirits living within these objects held power over them. In fact, they believed these spirits were so powerful that if one approached an altar without correct sacrifices, then snakes, lightning, or other evil forces would destroy the person.

Knowing the difficulties they were to face, the Christians prayed for power over the evil one and for God to govern their every word.

The next day in Behera, they gathered in the shade of some Kily trees. The hot sun blazed brightly on the dry, dusty village.

The tall missionary placed his autoharp on the hood of the cream-colored panel truck and began singing:

The Love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell.
It goes beyond the highest star
And reaches to the lowest dell

Attracted by this strange, light-skinned *vazaha*, the villagers gathered around and listened to song after song. The Malagasy people have beautiful singing voices, but this was something different. They had never heard songs like this before.

When the songs ended, the missionary put away his harp, and he and Adolphe began preaching about the love of the Creator God who had sent His Son to die for the people of Behera.

Suddenly, from the back of the crowd, a man named Reholahiny jumped up and shouted: “Stop telling lies! You have your Jesus, but I have this Kily tree.” He pointed to a lush, green tree a short distance away. “I receive my

children, cattle, sheep, goats, and everything I need for life from that tree. Get out of here. We won’t stand for your silly storytelling.”

Andre, one of the catechists, stood up and said, “No, it is Jesus, the One we are telling you about today, who gives you all you need. He also gives true happiness.”

Reholahiny became furious and stomped his foot on the ground: “Get out of our village at once. Let us live as our fathers lived. Leave us to the wrath of God. Leave us alone.”

“We won’t argue and fight with you,” Adolphe replied. “According to the Bible, the book I’m holding in my hand, vengeance belongs to God. He will do what is best for you.”

With that, the small band of Christians ended their meeting and returned to Votovoatavo.

The next day, while he was praying, Adolphe again heard someone coughing outside the door. But today it was more frantic. When he opened the door, he saw Kalovary again. This time she was smiling. “Yesterday, after you had gone home, my brother, Reholahiny, said to me, ‘Tonight you will die! It was you who brought those praying people here to disturb our peace. The gods don’t like that, and tonight you will die!’

“But see,” she said, holding her arms wide apart, “nothing happened to me during the night, and here I am as well as I have ever been.” And then with such excitement she could hardly control herself, she exclaimed, “you must come back to Behera with me. Something amazing has happened!”

So they all returned to Behera. Kalovary led them through the village to the Kily tree that Reholahiny had told them was the god he worshiped. There before their eyes stood a dead tree. What had been a lush, green tree yesterday had mysteriously withered and died over night. All that was left were bare branches and a bare trunk. Beneath it a pile of leaves lay, shriveled and yellow.

Gathered around the tree, villagers stood muttering, trying to explain what had happened. No one had an answer, except Kalovary.

“This is God’s doing,” she exclaimed. “He has more power than my brother’s tree. Now I want to follow this God. Teach me His ways, so I can be baptized and become a Christian.”

And thus in April 1954, in the village of Behera, God showed His miraculous power, and the light of the gospel finally penetrated the darkness that had covered this village for centuries.

Dyrud and his wife, Ovidie, served as missionaries to Madagascar from 1950 to 1969 under the Lutheran Free Church. In the fall of 1969, He began teaching in the AFLC Bible school and seminary, where he later served as dean of the seminary for 10 years. He is the missionary in this story. This story will be included in a collection of missionary stories to be published by AFLC Parish Education in 2008. Additional mission stories are currently being collected. If you have a story to share, contact Parish Ed at (763) 545-5631.

very near



BY PASTOR NATE JORE

to God

Have you ever heard a mango fall on a tin roof in the middle of the night? When you hear such a noise and can identify what it is, everything remains calm. But if, however, you are not certain what the sound is, the human mind has a way of changing that mango into just about anything else that is capable of making noise. “What was that?”

We arrived in Uganda on Nov. 3, 2006, after much planning, praying, and packing. Our flight arrived at 8:30 a.m. with 12 of our 13 pieces of luggage (the missing piece we received three days later). We were met at the airport by the president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Uganda (ELCU), David Natema, who drove us the three-hour journey to our new home in Jinja. We were very warmly received and delighted to be in our new home. The house was completely empty: no furniture, tables, chairs, or curtains. We had brought portable beds for the boys, an air mattress for ourselves, and mosquito nets. The electricity was off that first night so we went digging through our luggage to find the flashlights we had brought. I would like to share with you a portion from my journal entry dated Nov. 4, 2006.

“Last night was very difficult. I fell asleep exhausted and slept just enough to take the edge off. I lay awake with my mind whirling. There was the emotion of despair and fear. Rhoda woke up and we were able to talk and pray together. Elijah and Judah woke up as if it were morning, so we had some time as a family by flashlight (the electricity was off). I finally felt release from the despair as I sang praises to the Lord, declaring His Lordship, and worshipping Him. It was very real and reviving. There was peaceful sleep the rest of the night.”

As I think back to those first days in Uganda, I remember very clearly the presence of the Lord. There were many times when we felt vulnerable and alone, but always during those times, God was very near. It seems that God often allows us to feel uncomfortable so that we remember to run to Him for comfort and protection.

We are quickly adjusting to our new lives in Uganda.

It is such a blessing to have furniture now and even a stove and refrigerator! Rhoda has been enjoying learning how to cook Uganda-style. Jinja has a wonderful open market where we get most of our fresh produce. There are also supermarkets where we can get other essentials.

