

THE 

FEBRUARY 2018

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

BUILDING BLOCKS

Six levels of learning
are the building blocks
to spiritual maturity.



IMAGINING TO GOD’S GLORY

BY JENAYA CRESTIK

We live in world of virtual realities—millions enamored with television series, fantasy football, and video games, to name a few. Oftentimes these are used as a means of escapism, a way to distract from the unpleasant realities of life. On the other hand, maybe our virtual reality is self-made. Perhaps we use our imaginations to fix our minds upon things we desire or covet. Maybe we repeat scenes from our lives in our heads and mull over what we should have done or said differently in a situation. I wonder if our ability to imagine and think is a poison to our souls.

After looking at Scripture, I concluded that we can use our imaginations and thoughts to glorify God rather than be consumed by them in sin. We can enjoy the use of our imaginations to glorify God in various capacities like reading stories and formulating ideas for creative projects. While it is good to assess our lives, when we constantly dwell on past situations they can become a stronghold in our lives. When we struggle with this, we can be encouraged by Paul’s words in Philippians 3:13, “... one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

God has called us to lives of good works (Ephesians 2:10), starting with our thoughts. In fact, part of our calling is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). Part of God’s will for our lives is that we would

dwell upon things that are true, excellent, and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8). What would it look like if we imagined how we could bless or encourage others? “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,” says Hebrews 10:24. What if we considered how we could share the gospel message? Or what if we used our thoughts to dwell and meditate upon God’s Word? (Psalm 1:2)

Thanks be to God that we are not left dead in our sinful thoughts and imaginings because of Jesus Christ! He has given us new lives. In our earthly nature we use our imaginations and thoughts to covet, lust, and self-satisfy (Colossians 3:5, 8). However, Scripture tells us that we are to take every thought captive and obey Christ (II Corinthians 10:5). This is something we will always battle against in this life and we are called to “fight the good fight of faith” (I Timothy 6:12).

As we imagine and think of ways to glorify the Lord with our lives, let us remember the limitations of our minds and be encouraged by the limitless God we serve. I Corinthians 2:9 says, “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him” The God we serve “is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think ...” (Ephesians 3:20).

Crestik, a 2016 graduate of AFLBS, is a member of St. Paul’s Lutheran, Cloquet, Minn.



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

FEBRUARY 2018
VOL. 56 NO. 2

EDITOR

Pastor Robert L. Lee
rlee@aflc.org

MANAGING EDITOR

Ruth Gunderson
ruthg@aflc.org

CIRCULATION

Liz McCarlson
lasubscriptions@aflc.org

EDITORIAL BOARD

Monica Coyle
Pastor Jerry Moan
Pastor James L. Johnson

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

(USPS 588-620 ISSN 0746-3413)
is published monthly by
the Association of Free
Lutheran Congregations.
AFLC headquarters and
publications office is at
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Plymouth, MN 55441.
Phone (763) 545-5631;
fax 763-545-0079.

SUBSCRIPTION CHANGES AND INFORMATION

3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Plymouth, MN 55441.
763-545-5631
lasubscriptions@aflc.org

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

\$19 a year, Group, U.S.
\$20 a year, Individual, U.S.
\$22 a year, International
Periodicals postage paid
at Minneapolis, MN, and
additional mailing office.

POSTMASTER

Send address changes to
The Lutheran Ambassador,
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Plymouth, MN 55441.

sound bites

Seek not to grow in knowledge chiefly for the sake of applause, and to enable you to dispute with others; but seek it for the benefit of your souls.
—Jonathan Edwards

The goal of education by the grace of God is to create self-governing people who live under the Law of God for the glory of Christ.
—Tim Yarbrough


Faith does not eliminate questions. But faith knows where to take them.
—Elisabeth Elliot

The purpose of a Christian education would not be merely to make men and women pious Christians: a system which aimed too rigidly at this end alone would become only obscurantist. A Christian education must primarily teach people to be able to think in Christian categories.

—T. S. Eliot

Luther emphasized that it is only through education that we discover our gifts and our calling, our individual vocation. That is perhaps the greatest purpose of education, to enable young people to discover their talents and interests, indeed their sense of purpose in the world.

—M.J. Harran



Knowledge of God's Word
became the imperative for
man to fulfill the destiny
which was his to claim.

By Pastor
Oliver Olson

All four Gospel writers shared the life of the coming of the Lord Jesus as the divine Son of God, now evident in human flesh. But it is interesting how John, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, began his account. As the Greek text flows, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and God was the Word. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (1:1-4).

It is all right there. Everything that was revealed about our great God was capsuled in these short phrases. We are told in Colossians 1:15-17 that this One was "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him were all things created ... all things were created by Him and for Him—He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."

We need to know Him personally. As the Lord created man in His own image, it was imperative that God would seek to communicate with man, first in actual appearance, and then in oral communication so that man would understand what was required of him. God then made great pains to appear as a tangibility reality.

Hence, knowledge of God's Word became the imperative for man to fulfill the destiny which was his to claim.

We would assume, then, that God would make this process simple, so that man could understand and apply it. Certain Scriptures became powerful in the application of this truth, such as Hebrews 4:12: "For the Word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and discerning of the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

The application is noted in II Timothy 3:16-17 as well: "For all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, correction, reproof, and training in righteousness, that the man of God might be equipped for every good work."

God expects us to know Him. And through that knowledge be capable to not only understand His Word, but to communicate it to others in such a way that it would not be difficult. "But God chose the foolish in the world to shame those who are wise; God chose what is low and despised in the world to bring to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God" (I Corinthians 1:27).

God demonstrated His strategy for man as noted in Philippians 2: "Jesus, in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, humbled Himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him and bestowed in Him the Name that is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

We can follow the pattern by our own willingness to accept the motivation that comes from Jesus, as noted by the apostle Paul in Philippians 3: "Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ, counting everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, in that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, that I might know Him and the power of His resurrection."

