

THE 

AUGUST 2017

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

HERE I
STAND

→ The Annual Conference ←



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

AUGUST 2017
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SCRIPTURE ALONE

BY PASTOR PETER FRANZ

W

hen Martin Luther spoke of *Scripture alone*, his concern was for the authority of Scripture. Luther lived in a day when the Church didn't view Scripture alone

as the ultimate authority, rather, Scripture plus the traditions of the Church, which came from bishops, councils, and the pope. As a result, the Church taught things that weren't consistent with God's Word. So Luther challenged the Church to stand upon the truth that our ultimate authority is in the Word of God alone, *sola scriptura*.

This core teaching of Scripture alone, or *sola scriptura*, has been called the formal principle of the Reformation because it stands at the very beginning and gives form or direction to all that Christians affirm. If we don't get this principle correct, we won't get the rest of them right, either.

In II Timothy 3:14-17, the Apostle Paul gives Timothy, his young friend, three reasons why we must stand on Scripture alone.

First, because Scripture alone is powerful. Paul said to Timothy, "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (v. 14-15).

Timothy had the blessing of a Christian grandmother and mother who taught him from the time that he was an infant (II Timothy 1:5). He had seen what the Word of God had done in their

lives. But it wasn't just Timothy's mother and grandmother who convinced him of the power of God's Word. Timothy also had the example of the Apostle Paul. When you see the number one enemy of the Church become a committed follower of Jesus, it can't help but impact your life. If the Word of God can change a man like Saul of Tarsus, it can change anyone.

Second, the Word of God is inspired. The phrase translated "inspired by God" (v. 16) is literally "God-breathed." The words of Scripture come from the mouth of God. Though He used human authors, it is His very literal Word, breathed out. So we don't look at opinion polls, we don't look to our culture, and we don't even look to our own human reasoning to know what is right. The only question we should ask is: What does God's Word say?

Third, God's Word is profitable. It teaches us. It reproves us. It corrects us. It trains us in righteousness. And as a result we are "equipped for every good work" (v. 17).

Do you see the value of God's Word? Are you spending time in God's Word each day? Don't miss out on the blessing. God's Word is powerful. God's Word is inspired. God's Word is profitable. Become a faithful student of God's Word and your life will never be the same. Scripture alone is all that we need.

Franz, who is the vice president of the AFLC, serves Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.

I believe that the greatest indicator of our potential for expanding the reach of the gospel for the AFLC is for our Schools being full!

—Steve Jankord

The transformational power of the Gospel is central to everything we do.

—Dr. Mark Olson

Pray the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth workers into His harvest. The hard work is to pray: Hard in the sense that we must admit we can do little to create more pastors. The Lord must do the calling and our God tells us that He calls in response to His people praying.

—Pastor Lyndon Korhonen

Our greatest need is healthy congregations. Well-trained, soul-loving pastors who preach God's Word, administer the sacraments, and equip followers of Christ for their ministry in God's kingdom are a great gift to the congregation and a boon to its health.

—Pastor Wade Mobley

It is good to remind ourselves of these foundational truths of Scripture and of the Reformation and to preach them and teach them regularly and repetitively to all ages. May we never tire of hearing them!

—Marian Christopherson



HERE I STAND

The 2017 Annual Conference Report

BY PASTOR ROBERT LEE

The 55th Annual Conference of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC), met June 13-16 on the campus of the AFLC Schools in Plymouth, Minn., with the theme “Here I Stand” (Romans 1:16-17) in honor of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. Registration totaled 502, including 164 pastors, an increase from last year, plus many children in attendance with their parents.

President Lyndon Korhonen officially opened the conference on Tuesday evening at the beginning of the opening service, a change from previous practice, in order to call for a vote to accept the report of the Colloquy Committee. The change was necessary to authorize the rite of ordination, which was included for the first time in

the opening service. The service was led by Pastor Robert W. Lee, Naknek, Alaska, and the message was delivered by Pastor Rodney Johnson, Stanley, N.D., fathers of two of the newly ordained pastors.

Recent graduates of the AFLC seminary ordained during the service and their place of call were: Alex Amiot, to Thief River Falls, Minn.; Steven Jensen, to Milford, Ill.; Gideon Johnson, to Kenyon, Minn.; Paul Kinney, to Silverhill, Ala.; John Lee, to World Missions; and Andrew Olson, to Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT). Following the rite of ordination, Pastor John Lee and Pastor Andrew Olson were commissioned for missionary service by AFLC World Missions Director Del Palmer, together with members of the board. Pastor Terry Olson, assistant to the president, conducted the traditional remembrance of the following departed pastors: Peter Bergstedt, Theodore Berkas, Wayne Juntunen, Scott Nocton, Harris VanSomeran, James Winter, and Victor Young. Special music was provided for the service by the 2017 AFLBS Ambassador team. In conclusion, President Korhonen apologized for the length of the service and said that it will have to be “tweaked” in the future. [Editor: Perhaps the commissioning could be returned to the mission service as in some previous years.]

Pastor Peter Franz, Maple Grove, Minn., was reelected vice-president on the first ballot, and Pastor Micah Hjermstad, Fargo, N.D., was elected secretary after Pastor Brian Davidson, Dickinson, N.D., incumbent for many years, declined re-nomination.

The daily prayer hours were led by AFLC Schools’ President Wade Mobley, and an addition to the daily schedule was an informal singing time led by Pastor Rodger Olson, Tioga, N.D. Morning and afternoon devotional times each day were led by the recent seminary graduates.

Following the Luther year theme, workshops were held for the first time at the conclusion of each day’s business session, with Pastors Wade Mobley, Robert L. Lee, and Brett Boe speaking on Reformation themes. Funded by a Thrivent grant, these



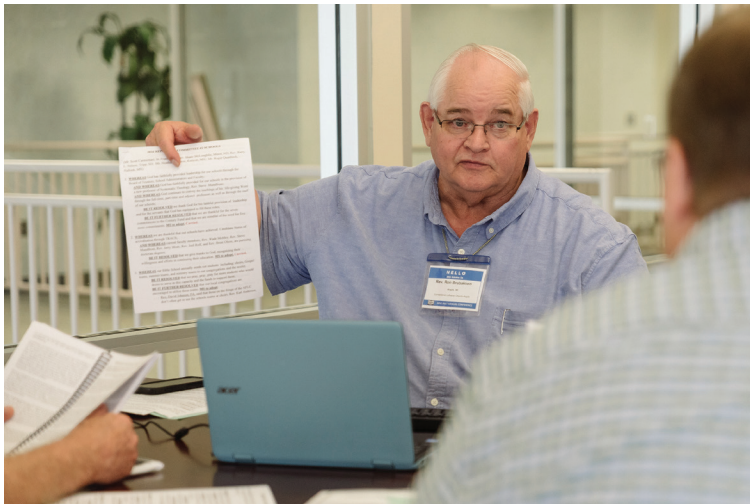
same pastors will speak during Reformation conferences this fall at Bethel Park, Pa.; Arlington, Wash.; and Salinas, Calif.

