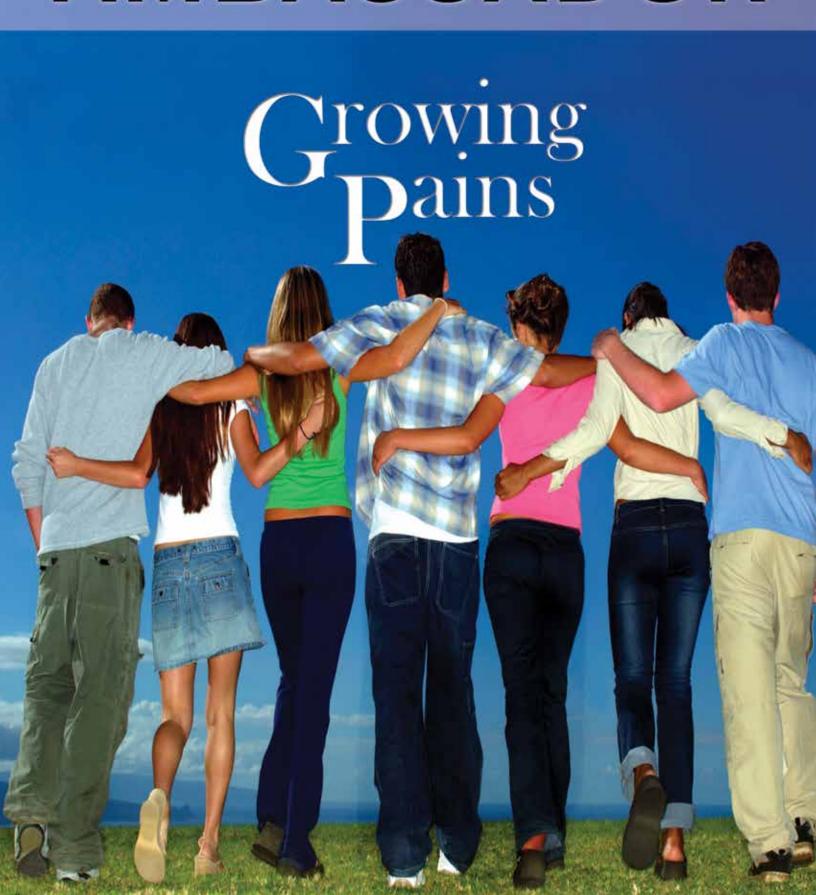
# THE LUTHERAN SADOR AND FEBRUARY 2004 AND SADOR



# [Encouraging Word]

# Becoming a doer



Liz Johnson Living Hope St. Michael, MN

I need to become a doer.
Listening is great.
But if I don't do anything, how will it help me?

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." — James 1:22

y family got new carpet about a month ago. With it came a whole new set of rules: Take off your shoes at the door. No food in the living room. No messy projects on the carpet ... etc. We all listened carefully to the instructions my mom gave us, and most of us are still faithfully obeying. Some of us are having a little bit of trouble — my dad and me, to be more exact. It's not that we didn't hear her or understand the rules. We just don't follow them. I have my reasons: I don't want to take the extra one-half minute to untie and put away my shoes. It's more comfortable for me to eat in the living room than in the kitchen.

I'm not noticing the consequences of my actions ... yet. But I'm guessing that if I continue to keep tracking in little bits of slush and mud, our beautiful off-white carpet will fade to a dull gray.

I need to become a doer. Listening is great. But if I don't do anything how will it help me? James 1:23-25 shows us a guy who looks at himself in the mirror, then forgets what he looks like the moment he turns his head. I imagine looking at myself in the mirror, then going somewhere and thinking,

"Hmm, what do I look like again? I forget ... are my eyes brown? Or were they blue? What color hair do I have?" I laugh because it seems so dumb. Who could forget that easily? But then I think about how easily I forget God's own Words.

I've read James 1:19 hundreds of times, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." I've heard it and I know it. But how many times have I lost my temper, lashed out with my words or failed to listen? More than I can count. How many times do I have my devotions, then, the next day, completely forget what I had just read? I'm just like that guy in the mirror.

God's Word is something I should strive to remember and to act on. James 1:25 says, "But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it, he will be blessed in what he does."

Becoming a doer isn't something that we can accomplish on our own; it's something that God has to do in us. He'll make us doers if we ask Him—and if we let Him.

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# **Sound Bites**

ntegrity is important in all of our lives and it happens to be one of the qualities that teenagers pick up on very quickly. If you lack integrity, teenagers will find you out and then shut you out.

- Bruce Becker

If we want our teens to really understand the needs of those who suffer, mission experiences cannot be once-a-year events. In order for our youth to grasp that service is a lifestyle, we must provide a variety of opportunities throughout the year.

- Scott Meier

hat if Jesus was serious? What if children are examples of true faith? What if working with young people is also an invitation to belong to them and learn from them? What if welcoming and caring for teens is actually hosting the living Christ?

— Jason Minnix

wonder what would happen if churches truly decided to take responsibility for the young people. They can still have a youth program and a youth worker, but the real youth ministry would happen when all of the adults decided to connect with all of the kids and do church together. Maybe there would be fewer students coming to church than attending youth group, but ten years from now, the ones who connected at church might still be there.

- Michael Yaconelli

# COLLEGE GROW

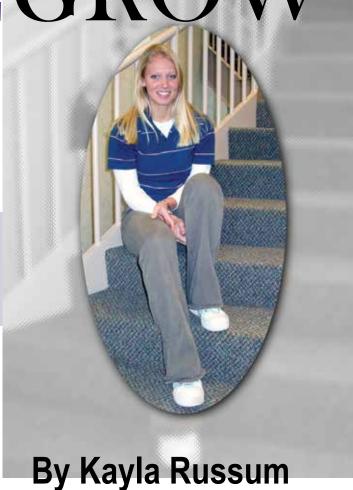
y senior year of high school was one of the most stressful times I can remember. Everyday was "D-Day," as my mom would say. There were college applications scattered all over the house and a few of those "College Applications for Dummies" books. Everyone told me that picking a college was one of the most important decisions I would make. And it was.

Unlike the majority of teenage Christians, secular college was a place for me to grow in my walk with the Lord. I grew up in a Christian home, and I had always attended church, but it wasn't until college that my faith became my own personal relationship with the Lord.

In high school, I threw the javelin for our track team. A track coach from Fresno State University invited me to fly to California to visit the school and the track program. The coach knew I was a Christian from previous phone conversations and he introduced me to a few teammates who were involved with Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). Those people made such an impression on me that I decided to sign with Fresno State.

I left my home, my family, my church, and my friends and moved to central California. I lived in the dorms my freshman year and immediately connected with a few Christian girls. We wanted to have a Bible study, but none of us were mature Christians. We decided to read the book of Matthew in a two-week time frame. All I needed was two days. As I read about Jesus, the Holy Spirit opened my eyes and made the Son of God real and personal to me. The miracles, parables, suffering and triumph were all familiar stories, but it was like I was reading them for the first time. By the end of Matthew, when Jesus promises that He would be with us to the end of the age, my heart was screaming, "I love Him!"