A key part of being a missionary is to establish meaningful relationships with people. Rhoda has had some wonderful opportunities to minister to some of the women around her, and I have also enjoyed building relationships with some of the men. Our study of the local language in this area (Lusoga) has opened many doors for us. Since most foreigners here speak only English, people become very excited when we greet them in their own language. It is our prayer that our lives will radiate the love of God, and that many will come to know Him.

There are some great needs around us. Witchcraft is rampant and the witch doctors keep busy cursing people. There is a lot of confusion, even in the church, as prosperity theology has turned Christianity into a pursuit of wealth. There is a Ugandan woman who drives a Hummer and travels around preaching that if people will give \$50, she will pray for them and God will bless them as she has been blessed. AIDS continues to be a big problem as well, leaving behind many orphans and broken people.

Despite the darkness around us, we have seen wonderful fruit of the gospel. The largest blessing for me has been to get to know the seven pastors of the ELCU. They are men of a great God, and God is using them in mighty ways to expand His kingdom. They use their modest resources for kingdom work. I thank God that He has called us to work alongside these national pastors.

“Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him” (Psalm 34:8). Thank you, dear friends, for standing with us in prayer. We are learning to take refuge in our great God. We send greetings from the brothers and sisters here in Uganda.

Jore and his wife, Rhoda, and children Elijah and Judah are AFLC missionaries in a new work in Jinja, Uganda.



BY DON RUHTER



Spreading the
gospel with
native language
and music

What's a Colorado-born, grade-school music teacher-turned missionary doing in Sierra Leone, West Africa? Why is she fighting malaria and dealing with primitive transportation, unusual food, touchy musicians and poor sound quality in her makeshift recording studio? Since 2001, Kedra Larsen, a member of St. Olaf Lutheran, Montgomery, Ill., has been helping African Christians develop, write, record and share liturgies and worship songs in their own language and style. Liturgies and songs that praise God and reflect the Africans' heritage and experience.

With a little encouragement from God, the prayers and financial support of hundreds of fellow Christians, and a lot of hard work, Larsen has come a long way from being an elementary school music teacher in rural Idaho and Seattle. Working with national churches, language program personnel and local musicians, she now helps create

message of salvation, and glorify God.

"These countries are not homogenous," said Larsen, "there are many languages, and a variety of worship and singing styles, as well as different instruments ... and a broad range of musicians each with his or her own style."

"Each culture has its own language and unique set of customs reflected in its own unique music system and heritage. Music speaks to the heart when it's culturally based and in a familiar form. Some local churches are stuck in a rut ... using western music with transcribed lyrics. But when we show people how to create their own worship music, their eyes light up and they find new meaning."

The portable recording studio Larsen uses to record the music weighs 55 pounds and is transported in a large waterproof Rubbermaid plastic box. Larsen's equipment includes microphones and stands, a mixer, tape recorder, mini disc recorder, an external sound card and a computer — all running off of batteries.

words

and promote the use of culturally relevant music in native worship programs. This is not like any "Common Doxology" we ever sang or heard ... but the purpose is precisely the same — to glorify God and to reach others with the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Always interested in sharing the gospel through cross-cultural missions, Larsen learned of Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT) and signed up for a summer trip to Guatemala with other interested potential missionaries. Two years later she was serving in Sierra Leone, after completing courses in linguistics, cultural relationships, language learning, and principles of ethnic music.

As an ethnomusicologist, Larsen "helps people expand and enrich their worship by helping them incorporate Scripture into their style of music and song." This is a modern-day version of a technique Martin Luther used in Germany: opening up and popularizing Scripture, which the Latin language had hidden from most people. Luther combined German translations of Bible passages and Latin songs with popular German music so that people could recognize, remember, rejoice, praise God and sing.

To date, Larsen has worked or held workshops in Liberia, Ghana, Cameroon, Angola, Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, Honduras and Guatemala, as well as Sierra Leone. She helps locals use their cultural instruments and songs to spread the gospel, raise awareness of the Bible's

"In the field, in addition to the local people, we work with literacy coordinators who are setting up language classes and teaching volunteers how to teach their fellow countrymen to read," said Larsen. "Participants interact directly with the Scripture text in song and drama workshops. This not only helps foster an interest in literacy, but it also helps people learn how to present the Bible message orally."

Larsen is currently taking a break from her ministry while she pursues a master's degree in ethnomusicology from Bethel University, St. Paul. In August she will travel to Nigeria to plan future work there. In November she will return to Sierra Leone and Liberia to continue training people in vernacular media.

If you would like more information on Larsen's ministry, contact her at klarsen@lbt.org or call (800) 532-4253.

Ruhter works for Lutheran Bible Translators, an independent mission organization dedicated to helping bring people to faith in Jesus Christ by making the Word of God available to those who do not yet have it in the language of their hearts. For more information about LBT, visit their web site: www.lbt.org, or call (800) 532-4253. Ask for Ruhter at ex. 31.

KIRK FLAA

My name is Kirk Flaa. I am 44 years old, spent my high school years on a farm in Galchutt, N.D., with my parents, Bryan and Bonnie Flaa, and graduated in 1985 from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minn. Gloria, my wife of 20 years this May, is from Wishek, N.D., and we have two growing boys—Eli (15) and Elliot (11). Prior to our call into the ministry and our move to Minneapolis, we had spent 15 years in Sioux Falls, S.D., where I worked as a territory manager for a wholesale tire company. Our church home is Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, served by Pastor Mike Brandt.