This is so noted in the life of Joshua, the Old Testament man of God who was to succeed Moses in leading the people of God in conquering and settling the land of Canaan. Faced with this very difficult task, Joshua was given a mandate

for success and victory: "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you might be careful to do all that is written in it, for then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

This same truth and mandate is available to us today, in no less certainty.

Thus the key is to not only know the Word of God, but to make application of the Scriptures in our daily lives. The application is required of us for our great God to make His ways and thoughts known to us (Isaiah 55:6, 8-9).

The development of Christ-like character is through application. This, of course, comes through the understanding of God's Word and His strategy, not as a sometime guide, but in full use of the pattern we see presented through the pages of Scripture. We can then note that all we really need to know in the matter of foundational truth is seen, for instance, in the outline of Psalm 119. As the preface so notes, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet."

The final application would be to examine ourselves—our worldview and walk with God—so that we can follow the admonition I once saw

in the room off the pulpit in a church: "Let the preacher know that he stands on holy ground. Let him hear the Word of the Lord. Let him say, 'thus saith the Lord,' or let his mouth be bound, his tongue tied. Let him fear no man. The world dies in the voice of man, his proclamation, his wishful thinking. Let not the preacher use his pulpit to convince others that he is a wise, prudent, or holy man. God is not mocked. Let the preacher say, 'thus saith the Lord,' for he has nothing else that the ear of man can hear before the deafness of death encompasses him but, 'thus saith the Lord.'"

Olson, a retired AFLC pastor, is a member of Reformation Lutheran, El Cajon, Calif.



PEERLESS PLECO TIVD

M

By Larry Walker

My family history holds some strange stories. One of my ancestors did not speak to his wife for a full year. If he had anything to tell her, he would send a message by way of one of the children. One day he found out he had misjudged her. He did not apologize (he was a Scandinavian, after all), but he spoke to her again after that. He'd gained perspective.

It's a consistent theme in Scripture that God does great works, and expects His people to understand and appreciate them. Not fully or completely—we don't have the capacity for that—but to the extent that we're capable as created, beloved creatures. We're not properly oriented—we don't understand our own lives—if we're mistaken about what God has done for us.

One of our many problems is that we "let our hearts rule our heads." Sadly, our modern world constantly broadcasts the message that we should "follow our hearts." That's a disastrous principle. Every student airline pilot has to

work hard to learn to ignore his feelings about his position, his speed, and his direction, and to believe his instruments instead. Often he has to do things that "feel" wrong or even suicidal, because he knows the instruments are trustworthy, and his feelings are often badly deceived.

God's Word is like a set of sophisticated electronic instruments (though better). If we pay close attention to it, it gives us vital, essential information. Information we need to live in this world and to be saved in the next. Information we could never generate on our own. It's crucial to humble ourselves and admit we don't have the wisdom to direct our lives. We need to understand that God is God, and that we are His creations, entirely dependent on Him. That understanding gives us perspective. It puts us in our proper place in the universe.

"He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel."

—Psalm 103:6

This attitude has a name. We call it "faith." The author of Hebrews, in an interesting passage, says, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

We often draw a simple line between those who believe in God and those who don't believe in God. But Scripture says there's another equally important qualification. It's not enough to just believe He exists. We have to believe He is good. We have to believe that He desires our faith and love, and will reward those things.

There are many people who—at least in practice—believe in God but don't believe that He's a rewarder of those who seek Him. They have some kind of faith, but they don't *trust* God. They've been disappointed in their faith. They obey out of fear. They're operating on faulty information. Like a pilot who doubts his instruments, they set their feelings above God's Word. They set themselves up as judges of God, rather than humbly trusting Him, regardless of their feelings.

Our greatest need, after the forgiveness of our sins, is to hear God's voice. We need to get the straight truth, the essential facts of the situation. "He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel." In the fullness of time, He made Himself known in the fullest possible way. "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (II Corinthians 4:6).

All our imaginations, all our false and inadequate ideas of what God is like, fade away when we come face to face with "the Word made flesh"—Jesus Christ, who is the full revelation of God. When we see the glory of God in the face of Christ, there is no longer any misunderstanding, no longer any slavish fear or sinful presumption. We are at peace. We know His ways and His acts.

Walker, a member of Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, Minn., is the AFLC Schools librarian.

H

By Pastor Greg Schram

Have you ever had someone say to you, “Oh, grow up! Act your own age!” I did, on many occasions. Hidden in these statements is the matter of maturity, or the lack thereof. What is true of us anthropologically is also true of us spiritually. God wants us to

grow to be spiritually mature (Colossians 1:28).

But spiritual maturity doesn’t happen instantaneously the moment we are born anew. It grows over time (Philippians 1:6).

One of the building blocks of spiritual maturity is conviction, which also grows over time. Conviction is defined as “a firm belief,” something for which one would die. Convictions, therefore, determine our conduct.

Some have argued that the Church must teach biblical convictions to counter the secular values to which believers are constantly exposed. Yet these convictions are not so much lessons that are taught, for by definition conviction is also “an effect of convincing.” In other words, biblical convictions are the fruit which the Spirit produces in and through believers by means of God’s inerrant and infallible Word. Convictions are not so much taught as they are brought about by the Holy Spirit (John 16:8), working in us through the Word of God (Isaiah 55:10-11; Hebrews 4:12).

“Do not be conformed to this world,” writes Paul, “but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12:2). How are our minds renewed so that we think more and more as Jesus would think, and

thus act as He would act? The mind’s renewal is brought about by the Spirit and the Word working together. James tells us to “receive with meekness the implanted word” (1:21). As we receive daily the truth of God’s Word, our minds are evermore renewed, growing in conviction of

such truths which, over time, creates corresponding conduct.