The president’s report emphasized a current shortage of pastors, which, combined with the reality of our aging clergy, the strong majority of whom are older than 50 years, creates a definite challenge. Conference attendees were encouraged again this year to “pray, pray, pray” for more pastors. The training of lay workers was also recommended, and pastors of retirement age were urged to think about interim or part-time service. On the other hand Korhonen cautioned older pastors to be willing to step aside when younger ones are available.

A resolution from the floor was approved by the conference, instructing members of the Coordinating Committee to form a task force “to thoroughly investigate the needs within our AFLC with the goal of reporting back to the Annual Conference in 2018 with a comprehensive pastoral retention program that will give specific recommendations as to how we as an AFLC can better support our pastors and their spouses and keep them serving in our congregations.”

The Coordinating Committee reported that 11 pastors have been added to the clergy rosters, and three congregations to the congregational roster (two of which were welcomed at the 2016 conference).





TOP: John and Hannah Lee (left) and Andrew and Alexis Olson (right) are commissioned by AFLC World Missions as missionaries. The Lees will serve in Asia, and the Olsons will serve on loan as missionaries with Lutheran Bible Translators. MIDDLE LEFT: Pastor Ron Brubakken talks about a draft resolution while serving on Committee No. 2. MIDDLE RIGHT: Elizabeth Luebke and Carol Quern give input while serving on Committee No. 4. LEFT: Bryce Timmerman and Hannah Peterson, who serve on AFLBS summer teams, helped lead VBS for conference children.

OPPOSITE PAGE

TOP: Claudia and Steve Hooper, Salinas, Calif., talk with Pastor Herb Hoff during a conference session. MIDDLE: Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, ordains Alex Amiot. MIDDLE: Seminarian Justin Nelson helped count ballots. BOTTOM: Seminarian Chris Kumpula spoke to a resolution on the conference floor.



ABOVE: John Rieschl, Sherry Mork and others take advantage of fresh brewed cold press coffee for sale by seminary children. RIGHT: Pastor James Molstre (left) is installed as dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary by members of the AFLC Board of Trustees and AFLC Schools President Wade Mobley.





ABOVE: Pastor Rodney Johnson spoke at the opening service of the conference. The service also included the ordination of seminary graduates and installation of missionaries.

TOP LEFT: Pastor Matthew Ballmann catches up with Justo Pillman and Matthew Pillman.

TOP RIGHT: While conference business commenced in the chapel, AFLBS summer teams led vacation Bible School for children of conference attendees.



Seven congregations were disbanded and/or removed from the roster. Highlights from the committee report were the calling of Pastor Gary Jorgenson, Baxter, Minn., to be the full-time assistant to the president, and the announcement that a decision was made to purchase the 1.2 acre Charles property that borders the northwest and lake side corner of our current property. It was also noted that the Fundamental Principles Bible studies are ready to be edited and prepared for publication. The nominations of Ron Strand, Abercrombie, N.D. (re-election), and Dr. Lyle Westrom, Crookston, Minn., were received by the committee for election.

A minor amendment to the Rules for Work was given final approval by the conference, stating that no board member can serve for more than two (2) consecutive terms. This allows corporation members to serve indefinitely, unless corporation bylaws state otherwise.

Reports from AFLC Schools noted the Century Fund made possible the addition to the faculty of Pastor Stephen Mundfrom and Dr. James Molstre, and the latter was installed as seminary dean by President Mobley during a brief ceremony on Wednesday afternoon. President Mobley reported that “the time for talking is now past,” and plans will progress toward the building of a gymnasium and/or dormitory when certain fund-raising thresholds are met. A committee resolution noted that Mobley, Mundfrom, Pastor Jerry Moan, Pastor Joel Rolf, and Pastor Brent Olson are all making progress toward completing



their doctoral degrees, financed in part by the Dr. Francis Monseth Fund for Faculty Development. New members of the Board of Trustees are Pastor Alan Arneson, Fosston, Minn. (four years), and Phil Johnson, Esko, Minn. (five years).

Mission funding was the subject of major discussion during the conference, both in the regular session and at the corporation meeting. The Budget Analysis Committee reported that Home Missions requested a 25-percent increase in their subsidy for 2018, in spite of a 2016 deficit, and the request was submitted to the conference encouraging “prayerful consideration before approval.” It was also noted in the resolutions of Committee No. 3 that they, too, had reservations about the subsidy request. After the conference rejected the initial request, as well as several resolutions and amendments, a budget goal representing a 10 percent increase over 2016 was approved. A member of another board commented that those who spoke both for and against the resolutions were very supportive of the people and the work of Home Missions, and he felt that the Spirit guided the discussion and the words well concerning a topic where strong feelings were evident.

The second issue concerning mission funding was addressed during the annual meeting of the Mission Corporation, attempting to address a disagreement between the Home and World Missions committees over the division of its share of undesignated gifts, which currently is channeled approximately one-third to Home



Missions and two-thirds to World Missions. The Home Missions Committee requested a 50-50 division, which was opposed by the World Missions Committee. Some corporation members stated that they had not been adequately prepared in advance to make a decision, so a three-man committee was elected to mediate between the two committees so that they might prayerfully come to an agreement.

The Missions Corporation finalized the election of Pastor David Johnson, Boyertown, Pa., to the World Missions Committee, and the re-election of Ron Jorgenson, Lidgerwood, N.D., to the Home Missions Committee.

The Board of Publications and Parish Education recognized Marian Christopherson for her 20 years of excellent service as director. Two new resources have been published to commemorate the Luther year, a flier entitled *The Five and 500* and *Twelve Reformation Hymns by Martin Luther*, compiled by Pastor Gordon Waterman. The board's next projects will be a collection

of the writings of Dr. Francis Monseth, a youth study on the Book of Acts, and a new confirmation curriculum. An urgent need was emphasized to maintain the funding for the administrative assistant and a part-time office position, as there are several projects "in the pipeline" that need to be completed. Maren Sletten, Argusville, N.D., was elected to a five-year term on the board.

The focus of the reports of the Youth Board, Free Lutheran Youth (FLY), and the Youth Director was the AFLC biennial youth convention, July 3-8, at Estes Park, Colo. The theme this year was "Illuminate" and 1,809 people registered and attended, making this the largest gathering of our church family. Pastor Eric Rasmussen, Fergus Falls, Minn., was elected to a five-year term on the Youth Board.

The Evangelism Commission and its director continue an emphasis on "Multiplying Disciple-Making," according to their reports. A resolution was approved by the conference, calling for congregations to schedule special evangelistic services





aimed at reaching the lost while encouraging the saved. A new member, Micah Johnson, Maple Grove, Minn., was elected to serve on the commission.

In other conference action, Tony Onnen, Cokato, Minn., was elected to serve a second term on the Benefits Board; and Steve Jankord, Fort Mill, S.C., and Phil Peterson, Beresford, S.D., were elected to the Budget Analysis Committee. The Benefits Board is responsible for managing the retirement plans for our pastors, and the Budget Analysis Committee reviews each department's budget projections and receipts, seeking to provide the conference each year with an overall financial picture of each ministry so that subsidy requests may be considered for approval or rejection.

Special guests at the conference were Pastor Michal and Sarka Klus and family from the Czech Republic. Former students at the AFLC Schools, Pastor Klus was the speaker for the pastors' and wives' banquet and the final worship service, and Sarka Klus spoke to the WMF ladies on Tuesday during

a workshop on discipleship.

Other evening speakers were Gracia Burnham, Rose Hill, Kan., for the Mission Festival service on Wednesday, and Jason Coyle, Hutchinson, Minn., for the laymen's service. Pastor Seth Forness, youth pastor from Pipestone, Minn., and a member of the Youth Board, conducted a special youth night for the teens after the laymen's service on Thursday.

The Women's Missionary Federation, an AFLC auxiliary, held their annual convention on Tuesday preceding the annual conference, and a report will be found on pages 14-15.

The 2018 Annual Conference will meet in Dickinson, N.D., hosted by Our Saviour's Free Lutheran Church, Pastor Brian Davidson, pastor.

Lee, a faculty member of the Free Lutheran Schools and member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., is the editor of the Lutheran Ambassador.

ABOVE: Deborah Sorensen, Butte, Mont., speaks to a resolution.

OPPOSITE PAGE

TOP LEFT: Pastor Lyndon Korhonen (right) prays with Pastor Steve Jensen during a devotional hour.

TOP RIGHT: Esther Hylden takes a picture of Pastor Tim Carlson, Pastor Rob Edwards and seminarian Kevin Hall.

CENTER: Pastor Michal Klus, Trinec, Czech Republic, was the speaker at the closing service of the conference.

BOTTOM: Pastor Cal Willard listens in during a discussion on the conference floor.

2017 ELECTION RESULTS

OFFICERS

Vice President

One-year term
Pastor Peter Franz, Maple Grove, Minn.

Secretary

One-year term
Pastor Micah Hjermstad, Fargo, N.D.

BOARDS & COMMITTEES

Coordinating Committee

- Layman, five-year term
Dr. Lyle Westrom, Crookston, Minn.
- Layman, five-year term
Ron Strand, Wahpeton, N.D.

ARC Board

- Pastor, five-year term
*Pastor Rich Carr, Tioga, N.D.

Home Missions Committee

- Layman, five-year term
Ron Jorgenson, Lidgerwood, N.D.

Bay Broadcasting

- Layman, three-year term
Ben Dahl, Camarillo, Calif.

Benefits Board

- Layman, five-year term
Tony Onnen, Cokato, Minn.

Board of Publications & Parish Ed.

- Layman, five-year term
Maren Sletten, Argusville, N.D.

Commission on Evangelism

- Layman, five-year term
Micah Johnson, Maple Grove, Minn.

COLLOQUY

One-year terms

Pastor Eric Swenson, Wheatland, Iowa
Pastor Brian Ricke, St. Michael, Minn.
Pastor George Winston, Newark, Ohio
Pastor Dan Antal, Grand Forks, N.D.
Pastor Dennis Norby, Enderlin, N.D.

Schools Board of Trustees

- Pastor, four-year term
Pastor Alan Arneson, Fosston, Minn.
- Layman, five-year term
Phil Johnson, Esko, Minn.

FLAPS Board of Managers

- Pastor, five-year term
Pastor Mark Antal, Park River, N.D.
- Layman, five-year term
David Mattson, Centerville, S.D.
- Layman, three-year term
Lavon Bohling, Inman, Kan.

World Missions

- Pastor, five-year term
Pastor David Nelson, Badger, Minn.

Youth Board

- Pastor, five-year term
Eric Rasmussen, Fergus Falls, Minn.

Budget Analysis Committee

- Layman, three-year term
Steve Jankord, Fort Mill, S.C.
- Layman, three-year term
Phil Peterson, Beresford, S.D.

CORPORATIONS

Five-year terms

Mission Corporation

Brady Arneson, Honolulu, Hawaii
Lavon Bohling, Inman, Kan.
Joel Forness, Wahpeton, N.D.
Kenn Graham, Camarillo, Calif.
Mike Grahn, Roseau, Minn.
Pastor Richard Gunderson, Alexandria, Minn.
Barb Gustafson, Apache Junction, Ariz.
David Handsaker, Plymouth, Minn.
Pastor Tim Hinrichs, Mankato, Minn.
Kevin Hoops, Byron, Neb.
Pastor Craig Johnson, Astoria, Ore.
Pastor Jon Langness, Deshler, Neb.
Pastor Rick Larson, Ortonville, Minn.
David Mattson, Centerville, S.D.
Pastor Henry Mohagen, Reva, S.D.
Marlow Nash, Colfax, N.D.
Tim Rolf, McIntosh, Minn.
Greg Schmitke, Moorhead, Minn.
Pastor Tony Stockman, Bloomington, Minn.
Richard West, Mankato, Minn.

Dean Feistner, Madison, S.D. (1-year term)
Steve Deysher, Fleetwood, Pa. (4-year term)

Schools Corporation

Pastor Dan Antal, Grand Forks, N.D.
Pastor Martin Horn, Crystal, Minn.
Wanda Jacobson, Brooklyn Park, Minn.
Phil Johnson, Esko, Minn.
Erling Langness, Ishpeming, Mich.
Dr. Dan Mundfrom, Richmond, Ken.
Sam Nash, Green Bay, Wis.
Dean Nelson, Vargas, Minn.
Pastor Eric Rasmussen, Fergus Falls, Minn.
James Rolf, Moorhead, Minn.
Tom Fugleberg, Roseau, Minn. (4-year term)
David Haugen, Pelican Rapids, Minn. (3-year term)

ARC Corporation

No quorum

* Must be ratified by corporation



LEFT: Michele Smith, Brookings, S.D., fills out a corporation ballot.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Central Tri State

Pastor Jerry Nelson, LaCrosse, Wis.

Eastern

Paula Nyman, Hagerstown, Md.

Eastern North Dakota

David Strand, Leonard, N.D.

Illinois

Jim Thompson, Janesville, Wis.

Lake Superior

Nancy Staudinger, McGregor, Minn.

Minneapolis

Pastor Tom Olson, Lakeville, Minn.

Nebraska/Kansas/Colorado

Pastor Ken Hart, Fairbury, Neb.

North Central Minnesota

Pastor Wayne Hjermstad, Bagley, Minn.

One-year terms

Northern Michigan

David Blake, Ontonagon, Mich.

Northwestern Minnesota

Joel Mattson, Newfolden, Minn.

Pacific Northwest

Pastor Cal Willard, Everett, Wash.

South Central

Judy Rehmer, Stover, Mo.

South Dakota

Iver Heier, Prairie City, S.D.

Southwest Central Minnesota

Loren Tungseth, Fergus Falls, Minn.

Southwestern

Mark Gustafson, Apache Junction, Ariz.

Western ND/Eastern Montana

Pastor Brandon Marschner, Culbertson, N.D.

2018 COMMITTEES

One-year terms

Committee No. 1

Leo Brackel, Mott, N.D.

Pastor Shane McLoughlin, Minot, N.D.

Pastor Bradley Novacek, Kasson, Minn.

Joel Erickson, Oslo, Minn.

Liz McCarlson, Plymouth, Minn.

Committee No. 2

Pastor Karl Anderson, McIntosh, Minn.

Martin Schock, New Leipzig, N.D.

Pastor Ryan Tonneson, Mesa, Ariz.

Flint McLoughlin, Plymouth, Minn.

Randy Kjos, Kalispell, Mont.

Committee No. 3

Robert Davidson, Felch, Mich.

Morris Haase, New Leipzig, N.D.

Iver Heier, Prairie City, S.D.

Pastor Jon Langness, Deshler, Neb.

Pastor David Ryerson, Ishpeming, Mich.

Committee No. 4

Pastor John Amundson, New Leipzig, N.D.

Pastor Dan Antal, Grand Forks, N.D.

Ernie Hilbert, Wheatland, Iowa

Deb Burmeister, Mt. Vernon, S.D.

Rolf Gjorven, Williston, N.D.

Committee No. 5

Victor Wiczorek, Mount Vernon, S.D.

Pastor David Tilney, Cloquet, Minn.

Jim Marcusen, Taylor, N.D.

Pastor David Johnson, Boyertown, Pa.

Richard Luebke, Parkston, S.D.



TOP: Gracia Burnham, a former missionary to the Philippines with New Tribes Missions, spoke at the Mission Festival Service about her time in captivity under the Abu Sayyaf. Her husband, Martin, was killed during a rescue attempt. LEFT: Sarka Klusova, Trinec, Czech Republic, was a featured speaker. ABOVE: Esther Hylden, first vice president of the WMF, spoke during the business meeting. RIGHT, TOP: Many times for prayer were set aside during the WMF Day. RIGHT, MIDDLE: Paula Nyman joined with others in singing a hymn. RIGHT, BOTTOM: Hope Unverzagt, Sparta, Wis., led a workshop.

Yesterday, today, forever

YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES

BY JOYANN DAHL



Two hundred and nineteen women gathered June 13 at the Association Free Lutheran Schools, in Plymouth, Minn., for the annual Women's Missionary Federation Convention.

Jan Tollefson, president of the Minneapolis District, welcomed attendees, and Joan Culler, Hagerstown, Md., author of *Lessons in Acts*, the WMF 2017 Bible study, led devotions.

The 2017 AFLBS Ambassador team led the ladies in praise and worship, including our theme song, "We've a Story to Tell to the Nations."

Hope Unverzagt, Cataract, Wis., shared her story, "The Heart of the Matter." Marsha Johnson, Fergus Falls, Minn., presented various ideas on how to present Sunday school lessons in her workshop, "The Creative Classroom."

A memorial service was led by Beverly Enderlein, Minneapolis. As names were read, peonies were placed on the wooden cross as a reminder of what Christ has done for us.

Special historical presentations were given by Lynn Wellumson, National WMF president, portraying Fraulein Von Krueger (a fictitious friend of Katharina Von Bora Luther). During lunchtime, the WMF Advisory Board met with the National WMF Board.

Following lunch, we were blessed by the WMF Day choir led by Anne Presteng, Grafton, N.D. Sarka Klusova, Trinec, Czech Republic, spoke on the theme, "Discipleship—A Task or a Lifestyle?"

During the annual business meeting the morning offering amount of \$4,748.63 was reported. The president, recording secretary, and treasurer reports were approved as presented.

The nominees to second vice president and treasurer were presented by Esther Hylden,

first vice president, in the absence of the 2017 nominating committee members, Linda Fugleberg and Grace Larson. By ballot, Deb Benson, Armour, S.D., was reelected as treasurer, and Tami Demo, St. Michael, Minn., elected as second vice president. A yearly budget of \$156,850 was approved for 2018 as presented by Benson. The 2017 Resolution Committee included Bev Schlott (Webster, S.D.), Doris Pulscher (Pukwana, S.D.), Dorothy Rydberg (Webster, S.D.), and DaNeil Olson (Nunda, S.D.). The board wishes to thank members of the Resolutions and Nominating committees for their hours of dedication. Lori Willard, out-going second vice president, closed in prayer, followed by small group prayer.

Wednesday morning, Lori Willard and Deb Benson led the WMF breakfast. Barb Long, Arlington, Wash., shared about ways to witness in our daily lives.

The Mission Festival Service speaker was Gracia Burnham, past missionary to the Philippines. She shared from her personal experience of being held captive in the Philippine jungle with her husband who was killed in the rescue attempt. Her message focused on God's grace in overcoming difficult circumstances and His faithfulness to her family. Following the service, she autographed her books, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies* and *To Fly Again*.

Plan to join us next year at WMF Day held on June 12, 2018, in Dickinson, N.D.

Dahl, the recording secretary for the WMF, is a member of Our Saviour's Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn.



Living through pain

Our Sunday school class departed from our study on Hebrews to talk about our experiences in pain. Our goal: to see how God had used this pain in our lives, to determine if we had grown through our pain, and to use our life experiences to help others with the comfort God had used to comfort us.

Many of us recalled the trials the apostles faced when they rejoiced and praised God. We remembered when Jesus prayed, “not my will, but your will be done” (Luke 22:42). And we couldn’t help but wonder what we would do if we were thrown into prison for preaching the good news of Jesus’ saving work on the cross. None of us in our little church have faced such trials, but it certainly is happening to our brothers and sisters in Christ in other parts of the world. We all marvel at the courage demonstrated in these situations.

Our class of ten that morning, led by Jeff Jacobi, pondered these questions.

- **Is it possible to grow in Christ without pain?**

It was the general consensus that without pain in our lives, our relationship with Jesus would not be where it is in each of our lives. Several pointed to Jesus as their example in their suffering, that even He learned obedience from what He suffered.

- **Are you able to welcome pain when it comes? If so, how?**

This question was a little tougher. Who enjoys pain, right? Most of us said that we really hadn’t welcomed pain, but as we look back we see how God was there for us, and how God caused us to grow.

“I accept struggles knowing that God is using it for good,” commented Glenn.

Bette said, “The best way for me to accept painful struggles is to be thankful in the midst of the pain.”

And Larry said, “God uses pain to draw you closer to Him, to teach you that He never forsakes or leaves us.”

- **What has helped you in the past with pain?**

Trish said that her daughter, Rachel, who is handicapped, has helped her by being a walking witness and an encouragement to both Trish and her husband, Guy.

Bette said the knowledge that she will see many of her loved ones again in heaven brings great peace to her when she is sad. Janice finds comfort in knowing that she can ask God anything, including, “Why?” Larry finds strength in watching the faith and courage being worked out those who face struggles. Another person searched the Scriptures, finding great comfort in God’s Word and in the companionship of those who had struggled with pain in the Bible. She called it her “joy journey.”

- **Where would our lives in Christ be without pain?**

Most agreed that we wouldn’t be walking with Jesus without our struggles. Trials are needed to humble us, to make us realize how lost we are, and help us see how much we need God. And without Him, we would be proud, arrogant, boastful, and living for ourselves with no thought for others or for God. Christina said that she wouldn’t be in church if it wasn’t for the struggles she has met.

- **Is it possible to be joyful in pain, and if so, how?**

We all agreed that it must be possible because the disciples and the apostle Paul were rejoicing in their sufferings. One person said that it depends on how we perceive pain. Philippians 2:5 says, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ

Jesus.”

Another person spoke about an attitude change she experienced as she was training for a long bike ride. She hated riding up hill, especially into the wind. But that changed when she heard an expert talk about preparing for long, hilly rides by using the wind as her helper to prepare her for a long ride. If we could see pain as God’s tool, perhaps we could be more joyful.

- **Have you ever asked God to help someone grow through their pain?**

The responses varied: some said their prayer lists are full of people in pain, whether physical pain, emotional, or spiritual. Some said that this is not a common prayer for them to pray. One



person said that she had visited with a young man whose pain was so palpable that it almost forced her to back up from him. This was her first encounter with the thought of praying that God would use this young man's pain to help him grow to be like Jesus. Kathy said that she asks God for wisdom when praying for people who are struggling with pain.

♦ **Has God prepared you in advance for upcoming pain? How?**

One of the ladies said that God had prepared her in advance with Scripture from I Peter 2:23, when a family member falsely accused her of something. Having read this Scripture prior to her encounter with her family member, she felt prepared

for this painful encounter, and did not react as she would have naturally, but rather as Christ would have. Janice was so thankful for all the Bible studies, sermons, and lessons that have prepared her for things to come, and helped her to grow and know Jesus better.

We noted that God has used pain to help us grow and become more like Him. God has given us many tools to help us in our pain: His Word, the example of believers before us, our brothers and sisters in the Lord, fellowship, church, prayer, family, etc. We are striving to trust God in our struggles and to look to Him for our hope and our strength. We desire to be able to pray effectively for those who are in pain.

And, we would like to be able to “count it all joy, my brethren, when you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4).

Submitted by the adult Sunday school class at Christian Free Lutheran, Wheatland, Iowa. Postscript: Larry Behne, one of the class participants, passed away shortly after this class. Please pray for his wife, Janice, and family.



O

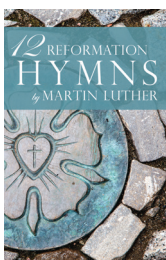
ne of Luther's Catechism chorales teaches about the Ten Commandments. This hymn, "That Man a

Godly Life Might Live," is a folk song and should be sung in a lively manner. Luther kept the "Have mercy, Lord" at the end of each stanza in the manner of a medieval folk song. The repeated "Gs" in the first line are the shaking finger, "Thou shalt not."

In the Klavieruebung, Part III, by J. S. Bach, the repeated "Gs" are made into a fugue subject. This fugue subject occurs ten times, and then the fugue abruptly ends.

~Pastor Gordon Waterman
Crown of Life Lutheran
Tomball, Texas

These hymns are featured in a new booklet from Ambassador Publications, *12 Reformation Hymns by Martin Luther*. Featuring a hymn of Luther for each month of the year, the booklet is available for \$2/each. For more information, visit ambassadorpublications.org.



That man a godly life might live

1. That man a godly life might live,
God did these Ten Commandments give
By His true servant Moses, high
Upon the Mount Sinai.
Have mercy, Lord!
2. I am thy God and Lord alone,
No other God before Me own;
Put thy whole confidence in Me
And love Me e'er cordially.
Have mercy, Lord!
3. By idle word and speech profane
Take not My holy name in vain
And praise but that as good and true
Which I Myself say and do.
Have mercy, Lord!
4. Hallow the day which God hath blest
That thou and all thy house may rest;
Keep hand and heart from labor free
That God may so work in thee.
Have mercy, Lord!
5. Give to thy parents honor due,
Be dutiful, and loving, too,
And help them when their strength decays;
So shalt thou have length of days.
Have mercy, Lord!
6. In sinful wrath thou shalt not kill
Nor hate nor render ill for ill;
Be patient and of gentle mood,
And to thy foe do thou good.
Have mercy, Lord!
7. Be faithful to thy marriage vows,
Thy heart give only to thy spouse;
Thy life keep pure, and lest thou sin,
Use temperance and discipline.
Have mercy, Lord!
8. Steal not; all usury abhor
Nor wring their life-blood from the poor,
But open wide thy loving hand
To all the poor in the land.
Have mercy, Lord!
9. Bear not false witness nor belie
Thy neighbor by foul calumny.
Defend his innocence from blame;
With charity hide his shame.
Have mercy, Lord!
10. Thy neighbor's house desire thou not,
His wife, nor aught that he hath got,
But wish that his such good may be
As thy heart doth wish for thee.
Have mercy, Lord!
11. God these commandments gave therein
To show thee, child of man, thy sin
And make thee also well perceive
How man unto God should live.
Have mercy, Lord!
12. Help us, Lord Jesus Christ, for we
A mediator have in Thee.
Our works cannot salvation gain;
They merit but endless pain.
Have mercy, Lord!



L

uke 17:11-19 records the healing of 10 lepers by Jesus. I hope that we can gain a few

insights that will help us to understand that being healed of our hurts, habits, or hang-ups is not all that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ hopes to teach us through this story.

When Jesus entered a certain village, 10 men with a serious skin disease met Him. They stood at a distance and yelled at Him to have mercy on them. These 10 men had a real deep problem that needed to be addressed. Leprosy's symptoms ranged from white patches on the skin and running sores, to the loss of digits on the fingers and toes. The disease presents itself as a skin issue, but in reality it starts much deeper—down in the joints and bone marrow.

Many of the things we struggle with in life present themselves in the same way. The problem on the surface looks like one issue, but it is really a sign of a much deeper need. Like leprosy, we have much deeper problems that go along with the disease of sin. The Old Testament law dealt with the deeper issues of leprosy by

THE DEEPER ISSUES

BY PASTOR RON STAUDINGER

commanding that those with leprosy be put out of the city. Those who were infected could no longer live with friends or family. They had to keep a distance from the highways. Whenever they approached a group of people, they were commanded by law to yell out, "Unclean!" so that people could have the chance to get out of the way. If someone came in contact with a leper, that person would be considered unclean, also.

The 10 men in this Gospel lesson were keenly aware of their need, and they were taking it to Jesus. One of the things that will lead us to being thankful is going to the right place for help. When we do so, we can get help. Many people go to the wrong place for help. When we need help with our sin sickness, we must go to the right person for the cure. Jesus is that person.

In this Scripture passage, only one man—a Samaritan—returned to Jesus to thank him. Jesus told the foreigner to go his way, and that his faith had made him well. Jesus didn't say that this man's faith had healed him, he said that his faith made him well—meaning that Jesus had also given him

a new heart of faith. The Samaritan was able to have an attitude of gratitude.

Many self-help groups such as Celebrate Recovery offer similar care. Members of these groups are willing to share their strength, hope, and faith in Jesus Christ as the only true healer of any hurt, habit, or hang-up one may have. They also express gratitude and glory to God, who cures them of their maladies.

When you come to Jesus for help, you will not be disappointed. If you develop a relationship with Him, you will be overflowing with thanksgiving for what He has done for you, and you will return time and again to thank Him with a grateful heart. He is the real answer!

Staudinger is the spiritual advisor at the Celebrate Recovery Program in Tamarack, Minn., and the assistant chaplain at the American Legion Post #23 in McGregor, Minn.

Seminary hosts annual Summer Institute

The Free Lutheran Seminary will host its annual Summer Institute of Theology Aug. 7-11 on the campus of the AFLC Schools. For a list of the three featured courses, as well as information about special evening events, visit aflbs.org/news.

AFLC Schools to host second Friends banquet

Save the date for the second annual Friends of the Schools Banquet, Thursday evening, Nov. 9, at the AFLC Schools campus in Plymouth, Minn. The evening will include a gourmet dinner and a program highlighting the ministry, mission, and future of the Bible school and seminary.

Reformation to be marked with hymn festival

A Reformation Hymn Festival will be held at 7 p.m. Friday, Nov. 10, in the AFLC Schools' Chapel, commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. This event will include congregational singing and a choral presentation featuring a chamber orchestra and festival choir, including AFLBS students, alumni, and friends. For more information, visit aflbs.org/news.



Seminary graduates ordained

Six recent graduates of the Free Lutheran Seminary were ordained during the opening service of the Annual Conference. Pictured (from left) are Andrew Olson, John Lee, Paul Kinney, Gideon Johnson, Steve Jensen, and Alex Amiot.



AFLC offers in-depth financial reporting

aflc.org/giving

In an effort to provide consistent and comparable financial data to supporters, the AFLC family will now have access to enhanced financial reporting from each of the AFLC departments and ministries. By visiting aflc.org/giving, readers will find the following information for each department:

- Annual Conference adopted subsidy amount
- Year-to-date giving
- Year-to-date subsidy goal
- Year-to-date giving for prior year
- Subsidy as percentage of total department income

These amounts will be updated on a quarterly basis and include remarks from each department to provide the best financial picture available to the congregations and friends of the AFLC. Online giving is also accessible at that site. Additional financial details are alternatively available by contacting each department.

LEM, Trinity celebrate reunion of gospel teams

The weekend of June 24-25 was a special time of reunion at Trinity Lutheran Church of Minnehaha Falls in South Minneapolis. This was the first all-teams reunion held for the gospel teams which were sent out by Trinity and the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement from 1962-85. Trinity was an extra special place to hold this event as it was where the Gospel Crusaders were sent out, by Trinity, from 1962-66. In 1965 and 1966, the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement (LEM) sponsored one of several Crusader teams, and in 1967 the LEM youth department was created, at which time the Crusader ministry was transferred from Trinity to LEM. Trinity was also the location of the very first LEM Mid-Winter Evangelistic Conference held 80 years ago in January of 1937.

Over the 23 years that the summertime Gospel Crusaders and year-round teams under various other names were sent out, approximately 600 young people served the Lord through this outreach. At the recent reunion, 137 registered for the weekend events. Special guests were Samuel MacKinney, drama and music director (1967-1977), and directors of youth ministries: Gary Alfson (1967-71), Dick Klawitter (1971-75), Bruce Stumbo (1975-77), and Mark Finnestad (1982-1984).

The weekend began Saturday afternoon with former team members sharing what team(s) they were on, the year(s) they traveled, and where they are today. Saturday evening's meal was followed by a program during which a greeting from LEM historian Jonathan Anderson was shared. Without Jonathan's tireless efforts in compiling the history of the first 20 years of LEM and its youth outreach, published in *Our Father's Saw His Mighty Works*, this reunion would not have happened. The Saturday program included another time of sharing memories and, with so many talented voices, plenty of singing.

Sunday morning, during the worship service at Trinity, Gary Alfson shared a short history of LEM and the gospel team program that began there. The weekend festivities concluded with a noon meal and another time of sharing and singing in the afternoon.

~Submitted by Timothy Larson, Osakis, Minn.

Imagine leaving those comforts of home taken so much for granted they are considered

normal—the little light in the hall on a nightly trip to the bathroom or a frozen pizza for a quick meal. This is what the Bergers left. They are working in one of the most rugged fields of AFLC World Missions, yet serve joyfully and seek to glorify God in all they do.

Micah and Famke, together with their daughter Naomi, serve in Uganda. They recently moved to Karenga, a region in the northern portion of the country. Micah began working in Uganda in 2011 as a short term assistant and later became a full-time missionary. He met Famke while in Uganda and they married in 2015.

Famke, who is from the Netherlands, has a unique story. Always very drawn to African culture, she figured she would end up there someday. While in college, Famke was able to spend a few weeks in Uganda visiting educational projects with a Dutch organization. She fell in love with the country and returned as soon as she could. The extraordinary aspect of Famke's story is that she did not become a Christian until after spending a great amount of time in Uganda. God prepared Famke to be His servant by giving her a heart for the Ugandan people even before she came to faith. Praise the



TAKE TIME FOR PEOPLE

BY PAIGE BLAKE

Lord she answered the call to make known His great name.

Famke's role of caring for her family looks a lot different than the typical American housewife. Their home is a simple two-room cement structure. No running water or electricity makes cooking and cleaning challenging. In order to make a meal, she first must take a trip to the local market to purchase the food they need; refrigeration is not an option. Next she prepares and cooks the meal on the floor of a little room about the size of a storage closet. Then, she serves the meal on a small plastic table and afterwards washes the dishes on the same table. Famke is completely dedicated to supporting her husband and his ministry regardless of living conditions. Together they have been able to establish a home and plug into their community.

There are many aspects involved in forming relationships with people. The component that binds them all is time. It takes time to build the proper trust and reputation necessary for fruitful friendships. It also takes time and practice to learn a new language and understand ethnology. This is the way God has designed social interaction. So much of missions in a



foreign country is about immersing oneself in the culture and lifestyle as means of expressing love and humility. This is exactly why our missionaries take the time to get to know those around them, so they may most effectively present the desperately needed gospel message.

God's grace has compelled Famke to dedicate her life to sharing the news of salvation with others. Isaiah 43:2 says, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you." This promising Word has been especially encouraging to Famke during seasons of difficulty. Grace says that God will never leave or forsake us. Grace sent Jesus to the cross, urged Martin Luther to challenge the corrupt teachings of the Church, and empowers Famke to pour herself out to others. This same grace is offered to you today.

Blake, a senior at AFLBS, is a member of Redeemer Free Lutheran, Ontonagon, Mich.

PEOPLE & PLACES

A total of \$276,000 in gifts has been received toward the purchase of the Charles property, located at the northwest corner of the AFLC campus in Plymouth, Minn. The purchase price is \$650,000, leaving a total of \$374,000 yet to be raised for the property.

June 18 marked the 50th anniversary of the ordination of the first graduates of the AFLC seminary: **Richard Gunderson, Howard Kjos, David Molstre, and Robert Rieth.**

Pastor Orville Hiepler, a senior AFLC clergyman and church planter, announced that he will begin conducting worship services on Sept. 10 in the fast-growing Riverpark neighborhood, Oxnard, Calif., beginning at 10:30 a.m. in the multipurpose room of the Rio Del Mar school. He asks that our AFLC family would remember this new outreach in prayer, and phone calls would be welcome (760.990.3704) if anyone knows of people who might be living in this area.

Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Tucson, Ariz., was removed from the AFLC congregational roster at their request.

JUNE MEMORIALS

- AFLBS**
Jane See
Joel & Audrey Rogenes (2)
Ruth Claus
Edwin Swanson
Morris Moan
Mabel Quanbeck (2)

Gordon & Carley Olson
Orvin & Berniece Sletto
Darrel Tungseth
Joel Rogenes
Arthur Arneson
Adeline Monson
Owen Binnebose
Irene Eich
- AFLTS**
Edwin Swanson
Mabel Quanbeck

WMF
Clifford Sateren
- Evangelism**
Dean Hobelmann
Arthur Arneson

World Missions
Gordon & Carley Olson
Orvin & Berniece Sletto
Arthur Arneson
- General Fund**
Gordon & Carley Olson
Orvin & Berniece Sletto
Tim Korhonen
Janice Schmitke
Arthur Arneson

Youth
Arthur Arneson
... in honor of
- Home Missions**
Darlene Davidson

Home Missions
Pastor Ryan & Liz Tonneson



Sunday worship in the woods

Each year on the Sunday following Memorial Day, members of Peace Free Lutheran Church of Canal Winchester, Ohio, begin holding the 8 a.m. services at the amphitheater at Chestnut Ridge Metro Park in nearby Carroll, Ohio. There, God's glorious creation surrounds an informal gathering of around 60 worshipers who draw near to God through the preaching of His Word in this green cathedral.

The unique outdoor services began on June 11, 1995, when Pastor Kurt Luebke led the first worship in the woods service on a trial basis, and the services have continued every summer since that first meeting.

The outdoor services have proven to be an effective means of outreach, and are attractive to some who might be reluctant to attend the services in the church sanctuary. Many who were initially drawn to the novelty of outdoor service have stayed with Peace Lutheran to become faithful members.

This summer, Greg Leitch, Tim Householder, and Joe Dombrowski play guitars and lead the singing. Pastor Michael Johnson preaches the same message at both the early outdoor service and the later service held in the church sanctuary.

Rain or shine, the services at Chestnut Ridge Park continue through the first Sunday after Labor Day. If it does happen to rain, there are shelters with picnic tables to gather around, and spirits are refreshed, not dampened.