Both Gloria and I grew up in the Lutheran church, but sadly, many years of our lives were lived knowing nothing of a personal relationship with Jesus. In the fall of 1993, Jesus Christ became the Lord of my life as He graciously delivered me from alcoholism, and shortly thereafter, Gloria, too, received Christ into her heart at a Sunday morning service as Pastor Brandt shared the gospel. How we give thanks unto God for His grace, mercy, and patience!

We are now completing our fourth year of seminary training as I serve as an intern under Pastor Kevin Garner at Fox River Lutheran Church in Norway, Ill. The Lord has

taught us a great deal these past four years. But perhaps no lesson has been of greater value than one set forth in a single verse from Paul's letter to the Philippians: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (4:13). We have come to know and trust this Word, and we have come, as well, to cherish one like it from I Thessalonians 5:24, "Faithful is He who calls you, and He will also bring it to pass." In both burden and in blessing, it is He who has sustained us, and we entrust to Him our every day.



NICK DYRUD

I was born Jan. 9, 1979, in Minneapolis. I was extraordinarily blessed to grow up in a family where the Word of God was the Bread of Life. I was taught that Jesus was always to come first in my life. My parents (Sam and Mary Jo Dyrud) and grandparents (Amos and Ovidie Dyrud) have had a lasting influence on me and modeled how a person should live for Christ. Our home congregation is Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.

Still, God desired a personal faith, and I will never forget the night God changed my life. It was the summer of 1991. During the night's sermon at the ARC's family camp, God revealed to me the true weight of sin within my life. I wanted nothing more than to accept a Savior who would purify me and save my life from death. That night I gave my whole heart to Jesus, giving God those things I was hiding and holding onto. That year I felt a clear call by God into the ministry, and I cannot explain that in words.

Years have passed since that summer. The road has had its ups and downs, and I have had those spiritual ups and downs, yet my hope rests in this: Even in times of unfaithfulness God has remained faithful to me. It is truly all Jesus.

After graduating from AFLBS, I earned a bachelor's degree in communication from Northwestern College. I started out in the working world selling cars for Toyota. At first I was quite successful, and I thought this was where I should be. But God quickly brought me to a low place, and

through that time of seeking God's will, I knew it was time to go to AFLTS — to fulfill God's calling.

During seminary I became a father. I had to mature quickly. I cannot say enough of the blessing God has given my wife, Shelley (Richman) and I. Our son

Mattias (3) and daughter Annika (1) have been teaching me patience and the importance of striving to be the godly example that my family was for me. We have served our internship at Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.

One of the most important lessons I've learned through my studies at seminary is resting in the assurance of God's promise, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22).



KIRK THORSON

I was born on Oct. 7, 1978, to Ann and Ron Thorson and grew up in a Christian home in Yorkville, Ill. Our family attended Helmar Lutheran Church in Newark. I came to an assurance of salvation as a 5-year-old in Sunday school when I understood that Jesus died on the cross for my sins. Throughout junior and senior high school, I had up and down periods in my walk with the Lord, but was blessed to have a solid group of Christian friends to hold me accountable.

I attended North Central College in Naperville, Ill., where I began working on an accounting degree. Near the end of college, with a job already lined up, I sensed God calling me to go to AFLBS. Jeremiah 29:11 tells us that God has a wonderful plan for our lives, but Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us that God's thoughts and ways are far beyond our comprehension. At Bible school I met great Christian friends, met my wonderful wife Jennifer (Martz), and felt called to enter seminary.

Seminary has been a great time of growth in my life. I was challenged spiritually by the coursework and professors. Jennifer, our son Will (1), and I are currently enjoying our time of learning during our internship at Bethel

Free Lutheran in Minot, N.D., as well, and are already realizing how difficult it will be to leave here in the next few months.

During my years in seminary and internship, I have grown in my understanding of Scripture and appreciation for the work it alone accomplishes in hearts and lives. I have learned that as a pastor, my job will not be to come up with all the answers on my own, but to simply and honestly point people to Jesus. We don't know where the Lord will lead us in the future, but we take comfort in knowing that the Lord is in charge.



SHANE MCLOUGHLIN

I was born Sept. 4, 1970, in Cheyenne, Wyo., to Tom and Lou McLoughlin. I was baptized in the local Greek Orthodox Church, but wasn't raised in the church. I grew up on a ranch west of town. Planning on spending my entire life on the ranch with the sheep and beef cows, I soon found that God had other things in mind. Paula Hagen and I were married and soon the proud parents of our son, Flint (13), and daughter, Casey (9). I had been working for a drilling and blasting company out of Englewood, Colo., at a local rock quarry, plus the work at the ranch and fire hall.

My parents went through an ugly divorce, which God used to rip away from me the family ranch and my close relationship with my father. I was flipping the radio dial one day and came across "Focus on the Family" on a Christian station. I had heard the 90-second blips on the local country station before and had thought highly of them. Over the next two years I came to cling to the work of Jesus on the cross. We still didn't attend church regularly, and I had no Christian friends. The one thing I did know was the first verse to "Amazing Grace" and "The Master's Call." Often on my way home from work, I would weep these precious words.