Key in the development of conviction is the Word of God. For biblical conviction and conduct, the Word must be taught and received in all its truth and purity, without adding to or subtracting from it. Paul exhorted Timothy: “continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it” (II Timothy 3:14). Timothy was a young man of conviction—a person with firm beliefs. From where did such belief and conviction come? It came from the Holy Spirit working through the Scriptures he had learned from his mother and grandmother.

Biblical conviction is the fruit that grows from the seed of God’s Word implanted within. David once prayed, “Teach me thy way, O LORD, that I may walk in thy truth” (Psalm 86:11).

When I think of people of conviction, I don’t think of the great heroes of the faith. I think of the silent and strong types in my life—the apostle Andrews of the world who are never in the limelight, but are always behind the scenes, quietly, faithfully going about their work. What inspires me about them is that they always seem to “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (I Corinthians 15:58). I never see them “walking in the counsel of the wicked, nor standing in the way of sinners, nor sitting in the seat of scoffers” (Psalm 1:1). They never seem to be “tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14). They’re never hoodwinked by the spiritual pragmatism so prevalent in the Church today, for they simply, almost imperceptibly, remain steadfast in what they had been taught concerning God’s Word.

Have you noticed that scriptural examples of conviction often are of those who, in a manner of speaking, do nothing? Just “standing fast” or being “immovable” is a great thing, a marvelous manifestation of conviction. For instance, with their backs against the wall of the Red Sea and with Pharaoh breathing down their necks, what did Israel do? Nothing. They were instructed to simply “stand firm” (Exodus 14:13). Don’t move. Don’t change position. The Corinthians were also told to stand firm (I Corinthians 16:13); so were the Galatians (5:1), as well as the Philippians (4:1). Peter, likewise, tells us to stand fast in the true grace of God (I Peter 5:12).

One does not stand fast without conviction. Standing firm and being unswayed by secular values not only requires conviction, but also the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, truth and fallacy. We call this discernment. And discernment is sharpened by the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. What the Church today desperately needs is people of biblical conviction! Let those of us who are mature be thus minded (Philippians 3:15).

Schram serves Lutheran Church of Hope, Loveland, Colo.

Biblical conviction is
the fruit that grows
from the seed
of God’s Word.



“The goal of our
instruction is ...”
—I Timothy 1:5

C

By Pastor Les Johnson

Christian education has a goal. While there may actually be more than one goal, a primary concern should be the development of character in the life of the student—specifically the development of Christ-like character. Romans 8:29 tells us that God has predestined us “to become conformed to the image of His Son.” It is God’s desire for His children that, through the faithful study of His Word, we take on the character of His Son. Jesus’ first followers displayed His character in their lives. According to Acts 4:13, their character shone forth as men who had obviously “been with Jesus.”

The proper proclamation of law and gospel, whether it be in the Sunday school classroom, in a one-on-one discipleship time, or from the pulpit, will accomplish this. The teacher/preacher who educates biblically uses the Word of God, which in and of itself is active (Hebrews 4:12), powerful (Romans 1:16), and fruitful (Isaiah 55:10-11) for the development of Christ-like character. This Word is said to “perform its work” (I Thessalonians 2:13), “build you up” (Acts 20:32), and cause us to “grow in respect to salvation” (I Peter 2:2). All of this is intrinsic to the development of the image or character of Jesus within the student.

But if this is accomplished by the Word of God, what part does the teacher play? Writing to Timothy, the apostle Paul says, “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (II Timothy 2:2). While the Word of God is effective in developing character, faithful teachers of that Word are a vital part of God’s plan, also. A teacher will always find God’s Word profitable in his effort of seeking to instill Christ-like character in his students. The Scriptures make teachers fully “equipped” for their task (II Timothy 3:17). Scripture “is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness”

(II Timothy 3:16).

If an educator is seeking to develop Christ-like character in his or her students, he or she should consider the four words Paul uses in II Timothy 3:16, starting with “teaching.” Some time ago the catchy acrostic of WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) was suggested as a guide for a person making a difficult or challenging choice. Part of having a Christ-like character is to have learned “what is pleasing to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:10). Having listed the sinful character of the people of the world in Ephesians 4:17-19, Paul continues in v. 20: “But you did not learn Christ in this way if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus.” Christ-like character develops as we are taught the truths of Jesus in His Word.

Christ-like character is also developed as a teacher reproves the disobedient with the Word of God. In II Timothy 4:2 Paul admonishes Timothy to “preach the word ... reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.” The Gospels record several incidents where Jesus had to deal with the sins and failures of His disciples in this manner. At times Jesus even seemed overwhelmed with frustration as He asked, “how long shall I put up with you?” (Mark 9:19). But patiently He continued to guide them and reprove them when necessary so as to build His own

character into their lives.

Continuing in the pattern of II Timothy 3:16, we see that Christ-like character is developed through “correction.” As a parent raises a child they do a lot of correcting. Some correction involves relatively minor issues while other correction may involve more serious disobedience. As is the case with reproof, correction involves recognizing the absence of Christ-like character and seeking the necessary transformation that leads to the demonstration of the very character of Jesus Himself.

Finally, Christ-like character is developed as a teacher trains his or her students in righteousness. Education in righteousness looks first to the righteousness that is ours through faith in Christ by which we stand before God as

though we had never sinned. But then it looks to our daily lives as to how that righteousness should manifest itself to the world. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* defines character as “one of the attributes or features that make up and distinguish an individual.” The righteousness of Jesus, received by faith, should manifest itself as the character of Jesus in all we say and do as we live by that faith.

God’s Word gives us much guidance in seeking, as a teacher, to instill Christ-like character in a student. But a final note should be considered. In Romans 2:21 Paul asks, “you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?” It is said that character is “caught” more than it is “taught.” The best way for a teacher to instill the character of Jesus into a student is to

model that character positively before the student as he or she teaches, reprove, corrects and trains in righteousness. A teacher who can be recognized as “having been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13) is a powerful instrument in developing Christ-like character in a student.

Johnson, who serves Christ the King Lutheran, Wilson, Wis., is a member of the Board of Publications and Parish Education.



W

By Judi Westgate

When I was a child my grandmother and my mother were Sunday school teachers, primarily for very young children. As we grew older my sister and I were helpers, providing the hands-on support that young children need. I always assumed I would end up teaching young children in Sunday school, also. Then came the day I tried it on my own. I realized I did not have this gift. It was very clear to me, and soon became clear to all. My desire to serve the Lord aside, I simply was not good at this task. No amount of effort to become better actually improved my abilities. I needed to find other ways to serve.

As Christians we read the words of James 1:22: “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves,” and feel the call and desire to find our ministry, our place in the body of the Church—our mission from God.

When all goes well, there is much joy in the process. However unfortunately, sometimes we seem to struggle and flail. What can be the cause of our frustrations?

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works”
—Ephesians 2:10

One cause might be that we are attempting to fill a role to which God did not call us and for which He did not equip us. Are our gifts and talents better suited for another purpose? Then let us pray and seek guidance to find our place. If we focus on a task to which we are not called, who will fulfill the task for which God prepared us?

Another cause might be that we have not taken the time to properly prepare. Ecclesiastes 10:10 tells us: “If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success.” And II Timothy 2:15 reminds us: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”

It is necessary that before we attempt to teach

others, we are well grounded in the Word. An athlete may have great natural talent, but must train with daily intensity, follow the instruction of coaches, and submit to great discipline in order to maximize the potential of the talent.


Finally, we need to spend time in prayer, seeking God’s guidance, assistance, and unfailing grace. In His Word we come to learn of Him. In our prayers we come to know Him.

Sharing our faith, helping reach those who have not heard the message of the gospel, and teaching those who have faith but still seek to learn can be accomplished through every function of the church. Whether we are called as preachers, teachers, administrators, exhorters, ushers, musicians, or any other service within the church or in our community, we are doing it for the Lord. With this attitude in hand, everything we say and do is an opportunity to teach and show others His love, His saving grace, the salvation He offers freely.

The process of Christian education is not limited to the things we say—it is also shared in the things we do and the way we live our lives. The custodian who views his work as a way to serve his Lord and performs his duties with an attitude of devotion; the cook who organizes the fellowship dinners with an attitude of joy in nourishing the bodies as the Lord’s Word nourishes the souls; the treasurer who applies his accounting skills with a determination to be a good and faithful steward of the church’s resources—all teach without words. With prayer and preparation we can do as Peter encouraged believers, “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you” (I Peter 3:15).

We must rely on the Lord to show us His purpose for our lives, then we may seek His aid to prepare us, direct us, lead us, and bring to completion our part in the body of His Church.

Westgate is a member of St. Matthew Lutheran, Millerstown, Pa.



“The family, or that which best resembles the family, is the best context for education.”

By David Olson

If you heard that 82 percent of a teacher’s students made it into top-tier universities while only 1 percent of other students did, would you be interested in that teacher’s name? I do not know if there is such a person, but I can tell you: understanding the importance of the context of Christian education has stark difference in outcome, with much more concerning consequences.

According to the National Survey of Youth and Religion, if parents were not actively engaged in their faith formation, only 1 percent of their children were engaged by their mid-20s. Whereas 82 percent of those whose parents talked with them about faith and set priorities accordingly were still active in congregations into adulthood (thearda.com/archive/NSYR.asp).

The most critical context of Christian education is not a great youth program or youth minister. It is not Bible camp or a gifted pastor. It is parents. (If you are not a parent, or lacked a believing mother or father, please stick with me, this is still for you, too.)

The family is the most valuable, effective context of Christian education. It is not accidental that God instructs fathers (not pastors) to train their children in the fear and knowledge of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). It is not just a cultural difference when God instructed Israel: “these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and

when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). God did not command Levitical priests to teach the nation’s children; God commanded parents to teach their children. Proverbs starts with the plea, “listen to your father’s instruction and forsake not your mother’s teaching” (1:8).

Timothy is reminded by Paul to cling to the faith given to him by his mother and grandmother (II Timothy 3:5, 1:5). From beginning to end, there is a consistent thread in Scripture that Christian education is first—and critically—a family event.

If we fail to teach our children the faith, we have set them up with 99 percent surety for an adulthood of spiritual wandering in a cultural wasteland desperate for the living water yet inoculated to the gospel.

Maybe you are that child. You did not have believing parents. Or maybe you did, but they did not teach you how the law of God informs how we see the world and how the gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection gives us forgiveness and freedom from the tyranny of sin. You were never shown how this gives us the graciousness to extend forgiveness to others. Maybe you missed learning how the promise of resurrection, reconciliation with our creator, and of a new heavens and new earth allows us to persevere under the darkest of circumstance and be generous even in scarcity.

For you, know that God has always been at work in the broken circumstances. Timothy learned the faith from his mother, but you’ll notice the absence of his father. Onesimus was a runaway slave, cut off everything, when he met Paul and was essentially

adopted by him. God has delighted to work in every broken situation imaginable.

What then? First, we must recognize God’s design (family) and strive to shape our lives and practice after it. Parents, recognize the profound responsibility given to you. Those finding themselves outside a believing family, strive for family-like structures. In the word of Pastor Robert Lee, “The family, or that which best resembles the family, is the best context for education.” Find a group of multigenerational believers committed loving one another as the family of God. Lacking that, find a committed group of believing friends to band together for encouragement and consider the following practices:

First, set a schedule. Pick a regular time to read Scripture together. Miss a day? Pick it up the next time.

Second, make faith the priority. Every time you skip Sunday worship for that game, Lenten services to do homework, or your small group for that movie, you shape priorities. Sports, school, and entertainment are important, faith gets the scraps. It is of eternal significance to invert that hierarchy, even if it means sacrifice. Especially when it means sacrifice.

Third, ask questions. After church on Sunday, ask your family group what they thought; what they were convicted by; what they were encouraged by; where they heard about what Jesus had done for them. Just ask and have the conversation. The first time might be awkward. So will the second time, but a rich, edifying dialogue will grow with practice.

Last, if you are thinking, “I failed,” know that Christ’s forgiveness is for you. Perhaps you have watched your children walking away from God,

remember that it is God who saves. Pray for your children. As appropriate, apologize for the way you failed as a parent. Have civil conversations about faith and family history. Trust that God can redeem the darkest of situations, because that is exactly what He has been doing in Christ since the beginning.

Olson is a member of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.



W

By Judith Wold

Without a measure of sympathetic understanding and love, teachers will never get linked up with their students nor be able to minister to them the life of our Lord Jesus. This can be accomplished by having some understanding of students' needs and how they are to be met. What are some of these basic needs?

Each student comes with tremendous potential now and in the years to come. They have been affected by their native inheritance, environment, and training or lack of it. Their lives with their families have and will continue to influence them. Are they loved and wanted? Do they have a relationship with God? Is there friction?

The environment outside the home has a tremendous influence. Do they feel accepted? If so, by whom? Do they have friends? Do they feel needed? Do they have a sense of accomplishment? Are they shunned, or sought after?

Yes, the soul's needs are varied. They are drives placed there by God.

Love is one of the deepest needs of the human heart.

Let us consider three basic soul needs that we must learn to recognize and meet if the aim

in all the work of teaching is to be fulfilled. "He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone full mature in Christ" (Colossians 1:28).

From the very beginning of life, a child cries out for love. This is one of the deepest needs of the human heart. The lack of it in the home is apt to cause difficulties in

growing children and in their adjustments to others and to life. Have you ever thought that for many students, the teacher is the nearest link with God they will ever know? How can we let God's love flow through us to meet this need of love? "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). What a relief it must be for children to know that the adults whom they love accept them just as they are, without condemnation. And God, the One who knows them best, is the One who loves them the most.

Then there is the need for recognition. Learn to know each child and to accept them as they are. Make use of the opportunities for commendation and recognition. Don't play favorites. Try to create an atmosphere of belonging. Discouragement is the devil's best tool.

We all need the feeling of security. Does the family circle meet this need? The atmosphere of the classroom should be one in which children feel secure. In a teacher, so much counts: a quiet voice, a smile, and good eye contact. Try to be fair. How great if a student feels comfortable sharing his or her personal life with you. Take time to listen, and return the confidence. Children feel secure when their Maker is allowed to develop in them fully their own unique possibilities.

Above all, pray constantly that you may illustrate in your own life the truth being taught so that your students will be drawn to the love, the personal recognition, and the blessed security found only in Jesus.

Wold was the executive secretary of AFLC Parish Education. Adapted from the May 30, 1978, issue.



Now the road starts to get rough." That wasn't exactly what I wanted to hear but it is what

Pastor Richard Gunderson said as we were traveling in the hills outside of Puebla, Mexico, a number of years ago. We had already been on a road that wasn't in good shape by American standards, but then it did get rougher. I was in Mexico visiting the Gundersons and we were heading to a village for a Sunday afternoon service with a small congregation that Pastor Gunderson visited occasionally.

This congregation at the end of the rough road had been going through some rough times. Some conflicts had developed and attendance numbers had dropped. Their worship area consisted of some poles holding up a tarp to give some shade, wood planks to sit on, and a dirt floor.

Pastor Gunderson shared a message from I Corinthians 1:5-7: "For in him you have been enriched in every way ... you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed." As he read those words my first reaction was to wonder if that

RICH IN GOD'S WORD

BY PASTOR CRAIG JOHNSON

was the appropriate text for this congregation. These people didn't appear to be enriched in any way. They seemed to lack everything. They didn't have a building. They didn't have many people. They didn't have any of the stuff we Americans think a church needs to have.

That little congregation up in the hills of Mexico had been given the Word of God. They had received the Spirit of God. They were poor in material things, but they had been enriched in the ways that mattered. Those verses in I Corinthians applied to that little congregation just as much as they apply to any other congregation.

A congregation with God's Word and Spirit is rich. Those things our culture says are necessary can be nice, but they can also be harmful. It can be tempting to get more concerned with creature comforts than clarity of God's Word. We can start relying on powerful visuals and moving music more than God's Spirit.

A little congregation with the Word and Spirit of God is a powerful force. That congregation in Mexico was "the right form of the kingdom of God on earth."

It was to a far-from-perfect, local congregation that Paul was first inspired to write those words about being enriched and not lacking any spiritual gift. In whatever country we are in, our congregations are full of imperfections and may seem to be lacking many things. But it is the local congregation that has been enriched and does not lack. And so the work of AFLC World Missions is to plant and build up local congregations throughout the world. When people are part of a congregation that has God's Word and Spirit, then they can feast on the riches of the good news of Christ. People get a chance to use their spiritual gifts when they are part of a congregation. People get built up and encouraged and kept in the faith when they're in a congregation. Our desire is to see people all over the world be a part of free and living local congregations.

Johnson, who serves Bethany Free Lutheran, Astoria, Ore., is chairman of the AFLC World Missions Committee.



The Women's Missionary Federation group at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Thief River Falls, Minn., has a very busy group of women. Our members have been putting their talents to use, and on Tuesdays they enjoy quilting and getting together for a Bible study. Some of the ladies enjoy cutting out the squares, while others sew squares, and others tie and attach backing fabric to the finished quilt. Each station has a job to do, and once the quilt is complete, the group decides where to send the quilts to and where they will be the most useful.

Sometimes, quilts are mailed to Alaska, where they are given to fishermen who are working close by or people who come to The NET, a coffee shop and ministry sponsored by AFLC Home Missions and KAKN radio in Naknek, Alaska.