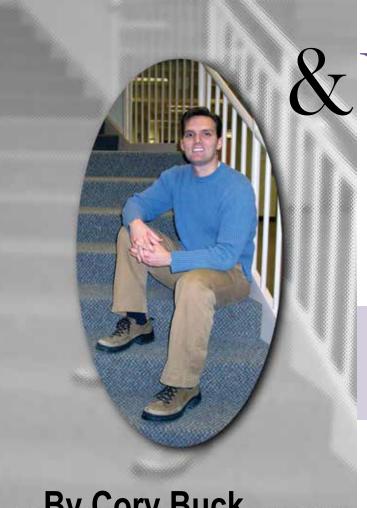
I continued to study the Word, and God gave me a desire to share what I was learning. I volunteered as a leader for Young Life, which is an outreach ministry for high school kids. It made a big impact on me when I was in high school, and in college it gave me the opportunity to share the gospel with teenagers who didn't know anything about God. Seeing God change these young people strengthened my faith and my walk with the Lord. By the time my senior year at FSU came around, I was asked to be on staff to start the first Young Life club in central California for high school kids who have developmental and physical disabilities.



The more I was involved in ministry, the more Satan attacked me. I faced most of the problems a typical college student faces. I struggled with a busy schedule, tough classes, disappointing friends and injuries in track. Satan went after my self-esteem and had me doubting the ministries I was involved in. Through all the trials and temptations, God used the attacks to show me that His grace is sufficient for me and His power is made perfect in my weakness.

I was blessed with great friends who met with me to study the Bible, kept me accountable and prayed with me a few times a week. God amazed me with the fellowship He provided while in a secular university. My testimony is best summed up by Ephesians 2:1-5: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins ... but because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved."

Russum, from Lake Stevens, Wash., is a senior at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School in Plymouth, Minn.



By Cory Buck

uring high school and through college, I believed I could live in sin and simply escape it when I decided I'd had enough. After all, drunkenness and drug use were things that only affected me, and I would decide when to quit. Opportunities to be a part of these activities presented themselves daily, and I soon found myself unable to escape. It's difficult to believe even a nominal faith would have kept me from making the decisions I did. As a young adult, those first years away from home tested everything I had ever been taught. Eventually, rationalization became my guide for making decisions rather than what my parents were teaching me and what the Bible said.

There are at least two principles I wish I could go back and bludgeon into my small, adolescent brain. First, our sin does affect other people. How many marriages have been torn apart by the sins committed before marriage? How many friendships must be rebuilt because of a lie? Only by the grace of God and healing from His Holy Spirit can these issues be overcome. Second, I cannot decide when to stop sinning. Everything in my body loves sin and desires to do it. Accepting Christ into my heart was the only way the guilt of these sins would ever be removed.

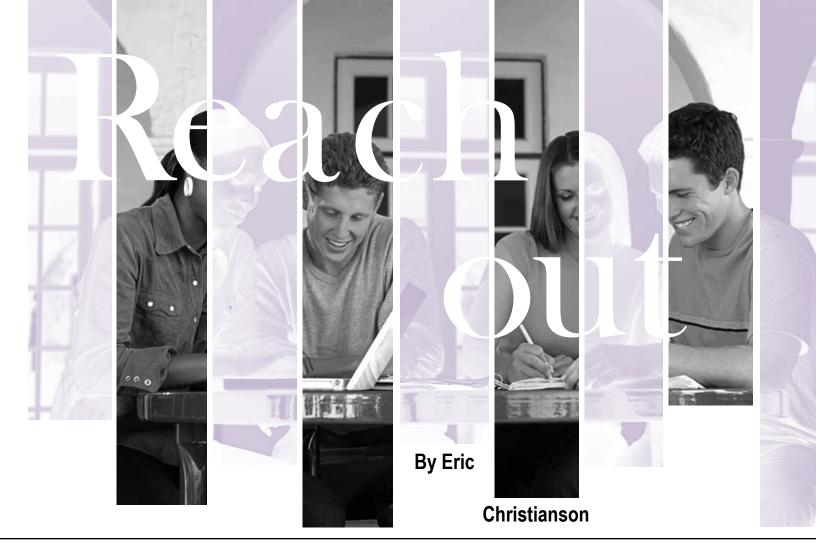
What would have made a difference in my life? I made the choices in my life. No one else is to blame for my mistakes. I do know that those who shared God's Word with me made a difference in my life. God's Word must be brought to college students. Brought by Christians living their lives on campus as testimonies to God's love and holiness. When opportunities present themselves, God's law must be taught in all its fullness and the gospel given with all its sweetness. The consequences of sin reach far beyond the moment each sin is committed. How can anyone see a need for the gospel unless they examine themselves against God's Word?

In I Samuel 12, Samuel gives his farewell speech to Israel. He asks the people to account for any wrong he has done to them and he will make it right. The people of Israel reply, "You have not cheated or oppressed us, you have not taken anything from anyone's hand" (verse 3). After reading this portion, I was reminded of the far-reaching consequences of sin. Would I be so bold as to stand at the end of my days and ask anyone to come forward that I had wronged? What a frightening thought!

When Samuel testified to the work God had done for Israel from the days of Moses, they were convicted of their sin in asking for a king. In I Samuel 12, Samuel responds to the people's confession of their sin. In verses 20-22 it says, "Do not be afraid, you have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. For the sake of His great name the Lord will not reject His people, because the Lord was pleased to make you His own."

As a college student lost in my sin, I needed to hear the truth of God's Word. I needed the conviction it brings. I needed the good news and assurance of the gospel. I need these equally as much as a Christian. Are you lost today as I was five years ago? There is hope for you! Are you a Christian in college struggling with your faith? Do not be deceived by useless answers the world offers. We need more Samuels who can challenge and encourage both the lost and those who are saved.

Buck is a 2001 graduate of the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, Plymouth, Minn., where he currently works as business manager. He is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.



rom Bible studies to game nights, lock-ins to missions trips, district retreats to national conventions, and friendship to discipleship, youth ministry involves many different things. In fact, there are many ways in which AFLC congregations and AFLC Youth Ministries are partnering together to reach students for Jesus Christ. But is youth ministry enough? What happens to our youths when they go off to college? More importantly, what happens to their faith in Jesus Christ?

Summit Ministries reports that three out of four Christian high school students leave their faith during college! That's 75 percent of students who turn their backs on Jesus Christ and the salvation He offers. The religious community has done little to address this epidemic that's been growing since the 1960s. However, AFLC Youth Ministries is praying that this will soon change. That is why we have begun a new emphasis: College-age ministry. We believe that college-age students (18-25), whether away, at home, or entering the work force, need to be remembered and encouraged in their faith by the church and individuals.

AFLC Youth Ministries desires to assist local congregations in ministering to these students. We have

assembled a presentation and have collected resources to inform and equip any congregation, any person, anywhere to encourage and minister to college-age students. In this presentation, we communicate many of the problems, temptations, and struggles that college students face everyday. These range from the humanistic and agnostic philosophies that are being taught by the college professors and dorm staff, to the pressures of classmates both on and off campus. We also explore why college-age students abandon their faith and change their beliefs and actions so quickly.

We also present simple and easy ways to help encourage college-age students in their faith, whether they are across town or across the country. Too many times people and congregations assume that since they do not live in a college town, they cannot minister to college-age students. This fallacy is exposed and simple, practical ideas are shared in which anybody can encourage and minister to college-age students.

We have already given this presentation almost 40 times in AFLC churches and events, and the response has been overwhelming. Mothers and fathers have shared the experiences of their children — some with rejoicing and sharing what helped their child stay

# How can you support college students?

uring the past few years, we have met with the youths at our church on Wednesday nights for a LIFE (living in faith everyday) study. Relationships need to be established with youths when they are young. Over time, these relationships grow into trusting friendships. It's all about spending time with youths, listening to them and learning from them. It's no different than how we befriend our Lord Jesus Christ.

We keep connected with students while they are in college by writing letters, sending cards, calling occasionally, visiting with them when they are home on breaks or taking them out for coffee or pizza. But the most important thing we do is pray for them.

It has given us so much pleasure to see young people grow, not only in maturity, but also in their spiritual walk with the Lord. It's also been a pleasure to see them take on Christian values and become involved in service projects while at college.

Our church recently started a program intended to keep contact with college students while they are away at school. It has been a positive approach to keep them connected to our congregation. To sum it up: take time, listen, learn and pray for students.

- Steve and Phyllis Stull, Faith Lutheran, Ottawa, Ill.

strong in college, others with pain tell what has happened to their children. Some come forward asking for information since they soon will have kids in college. In one instance, a youth group decided to help by sending care packages, and another church now sends out weekly e-mails to stay connected with the college-age students in their congregation.

AFLC Youth Ministries is also ministering to these students with a weekly e-newsletter, Web site (www. aflc.org/college), and resources. However, we can't do it alone. We must work together to make college-age students a priority and disciple them in Christian maturity. Ephesians 4:16 says, "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

If you are interested in having this presentation given to your church, or for more information regarding college-age ministry, please contact AFLC Youth Ministries at (763) 545-5631, youthmin@aflc.org, or visit our Web site.

Christianson is a member of the AFLC Youth Board.

t is not uncommon to hear a quite unsettling statistic suggesting that as many as 80 percent of Christian students who attend secular colleges and universities abandon their faith. If in fact that is the case, than it is imperative that our local

churches rethink their strategy By Rick Tollefson to train and disciple our high school and college-age students.

At Helmar we have tried to reach out to college students by involving them more as leaders within the high school group as well as attempting to meet with them as a group of their own. I have been the high school Sunday school teacher at Helmar for the past dozen or so years. It has always been my intent in the class to give students the necessary apologetic tools to not only sustain their own belief, but also to enable them to give an answer for their faith when it comes under scrutiny.

It is no secret that many public university professors are hostile to the Christian faith. I could give many examples, both at the graduate and

# See TOLLEFSON, page 22

was involved in a mentoring program during my first year at Bible school. When I went home to Stanley, N.D., I often thought about how this would be something our church could benefit from. So I brought the idea to the WMF. The women agreed

that a mentoring program By Tami Jo LeRohl could tie the youths and adults together while building

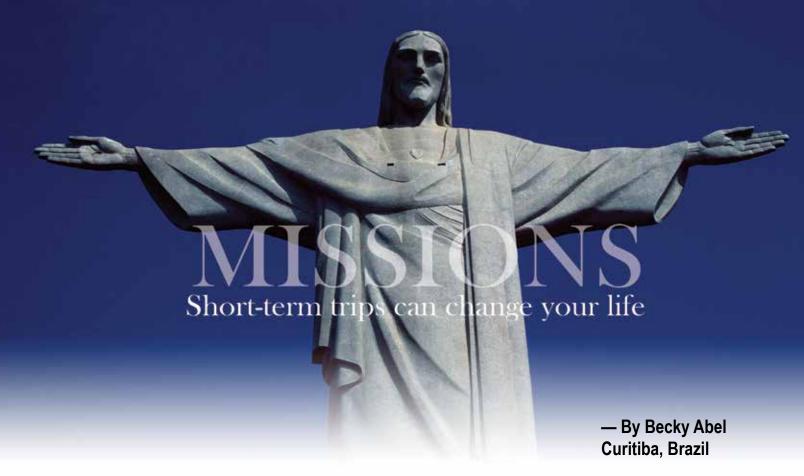
all of them up in Christ.

My pastor's wife and I sat down and prayed for direction on organization and who the program should be geared to. We decided to direct the program toward college students.

We chose Hebrews 13:13 as a theme verse: "Encourage one another day as long as it is still called today."

Since the WMF was leading the project, we worked with women the first year. In our second year, we got men from Promise Keepers involved.

Our main goal in mentoring college students was encouragement. While away from their home, friends and family, students need this ministry while they are at school. We asked mentors to write letters and emails, send cards and love packages, and call them. But above all, we asked them to pray for the students so that they would not become weary in their walk



reams about faraway places, interest in different cultures, crash course lessons in a foreign language, prayers for people yet unfamiliar, steps of faith in trusting God to provide for myriad details. The anticipation finally leads to a short-term experience on the mission field.

Young and old alike have taken opportunities to see the mission field firsthand. For them a vague idea of the mission field is transformed into a living reality as they spend time in a foreign country, meeting real people and experiencing a different culture. New steps of faith are taken, cross-cultural friendships are established through gestures and hugs and simple phrases, and the unity of the body of Christ takes on a whole new meaning.

During our 19 years in Brazil, many short-term missionaries have visited us. These visits range from two weeks to three years. Those who stay longer obviously have a better chance of really being useful and have a better idea of what the missionary experience is all about.

Although the language barrier gets in the way of personal one-on-one ministry to Brazilians, we've seen short-termers creatively learn to communicate and develop friendships through companionship and prayer. They also learn from observing the missionaries in their day-to-day service of reaching out and sharing the gospel. Others come for short periods to willingly help out in any way they can — building a house for a poor family, handing out tracts, singing a song, sharing a testimony, praying for people who now have names and faces.

Although the results of such interaction are hard to

measure, we believe that God uses those contacts of planting seeds to cultivate faith in lives, both of the giver and of the receiver. Perhaps the greatest results are reaped in the lives of those who come as short-term missionaries. Their idea of missions changes, they become more interested in praying and supporting mission efforts around the world, and they return home with much gratitude in their hearts for the many blessings they have received.

Some who have come to serve as short-term missionaries have sensed God's call to go into full-time mission work and are serving in a variety of places in the world today. In each contact with a short-term visitor, we have attempted to point them to God's great plan of saving a lost world through the humble efforts of His people sharing the good news of Jesus at home and abroad.

Missionaries are nothing of themselves. In Christ we are empowered to proclaim a great message that is for *all* people — Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. All who believe in Jesus will be saved. Those who don't know Jesus continue in darkness, without hope, without a Savior, without eternal life in Christ. Evangelization of the world is up to us — God doesn't have a second plan. He is calling young people today to accept the challenge of cross-cultural missions. Is He calling you?

Dream about faraway places, take interest in other cultures, learn a second language, pray for the people in other parts of the world, step out in faith. Perhaps a short-term mission experience is waiting for you.