In June 1999 I moved my family to Beulah, N.D., to do the same kind of work in the coal mines. I had an overpowering sense that I had to get my family to church every Sunday. Through my mother-in-law's pastor, we started

attending Zion Lutheran (ELCA) in Beulah. They had conservative pastors whom God used to extend His call to me for pastoral ministry. In 2003 I began filling the pulpit at Prince of Peace Lutheran (AFLC) in Beulah once a month.

The congregation was sending two men to seminary; one of them was from my church.

Within another nine months, I started seminary. And God had just begun to work. Over the next three years in seminary and during my internship at Grace Free and Zion Free Lutheran churches in Valley City, N.D., God has shown me incredible things: how faithful He is in the little details, even unto death on the cross; the love of Christ seen in Christian fellowship; the darkness of sin and the light of Christ. And He can and is willing to use *me* to preach His good news.



equipping leaders

BY DR. LYLE MATTSON

“We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”

— Colossians 1:28

In recent years, it has become more apparent to those of us on the World Mission Committee (WMC) that we should focus more on teaching local pastors and lay leaders in various mission fields. Therefore, it was with great interest that we listened to an idea brought by Pastor Kevin Olson in March 2006 to establish a distance learning program through the World Missions department. Olson, currently the director of Youth Ministries, spent a nine-month sabbatical in 2005 teaching at the Waama Bible School in Tanzania.

A discussion was held last summer at the Annual Conference with members of the AFLC Schools Board of Trustees concerning the possibility of partnering and developing of this new ministry. Though the school board members felt that there were too many irons in their fire at the present time to consider joining in ministry oversight, they were more than willing to serve as a resource for a distance learning program. They also offered an unused office for our use.

In July 2006, members of the WMC extended a letter of call to Pastor Olson to serve in a staff position under Pastor Del Palmer, director of World Missions, as developer of Distance Education beginning Sept. 1, 2006. With the letter of call in hand, Pastor Olson approached the Youth Board with this proposal. Its members asked Pastor Olson to continue as Youth Ministries director until July 31, after the FLY Convention.

Pastor Olson will begin in his new position with World Missions on Aug. 1. In the interim period, an oversight



committee consisting of Dr. Francis Monseth (AFLTS dean), Pastor Mark Olson and myself has been established to begin initial development of the program. Our first meeting was Jan. 30. We came to the conclusion that Pastor Olson must devote himself full-time to Youth Ministries until the transition, with anything done for distance education being on a part-time or spare-time basis. He is presently examining the legal courses to follow in establishing a course- and degree-offering institution under the WMC. Pastor Olson is also seeking advice from other pastors and teachers concerning the best path to follow when his position does become full-time.

In closing, I'd like to leave you with a mission statement developed by Pastor Olson for this developing ministry: “The AFLC is a small denomination with limited physical and financial resources, but it is wealthy in biblical truth and spiritual life. The AFLC World Mission Committee desires to assist these organizations in training and equipping leaders. This project intends to distribute the biblical and spiritual resources of the AFLC around the world.”

Mattson, a member of United Free Lutheran, Greenbush, Minn., serves on the World Missions Committee.



BY PASTOR DEL PALMER

We were up early and on the road. Today we were visiting our church on the fisherman's island in India. When we reached the Krishna River, it was obvious that the tide was out. A river's level near its mouth is affected by the tides. Our boat couldn't come up to the shore because the water was too shallow. We took off our shoes and waded through the water. I could feel something scurrying from my feet when I stepped down.

I've noticed that most of life is spent walking through the water, rather than walking on it. It's especially true for the people of the fisherman's island. When we reached the island village, V. Raju, the pastor's son, greeted us. His English was clear and he told us how they have been praying for a church to worship in for 14 years. During that time they've had their share of setbacks. The people of this area have always been fishermen, but in recent years they labored hard and long to dig shrimp ponds. Shrimp farming provided a higher income so things were looking up.

Then the tsunami of Christmas 2005 hit. It flooded most of the island and village. Although there was little loss of life, the shrimp ponds were contaminated with sea water. The water contained a marine virus that wiped out their shrimp and made the ponds unusable. Although the villagers were now afraid of the sea, they had no choice but to return to fishing.

They had been faithful. They had been praying for a church. They had been asking God to help them. But now they were in the deep waters. At times like this questions come naturally. Questions like, "Is there a God?" "Does He hear our prayers?" "Will He answer?"

God has promised, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you" (Isaiah 43:2). Of course it's easier to believe it when you're not walking through deep waters.

Just after the tsunami, the village asked the World Missions Committee to help them build a storm shelter with a flat top, which they could use as a refuge in times of flooding. The building would double as a church. Members of the committee saw this as a way to promote the gospel and guard against future disasters at the same time. The people of the AFLC were generous, and the building was constructed.

Today was a very special day; it was the day the congregation would dedicate the church building. They prayed for a church for 14 years. God answered their prayers even as they walked with Him through the natural disaster. There was great joy in the village; they were walking on clouds. The whole situation seems so familiar, very like the way God has worked in my life. I have found that I've had to walk through deep waters before I could walk on clouds.

Does this mean that the problems for this village are all solved? Not at all. They still have the financial needs they've always had. Their pastor needs open-heart surgery, which was scheduled for March. But they have one more piece of evidence that God is always true to His Word. He has proven again that He will be with us when we pass through the rivers and they will not sweep over us.