Material for the quilts is sometimes donated or purchased through WMF funds when a fabric store has a sale or discounted items. This helps to keep the cost of the quilts low and allows individuals to donate specifically for quilting material or to purchase some items ahead. The materials are then stored at church for a time when they are ready to be used.

Each year the group also makes beautiful quilts for the

BY JOYANN DAHL

TALENTS ON DISPLAY

high school graduates from the congregation, giving them out on a special Sunday in May when we honor the graduates. The graduates are always very appreciative and excited to receive these special blankets. Many of the quilts have gone along with the graduating senior to college in the fall, where they are well loved and used. Our own son, Cristian, displayed his by hanging it on the wall at his graduation open house celebration before bringing it to AFLBS, where it keeps him warm on a daily basis.

In addition to quilting and Bible study on Tuesdays, this same group of ladies joins a larger group on Saturdays. Once a month, the Saturday group meets for Bible study, brunch, and a business meeting. This group works through the WMF AFLC Bible study published each year and keeps updated on AFLC missionaries as well as others who are involved in mission work. They have recently decided to periodically send letters or cards of encouragement to a few Home Mission wives. At times, the group will send out a gift card for coffee, a book, or some other type of encouragement that they hope the receiver will enjoy. Earlier, they took a group photo and mailed



that along with a note of encouragement, letting the Home Mission wife know that the group was praying for her and was hoping to encourage her.

These are just a few of the ways that this WMF group is involved in reaching out to others in the congregation and in the world, through quilting and sending cards or notes of encouragement. These are small and big ways that can make a huge difference in the life of another. And because each WMF is unique, there are endless ways and ideas to encourage each other along with many talents to share.

"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had" (Romans 15:4-5).

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



chaplaincy

RESPONDING TO STRESS

BY PASTOR RANDY NELSON

Approximately 150 law enforcement officers and 90 fire and EMS personnel lose their lives each year in the line of duty. What most don't realize is that in addition to these losses, approximately 110 police officers and 130 fire service personnel are also lost through suicide. A leading cause for the depression experienced by these men and women is due to untreated post-traumatic stress caused by chronic exposure to critical incident stress without proper post incident care.

For those unfamiliar with these terms, post-traumatic stress can happen to anyone and is caused when a traumatic event overwhelms our emotional coping abilities. We call this critical incident stress. These events trigger our body's natural defenses and can lead to a number of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual responses that can last for weeks after the event. These responses may include emotional numbness, nightmares, disruptive daydreams, moodiness, irritability, inability to concentrate, withdrawal from others, grief, and questioning one's faith. These are just a few of the normal reactions to critical incident stress which can usually be shortened when treated. However, without treatment, the symptoms can worsen and become Post Traumatic Stress Disorder



(PTSD), a debilitating disorder that can result in clinical depression or worse. Because of their frequency of exposure, first responders are more susceptible than most.

Last fall, with the support of the AFLC Foundation, the AFLC Chaplains Divisions hosted a Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) training class at the Association Retreat Center for pastors and laity in support of first responders. While CISM is not therapy—it can best be described as emotional first aid—it has been successfully used in the military and with first responders to lessen the effects of critical incident stress through a number of tools, including debriefings and one-on-one post incident supports.

We are thankful for this opportunity to equip our chaplains, pastors, and laity with these tools, and we hope they will use them in support of first responders and others in their local communities. However, we also realize that critical incident stress doesn't just happen to first responders. Which is why, under the direction of the Coordinating Committee, we are also forming an AFLC CISM Response Team that will be

available as a resource to AFLC congregations as they respond to critical incidents that may occur in their congregations and communities.

We currently have about 25 pastors and laity who recently completed the ICISF (International Critical Incident Stress Foundation) basic group training and we are planning on offering the one-on-one training this fall. We are also looking for any AFLC clergy or laity who have completed these courses through the ICISF and who would like to be a part of this response team. If you are interested, please contact me by email at plcpastor.nelson@gmail.com.

Please continue to pray for your local first responders as they serve in your communities, and encourage your pastor and congregation to consider ways that you might show the love of Christ to those who serve, protect, and care for you.

Nelson serves Peace Lutheran, St. Francis, Kansas, and has been involved in police chaplaincy and the fire service for more than 17 years.

Schools host interterm, Bible conference



The AFLC Schools hosted a week of interterm classes Jan. 8-12 for students in both the seminary and Bible school.

Two classes were featured at the Bible school. Pastor Phil Haugen dug into a three-hour daily course on “Discovering God’s Will” in one classroom while across the hall Pastor Brett Boe led sessions on “Relationships and Marriage.”

At the seminary, students and guests listened to two courses: a one-day course led by Pastor Brian Pearson on “Pastoral Care at the End of Life,” and a three-day course by Dr. Jonathan Strand on “The Right Place of Reason in Reformation Theology.”

The Schools then live-streamed a one-day Midwinter Bible Conference in the seminary on Jan. 13, which featured three classes: Dr. James Molstre led a session on “Piety in Lutheran Ethics,” Pastor Brent Olson taught on Moses’ “Song of the Sea,” and Pastor Jason Holt led an interactive session on “Engaging the Younger Generations in Your Congregations.”



TOP RIGHT: Pastor Haugen taught an interterm class at AFLBS on Discovering God’s Will. TOP LEFT: Dr. Jonathan Strand, of Sherwood Park, Alberta, led a discussion during his three-day course. MIDDLE RIGHT: Seminary intern Nick Schultz listens in during Pastor Brian Pearson’s class. MIDDLE LEFT: Pastor Brett Boe taught an AFLBS class on Relationships and Marriage. ABOVE: Pastor Jason Holt led a session at the Midwinter Bible Conference on engaging the younger generation in your congregation. (Photo Andrew Abel)



TOP: Ganzorig Enkhjargal, a junior seminarian from Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, sits in on a interterm session. MIDDLE: Pastor Brian Pearson, from Ruskin, Fla., taught an interterm class on Pastoral Care at the End of Life. ABOVE: Julia Aamot, from Cokato, Minn., takes notes during Pastor Phil Haugen’s class on Discovering God’s Will. OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT: Marian Christopherson, Diane Brubakken and Dan Mundfrom participate in a discussion group. (Photo Andrew Abel)



HUNGER FOR HIM

By Joan Culler

It’s hard to ignore hunger, isn’t it? When we’re really hungry it becomes difficult to work or concentrate or focus on anything else. Hunger becomes insistent. If it isn’t satisfied, it begins to consume us (literally). In the verse above, taken from the Sermon on the Mount, and one of what we call the Beatitudes, Jesus tells us about one hunger only He can satisfy—a hunger for righteousness.

According to my Bible dictionary, righteousness is “inherent or imputed guiltlessness before God.” In layman’s terms, you might say it is being made right with God; or being declared “not guilty” in God’s eyes. We all know we can’t do that on our own. All the good deeds, all the striving to avoid sin, all the confessions and church services and Bible study in the world won’t get us there. For that, we need a savior. Only Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for each one of us can close the yawning gap between us and God.

The question remains, do you hunger to be saved? Do you hunger for Christ? I have to say, too often, I hunger for worldly things because they seem so much more immediate. After all, I need a house and a car and someone to love me right now! I’ll attend to that spiritual hunger later, when I have more time, when my other hungers have been sated. The problem is, later never seems to come. And the truth of the matter is, we do find the time for things we really care about. Don’t we care about Him? He should be first on our hunger list.

Be right with God now. Put the Kingdom first. You’ll be satisfied. The rest will follow.

Culler manages and writes for the Lutheran Ladies Connection, a daily blog by the women of St. Paul’s Evangelical Free Lutheran, Hagerstown, Md.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Jordan Langness accepted a call to serve as pastor of youth and family ministry at Hope Free Evangelical Lutheran, Ishpeming, Mich. Langness previously served as youth pastor at Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah, N.D.

Rebecca Moan has been hired as the admissions coordinator at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School. She will begin in this position beginning in May.

Pastor Matthew Ballmann has accepted a call to start a new AFLC congregation in San Antonio, Texas. The new church plant is a project of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., where Ballmann currently serves as discipleship pastor. His family plans to transition to San Antonio in June or July.

Pastor Steven Lombardo is serving an internship at Helmar Lutheran, Newark, Ill.

Pastor Mark Olson, Dalton, Minn., has been granted a two-month sabbatical by the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish for the months of January and February. He will return to his pastoral duties in March.

Pastor Larry Christenson, who attended Hope Lutheran, Northome, Minn., for many years, died Dec. 26, 2017, at the age of 89. He is survived by his wife, Nordis, and four children. The service was Jan. 13 at St. John’s Lutheran, Northfield, Minn.

DECEMBER MEMORIALS

AFLBS Ruth Claus Sherry Stover	Home Missions Larry Behne
AFLT Jeanette Larson	World Missions Harriet Anderson (3) Larry Behne
All Departments Darlene Davidson Earl Hartsoch Eileen Jennissen	Parish Ed Carol Larson Alvina Dalager Dollris Hanson Brian Mickelsen Hilmer Rice Delford Martinson Orrice Gohrick
Evangelism Morris Moan	Youth Morris Moan
FLAPS Harvey Hoops Timothy Quarles	
General Fund Morris Moan	

Milestones

Pastor Raynard Huglen, the founding editor of *The Lutheran Ambassador* celebrated a milestone birthday, turning 90 on Dec. 29. Huglen was charged with publishing a churchwide publication during the organizational conference of the AFLC in October 1962. The first issue was published on Feb. 12, 1963, and the magazine now marks 55 years in print.

Huglen wrote in his first editorial: “Sometimes one wonders what right he has to accept a position for which he has no real formal training. Yet when coworkers say, ‘We want you to do this for us,’ it seems like a call to service by them and the Lord.”

Huglen went on to edit the Ambassador for 27 years, retiring in 1990. He lives in Newfolden, Minn.

Winter, spring retreats at the ARC

The Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis., will host several winter and spring retreats. They include:

- Youth retreats: Side X Side (for students in grades 9 through 12) and Sno Daze (for students in grades 4 to 8) will be held February 2-4. Speakers include Luke Tempte, youth worker at Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., and Owen Parsley, a social studies teacher and FCA leader from Flandreau, S.D. Both outdoor and indoor activities will be offered.
- Marriage retreat will be held Feb. 9-11 with the theme, “Unless the Lord Builds the House,” featuring Pastor Jerry and Kristi Nelson from Onalaska, Wis. Jerry is pastor of marriage and family ministries at Christ is Lord Free Lutheran, Onalaska. Kristi is co-director of New Image Women’s Ministry. Together they also have a private clinic.
- Young adults retreat, scheduled for March 9-11. Plans include engaging speakers, gym sports and conversation.
- Readers retreat, scheduled for March 16-18
- iDisciple seminar, April 6-8, will focus on responding to the Great Commission by becoming disciples who can make disciples. Featuring speakers Jim and Cindy Lilly, of Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, and Matt and Courtney Bolling, missionaries with No Place Left, a discipleship movement.
- Womens retreat, scheduled for April 27-29

For more information on these retreats and to find out about summer camps, visit the ARC website at arc-aflc.org.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-December 31, 2017			
FUND	REC'D IN DECEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$53,549	\$421,542	\$505,450
Evangelism	13,552	135,682	121,836
Youth Ministries	45,066	165,187	104,385
Parish Education	12,657	169,292	150,231
Seminary	26,519	276,140	263,450
Bible School	158,650	640,028	529,494
Home Missions	204,132	711,365	525,256
World Missions	50,696	462,344	534,206
Personal Support	92,235	649,617	612,782
TOTALS	\$657,056	\$3,631,198	\$3,347,089
For additional financial information for each department, go to www.aflc.org/giving			