Which one will you make?

By Jeremy Erickson

ver the last five years I've spent a good deal of time on secular college campuses. I've visited with Christian students about their experiences there — of leaving home and finding themselves in thoroughly unfriendly environments for those believing the Scriptures to be true.

I've met students raised in the church on healthy doses of Bible camps, Bible study and fellowship suddenly shaken by a critically thinking and well-prepared culture that tells them their faith doesn't matter. They're not told they're wrong as much as they're told their faith is wholly irrelevant to the world around them.

In nearly every case, I've seen one of three responses:

- Some students come to believe this worldview and forfeit faith altogether, choosing instead a life of frivolousness and setting faith aside as a mere peripheral of life where it loses its rightful influence on the choices they make.
- Some students deny their faith is irrelevant, yet retract from interaction with opposition, forming a club with other students who believe the same things, where they remain strong, but abandon their influence on the culture in a sad way proving what they set out to deny in the first place.
- Some students rise to the challenge, seeking to understand and engage the culture and Christianity's relationship to it, listening and critically thinking through the teaching and arguments laid before them, and joining the conversation with an informed and focused but friendly air of conviction. Gradually they make the case for the relevance of our faith with their words and their lives.

Among the needs these students face for sustaining fellowship and ample support from family, there is a need also for preparation, for training in apologetics and critical thinking to grant them victorious passage through these tumultuous years.

Christian students need to understand that while Christianity is ultimately a relationship with the Living God, it is also a worldview that makes a whole lot of sense.

Many authors have expounded upon this for generations. G.K. Chesterton, C.S. Lewis, Os Guinness, and Philip Yancey (among many others) have made their musings available for those seeking to understand Christianity's doctrines in contrast with current cultural views. Summit Ministries and Worldview Weekends provide opportunities for youths desiring a more extensive application of their faith to the world around them. And AFLC Youth Ministries is also seeking to plug students into such programs and introduce youths to such minds.

Whether by regimented study or mere exposure to people who have wrestled with the accusation of irrelevancy before, youths going off to college need not be unprepared. We can be, and become, that which we already are: Salt and light in the midst of a broken and confused world.



Erickson lives in Bloomington, Minn., where he helps with the youth and worship ministries at Emmaus Lutheran. Learn more of his ministry at www.jeremyerickson.com.



ust a few days into my very first mission trip I found myself sitting in a Turkish jail. The guards around me were talking and yelling in a language I did not know. They searched me, checked my passport and, as best as I was able to tell, interrogated me. Although I was a 19-year-old sophomore in college, I was still an infant in the spiritual realm. I had come to recognize my sin and need for a Savior just 12 months earlier. Still struggling after my rebirth, I found myself in the presence of five unhappy Turkish police officers.

A fellow missionary and I had been taken into custody for handing out copies of the New Testament to college students. I tried to remain faithful and calm, but after 45 minutes I began to worry. Fortunately, not long after the fear began to rise in me they let us go.

Although the police officers did nothing to harm us physically and, in reality, very little to worry us emotionally, they changed me forever spiritually. My faith, my understanding of the world, and my priorities have never been the same. God, through that experience, left an indelible mark on my heart and mind. He had used the Turkish police to etch onto my soul a previously unimaginable understanding of His glory and sovereignty. Here is a quote from my journal that night:

That night, Chris and I went out on their

balcony and prayed and sang for quite a while. It was unbelievably moving. ... Overall, this was one of the most important weeks of my life. I am not sure how much that I helped the cause of Christ over here, but what did happen was an enormous eye opening for me. ... Probably the biggest area of growth for me was learning respect for other cultures as well as the importance of boldness in ministry. I hope that I am able to explain this week to others in such a way that accurately portrays the emotions that I felt, the things that I experienced, and the love of Christ that is in me.

- March 10, 1996

I have been on many short-term and longer mission trips since the one to Istanbul in 1996. Many of them have been in the United States and several have been overseas. While none have had the same kind of "legal experience" as the first, they have all had several things in common.

First, every mission trip that I have been on has brought me way out of my comfort zone and — perhaps by definition — closer to God. Getting out of my normal routine, my controllable space, has allowed me — forced me — to rely on God where I normally do not. It has always been scary and generally difficult to leave my family, friends and home, but it has



helped me to see that unquestionably the Treasure found in the harvest field is worth everything (Matthew 13:44).

Second, every mission trip that I have been on has allowed me to focus sharply on God. Spending time with God in His Word, depending on Him for the grace I need to get through the challenges of the day, and offering my thoughts, words, and actions up to Him through prayers seems much easier when I am on a mission trip. Perhaps this is because many of the distractions that surround my life back home are absent from the mission field. While going on mission trips has always been challenging, it has also uniquely enabled me to be single-minded.

Finally, each time that I have gone on a mission trip I have gained an increased passion for God and burden for the souls of the people back home. Mission trips seem to allow me to step back from my usual context and view life from a completely different perspective. So many things that I tend to consider important seem relatively unimportant when my focus and trust is Jesus alone.

Over all, it seems that God has used mission trips to be a shock to my system, a cleansing of my mind, and a source of ignition in my soul.

VanAcker is a youth worker at Sunnyside Lutheran, Stacy, Minn.

# Shapir

By Katie Thomas

od has revealed Himself to me in amazing ways through mission trips. God called me to serve Him in Costa Rica in 2002 and in Ecuador in 2003. What I experienced on these two trips has shaped who I am and how I live today. Missions have changed my perspectives, made me more prayerfully dependent, and reminded me that my future is in God's hands.

God changed the perspective in which I view others. In Costa Rica God allowed me to see His people and His creation through His eyes. I met people on the street, and, instead of judging them I loved them. God's love flowed through me. I recognized that God has a plan for everyone, regardless of what society says. The Holy Spirit is still at work in me, teaching me to love everyone and tell every person I meet about my loving Savior.

I learned that I needed to be prayerfully dependent in every situation and in all of my life. I was drained emotionally, physically, and spiritually while I was in Ecuador. As the week progressed the Holy Spirit enabled me to see that I was depending on myself and not God. Now, no matter where I am or what I am doing, I am also praying, because I know that I am dependent on God for everything.

As I have reflected on these past experiences I realize that God has an amazing plan for me. Five years ago I would never have guessed that I would be spending time in foreign countries telling people about Jesus. This has taught me that my future is in God's hands. As I am continually reminded of God's greatness, I am able to lay my future before Him and trust whatever He has planned for me.

Thomas is a senior in high school and a member of Sunnyside Lutheran, Stacy, Minn.



family to come back to preach the message at his funeral. I was blessed that day to see evidence that some of my students are currently walking with the Lord. One former student was Dale's older brother. The way in which he helped his parents and family deal with this tragedy was evidence of his own personal faith.

Another former student spoke at Dale's funeral on behalf of the family. A Minnesota state trooper, he introduced me to his wife of two years and spoke articulately about his and this family's personal faith in Christ. It was a joy to talk with him and his sister (another former student) who is preparing to marry next summer. She wanted me to know her fiancé is a Christian.

What really blessed my heart was to be able to share that Dale had been not only a good soldier, but also a Christian soldier. He had been a confirmation student who, like many other junior high boys, was not always so attentive in class. He had gotten quite behind on his memory work. When the end of his second year was coming around, he began to realize he would have to make up that work. He stopped by my office several times after school to go over parts of the catechism together and then be quizzed on them. There was quite a bit to make up, but he had no problem doing so. In the process I had some extra opportunities to talk with him about the meaning of what he was memorizing.

After Dale graduated from high school, I lost track of him, though I knew he had enlisted in the armed forces. It had been his goal from a young age. In visiting with others, I found out he had served almost nine years in the military and had worked his way to the position of staff sergeant. He was an officer who had a concern for his men. When contacting home he regularly asked for prayer for himself and his men. He had shared with his mother about times he and another young man from the same area would sit on their bunk at night, read their Bibles and pray. Sometimes other men would come by and ask if they could join them. One conversation resulted in four men expressing their desire to have Bibles of their own. He helped them get Bibles. One Sunday afternoon, in talking about the imminent danger they faced in Iraq, Dale led those men in prayer to receive Jesus as their Savior.

He told his mother: "God's got me here for a reason — to help these guys." After his death, an Army chaplain wrote Dale's parents, telling them that their son always seemed to take time to come to worship services, both on and off the field, and he usually brought someone else with him when he came.

As I drove home from Dale's funeral service, my heart overflowed in thankfulness to God for the privilege of having a part in impacting young lives and teaching them the fundamentals of the Christian faith. I think there are going to be some great confirmation class reunions in heaven some day!

Dale Panchot, a member of Hope Lutheran, Northome, Minn., was the third Minnesota soldier killed in action in Operation Iraqi Freedom. His family would appreciate your prayers for them as well as for other military personnel still serving in Iraq. Pastor Quanbeck serves Bethel Free Lutheran, Minot, N.D.

He told his mother: "God's got me here for a reason — to help these guys."



# TOTM By Pastor Jerry Nelson

# We are called to be nonconformists after God's pattern

o you have something on that says, "Nike?" Do you own a pair of Adidas? Have you ever heard of the Minnesota Vikings? Have you ever worn a pair of socks and sandals to school, even though it was 30 degrees below zero outside? How about hairstyle? When was the last time one of you guys had hair down to your shoulders?

Why do we do this? Some people say it is to express nonconformity. But, really, unless you conform to the nonconformity, you may be considered a nerd, dork or geek.

When I was in eighth grade, I went to my first school dance. I didn't have the foggiest idea what I was supposed to wear. Being the oldest child, I couldn't ask a brother or sister. So I turned to good old Mom, who was always a fountain of good information. I failed to consider that the last school dance she attended was in the 1940s. I showed up to the dance dressed in a Sunday suit and tie. I had a growing spurt that year, so my pants were a little short. I had also neglected to put my socks in the laundry basket,

so I had to wear my white gym socks. So I had on short pants, white socks and a tie that was one-half inch wide, left over from my sixth grade graduation. My suit coat was just a little too short. I took care of that easily enough by pulling my shoulders up into the sleeves. I walked around looking like Jethro from "The Beverly Hillbillies." I won't even tell you about my glasses! I no sooner got inside the school when a couple of girls came walking by. They laughed so hard they could barely invite me to take my coat and tie off to stay awhile.

Peer pressure — conformity — is a wonderful thing.

We , even adults, have practiced peer pressure since time began. Romans 12:2 states: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — His good, pleasing and perfect will." And I Peter 1:14 tells us: "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance."

I wish I had known these verses when I was

in high school. The word conform means to mold into a pattern. I tried real hard to mold into the pattern of those around me, but somehow I never quite made it. According to these verses, we are not called to conform to this world. We are called to be nonconformists after God's pattern. Scripture is filled with nonconformists.

Consider David. His people were being threatened by the ever-present and dangerous Philistines who had Goliath on their side, a giant at more than nine feet tall. He would come out and roar at the Israelites, who were shaking in their sandals.

Goliath was very cool. He had all the right clothes. Can you picture him standing out there on the hillside? His armor had so much lettering that it weighed 125 pounds. The King James Version says that he was such a stud, he wore a target between his shoulder blades, as if to say, "C'mon, I dare you!" His spear was perfectly balanced; the point alone weighed 15 pounds. This was one bad dude — a Philistine Rambo.

And who went up against him? When King Saul took roll call, it was David who answered. Saul tried to conform David to the same class as Goliath. Small in stature, David was given Saul's armor, which probably weighed 70 pounds. The helmet weighed 10 pounds and the sword was another 20 pounds. But it just didn't work for David. He couldn't move. He didn't want to conform to the way battle was done. He went out to meet Goliath the way God had made him, and Goliath laughed. You know the ending of the story. Goliath's garments didn't help him.

The Church itself has had an interesting struggle with conformity. The Apostolic Church did not conform with traditional Jewish worship. This led to persecution, lasting 300 years. During this time, the Christian Church grew and became spiritually strong. In the year 312, Emperor Constantine became a Christian and proclaimed the whole kingdom to be Christian as well. Suddenly it was in vogue to be a Christian; conformity was mandatory.

To make it more appealing to the masses,

many pagan ceremonies were incorporated into the Church. A power struggle also began to develop between church and civil authority. The Roman Empire now continued through the Pope, who became the head of a new power structure. The Church molded itself after the world and rapidly deteriorated into a money-hungry,

despicable institution.

t h e

The Church is not so different from individuals.

I consciously tried to conform to the patterns of the world until the age of 20. The more I tried to find happiness the world's way, the more depressed I got. Then I considered Jesus. He was a non-

c o n - formist who went against traditions of the Pharisees and Sadducees. I found that Jesus speaks to our inner thoughts and attitudes, not to our meaningless words, actions or dress.

He is more interested in what is going on in our minds and conforming to His will. We are to be molded into a pattern God has set out for us. If you don't know what that pattern is, you need to find out. The world's pattern only leads to emptiness.

> The first step in renewing your mind is deciding to follow Jesus. If you have already made a commitment to Christ, there will still be pressures from the world. All of us need to grow, no matter where we are spiri-

tually. We cannot afford, out of ignorance, to only wear the outer garments of Christianity. The time will come when we will be tested. Then, the garments will fail. Renew your mind. Bring it into conformity with Christ. "Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is."

Nelson serves Christ is Lord Lutheran, La Crosse, Wis., and has also worked as a counselor.



# Women in our congregations are crying out for someone to come alongside them, take what God has taught and lead them down the gentle path of God's wisdom.

# to LOVE one ANOTHER

WOMEN MENTORING WOMEN



omen today feel that something is missing in their lives. Gone are the days of coffee klatches and neighborhood get-togethers. There is a desperate need for heart-to-heart, woman-to-woman, one-on-one connection.

A woman who steps into the role of a Christian mentor is a **wise** and **trusted counselor**. She uses the wisdom that comes from life's experiences to help another who is encountering similar situations. Regardless of chronological age, women seeking mentors need a godly role model — someone who will help them understand how to live as a Christian woman, mother, wife, sister, single parent, while divorced, dating, remarried, widowed, a grandmother, career woman and neighbor.

Wisdom comes from God. As a Christian mentor we have the ability to share the exciting things that happen when we turn our lives over to Christ. When we allow God to teach us from His Word what He wants us to learn, we then take this knowledge and give it back to another. Mentoring is imparting biblical truths to help others grow in their own personal relationship with Christ.

Trusted implies someone in whom we can have confidence to share our innermost feelings and know they will not gossip or slander about us. Women need the opportunity for bonding sister-to-sister in Christ.

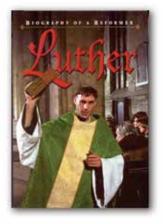
Counselor is a confidant. In Christian mentoring, it is someone who can help you learn to go to the one and only Counselor, the Lord. Nowadays we get advice from talk shows, newspaper headlines, women's magazines and an odd assortment of other resources; many of them give a worldly, liberal viewpoint that can often lead to discontent and delusion. It's a delight to have a Christian sister one can trust, knowing she gives good advice because we know her wisdom is God-inspired.

Women in our congregations are crying out for someone to come alongside them, take what God has taught and lead them down the gentle path of God's wisdom. As Christian mentors we have the opportunity to be a teacher/trainer of what is good and right. "In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned" (Titus 2:7, 8)

Beth BergrenHope LutheranMinneapolis, Minn.

For more information on mentoring resources and training programs contact Beth Bergren via e-mail: beth@bethbergren.com or at (763) 425-4189.

# [Parish Education] Youth Resources



# Luther Biography of a Reformer

Martin Luther had one goal: peace with God. Journey through the adventurous, often dangerous life of this man of God. Luther knew his weaknesses and sin only too well but all the more clung to his Savior, Jesus Christ. Hardcover book includes full-color pictures from the recent Luther movie. \$12

# Why One Way?

Defending an Exclusive Claim in an Inclusive World

How do I respond to postmodern voices shouting "tolerance"? This concise guide gives a scriptural foundation and logical explanation for defending the truth that Jesus is the only way to God and gives a blueprint for communicating truth to a "truthless" and cynical generation. \$9



# **Youth Ministry Basics**

An all-around resource for developing a biblical philosophy of ministry, encouraging leadership, planning events, leading Bible studies, outreach, fund-raising, and more. Includes reproducible pages. \$15.50

# **Teens** Pray:

Conversations with God

Written by teens and adults, this hardcover gift book of prayers cov-

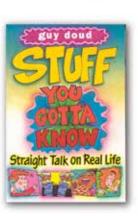


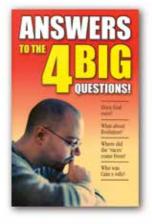
ering specific problems and concerns of teens will help stimulate Christian youths in their daily conversations with God. \$6.50

# Stuff You Gotta **Know**

With humor and style, Guv Doud

addresses teens' common struggles — friendships, parents, peer pressure, school, addictions, sex, and more and gives godly advice, answers, and hope. \$7





# Answers to the 4 Big Questions

Does God exist? What about evolution? Why are there races? Who was Cain's wife? This booklet will help you find the answers. \$.50

These and other resources available from Ambassador Publications: AFLC Parish Education, 3110 East Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55441. Phone: (763) 545-5631 Fax: (763) 545-0079 Email: parished@aflc.org Web site: www.aflc.org

# [World Missions] Ministry Training Institute

# ministry partners

The program shares in the great task of preparing young people to serve the King of kings.

he Ministry Training Institute, a third-year program of the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, has depended on a cooperative effort by the various ministries of the AFLC from its very inception. The program shares in the great task of preparing young people to serve the King of kings. Those who join us in this very important effort encourage

> us. Many of our AFLC missionaries have done so by coming into the classroom to teach MTI students.

There are great benefits from these times as our missionaries and other guest teachers and instructors pass on to the students their wisdom and expertise in cross-cultural ministry. There is a very realistic impact as our missionaries from Brazil and Mexico instruct, sharing fresh views from their own experiences. This school year, Pastor Jonathan Abel, who is on home assignment, taught a 10-hour class entitled, "Introduction to Cross-Cul-



Richard Gunderson

tural Ministry." Others who taught were Pastor Ollie Olson and Pastor Don Richman. These servants of the Lord share out of their background of cross-cultural ministry, years of experience and zeal to win souls for Jesus. They give our students valuable insights. Now in its fourth year, MTI was supported from the

beginning by World Missions. Pastor Todd Shierkolk, missionary to Mexico, extended his home assignment a few months so that he could teach and give leadership for the first year of the MTI program. In successive years, Pastor Paul Abel, Pastor Connely Dyrud and Pastor Dan Giles have joined us as speakers and instructors. Pastor Paul Nash from the Home Missions office and Lavon Bohling from FLAPS joined them as instructors. Pastor Kevin Olson has contributed greatly as an instructor in the training of youth workers. This has been a partnership with a great many shared blessings.

I encourage you as members in our AFLC to express your appreciation to these mission committees for their collaboration in this effort. As you support missions, you can be assured that you are not only reaching out to win people for Jesus, but at the same time preparing future workers. We in MTI look forward to the Lord working through our partnerships. It is an appreciated partnership.

Gunderson is the director of the Ministry Training Institute and a member of Sunnyside Lutheran, Stacy, Minn.

# to the RESCUE

man stranded in the middle of a rushing current of floodwater stands on what is left of his truck and reaches with all he has for the rope that has been lowered to him. A frightened little girl waits, lodged in a dark well, trapped, barely able to move while dozens of people work around the clock finding a way to reach her. A pregnant mother struggles to retain con-



**Andrea Monseth** 

head bleeding,
while the Jaws of
Life pry open the
twisted metal
that was once
her car. Those
who are unable
to do anything
for themselves
— powerless to

free themselves,

sciousness, her

legs broken, her

helpless to escape — depend on others to save them. While they are broken, paralyzed and held captive by their circumstance, others have come to their rescue.

And here, people condemned from birth march forward to eternal death, deserving it fully with no other options or solutions of their own. Who will lower the rope? Who is working through the night to reach them? Where is the Jaws of Life that will free them from the twisted wreck that holds them captive? Who will come to their rescue?

God did. God is. God has it. God will.

The very core of our being — our sinful nature — makes it impossible for us to live up to God's standard of perfection and, therefore, sentences us to eternal separation from Him. We who fall, we

who fail, we who sin, we who have nothing to contribute to our salvation — we need to be rescued.

Rescue: To save, to set free from danger, evil or captivity. God does it. We need it.

The problem is people don't know. It is believed that there is no danger, there is no hell and there is nothing to be rescued from. People also believe that there is no rescue, there is no hope and there is no God.

But these are lies.

There is a God who is lowering an undeserved rope to us — Jesus. All we need to do is hold on. He even gives us the strength to hold on, lifts us from the rushing floodwater and raises us up with Him. He offers eternal and abundant life. He is our rescue from the dark places of this life and from eternal death. He restores us to where we were created to be. We were created to be with Him, in an unbroken and unhindered relationship. He brings us from death to life. He is our Rescue.

"Rescue" is the theme for the 2005 FLY Convention. "For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14).

Andrea Monseth serves as secretary to the Free Lutheran Youth committee, an organization that plans national youth conventions, and is a member of Living Hope, St. Michael, Minn. There is a God who is lowering an undeserved rope to us — Jesus. All we need to do is hold on.





# Moving day

AFLBS students took a break from classes on Dec. 12. Instead, they lent their combined efforts to move desks, books and classroom and kitchen equipment to Heritage Hall. Students and staff formed lines out of the chapel building and dorms and into the new student center, which now houses classrooms, library, cafeteria, kitchen and offices for staff and faculty.

Although they weren't able to meet in the new building for classes in 2003 (occupancy permits were granted during Christmas break), the students did a majority of the work in moving to the new facility.

TOP LEFT: Junior Radek Labaj, from the Czech Republic, and senior

Sarah Rolf from Valley City, N.D., help move furniture. TOP RIGHT: Senior Mark Hensrud, Hoople, N.D., puts his back into it while two others students try to move a heavy desk. **MIDDLE: Pastor Kevin** Olson mans the truck while students hand off kitchen supplies. BOT-TOM LEFT: A line of students hand off boxes outside the chapel building. BOTTOM **RIGHT: Senior Luke** Norell. Butterfield. Minn., carries furniture.









Members of Chippewa Lutheran, Brandon, Minn., collected school supplies for needy children in Bosnia. The drive began when Lt. Joseph Sanganoo, stationed in Bosnia with the National Guard, indicated a need for the school supplies. Sanganoo, who is the son-in-law of church member Diann Thompson, works with children in Bosnia during his free time. On Nov. 30, the supplies were dedicated at Chippewa Lutheran and sent to Bosnia, where Sanganoo will distribute them to the children.

# WMF to hold district officers retreat at ARC

All officers encouraged to attend

The national WMF board is sponsoring a retreat March 25-26 at the ARC in Osceola, Wis., with the theme, "How to be a World Class Christian." District WMF officers, don't miss this opportunity to hear from Tamba Abel, Jan Galland, Rhoda Jore, Elaine Kohl, and Tammy Vukonich as they share on topics relating to the Great Commission given us by Jesus.

Registration, including meals and lodging, is \$40.

District ladies, consider sending your officers with help from your district treasuries. It is our goal that they will come back to your district and share the information with you.

Expand your vision for the lost to reach from your home to the ends of the earth!

For more information on the retreat, contact the ARC at 1-888-748-3969.



Pastor Nathan Hoff was installed Nov. 23, 2003, at Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn. Pastor Elden Nelson, AFLC vice president, led the installation service. Pictured are (back, left to right) Mark Nelson, Phil Schumacher, Arden Jacobson, Paul Johnson and Eric Throldahl (front, from left) Tom Caouette, Pastor Elden Nelson, Pastor Nathan Hoff, Rick Rasmussen and Roger Niday.

# Classic devotional booklet reprinted by Mercy and Truth

"Lent in the Heart," a devotional booklet written by Dr. Iver Olson has been reprinted by Mercy And Truth Publishers. Originally printed in 1949 by Christian Literature Press of the Lutheran Free Church, the booklet has a reading for every day of the Lenten season.

The 47-page booklet can be purchased for \$2.50. Write to Pastor Dennis Gray, 19594 350th St. NW, Newfolden, MN 56738-9286.

Members of **Good Shepherd Lutheran**, Camarillo, Calif., dedicated a newly remodeled facility on Jan. 11. Speaking at the dedication were AFLC President Pastor Robert Lee and Home Missions Director Pastor Paul Nash. Pastor Rodger Olson serves Good Shepherd.

**Dr. Mary Lindquist**, 78, of Grand Forks, N.D., died Oct. 23, 2003, at Park River, N.D. Lindquist had served two terms on the AFLC Board of Parish Education. She served as a missionary to Japan and taught at the University of North Dakota. The service was at Trinity Free Lutheran, Grand Forks.

Members of **Faith Lutheran**, Detroit Lakes, Minn., and **Victory in Christ Lutheran**, Maplewood, Minn., have voted to withdraw from the AFLC and become independent congregations.

# **TOLLEFSON**, from page 7

undergraduate levels of times when professors directly attacked Christianity. What I try to do in my class is "hit" my students with those attacks, forcing them to think through their answers carefully. I often play the part of a skeptic who does not so easily give in to their assumptions regarding God and the Bible. I think my students have found this helpful, allowing them to explore answers to serious and difficult questions in a nonhostile environment. I have seen my students grow greatly in the solidification of their own faith as these questions are dealt with, but I also see them grow in confidence in providing a defense for the faith that is within them. I want my students to look at the public collegiate campus as not a threat, but an opportunity.

Tollefson is a member of Helmar Lutheran, Newark, III.

# **LEROHL**, from page 7

with the Lord.

While encouraging words don't save someone's life in the literal sense, they certainly can breathe life into frustration, hopelessness, disappointment and trials while at college. It makes everyone feel good when they see people smiling, hear affirming words, or just know that they are being prayed for. Perhaps you're not a natural encourager. Maybe you find it difficult to write encouraging words. You can encourage students just by sharing your passion for life in whatever area God has allowed you to flourish. As long as you don't forget about them, you have done your duty as a mentor as described in Titus 2.

LeRohl is a 2003 graduate of the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, Plymouth, Minn. Her home church is Our Savior's Free Lutheran, Stanley, N.D.

Correction: Living Hope, St. Michael, Minn., was accepted by members of the Coordinating Committee. The church's full name was listed incorrectly in the December issue. Correction: The members of the Northwest Minnesota District are supporting a building project in Brazil. The district was listed incorrectly in the January issue.

# **AFLC** memorials — December

# **AFLBS**

Dr. Howard Franzen, Edna Ohnstad, Arthur Olson, Florence Fergerson, Kenny Jacobson, Estella Schmidt, Harriet Dolan, Maynard Jorstad, Rick Cummings, Rita Gorman, Millie Mackey, Carol Kooiman, Mae Lumppio, Gerd Knudsvig, Norris Fugleberg, Lawrence & Kathleen Walch

## **AFLTS**

Edna Ohnstad, Dr. Howard Franzen, Gordon Feige, Bud Lygtebo, Donna Henry, Gerd Knudsvig, Norris Fugleberg, Myrtle Tungseth

## **General Fund**

Dr. Howard Franzen, Edna Ohnstad, Gerd Knudsvig, Norris Fugleberg

# **Home Missions**

Lester Edmunds, Mae Haverland, Dr. Howard Franzen, George & Julia Kvistan, Edna Ohnstad, Skip Walberg, Henry Peterson, Gerd Knudsvig

## **Parish Education**

Dr. Mary Lindquist, Dr. Howard Franzen

# Vision 2004

Ellert Nelson, Gladys Thompson, Gladys Jacobson, Iva Stuntz, Carl Fuglesten, Laurence Ferdinand, Edward Fryer, Dr. Howard Franzen, Edna Ohnstad, Brad Haugen

# **World Missions**

Ardell & Percy Bjerke, W. Jerald Hansen, Edna Ohnstad, Gladys Thompson, Carl Fugelston, Susan Clark, Dr. Howard Franzen, George & Julia Kvistan, Jerald Hansen, Gerd Knudsvig, Dr. Mary Lindquist

# **Youth Ministries**

Jerry Thompson, Emelia Kosel, Dr. Howard Franzen

... in honor of

## AFLBS

Dorothy Olson, Don Rodvold
AFLTS

Dr. Francis Monseth, Pastor James & Kristin Molstre

# **Home/World Missions**

Pastor Fred Klopfer

# Vision 2004

Pastor Orville & Florence Hiepler

# **Association of Free Lutheran Congregations**

3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

AFLC Benevolences (12 month) - January 1 - December 31, 2003

FUND	TOTAL Subsidy	REC'D IN DECEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$305,568.00	\$50,275.49	\$298,599.03	98
Youth Ministries	48,154.00	10,325.96	47,750.74	99
Parish Education	90,907.00	10,936.70	83,439.28	92
Seminary	152,070.00	44,499.88	171,122.42	113
Bible School	263,356.00	32,836.38	251,066.45	95
Home Missions	305,087.00	37,990.48	262,195.70	86
Church Extension	28,945.00	1,626.10	16,562.61	57
World Missions	247,082.00	62,807.37	237,413.40	96
Personal Support	301,156.00	34,013.02	347,058.40	115
	1,742,325.00	\$285,311.38	\$1,638,066.61	94
TOTALS 2002	\$1.521.284.00	\$298,633.11	\$1,715,409.86	113
<b>Goal 100%</b>	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	, ,	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	

The Evangelism Department received \$21,178.74 in December. The office of director of Development received \$1,098 in December.

# [Editorial]

# Admitting you're a mess

ome people have more influence than name recognition. One of those, when it comes to youth work, was Mike Yaconelli who died in a car crash on Oct. 30, 2003.

Mike was an author, speaker and founder of Youth Specialties, a ministry that, over the years, has



**Craig Johnson** 

produced a vast and wide variety of material for vouths and vouth workers.

Doug Fields, in writing about his friend, said, "He wanted vouth workers to know Jesus. That was primary. More important than

any program, event or resource.

"He wanted youth workers to not give up. He heard about the trials. He listened to the pain. He got angered by the way youth workers were treated in the church and he didn't want you to give up. He committed his life to making sure you wouldn't.

"He wanted youth workers to be themselves. ... Mike didn't want people to be like him or like me ... he wanted them to be themselves and serve God faithfully. ... He wanted people to be themselves and most of the time that meant ministry in small ways."

I had the privilege of hearing Mike speak a few times at youth worker training seminars. He shared some powerful truths and some great stories. One in particular has stuck with me.

When he was a kid in gym class a time came for square dancing. Everybody needed to pick a partner. A teacher came to Mike

and told him he ought to pick Mary — the girl nobody wanted to have for a partner. She wasn't the prettiest girl in the class. She was kind of uncoordinated. He figured she'd probably step all over his feet. Mike knew in his heart, though, that the teacher was right.

He couldn't really believe it, but he found himself walking over to Mary and asking her to be his partner. He said he never forgot the look on her face. She was so thrilled to think that somebody would ask her to be his partner. It meant so much to her to be chosen.

Mike had a passion for letting people know that Jesus wanted them; they were chosen. He believed many people, many young people in particular, feel like Mary — unwanted and unloved. Mike longed for them to hear the good news: "You are a chosen people" (I Peter 2:9, NIV).

He began his book, "Messy Spirituality" with the declaration: "My life is a mess. ... I have been trying to follow Christ most of my life, and the best I can do is a stumbling, bumbling, clumsy kind of following." He reminds us later in the book: "But the truth is, we are a mess. None of us are who we appear to be. We all have secrets. We all have issues. We all struggle from time to time. No one is perfect. Not one. (I have just paraphrased Romans 3:10.) The essence of messy spirituality is the refusal to pretend, to lie, or to allow others to believe we are something we are not. ... When you and I stop pretending, we expose the pretending of everyone else. The bubble of the perfect Christian life is burst, and we must face the reality of our brokenness."

We get so used to the pretend-

We get so used to the pretending, we don't know what to do with one who isn't playing the game.

ing, we don't know what to do with one who isn't playing the game. At times that was the case with Mike. Some of the things he said and did and wrote disturbed others. That happens when you're honest about sin and intolerant with hypocrisy. It happens when you proclaim the incredible grace of God. Mike wrote: "The grace of God is dangerous. It's lavish, excessive, outrageous, and scandalous. God's grace is ridiculously inclusive. Apparently God doesn't care who He loves."

God loves each one of us, riff-raff that we are, and wants each of us in His family. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Mike closed "Messy Spirituality" by writing: "My fervent prayer is that throughout this book, you heard the crystal-clear voice of Jesus whispering, 'I love you.' May you hear him in your unfinishedness, your incompleteness, your incompetence, in other words, in your particular mess."

## THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd. Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

# Assurancebusiness

've never forgotten the speaker who came to our college group one Sunday night and began his message with these words: "Young men and women, tonight I am in the assurance business." That opening phrase and the obvious play on words really grabbed our attention. He taught that night on I John 5:11-13, and God used His Word in many lives. I learned that night as well how common it is for people to struggle with assurance.

While in seminary, I spoke at a little church west of the Twin Cities. Later, my wife and I visited in the home of a dear elderly woman. Before we left I read I John 5:11-13 and spoke with her of the blessed assurance we can have in Jesus. She began to weep and said she was not sure if she would go to heaven when she died. As we continued to visit, it became clear that she knew she was a sinner and she believed in Jesus. Yet she spoke of her sin and her struggles to live for God. Was she a Christian, but lacking assurance? I think so, and I also think this is not an uncommon struggle.

God wants us to be sure. The verses from I John have been of help to me in my own spiritual life and in ministering to others.

"And the witness is this, God has given us eternal life ..."

What a God! He has given the

greatest gift, eternal life.

It is a free gift, not earned or deserved. It is not dependent upon our performance, be it good or bad.

It is of God, not us.

# "This life is in His Son"

Eternal life is not in being good, going to church, or any other human work. This life is in His Son, Jesus.

Salvation is all about Jesus, His perfect life, His sacrificial, substitutionary death on the cross (for us, in place of us and because of us) and His resurrection. Therefore:

# "He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life"

Either you have Him or you don't. Either you have life or you don't. How can you have Jesus? "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12).

Receive Christ by faith. Notice receiving and believing here are together. We must be fully aware of our sin and need before a holy God. We must turn (repent) from self and sin to Jesus and hope only in Him, believe and receive Him.

Then comes the assuring promise.

"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life."

# [Building the Base]

Eternal life is not in being good, going to church, or any other human work. This life is in His Son, Jesus.

What is the key word? KNOW. Notice it doesn't say guess or wish or hope, but know.

God wants us to know that we have eternal life. Do you know?

Have you repented/turned from sin and self?

Have you given up on saving yourself and pleasing God?

Receive Jesus through true repentance and faith in Him. Then you can sing, "Blessed assurance Jesus is mine, O what a foretaste of glory divine!"

> — By Pastor Jeff Swanson Helmar Lutheran Newark, III.