Palmer is director of the AFLC's World Missions Department.

ministrybond

BY PASTOR TODD & BARB SCHIERKOLK

Christmas morning finally arrived in our house this past December, but instead of opening any presents, which we save for the evening, we pulled out a stack of cards that had come from friends, family and many WMF groups throughout the country. As we opened each one, we read through the list of signatures. Different members of our family would pipe in, "Oh, I remember them!" Many of the names on the WMF cards brought back fond memories for us, and we felt thankful to be connected to people with whom we share a bond in the Lord.

This scene repeats itself at each birthday in our family, and we are regularly reminded of the need we have for the encouragement our friends in WMF groups back home are able to provide for us. Some groups are also able to put together a care package for our family, which is always a big lift to our spirits.

The WMF has had an important part in our ministry to children here in Mexico, as well. One of our special projects this last year was the purchase of Arch Books for the kids in the clubs and Sunday school. They were received with much excitement. We have given away several hundred "The Story of Jesus for Children" videos and several hundred more of the "Jesus" film to each family of children that has come these past years.

Different WMF groups have also made quilts, which have been tremendously appreciated by the people here in Jerez. It gets quite cold, and there is no central heating in

people's homes. The quilts have been an important part of our Christmas outreach to the children in our clubs and the youth group. We have also been very blessed to receive boxes of supplies for the clubs and little toys that we give away as prizes to the kids. There is a constant need for things like glue sticks, kid's scissors, construction paper, small toys, washable markers and easy crafts for 100 kids. We go through crayons like crazy, as well.

We are so blessed to have so many individual ladies' groups that support this ministry financially, in addition to the WMF. We are truly grateful for your gifts, and we thank you so much for your thoughtfulness and generosity to our ministry and to us individually when you are able to send a personal gift.

More than anything else, though, we are deeply grateful to you for your prayers on our behalf as a family and in our ministry. We would stand no chance here in Mexico without the prayer intercession of WMF groups and others for us. As parents we need wisdom beyond ourselves to meet the challenges of family life on the mission field. As ambassadors for Christ we depend on your intercession for us and for those to whom we minister, that the seeds of God's Word that are shared will take root and bear fruit. That is why we are here as your representatives. And we are grateful for your partnership with us in this ministry.

The Schierkolks are AFLC missionaries in Jerez, Mexico.

WMF National Convention

June 12, Sioux Falls, S.D.

"Give Me An Undivided Heart for You"

The 2007 WMF National Convention will be held Tuesday, June 12 at Abiding Savior Free Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, S.D.. To register for the convention, the luncheon and banquet, please see the Annual Conference registration on page 19. District presidents

and national officers, please register for the Wednesday WMF advisory breakfast.

Speakers under the theme from Psalm 85:11 include Jane Emerson, author of the 2007 Bible study; Laurie Nash, who will speak on the "Role of Women;" Linda Korhonen, who will

speak on "An Effective Devotional Life;" and Pastor Paul Nash, who will speak on "Fear."

Child care will be available. For more information on the convention and the annual conference, please visit the conference web site at www.2007aflc.org.



2007 AFLC Annual Conference

June 12-15

Sioux Falls Christian Schools, Sioux Falls, S.D.

Hosts: Abiding Savior Free Lutheran
& Living Word Free Lutheran

CONFERENCE

For an interactive/downloadable form, and for more information, visit www.2007aflc.org

First name: _____ Spouse's first name: _____

Last name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Congregation: _____

(Circle)

You are: Pastor Visiting Pastor Lay Member Lay Visitor

Your spouse is: Pastor Visiting Pastor Lay Member Lay Visitor

Name of person attending WMF Convention on June 12: _____

Meals

Breakfast and evening dinners are on your own, except as noted. A general lunch will be available at noon on site.

Special meals and banquets

Tuesday WMF luncheon	_____ X \$8.50	\$ _____
Tuesday WMF banquet	_____ X \$11	\$ _____
Wednesday WMF advisory board breakfast	_____ X \$6	\$ _____
Wednesday Builder's Fellowship lunch	_____ X \$8.50	\$ _____
Wednesday general lunch	_____ X \$8.50	\$ _____
Wednesday Schools Corporation dinner	_____ X \$11	\$ _____
Thursday Mission Corporation breakfast	_____ X \$6	\$ _____
Thursday general lunch	_____ X \$8.50	\$ _____
Thursday ARC Corporation lunch	_____ X \$8.50	\$ _____
Thursday PIMO lunch	_____ X \$8.50	\$ _____
Thursday Pastors and Wives banquet	_____ X \$17.50	\$ _____
Friday FLAPS breakfast	_____ X \$6	\$ _____
Friday general lunch	_____ X \$8.50	\$ _____
Friday Foundation lunch	_____ X \$8.50	\$ _____

Total lunches/special meals \$ _____

Conference registration fee (\$30 single/\$40 couple) \$ _____

WMF Convention registration fee (\$7) \$ _____

Total registration and meals \$ _____

Make checks payable to:

Mail to:

Abiding Savior Free Lutheran Church

Abiding Savior Free Lutheran Church, Attn.: AFLC Conference Committee,
4100 S. Bahnson Ave., Sioux Falls, SD 57103

2007 Annual Conference housing information

The AFLC Annual Conference will be held June 12-15 at Sioux Falls Christian Schools in Sioux Falls, S.D. Hosts Abiding Savior Free Lutheran and Living Word Free Lutheran have compiled a list of housing options, listed below.

A. Ramkota Best Western Hotel, \$79.99/night. This hotel functions as a great location for families. Although it is the farthest from our main conference facility, it boasts of outdoor and indoor water parks, which are included in the conference rate. Call (605) 336-0650 and ask for the AFLC conference rate.