~Submitted by Leslie Hall, secretary of Peace Lutheran, Canal Winchester, Ohio

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-June 30, 2017			
FUND	REC'D IN JUNE	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$19,781	\$216,721	\$179,352
Evangelism	14,876	64,574	57,880
Youth Ministries	17,281	56,112	57,697
Parish Education	4,290	71,995	79,768
Seminary	16,275	119,770	108,466
Bible School	52,853	283,038	255,691
Home Missions	44,201	293,602	223,558
World Missions	28,379	213,254	267,809
Personal Support	45,508	314,982	306,783
TOTALS	\$243,444	\$1,634,047	\$1,537,003
For additional financial information for each department, go to www.aflc.org/giving			

TRADITION IS GOOD, BUT ...

Some who attended the recent annual conference may recall a brief exchange between President Lyndon Korhonen and an AFLC Schools professor whom he titled “the unofficial historian.” A question had been raised about whether



Pastor Robert Lee

or not a practice could be changed which has been followed for more than 100 years. “Tradition is good,” the historian replied. People laughed, the discussion ended, and the practice continues unchanged.

Yes, tradition is good. Doing what has been done in the past provides us with a strong sense of continuity with those who have gone before us. Practices and procedures that have stood the test of time should be respected and not casually discarded simply for the sake of change. Tradition is good, but it can be overruled.

During this Luther year we are encouraged to look back 500 years to see what the Reformation can still teach us, and there is a lesson to be learned that certainly applies to the place of tradition in the life of a congregation. After the Diet of Worms in 1521, where Martin Luther was officially declared to be an outlaw, the reformer was secretly taken to Wartburg Castle where he would remain for about 10 months. Lacking his leadership, the reform movement in Wittenberg took a radical turn. False prophets arrived with supposed special revelations from God, there were even episodes of violent riots, and sudden changes were made in worship practices for which the people had not been prepared ... changes that were thought to be in accord with Luther’s concerns. Pressured by others, Frederick the Wise, the ruler of Saxony, was losing patience, but he did not want the outlawed reformer to return.

The city fathers begged Luther

to return, and he did, in spite of the consequences. He preached a hard series of sermons that accused the Wittenberg reformers of coercing believers just as Rome had done. He did not object to the changes in principle, but to the spirit in which they were imposed on the faithful. Praising the reformers for their love for the Scriptures, he chided them for their lack of love for the weak in faith, warning against arbitrary changes:

“Yet Christian love should not employ harshness here nor force the matter ... It should be left to God and His Word to work alone, without our work or interference. ... Dear lords and pastors, abandon the mass, it is not right, you are sinning when you do it. I cannot refrain from telling you this. But I would not make it an ordinance for them or urge a general law. ... (Let) the Word sink into the heart and do its work.”

The gospel must be preached, people must be taught, and the weakest member of the body must be considered before any changes are made. Luther emphatically expressed his frustration, declaring that he was ready to wash his hands of them all, for “no foe, regardless of how much pain he has inflicted on me, has so put the screws to me as you have here.” The impact was almost electric, and his leadership over the reform movement was secured.

What are the lessons from this interesting Reformation episode that may be applied to congregational life in the 21st century?

First, tradition is good, but may be overruled by Holy Scripture. Does the Bible

speak to this issue? The Swiss reformers would later approach the matter differently and more radically, teaching that only those traditions commanded by Scripture should be retained. On the contrary, Luther and his followers maintained that only those traditions forbidden by Scripture should be abandoned. The Lutheran Reformation was a conservative one, and the Augsburg Confession (Article XV) affirms the historic traditions of the Church, while at the same time making it clear that following these practices is not necessary for salvation and that peoples’ consciences should not be burdened by them. So, traditions are good, but are not necessary for salvation.

Second, change may be good, too, but should come after proper and patient preparation, with special concern for those who are weak in faith. Also, all change should properly flow from the preaching and teaching of God’s Word. Those of us who were influenced by the church renewal movements of the 1970s will

*... change may
be good, too, but
should come after
proper and patient
preparation ...*

recall the oft-repeated seven last words of the church: “We’ve never done it that way before.” Yet the same movement also encouraged a principle of unanimity, that decisions to change should be unanimously approved if possible, because even one concerned and hesitant negative vote could be God’s way of slowing us down.

May God grant to our congregations the same balance of faithfulness to the past and openness to the future, under the authority of His Word, that He continues to bless.

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

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

building the base

MEANS OF GRACE: TOOLS FOR FAITH

BY PASTOR JOHN BRENNAN

"Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'" (John 20:29).

Seeing is believing: That has been a universal truth since the beginning of time. We only have to see a thing in order to believe in it. That's what the apostle Thomas said after all. He just needed to see Jesus and then he would believe. I wonder if that seeing and touching was really the end of Thomas's doubting. What about the weeks, months, and years following his encounter with the risen Christ? Did he still believe so strongly? Or did doubt begin to creep back into his mind?

Thomas spent many days and nights with Jesus throughout His ministry on this earth. So he would have seen countless miracles; he would've seen numerous demons cast out; he would have seen thousands of people fed on just a few loaves of bread. And yet having seen all of that, there was still room for doubt.

Poor doubting Thomas seemed like such a lightweight when it comes to faith. Had you or I seen the many heavenly spectacles he did, wouldn't our faith be rock solid—unshakable and immovable? I doubt it (pardon the pun).

Maintaining our faith is no easy task. We are inclined to occasionally wonder about (doubt) the spiritual truths we confess. Moreover, all the forces of hell are constantly attempting to break down the faith on which we try to stand. And as if that were not enough to deal with already, the world tells us over and over again that our faith in Christ is utter foolishness. So single-handedly safeguarding our faith from the threefold onslaught of our flesh, the devil, and the world is impossible.

Thankfully God understands our weakness. He knows that we will vacillate between faith and doubt endlessly. That is why He gave us the means of grace—the sacramental elements to hold in our hands, to see with our eyes, to smell, to touch, to taste—because sometimes seeing is just simply not enough. We need the bread, wine, and water empowered by God's Word

to fortify the truth on which we stand.

In the life of every believer are peaks and valleys of faith. After having seen Jesus crucified, Thomas experienced doubt. When John the baptizer was thrown into prison, he experienced doubt. When Peter stepped out of the boat and saw that he was standing on water, he experienced doubt. When you and I stray into the shadier valleys of life and wonder why God hasn't rescued us, we begin to doubt. We are all faith lightweights.

Therefore, time and again we must return to Word and sacrament to renew our faith, to sweep away all doubt, and to see ourselves standing on holy ground once again. God knows our weaknesses, and in His mercy He shows us His strength in the sacraments given in Christ Jesus.

"Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him" (John 6:56).

Brennan serves St. Peter Lutheran Church, Melvin, Ill.