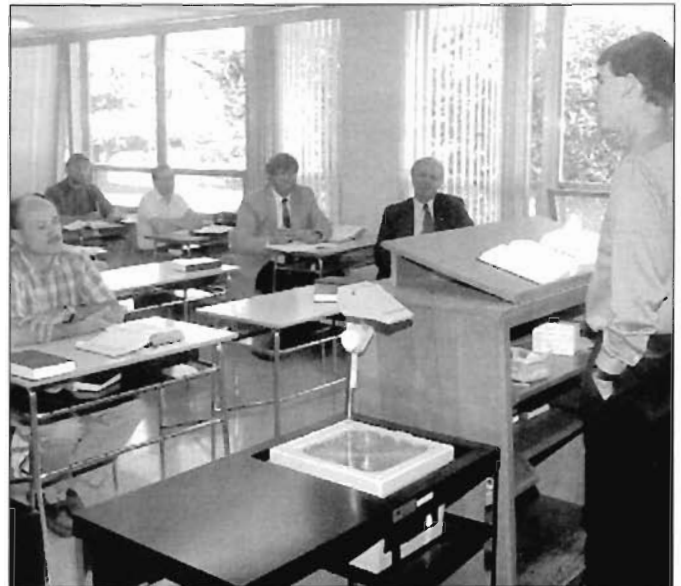


The Lutheran AMBASSADOR

February 3, 1998



The AFLC Schools



making an impact

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

February 3, 1998
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AN ENCOURAGING WORD

He will sustain

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. — James 1:12

Everyone is susceptible to temptation. In fact, James wrote to the overall church to expect it. Temptation can refer to an act of testing (trying) or to entice to evil. It is any life situation in which we must decide for or against God, for good or for evil.

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone (James 1:13). God does not tempt us to do evil. God does test and try the faith of His children for the purpose of purifying and strengthening them. When God tested Abraham, it was not to get him to do evil, but to test Abraham's loyalty and to purify and strengthen his faith. God permitted Job to be tried for the purpose of proving and purifying his faith. Job gave a powerful testimony in the midst of his suffering as he declared, "I know that my Redeemer lives!" We can be assured that, *God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it* (I Corinthians 10:13).

What God intends to test our faith, the devil uses to destroy our faith!

Explaining the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, Luther wrote, "God indeed tempts no one; but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us nor seduce us into disbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice; and though we be assailed by them, that still we may finally overcome and obtain the victory."

It has been said, "We have found the enemy and the enemy is us!" Not only does Satan tempt us to

do evil, but we too may be our own worst enemy. James wrote, *Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death* (James 1:14-15).

When tempted look up. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." There is no shady side of God. He has no hidden agenda to trick us into doing evil. God has our ultimate good in mind! We can trust Him that He allows testing to strengthen and purify our faith and that He will provide what we need when being tempted — as little children, gaze with trusting eyes to the Father.

Henry Blackabee in *Experiencing God*, advises, "Settle in your own mind that God has forever demonstrated His absolute love for you on the cross. That love will never change. When you face situations where God does not tell you what He is doing, acknowledge God's love and sovereignty and depend on His sustaining grace to see you through the situation."



— Pastor Jerry Peterson
First Lutheran Church
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

sound bites

1 “The greatest danger besetting American Evangelical Christianity is the danger of anti-intellectualism. The mind as to its greatest and deepest reaches is not cared for enough. ... The result is that the arena of creative thinking is abdicated and vacated to the enemy.”
— Charles Malik

“If we are not preparing the next governor, novelist, TV anchor, or filmmaker, we can never expect to find a Christian influence in those culture-shaping professions. If those who have a role in Christian higher education would make an uncompromising commitment to excellence with faith that God will help them achieve it, we could see amazing things happen in the lives of our graduates.”
— Bob Briner

6 “No man really becomes a fool until he stops asking questions.”
— Charles P. Steinmetz

2 “To be ignorant and simple now, not be able to meet the enemies on their own ground, would be to throw down our weapons and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen.”
— C. S. Lewis

3 “There is precious instruction to be got by finding we were wrong.”
— Thomas Carlyle

“Nothing is so effectual against the devil, the world, the flesh, and all evil thoughts as to occupy oneself with the Word of God, talk about it, and meditate on it. ... You will never offer up any incense or other savor more potent against the devil than to occupy yourself with God’s commandments and words and to speak, sing, and meditate on them.”
— Martin Luther

5



Seminarian
Steve Carlson.

There's HOPE

SSomeone once said, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Bible students with an appreciation for its application to its original setting will readily agree. Though specific circumstances and application of its principles differ from era to era and place to place, the Bible retains a timeless relevance because people basically are the same.

Travel with me to a culture where corrupt leaders are more concerned for luxury and retaining their place than for integrity. A nation where there is a widening gap between the rich and the poor and where social injustice remains a problem. Where leaders do not think of relying on God in their governing and negotiations with neighboring nations and where politically strong alliances are the order of the day. What religion there is has become widely diverse. New religions from lands far to the east increase in their influence. Others put their faith in superstitions or even magic.

In this land even many spiritual leaders have sold out, compromising the convictions of true faith in God for the temporary comfort promised by wealth and prosperity. Their message is not what the people need, but what they and their leaders want to hear. Adjustments to the world's ways, and to what sells is the order of the day. Resulting is an increasing mass of people who have memory of the religious language and customs of their fathers, but whose daily lives reflect little of that faith.

This description sounds familiar. Similarities can be found in the writings of critics of Western civilization in the last third of this twentieth century. Some are preachers calling men back to God and others are secular historians, philosophers, and journalists who, by identifying modern ills, hope to arrest the downward slide of a civilization threatening to destroy itself.



AFLC School's faculty: (L. to R. row one) Pastors James L. Johnson, Robert Lee, and Jim Johnson; (row two) Mr. Jerry Nelson, Pastor Jerry Moan, Dr. Francis Monseth and Jerry Holmaas.

The library reading room provides a comfortable seminary classroom setting. Insert picture is Old Testament professor, Rev. Jerry Holmaas.



But the civilization described is not the West at the end of the second millennium. It's Judah as depicted by the Hebrew prophet Isaiah seven centuries before Christ.

Isaiah's message helps us see both the hope and relevance of the Bible. There is hope in knowing that our age is really not unique in its practice of wickedness. People have not changed, just found new ways to do old things. But God's people have emerged victorious in the battle with sin.

Isaiah confronted the same problems we face. He possessed solutions to the difficulties of a decaying culture. In studying his message and making appropriate connections to our era, we learn too, that we can make a difference!

We can be salt and light in our communities. The AFLC proclaims the whole truth of God's Word and without shame declares the hope and relevance of Isaiah's message to a decaying world. And in the heart of the AFLC, is our seminary.

We need a strong and stable seminary — one which stands on the infallible truths

of the Bible. Support and pray for our seminary teachers and students. Let them know with letters or phone calls you appreciate the work they're doing and assure them that you are holding them up in prayer. Even ask for a list of the names of the teachers and students so that you may pray for them by name. A monthly love offering to the support of AFLTS will also assure the financial stability for a sound Bible teaching seminary. God has blessed us with our school, but in order for it remain, it needs our prayers and financial support.

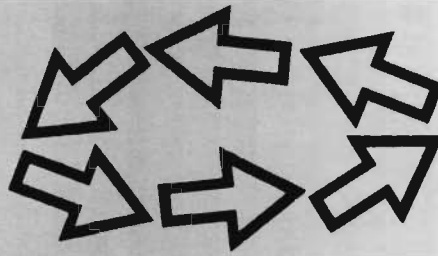
Let us rally in 1998 to support the men who will make a difference in the next century; men of God who will be able to give hope to a struggling world. If we are not faithful to build up, Satan will surely tear down.



— Pastor Alvin Sather
Warroad Free Lutheran
Warroad, Minnesota



The congregation
and the seminary



supporting
one another



The seminary's New Testament professor, Rev. Jerry Moan.

E Empty cupboards, little cash in the wallet and a family to feed. It is a common problem for many of the world's poor. It is also a memory of my childhood growing up in a pastor's family.

My dad was ordained into the ministry the year I was born. I can remember my mother stating there was little to eat while they were in seminary, but they also testified of God's provision for them. On many occasions people were moved to give them something at just the right time. God has promised His children they would have all they need and He really does provide!

Although this occurred 40 years ago in Canada, I don't believe it is much different today for the seminarians living in Minneapolis. They still need the support and encouragement of God's people.

The first obligation of the believer and local congregation is to be in prayer. We are reminded in Matthew 9:37-38 that laborers are few and we are to pray for the Lord to send forth more laborers.

The congregations are also to be instruments of encouragement to those who are called or those who may believe the Lord is leading them into full-time ministry.

The decision to answer the call of God into full-time work requires much time and effort. For most people four years of college is enough. But for a pastor it is just their preliminary education. Seminary is another four-year commitment of time, energy and limited finances. If the future pastor has

**From the
seminary dean,
to the 1965
AFLC annual
conference:**

"Throughout the history of the Lutheran Free Church there was a strong emphasis on the training of pastors. It wasn't enough that pastors have a certain degree or a certain knowledge but they were also to have a certain approach towards and concern for the local Christian congregation. They were to come as servants of the congregation concerned that souls be saved, that Christians be edified, and that all believers do their part in the work of spreading the Gospel. There

was to be the right understanding of correct doctrine and the putting away of that which was false and only of man. There was the simple recognition that unless pastors are trained right, the congregations could not be free and living. Therefore the heart of the church in many respects is the theological seminary where pastors are to be trained to be servants of the congregations."

— Pastor John P. Strand

— Erling Langness
Hope Free Lutheran
Ishpeming, Michigan

included AFLBS in his educational plans, he can spend ten years of his life and has yet to be employed in his called profession. The end result is a demanding career with modest earnings. The pastor and his family receive many blessings from God. Do they receive gratitude and blessings from their congregations?

As local congregations, we are fortunate to have the Free Lutheran Seminary in the Minneapolis area to prepare the future generation's pastors. In this day of humanistic, liberal teaching it is an assurance to know that our seminarians are being taught that the Bible is the inerrant, living Word of God.

In the framework of the AFLC, the local congregation has the responsibility to find their future pastor instead of one being sent to them by their synod's leadership. It is gratifying to know that the men from our seminary will be ready to face the challenges waiting in the local congregation.

Our congregations can be of assistance to the seminarians by contributing to the furnishing and building of seminarian housing. The costs of living in the Minneapolis area are much greater than that of many rural areas. It would be of benefit to seminarians to know that the church body cares enough about its future to provide adequate housing for its future ministers.



The 1997-98 FLS faculty and students.

The most important aspect of mutual support must come in the form of prayer. With all the problems of the world and the temptations of life, we as Christians need to be lifting up the names of our clergy and seminarians to the Lord daily. It is also satisfying to note that the seminary is praying for the local congregations.

As we continue to proclaim the good news of Christ's Resurrection and victory, let us lift our hearts to the Lord in thanksgiving for the great things He has done and will also do in the future as He has promised. Future growth in congregations and in our seminary begins on our knees.



Scott Roberts of the Welsh Companies, with Pastor Tonnes Pollestad, Vision 2004 Project Director.

Seminary housing may become a reality!

In the original time table of Vision 2004, seminary housing was not placed at the forefront. But for many years, AFLC people have expressed concern for that need and it may be built sooner than expected.

According to Larry Behne, member of the Board of Trustees, "If the City of Plymouth approves the master plan, the Lord has already provided funds to build a fourplex for married seminary students and their families." David Borg, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, said that pending approval, the housing will go up this fall.

Pastor Tonnes Pollestad, Vision 2004 Project Director, said, "It's exciting to see how God is providing for this need. So many have been concerned over the years and now the dream may soon be a reality."

W

When asked to share my viewpoint on this subject as one of the laymen on the coordinating committee of our AFLC, my first thought was my qualifications, or lack of them, to

put this view into writing. What are the needed credentials of our graduating seminarians or transfer pastors to be accepted into our AFLC?

The calling

A candidate must sense a true calling from God. Romans 10:15 says, *How shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"* I would discourage a person who expresses the shallow admission, "Well, I've been told I talk and sing well, so I thought I would be a pastor." There is a place for this individual (Ephesians 4:11), but probably not as a shepherd of God's sheep.

The life

A perspective pastor should be above reproach if he is to be a mirror of Christ. As we are all admonished in I Peter 2:11,12, *Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles.* A man who has been truly called by God, has the desire to serve Him, and expresses a strong interest in representing our AFLC, must have high personal ideals. He must be a Christlike example for his people and, as all of us, he must have a childlike faith and be inwardly and outwardly a man of integrity. Any embellishment of the truth at any time will be a stumbling block and hinder the work of God's Kingdom.

The attitude

Ideally, a man must have an attitude like John the Baptist when he answered questions as recorded in John 3:30, *He must increase, but I must decrease.* Blended with this humble attitude of John, a pastor should have the assertiveness of Paul when in II Timothy 1:8-12 he declared, *I am not ashamed of the gospel.*

The relationships

How should a pastor relate to people? As a man receives the call and responds by seeking an education and attending seminary, he will already have a feel of what the

What we look

parish work is like. Indeed, it is a humbling experience to be a (servant) pastor. II Timothy 2:24 teaches, *And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition.* This is not an easy task.

At a coordinating committee meeting some time ago, a pastor from another church body was applying for membership in our AFLC. One of the ordained members on our committee explained the pastor/congregation relationship in our fellowship. The candidate acted surprised and appeared to be almost "miffed" as the role of the pastor in the AFLC was described not as that of a dictator, but rather as a teacher, servant of God and a friend. Our seminary gives a strong emphasis on this aspect of the ministry in our AFLC and this will continue to be a strength of our church body. Candidates are consistently questioned regarding their role of being a pastor in relation to the congregation.

I would encourage all first-year pastors

A heart for Estonia, a heart for God

International students contribute much to the life of the seminary, and Pastor Ove Sander of Estonia is no exception. He is doing a year of study which will lead to a master's degree. His wife, Liina, and two children, Samuel and Siimon, are here with him. Faith Lutheran in Minneapolis has opened the apartment in their church to the Sander family.

Ove is only 27 years old, but has

for in a pastor

— Marlin Benrud
Our Saviour's Lutheran
Zumbrota, Minnesota



and those considering a call to a congregation to study the constitution of that church before accepting the call. Many problems could be avoided if everyone understood and followed their constitutions. By the same token, congregations should study and clearly define their constitutions. As the congregation governs itself within our Association

of Free Lutheran Congregations, we support one another and God is magnified. A total picture of educating a pastor ties the principles of Word, the local church constitution and Lutheran doctrine based on biblical teachings all together in one package.

Our congregation in Zumbrota was accepted into the AFLC ten years after the Association was organized. I am constantly amazed at the foresight of those leaders as they preserved the Free Church principles that the congregation is the right form of the Kingdom of God and how they organized the corporations independently of the congregations. May we in the congregations preserve and uphold our freedom and have the ordained pastors join us in continuing under these principles.

What do you look for in a pastor? Each of us probably has a different list. Pastors and lay people, may we look within ourselves and then work side by side to uphold our AFLC.



an interview with Ove Sander

— Louise Burton
FLS librarian and secretary
Plymouth, Minnesota

already had a full and interesting life. He grew up under communism, and had to go to schools where history was falsified and religion debunked. His parents, however, were against the communists and told the true history at home.

"Keep it quiet," he was told.

His family also went to church and celebrated Christmas. These were the quiet ways that the Christian faith was kept alive during communist rule.

Ove was pressured to join communist clubs at school. But the influence of his family as well as a natural feeling of rebellion prevented him. His grandfather had been deported by the communists in 1940 simply because he was wealthy and a foreigner (Danish). To join the communists was to betray his family.

After secondary school, Ove entered college for a degree in sci-

ence. But he quickly saw that this wasn't for him, and instead entered the Institute of Theology in 1988. In his second year he was assigned to Vastseliina, one of the biggest Lutheran congregations in Estonia, with over 1500 members. While there, the senior pastor left and the church asked Ove if he would take the senior pastor's place. Ove consented, and at 20 became the youngest man to be ordained in Estonia. At 27, he is still the youngest ordained Estonian pastor.

Russian was the required second language under the communists. Ove, however, taught himself English from books. This knowledge opened doors to teach English in the local state school. Because of this contact with him, many students became members of his confirmation class at his church.

Ove was asked to take on two other commitments: writing a col-



Pastor Ove Sander

umn for a Christian church newspaper, and assisting in the training of pastors at the Theological Institute in the city of Tallin. It became clear that he needed more training. Through his contact with Dr. Francis

Monseth and Pastor Don Richman, it was decided that the Free Lutheran Seminary would be the best place for him. He arrived in Minneapolis last fall.

These few months have become very significant in Ove's growth as a Christian. He believed in Christ as a child, and became more aware of God through his theological training. But while here, he has come, for the first time, to a full assurance of his faith.

"It was while reading Walther's *Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*" said Ove. "I had been struggling with the issue of repentance - was my repentance good enough? I couldn't be sure. But, on October 22 at 2 a.m., I finally became sure. Walther said to me that night, 'If you ask, "Am I ready?," and pass through true repentance, then you are ready.' This spoke to me, and I knew I was forgiven.

"The result is that I can hardly recognize myself. I was planning to go back to my church in Vastseliina when I returned. But now I want to be an evangelist, to share the good news, through the training of other pastors. Before, I thought that our theological training could just be a supplement to the state university training. Now I see we have to develop our own complete training.

"Our country has so many moral problems. Before the communists took over, 99 percent of our people considered themselves Christians. Now only 10 percent of them do. We are in desperate need of believing pastors who can spread the gospel to all of the people. Then we can change the world!"

Ove is a gifted man, with a great vision. Best of all, he is a man who loves God and wants everyone else to hear about Him as well. We thank God for the privilege of having him at the seminary this year. Pray for him and his family, and the great spiritual needs and challenges in Estonia.



"The result is that I can hardly recognize myself. I was planning to go back to my church in Vastseliina when I returned. But now I want to be an evangelist, to share the good news, through the training of other pastors. Before, I thought that our theological training could just be a supplement to the state university training. Now I see we have to develop our own complete training."

Christianity in Estonia

Estonia has a long history of being ruled by others, including Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Poland and Russia. In 1710, rule switched from Sweden to Russia. This continued until their independence in 1917.

Their short-lived independence ended in 1939, when in a secret treaty between Stalin and Hitler, the Baltic States went to Russia. Estonia was invaded by Russia in 1940. Ove Sander describes it as "a horrible time." Deportations to Siberia began which included his grandfather. (Ove's grandfather was spared the trip to Siberia because his train was hit by a bomb. He died two years later.) Pastors were persecuted and churches closed. In the church that Ove now serves, the parsonage was destroyed, as well as books and church records. The communists arranged a revolt so that Estonian/Russian communists ruled.

From 1941 to 1944, Germany ruled. There was another puppet government, but churches were reopened.

The Russians returned in 1945 and within four years, persecution began to be directed at the ordinary citizen. Thousands of Christians were killed or deported. Sometimes they were given two alternatives: deportation or collaboration with the KGB. To their credit, some who chose to collaborate, somehow never had anything to report to the KGB. In fact, someone who was supposedly a

collaborator, secretly warned Ove's father of a plan to arrest him. His father fled in time.

The Lutheran church had carried the national identity of the country and therefore, it was systematically attacked from 1945 to 1991. There were attempts to destroy the church in "possible and impossible ways," according to Ove. The goal was to have zero churches by 1970. The methods included deportation and elimination of theological education. Only one theological institute in Tallin managed to keep itself going — the one to which Ove is associated with today. Other methods included economic pressure (such as charging churches electrical rates that were 19 times higher than everyone else), communist clubs and propaganda in the schools. False history and "anti-religion" were taught.

Ove points out that these anti-religion classes, however, were sometimes counterproductive. "Several have told me that these classes were their first encounter with Christianity. Eventually they became Christians instead of atheists." The 1980s were particularly hard on the churches, with the task of just keeping the doors open almost impossible. KGB agents would come to services. If one word was said against the government by anyone, they would be called in the next day.

Then, miraculously, freedom came in 1991, and Christianity is again allowed. The challenge is now to counteract the relentless assault that has been leveled against Christ and His Church for over 50 years.

Preparing for the race

In today's world the media tells us, "If you want it, why wait?" If that new car is what you want, then buy it. Do not worry about the cost. We can finance it for you. Are you interested in a new stereo? Just charge it. Worry about the payments later.

This mentality has not only permeated the secular world, but the Christian community as well. We are quick to establish how unlike the world we are, yet slow to admit our many similarities. How can we then explain to our young people the importance of setting aside time for God and waiting? After all, this time could be used to accomplish "things" for God's glory?

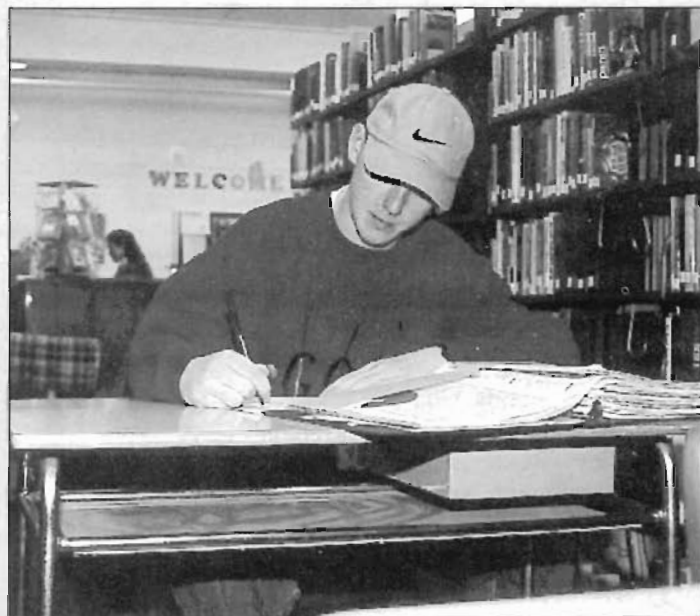
As a 1992 graduate of AFLBS, I often ponder on those wonderful years. I reflect on the permanent relationship built between complete strangers, the bonds that developed between the students and the faculty, and the challenging classes that caused us to consider the Bible in a whole new light. If this were all that AFLBS meant to me it would still stand as a great monument; however, there is more. AFLBS caused me to develop a relationship with Jesus, as in the words of Pastor Jim Johnson, "more precious than silver." I learned to cultivate a personal relationship with Jesus on a day-to-day level, establishing a firm foundation.

Upon graduation I did not leave AFLBS with a diploma that said, "It is finished." Instead my diploma represents, "It is only the beginning."

Why spend two years at Bible school when everyone else seems to be starting the race? I believe it is important to train for the race prior to the start. Going to Bible school allows one to wait patiently on the Lord, to allow Him to work in our lives, and to establish a foundation of what His Word truly means. When this time is completed, a person is then prepared to go out into the world to be used by God to accomplish His plans.



— Chris A. Larson
History teacher at Traverse City Christian High School,
Traverse City, Michigan



Mike Presteng,
Grafton, North
Dakota, catches
up on homework
in the library.



Mr. Jerry
Nelson,
AFLC
schools
choral
director.

Bible school, the greatest

— Andrea Nelson
AFLBS Junior
LaCrosse, Wisconsin

For me, these last months at AFLBS have presented more blessings than challenges. Or perhaps, the challenges it threw at me have just turned into blessings.

Blessing number one

I am being forced to study the Word of God. In this busy world, it is far too easy to neglect the one thing of importance: God. I appreciate the motivation to do the things that will benefit me, and hopefully, those around me for this life and for all eternity.

Blessing number two

Christian friends. God has always blessed me with Christian friends, first at home and now at school. I cherish my friends at home and delight in my new friends here at AFLBS.

Blessing number three

This is perhaps the challenge-turned-blessing. In Bible school (and I've only started my second semester) I am being taught things I hadn't really thought about before. Now I need to question in my own mind what I believe. I am grateful for the solid biblical teachings put forth which are helping me formulate my own viewpoints based on Scripture.

Bible school has already been a time of great personal, spiritual, and mental growth. I'm glad God led me here!



"Lofting" in one of the girls' dorm rooms provides extra floor space.



The men's dormitory lobby.

A new person, a new position

— Mark Johnson
AFLBS Dean of Students
Plymouth, Minnesota

In the summer of 1986 I had a decision to make regarding where to further my education after high school. The Lord led me to AFLBS and two years of challenge and growth in the Word of God.

While at AFLBS I learned to appreciate more and more the heritage and vision of the AFLC, and most importantly the uncompromising view of Scripture. It was my privilege to travel on choir tours, the Ambassador Gospel Team for two summers, and to visit a number of AFLC congregations from California to New York.

During my time at Bible School and even prior to that, I felt that God had a plan for me in ministry.

After my graduation from AFLBS, I attended North Hennepin Community College for one year and then completed my degree in communications at Northwestern College.

Seven years ago, while in college, I married Sara Huglen. I worked my way through college supervising heavy equipment crews in construction. After college I continued to work in construction with increased responsibilities supervising projects, all the while gaining business and management experience.

In 1994, I wanted to test the radio industry and use my degree toward that end. I worked in sales, news, sports and eventually management. During this time God opened up many opportunities to share the gospel in the workplace. He challenged my faith on a daily basis, and for that I am forever grateful for His grace and strength.

After the sale of the radio stations I was working for, I became part owner of a communications company. This experience of being involved in a new business start-up was invaluable.

During this time I felt God was beginning to move me in a different direction. Since my graduation from college, God has provided opportuni-

ties to be involved with the National Free Lutheran Youth, the AFLBS Alumni Association, and in the local congregation — most recently as youth pastor at Calvary Free Lutheran in Fergus Falls under the leadership of Rev. Rodger Olson. I enjoy when I have the chance to speak and to lead youth and adult Bible studies.

I am excited to be back at Bible school, but this time in a different role — as the first-ever Dean of Students. God is working mightily among the youth of the AFLC and within the entire Association.

The creation of the Dean of Students position has been brought about to assist the Bible school dean, Pastor James L. Johnson as a co-laborer in the work of the school — to help shepherd the students and assist Pastor Johnson with some of the day-to-day operations of the school, freeing him to focus more on shepherding the school. With the increased enrollment and indications that steady growth will continue, the School Board thought now was the appropriate time to add this position. During the summer I will travel on behalf of the Bible school for one month and also go out once a month during the school year on behalf of AFLBS.

Why do I believe so strongly in the Bible school? I believe God has a big plan for the school in bringing revival across our nation and world. With the constant barrage of secular humanism penetrating the educational process, young people need to be well equipped to engage in the spiritual warfare that is in the marketplace, the church and in homes across our land. It is my desire that each student at AFLBS would first, have a personal relationship with Jesus and grow in “knowing Him and the power of His resurrection.” As they go in His name, equipped to serve and build in their local congregations, the AFLC and its ministries will be strengthened.

We are living in a day of urgency. There remains an openness to the gospel. It is my prayer that God will use my life in the lives of students at AFLBS for the furtherance of the kingdom of God. As I began my first day of work on January 5, the Holy Spirit laid my confirmation verse on my heart:

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (I Corinthians 15:57-58).



Some of the group who gathered for worship on November 15, 1997 in Lisbon, Portugal. Missionary Connely Dyrud is second to the left.

A new partnership in Portugal

N "Nothing More Beyond" was the ancient motto for the nation of Portugal, according to a recent radio message, signifying a firm conviction that any voyagers who ventured too far from their shores would fall off the edge of the earth. After the discovery of the New World, however, and the opening of new trade routes to America and Asia, the national motto was altered by one word to read, "More Beyond."

Perhaps the same motto might be appropriate for our AFLC World Missions outreach as we approach a new millennium. The challenge is before us to look beyond the fields in Brazil, Mexico, and India where we are currently committed, to possible new open doors in other parts of the world. Inquiries have come especially from countries where the

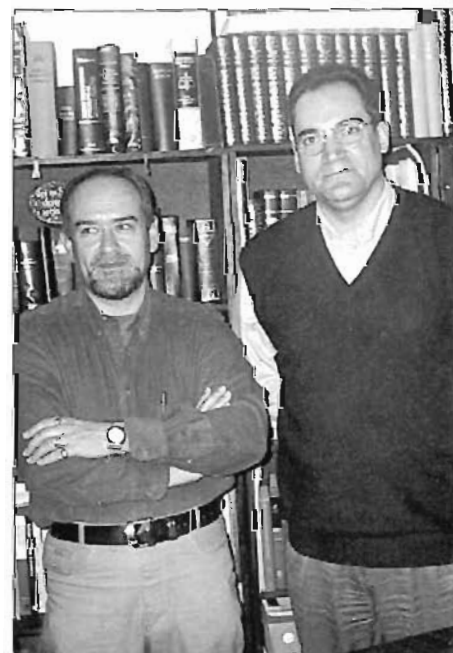
Portuguese language is spoken (which is the language of Brazil). The 1997 Annual Conference encouraged the World Missions Committee to prayerfully study these contacts in order to determine if there is a potential for mission partnership.

It is significant that the first of these possible new open doors is Portugal. Missionary Connely Dyrud and I visited this beautiful and historic country for several days in November, responding to an invitation from a Lutheran pastor named Artur Villares who had received the AFLC informational material a couple of years ago. We flew into Lisbon, the capital, where we were met by two new friends who drove us to the railroad depot. The next stop was Gaia, where Pastor Villares, who currently is a university professor in the twin city of Oporto, welcomed us to a dinner with his family and escorted us to our lodging.

During our short stay in Gaia and Oporto we were introduced to Pastor Eduardo Bettencourt, originally from the Azores Islands, who had served another Lutheran congregation in Portugal and was now employed as a homeopathic physician. We returned to Lisbon by

train, where a service and meeting were scheduled for Saturday afternoon in a downtown hotel room. About 20 interested people gathered there to hear about the AFLC and to celebrate the Lord's Supper together, and the declaration was prepared signifying their intention to establish a Free Lutheran fellowship in Portugal.

According to the information that



Pastors Eduardo Bettancourt and Artur Villares.

"It was clear ... this was not the opening of a traditional mission field ..."

Missionary Dyrud and I received, there had been a growing Lutheran presence in Portugal several years ago, connected to one of the Brazilian Lutheran church bodies. A conflict arose which eventually resulted in the disbanding of the congregations, and the two Portuguese pastors were forced to find other employment. Many drifted to other churches, but there were still people who were Lutheran by conviction and could not in good conscience find a home in another denomination. It was on their behalf that Pastor Villares sought a conservative Lutheran church body and first contacted us.

Now there is an open door for a new beginning of this evangelical Lutheran witness in Portugal, a spiritually needy land where only approximately one percent of the people are Protestants. A building in downtown Lisbon has been rented for service and the AFLC World Missions Committee has agreed to subsidize this outreach for two months with an eight hundred dollar grant to help our new friends during the initial phase. It was clear to both Missionary Dyrud and me that this was not the opening of a traditional mission field, like our work in Brazil, for example, but an opportunity for partnership with a young sister church.

What will the future hold for this partnership with Portugal? I envision the possibility that teachers from our Bible school and seminary could help in the theological education of Lutheran pastors and lay workers there. Teams of young people could serve during the summer months with youth outreach and children's ministries. Evangelism training could also be offered through some of our Portuguese-speaking pastors and missionaries. The potential for fel-



Pastor Robert Lee with Pastor Artur Villares and his daughter, Morta, in Gaia, Portugal.

lowship between the AFLC, Brazil, and Portugal could lead to spiritual enrichment for all of us, as well as provide a bridge to new open doors of opportunity in Portuguese-speaking Africa (especially Mozambique and Angola).

Pray for Portugal and for the ministry of our new friends there. In some ways I see them as an orphan church. "Don't leave us alone!" was the plea from several believers there as they expressed their great need for a relationship with other Lutheran Christians. Gifts designated for the work in Portugal may be directed to AFLC World Missions. You will be kept informed through *The Lutheran Ambassador* as our partnership in the gospel progresses.

— Pastor Robert L. Lee
AFLC President





God at work in India

— Pastor Eugene Enderlein
AFLC World Missions Director
Minneapolis, Minnesota



This temporary shelter was set up for meetings. There are still eight or nine villages with this style of church building. Five thousand dollars per church building is needed for a permanent brick and cement structure.

Someone has said you cannot remove missions from the Bible without destroying the Bible in its entirety. The emphasis throughout the Bible is for the people of God to carry the message of Christ to all places and all people. Psalm 96 says, *To sing a new song to the Lord, everyone on the earth, sing praises to the Lord and sing and praise His Name. Day after day announce, the Lord has saved us. Tell every nation on earth that the Lord is wonderful and does marvelous things.*

New Testament Christians were exhorted to declare to all people the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. This is our commission today.

Last November, I traveled to India, the largest democracy in the

world and also a nation in which the majority of people live in spiritual darkness. Tradition tells us it was the Apostle Thomas who first came to South India to preach in the first century of the Church.

Lutheran missionaries in the 1700s were the first Europeans to carry the gospel to India. This was a part of the Danish-Halle Missions. It is in this same region that our AFLC is working with the Bible Faith Lutheran Church of India. We thank God for the fellowship in the gospel with those in this state of Andhra Pradesh, where many can trace their Christian roots to those first missionaries.

The AFLC involvement in India dates back to 1979-80, when Christian believers requested that we come and help them organize. At that time they were meeting in house churches and were desirous of becoming a part of a Lutheran fellowship.

The church then had a limited number of national pastors and Bible women. As the work began, churches were often planted in

"What a joy I experienced during a number of services to baptize new converts to the Lord Jesus Christ."

small rural communities. (Small by Indian standards, yet they reach large numbers of people because of the dense population.) Today there are some thirty organized congregations served by 26 national pastors.

Congregations and individuals in our AFLC are supporting one of the national workers in India for \$30 a month. For \$1 a day, you too, can provide for one national worker to bring the gospel to the multitudes in the villages of Southeast India.

The first churches in the area were simple structures of woven sticks and mud plastered with a

thatched roof. Intense tropical storms across the coastal plains severely damage these structures. The church in India has put aside funds, some of which come from the AFLC, to gradually replace these buildings. During these three weeks in India, I had the joy of dedicating a number of new permanent brick places of worship.

A brick building in a village is often a place of protection during tropical storms. The church literally becomes a place of refuge in times of need. Last October, severe storms and flooding devastated a wide area in which our AFLC is involved. The village of Jillellamudi sustained the greatest damage from four feet of standing water.

I had the privilege of overseeing in that area the distribution of food and clothing for people in need and to do so in the name of Jesus on behalf of our AFLC. I saw the joy that came into the eyes of those who received portions of rice. Many of these people are Coulee workers (the poorest of the poor), and without assistance had no other place to go.

Prior to my departure for India, we became aware of this urgent need. There are those within our AFLC who provide funds for relief work. Most of the relief funds are passed on to the World Relief Commission, but some gifts are specifically designated for our own AFLC relief work. So far, we have used these funds only in India. The World Missions Committee released some of those funds so that I could carry them with me and set up a distribution of needed items.

The World Relief Commission was advised of this natural disaster and they graciously provided a matching grant to our own AFLC funds.

We thank God for the open doors in India. Pray for our Indian brothers and sisters as they reach into new areas with His Word. What a joy I experienced during a number of services to baptize new converts to the Lord Jesus Christ. They were converts out of both Hinduism and Islam. The power of God's Holy Spirit is moving in India.



D. Luther Sastry and Pastor Enderlein look over the distribution of rice, blankets and cooking utensils in Jillellamudi.



Update on Vision 2004

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

— Philippians 4:6

It never ceases to amaze me how the Lord starts a project and directs the work. As His servants begin and continue to listen, we are totally in awe of His wonderful presence. Truly that is how the Lord is working on this project. We as a committee can see the doors opening and pray that they would continue, following Philippians 4:6.

Are we anxious? Stressed, maybe, with a very fast-paced analysis process going on. But it's exciting to see what is happening.

Are we praying about everything? Yes, and we still need your support for every detail! We are asking God to supply wisdom, alertness, cooperation, clarity and His will for Vision 2004.

Are we asking with thanksgiving? As we all pray, what relief it gives to ask with thanksgiving. We know God is already working on our needs. It changes any "begging" into confidence that the result will be God's will, not ours. (He really knows how to guide us in His Word, doesn't He? Thank you, Lord!)

Phase I of Vision 2004 will benefit both the Bible school and the seminary in terms of space and practical ability to continue teaching the Word of God in its truth and purity. We were blessed by the summary of our schools given by the architects:

"During their 30 years of service to the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations as a Bible school and seminary they have trained over 2000 men and women into ministry and effective lifelong local church and community service. Their reputation and effective use of available resources has resulted in an increase in enrollment. To accommodate this increase in enrollment, they must expand the existing dormitories and build additional classroom and multi-purpose auditorium space."

How wonderful to have such a need! And to know that this was in the hearts of our forefathers as they prayed and planned for growth in training students. May we be faithful to carry on.

I therefore urge you to continue to pray, "Lord keep opening the doors in this project as You see and not as we as humans see." God goes to work when we step out of the way and let God be God.

Answered prayers:

Master planning of property initially received well by City of Plymouth.
Collaboration of schools' representatives to identify real building needs.
AFLC youth returning surveys.
Expertise of the Welsh Companies.
Commitment of committee members.

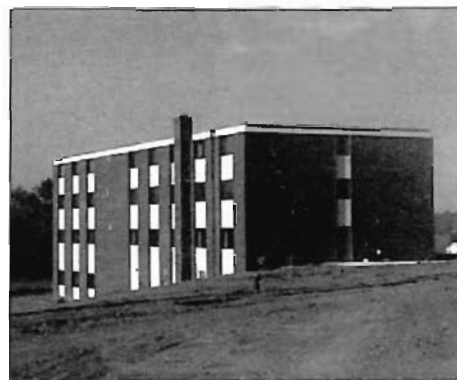
Prayer concerns:

Rezoning of property by City of Plymouth.
Permits from the city.
Specific design of buildings.
Finances to support Vision 2004.

Call at any time or leave a message for me to call you or leave a message with my assistant Cindy Schlenk and I will get back to you. I welcome any thoughts, ideas or concerns you may have.

— Pastor Tonnes Pollestad, 612-544-1194

THEN



The men's dormitory, built in 1974, was the last construction project for the AFLC Schools. Preliminary plans have the new multi-purpose building located in this area, northeast of the men's room.

NOW



Limited Bible School classroom space on the first floor of each dorm has been a concern for a long time. AFLBS opened its doors in 1966, with 13 students enrolled. The two-year Bible School's enrollment has increased with some fluctuation over the years until this year's record student body of about 150 members.



The junior class of 1978-79.



Ninety students are registered in the 1997-98 junior class.

Pastor Everett Hind, Holland, Minnesota, began serving Calvary Lutheran in Fosston, Minnesota on January 4, 1998, as an interim pastor. Previously he had been on the pastoral staff at Christ the King Lutheran in Pipestone, Minnesota.

Pastor Ted Berkas, Wallace, South Dakota, concluded his interim pastorate at Calvary in Fosston, Minnesota, and with his wife Dee traveled last month to Oman to visit their son and his family.

Willmar, Minnesota — Maranatha Free Lutheran dedicated their new church building on January 18, with AFLC President Robert Lee and Home Missions Director Paul Nash as the guest speakers. The congregation's pastor is Elden Nelson.

AFLC Missions Conference was held January 5-16, at the schools' campus in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Bible school students attended classes the first week: seniors studied "Cults and Isms" and the juniors focused on Home and World Missions. At 11:00 each morning they met together to hear lectures from various missions, including Jewish and inner city ministries. Pastors Eugene Enderlein, Paul Nash, and Dan Giles joined with the AFLBS staff along with the special guests to make this intensive "missions inter-term" possible.

The second week offered sessions at 11 a.m. and in the evening at 6:30 and 7:30. The evening speaker was Missionary Todd Schierkolk from Aguascalientes, Mexico. Pastor Tom Olson challenged the students with the urgent cry for help in Alaska.

Dr. Francis Monseth wrote in the Medicine Lake Church newsletter: "Our Bible school will graduate fifty young people this year. Many of them would like to go to the mission field. The doors are opening to our AFLC in new fields besides our great opportunities in Brazil, Mexico and India. Eastern Europe, Portugal, Mozambique, Angola, Tanzania, and other places are asking us to 'come over and help.'"



Glyndon, Minnesota — Maranatha Free Lutheran, after ten years of existence, is experiencing unprecedented growth. "I can't explain it any other way but that the Spirit of God is drawing people. There's a real searching going on and we're seeing the hearts of our own people hungry for the Word of God and excited in what God is doing among us," says Maranatha's Pastor Dale Finstrom. "But we're praying and waiting for real revival to break out."