B. Holiday Inn City Centre, \$84/night. Located in downtown

Sioux Falls. Many restaurants and visitor opportunities exist nearby, including the city's namesake Sioux Falls. This will serve as the main location for AFLC staff and some evening receptions. Call (605) 339-2000 and ask for the AFLC conference rate.

C. Ramada Limited, \$69/night. Call (605) 330-0000 and ask for AFLC conference rate.

D. Red Roof Inn, \$51.99/night/single or \$57.99/night/double. Call (605) 361-1864 and ask for AFLC conference rate.

E. Sheraton Hotel & Convention Center, \$94/night. Connected to the Sioux Falls Convention Center

and Canary Stadium, it boasts of a newly added business addition and a wonderful atrium environment. Call (605) 331-0100 and ask for the AFLC conference rate.

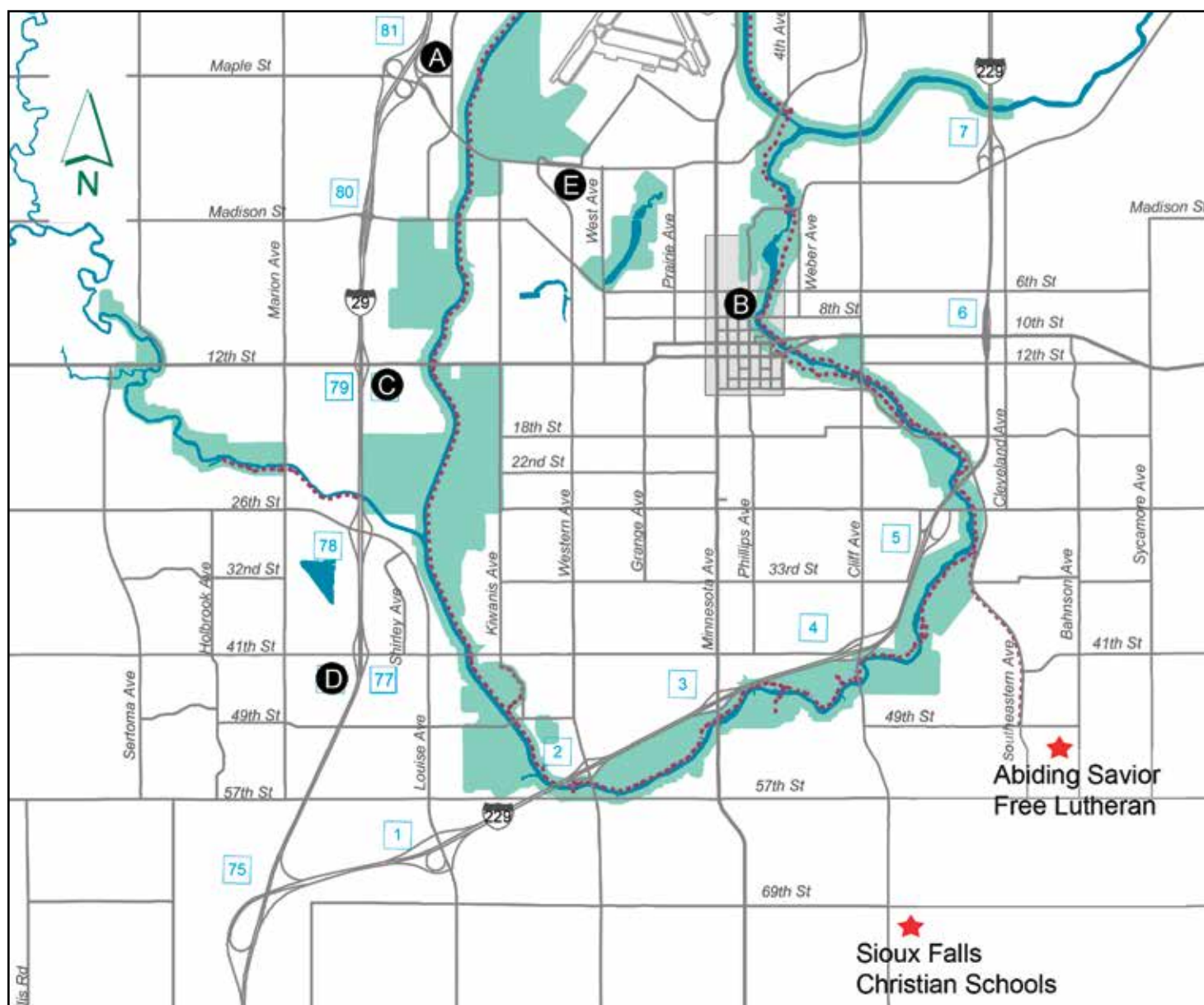
Camping

• **Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park,** Call (800) 638-9043 or visit www.jellystonesiouxfalls.com.

• **KOA,** Call (800) 562-9865 or visit www.koa.com.

• **Red Barn RV Park,** Tea, S.D. Call (605) 368-2268.

Conference registration forms, child care and meal information will be published again in the May *Ambassador* and is also available online at www.2007aflc.org.





thus far

BY CARL BUSSE

Report from a home missions congregation

Then Samuel took a stone and set it up ... He named it Ebenezer, (*stone of help*) saying, “Thus far has the Lord helped us” (I Samuel 7:12, NIV). Fellow members of our congregation chose to name our church Ebenezer because we all agreed that even though we had been through some very unpleasant situations and difficult decisions, certainly the Lord had helped us “thus far.” And now, three years later, and many times in between, we can still say, “Thus far has the Lord helped us.”