LEARNING FROM OUR PAST ISSUES

Many of our readers are aware that their editor has spent the past four to five months immersed in the project of preparing the history of our AFLC, and it should be no surprise that the two most valuable resources have been the reports from the annual conferences and the back issues of *The Lutheran Ambassador*. Beginning publication in February 1963 under the editorship of Pastor Raynard Huglen, our church magazine has been a faithful chronicler of the events and individuals that have shaped our fellowship. It commenced as a 14-page paper, produced



Pastor Robert Lee

twice a month; today it is a larger monthly. The 100th issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador* is dated January 24, 1967, and it is instructive to compare it with our current issues. Each issue still begins with a brief devotional, “According to the Word,” and the one in 1967 was written by the late Pastor Hubert F. DeBoer. A lengthy featured article entitled, “Are We Huckstering our Youth?” was reprinted from *Eternity* magazine. A message from the first issue was reprinted, entitled “Fear,” by AFLC President John P. Strand, who called the readers to “fear not” in the face of the task of establishing a new church body.

There was a “School News” page, with testimonies from Bible school students, plus a photo of the students enrolled in both the Bible school and seminary. The “Women for Christ” page was edited by Mrs. Jay Erickson, and included personal thanks from one of the missionary wives and the announcement of an upcoming WMF workshop, plus the WMF Bible study for February. In other issues during the same year one could read of WMF Honorary Membership ceremonies (with photos), and detailed reports of district spring rallies. There was a Stewardship page, news of the churches, two pages of editorials, a brief treasurer’s report, and information about the upcoming Winter Bible Conference in

Dalton, Minnesota.

Many issues had a “Luther League Activities” page. Pastor R.S. Persson was the author of an article with a youth focus, entitled “The Church’s Great Demilitarized Zone,” and the final page featured an AFLC Directory. Some of the 1967 issues included a letter to the editor, including one by Mrs. Knute Jore in the July 25 issue calling for intercessors.

Are there patterns to be discerned from the past issues that might serve our church family today? Our current issues are strong in terms of devotional articles and weak in terms of news, right? So, more devotional articles from our ministry departments are not needed. What’s going on with Home and World Missions? With Evangelism and Youth Ministries? With Parish Education and the ARC? Do our WMF districts still have rallies? Is there still a WMF Honorary Membership program? Are there any district youth retreats or other activities? Is there something happening in your congregation or district that would be encouraging or instructive to other congregations? Anniversaries? Installations? Thanks to all who have remembered to provide our church magazine with news items, but we need to do better.

There is another pattern from the past that could serve us well today. The *Ambassador* reported in the June 27 issue that delegates at the 1967 Annual Conference voted 130-1 to authorize the building of the first Bible school dormitory. A thermometer-type graph was placed on the platform, inviting people to join the “One Grand Fellowship” to make the needed new building a reality, and by the conclusion of the conference the thermometer had already begun to rise as cash and pledges were given. A gift of \$1,000 was considered to be major in 1967,

out of reach for many if not most of us.

Today the AFLC has taken advantage of an unprecedented opportunity to acquire the Charles property that adjoins our campus and headquarters land. Gifts of \$1,000 are possible for many more of us than in 1967, and if about 250 of our readers would designate such a gift to the Charles property fund, it would not be necessary to obtain a loan to finance the purchase. Let’s have a new “One Grand Fellowship!”

Years ago, when there was discussion during an annual conference about cutting

Help us, please, in our efforts to maintain and grow the ministry ... as a significant force in the gospel partnership to which God has called us.

the number of issues of the *Ambassador* per year, there was one lady who objected, saying that each issue was to her “like a letter from home.” She was one who was part of the AFLC from the beginning, and most of the names in each issue were familiar to her, but that generation is passing away. Help us, please, in our efforts to maintain and grow the ministry of the *Ambassador* as a significant force in the gospel partnership to which God has called us.

P.S. Give a subscription to someone today.

P.P.S. Does your congregation have a group subscription?

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

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

building the base

MEMBERS OF GOD'S FAMILY

BY PASTOR RICHARD GUNDERSON

I

want to put before you as a reader some helpful suggestions from looking into the Word of God and some hard-earned lessons in my life.

We are living in a time when the biblical definition of family is being challenged with efforts to redefine its meaning. I will not go into detail about the origins of the family in the Bible except to quote Genesis 1:27-28: "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it ...'"

The importance of family is reflected in the scriptural details of the genealogies in the Old Testament books and, yes, the genealogy of Jesus Christ. God's plan of reconciliation used the institution of family—God became man in the person of Jesus Christ, born of a woman named Mary and growing up in the household of Joseph and Mary.

From the beginning, God's plan was to establish and grow a family. God's plan was to do it biologically and spiritually. The Church of Jesus Christ, the family of God, is made up of "born again" believers as Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John 3. Biblically we understand that entrance into the family of God can also happen through adoption. To adopt a child, as families in this world do, is to take and rear a child of others as one's own child legally. Adoption biblically is as Paul writes in Romans 8:15b, "... you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'"

The question is how does one become a member of the family of God? My answer is short—it is all God in and through the work of Christ. Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

My wife and I have been blessed with six children, five biological and one we chose to adopt while we lived in Bolivia. Jon was a very sick 1-year-old who needed to be hospitalized. His biological mother knew

that if he did not get medical treatment he would not survive. We brought him home from the hospital to be our son and a full member of our family. Shortly afterward we returned to the U.S. on home assignment, and at that time we legally adopted him. Interestingly, his new birth certificate issued at the time of his adoption does not record that he is adopted.

All six of our children are Gundersons and have the name and rights as family members. More than anything, we are bound together as Gundersons in our diverse and unique ways. We are spread out geographically yet still belonging to each other.

And so is the family of God. "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love" (John Fawcett).

Gunderson is a member of Scandia Lutheran, Glenwood, Minn.