

# The Lutheran **AMBASSADOR**

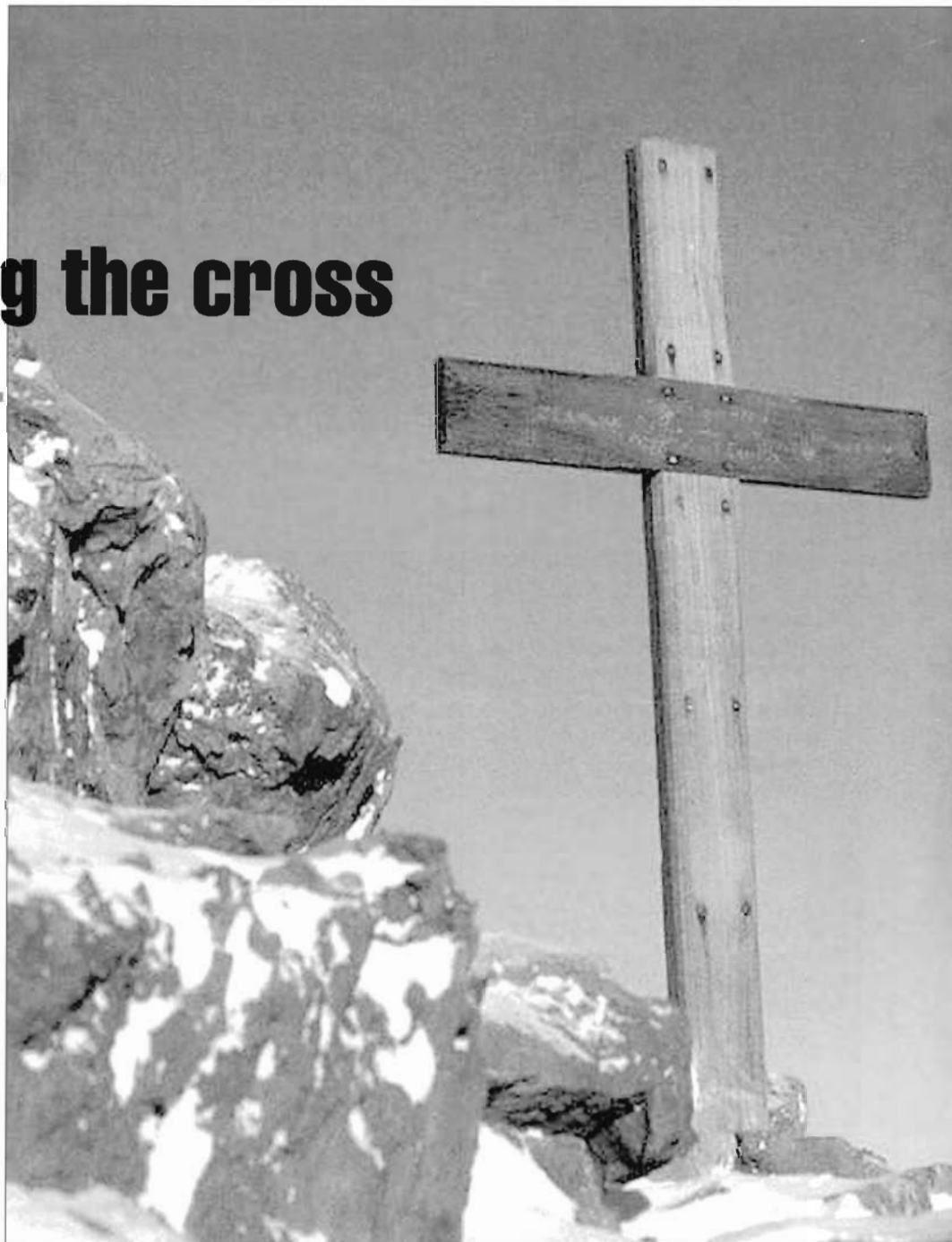
February 23, 1999

## **Contemplating the cross**

Why do we  
celebrate the  
Lenten season?

The cross that  
offends is the  
path to grace.

Meet the 1999  
seminary seniors.



# THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

February 23, 1999  
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**Editor:** Rev. Craig Johnson

**Assistant to the Editor:** Solveig Hjermstad

**Editorial Board:** Rev. John Mundfrom, Oryen Benrud, Rev. Jerry Moan.

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#### For editorial inquiries and information:

The Lutheran Ambassador, Box 446, Bruce, SD 57220-0446; 605-627-5188; fax 605-627-9254;

e-mail [craigj@teleport.com](mailto:craigj@teleport.com)

[wshjerm@brookings.net](mailto:wshjerm@brookings.net)

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## AN ENCOURAGING WORD

# Joy in the sorrow

"When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And He bowed His head, and gave up His Spirit."

— John 19:30 (NASB)

I try to use the Lenten season as a time to reflect on Christ's suffering for me. It is a time to stop and look at the work Jesus accomplished for us.

In John 19:30 Jesus says, "It is finished!" What exactly was finished? Probably the best explanation I can give is to quote R.C.H. Lenski: "The death of Jesus finishes His redemptive work, the work of reconciliation and atonement. This specific work is now brought to a close. The humble Lamb of God has made His great sacrifice for the world. Our great Substitute has paid the great price of ransom, paid it to the uttermost farthing. The redemptive shedding of His blood, done once and for all, is finished and stands as finished forever."

Though Lent is a time of solemn reflection, I can't help being excited when I stop and realize that Jesus did this work for me. My sins are one hundred percent paid for. I can do nothing to pay for my sins. Christ has completed the work. My response is first to believe Him, and then, on a daily basis, to repent of my sins. This means I confess the sins that the Holy Spirit brings to my mind, and turn away from repeating those sins. I cannot do it on my own, but Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can empower me to keep from falling back into my old patterns of sin.

I wonder how many of us really believe the Word of God when it says that our sins are completely paid for? So often we want to believe it, but we look at ourselves compared to God's holiness and we

think, "It's not true. It can't be!"

I remember the time when my mother was dying of cancer. She was in the hospital, lying in a coma. Our family went to visit her one Friday evening. Our oldest son Eric was not with us because he was playing basketball with his team. I planned to take Eric and his violin in on Saturday morning so he could play for his grandmother one last time. But God took her home in the middle of the night. When I got the call about 5 a.m. Saturday, I couldn't believe it. Mom could not have died! But she had.

My inability to believe the truth did not change the truth. Christ has paid the price for your sin. It is true. There is not one chance in a million that it is false. When you confess your sins they are forgiven! They have been paid for by Jesus. When He said, "It is finished," the payment was complete.

When I think about the truth of God's Word, I am encouraged to go on and live an open life, sharing Jesus at every opportunity. May each of you see Jesus in a new and refreshing way this Lenten season.



— **Pastor James Rasmussen**  
**AFLC Director of Evangelism**

## sound bites

A man is never the same after he simulta-

**1** neously sees his utter despair and Christ's unbending grace.

— Max Lucado

**2**

**If he be God, and died for me,  
No sacrifice too great can be  
For me, a mortal man, to make —  
I'll do it all for Jesus' sake.**

— William McChesney

It would be wrong to force the innocent to die in this manner; but when the innocent one himself offers himself into death in

**4** order to save the guilty, this is the supreme height of nobility, the very acme of self-sacrificing love. It is so

regarded even among men and is infinitely more so when the Lamb of God died voluntarily for the ungodly.

— R. C. H. Lenski

It was a profound awakening within me when I realized that God wants us to understand not just the doctrinal fact of his love but also the emotional intensity and the reality of His love. Love is not only a word describing commitment, as vital as that is. It is also a concept that engenders feeling.

— Ravi Zacharias

**3**

An eternally valid atonement, effective to cancel the judgment; a merciful love, stretching out its arms to all these evil hearts, in which sin is still in motion like reptiles in a snake pit. Jesus only!

— Bo Giertz

**5**

**6**

**No sin is so small that it does not need to be atoned for. And no sin is so great that it cannot be atoned for.**

— O. Hallesby

# The value of the Lenten season



— *Pastor Joel Lohafer*  
*Triumph Lutheran*  
*Ferndale, Washington*

**You will not find the word “Lent” in Scripture, so why then do we set aside a period of time each year to celebrate the Lenten season? Let me suggest several reasons we should value this time of preparation.**

## **A Brief History of Lent**

The word “Lent” means “spring” and was originally meant to be a time to reflect upon our baptism and its connection with the death and resurrection of Christ. The Lenten Season lasts 40 days, and excludes Sundays, which are always set aside to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. The traditional color of Lent is purple, suggesting a sense of somberness and solemnity.

In the ancient church during the middle of the fourth century, candidates for baptism were required to fast for 40 days, and listen to the catechetical lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem. Forty days corresponded to Christ’s 40 days of fasting in the wilderness, Moses’ sojourn of 40 days on Mt. Sinai and 40 years of wilderness wanderings.

Ash Wednesday originally was a day when penitents were expelled from the church — a type of temporary excommunication. It is interesting to note that in the fourth century those under church discipline faced several stages of discipline and reinstatement: “weepers,” who stood outside the church door and asked for the prayers of those who entered; “kneelers,” who were required to kneel while the congregation stood during the worship service; and “standers,” who were allowed to stand with the congregation but had to leave when Holy Communion was served. Several years could

be spent in each of these stages before complete reinstatement in the worship life of the congregation. Eventually by the eleventh century this time of public church discipline was assimilated into the 40 days of Lenten preparation.

## **Lent reminds us who we really are**

We are sinners. Scripture is clear. Isaiah 1:18 says, “Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord, “though your sins are as scarlet, they will be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.” Another Old Testament prophet describes us by saying, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Not only do we sin, we are sinners.

You may say, “I know that I am a sinner; why do I need to be reminded again?” I know I am a father of three wonderful children, but I need to be reminded that being a father is more than an intellectual fact. It involves the need to nurture a relationship of love and trust. Lent reminds us of our need and the importance of not taking Christ’s sacrifice for our sins for granted.

Christ died for sinners. Romans 5:6 says, “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” We never lose our sinful nature and the possibility of drifting away from Christ. The season of Lent reminds us through Christ’s suffering and death, not only are we forgiven, but we may rejoice in our helpless state and time of weakness and human frailty. For when we are weak, then Christ may become our strength!

## **Lent prepares us for Easter**

Have you ever endured a diet? Remember how good food tasted when you began to really eat again? Lent serves a similar purpose in preparation for Easter. As much as I enjoy Lenten disciplines, sometimes the journey seems long and I get weary of waiting. But the wait is worth it when I stand and announce on Easter morning: Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!!

This year you may want to read Psalm 51 or 139, and ask the Lord to speak directly to the spiritual need in your heart. You may

# Sweet The Moments, Rich In Blessing

Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,  
Which before the cross we spend;  
Life and health, and peace possessing,  
From the sinner's dying Friend.

Truly blessed is this station,  
Low before His cross to lie,  
While we see divine compassion  
Beaming in His gracious eye.

For Thy sorrows we adore Thee,  
For the pains that wrought our peace;  
Gracious Saviour! we implore Thee,  
In our souls Thy love increase!

Here we feel our sins forgiven,  
While upon the Lamb we gaze;  
And our thoughts are all of heaven,  
and our lips o'erflow with praise.

Lord, in loving contemplation,  
Fix our hearts and eyes on Thee,  
Till we taste Thy full salvation,  
And Thine unveiled glory see.

— *Walter Shirley*  
Ambassador Hymnal No. 68



want to take extra time for devotions, and spend some quality time on your knees in prayer. Have we as disciples forgotten how to bend the knee in prayer?

Try to see Lent not as a burden to endure, but as a time to reflect on Christ and His suffering and death on the cross. Ask the Lord to soften your heart, and help

you prepare rightly for the celebration of Christ's resurrection. Above all, remember that Lent is only a part of your spiritual journey, but it is a very important time of repentance and forgiveness. God grant you His peace and contentment as you reflect on the cross of Jesus Christ.



# LENT: grief or gladness

— Sarah Giebink  
AFLBS junior  
Minneapolis,  
Minnesota

I have to be honest with you, when I hear the phrase “the Lenten Season” the word “GUILT” comes to mind. Recently I overheard two women discussing their way of observing Lent.

“Well, Lucille, I haven’t touched a Hershey’s bar in three weeks!”

“Oh yes, dear, I gave up chocolate last year. It was such a sacrifice. This year I decided to throw away every single ‘Soap Opera Digest’ in the house.”

“Good for you!”

Now, I’m not saying that these ladies are doing the wrong thing, but true observation of Lent is infinitely deeper and can bring lasting impact on our lives. Let’s take a look at how Lent originated and what it really means for us today.

The ancient Saxon word “Lenten” can be literally translated as “spring.” Some amazing parallels can be drawn between the season of spring and the observance of Lent.

Spring weather often comes upon us with frightening severity. It is a time of killing frosts, biting winds and drenching rain-showers. It is a time in which we are also blessed by the warming rays of the sun and the freshness of newly sprung plant life. In simple terms, Lent is a similar season. We see the severity of Christ’s sorrow and sacrifice, but we also ponder the growth that will come when we draw near to the healing rays of the risen Son.

Although the result of this spiritual healing is abundant joy, it can only be achieved through an extremely painful “stripping” process. Each of the Gospels record how Jesus was stripped of His outer garments before He was beaten and hung on the cross. This shame He experienced can compel us, especially during Lent, to strip off our own filthy, sinful rags. After we become essentially naked before God, He can provide us with superior clothing. “I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, he has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10a).

Nowhere in the New Testament is the observance of Lent mentioned or required,

but Christ Himself gave us the concept in Mark 2:19-20. “And Jesus said to them, ‘While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom do not fast, do they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.’”

Throughout history the church has approached Lent from many angles. It began when the early church practiced fasting during the forty-hour time period between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. Fasting was an expression of mourning, because the bridegroom had been taken away.

Eventually, the period of fasting was extended to an entire forty days, following the example set by Moses, Elijah, and Christ in the wilderness. In present times, Lent is observed beginning on Ash Wednesday and culminating on Easter morning. Fasting and self-discipline are recommended by many churches, but our motives must be correct or our actions are worthless. If sincere repentance is the motivation to abstain from food or anything else, then go right ahead. But beware of being too public about the sacrifice. “And whenever you fast do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you” (Matthew 6:16-18).

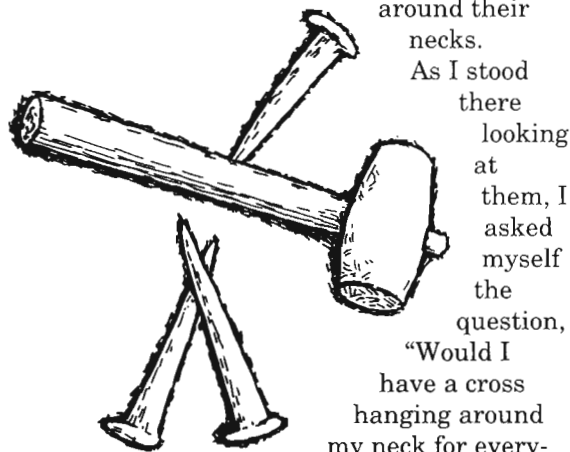
Those of us living in the Midwest probably see a lot of ice and snow when we look out the window this time of year. Be assured that the air is getting a little balmy. Just underneath the protective layer of white, there are millions of sprouts getting ready to stretch upwards. As you begin to see the signs of the coming season, remember to see the signs of the coming Savior! Consider His sacrifice for you, but don’t get tied up and stuck in grief or guilt. Lent is not only a season of grief, but also a celebration of anticipation.

Easter is coming!



# Viewing His cross and taking up mine

**A** Allow me to take you back a few years in my life when I was a part of the seven-to-four factory work force. It was the time when we had a group of high schoolers coming to our house for a weekly Bible study. One night a couple of the guys came wearing crosses around their necks. They had made them out of flat nails and a leather shoe lace, tying them



around their necks. As I stood there looking at them, I asked myself the question, "Would I have a cross hanging around my neck for everyone to see?" I wasn't

sure I was ready for that. I wasn't sure I wanted the world I worked in to know I was a Christian. Then I heard a still soft voice deep inside saying, "What's the matter Bruce, are you ashamed of Me?"

That did it.

A verse of Scripture flashed across my mind. "If people are ashamed of me and my teaching, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory" (Luke 9:26).

This really rattled my cage. I loved Jesus. In fact, I had a deep personal relationship with Him. And I knew of the ridicule and the degrading remarks that men can dish out so viciously in the work place. I began to ask myself, "What's the Cross all about, anyway?"

Another portion of Scripture came roaring into my life: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). Yes, that was me! In all my previous life I had never experienced such completeness and wholeness as I had since Jesus came and took up residency in my life. But it was just a taste of what I thought really was there, especially as I looked at the lives of some of the saints around me. The good stuff was yet to come.

Jesus hands you and me the keys to unlock the door of discipleship. Permit me to repeat them: "let him deny himself."

A Christian must deny himself. What does Jesus mean when He says that? One excellent scholar observes that in Peter's denial of his Lord after His arrest, He said of Jesus, "I don't know him." To deny ourselves is to say, "I don't know myself." It is to ignore the very existence of yourself. It is to treat the "self" as if it did not even exist. By far it is the normal thing in our world to treat "self" or "I" as the most important thing in the world. In fact our world encourages and fosters such a attitude.

The small Christian tract called the "Four Spiritual Laws" does a marvelous job of illustrating this. There are two large circles. In the center of the first circle, portraying what we were before becoming a Christian, there is a throne. Seated on this throne is the word ego meaning self. Outside this first circle is a cross, the cross of Christ. Next to it is a second large circle portraying what we should be after we become a Christian. Seated on the throne in this circle is a cross — meaning Jesus should be on the throne of our lives. The ego is still within the circle but away from the throne. Our natural self demands to be central on the throne, but it is denied. This is what the cross is all about — making Jesus number one.

Let's go on to the next part of the verse — "and take up his cross daily." Jesus tells you and me, with startling and complete  
(continued on next page)



— *Pastor Bruce Peterson*  
*Valley and Ny Stavanger Parish,*  
*Buxton, North Dakota*



Luoma photos

# The cross that offends

— Pat Lewis  
WMPL/Canada  
Camrose, Alberta

W

What is the cross about? To me it can be summed up in two words: Grace and forgiveness. To many in our world, though, the cross is an offense. I grew up in the

Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The generosity and hospitality of the Pakistanis put some Westerners to shame. Nevertheless, in that culture the cross of Christ is an offense, so much so that it is never allowed to be erected or left standing.

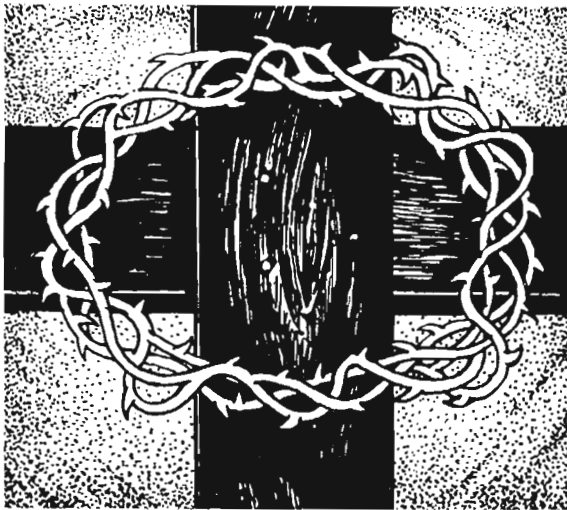
My brother Steven (Patzold) was buried in Murree Hills, Pakistan on May 29, 1957. On his grave, chiseled into the marble head stone are the words, "He will gather the lambs in His arms." Above those words stood a marble cross. I have never visited Stevie's grave when I have not seen that cross broken and lying flat, no matter how many times it is righted. Being an offense to

passing Muslims, they would throw stones and desecrate the Christian graves, especially those with standing crosses.

How could the cross that means so much to me be an offense? First of all, it represents Jesus, who we Christians believe is God. To consider Jesus as God is blasphemous to the Muslim. It represents Jesus as God's Son. The Muslim believes that Allah (God) would never stoop to sexual intimacy with a woman, therefore, He could not have a son. The Trinity is understood to be comprised of God the Father, his wife Mary and their son Jesus. The sight of the cross is offensive to the Muslim because of what it represents.

Second, the cross is offensive to the Muslim because of what it is said to accomplish. Jesus is seen as not being divine, having no power to forgive. His sacrificial death is viewed as having no merit, since He was merely a prophet and not God Himself. Most Muslims believe that Jesus was not crucified. One sect believes that He was nailed to the cross, but was taken down when He fainted and later died a natural death.

Third, the way of the cross to the Muslim is too simplistic. According to Islam, one must earn forgiveness through good deeds, which will be weighed in the balance at life's end. It will then be discovered whether Paradise has been earned. Islam, like many world religions, is based on the need to prove one's worth to a holy God and



## TAKING UP THE CROSS

honesty, that if we have denied our ego's demands, we are daily to take up our cross.

When Jesus made this demand, He knew exactly what a cross was and how cruel and brutal death upon one could be. When Jesus was about eleven years old, a Galilean by the name of Judas had incited a rebellion against the Romans. He made a small attack on a Roman armory about four miles from Nazareth. The Roman response was swift and methodically brutal. The entire town was burned to the ground. All the inhabitants were sold into slavery. Two thousand of the rebels were crucified in rows along the road to warn all others. It was a

sight Jesus most likely saw.

Jesus expects loyalty and daily devotion from us. Are you ready for such a selfless commitment? Is this the same cross you have in mind?

A man must spend his life, not hoard it. The whole gamut of the world's standards must be changed. The question is no longer, what's in it for me? How much can I get out of it? What is the safe thing to do? We Christians are given a new life, not to squander for ourselves, but to spend on others and to share with others so they too can have a new and eternal life. This is what the cross is all about.



# is the path to grace

one's deeds as sufficient for eternal reward.

Christianity differs not only from Islam, but all other world religions in one major point. God took the initiative to reach us while we were helpless in our sin. Romans 5:8 (NIV) tells us, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Unearned forgiveness is what the cross of grace is all about. It is not fair, but just. It is not natural, but supernatural. It is simply a gift. We find it hard to fathom. No strings attached. No guilt messages. Nothing left hanging over our heads. We no longer need to prove our worth. We are accepted and forgiven by grace. Wow!

So how do we respond to this cross that causes offense? We lovingly and without apology uphold the truth that Jesus alone is the way, the truth and the life. As Christians we lift high the cross and cling to grace. When tempted to slip into self-righteousness and place limits on God's grace, I must allow that offensive cross to once again remind me that Jesus paid it all.

God alone is the one who can teach us to love others so much, that we will not diminish the message of the cross. Christ's sacrifice provides our forgiveness. His resurrection ensures eternal life. Although offensive to many and difficult to understand, the cross is the only path to grace and forgiveness.



## A Lutheran Free Church begins in Portugal



The worshippers at the Lisbon congregation on January 3, 1999.

"The congregation exists to announce Jesus." This was the theme of the sermon last January 3, when the Lisbon congregation of the Lutheran Church of Portugal opened officially. In fact, the name of Jesus echoed in the church, in the sermon and throughout the worship service.

It was a moment so anxiously awaited. We invited people we've not seen for years, but maybe they still remain Lutherans. God answered our prayers and we had 25 people present at this blessed service.

Now every first and third Sundays, we have Sunday school and a worship service, hoping that the Spirit may maintain us united in His Word and salvation. For now that is the schedule I can maintain since I live 300Km north of Lisbon. The Lord will give us wisdom to find the means to overcome this transitory situation.

It was very important for us on that day to know that we were not alone. In spite of the distance, we could feel the support of the friendly AFLC that has helped us so that we may begin and strengthen the Free Lutheran work in Portugal.

Our prayers are with you, dear brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus, with our President Robert Lee, with Pastor Eugene Enderlein and all the World Missions committee, and with Missionary Connely Dyrud and the church in Brazil (which partakes with us not only in salvation but also the language), and with the missionaries and national pastors and brothers in Mexico, Canada, India and wherever free Lutheran congregations exist worldwide.

— **Pastor Artur Villares**  
**Free Lutheran Church of Portugal**  
**Lisbon congregation**

The web page of the Portugal church is <http://www.TERRAVISTA.PT/GUINCHO/2756> or e-mail Pastor Villares at <rd22304@mail.telepac.pt>

Pictured are the Board of Directors of the Free Lutheran Church of Portugal: Christiano de Barros, Natalia Comsolado and Rev. Artur Villares.



**Medicine Lake Lutheran Academy**, Minneapolis, Minnesota is sponsoring its first mission trip for its high school. On February 26, fifteen freshmen and sophomore students and their chaperones will leave for Aguascalientes, Mexico. These students will spend a week working with AFLC missionaries, the Dan Giles and Todd Schierkolks, in worship services, and street evangelism with puppet and mime presentations. They will also paint and clean the mission's newly acquired property. Students have been preparing for this trip in their Spanish and Bible classes. Special speakers have been sharing about Mexican culture, support raising and evangelism.

Medicine Lake Lutheran Academy is a ministry of Medicine Lake Lutheran Church. The school is adding a grade of high school each year to their program. Currently 276 students are enrolled. At a recent strategic planning meeting, the board, administrators and teachers affirmed the goal of stressing missions and evangelism in the expanded outreach of adding these high school grades to the academy.

**Campo Mourão, Brazil** — My name is Ivanilda de Costa Silva and in March I will start my third year at the AFLC Bible School in Brazil.

My parents were non-practicing Catholics, but I became a teacher in the Catholic church at age 15. Though I was working in the church, I felt that something was missing in my life. I looked for happiness in all the wrong places and eventually became involved in the occult.

My mother came to know the Lord and through her testimony, I prayed to ask Jesus into my life on August 8, at the age of 17. He freed me from all the false visions and forgave me of all my sins and made me a new person.

I then became very active in a local church as a youth leader, sharing Christ's message on a radio program, being a part of the praise group in the church and just working and sharing my faith wherever possible. It was during this time that I felt God wanted more from me and I needed to prepare. It was then that I first heard about SEMEAR (the AFLC Bible School) in Campo Mourão, Parana. On Feb-



ruary 25, 1997 I traveled three long days to Campo Mourão and began my first year of school.

Today I understand why God brought me from one end of Brazil to the other. I have a strong desire, led by the Holy Spirit to take the message of Christ to those who don't know Him. It is that same Spirit that leads me to pray for the nations in need of the gospel. This has opened my heart to Africa. Pray for me as I prepare and seek His will.

**Pastor John C. Rieth, chaplain** at Altru Health System, Grand Forks, North Dakota, will be awarded the distinction of certification as a board certified chaplain in the Association of Professional Chaplains. The presentation will take place at the Association of Professional Chaplains Annual Meeting to be held in Kansas City, Missouri during February 27 - March 3, 1999. Chaplain Rieth has served as a staff chaplain at Altru Health System since May of 1996. Pastor Kerwin Sletto, Ottawa, Illinois, Director of the Division of Institutional Chaplaincy for the AFLC, is also certified.

**Newark, Illinois** — West Lisbon, Helmar, and Newark Lutheran churches are planning a special series of meetings at the Newark High School gymnasium to reach out to the community. The theme for the March 14-19 meetings is "Hope '99." Pastor Vern Baardson, Moorhead, Minnesota, is the guest speaker.

## Be a missionary from your home

Ken and Sandy Lehmann from St. John's Lutheran in Milford, Illinois, work for INTO Ed Ventures, a foreign exchange program. They have been coordinators for three years and have had the opportunity to meet students from all over the world. They have also seen people open their homes up to students and have the opportunity to present Christ and God's Word.

The Lehmanns prefer to place students in good Christian homes as they have found most foreign students do not attend any church. They themselves had a Buddhist student in their home two years ago. She joined them in church every Sunday and loved it. The Lehmanns still keep in touch with

her. As Christians, it is a great way to spread the gospel to other countries without leaving home.

Many people feel they can't evangelize because they are not educated enough or do not have the time. By hosting an exchange student, they simply become a part of your family. Anyone can be a host parent and you do not have to have children in your home. Single parents may apply as well.

Anyone interested in hosting or becoming a coordinator may call Ken or Sandy toll free at 1-877-404-4092. They love talking to people about the program and how they feel God has led them to help spread His Word without leaving their home.

**Deshler, Nebraska** — Pictured is Pastor Jan Horne, Fairbury, Nebraska, Pastor Jerome Nikunen, Deshler, Nebraska and AFLC Home Missions Director Paul Nash, at the installation service last fall of Pastor Nikunen as the new pastor of Abiding Word Lutheran in Deshler. Organized in 1987, the members of Abiding Word are building their first permanent worship facility with completion anticipated by Easter Sunday.

**Pastor John and Ruby Abel** — Thanks are given to God that Pastor John and Ruby Abel, retired AFLC missionaries to Brazil, were not injured when their motor home was destroyed by fire as they were traveling through Texas. They escaped from the motor home with only their passports and other documents. Thanks to God's provision and protection they were still able to continue on their journey and return to Brazil in January to assist for the next few months with Bible camps and evangelistic meetings.

**AFLC Evangelist/Director James Rasmussen** began teaching a spring semester class on "Personal Evangelism" at AFLBS on January 25. His schedule also includes:

February 20-25 — Illinois District Rally and area congregations.

February 28 — Hosanna Lutheran, St. James, Minnesota.

March 14-17 — Our Saviour's Lutheran, Zumbrota, Minnesota.

March 21-24 — Emmanuel Lutheran, Kenyon, Minnesota.

March 28-31 — Badger Creek Lutheran, Badger, Minnesota.

April 9-11 — Westaker-Bethania Parish, Newfolden, Minnesota.

April 16-18 — Valley-Ny Stanger Parish, Portland, North Dakota.

April 25-27 — Lake Region Parish, Roslyn, South Dakota.

April 30-May 1 — AFLC Spring Evangelism Rally at Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minnesota.



## Milford, Illinois, construction crew has a mission

"We just enjoy working at the ARC," smiled Ken Lehmann as he explained why his group of construction workers keep on coming back to help with Association Retreat Center projects for a week each January. Pictured are four men from St. John's Lutheran Church in Milford, Illinois, (L. to R.): Warren Butzow, Ken Lehmann, Steve Lehmann and Charles Leitz. Jerry Anderson, (far right) is the construction foreman at the Osceola, Wisconsin retreat center. They worked on the 10,000 plus square foot gymnasium/auditorium being built at the ARC with anticipated completion this summer.

It's not just the ARC that the

St. John's crew of farmers and part-time contractors donate their efforts to. The first building project was in 1988 at a Bible school in El Carmen, Mexico. Since then about 15 men have participated at one time or another in construction work for AFLC congregations in Palmdale, California; Chilicothe, Illinois; and the AFLC administration building in Minneapolis in 1992. When St. Petrie Lutheran in Leland, Illinois was damaged by lightning, the crew from Milford showed up to help. Besides the trip each January to the ARC, they have recently helped new AFLC churches in Metropolis and Lincoln, Illinois, build their first facilities.



## Craig Benson

Born on September 7, 1959.

Parents are Sherman and Evelyn Benson.

Hometown is Kenyon, Minnesota.

Married to Deb Mortrud of Thief River Falls, Minnesota.

Four children are: Heather, 15; Erin, 14; Kayla, 12; and Alex, 9.

Home congregation is Hauge Lutheran Church of Kenyon, Minnesota.

Attended AFLBS, Northwestern College, Roseville, Minnesota and received a degree in History at Moorhead State University, Moorhead, Minnesota. He is a Major in the U.S. Air Force Reserve.

### Personal Testimony

As a teenager, I recommitted my life to God, through a personal and conscious commitment of faith in Jesus Christ. This was definitely a conversion experience for me as I realized that I had been living out of God's will for much of my life. Over the years I had drifted away from my baptismal covenant with God. I thank God for His patience with me and for the many Spirit-filled friends and family He brought into my life during these earlier years, especially at Hauge Lutheran Church.

I remember the Scriptures becoming so fresh and real to me as I allowed God's Spirit to enter my life again. I experienced a joy and peace that I hadn't possessed earlier — just two of God's wonderful gifts to me. Over the years I have learned that the secret to the Christian life

is continual and honest prayer before God and constant feeding on His words to me in the Bible.

During my younger years, I looked upon the pastoral ministry as something I would like to do, but I didn't sense a call into the ministry at that time. After eight years of service in the U.S. Air Force, I sensed that God was calling me into service for Him as a pastor. I want to emphasize that this call came after I had served as a deacon in one of our AFLC churches.

During this time the words of the apostles in Acts 6:4 and I Timothy 4:13 were impressed upon me and they took on special meaning for me as I sought God's will for my family and myself. They declared, "But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word (of God)" and "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching."

Throughout the past six years of attending our seminary and being able to minister to the spiritual needs of people in various ways, God's call into the ministry has been reaffirmed many times. Seminary training was a vital part of my preparation for the pastoral ministry. Here the emphasis is upon a living and maturing personal relationship with God, built on the foundation of God's Word and prayer. In

## Meet the 1999 FLS seniors

these years of submission as a seminary student, I echo the words of the prophet Isaiah when he said to God, "Here I am, send me."

The capstone experience of my seminary training has been my internship ministry at Salem Lutheran Church in Radcliffe, Iowa. My supervisor and mentor, Pastor Harlan Johnson, and the people of Salem, have been a joy to work with and I have learned much from them. Their love for the Lord and concern for my family have made it a pleasure to serve as their student pastor.

My family and I thank the many people who have prayed for us and gave financially to meet our needs. We covet your prayers as we seek God's will for the next chapter in our lives.

Colossians 2:8 has challenged me since my days at our Bible school: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hallow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."



## Gary Haug

Born on December 2, 1949.

Hometown is the Adams-Edinburg area of northeastern

North Dakota.

Parents are Glenn and Donna Haug.

Married to Lucinda Olson.

Graduated from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota.

Taught music at Buffalo and Park River, North Dakota where we also engaged in farming.

Daughter, Julie is pursuing a nursing degree. She is recently engaged to marry Jeremy Day of Champlin, Minnesota. Son, Brandon is 15, and is a 9th grader at Medicine Lake Lutheran Academy.

Members of Victory Free Lutheran Church in Park River, North Dakota, since about 1986 although we now call Emmaus



## Jason Holt

Born on July 2, 1973.

Parents are Gale and LuAnn Holt.

Hometown is Eagle Bend, Minnesota.

Married to Jennifer Riebling.

Children are Caleb, two years and Susanna, two months.

Home congregation is Faith Lutheran Church (ELCA) in Eagle Bend, Minnesota. Now our home church is Medicine Lake Lutheran Church in Plymouth, Minnesota.

Graduated from the University of Minnesota at Morris in 1995.

### Personal testimony

I came into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as a young teenager. The Word of God worked on my heart as the Holy Spirit convinced me of my lost condition in my sin and confirmed in me that Jesus can save me from my sin (Luke 19:10). I grew up in a Lutheran church and learned much about God through the regular church activities like services and Sunday school. But as a young teenager, after hearing the Scriptures proclaimed at a Bible camp, I knelt and prayed to receive Jesus. I confessed my sin to Him, and asked Him into my heart. Jesus has been faithful to me every day (Hebrews 13:5-6). As I write these words, I know that my Savior Jesus Christ is alive, that He is at work in me today, and that He has promised me a living hope through His resurrection (1 Peter 1:3). I praise Jesus for who He is and all that He has done for me. "Praise Him for His mighty deeds; praise Him according to His excellent greatness" (Psalm 150:2).

The Lord's call into the ministry began when I received Him into my life. At this time I sensed the need

to surrender my life to serving Him, and becoming a pastor was a natural thought to me. It was because it was a thought which came to me so quickly after coming to assurance of salvation that I often doubted the call. It wasn't until my junior year of college when the Lord brought me to a place where I had to prayerfully analyze if He was calling me into the ministry. Through His Word, and then certain circumstances, I said "yes," to seminary. Jesus showed me that the only things that are valuable are the things He enables me to do (II Corinthians 3:5).

The next summer I heard about the AFLC through a sister in Christ. Within a year of ever hearing of the AFLC, the Lord led me into seminary.

These last four years have led to a deeper walk with Jesus. The time spent with the Lord has been wonderful. I was committed to the Bible and I had a concern for souls as I came to seminary. Now a few months from completing seminary, I am only more committed to the Word and more burdened for others because of the grace of God in

Lutheran of Bloomington, Minnesota to our church home.

### Personal testimony

It was during a Lenten service at Victory in Park River under the preaching of the late Pastor Norm Tenneboe that I came to understand my sinfulness and need of a Savior in a real way and experienced Christ's offer of forgiveness as a personal sacrifice for my sins. I accepted Jesus as my Savior and Lord that evening. I am grateful for the support and prayers of that fellowship, the teaching of Pastor Jim Rasmussen, our next pastor there, and most of all to our Lord for the nurture in the faith that was extended to my family and me in the following years. He continues to work in our lives as He prepares us for ministry. Praise the Lord!

Lucinda and I had, since about 1994, been open and searching for

ways to devote more of our time to direct service to the Lord and had been active in many ways in local and area church work and service. In the middle of January of 1995 the Lord made it very clear to us individually that He was calling us to the seminary and ministry. I will never forget that walk on a snowy evening in the woods near our home, when we first shared together that we both knew God was calling me. By the spring of that year, all the arrangements had been made, some of them in miraculous ways, and we were living in Minneapolis by August 1, of that year. Since that time, the Lord has provided abundantly for my needs and for those of my family and we continue to rejoice in Him.

These years at the Free Lutheran Seminary have not only been years of learning, they have also

been years of increased trust and reliance on God for all of our needs. We had a wonderful internship experience at Emmaus in Bloomington where God showed me that He could make use of even someone "like me. Through that experience, He has confirmed in me the desire to serve His people, to reach out to those that do not yet know Him, and to continue to grow in my own personal walk with Him. Lucinda and I, along with our family, are excited to see where He will lead us to serve in ministry.

We want to take this opportunity to publicly thank all of my teachers at the seminary and especially the readers of this publication, some whose names we may never know, who have supported the seminary and the students so wonderfully, both monetarily and in prayer. We praise the Lord for you.

## HOLT

Christ Jesus. The classes, the instructors, and the other students have all been a great blessing to me. I have come to receive the heritage of the AFLC as my heritage. Our emphasis upon the spiritual life of both the individual and the congregation has been significant to me. My seminary training has focused me on becoming a more dedicated disciple of Christ, a more godly man, and a more committed servant of the body of Christ.

An important part of this training was my third-year internship at Helmar Lutheran Church, Newark, Illinois. Pastor Jeff Swanson and the congregation were a great blessing to me and my family. The wide-range of internship opportunities and the practical biblical seminary studies have made me ready, by the grace of God, to serve Jesus as a pastor. Glory be to the Lord!



### David W. Johnson

Born on February 13, 1944.

Parents are the late Gustav and Anna Johnson.

Hometown is Duluth, Minnesota. After marriage, has lived in Richfield, Minnesota.

Married to Cynthia Brecke.

Children are Michael, 18 and Matthew, 17.

Home congregation is Emmaus Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Minnesota.

Received a B.A. in English from the University of Minnesota, Duluth; a M.A. in English (Linguistics), from the University of Oregon, Eugene; a M.S. in Speech (Audiology) from Portland State University, Portland, Oregon. Taught school for four years before working as an audiologist from 1972-1995, during which time he also was an Associate Professor in Otolaryngology.

#### Personal testimony

I was brought up in a Christian household and a family that had been actively involved in the formation of an Augustana Synod church in Duluth, Minnesota. I was nurtured in that household of faith, confirmed in that faith at Concordia Evangelical Lutheran Church, and was involved in the practice of faith in Augustana Luther League's Caravaning Program (similar in some



### Raitis Evamois

I was born in 1963 in a small boarder town between Estonia and Latvia. My parents divorced when I was five years old. Soon after that my dad died in a traffic accident. In 1981, I graduated from high school and went to the capital city of Riga to study at the trade school. Two years later I started working as a waiter. It was a dark time in my life as I did not know the Lord.

After I became sick with diabetes at age 16, I started to seek

answers to life's most important question. I could not find any answers, but my heart kept saying to me, "There is something more to this life. You are missing something."

It was a time of spiritual revival in Latvia and my family and I were baptized at the Lutheran church. The only thing we knew about God was the Lord's Prayer. After baptism, I started to attend church where the Lord spoke to me through His Word. He met me on my knees at the regular high liturgical Lutheran service while I was confessing my sins. Then one day while praying at home, I surrendered all to my dear Savior, Jesus Christ. This turning point in my life brought peace and gave me hope.

The Lord changed my life 180 degrees: from pub to the church, from deep darkness into His bright light. It didn't happen overnight, but step by step the Lord faithfully led me out of darkness as I trusted Him. Soon my son, Zigmaris started to attend one of the first legally open Sunday schools and my wife,

Indra became a Christian. I left my job at the restaurant and started to study at the newly opened Deaconal Institute. God gave more understanding in His Word and sent people in my life who helped me walk the Christian life. It was there that I met Dr. Francis Monseth, a short-term teacher at the school.

It is exciting to be in the midst of His plan. When He brought us here to the FLS in Minneapolis, I didn't know how it could work out, but I trusted Him that He cares and provides. Now we look back on these two and one-half years on campus and we see God's blessings.

It hasn't been easy but the Lord has given strength. I'm most of all thankful for the truth revealed in His Word; truth that gives freedom when His Word is obeyed. God showed me the need to share unconfessed sins of the past with my wife and ask her forgiveness. It was like a big millstone rolled off my shoulders. I'm also thankful for my teachers and fellow students who all are believers and that my family can live in the midst of people who love

ways to our Bible school's summer teams, but a program more concerned with teaching church leadership skills to teenagers).

I must say that I took God for granted through high school and college until the final days of my audiology studies in Portland, Oregon, when I believe His intervention brought me back to Minnesota. Upon my return to Minnesota, I became

## More FLS testimonies...



### Wayne Olson

Born on May 9, 1951.

Parents are the late Selmer and Alice Olson.

Hometown is Edinburg, North Dakota.

Married Linda Lerud on November 1, 1969.

the Lord and daily live their faith out even when life turns in ways we don't like. God has given me knowledge not only for my head, but for my heart. It was here that the Lord gave me full assurance of my salvation.

As we conclude our studies here, we believe that with God all things are possible and that He holds our future (Isaiah 55:12-13). All of my family — my wife Indra, son Zigmars, 17, and daughter Madara, 8, love the Lord and want to follow and serve Him.

involved with small group Bible study, one in which the Lord brought my wife Cindi and me together. I feel that the Lord Jesus has used me in the past and has put me in Minneapolis "for such times as these." He has been more than kind, and I know He has plans for me, plans for my good and those around me. My family and I look forward to the leading and following of the Lord's direction in these coming days.

The Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and preserves us in unpredictable ways, but all His ways build the Body of Christ. Through a number of life-circumstances, the Lord led me from an ALC church to an AFLC church in the 1980s. When the Lord led me to seminary training in 1995, there was only one obvious seminary choice for me, our FLS at Medicine Lake. I began my studies with a strong sense that the Lord was calling me to seminary training for some kind of ministry.

Children are: Chris and his wife Monica, Sioux City, Iowa; Tom farms the home place; Philip and Sherri are a junior and sophomore in high school.

Home church is Grace Free Lutheran of Edinburg.

#### Personal testimony

I am thankful for the many years God has given me on the farm. In January of 1980, I felt the Lord's hand become very heavy on me. I knew He wanted me to make a commitment of my life to Him. I also knew He wanted no ninety or even ninety-nine percent, but one hundred percent of my mind, body and soul. I resisted God until memorial weekend of May.

His hand so heavy on my burdened heart was finally more than I could bear. I confessed my sin, asked Christ into my heart, and surrendered all of myself to Him. I started teaching Sunday school that fall in our ALC church.

In 1988 I felt God calling me out of the merging Lutheran churches. God led a group of us to start Grace

Not only has God in His mercy desired me to prepare for ministry, but He has nurtured me in my studies and been very kind to me in my internship at Maranatha Lutheran in Spring Lake Park, Minnesota, by surrounding me with a loving and supportive congregation. God does speak to each of us through the experiences of life and He brings us along through His Son who is the Resource for all problems in life. Through Jesus we can know the Father and His love and concern for us.

Jesus has loved me and my family during my seminary years by providing in practical ways for our family needs of housing and sustenance. Without Christ and His love, I would have been completely discouraged and unable to complete the work of this seminary academic program. He has taught endurance and patience in waiting on His provision.

Free Lutheran Church of Edinburg. There I led the adult Bible class and began to preach on occasions. These opportunities began to increase and when I became a Gideon, God blessed me with numerous opportunities to share His Word with different churches.

I still felt God calling me into full-time ministry, but I didn't know how or when. I did know He had the timing and the plan. In the summer and fall of 1997, I mentioned to my wife Linda the time has come to search out this possibility. Over the years, I had mentioned this as well to a friend, whose testimony led me to the Lord. We had been praying for the Lord to guide. I had shared this with my pastor, James Rasmussen, and am sure he too, had this in prayer before the Lord.

I contacted the AFLC headquarters and expressed my sense of God's calling me to be a licensed lay pastor. After meeting with various boards and committees, and upon their recommendation to take one year of seminary classes, I started

(continued on next page)

## OLSON

the FLS in September of 1998.

These months have been a rewarding experience with in-depth, excellent teaching and a wonderful class of brother seminarians. Upon reading this you might think I am a man of patience and endurance. But I see myself as a sinner, saved by grace, through faith in Christ my Lord. I believe that each day the Lord gives me, there is something He would have me learn, and this is true for all God's children. So it is with great joy, humbleness, and more than a little inner trembling, that I again declare to the Lord Jesus Christ, as I did in May of 1980: "Lord, I give you all of me, do with me as you will. Amen."

Romans 14:8 says, "If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord."



**Missionary Clara Gunderson, Puebla, Mexico, joined Lay pastor Dale Finstrom, Glyndon, Minnesota and Pastor Alan Arneson, Badger, Minnesota in a discussion group.**

## A little change of pace Report on the AFLC Pastors' Conference

**S**ome things were different at the 1999 AFLC Pastors' Conference from the way it had been done before. The schedule was a little less full with a few more breaks. The emphasis was on being a little more relaxed and a little less for-

mal. A number of workshops with plenty of small group discussion took place. Communion was served at the closing service instead of the opening. But the same Savior was present, and worked through His same Word to bring encouragement to those in attendance.

The conference began January

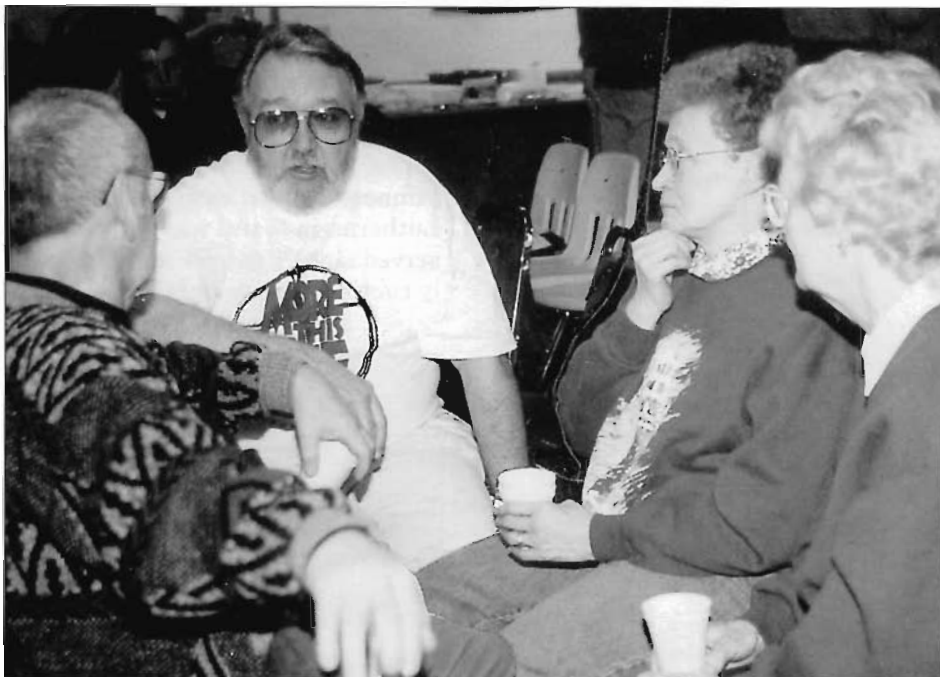
19 with a worship service led by a group from Association Free Lutheran Bible School. Much time was spent singing together and also listening to students share testimonies. The heart of the testimonies was expressions of appreciation to pastors for the way God had used them in the students' lives. "He



**Pastor John and Dana Chandler, Amarillo, Texas visit with Pastor Marlyn and Gayle Kruse, Mankato, Minnesota during last month's pastor's retreat at the ARC. Pastor Chandler was accepted on the AFLC Fellowship Roster at the January 18, coordinating committee meeting.**



**Pastors Richard Frederick, Windom, Minnesota, and Tom Tuura, St. James, Minnesota were two of the leaders of the workshop, "Bytes and Blessings: Computer Benefits in the Ministry." They are pictured with Pastor Harvey Jackson, Hatton, North Dakota.**



**Pastor Michael Burke and Beverly (center) of Ishpeming, Michigan shared a discussion group time with Lay pastor Orville and Jean Jenson of Escanaba, Michigan.**

takes time for me and others." "He has been a great example," were some of the things shared.

The pastors spent Wednesday and Thursday, January 20 and 21, in a series of Bible studies on Philipians led by four different pastors. Also on those days they had a choice

of workshops to participate in. These covered topics such as: worship, tax preparation for pastors, evangelism, transitions, computers, challenges of rural ministry, living on a limited budget, Y2K and the

church, family vacations, and dealing with discouragement. An afternoon prayer time took place as well.

The evenings were spent enjoying a banquet together on Wednesday and worshipping and serving one another Holy Communion on Thursday. It was viewed as a restful time, well spent in the presence of God and one another.

#### **Vacation spots available?**

During the recent pastors' conference a workshop was held on "Family Vacations: Creative Options for Pastors' Families." The workshop generated the idea of gathering information on inexpensive vacation and/or retreat locations that might be available, in particular for AFLC pastors and individuals on a limited budget who might be in need of a location to go to for rest and renewal. Those who might know of such a site are encouraged to pass the information along to the workshop leader, Pastor Elden Nelson, 1633 Co. Rd. 8 SE, Kandiyohi, MN 56251; 320-235-0487; e-mail: [efnelson@willmar.com](mailto:efnelson@willmar.com)

This information will be shared with all AFLC pastors.

Evangelist Clifford Anderson, 93, Cokato, Minnesota, passed away on February 3, 1999. An obituary will be included in the next issue.

**Pastor Harvey and Hazel Carlson**, St. Paul, Minnesota, have moved to the Augustana Home of Minnesota. Their new address is: 1007 E. 14th St., #314, Minneapolis, MN 55404. Phone (612) 333-1551 ext. 464.

**Teachers needed** — Teachers who have a degree and would enjoy teaching in a growing Christian school are encouraged to call for an application to Medicine Lake Lutheran Academy of suburban Minneapolis. Needs for August of 1999, are Kindergarten, First Grade, and Secondary Administrative Team. For information, call (612) 531-0845 or e-mail at [mlaa-academy@juno.com](mailto:mlaa-academy@juno.com)



**AFLC Couples' Retreat is scheduled for March 19-21, 1999, at the Association Retreat Center near Osceola, Wisconsin. Pictured are the New Image Players and Company. They will put on "The Marriage Drama" in five dramatic sketches throughout the weekend. The retreat will be led by Pastor Dick and Audrey Gilmore of Christ Is Lord Free Lutheran of Onalaska, Wisconsin. Audrey is also the director of the New Image Women's Ministries. Please pre-register. For more information call the ARC at 1-800-294-2877.**



Thea Hagen

**Wallace, South Dakota —** Calvary Lutheran has begun a "Friends in Faith" Sunday to honor older members of the congregation and as an opportunity to bring families and friends together in the church. The first of these periodic celebrations was held on January 10, 1999, for Thea Hagen who for 99 years has been a valuable part of the congregation and the Wallace community. She has been the Sunday school superintendent and a teacher for all ages and loves to prepare and lead Bible study lessons. The church was filled with her family and friends to honor this "humble and gracious woman of the Lord," according to the church bulletin insert.

Pictured is Coach Wade Mobley and the AFLBS boys basketball team. The AFLBS girls Conquerors team is coached by Sara Johnson, wife of Dean of Students, Mark Johnson. The teams played in Dubuque, Iowa on January 29, then spent the weekend with families from Christian Free Lutheran in Wheatland, Iowa. After pizza on Saturday night, the church youth challenged the AFLBS teams at a nearby gym.

**Elbow, Saskatchewan —** Bethel Lutheran began an outreach program for children, ages 9-12 this January. The weekly sessions are held on Sunday evenings. The sessions begin with choir practice to prepare for a musical to be presented in May, followed by an activity and Bible time.

**Radcliffe, Iowa —** Salem Lutheran hosted the Mike McCarlson family of Webster, South Dakota for a night of music and an update regarding AFLC Evangelism Commission on February 14. The McCarlson family began presenting their musical program last summer in congregations in South Dakota and Montana.

**Mountain Home, Arkansas —** St. Matthew Lutheran Church was removed from the AFLC congregational roster as per their request.

**Pastor Jim Haga,** Isanti, Minnesota is now serving Victory in Christ Lutheran in Maplewood, Minnesota along with Redeemer Lutheran in Isanti where he has served since 1993. He and his family continue to live in Isanti.

## AFLC Memorial Gifts December, 1998

**AFLC department**  
given in memory of

### AFLTS

Albin Eversvik  
Julia Hammerstad  
Anna Kettelhut  
Arland Nelson

### AFLBS

Orrin Nyhus  
Bertha Cutkosky  
Talbert Koppang  
Rodney Huffman  
Verna Lindgren  
Rosella Grahn  
Ragnhild Bakken  
Clarence Lunde  
Eleanor Cleveland  
Kevin Reitmeier  
Jean Pirlet

### Vision 2004

Josie Ystebo

### Home Missions

Dick Heyen  
Burdeen Peterson  
Palmer Johnson  
Milo Hovick  
Arlen Nelson  
Don Bakken

### World Missions

Michael Malcolmson  
Eleanor Cleveland  
Verna Lindgren  
Palmer Johnson  
Shairl Oelkers  
Evelyn Hove

### Evangelist

Dan Stark

### General Fund

Verna Lindgren  
Eleanor Cleveland

### Parish Education

Pastor John Strand

# The “so what” of the cross

I was a college student, attempting to share with a non-Christian the good news of how Jesus loves us. I told her, “He loves you so much He died on the Cross for you.” Her response was a somewhat polite, “so what?”

She viewed Jesus as a good man. She thought it was too bad He died such a painful death. It didn't seem necessary to her, however, for someone to die in her place. In her view, she was a pretty good person. She was kinder and more moral than most. Her past didn't include what the world would call any terrible sins. Her response to being told someone paid the penalty for her sins was basically, “But I don't owe that much.”

She had been told, as much of the world is told, “do these things, avoid those things, and you'll be considered a good person.” She had kept the rules, better than most. The idea that she needed someone to die in her place seemed a little bizarre and somewhat insulting to her.

She felt like one coming to the register at a store, expecting a refund and being told you owe a huge amount, but someone else paid the bill. The first reaction isn't necessarily going to be gratitude to the one who paid the bill. Instead the response will likely be, “I didn't owe anything. I ought to be getting money back.”

The world had been telling my non-Christian friend she was going to be getting a “refund” because she had been so good. “God owes you something,” was the message the world was proclaiming. She didn't like being told she had a debt to pay, even if someone else had paid it.

By nature we don't like to hear that a debt is owed because of the sins we have committed. We want to be told we have been good. The Cross says we haven't, and because of that somebody has to pay.

My friend's lack of appreciation for what Jesus did on the Cross helped me to see that before Christ's death means something to a person they have to see their need. Otherwise, it is just “so what?”

In Romans 5:8, the phrase in the middle of the verse makes the first and the last parts of the verse incredible. It says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

“While we were still sinners ....” That makes God's demonstration of love something beyond compare. It says the death of Christ is not merely the

tragic loss of a good man, but the solution to our greatest dilemma.

As we share with people about Jesus giving His life for us, we pray they will see their need for such a gift. At the same time, however, we must not forget our own need. We must check our own lives to be sure we don't develop a “so what?” attitude toward the Cross.

It is tempting to think that after we have been a Christian for a while we should start getting into the “deep truths” of the Christian life. We may feel we ought to start trying to figure out “the hidden meaning” behind all the numbers in the Bible. Determining the decade in which Jesus is going to return and what exactly is going to happen when He does return is something we may conclude we

should do now that we are “mature.” We get deceived into thinking the Cross is for “beginners;” something we don't need to think about and talk about so much anymore.

The Apostle Paul said, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (I Corinthians 2:2, NIV). He expressed his goal and his view of growth when he said, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (Philippians 3:10, NIV). He declared that what is “of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scrip-

tures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (I Corinthians 15:3, 4, NIV).

We never get mature enough or good enough that we don't need the Cross. “If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” (Galatians 2:21, NIV). If our appreciation for the Cross and our interest in reflecting upon the Cross has diminished, our sense of our need for the Cross has diminished as well. But our need remains. The good news is the answer to our need remains true as well.

Jesus dying in our place is not “so what?” but “so everything.” Without it we have nothing. Because of it, when we are in Christ, we have forgiveness, we have access to God, we have the assurance we are loved, we have life eternal, we have ..., and the list goes on and on.

— Pastor Craig Johnson

**“We never  
get mature  
enough or  
good enough  
that we  
don't need  
the Cross.”**

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SOMETHING TO SHARE

---

## Hypothermia

**W**e eagerly entered our new sanctuary, glad to get indoors away from the South Dakota winter wind and ready to worship.

Church family faces smiled around us as we joyfully sang songs of praise and settled in for a Sunday morning message. Not long into the service my daughter touched my neck with cold hands and complained about the temperature of the room. In spite of my turtleneck and wool blazer I realized that I, too, was cold. Icy fingers shook hands in the narthex that day, and we all remarked about how cold it was. Though the thermostat was adjusted, it seemed to take all afternoon at home for me to warm up.

The "Something to Share" column is designed for creative thoughts about Christians sharing their faith with others, specifically unbelievers. Before undertaking this assignment I went to Doctor Jesus for a pre-operative self-examination. The diagnosis seemed serious. The Doctor warned me about impending hypothermia. Medically speaking, as one's body temperature lowers there is marked depression of brain blood flow, reduced cardiac output and decreased arterial pressure. My nursing books report that "Victims can appear to be clinically dead ... but the potential for full resuscitation ... is possible, although unusual ... lifesaving measures should not be withheld." Thank goodness!

I wonder if hypothermia is a common Christian ailment. We are called out of sin-darkness into His marvelous salvation-light. The fervor of this miracle initially causes us to be "on fire" for Christ. We enjoy walking in the warm light of fellowship with other believers. We burn ourselves out with concern for Bible study, personal growth, and desire for spiritual entertainment.

The twisted irony of this analogy is that if we neglect an outflow vent of sharing our faith with unbelievers, we do not heat up internally and explode. Instead over a period of time of cloistering in the light, our spiritual body temperature begins to drop, and the brain blood flow is so depressed we may not even realize how cold we are getting. We begin to suffer from a reduced love-concern-heart output and a decreased pressure-desire to see the predicament of unbelievers lost in the dark. We may feel pseudo-warmed by all the good, needful growth elements, but unless we consciously also share our faith we may numb our self-centered selves into serious hypothermia.

Don't despair, potential for full resuscitation is possible!

Lifesaving measures may be as simple as asking ourselves, "What's my temperature? What has happened to the fire of my motivation for witnessing?" Jesus wants us to be hot. It is lukewarmness that is distasteful to Him. Part of being redirected toward the flame of zeal may be honestly remembering just how

cold is cold for the believer, and how dark is darkness for an unbeliever?

Darkness is "being devoid of light; the utter or virtual lack of illumination." It is separation from Christ, the light of life. How dark is this darkness? Each of us has had some physical experience with darkness, perhaps in a deep, black cave in Brazil, in the Minnesota northwoods at night, or in our own closets with the lights turned off. Those proverbial moments when we can't see the hand in front of our face are not comfortable; we don't like to stay there long. In fact, we don't. By God's grace, Christians have been called out of that darkness into the light.

The Bible tells us that as believers our daily struggle is against the world forces of this darkness. How great is the darkness!

So where is the fire? Our privilege is to open the eyes of our friends so that the Holy Spirit may turn them from darkness to light. Only in Jesus is there no darkness at all! (I Peter 2:9, John 3:19, John 12:35, Ephesians 6:12, Matthew 6:23, Acts 26:18, 1 John 1:5).

As we begin this 1999 series of "Something to Share," repent with me of impending hypothermia, turn to the fire and be resuscitated, and remember just how dark it is without the Light.

What's your temperature?

— Jeannie Brandt  
*Abiding Savior Free Lutheran  
Sioux Falls, South Dakota*