When we started Ebenezer, we also remembered the experiences of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:36-39, where “They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company.” That was the very reason we left one congregation to start another. And, just as the Lord used that situation to send out two teams instead of one, there are now two congregations instead of one.

Ebenezer Free Lutheran was started in September 2003 by three couples who began meeting for worship, fellowship and Bible study in the living room of one of the families. We worshiped at 4 p.m. so that Pastor Brent Logeman could make the more than two-hour drive from Metropolis, Ill. He came once a month, and guest pastors and laymen led the other services. Since then, several families from our former congregation have joined us, and we have moved our worship time to Sunday mornings. Pastor Logeman and the people from Faith Lutheran in Metropolis were a big help to us, both before we organized,

and for more than a year after.

The search for better facilities led us to a property on Highway 45 bypass in Humboldt. On the property is a 40-by-130-foot metal-sided pole building, divided into three sections and highly visible. It also has a paved parking lot and several acres of land. We recently finished one 1600-square-foot section for a sanctuary and narthex. One other room is for food and fellowship, and the third we use for Sunday school and meetings. We feel really blessed to have this fine facility.

But ministry is a challenge, especially since we all are “transplants” from other parts of the country, and none of us live or work in Humboldt, a town of about 9,000 people where Lutheran churches are almost unheard of. So we are not only the “new kid” on the block, we are also the “foreigners” in the neighborhood.

To make some contacts and reach out into the community, we have become involved in some of the activities at the Senior Citizens Center, and we recently joined the Chamber of Commerce. Also, several members have begun a ministry of singing, devotions and activities at a local nursing home and are trying to help them get some badly needed furniture.

Thus far has the Lord helped us, and we continue to rely on our “Ebenezer.”

Busse is a founding member of Ebenezer Free Lutheran, Humboldt, Tenn.

AFLC Memorials

► January

AFLBS

Roger Swenson (2)
Randy Strand
Ray Anderson

AFLTS

Roger Swenson (3)
Henry Dengser
Dan Braunschweig

Home Missions

Virginia Peterson
Lucille Linn

Parish Education

Esther Suelzle

World Missions

Stanley Carlson
Hazel Holland
Marilyn Langland
Paul Johnson
Kenneth Wold

Annual Conference web site now available

Looking for information about child care, hotels, or registration for this summer's annual conference? Be sure to visit www.2007aflc.org. The site offers complete information about the conference and WMF convention, as well as an interactive/downloadable registration form.

The conference registration form found on page 19 is also available on the web site.

ARC hosts annual men's retreat

Theme focuses on study of II Timothy

With the theme, "Rock Solid in Jesus," the AFLC's annual Men's Retreat will be held April 20-21 at the Association Retreat Center in Osceola, Wis. The special speaker for the event is Pastor Tony Stockman, Brandon, Minn. Pastor David Johnson will lead music.

Registration begins at 6:30 p.m. April 20. The cost of the retreat is \$60/person. An extra lodging option is offered this year, which includes Saturday night lodging and Sunday breakfast for \$20 more.

A registration form is available online at www.arc-aflc.org, or you may email arcregistration@centurytel.net. Call (800) 294-2877 for more information.

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Karen Palmer has resigned as secretary in AFLC Parish Education, where she served part-time for more than 10 years. Karen plans to travel with her husband, World Missions Director Pastor Del Palmer when he visits AFLC congregations. **Diane Brubakken**, Plymouth, Minn., a recent graduate of Trinity Lutheran College, Issaquah, Wash., recently began working as the new secretary. **Brett Boe**, currently a seminary student, also serves in Parish Education as part-time office assistant.

Correction: Leo Boger was inadvertently included in the January memorials listed in the March issue.

Pastor Philip Featherstone, 83, of Osceola, Wis., died Feb. 13. Born June 24, 1923, in Red Wing, Minn., he was the son of Ted and Lola Featherstone. He married Delores Lundell Dec. 23, 1944. She died in 1973. He married Hazell Lundell in 1974.

He grew up near Red Wing and became a farmer. After his first marriage, they moved to Vasa, Minn., where he farmed, worked for a seed company and did carpentry work. He was a member of Vasa Lutheran Church. They moved to Minneapolis in 1967, and he attended Independent Lutheran Seminary. He was ordained in 1969. He served Faith Lutheran Church in Minneapolis; Running Valley Lutheran, Colfax, Wis.; Pukwana and St. Olaf Lutheran churches in Pukwana, S.D. He retired in 1988. They moved to the Association Retreat Center in the mid-1990s, where he participated in Bible studies, prayer groups and worked as a handyman.

Surviving are his wife, four children and numerous other family and friends.

The memorial service was Feb. 20 at the ARC, with Pastor Eric Westlake officiating.