Last July, the congregation

went to two worship services and saw a 22 percent increase in attendance immediately. New people continue to come. The Sunday school has nearly doubled so they brought in a trailer to add four classrooms. One of their members, retired Pastor Hubert DeBoer, from nearby Moorhead, has been helping with visitation and Jeremy Larson from Fargo is the youth worker. Pastor and Mrs. DeBoer currently have their home for sale and plan to move to Apple Valley, Minnesota, a southern suburb of Minneapolis.



The campus chapel, seminary classrooms, library, school offices and cafeteria are located in this building overlooking Medicine Lake in the Minneapolis suburb of Plymouth. Medicine Lake Lutheran Church also rents this facility.

Missionaries David and Sarah Nelson, Campo Mourão, Brazil await the completion of the adoption process for their little Rachel. She began her third year with the Nelsons on January 1, 1998. The Nelson family and Missionary Sonja Dahl, also serving at Campo Mourão, have temporary visas but seek permanent visas to stay in Brazil. Pray with them for God's will to be done and in His timing.

Apache Junction, Arizona — Seminary intern Gary Haug from Emmaus Lutheran in Bloomington, Minnesota, led a worship service during the Christmas holidays for a group in the Phoenix area. This fellowship group has started a Bible Study and welcome year-around residents and "snowbirds." For information call Eldwyn Van Bruggen at (602) 854-0617.

Newfolden, Minnesota — Westaker and Bethania Free Lutheran congregations are hosting a Midwinter Bible Conference during February 6-8, 1998. AFLC President Robert Lee is the guest preacher along with speakers from the district. The theme is, "Call to Worship" from Psalm 29:2.



Tucson, Arizona — Living Faith Lutheran burned their mortgage at the end of 1997. The congregation had purchased and remodeled their building in 1983. They share their pastor, Frank Cherney, with a sister congregation in Tucson, Body of Christ. The young congregation expects to go off of home mission support in the near future.

Chillicothe, Illinois — Our Savior's Lutheran Church recently went off home mission aid. Pastor Jerome Nikunen serves this congregation while also serving as a chaplain in nearby Peoria. Home Mission Director Paul Nash visited the congregation on January 24, before preaching at the new Good Shepherd Lutheran in Lincoln, Illinois, on Sunday, January 25.

Beaverton, Oregon — Willamette Free Lutheran Church, a Home Mission church sponsored by the Pacific Northwest District, recently began meeting at the Learning Tree Preschool at 15135 SW Beard Road in the Portland suburb of Beaverton. If you have family or friends in the Portland area who might be interested in being a part of this new congregation, please contact Pastor Craig Johnson at (503) 579-5009.

Kasson-Dexter, Minnesota — Mt. Sion and Zion Lutheran parish hosted a Home Missions Sunday on January 4, 1998. Home Missions

Director Paul Nash spoke. Living Word Lutheran in Eagen, Minnesota, also sponsored a home missions service on Sunday evening, January 11.

In Memoriams

Carrie Labarr, Ortley, SD
Opal Hjellming, Ortley, SD
Frank Knochenmus, Roseau, MN
Avanelle Marble, Watertown, SD
Dolette Hjermstad, Wallace, SD
Irvina Hellekson, Faith, SD
Margaret Burnett, Faith, SD
Olga Thompson, Spicer, MN
Elvire Ostlund, Kirkland, WA
Anna Mae Hill, Morris, IL
Eilert Haakenson, Tioga, ND
Darlene Quanbeck, McVile, ND
Mabel Thuney, Bagley, MN
Mayann Young, Ray, ND
Bertha Winsryg, Ray, ND
Carol James, New Hope, MN
Naomi Lauen, Hopkins, MN
Beatrice Odegaard, Tioga, ND
Leroy Raad, Tioga, ND

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations

3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

AFLC Benevolences — January 1 - December 31, 1997

FUND	TOTAL Subsidy	REC'D IN DECEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund			\$279,330.00	
\$33,987.22	213,282.11	76		
Seminary	113,300.00	20,925.79	107,055.55	94
Bible School	142,509.00	33,523.78	143,453.31	1.01
Home Missions	257,432.00	51,421.76	231,274.83	90
World Missions	341,000.00	59,779.41	372,883.78	1.09
Capital Investment	19,000.00	1,489.38	13,599.40	72
Parish Education	56,517.00	13,415.31	58,800.37	1.04
Church Extension	14,813.00	5,269.30	20,353.09	1.37
TOTALS	\$1,223,901.00	219,811.95	1,160,702.44	95
TOTALS 1996	1,232,267.00	220,653.31	1,197,887.11	97
Goal 100%				



FLS dean, Dr. Francis Monseth has taught at various times at the theological academies in Latvia and Estonia since their beginning five years ago. Current total enrollment in these schools is about 400 students.

Dr. Francis and Ellen Monseth, Rogers, Minnesota, left for Eastern Europe for two weeks of teaching at the Tartu Theological Academy in Estonia and the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Academy in Riga, Latvia. They expect to return in the middle of February.

Kalispell, Montana – Stillwater Free Lutheran has several members planning to travel on March 14-27 to Obregon, Mexico. Their church newsletter stated, "One of the objectives in our Mexico '98 trip is to finish construction of a covered and screened patio for our AFLC church in Obregon. This will be a multipurpose room – also for a sanctuary when it gets hot in the summer (up to 120°). Pastor Gabriel Mercado and his wife Virginia serve in the Obregon area.

Partners in Mission Outreach has been taking bus trips into Mexico in recent years. For more information on how you or your congregation can participate in a mission trip, call Pastor Alvin Sather at (218) 782-2745 or Al Brazier at (218) 782-2456.

Sydney, Australia — She was surprised to hear that she had won the lottery, since she hadn't purchased a ticket. But the anonymous winner of \$7.5 million in a recent New South Wales lottery claimed her prize — then gave it all away, explaining that gambling was against her Christian beliefs. The woman with the winning ticket usually receives a box of chocolates from a friend at Christmas, but because she was on a diet this year, her friend bought her a lottery ticket. The woman gave her friend \$1 million, then gave the rest to charity.

Oslo, Norway — A Lutheran pastor is the new Prime Minister of Norway. Christian Democrat Kjell Magne Bondevik, 50, succeeded Thorbjørn Jagland, an unchurched Social Democrat. Bondevik is a teetotaler and a member of the YMCA.

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

Nordic Adventure Christian Fellowship Tour

The tour will include Copenhagen, Oslo, Trondheim, and a cruise to the North Cape. An optional tour to Stockholm and Finland is available. The 13-day tour begins July 27, 1998, leaving from Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Chicago or New York. Hosts with experience are Pastor Orville and Florence Hiepler. For more information, call (760) 731-0980.

Pastor Don Richman, Bloomington, Minnesota, the Director of the East European Missions Network, met with missionaries and pastors and spoke at seminars in Eastern Europe in December, 1997. He has serious concerns regarding the new Russian law mandating that unless a church has been registered for 15 years or more, it cannot own property. This means that the church would have been registered during Communist days which was nearly impossible. On October 30, 1997 this new law resulted in the closure of a Lutheran Church in Touim, Khakassia. The *Washington Post* carried this story and the U.S. State Department raised the issue with Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, who admitted the action was illegal and took steps to temporarily rescind the closing. However, local officials in Khakassia have stated their intent to close the church permanently. Pastor Richman reports that the Orthodox Church pressured the Russian Parliament to pass this law, but many observers believe it will eventually be used against them as well.

Missionary furlough house completed

Missionaries Dan and Debbie Giles, Osceola, Wisconsin, have moved into the newly remodeled Eagle's Nest, the AFLC World Missions home next door to the ARC. The Giles will reside there until returning to Aguascalientes, Mexico later this spring. Pastor Giles said, "Someone said 'it was the house that love built.' That is really true. It's wonderfully furnished with incredible details that just amaze me. There is enough bedroom space for six children plus a master bedroom. It's a gift that will last for many years to come! We're thrilled to have the privilege to live here." The address of the Eagle's Nest is 2344 30th Ave., Osceola, Wisconsin, 54020; phone (715) 294-3645.

The Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wisconsin

has changed two dates for 1998:

Youth Camp

is now June 28-July 3

AFLC Couple's Retreat

is now March 27-29.

The ARC has a new e-mail address: thearc@centuryinter.net

Getting ready for what is to come

The over 1,000 young people at the Free Lutheran Youth Convention last summer were asked how many planned to attend the Association Free Lutheran Bible School. It appeared that nearly 1,000 hands went up.

Dorm capacity at the school is being stretched to the maximum this year with over 140 students. What will happen if simply a third of those 1,000 hands want to attend AFLBS at the same time?

To meet the need and to prepare for the possibilities ahead, the AFLC Schools' Board of Trustees is making plans for the future. The plans are being called Vision 2004. It is a vision our congregations should prayerfully consider, support and encourage.

Preparing for what might come because of those 1,000 hands involves more than just constructing a new building, however. The rest of our church body and our congregations as well need to prepare and pray for vision as to what might lie ahead.

The produce section at the grocery store may offer a tremendous deal on fruit. It is of little benefit, however, if you have no way of preserving the fruit. A similar principle applies to spiritual fruit that God provides.

We are seeing spiritual fruit being produced by God among the young people of our church body. It is important to enjoy the fruit today and also give heed to how the fruit will be preserved for tomorrow. We are to be much in prayer that these young people who are excited about Jesus will be kept and encouraged in the faith. As others have noted, Jesus does not call us to simply make converts, but to make disciples (Matthew 28:19); ones who are continually growing by God's grace.

These young people are going to need protection. If God is truly at work, we can expect the enemy to show up and attempt to cause problems. Therefore we must be on guard.

The Lord speaks strongly against the shepherds who "cared for themselves rather than for my flock" (Ezekiel 34:8, NIV). Those who are older in the faith have a responsibility to care for those who are younger. Those who are relatively new in the faith are not to be left on their own to try to stand against the vicious wolf, the devil. Christ wants to work through His body, the Church, to protect and look after them.

Some young people in our society are provided

much of what is rather unnecessary and little of what they truly need. In our congregations we are to take care that we provide young people what is truly vital.

AFLBS exists to provide young people solid instruction in the Word of God. Many people today receive fine instruction in how to make a living, but not in how to live. It is God's Word that provides that kind of instruction. These youth with an enthusiasm for the Lord need to be provided good training from the Word, by our congregations with the assistance of our church body.

Opportunities to serve must also be provided. Paul tells Timothy: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers ... Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (I Timothy 4:12,13, NIV). Paul knew Timothy, in spite of his youth, had gifts God could use, not some day but that day.

These young people have talents God has given and can use. In areas of missions, both in this country and other parts of the world, and in our local congregations, opportunities and encouragement to serve are to be provided. Along with this, freedom and trust are to be given. This freedom is not to be: "free to be just like me." We are to expect "young men will see visions" (Acts 2:17, NIV). God may want to do a unique, new kind of work through these young people. May we not be ones who fight it, simply because it's different.

We are to provide the youth of our congregations trust; trust that is not so much in them as it is in the Holy Spirit who is within them when they are in Christ. We consider what they might do without fear because our confidence is in God and His great power and love.

The young people are also to be given a push. A mother bird doesn't let her babies stay in the nest. She wants them to get out into the world and fly.

Our young people likewise are not called to simply stay where it seems warm, cozy and safe. They are to be encouraged to get out into the world and make a difference for the cause of Christ. "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18, NIV).

Our dreams aren't big enough to conceive what God might do through young people who are preserved, protected, provided for and pushed. Let's be ready, though, to be amazed.

— Pastor Craig Johnson

"Many people today receive fine instruction in how to make a living, but not in how to live."

BUILDING THE BASE

The fish in God's aquarium: a biblical view of this world

In recent years, many have enjoyed watching and caring for tropical fish in an aquarium in the home or office. Perhaps it could be said that, to God, the whole world in which we live is like a giant aquarium, and we are the fish in it!

Jesus made this comparison in Matthew 13:47-48: *The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach and they sat down, and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away.*

1. We are all on display before God Almighty!

Hebrews 4:13 tells us: *There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.* Our lives and hearts are as transparent as the glass walls of an aquarium. Psalm 139:1-2 says: *O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up; Thou dost understand my thought from afar.* Later in verse seven, the psalmist asks: *Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence?* We can't even hide in the bottom of the tank. *If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there ... Thy right hand will lay hold of me.*

2. He watches us intently!

An aquarium owner loves to

watch his fish and study their habits. God does the same. *The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men* (Psalm 33:13). In our aquariums, we keep natural enemies apart, but God has given us the freedom and responsibility to all live in the same tank. In Psalm 14, we read: *The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.* He is hurt by how we mistreat and "eat" each other, and by our denial of Him. But He rejoices in *those who fear Him, on those who hope for His loving-kindness* (Psalm 33:18).

3. He appreciates and loves each of us!

Though we are all different "species" and have not the same size and color, God appreciates each of us. We have so much value to God that He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to become one of us, even though He knew that Jesus would be "devoured" by some of the deadly fish in this aquarium (Romans 5:8). Because of His sacrifice, we will someday live outside of this "fish tank," and live in His house in eternity.

4. We could not survive without His constant care!

An aquarium keeper makes sure his fish have clean water and food or they die! In Acts 17, we read: *He is*

not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist. We may not even be aware of God, but He is always there. Without Him, we could not exist.

5. Some of us are "near extinction"!

Some fish have become "endangered species" because of fishing practices. Jesus warns us that someday, the aquarium of this world will be emptied of fish. All of us will be harvested and judged. Matthew 13 says: *So it will be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Many of those around us are going to hell because they won't survive God's close scrutiny. They are truly "endangered species" because they do not know Christ and His salvation. Do we care about them? Jesus said, *I will make you fishers of men.* May God help us.



— Pastor Craig Wentzel
Living Word and Zoar Lutheran
Edmore, North Dakota