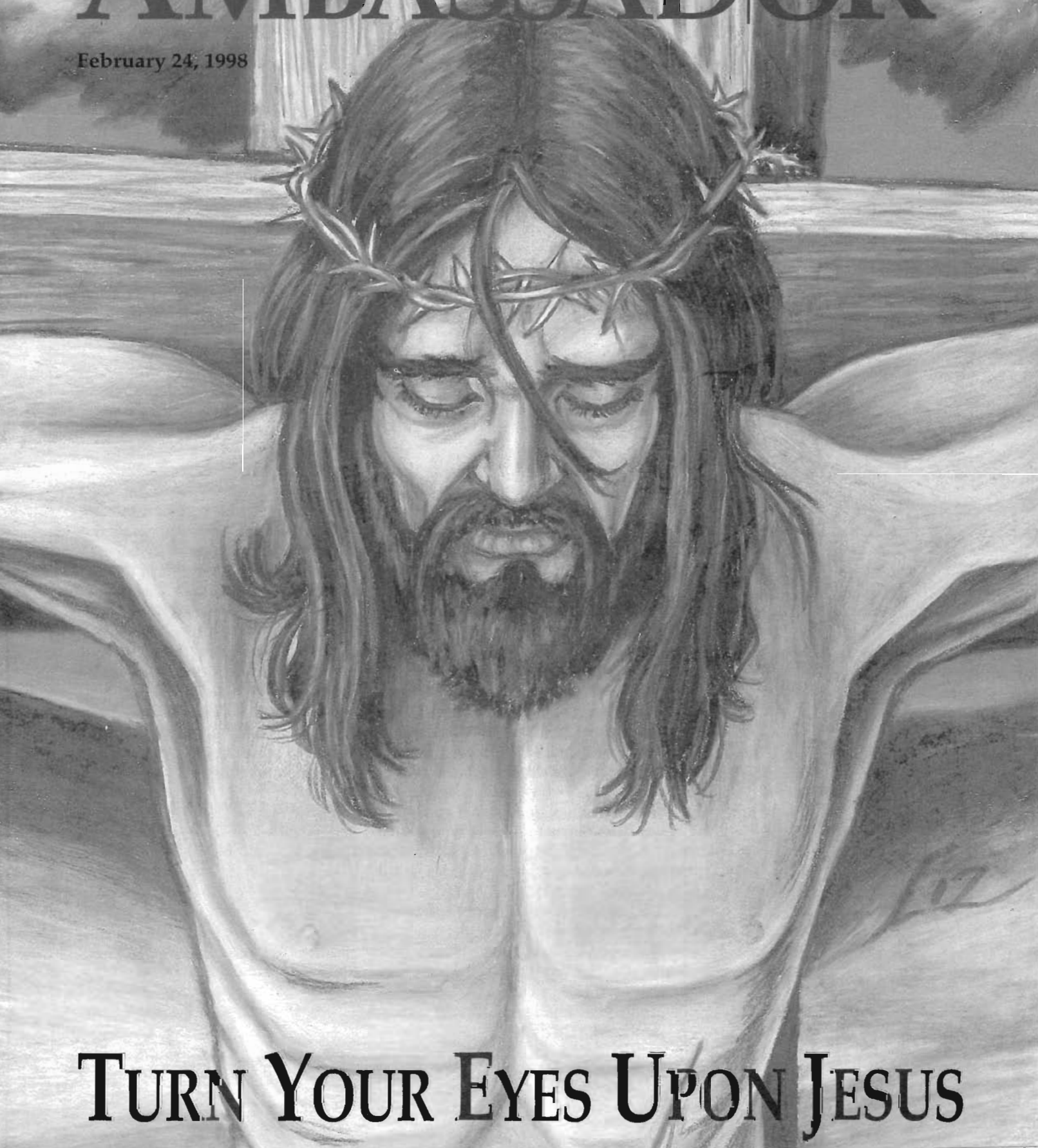


The Lutheran **AMBASSADOR**

February 24, 1998



TURN YOUR EYES UPON JESUS

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

February 24, 1998
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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 423, Faith, SD 57626; (605) 967-2381; fax (605) 967-2382; e-mail craigj@teleport.com
solveighj@gwtc.com

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AN ENCOURAGING WORD

Gems from James

He (God) chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created (James 1:18).

W

We are looking at the gems in James and what a gem we have in this verse! God chose to give us the new birth in Christ Jesus.

Similarly, Peter wrote: *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God (1 Peter 1:18-19, 23).*

James spoke about us being a kind of firstfruits; the fruit that is ready to harvest before the main harvest. The firstfruits were dedicated to God, trusting that the greater harvest was soon to follow. We, as Christians, are designed to be the special possessions of God and the pledge of a redeemed race. As firstfruits, there will be evidence of our faith relationship with our Creator.

The Word of God which is sown in our hearts for our salvation is the same Word which produces fruit in our Christian life. What are some of the first fruits? In James 1:19, we are told to *take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.*

We are to be quick to listen to the Word of God for our salvation and as our way of life. Martin Luther wrote of the Third Commandment, "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise His Word and the preaching of the same, but deem it holy, and gladly hear and learn it." It is normal for the Christian to take every

opportunity for learning more truth, to listen again and again to the divine message.

We are to be slow to speak. The human ego says, "I don't know what the Bible says, but I think!" To be slow to speak means to humbly take the position of a learner. To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, *If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32).*

Finally, we are to be slow to become angry. When discussing the Christian faith, many of the discussions have been lost due to our getting angry. I had a member who prided himself that he could so quickly get himself into arguments concerning the Bible. Too often, the saying is true: "You may win the battle but lose the war!" In most cases, anger does not reflect the character of God. James knew that *man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires (1:20).*

The Word of truth is the means of grace to become one of His children. This means of grace empowers us to live as His children. Are you God's child? Then His fruit will be reflected in the way you listen, speak, and react.



— Pastor Jerry Peterson
First Lutheran Church
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

sound bites

"True theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ. ... It is not

1 sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross."

— Martin Luther

"I must die if I am to live, even as Christ went through the

4 death of the cross to the resurrection. The Law must destroy all my pride and self-righteousness, and the Gospel must make me glory in nothing 'save the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.'"

— Herman A. Preus

6

"God gives where He finds empty hands."

— Augustine of Hippo

2 **"To love a person means to see him as God intended him to be."**

— Fyodor Dostoevsky

"By the atoning death of His Son God has removed that which hindered Him

3 *from forgiving His enemies. Now God can, unhindered and unbound, overwhelm His enemies with His boundless love."*

— O. Hallesby

"When I approach the cross on Golgotha and see Him dying because of my sin, then I dare to believe the incomprehensible. Then I dare to say from a trembling heart, truly, He first loved me!"

— H. E. Wisløff

5

Looking at God

through the prism

of the Cross

As has been said, "History is HIS STORY," and His story is my story. And at the heart and core of His story is the cross. When light shines through a prism, its hidden beauty is unveiled. The cross is the prism which helps us see God in all His beauty.

The cross reveals the heart and will of God far better than anything ever devised by the human mind. Romans 1:18-32 says that every person in this world knows about God through His creation, but they do not honor Him as God, or give Him thanks, and so their foolish hearts were darkened. The light going through the prism of creation becomes distorted and blurry due to our sinful hearts.

I grew up in Southern California, and was involved in scouting. I did not have the advantage of growing up in a Christian home, and had only a limited experience in Sunday school. But hiking and camping in the mountains and deserts around me, I knew there was a God, there had to be one. Sitting at the tree line in the spring in the midst of the snow-capped mountains, and viewing the sun reflecting off of the crystal clear mountain lake at sunrise, I was awestruck by its beauty. God's creation had convinced me that a God existed, but I only knew about Him. Just as I only know about the President, but can't say I know him personally, so I only knew about God, but didn't know Him personally.

Then God changed my life. He used the circumstances of having to get a form signed by the pastor of a church in order to advance to an Eagle Scout to bring me to Himself. I came out of my own selfish desire, but He met me with His powerful Word. Through some of the things the Lutheran pastor said in his messages, and through repeating the liturgy, I had to ask myself some questions. "Who is this Jesus Christ? Is He really God's Son, God and man, as the Bible says He is? Did He really

die on the cross to take my place, and is He the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? Did He take away my sin?"

I concluded that He was who He said He was, and did what the Bible said He did. I believed in Christ as my Savior and Lord, and surrendered my life to Him.

The light of the gospel shining through the prism of the cross showed me the heart of my Savior. He loves me and everyone in this world so much He was willing to die for us. The gospel also revealed the Holy Spirit who dwells in me, and the Father who sent the Son. He who has seen Jesus has seen the Father. Because Jesus went to the Father after the cross, the Holy Spirit abides in us. I now view God and my life through the cross.

As I entered UCLA and was involved in Christian organizations on campus, my spiritual life flourished. I memorized a verse then which has become my life verse: *I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me* (Galatians 2:20).

I realize that God works through me, and expresses His life through me. Sometimes like a scratched up prism, I reflect the Savior poorly due to my sinful thoughts, words and deeds. Yet I thank the Lord that weak as I am, God's power is made perfect in weakness. My goal is to avoid sin, and allow Christ to shine through me. He can take our weaknesses and display His power through them. Realizing this, I say with John the Baptist, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

When I entered the ministry, I dedicated my life to proclaiming the wonders of the cross. It has been the constant theme of my preaching. Along with Paul, I understand that "Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified ..." (1 Corinthians 1:22-23). As we keep the cross central, we keep Christ central. His was the life of a servant. As we see the cross as central to our life, our lives will become like Jesus' life, one of a servant. Jesus "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

History is His story. His story is my story. May His story be your story as you look at God at work through you through the prism of the cross.

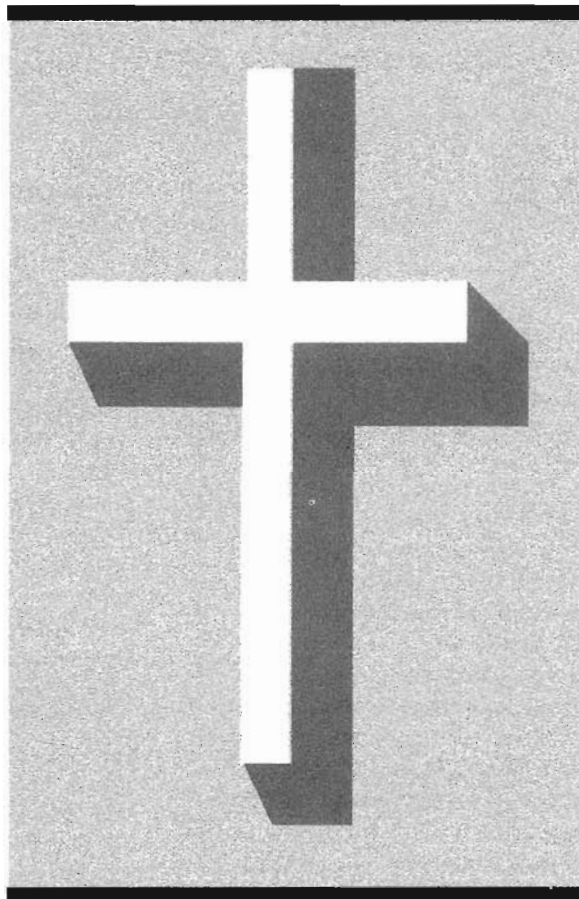


— Pastor Ken Wilsdon
Bethlehem Evangelical
Lutheran Church,
Calgary, Alberta
Vice president of the
AFLC in Canada.



In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.

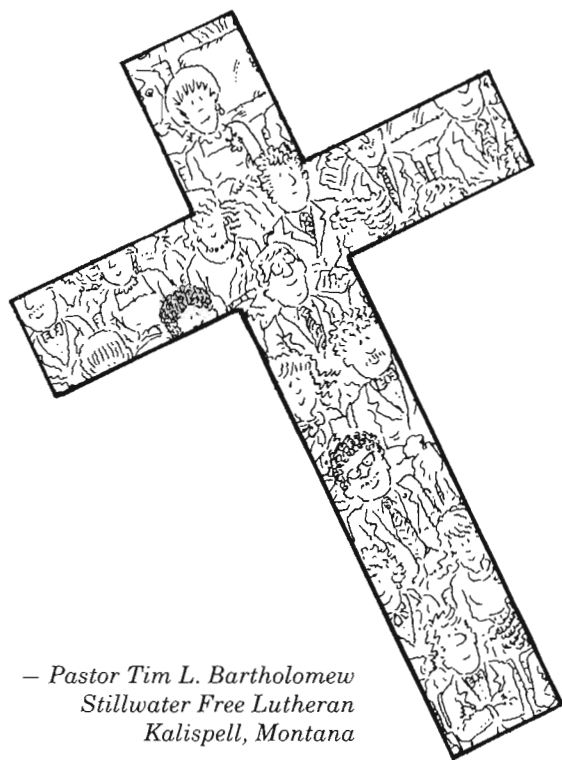
When the woes of
life o'ertake me,
Hopes deceive, and
fears annoy.
Never shall the cross
forsake me;
Lo! it glows with
peace and joy.



When the sun bliss
is beaming
Light and love
upon my way,
From the cross the
radiance streaming
Adds new lustre
to the day.

Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,
By the cross are sanctified;
Peace is there that knows no measure,
Joys that thro' all time abide.

— John Bowring
Ambassador Hymnal, No. 6



— Pastor Tim L. Bartholomew
Stillwater Free Lutheran
Kalispell, Montana

Viewing others with a cross perspective



Today I looked in the mirror. Just a quick check to make sure that I had it “together.” Then I noticed that while I was in sharp focus, others in my peripheral vision were distorted shapes in the background. In a similar way when I am too greatly focused on myself, other people appear petty, offensive and irritating. I am embarrassed to be around them because they are just not as sharp as I am.

By contrast, Jesus looked at people through eyes of love. On the cross He saw and met the emotional and material needs of His mother, Mary. Surely His own circumstances would have excused him for ignoring them. Yet He chose to teach us that caring is not mere emotion, it is action.

As a follower of Jesus Christ, I dare not look at others from my point of view. Taking up my cross, following Jesus (Matthew 16:24,25) and being crucified with Him (Galatians 2:20), requires that I see others from the vantage point of the cross.

Jesus lived with a cross-perspective every day. Ministering without being condescending, He associated with lost people, not focusing on their deeds. Instead, He saw their need and touched them, made friends with them, and brought them into the kingdom.

A few years ago, I had to ask myself some painful questions about my role in reconciling lost people to God. “Are the lost comfortable being around me? Do worldly

people like to spend time with me because they are drawn by the presence of Christ in me?” The answer was unsettling when I realized I had often mistaken an obnoxious attitude on my part for Holy Spirit conviction on their part. Sometimes people avoided me, not because I was glowing with godliness, but because I was oozing with smug self-righteousness.

Struggling with this, I read over again the Gospel of John. The garden-variety, lost sinners flocked around Jesus as they were invited to enter into the kingdom. They were drawn to His righteousness as strongly as they were repelled by the religious leaders of the day. They found what they were searching for in Christ.

Compare this with Jesus’ stinging criticism of religious people found in Matthew. This soul-shaking revelation forced me to temper my ministry of reconciliation with a healthy dose of compassion. Lost people, who were always **they** have become **we**. I have learned to be broken by God to the point of weeping for the lost, to grieve in my spirit for those wounded in battle with the forces of hell.

You and I cannot be effective ambassadors for Christ as long as we see lost people as substandard human beings. We (the Church, the Body of Christ) are called to be a M.A.S.H. unit, putting ourselves in the way of danger in order to protect and care for those who have been wounded in the war with Satan. Our orders are to carry on warfare with Satan in the spiritual realm, not to further punish his victims (Ephesians 6:10-18).

The Holy Spirit convicts people of sin. We are commissioned to proclaim and live the good news of salvation for all who believe, everywhere we go. Since wounded people are often uncomfortable coming to the church building, we might have to go to parties, libraries, overpasses, nursing homes, parks and beaches if we want to minister to them.

Keep reading the Gospel of John. You might notice that Jesus did much of His ministry in these same places. If God moves you to minister this way you should be aware that Jesus was highly criticized and crucified by religious people.

Is it worth the risk? Ask your heart as it rejoices with the angels in heaven when one soul finds salvation in Jesus.

Now, when I look at others from a cross-perspective, I often catch a glimpse of Jesus reflected in their eyes.



Focus on the significant

— Hope Dyrud Unverzagt
Grace Lutheran Church
DeKalb, Illinois

I could have been distracted by preparations for a lovely Easter dinner for the next day or flustered with the unexpected guests (delighted as I was), but all concerns of a superficial nature were slowly draining away.

Hour after hour went by and still my four-day-old baby refused to eat.

She was my only concern as we drove to the emergency room and watched doctors and nurses perform dozens of tests on our newborn. It's strange how quickly the things that seem important fade in light of the things that really are important.

Sigre spent the next ten days in the hospital connected to an IV chip and a heart monitor. I made many trips to the hospital daily to feed her, and spent most nights on a fold-out bed near her. I mentally watched our hospital bill soar and with each day my heart ached even more to bring my baby home where she belonged with the rest of the family. I longed to hold her without all those wires and without having to weigh her before and after each feeding.

Perhaps that week and a half could easily have turned into a bad memory and an excuse to become depressed or angry with God at the unfairness of life, but instead it became an incredible testimony of His faithfulness.

Several weeks earlier, my sister, Ingrid had called me from AFLBS with an exciting announcement, "I'm coming to spend two weeks with you when the baby is born. I'm supposed to be going on choir tour, but the Lord has given me no peace about it. I really feel it's the Lord's will for me to be with you instead." I was thrilled! But why would someone give up a trip to California on choir tour?

I don't have particularly difficult recoveries after childbirth, but extra help is always nice, I thought. The Lord saw the big picture, however, and Ingrid was able to tend to our four other children during the entire time Sigre was in the hospital. I don't know what we would have done without her! The Lord continued to amaze us by providing money to meet our hospital bills! Sigre recovered from her infection and we've shared of the Lord's faithfulness to us many times since then. It was worth it!

Our outlook is really determined by our

purpose in life. We can fall apart at every inconvenience and difficulty, or we can realize God is shaping us and teaching us that serving Him is the only thing that matters. And what better time to be reminded of this than during the Lenten Season when our attention is turned once again to the unbelievable sacrifice — Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. He paid in full the penalty for our sins so that we could live with freedom, looking forward to an eternity with the Lord. In I Corinthians 2:2 Paul writes, *I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.* The cross means everything. It gives meaning to life. It takes our eyes off ourselves and onto Jesus.

I recall a story I heard when I was young that made quite an impression on me. It was about a man who found life too difficult to be worth living. Since he was an avid swimmer, he chose the pool as the place where he would end it all. Late one night, when he knew the pool would be empty of water, he climbed the highest diving board. He stood with his arms outstretched prepared to dive to his death. The moonlight poured into the dark pool room, and as the man glanced across the room he noticed his shadow on the opposite wall. It was in the shape of a cross. Slowly the disillusionment of his life faded as the great significance of the cross flooded over him. He climbed down the ladder and fell to his knees before the Lord.

Our lives, filled with all their empty endeavors, really aren't worth living — except for the cross.

**I take, O cross, thy shadow
For my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than
The sunshine of His face;
Content to let the world go by,
To know no gain or loss,
My sinful self my only shame,
My glory all the cross.**



— Elizabeth C. Clephane
Ambassador Hymnal No. 62

How the cross
affects the way
I view myself

I cup
my
hands

W

While visiting the secondhand book corner in our neighboring town the other day, I found this verse in a book of poetry by Anne Frear entitled *Savior of Love*,

*On Easter morning
Lilies
Cover the Cross and
The anguish of Good Friday.
As I gaze on the Cross
My heart aches painfully
For the truth of it all
Is Christ suffered for me;
Oh Savior of love
Make me worthy of Thee!*

It's a fitting inspiration for the topic "How the cross affects the way I view myself." I cherish the words of hymns of how the cross enlightens and gives direction to life. No greater love can be expressed than as written in Romans 5:8: *But God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* He paid the price with His precious blood for my salvation and total well-being. The familiar words from the hymn *Rock of Ages* state the truth: "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling."

I cup my hands to receive His **providence**.

First John 2:12 says, *I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.* I can view myself as redeemed and forgiven, and then I'm enabled to share the same measure of forgiveness to others!

I cup my hands to receive His **pardon**.

What a privilege to spend those rich and blessed moments at the cross. I am promised in Philippians 4:7: *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.* Christ's peace meets all the wants of the soul.

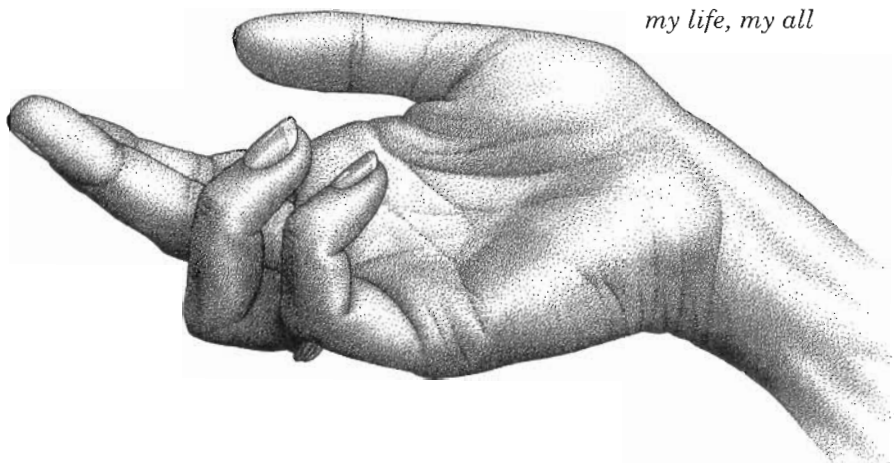
I cup my hands to receive His **peace**.

My heart is grateful for God's providence, pardon and peace, giving purpose to life. *And you are complete in Him* (Colossians 2:10a). God desires to bring all of who He is, to bear on all of who I am.

Twenty-two years ago I stood at a "Y" in my life's road. I thought my faith was strong, but then God gave us our handicapped baby. My pride needed to be broken and I needed to adjust my values according to God's perspective. In the midst of that turmoil, the cross stood in the center. It became my anchor. It focused my faith, weak as it was. The cross became more precious than ever before. Now over two decades later, I see how our Mary teaches me the simplicity and joy of seeing the cross. She simply kneels at the cross while I struggle trying to reason out so many things. Her sensitive, loving, and forgiving spirit illustrate truly what it is to be a Christian. God does all things well.

I cup my hands to receive His **purpose**.

My cup overflows. It is "*Love so amazing, so divine,*" it "*Demands my soul, my life, my all*"



— Laurel Johnson
Maranatha Free Lutheran
Spring Lake Park, Minnesota

AFLC Pastors' Conference

The ones who encourage others were invited to come together under the theme "encourage one another" at the 1998 AFLC Pastors' Conference at the ARC in Oseola, Wisconsin, January 20-22.

Two events preceded the conference at the ARC. One was the second annual youth workers' retreat, a time for the growing number of youth workers in AFLC congregations to gather together for refreshment, encouragement and instruction. On January 19 and 20 the pastors of AFLC home mission congregations gathered for a time of sharing, praying, worshipping and studying the Word of God together.

The pastors' conference itself began on Tuesday evening, January 20 with a service of Holy Communion and a message shared by AFLC President Robert Lee.

During the day on Wednesday, January 21, Bible study hours were led by Pastor Jerry Holmaas, a professor at the AFLC schools. The focus of the studies was God's calling of the Old Testament prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel and the encouragement and application they give as God's servants consider their calling today.

Pastor Roger Charman of the Pastoral Outreach Department of Focus on the Family shared twice on Wednesday and once on Thursday on the condition of the church in America today and what pastors can do to face the challenges.

The Wednesday evening banquet featured sharing by Pastor Norman Thomsen, Minnesota Director of the World Relief Commission, along with two men originally from Sudan. They shared on the plight of refugees who come to this country and some of the struggles Christians face in the midst of severe persecution in Sudan. Compassion and action was called for.

The conference closed on Thursday with a time of sharing about what God has done; a time in which the pastors continued to "encourage one another."

—Pastor Craig Johnson

OUR PRESIDENT WRITES

Looking backward at the budget



Thank you, faithful friends of the AFLC, for your prayers and financial support of our common endeavors during 1997. The final reports are complete, and it is good to see that an average of 95% toward the budget goals was reached. World Missions, Parish Education, the Bible School, and Church Extension exceeded their goals, in fact, with Home Missions and the Seminary not far behind.

The ministries of our AFLC operate totally on a freewill basis. No assessments or even recommended amount for giving are levied on member churches. The Fundamental Principles state (#11) that no burdens shall be laid on individual congregations by conferences, committees, or officers. We seek to strictly follow this principle in all matters, including financial ones. This underlines the vital necessity for AFLC people to be well informed and responsible in their own personal stewardship, as well as the stewardship of their congregations.

There are two aspects of our budget receipts for 1997 that should cause some concern. First, the budget was smaller than the one for 1996, which was reached by a higher percentage and a larger amount of total gifts. The reason for the lower goal is a system adopted by the Budget Analysis Committee which bases the new budgets on the ones from the previous years. This also means that the funds not reaching their goals this past year will be recommended by the committee for lower ones in the new budget submitted to the annual conference in June.

The second concern is the fact that our General Fund only received 76% of its budget goal for 1997. Since our other ministries are served through this fund, plus supporting youth ministries, evangelism, etc., the shortfall becomes a real problem for all areas of our work. Please remember the General Fund in your giving during the coming months, so that this important support ministry might receive the needed funds to continue at current levels and expand to meet the challenges of a growing fellowship.

We look backward at the budget for 1997 and realize, too, that significant financial contributions are not included which would change the total figures for the better. Over sixty thousand dollars were donated for a special flood relief fund that was channeled to our congregations in Grand Forks, North Dakota, and East Grand Forks, Minnesota, to aid the victims of the Red River Valley flooding last spring. Also, all of the designated missionary support for World Missions is not included in their final budget total, which makes the level of support to this area of ministry even more encouraging.

There is another kind of backward looking at budgets, and this is the idea that they represent the maximum needed to support each area of ministry. Wrong! The total approved by conference is a striped-down minimum. To look forward at the budgets means that our goal should always be to exceed them.

We are debtors, giving in grace because so much has been given to us. Pray that the Lord will continue to provide for His ministries through His people and that your own soul might be stirred to ask, "What can I do?"

*Yours for free and living congregations,
Pastor Robert L. Lee*

AFLC schools missions conference

T They kneeled in circles on the cherry-colored carpet in front of the Medicine Lake Chapel.

It was Thursday night, about 9:15 p.m., and many of the 140 AFLBS students taking the two-week inter-term session on Missions and Evangelism had come to pray after the final evening session with AFLC missionary Todd Schierkolk. Some students huddled and wept. Several hunched forward with their elbows and head on the carpet.

"I want to be a part of the generation that brings Jesus back," said one AFLBS student, Annie Olson, 19, of Fosston, Minnesota. "I don't want to break His heart and force him to raise up another generation to do the job we were called to do."

Among the many images that picture the powerful impact of the two-week missions conference at the AFLC campus, held January 5-17, the Thursday night scene strikes the memory. AFLC missionaries to Mexico, Pastor Todd Schierkolk and Dan Giles were two speakers among many who touched the heart of students. AFLBS students also had morning sessions with Home Missions Director Paul Nash and World Missions Director Gene Enderlein. Seniors took a course in Cults and Isms during the week.

For the first time at AFLBS, the conference was incorporated as part of the two-year Bible school's curriculum. The two-week inter-term focused on evangelism.

"I feel like it was the breakthrough I was waiting for," said Pastor James L. Johnson, the AFLBS Dean. "I've been praying that this young group of believers would step forward in commitment, sold out, willing to make a break for the Lord."

Morning classes ended with an 11 a.m. chapel service each day, featuring born-again leaders from cross-cultural groups in Minneapolis. Chapel speakers included Messianic Jewish believer Ed Rothman, pastor of Seed of Abraham in Minneapolis; Haas Hirji-Walji of Building Bridges, Inc., who shared about reaching Muslims with the gospel of Jesus; Wycliffe missionary Dan Jore, who made a presentation on Bible translation to unreached tribes; and Floyd Beacham, a black pastor in north Minneapolis, who struck a chord with seminary and AFLBS students.

Haas, a former Muslim from Uganda who was led to Christ as a high school student in the 1970s, stirred students with a message about the American apathy for reaching the fast-growing population of Muslims migrating to the U.S.

Before each evening service, AFLC missionary Dan Giles led a discussion hour, sending students in huddles to talk through issues of the great commission of Jesus. The discussions made students think. Said junior Josh Carlson, of Badger, Minnesota, "When Pastor Giles asked us if we truly believe in Jesus, and that those don't believe will go to hell, I felt so ashamed. If we truly believe, how could we possibly not tell them?"

Another unforgettable image was Wisconsin pastor, Tom Olson, sharing Tuesday night about the new AFLC mission project in Naknek, Alaska. Olson urged students to consider praying for or going to the village over the river, South Naknek, where no missionary has lived for 50 years. "If you live with them, if you eat what they eat,

if you help them bury their dead and be with them when their babies are born," he said, "they will listen to you when you talk about Jesus." Pastor Olson and his family will move this summer to Naknek to serve the mission. Following that service, 25 AFLBS students met with Olson in the balcony to pray on their knees for the people of South Naknek. Olson wept.

But most difficult to forget was the Thursday night service. Before Schierkolk spoke, students watched a "Generations" video showing thousands of Korean teens standing in a pledge to give one full year overseas as evangelists for Jesus. After a message by Schierkolk from Psalm 96 (*Tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples*), the call went out to the 170 in attendance, "Why should only the Korean students get a chance to make such a commitment?" The leader asked students willing to pledge one summer of their life for evangelism to come forward and kneel at the altar. Approximately 40 students came forward, praying for each other, in four large circles. The leader also asked students who, like the Koreans, would pledge one year of their life for overseas evangelism to go up to the balcony and pray with Dr. Monseth. "More than 30 students came to pray," said Dr. Monseth.

Several students testified the next day:

- "The missions conference really opened my eyes to what work is so desperately needed for the harvest," said junior Tim Borg, 19, of Cokato, Minnesota.

- "I don't see how a Christian can keep Jesus to themselves," said Brandon Pangman, a junior from Montgomery, Illinois. "We must go out and spread the Word to the blind."

- "The week may have been the reason I came to Bible school," said Rhoda Monseth, Rogers, Minnesota. "I felt a call to go into foreign missions ... and I can't wait to see where God is going to send me."

- "All I know is that I cannot just live my life, get a job, and die,"

Missionaries Paul and Becky Abel, Santa Felicidade, Brazil, finished 1997 with a flurry of activity. They hosted Arnie Anderson and four youth from Cokato, Minnesota for a two-week taste of mission life. In January, Heidi Quam returned from her visit to Ecuador and began helping the Abel children with their American studies after their "summer vacation" ended. The Abels request prayer for renewed vision and strength for the ministry in their congregations and at the ARCA.

Aguascalientes, Mexico — Spring of Living Water congregation enjoyed a Christmas evangelistic drama written by one of the members, Marcela Lozano, and performed by the youth group. They are mothering a new congregation in nearby Palomino and rejoice that they are close to purchasing land for a new church building.

said Andrea Valdez, a junior from Maple Grove, Minnesota.

• "The missions conference has opened my eyes," said Jennifer Peterson, Elk Mound, Wisconsin, a student who walked forward to pledge time to serve in evangelism for Christ. "If it wasn't for this conference, I know that I wouldn't have admitted to myself that God wants me to go. It showed me that I feel a call to go to another country to share His gospel."

• "God really worked among our students," said Amy Klinkel, a junior from Lake Preston, South Dakota. "The conviction I felt laid on my heart was that I need to first be concerned with the lost souls all around me in my own country, at my job, in my family, old high schools, etc. There are so many people here that I should be praying for and trying to reach."

• "The Lord has called me to the mission field," said Dan Keinanen, Cloquet, Minnesota. "It's **time** to go out and share this secret with all the nations."

— *Pastor James. L. Johnson*
AFLBSdean

Mission opportunities

FLY Team to Brazil is again being scheduled for next summer. Team size needed is about five members with at least two young men. Estimated cost is \$2,500, including travel, living and project expenses. For more information,

contact Youth Director Kevin Olson at (612) 544-5631.

Partners in Mission Outreach bus is scheduled to depart from northern Minnesota for Obregon, Mexico, on March 13-26. For more information call (218) 782-2456.

MEMORIAL GIFTS

December 1997

Name	Given By	Department
Marvin and Margaret Tande Robert Merchant	Dean/Eileen Iverson Ken/Mary Nash and Adeline Syvertson and Milford Flag and LeRoy Jost	FLS Home Missions
Eleanor Lee Virginia Olson Elsie Farb Rev. Hans Tollefson and Bruno Liimatainen Pastor/Mrs. Ernest Langness Rev. Hans Tollefson and Rev. John Strand	Mr/Mrs. Otto Seidelman Roger/Maxine Rasmussen Gordon/Doris Newell Paul/Elaine Eliason	FLS
Alpha Huus Dorothy Doran Russ Bergstrom Mark Kjos Alma Hegseth	Mr/Mrs. Anchor Harbo Pastor/Mrs. Harvey Jackson Lyell/Lois Johnson Pastor/Mrs. Wayne Hjermstad Duane/Susan Haugen Ken/Kathi Anderson Delbert/LuVern Jones Tim/Mary Jones Lois Oscarson Ken/Mary Nash Robert/Carol Dietsche Ken/Mary Nash Roger/Lois VanSomeren James/Gail Peterson Gordon/Doris Newell Friends	Various depts. AFLBS Vision 2004 AFLBS Home Missions Home Missions AFLBS General Fund World Missions
Margaret Dietsche		
Harvey Underdahl Darlene Quanbeck Vido Strand Erling Skarderud Carol Nels James	Muriel Underdahl Duane/Kristi Twedt Thomas/Marion Stockeland Edna Skarderud Aini Myking Pastor/Mrs. Laurel Udden Mr/Mrs. James Boe Marlene Unverzagt Friends and Family Esther Larson Friends and family Ernest/Darlene Miedema Pastor/Mrs. John Skeie Larry Walker Mr/Mrs. Rick Rasmussen Mr/Mrs. Otto Seidelman Beatrice Anderson Pastor/Mrs. Donald Richman Gary/Lucinda Haug Pastor/Mrs. Eugene Enderlein Carter/Kristin Nickolay Friends and family	General Fund General Fund FLS Home Missions World Missions AFLBS

Pastor Tim Hinrichs, Cesky Tesin, Czech Republic, continues to serve in nearby Trinec where the church is desiring to rebuild an old movie theater for use as a ministry center. The Hinrichs work with the youth and an adult Sunday school class in the congregation, whose senior pastor is Stanislov Pietak. Besides their work in Trinec, they are preparing for the opening of a Lutheran Bible school in Poland, leading weekend retreats, seminars, and university classes. The Hinrichs plan to return to the States for a three and a half month furlough next summer.

FLS receives funds

Lutheran Brotherhood recently gave Free Lutheran Seminary \$2,325 through their Member Matching Gift program. The latest payment matches 25 gifts from Lutheran Brotherhood members made during the fourth quarter of 1997. This program matches members' gifts of \$25 to \$100 per year to Lutheran seminaries nationwide.

Eden, South Dakota — Buffalo Lake Lutheran hosted the third annual Norwegian Christmas Service last December. The service was conducted in Norwegian which included the playing of the historic pump organ. Buffalo Lake is part of the Lake Region Parish served by Pastor Lynn Wilson.

Astoria, Oregon — The Pacific Northwest District Bible Conference will be held at Bethany Lutheran during March 6-8. Pastor Dan Giles, missionary to Mexico will be the guest speaker. The theme is "Raise Up a Vision for the Lost." The district's Women's Missionary Federation Spring Rally will lead off the conference on March 6.

Loveland, Colorado — Lutheran Church of Hope is only three years old, but God has poured financial blessings on them in the form of special gifts from within the congregation and through the AFLC Home Missions department. They currently have over \$600,000 in assets and are seeking approval from the city to purchase property

for their church. The congregation's pastor, Larry Haagenon said, "We've just been praying so far and God has been answering. But we weren't expecting this delay of red tape from the city." In the meantime, Lutheran Church of Hope continues to rent a funeral chapel for their worship services. The pastor added: "We are soon to take in three new family units as members and I'm encouraged with their desire to grow in the Lord."

Our congregation has a mission outlook and perhaps the Lord will someday allow us to mother another congregation in this rapidly growing area near the Rocky Mountains. But for now we have to patiently wait on the Lord." Pray with Lutheran Church of Hope that God's will might be done.

Pastor Norman Dornquist, Weslaco, Texas has announced his retirement effective next June. He has served Faith Lutheran since 1975 and has been a part of the AFLC since 1988. He expects to live in retirement in Arkansas.

Dear members and friends of the AFLC

On behalf of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Zumbrota, Minnesota, and the congregations of the Tri-State District, we are happy to invite you to the 36th Annual Conference of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, June 17-21, 1998, in Red Wing, Minnesota.

The general sessions and worship services will be held in the Red Wing High School Auditorium. This beautiful facility, built in 1995, has a spacious auditorium with comfortable air-conditioned theater seating, a large cafeteria from which we will serve noon luncheons, and adequate classrooms to meet the needs of the various committees.

Red Wing is a picturesque community, located on the banks of the Mississippi River. Its wooded hills and bluffs, historic homes, and unique shops attract a large number of tourists. The setting for this year's conference will be one we hope everyone will enjoy.

We have "blocked" a large number of motel and hotel rooms in Red Wing and the surrounding communities. It is the personal responsibility of all planning to attend to make your own reservations and to do so as soon as possible. Please refer to the lodging information in this issue and be sure to mention that you are attending the AFLC

annual conference.

Most of the motels have agreed to hold the blocked rooms for us until one month before the conference. After that they will be released to the general public. Every effort is being made to make your time at the conference as physically comfortable as possible. In order for us to plan with the caterers or restaurants for various meals, it is important to pre-register with the form available in the April 28 issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador*. Those who are flying in to the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and need ground transportation will need to let us know.

While we look forward to serving you, our greatest desire is to honor our Lord Jesus. We encourage every congregation to participate and, of course, all of the pastors. The bond of fellowship, which grows at the conferences, the time spent in prayer, and the important business of the Kingdom are all worthy of our participation and effort. May the Lord bless and encourage each of you in making plans to attend this important time together.

In Christ's Service,
Pastor Timothy K. Skramstad and
members of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church
(507) 732-5449

Isanti, Minnesota —
Redeemer Free Lutheran Church has voted to go off home missions aid and home mission status. The young congregation just north of the greater Twin Cities area, in the Isanti-Cambridge community, is served by Pastor Jim Haga.

Melbourne, Florida —
Abiding Word Lutheran recently went off home mission aid. This young congregation on the eastern coast of Florida, is served by Pastor David Barnhart, who also works as Director of Abiding Word Ministries.

Naknek, Alaska — Brent Logeman, a layman from Metropolis, Illinois, plans to serve the mission congregation from March through June until the arrival of Pastor Tom Olson and his family.

1998 AFLC Annual Conference Lodging

Call to make your own reservations. For conference rates, identify yourself as attending the AFLC Annual Conference. If using the 800 numbers, you may only get a central number and need to contact the motel itself.

Red Wing

Historic St. James Hotel	\$80-165
406 Main Street	
800-252-1875	
Days Inn	\$51-72
Highways 61 & 63	
800-325-2525-or-612-358-3568	
Super 8	\$62-75
232 Withers Harbor Drive	
800-800-8000-or-612-388-0491	
Rodeway Inn	\$50-60
Hwy 63 & Withers Harbor Drive	
800-228-20000-or-612-388-1502	
AmericInn	\$53-83
1819 Old West Main Street	
800-634-3944-or-612-385-9060	
Best Western Quiet House	\$65-125
Hwy 61 & Withers Harbor Drive	
800-528-1234	
Parkway	call for rates
3425 Hwy 61 North	
800-762-0934	
Candlelight Inn	\$85-145
721 East Avenue	
612-388-3315	
Pratt Tabber Inn	\$120
706 West Fourth Street	
612-388-5945	

Hastings - 20 minutes north of Red Wing

Hearthwood Inn	\$80-120
17650 - 200th Street	
612-437-1133	
AmericInn	\$60-72
612-437-8877	
Super 8	\$48-53
612-428-8888	
Hastings Inn	\$49
612-437-3155	
Country Inn & Suites	\$45
612-437-8870	

Welch - 10 miles west of Red Wing

Hungry Point Inn	\$80-120
One Olde Deerfield Road	
612-388-7857	

Zumbrota - 20 minutes south of Red Wing

Super 8	\$49
507-732-7852	

Lake City - 15 miles south of Red Wing

AmericInn Motel	
\$49.90-74.90	
1615 North Lakeshore Drive	
800-634-3344	
Lake Aire Motel & Cabins	\$21
917 North Lakeshore Drive	
612-345-4586	
Lake City Country Inn	\$45
1401 North Lakeshore Drive	
612-345-5351	
Lake Pepin Lodge	\$79.90-93.90
1737 North Lakeshore Drive	
800-644-2700	
Sunset Motel & Resort	\$50 plus
North Lakeshore Drive	
800-945-0192	

Campgrounds

Island Campground & Marina	
6 Blocks North of US 61 & MN 58	
2361 Hellquist Avenue	
Red Wing - 715-792-2502	
Hay Creek Valley Campground	
RR 4 - Red Wing - 612-388-3998	
Lake Pepin Campground	
Lake City - 612-345-2901	
Shades of Sherwood Camping Park	
14334 Sherwood Trail	
Zumbrota - 507-732-5100; 612-258-4640 (off season)	
Frontenac State Park	
City. 28 Blvd.	
Frontenac - 612-345-3401	

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. State Department will hire a new coordinator to promote religious freedom around the world, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced.

"I will designate a new senior-level coordinator within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, to ensure that our efforts to advance religious freedom are integrated successfully into our broader foreign policy," said Albright, who added that the new coordinator would work with other government agencies and with religious leaders.

Albright's announcement came with the release of a new report from the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad, established in 1996 to recommend policy relating to the promotion of religious liberty.

The 35-page report urged President Clinton to deliver a "major address explaining the importance of religious freedom at home and abroad." It also encouraged the President to give "greater weight and enhanced importance" to matters of religious freedom in setting U.S. foreign policy, particularly in such areas as foreign aid and military assistance.

The report noted nations around the world where religious persecution is commonplace. "In Vietnam, Buddhists and Christians who act independently of the officially approved temple and church are subject to arrest and harassment," the report said.

In Communist nations, such as China, members of government-registered religious groups have limited freedom, but others, including Tibetan Buddhists, Muslim Uyghurs, unregistered Protestants and Catholics face "widespread harassment, detentions, incarceration, and persecution."

The report added, "The government of North Korea strongly discourages religious activities, unless it serves its purpose. There is a government-sponsored church that is reported to be open only when foreign visitors seek to visit."

The report also singled out Iran for its severe persecution of the Baha'i faith, but noted that Christians, Jews, and others face detention, torture and death in Iran. "The climate of intimidation in Iran has also severely and comparably affected certain Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian communities, whose members have been victims of harassment, persecution and extrajudicial killing," the report noted.

Russia's controversial law limiting religious freedom was noted in the report, which said, "Since its adoption, there have been increasing reports of efforts by local officials to restrict activities of religious minorities." The law was passed at the urging of the Communist-backed Russian Orthodox Church, and imposes sanctions on non-Orthodox faiths.

CHICAGO, Ill. — Teams working to draft a revised proposal for full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Episcopal Church need to pursue clarity and candor, ELCA church leaders told members of the writing teams during a December meeting. The Rev. Thomas A. Prinz, Alexandria, Va., said he hopes "we can assist with the clarity needed to give this agreement a second time at bat." In August the ELCA turned down the original draft of a "Concordat of Agreement," but rededicated the ELCA to work toward that relationship. Church leaders expressed concern that the original draft was hard to understand, and therefore hard to support. The Rev. Todd W. Nichol of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., one of three members of the ELCA writing team, said, "We need to practice honesty. Both churches need to be absolutely clear with each other, so that each fully understands and agrees to the meanings and consequences attached by the other to words and gestures, documents, practices and ritual actions."

OAKLAND, Calif. — Police officers were called to the scene

when a pastor's funeral turned into a free-for-all. The Jan. 13 battle at Restoration Christian Ministries in Oakland, California, involved as many as 40 people from two different churches who had come to the funeral of Bishop DeWynn McGlothlin Sr. Bishop Leslie Edwards, whose sermon was interrupted by the brawl, said he was struck in the head and back with a chair, while other witnesses reported seeing six men swinging chairs, and others punching and kicking one another. There were no arrests or serious injuries. The cause of the fight was not reported.

(The above stories used with permission of the EP News Service.)

Looking for Lent and Easter devotional material?

Martin Luther's Easter Book, edited by Roland H. Bainton is a collection of devotional passages from Luther's Easter sermons. They portray his thoughts on salvation through grace, human imperfection, faith, and the wonder of God. It's illustrated with 18 woodcuts by Virgil Solis, a contemporary of Luther. (\$10.95 from AFLC Parish Education).

Volunteer needed

The Parish Education office is in need of a volunteer to do word processing, entering text verbatim into a computer. This could be done either on your own personal computer or at our offices. Contact Marian at (612) 545-5631 if you are able to serve in this way.

Attention Sunday School Superintendents

Parish Education office is collecting Christmas program ideas to keep on file and make available to other churches in the future. If you have created your own programs, please send a photocopy of your script to Parish Education, 3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 55441.

Watching our pronouns

T“They” is an easy pronoun to use. It isn’t very personal or threatening. It doesn’t make us uncomfortable.

We can talk about how “they” fail and fall so far short. Then we and the one we are talking with look fairly good in comparison. If we keep talking about the problems “they” are causing in the church or in society, the light won’t get shined on us. The more time spent considering the responsibilities “they” have means less time considering our’s.

In Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, the day when the Holy Spirit came upon the early believers, the pronoun that stands out is not “they,” but “you.”

Peter and the others had been cowering behind locked doors. They were fearful there may be a cross waiting for them. Now, after seeing the Resurrected Christ ascend into heaven and having the Holy Spirit empower them, they boldly go out into the crowded city streets and declare, “you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (Acts 2:23, NIV).

If we had been advising Peter before the sermon we may have suggested, “This may not be a receptive crowd. Talk about what ‘they,’ those Romans, those other bad guys did. ‘You’ would be kind of harsh.”

Peter followed the direction of the Lord and used “you.”

It is harsh. It is strong. It is personal. It attacks our self-righteousness and crushes our pride. It says that the one who needed his sins paid for, the one who is responsible for the cross, the one who is as sinful as anyone else, is the one we see when we look in the mirror.

You did it. I did it. You are at fault. I am at fault. It is not just “they” who needed the sacrifice of Jesus’ blood shed on the cross. It is you and me.

The message of the cross can be offensive. People do not like to hear about their guilt and their need. The crowd that was following Him quickly dwindled to a handful when Jesus declared, “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you” (John 6:53, NIV).

The message of the cross is personal. It is not just directed to and relevant for someone else, but for us. It is the heart of the Word of God which “penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints

and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12, NIV).

In Acts 2, as Peter addresses the crowd he is inspired by God to use “you” as he speaks of their guilt and need. We rejoice that he also uses “you” as he describes the promises of God.

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that *your* sins may be forgiven. And *you* will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for *you* ...” (Acts 2:38,39, NIV - italics added). “Even though *you* crucified Him,” Peter declares, “the promise of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit is for *you*.”

Forgiveness is not just for someone else who has done a lot of good things. It is not just for the one who has a clean past. It is for you, when you repent of your sins and believe in Jesus.

The Holy Spirit doesn’t just come to dwell within them. He doesn’t only take up residence in the ones we think have been good. It is not just those who talk and walk like we believe religious people should, who are deemed worthy of His presence.

All who have confessed their sins and are trusting in Jesus are made fit homes for the Holy Spirit by the blood of Jesus. “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” (I Corinthians 3:16, NIV).

If you are in Christ it is not only “they” who are God’s temple and have the Holy Spirit living in them. It is you.

This time of year we call Lent, this time of focusing on the cross and preparing for Good Friday and Easter, is a time to get personal. It is a time to not just think about “them,” but to think about “me.” It is a time for reflecting on and confessing my guilt, to see my responsibility, to face up to the debt I owe.

It is also a time to rejoice and be struck with awe at what the Lord at the cross has done for me. He died for the world, and He also died for me. He forgives my sins. He paid the penalty in full for what I have done. He welcomes me into His Kingdom. He gives me His Holy Spirit. He calls me His child.

He is a personal God, and we each have personal guilt, but He offers a personal gift of love and forgiveness for each person who will receive.

— Pastor Craig Johnson

“The message of the cross is personal. It is not just directed to and relevant for someone else, but for us.”

SOMETHING TO SHARE

When the fish aren't biting

When I was asked to write for this column, I had to honestly admit it had been a long time since I thought I was part of a "fish being caught" — a soul being reached for Christ. Many times I have asked myself what's wrong. Am I out of God's will in some way or is there unconfessed sin in my life? Am I not praying and fasting as God wants me to? Am I not confronting people with God's truth? These are questions that as a pastor I have wrestled with and continue to wrestle with. Maybe you have been through times like this also. Where do I turn when I face such feelings and questions?

I have had times when fishing on the lake was not successful. I would ask others if they were catching anything. Are they fishing weed-lines or running spinner baits over the weeds? What time of day or night are they catching fish? Sometimes one has to take the silver and blue rattlin rap off that has always produced well, and try a new bait. Then there are times one just has to put in the time and keep exploring new areas of the lake to

find where the fish are feeding.

Where are souls hungry today? I hear of Eastern Europe and Russia as places where souls line up to hear of Jesus, not only in churches but also in schools. This leads me to ask a question: Does God want you and me to go somewhere else to find hungry fish?

We do have the Great Commission where we are told to *Go and make disciples of all nations* (Matthew 28:18-20). We know it is God's will to go. Does that mean I need a specific call to go to Russia if God has given a general command to everyone to go?

Consider two things at this point. One, I could not guarantee that you would catch fish if I told you where to fish on a lake. Second, I know I can't interpret God's will for you about where you are to serve Him.

What does all this mean? It causes us to become increasingly dependent on the Lord. Perhaps that is what God wants to teach us all along through the times of few bites. We cannot win souls on our own. All we can do is sharpen our skills and live in dependency on God to use us.

When people around us don't seem to be hungry, try different approaches to sharing your faith. Brush up on the "Romans Road to Salvation" and "Evangelism Explosion." I have found that when I am ready to share and looking for opportunities, once in awhile a soul is a little hungry. As you yield yourself afresh to God, specifically tell Him, "Lord, I'm willing to fish for souls wherever You want me. You are the Fisherman, I am the rod in Your hand with my gifts and talents, and the gospel is the bait. Cast me, Lord, wherever You want. I want to be part of souls being reached for You."



— Pastor Lyndon Korhonen
Good Shepherd Lutheran
Cokato, Minnesota