Members of **Ortley Free Lutheran**, Ortley, S.D., will celebrate the congregation's 100th anniversary on June 17. The event, planned for the weekend following the annual conference in Sioux Falls, S.D., is open to all who wish to attend. More information regarding this event will follow in a future issue.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1- Feb. 28, 2007

FUND	TOTAL (Subsidy)	REC'D IN FEBRUARY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$361,225	\$28,812	\$76,809	21
Youth Ministries	73,114	2,992	9,112	12
Evangelism	108,236	7,921	15,754	15
Parish Education	107,052	4,631	12,710	12
Seminary	216,097	15,506	34,174	16
Bible School	343,545	23,061	48,058	14
Home Missions	316,413	20,748	48,659	15
World Missions	287,808	14,955	40,592	14
Personal Support	407,198	33,078	101,657	25
TOTALS	\$2,220,688	\$235,821	\$387,525	17
TOTALS 2006	\$1,994,798	\$165,228	\$292,709	15

Goal 17%

These are the Annual Conference-approved budgets but do not reflect all the financial needs of the departments. Contact the individual departments for further information.

the value of one person

It is hard for me to imagine how anybody could think it is okay for one person to own another person. How could someone treat a human being as nothing more than a piece of property to be bought and sold? Yet slavery is very much a part of our history, and continues to exist in various forms throughout the world.

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the passage in British Parliament of a law to abolish the slave trade in Great Britain. William Wilberforce worked for 20 long years to see that law become a reality. His life and work is the basis for a recent movie called “Amazing Grace.”



Pastor Craig Johnson

Wilberforce was strongly influenced by John Newton. Newton had been a slave trader. The Lord pursued him, however, and he came to know of God's grace. He left slave trading and became a preacher and also a hymn writer. He wrote probably the most familiar and beloved hymn in the English language:

“Amazing Grace.”

Newton wrote of grace “that saved a wretch like me.” He called himself “the Great Blasphemer.” His attitude was similar to the apostle Paul, who described himself as “the worst of sinners” (I Timothy 1:16, NIV).

Understanding their unworthiness made Paul and Newton appreciative of God's grace. It also led to the recognition that God wants to shower His grace on everyone. They knew if they could receive grace, everyone could. God “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” Christ Jesus “gave himself as a ransom for all men” (I Timothy 2:4, 6).

God isn't interested in only certain people. The Lord doesn't care for one ethnic group more than another. He looks at each person as being of incredible value, no matter the color of their skin or their country of origin.

Newton had previously transported Africans in ships as if they were nothing more than cargo. By God's grace he changed and began to see people as God sees them. Wilberforce caught the same kind of vision and, inspired, spoke out against the terrible evil of slavery.

Each of us needs to catch that same vision and then

act on that vision. The battle against slavery still needs to be waged today. According to some estimates, 27 million people in our world suffer in some type of slavery. Young people are forced into prostitution. Children are taken from their families and made to fight in militias and kill or be killed. Desperate people are lured into forced labor conditions they can't escape from. The slavery of our day should bother us deeply, like the slavery of his day bothered Wilberforce.

Recognizing the value of each individual should also lead to a passion for missions. God calls us to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). We're not to just care about the people of our community or our ethnic group. They are not the only ones who matter to God, and they are not the only ones who should matter to us.

When I was in India, a man came up to me asking for prayer. He had obvious physical problems. He was wearing rags for clothes. If he had been limping along on the sidewalk in many places in the U.S., a lot of people would do what they could to avoid him.

The Lord doesn't care for one ethnic group more than another. He looks at each person as being of incredible value, no matter the color of their skin or their country of origin.

Jesus came for him, loves him and died for him as much as anyone.

The Lord is the Good Shepherd who searches for lost sheep. He doesn't just look for the sheep that are well groomed, have been well behaved and haven't wandered too far from the pen. He searches for the lost and brings back the strays. He binds up the injured and strengthens the weak (Ezekiel 34:16). Jesus said, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also” (John 10:16). Each lost sheep matters, whether it's a kid begging for spare change in Brazil or a rich suburbanite in the States. The Lord searches for whoever will come.

association retreat center



mission possible

BY JIM KELLER

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy my true son in the faith ...” (1 Timothy 1:1-2).

When we consider our lives and the many difficult things that we face, we can all come up with at least one event that really stands out. Probably one of the more difficult current events would be sending a family member overseas to perform their duty in service to our country. How difficult it is to leave a young family or have a young person leave Mom and Dad and the rest of the family for the first time.

Then there are the exciting challenges we take on willingly. Many people have climbed mountains, explored jungles, or taken a bungee jump off a bridge. All these things seem difficult and scary, but God gave us the will to try such things.

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he knew he was writing to a young man who was facing an impossible task. Timothy was serving one of the most difficult congregations in the world at that time. Paul knew that the task was more than any man could handle. But he also knew that God would be right there with Timothy and that the

task could be accomplished.

In his letter to Timothy, Paul reminds us that though it seems impossible and difficult, we can be God's hand here on earth to change people's lives. He knew this to be fact by just looking at his own life. Paul realized that Jesus was Savior and that without Him, he would be nothing.

God's love is demonstrated throughout this letter. Paul reminds Timothy of God's great gift of salvation through His Son Jesus. We are reminded that in the same ways God watched over Paul, He has continued to watch over millions of others throughout the centuries. Throughout his personal trials, Paul tells us that our hope is in Jesus Christ.

Another message in this letter is that the gospel must be shared. Paul tells us just what the church is supposed to do. We are to evangelize the sinner, equip the saints and lift up the Savior. We are to go into all the world and make disciples for Jesus.

As humans we can look upon this challenge as an impossible mission, but God knows that all things are possible to those who believe in Him. Be encouraged that you are not on an impossible mission today as long as you keep Jesus Christ first in your preparations and as the center of your life.

Keller is director of guest services at the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis.