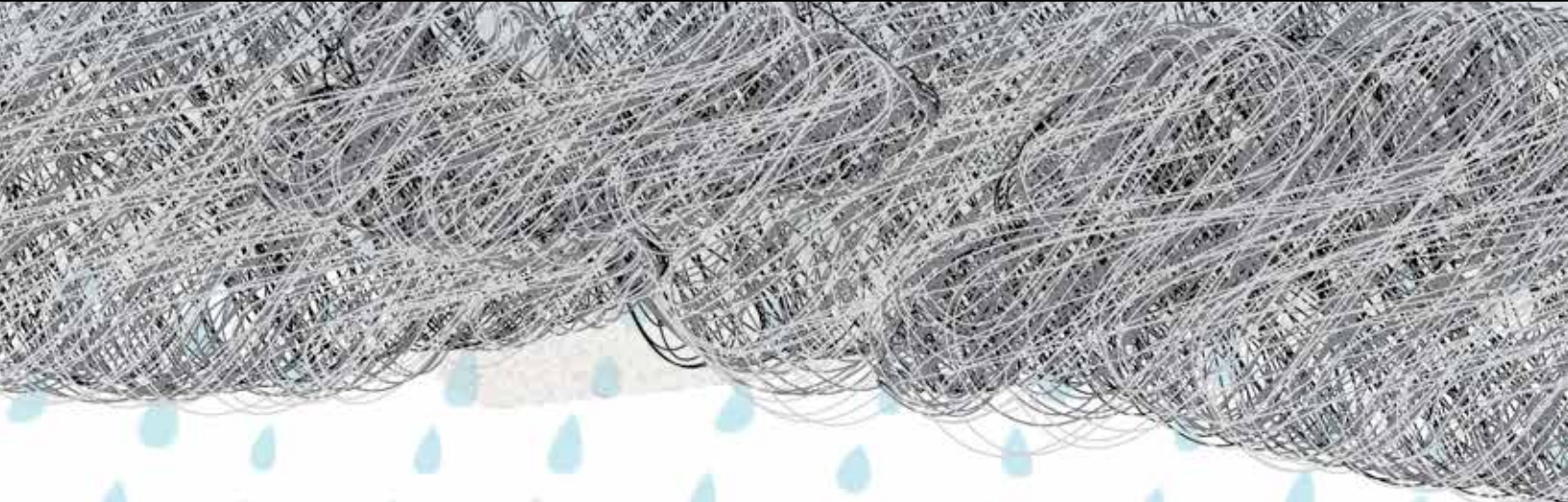


THE LUTHERAN 

JANUARY 2009

AMBASSADOR



WORRIED?

*"Search me, O God,
and know my heart;
test me and know my
anxious thoughts ..."*

Psalm 139:23



It takes



awhile

BY PASTOR HERB HOFF

I am one who appreciates having things take place quickly, and of course, this is for my convenience and enjoyment.

I loved it when my children acted on my requests (and occasional demands) with a rapid and joyful response. Occasionally they even did as I imagined.

I appreciate our microwave oven, the DSL connection for the computers, and I really enjoy fast food, probably more than is good for me.

For me, fast is nice, especially because I don't particularly like to wait.

Slow is not high on the list of things I appreciate. Slow is so boring, so tedious, and often seems to be such a waste of time.

Yet it seems that what is slow to me turns out to be perfect timing for God. I am reminded of His judgment: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

As we begin a new year, I thought it might be nice to look back at a couple of things that happened on the first day of January which seemed to take a really long time.

January 1 is the day we remember that our Lord was circumcised and given the name Jesus. It was a long wait for the fullness of God's plan to kick in, but He was not slow; Jesus came at the perfect time.

On January 1, 404, the last known gladiator competition took place in the city of Rome. Emperor Honorius had decreed the end of gladiatorial contests in 399 after one particularly disappointing

event. But it still took a half a decade to have this decree become a reality.

To quote from Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus (in Syria) in *The Ecclesiastical History*,

[Emperor] Honorius, who inherited the empire of Europe, put a stop to the gladiatorial combats which had long been held at Rome. The occasion of his doing so arose from the following circumstance. A certain man of the name of Telemachus had embraced the ascetic life. He had set out from the East and for this reason had repaired to Rome. There, when the abominable spectacle was being exhibited, he went himself into the stadium, and stepping down into the arena, endeavored to stop the men who were wielding their weapons against one another. The spectators of the slaughter were indignant, and inspired by the triad fury of the demon who delights in those bloody deeds, stoned the peacemaker to death.

Three days after the death of St. Telemachus, Emperor Honorius decreed an end to the gladiatorial games. But this was not the first such decree. Back in AD 325 Emperor Constantine called for an end to this bloody sport of death, and yet it was still 79 years until the end finally came. It took awhile, but it ended.

Today as we wait for God's perfect timing, remember this is not a day to worry. God is still on His throne and will be perfect in His timing.

Hoff serves St. Ansgars Free Lutheran, Salinas, Calif.

January 2009 >>

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR vol. 47, no. 1

Editor Pastor Craig Johnson
craigj@teleport.com

Managing Editor Ruth Gunderson
ruthg@afcl.org

Editorial Board Oryen Benrud
Pastor Jerry Moan
Pastor James L. Johnson

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

For subscription changes and information: The Lutheran Ambassador, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441. 763-545-5631 or e-mail at luthamb@afcl.org.

Subscription rates:
\$17 a year, Group Rate, U.S.
\$18 a year, Individual, U.S.
\$20 a year, International
Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, MN, and additional mailing office.

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

Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows,
but only empties today of its strength.

— Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Sometimes we pride ourselves in thinking that we have kept ourselves
unspotted from the world and have kept the faith. But actually we have kept
the faith imprisoned behind a wall of separation and fear.

— Everett L. Cattell

Worrying is like a rocking chair, it gives you some-
thing to do, but it gets you nowhere.

— Glenn Turner

Worry is a cycle of inefficient thoughts whirling
around a center of fear.

— Corrie Ten Boom



OUR PROVIDER

By Kevin Olson

*God satisfies our
temporal needs
in the same way
that He meets our
spiritual needs*

Economic news provides a fitting backdrop for a discussion about worry. The ongoing decisions made by consumers, producers, investors and governments have a collective effect on all of us in one way or another. Often, the impact can be measured—higher grocery bills, monthly income that doesn't seem to stretch as far, and negative returns in investment accounts. Also, what would a news report be lately without a discussion of prices at the pump?

These changes are not imaginary. All of us, including our congregations, face real decisions about how to allocate the earthly provisions that God has given. There is nothing wrong with taking a closer look at how we are affected by the changes going on around us, or what we might do differently in the future. However, worry will creep in when we begin to trust in the provisions rather than the provider.

We have all worried, in some form or another, about our lives. For me worry seems most prevalent when forces beyond my control start to influence my routine, the things I am comfortable with. When I stop to consider how many things are truly outside of my control, the worry really starts to kick in.



But is any of this really unique to the period in which we live? There is scriptural evidence that the disciples were prone to worry. It makes sense, I suppose. They were every bit as human as we are. In one particular section of the Sermon on the Mount we see Jesus address their concern over the basic provisions of life. Take a moment to read through Matthew 6:25-34 and pay particular attention to the contrast between our own worries and the reality of God's provision for us.

In these verses Jesus exposes our faithlessness with simple, straightforward examples from His creation. The examples are so logical that one cannot help but stop and think about them. How is it that birds, which possess no capacity to "store up" for future needs, get along just fine? How is it that flowers, which seem to possess even fewer abilities than birds, end up being among the most beautifully clothed creations on the planet?

I suspect that Peter, Andrew, James and John may have been especially affected by these words. It was not long before this that they had witnessed firsthand Jesus' provision for them with a huge catch of fish. These two additional examples stood as further evidence to them that the Creator

powerfully provides, not only in big attention-getting ways, but also (and especially) in the normal day-to-day care that He gives to all things—in particular to those whom He calls His children.

Through verse 32 Jesus has pointed out our sin and how illogical it is. There is no sense in trying to get around it, worrying is part of the human condition and, at its heart, attempts to replace God's power with our own. However, it is important to realize that He does not leave us without hope. Jesus goes on to tell us what to do, or perhaps precisely, whom to trust. Verse 33 says, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." It is here that Jesus revisits a central theme of His sermon, the satisfaction that comes by faith in the provider, not the provision.

At the beginning of the sermon (Matthew 5:6) Jesus used the phrase, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Notice the connection? When Jesus points out our sin of worry, we end up realizing that we cannot make it on our own, we are hungry for forgiveness. He connects His provision of our spiritual needs, like faith and forgiveness, to the temporal, day-to-

day things He also knows we need. Jesus suffered death and hell to make us a "new creation" (II Corinthians 5:17) and can easily take care of our needs from there.

Consider what Lutheran commentator R.C.H. Lenski had to say regarding the desire to seek His kingdom and righteousness: "The desire for the kingdom and the righteousness is constantly satisfied, for what we seek is ours by grace; and yet the seeking is always to continue, for the object of our desire can be ever more fully attained ... Grace kindles the desire and keeps it ever active in this life."

The realities that face us each day, financial or otherwise, certainly have an impact, and worry is all too often our response. Confess all of your worries to Him, including the worry that you worry too much. Your experience on this earth may not get any better, according to your own measurement, but He forgives you and will make sure that your hunger and thirst will be satisfied, both now and for all eternity.

Olson, Eden Prairie, Minn., is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis, Minn.

ReMeMBer

*Bringing light and life
to our own stories*

By Jeremy Erickson

Call it. The coin is tossed. I got my eighteenth CT scan this morning. It's routine now. Every couple of months: the chalky barium shake, the poke, and the intravenous contrast that makes one feel warm all over. They say they're looking for irregularities in my thoracic cavity; what that means is they're looking for tumors. And I guess they have reason to suspect they might find one.

I've been in remission for a while now, and I don't think of cancer all that often anymore. Still, every time a CT scan looms near I can't help but remember the odds that I'll relapse: 50/50. It's a coin toss. I write this now between the coin toss and the telling. Heads? Or Tails?

It's not difficult to name the activity or the emotion that comes with such a segue, nor is it unfamiliar to any of us. Worry comes nearly as often as our next moment looms uncertain, which is pretty much always. And if life itself doesn't offer ample opportunity for worry as it is, we've certainly got cause for concern as portrayed by the day's headlines. A recent issue of *Health* magazine reads: "Dry Skin? Or Cancer?" What isn't a sign that death is imminent?

I remember the comparison of worry to a rocking chair: it gives you something to do but won't get you anywhere. I can't remember the Scripture reference for that one, but for this one I do: Philippians 4:6-7: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Scripture persuades us to turn our anxiety into action, but not just any action. Nervous habits are not sanctioned here. Supplication is. Prayer and thanksgiving.

Supplication: asking, pleading with

God for a favorable outcome. I'm inclined to include in this category the prayers of lament—about half the psalms—in which the lamenter purposefully grieves his circumstances God-ward. Complaining to the God-audience is more productive than the rocking chair. It might begin to look something like prayer, and in the process, you may remember your audience and remember that He is good. And you may be moved to thank Him for it.

But if you are not so moved, you can still purposefully thank Him for something. Isn't there always something for which we can give thanks? The sour circumstance itself may not be the thing, but if nothing else, isn't there something sweet to be remembered, and in the remembering, thanks to give? Worry will not keep company with gratitude for long.

Perhaps this was one reason why the Israelites were told so often to remember: "Remember your father Abraham ... remember that you were slaves in Egypt."

In remembering their story they were reminded of the goodness of their God—His faithful intentionality, His hand mighty to save, His abiding presence—all of which were occasionally hidden in a cloud (or later, in a cross). Remembering well brought past possibilities into their present circumstances: "If God was there when we crossed the Red Sea, perhaps he will be there when we ford the Jordan."

Remembering well rehearses us for our own stories. Their possibilities become our own:

"If God delivered Israel from their oppression, perhaps He will deliver me from mine."

"If God worked His greatest act of salvation through history's most horrific hurt, perhaps He will work something good through mine."

Remembering well cripples worry.

Giving thanks for the good we remember takes worry out at the knees, or out the door by the scruff of its neck.

Often this remembering and thanksgiving in the context of our communal stories brings light and life to our own.

God was faithful to provide manna (lit. "What is it?") for the Hebrews day by day. One couldn't eat today's manna tomorrow. The peace that God gives us in exchange for our supplications and thanksgiving (beyond comprehension) is like this: one cannot spend today's peace on tomorrow's problems. Nor does one need to.

I remember one late winter evening six years ago when I was sick from Crohn's disease, only we didn't know yet that it was Crohn's. That night, my wife, Jen, and I considered the possibility of cancer. It just about undid us.

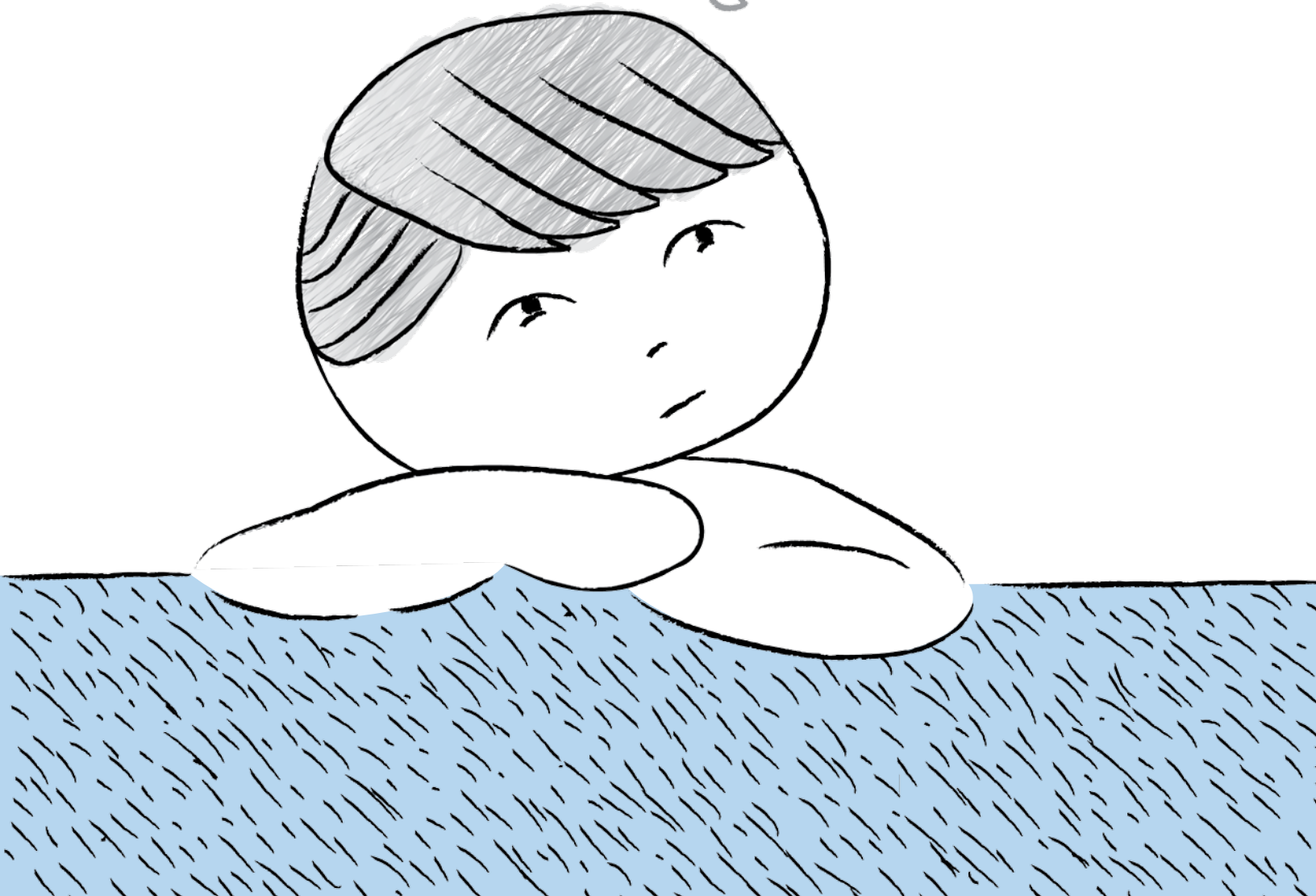
But it wasn't cancer. What it was at the time was easier to stomach. And two years later, when the diagnosis given was cancer, it didn't undo us, because tomorrow's problems had become today's. And peace for today was precisely what God had given.

Remembering what God has done gives cause for thanksgiving, and giving thanks strengthens faith that He will do it again.

Faith strengthened, worry removed.

Recalling His intentional involvement in the lives of Joseph and Jesus (and maybe Jeremy, too) might also lead me to believe that there really are no "coin tosses" with God. And that, right now, would be a very good thing.

Erickson attends Emmaus Free Lutheran in Bloomington, Minn., with his wife and three boys. His most recent scans revealed no cancerous activity. More of his story can be found on his Web site at www.jeremyerickson.com.





WALKING *through* WORRY

*Helping your children resolve
their concerns about life*

By Pastor Eric & Andrea Christenson

Worry seems to be everywhere these days. We all have issues that cause us concern and even make us anxious.

Have you ever stopped to think about your teenager and the things that worry them? From war to family stability, grades to drugs, relationships to jobs, youths today have a lot to be worried about.

Often when compared to worries in the “real world,” adults tend to belittle or ignore these concerns of their children. Some of their worries can seem trivial to adults, but they are very real to the teens in your life. Remember how it was to be their age and how big those issues were to you. How teenagers learn to process worry now can guide how they deal with it in the future. As parents and concerned adults we should stop ignoring and minimizing the issues our teenagers are facing and the worries they bring. Rather, we should help them learn to process through the issue and handle worry in a God-honoring way. After all, the wisest father ever said, “Train up a child ...” (Proverbs 22:6) not fix or ignore them.

The teen years are an important training ground for young people learning to be adults. We can use this pivotal time to not only instill values but also healthy habits for dealing with problems and worry. Here are a few observations on how adults can help adolescents work through worry.

Listen, listen, listen. Adults are quick to spout fixes for the issues their teenagers are worried about. Listen, listen, listen. Let them talk their problem through com-

pletely. Sometimes just talking through the issue will lead them to see that the issue may not be as big as they originally thought. Other times you will need to help; knowing the whole story will be key to assisting them in working it out. Be sure that before you offer your assistance you’ve taken the time to really listen to what your child is saying and help them come up with a solution. Don’t just jump in with a three-step process on how to take care of the problem. Roll up your sleeves and dive into the mess with them and figure it out together.

Don’t be afraid to be the God-person. Long-time youth guru, Tiger McLuen, shared these words with us and they have stuck in our hearts. Even teenagers who love Jesus Christ and seek to follow Him tend to compartmentalize their faith in times of crisis. They forget how God speaks to these issues in Scripture and can’t see how He is there to help. It is your responsibility to bring them back to their biblical roots. Open up the Scriptures to them to help them see how God views, assesses and reacts to these issues. Don’t just say, “God is in control,” or, “all things will work out,” and not deal with the problem. Instead, help them see how God has worked in the past and can work in this situation. Remember Christ’s promise in Matthew 6:31-34 that God sees and cares for all aspects of our life.

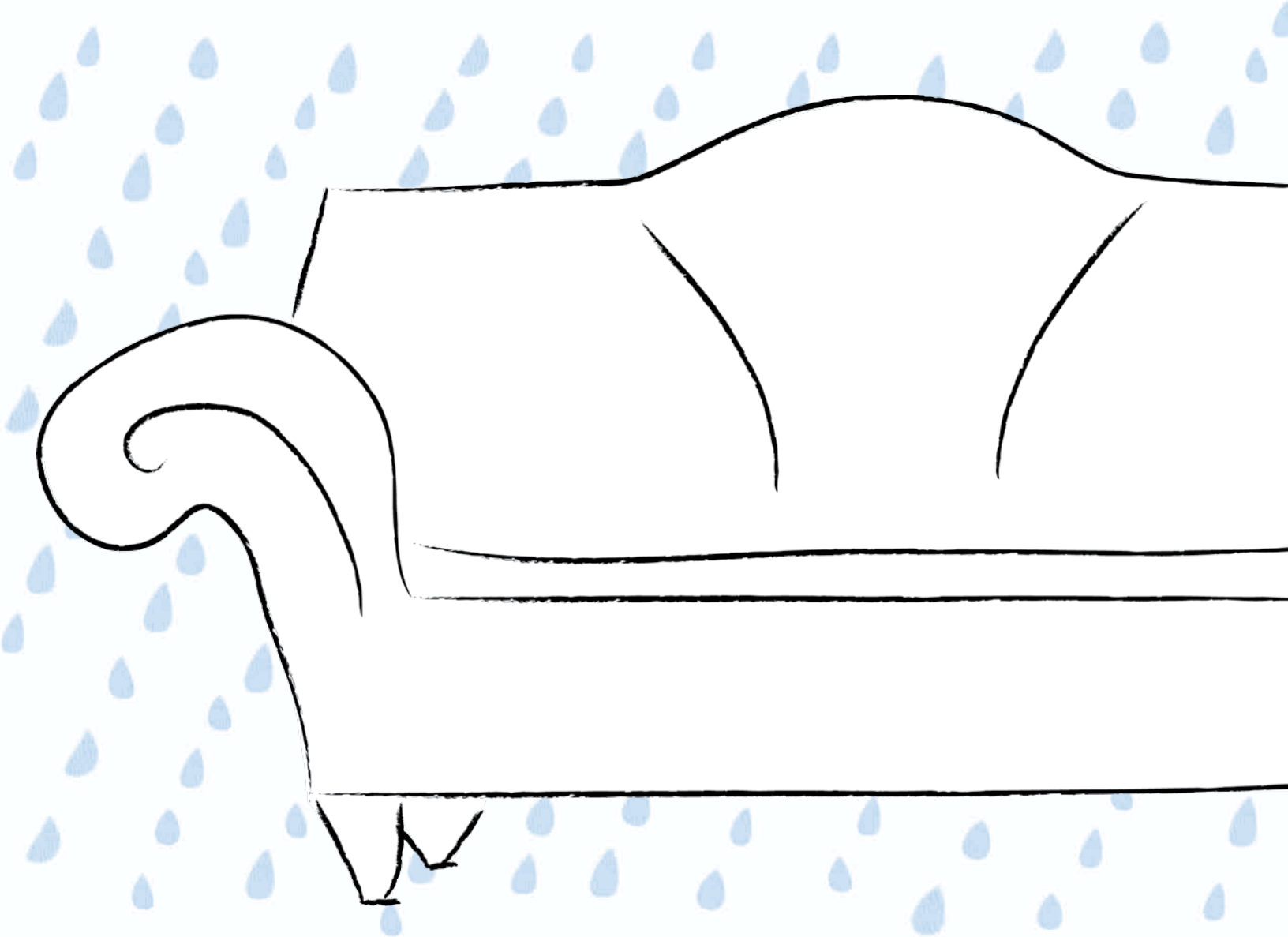
Your worries and anxieties can affect your teenager. Check yourself. Have your anxieties spilled over into your teen’s life? Has he or she picked up on things that you are worried about and amplified them? If you discover that your children are carry-

ing your burdens with or for you, be honest with them about how you have found relief through these times. Chances are your reassurances and trust in the Lord will go a long way toward helping them deal with their anxious hearts.

If your teen’s worry is excessive, sometimes professional help is needed. Let your teen know that it is normal to have some worry but it is not normal for them to obsess over it to the point of letting other things go. If things get to that point, professional help may be needed. At times, this can be as hard (or harder) for the parent to accept. This is not a failure on your part as a parent, or a shameful thing for your child. At times we all need help to think things through from an outside perspective. Both you and your child will benefit from the insights and results a professional can offer.

Helping adolescents process through to a healthy solution will not only relieve the anxiety and fix a potential problem in their lives, but it will teach them healthy and biblical principles for dealing with worry. This will also improve your relationship with your teens as they see you as not just a rule maker, ATM or holder of the car keys, but someone who is concerned for and with them. Love them enough to enter their world, listen to their problems, and work with them in discovering a solution.

The Christensons live in Amery, Wis., where Eric serves Amery Free Lutheran.



I remember that it was a rainy day. People were busily running Saturday errands at the shopping mall as I pulled into a spot near the bookstore entrance. I held my umbrella as I quickly dashed in. Normally, I relish my time among titles. Today, I just wanted to get in and out.

On a scrap piece of paper I had written a title and author. Where to first? The “Health” section? No, nothing there. “Self-help”? Ditto. I didn’t want to, but with a little inner push I found a sales clerk who led me upstairs to the right section: “Psychology.” Great, I rolled my eyes. There it was. And it was big. Could I be more conspicuous?

I shielded the book in my arms as I descended the stairs and wove my way through the aisles to the checkout counter. At some point, I knew, I was going to have to put the book down. I was going to have to let someone see what I was buying.

“The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook.” Was it just me, or did the chatty cashier suddenly get quiet?

That trip to the bookstore was a tiny step that I took in the biggest journey of my life. The first step was seeing a counselor.

I’ve never been abused. I’ve had no horrible traumas in my life. In fact, I have great Christian parents who love me deeply and gave me a great childhood. I’ve successfully navigated my way through high school, college and career. I’ve got great friends. By all accounts I am fine. More than fine.

But then I’m not fine.

You see, somehow along the journey of my life I learned that failure wasn’t an option. All of my self-worth came from how I thought others perceived me. If I couldn’t succeed, I wouldn’t try. It’s the classic definition of a perfectionist. It’s main side effects are worry and anxiety: both social and performance anxiety. It was a recipe for a personal meltdown.

It’s a terribly treacherous way to live. And my body is a sort of road map to my anxiety. Hives, canker sores, sweat, uncontrollable shaking, headaches, stomach aches, sleeplessness, tension. All were outward manifestations of my inward turmoil. All were symptoms I assumed I’d live with forever.

It took two separate but huge failures (consecutively) for me to seek help. In the first I failed professionally. In the second I failed personally. In both my reaction was to turn on myself. “How could I be so stupid? Of course you’re not good enough. Why do you even try?” That, I’ve since learned, is negative self-talk that only serves to reinforce the hurtful way I had cultured to cope with life.

It was in the midst of my second, personal, failure that I saw the depth of my need. I had caught glimpses of it before: that unnamed something; that unexplained dread I felt when I really looked deep within



CONFESSIONS *from the* COUCH

One person's story of counseling

myself. I always looked briefly, and then buried that real thing a little deeper under smiles and assumed confidence. If not for my sister, I would still be hiding there, worried.

She told me about a time in her life when she decided to get real with herself. She decided to go to counseling. And she thought I should, too. So I did.

That first meeting, I tried to put into words why I was there. I couldn't talk for the tears. I cried a lot that day. It was a relief, in a way. Amidst the tears I got out a couple of things. I was tired of living status quo. I wanted to be really real, to live the life God wanted for me. And I wanted some tools to help me get there.

I wanted help. Do you know what it is like to say that? To pursue help? And to have someone to say it to? And to have that someone say, "I can help you." It's like air. It's like coming up for a breath after trying to hold yourself under water. It's "Aha!"

It's wonderful. It's God. It's truth. There is nothing more powerful.

My counselor told me that Jesus never healed people until they asked. I've realized that getting to the point of seeing my need has been the work of the Holy Spirit.

I would bore you if I told you all of the gritty details of my counseling sessions. It is enough to say that they are a gift I wish everyone could experience. The wall I put around my heart is crumbling away as I learn to open myself up to others. To share what I have learned about myself. I've found that as I share my story, many people have similar struggles. Anxiety. Worry. Fear.

Yes, life is wonderfully sweet. And with that sweetness comes bitterness, at times. But that is life. God has taught me that being really real with myself and others is being ok with my failures. Learning from them. Seeing my value despite them. And I'm letting others see my failures, as well.

Looking back, I am amazed at the

work God has done in my life these last six months. I realize that at just the right time God prepared that first "Aha!" moment for me. But not until I was ready.

That book, now covered with a brown grocery bag (my counselor and I had a good laugh over that one) is a staple in my library. When I worry that I won't remember everything I've learned, I know that book is there. Even more, I know that God is there, loving me despite my failures. It's hard work being perfect. I thank God that He is perfect for me.

The writer, who works in full-time Christian ministry, has asked to remain anonymous.



Worrying is like jogging in place; it makes us sweat, wears us out, and gets us nowhere. We've all worried unnecessarily about something, haven't we? I certainly have worried more times than I should. For example, just the other night, my husband, Keith, was late in getting home, and our two boys, Kristofer and Matthew, were with him. Racing anxious thoughts filled me as I went through a list of possible scenarios about why they might be late. One possibility came looming to the forefront. Could they have been in a car accident? Was one or more of them badly hurt or killed? And that last question instantly brought tears—instantly brought bleak imagined images and unnecessary worry. They were late simply because they stopped at the grocery store, and it took longer than they expected.

Obviously, we all know that worry isn't

I'm unable to lift my head off the pillow because of a painful, throbbing headache. I can't cook meals. I can't help the boys with their homework. I can't do the laundry. Everything in my life stops until I recover.

Keith, on the other hand, tends to be a sleepless worrier, one who worries late into the wee, dark hours of the night. He tosses and turns restlessly. As a farmer, he is more prone to worry during spring planting and fall harvest, especially if the weather conditions make it impossible to get in the fields. When Keith can't sleep, he's tired the next day, making his job more dangerous when operating farm equipment. When Keith can't sleep, my sleep is interrupted, too, and the lack of sleep makes my migraines more susceptible. Sometimes the boys' sleep is interrupted if Keith is roaming around the house. This makes us all tired and more irritable the next day.

A friend of mine tends to be a talking worrier, one who carries her worries into

When those first anxious thoughts reach into the crevices of our hearts and minds, we need to heed the words of Jesus. He said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Corrie Ten Boom understood this. In her book *Clippings from My Notebook* she wrote, "Any concern too small to be turned into prayer is too small to be made into a burden."

First and foremost, prayer with a thankful heart is how we should handle worry. God instructs us in Philippians 4:6-7 to "not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present our requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus."

God further instructs us in Philippians 4:8-9 not to worry but instead think on "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is

RELATiONSHiPS

By Linda Lein

When others are affected by our worries

good for us. It causes all kinds of physical ailments—headaches, stomachaches, tightness in the neck and shoulders, among other things. Worry also is a waste of time. It distracts us from the tasks at hand—from the daily jobs that need to get done. But what does it do to relationships? How does worry impact others: our family members, colleagues at work, and friends? How we answer this question about relationships probably depends on what kind of worrier we are.

I tend to be a silent worrier, one who does not share my heart easily with others. I distance myself when I'm troubled about something. Because I stuff my worries internally, my physical health is impacted. I've suffered from migraine headaches since I was 13 years old. My husband and boys must look after themselves those days that

every relationship she has. Her list of worries is endless—medical problems, family issues, work concerns, financial constraints, etc. She wants others to know her suffering; she wants them to lighten her load by having others help her carry it. Unfortunately, some of her friends and work colleagues avoid her. They don't want to be around someone who is negative. They don't want their work tasks interrupted and uncompleted because she needs to talk.

Whether we are a silent, sleepless, or talking worrier, the resulting effects are the same. Proverbs 12:25 says, "An anxious heart weighs a man down." Worry causes all of us to carry a heavy burden—a load that will wear us out—possibly even break us because excessive, prolonged worry can cause serious anxiety problems and depression. So how do we combat worry?

lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things ... And the God of peace will be with you."

I know too well from firsthand experience that it is easier to identify these two steps of how to overcome worry than it is to live by them. Nevertheless, God's Word is true. Instead of allowing anxious thoughts to jog into our hearts and mind and overpower us, we should run to God, make our requests known with thanksgiving, and receive His peace. And as His peace fills us, it will radiate outward into our relationships with others.

Lein is a member of Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn.

BRAiN DRAiN

*Worry can sap our
spiritual, emotional
and physical strength*

By Pastor David Skordahl

Two basketball teams are playing for the championship and for the trophy that comes along with the win. The coach of one team takes a guy off the bench and puts him into the game. The hitch is that this new player has never attended a single practice nor played in a single game. He runs all over the basketball court not knowing what to do or how to do what he thinks he should do. His team loses the championship and the trophy.

Team players do not learn the game by sitting on the bench, but by consistent practice. As they practice plays and shooting the ball into the hoop, they become skilled and the plays become automatic for them. They don't have to stop and think, "What shall I do now?" It comes quite naturally. Through practice they become confident in their skills and can move on to win the game.

How often do we as Christians expend our energy not knowing what to do or how to do it? The dictionary definition of worry is to "afflict with mental distress," or "to make anxious." We often worry because we have not learned (through practicing the skills) how to smack worry in the face and defeat it as our enemy.

Worry can do a lot of degrading things to us. It affects our relationship with God as well as with others. It takes our mind off of God and places it on self and circumstances. This is contrary to what Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:25: "Do not be anxious about your life," and in verse 34, "Do not be anxious about tomorrow."

Isaiah 26:3-4 says, "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an Everlasting Rock." Does it not become sin, then, when we take our minds off God and expend our energy focusing on the circumstance rather than Him? Is it not an insult to God when we carry the burden ourselves? It's kind of like saying, "God, You're not big enough to deal with this problem in my life." It conveys a lack of confidence in the many promises of God's Word.

Worry saps our spiritual, emotional, and physical strength. It wears us down. It *drains our brain* as worry causes us to be unable to focus well. It can often result in depression. When we are depressed, we're not too likely to be motivated to reach out toward God—even if in our minds we know we should. Worry can result in physical illness, as through stress our immune systems get worn down, making us susceptible to various diseases. This can lead to all kinds of spiritual malfunctions within us, as well. It can give us the false belief that God really isn't interested and won't intervene on our behalf. We may lose interest in reading God's Word, and that really increases the amount of stress and anxiety.

Some say, "Worry works, because a great percentage of things we worry about don't ever happen." The problem with this kind of thinking is that if we hadn't worried, it most likely wouldn't have happened anyway. And if it does happen, worry is not going to stop it! Others say the more spiri-

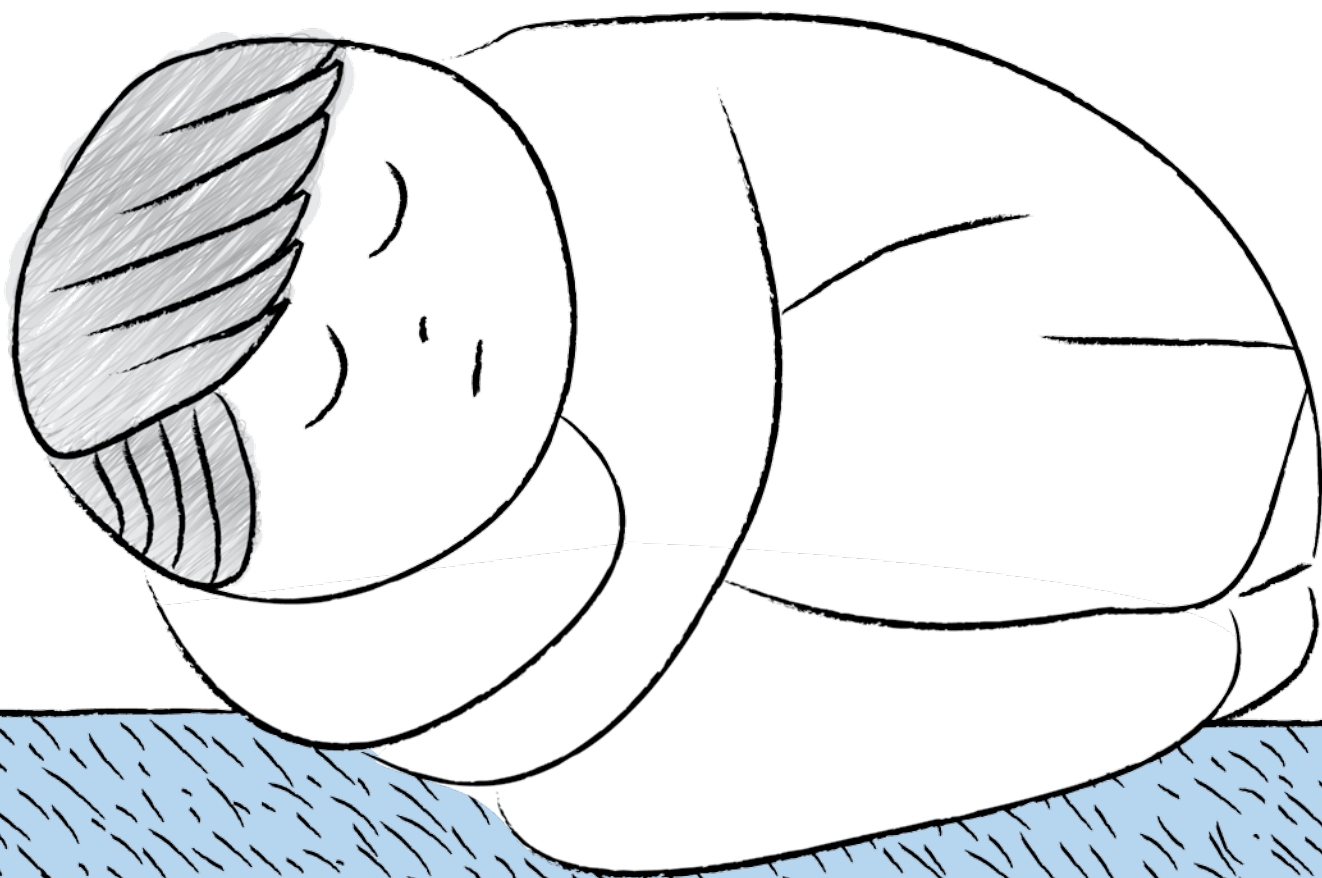
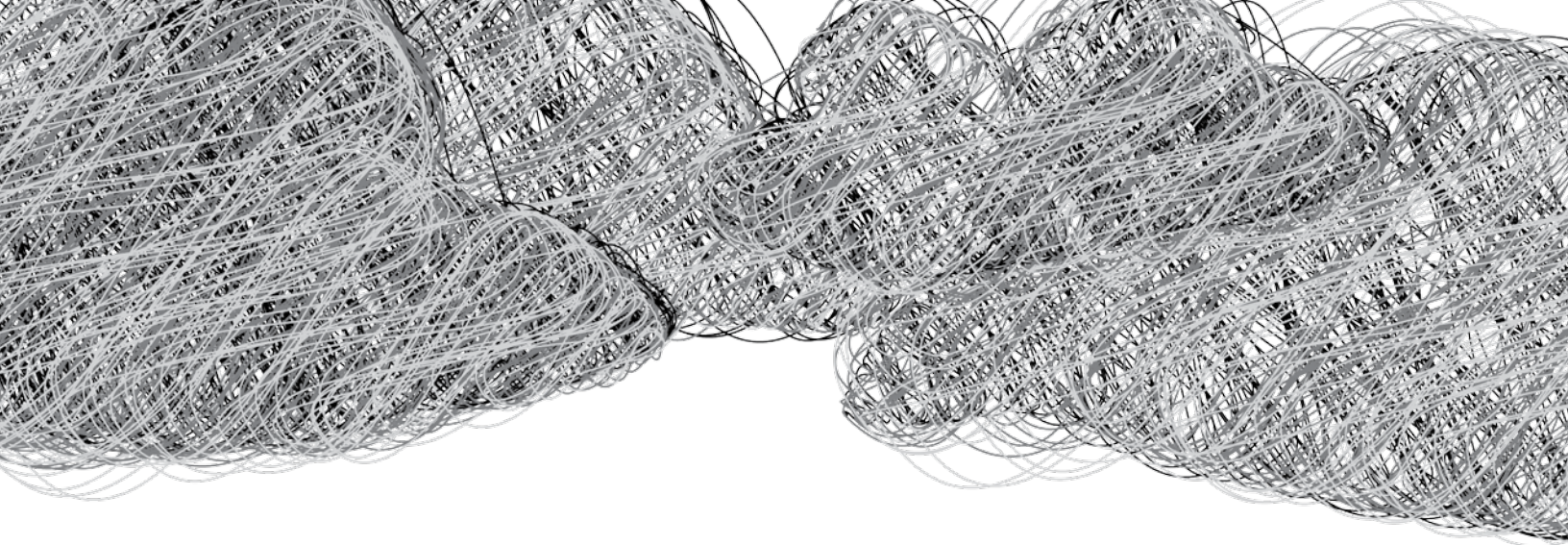
tual thing, "Why worry when we can pray?" That's a very true statement. However, so often we pray and then we still worry. So, what's the purpose of our praying if we are not going to trust in God's promises?

Worry is a sinful choice. It's important that we deal with it and not ignore it as though it were a normal part of life. For a Christian, worry is not normal but abnormal since it blurs our spiritual vision and drains our brain of much God-given potential.

Paul says in Philippians 4:6-8, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Here we are instructed not to be anxious. This is an imperative. Additionally, we are promised a peace which is beyond our understanding when we leave it in God's hands. This passage very clearly implies that when we worry, our minds are not at rest, or at peace.

So we know what we are supposed to be doing. The question is, *how* do we do it? Do you recall the basketball player who goes out on the court and practices consistently until the plays and moves become a natural part of him? Like him, as we practice—keeping our focus off our circumstances and on Jesus—living worry-free will eventually become natural.

Skordahl is serving as interim pastor at Bethlehem Lutheran, Morris, Ill.



Ministering faithfully

Making use of your gifts

As the New Year begins, we are confronted with many challenges in our country. Many of these challenges center around the economy—job losses, increased costs for groceries, clothing, and those things we need to live from day to day. As women we face those challenges, also, and it is easy to get caught up in the emotions of this difficult time. As Christian women, we have one to whom we can turn in this distress, and that is God Himself. We can have every confidence that He will go before us and provide the strength that we need for each day as we face these difficult times.

The Women's Missionary Federation will be continuing with the theme "Women Ministering Faithfully" this year. We want to be faithful in our ministry to our families, churches, communities, country and world.

First and foremost, the WMF seeks to be faithful in our ministry to women—in our community and our churches. By being faithful in our ministry to women, we can point them to Jesus Christ. We don't want to point them to ourselves, our congregations, our pastors, or our church building. We want to point them to Jesus. He is our focus.

Each year the National WMF board puts together a resource packet, which we would hope the ladies of each congregation would use for women's ministry. It is not something just for the president of your women's organization or for the pastor's wife; it is for your use. We want you to utilize all or some of the ministry ideas in the packet. There are women all around us who need to know Jesus. Some are on the fringes of your congregation—women who attend your church occasionally but have never gotten involved in Bible study or fellowship with other women.

There are also some ideas in the packet that will help you plan a community outreach event. Perhaps some of you are already doing some outreach into your community but want more ideas that could involve more of the women in your congregation.

If your women's group has gotten smaller due to busy schedules, jobs, children and their activities, or the economy, we're hopeful that some of the ideas in the packet will be helpful in drawing the women back together again.

Perhaps it won't be WMF as you know it now, or as it used to be, but it will be an outreach to the women in your church and community.

We support you with our prayers. The theme verse that our National WMF has adopted for this year is Romans 12:6 (NKJV): "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them." God has given us various gifts to use in ministering to others. Let us use these gifts faithfully to minister to one another, our families, our communities, and our world.

*Mundfrom, Spencer Creek
Lutheran, Eugene, Ore., is the
president of the National WMF.*

Roots of Freedom

New publication highlights AFLC history

Did you know that the oldest Norwegian-American congregation in the U.S. is affiliated with the AFLC? In this new AFLC publication, author Loieil Dyrud recounts the beginnings of Norwegian-Lutheran congregations and church bodies in the U.S. and summarizes AFLC history and “roots of freedom.”

Dyrud notes the earliest Norwegian congregation was organized in 1839 in the Fox River area of northern Illinois by lay evangelist Elling Eielsen, a follower of Hans Nielsen Hauge. Eielsen and many other Norwegian immigrants had been greatly influenced by Hauge, the well-known lay evangelist who led a spiritual awakening throughout Norway. Hauge believed there was more to being a Christian than simply being a member of the State Church and emphasized a personal and growing faith in Christ.

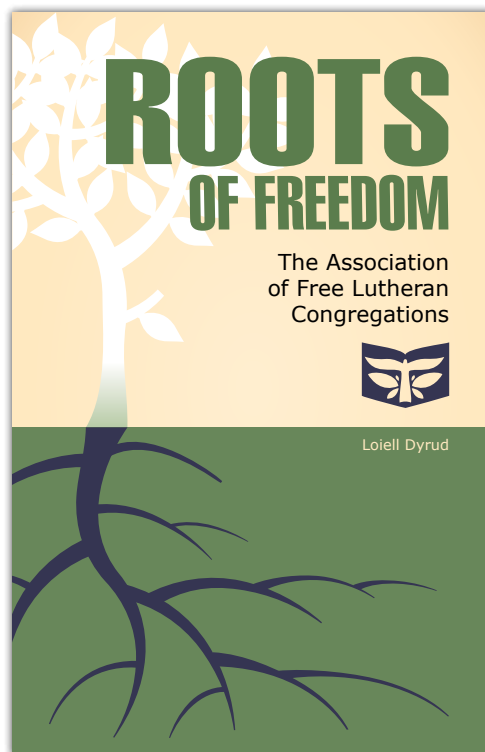
Another Lutheran congregation was organized in 1843 north of the Fox River area in the Norwegian settlement of Muskego, WI. Rev. J. W. C. Dietrichson, ordained by the State Church of Norway, became their pastor in 1844. The author explains that in contrast to Eielsen, Dietrichson represented the State Church model, which was a highly structured institution that exercised control over spiritual matters through bishops and pastors.

As other Norwegian-American congregations were established in the New World, congregations that followed Eielsen eventually became known as Hauge’s Synod while those who followed the State Church model of Dietrichson became known as the Norwegian Synod. A third group of Norwegian Lutherans organized a church whose position lay somewhere between the Haugeans and the Norwegian Synod and became known as

The Conference. The author writes, “The Conference believed in the personal piety of the Hauge’s Synod on the one hand while embracing the tradition of a theologically trained clergy of the Norwegian Synod on the other. But in a distinctly different position from both, The Conference believed the local congregation should be free from any form of higher church government as was often the case in a synod, where the clergy could exert control over the congregation.”

The writer goes on to describe how the Lutheran Free Church (LFC) was established under the leadership of Georg Sverdrup and Sven Oftedal. Organized in 1897 “as an association of autonomous congregations working together in common endeavors such as missions, schools, and educational publications,” the LFC emphasized a unique structure of church government with no human authority over the congregation, where “members of the congregation direct their own affairs under the guidance of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.” The LFC officially merged with The American Lutheran Church in the early 1960s. The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations formed in 1962 and has continued the same church structure and emphases as outlined in 12 “Fundamental Principles” originally established by the LFC and included in this booklet.

This booklet also contains photographs and information about the four AFLC presidents as well as a section summarizing various ministries of the AFLC and how they serve our congregations. People who have not yet visited the AFLC campus may appreciate the photographs of the Free Lutheran Schools Chapel, Heritage Hall, and the AFLC Administration Building. Ten questions



This new 20-page booklet summarizing the history, principles, and ministries of the AFLC is now available from Ambassador Publications. Appropriate for youth, adults and new members as an introduction to the AFLC. Cost: \$4 each plus S&H. Contact Parish Education

in the back encourage discussion to help people gain a deeper understanding of the principles and practices of the AFLC and its relationship to their congregation. The booklet was funded in part through a grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.

Christopherson is the director of Publications and Parish Education.

Shining light

Arizona congregation uses evangelism grant to reach their neighborhood

The Calvary Free Lutheran Church property was an island of light in Mesa, Arizona on Oct. 21, 2008. As a 30-foot light tower beamed light outside our church building, activities for the whole family were available during the evening hours.

There were inflatables, games, face painting, a fish pond, a balloon artist, Spanish Christian music, prizes and lots of food. An enthusiastic neighbor of the church built a six-car train pulled by a four-wheeler and provided more than 240 rides during the evening. More than 40 volunteers (including some of our winter visitors) helped engineer the event. An estimated 500 attended this year, indicating our volunteers worked very hard.

Each family received a welcome bag containing an attractive gospel tract entitled, "Light Up The Night," information and an invitation to attend services at Calvary Free Lutheran. A PowerPoint presentation on our congregation also ran continuously throughout the evening.

This was the third annual "Light Up The Night" event at our church. The spark for this event came from a grant in 2006 from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans through the AFLC Commission on Evangelism. In our first year an estimated 300 people attended the event. This response served as fuel to ignite the vision for continuing the event yearly.

The vision includes being a light in the darkness of the Arizona night and a light during our culture's celebration of Halloween. We want to provide a safe alternative for families. But the most important part of the vision is to present the light of Jesus Christ to those living in the darkness of sin.

Our prayer is that of "Shine, Jesus, Shine," written by Graham Kendrick:
Lord, the light of Your love is shining in the midst of the darkness, shining;
Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us,
set us free by the truth You now bring us,
shine on me, shine on me.
Shine, Jesus, shine,
fill this land with the Father's glory;
blaze Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow,
flood the nations with grace and mercy;
send forth Your word,
Lord, and let there be light."

By Pastor Al Monson



Question: To build or not?

BY NATHAN OLSON

In the month of Kislev in the 20th year, back in the time of Israelite captivity and exile, Nehemiah found himself in the citadel of Susa. The sun was shining, the birds were chirping and Nehemiah was going about his day like any other. However, this average day was about to drastically change, as Nehemiah looked up and saw a caravan of men arriving from Judah.

Expecting to hear good news, Nehemiah was quickly disappointed upon hearing the message that he received. His Jewish brothers reported that their homeland was a complete mess. Those who had survived the exile and had gone back to Jerusalem went back to a city of disgrace with walls broken down and gates charred by fire.

For days Nehemiah mourned, fasted and prayed before the Lord. And then His calling came: rebuild.

This calling from the Lord was certainly not an easy one. Nehemiah faced

constant rebuke, persecution and anger from surrounding leaders, as well as doubt and fear from his own people. Yet in only 52 days, the walls were rebuilt and Nehemiah's enemies cringed in fear as they realized this work had been done by the power of Nehemiah's God.

Today, 2,500 years later, the same God who called Nehemiah to rebuild is the same God who calls us to rebuild, as well. In our daily lives we face the need to rebuild our focus, our goals, and our dreams around that which the Lord would call us to. Just like the walls and gates of Jerusalem, often parts of our own lives have crumbled or been charred by fire and need some serious work. As believers, we have One who is faithful and who is mighty to save!

Maybe this whole rebuilding process won't be easy. Maybe like Nehemiah you'll face some opposition. Maybe it won't be something that is accomplished in an hour, or even a day. Regardless of the obstacles that you encounter and the amount of time

it takes for God to do some restructuring in your life, the important thing is that it be done by the power of God.

If Nehemiah had tried to build up the walls of Jerusalem in his own strength and might, it would have been impossible. Likewise with our own lives, if we try to work on them in our own power and might, we are going to fail and fall flat on our faces. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord God Almighty" (Zechariah 4:6).

So how about you? Are you going to build up or not? God calls us to do great and mighty things, one of them being to rebuild and reconstruct our own personal focus and vision. Just like Nehemiah rebuilt the walls and gates of Jerusalem, may each of us build up our lives around the Lord Jesus Christ and His plan for us!

Olson, a senior at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn.

Respond!

Short-term mission trips can change lives

Naknek, South Naknek, Kokhannok, Egegik—they were names we could not even pronounce. But those names would change our lives. Under the guidance of Emmaus Lutheran Church's (Bloomington, Minn.) Respond! Short Term Mission (STM) program, a team of 10 members traveled to Naknek, Alaska, in June to serve AFLC churches led by Pastor Jeff Swanson.

Our tasks were to present VBS to the children, construct two arctic entrances, repair flooring in a church, hang new lights and rewire an airplane hangar, reconstruct the hangar entrance, dig tie downs for the planes, and scrape and prime the Naknek church building.

With the advantage of long daylight hours, we had the joy of completing the list in spite of rainy, chilly weather. God blessed us with time to fellowship with the Swansons and the people of the community, and we learned that there is a great need for the gospel to be brought to this huge area. We *responded* to the call.

The Respond! STM program is relatively new at Emmaus Lutheran Church. The first trip we took was to Ecuador in 2007, and most recently we went to an orphanage in Baja, Mexico. Participants receive important preparation through an extensive team training program that consists of Bible study, ministry knowledge, cultural skill development, team building, and even fundraising.

One of the goals of each mission trip is to encourage and assist the local missionaries who experience a huge boost in productivity and community exposure when teams come to serve alongside them. Construction projects, special Bible camps, medical clinics, business/agricultural help, and English language camps are just some of the ways STM teams serve.

Each trip becomes a life-changing experience for the team members. One participant, in talking about the new perspective she gained on her trips to Ecuador



and an orphanage in Mexico, said, "Short-term mission trips have changed the way I view servanthood. Seeing our leaders humble themselves and minister to the needy demonstrates the love and compassion taught by Christ. We have the opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus in today's world."

What's required to serve on a Respond! STM team? A servant heart is the first and primary requirement. Other desired skills vary by project and team trip. Participants are challenged to become "world Christians," seeking to view the world through God's eyes and to understand how God wants to use them. The program encourages adult, youth, and multi-generational team participation.

We are excited to partner with AFLC World Missions and Home Missions departments to reach out to those we are supporting in the field. Respond! has STM trips scheduled this year to the Philippines and Turkey, with plans for developing further outreach in 2010.

For more information on Respond! STM trips or on creating your own mission



Members of Emmaus Lutheran's Respond! mission team in Naknek, Alaska.

trip, contact Becky Petersen at (952) 201-1698 or bpetersen@emmauslutheran.org.

Peterson is a member of Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn.

fly 2009

July 6-11, 2009

Estes Park, CO

YMCA of the Rockies

youth.aflc.org/fly

Do you wonder what is being planned for FLY 2009? Are you biting your nails in anticipation as you raise funds to pay for your trip this summer? Do you find yourself wondering who is going to speak, and on what topic? Why not check out the FLY 2009 Web site? Filled chock full with information you'll need to prepare for a week in the Rockies, the FLY Web site is your source for news (wowie!), registrations (dude!), health forms (zap!), and ... (drum roll) the FLY promo video. Here's just some of what you'll find by visiting "youth.aflc.org/fly."

- The FLY 2009 promotional video is now linked to our Web page. On it you'll catch just a glimpse of what our youth conventions are all about. Use it to refresh your memories or inspire your friends to come with you.

- Prayer Warriors: At the heart of every FLY convention is a community of praying friends whose mission it is to lift up those attending our convention. You can get a head start on getting connected to this group by clicking on this link. Have a prayer request? Let us know. We want to be praying for you!

- Polls: Every month we feature a new poll. From your favorite movie genre to your favorite holiday, we want to know all about you. Check back here often.

- America's Best Youth Group Video: That's right, we're asking your youth group to come up with your best video efforts. Silly. Inspirational. Dramatic. Find out about the contest rules and get ready to act your heart out.

- Make a funny face, you just might see it on our Web site. That's right, we want you to pucker up and snap! Then send your picture to our Web administrator. Find out more on our Web site.

- More downloads: Besides our FLY promo video, check out our Web site to find exciting downloads. Be the first to put our wallpaper on your computer's desktop. Download the registration form and health forms. Get our FLY poster to hang up in your bedroom. Find out about the dress code. It's all there!

So if you just can't wait for the latest news, or if you've got some spare time on your hands, visit our Web site. And get ready for a week in the Rockies, where you'll be sure to have a ton of fun with your friends and you'll be firmly planted in God's Word.



early registration: February 1

November memorials

AFLBS	Jim Brintnell
Alice Rokke	Pastor Marlyn Kruse
	Myrtle Gauslow
AFLTS	
Maurice McLoughlin	Parish Education
Alice Rokke	Joanne Weinkauff
FLAPS	World Missions
Alice Rokke	Alice Rokke
	Joanne Weinkauff
General Fund	Pastor Marlyn Kruse
Maurice McLoughlin	
Vernon Buck	In honor of ...
Dorrcy Brintnell	
Home Missions	AFLBS
Ralph Kinneberg	Bea Anderson
Rey Lark	World Missions
Alice Rokke	Edith Gudim

People and places

Pastor Steve Papillon has accepted a call to serve Fox River Lutheran, Sheridan, Ill., along with Pastor Kevin Garner. Papillon had served Zion Free Lutheran, Wadena, Minn., and Bethany Free Lutheran, Sebeka, Minn.

Members of **Trinity Free Lutheran**, Janesville, Wis., will celebrate the congregation's 20th anniversary on Jan. 18. Celebration worship will begin at 9 a.m., followed by a social time, program and dinner. Pastor Elden Nelson, AFLC president, will be the guest speaker. Pastors who have previously served the congregation will also bring greetings. All are invited. For more information and to RSVP for the dinner, please call (608) 757-1237.

India, Uganda trip planned

A group of pastors and laymen from the AFLC will visit India and Uganda this month.

Pastor Kevin Olson, director of the Ambassador Institute, will travel to Uganda and India, leaving on Jan. 5 and returning on Feb. 7. Olson will continue to reach potential students for the distance education program. In India, he will work with Pastor Luther Sastry to roll the current seminary by extension program into the distance education program, and encourage the graduate leadership there to begin teaching their own students.

Pastor Elden Nelson, AFLC president, and Pastor Del Palmer, director of World Missions, will travel together to both India and Uganda, leaving Jan. 21 and returning Feb. 14. This will be Pastor Nelson's first trip to both mission fields. They hope to discuss the future vision for these fields with the workers who are there.

Bob W. Lee, currently a student at AFLTS, and Pastor Craig Wentzel, who serves on the World Mission Committee, will travel to India Jan. 21-31. Lee, a former World Mission Prayer League missionary to Bangladesh, is considering mission work in India.

Lyle Mattson, a World Missions Committee member from Greenbush, Minn., will travel to Uganda Feb. 6-14 to discuss the future vision of the work there.

Strom, former president of the Lutheran Brethren, was a friend of the AFLC

Pastor Everaldo Strom, 87, of Fergus Falls, Minn., died Dec. 1, 2008, at the Broen Memorial Home, Fergus Falls.

Born June 7, 1921, in Wahpeton, N.D., he was the son of Pastor Erwin and Bertha (Hanson) Strom. He married Sylvia Kilde on June 5, 1943. He graduated from Hillcrest Lutheran Academy, Fergus Falls, in 1938. He graduated from Augsburg College, Minneapolis, in 1942 and from the Lutheran Brethren Seminary in 1944 with a Master of Divinity. From 1944 to 1968, he served Lutheran Brethren congregations in Staten Island, N.Y.; Minneapolis; Scarsdale, N.Y.; and Moorhead, Minn. He was elected president of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren in 1968, a position which he retired from in 1986. He served as chaplain/director of the Tuscarora Oaks Housing Development, Fergus Falls. He also served as editor of *Faith and Fellowship*, and was on the board of the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement. Strom worked as a counselor with the AFLC's Home Missions department and was a friend of the AFLC.

Surviving are his wife; two sons; one sister; five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

The service was Dec. 3, 2008, at Bethel Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn.

ARC hosts Pastor's and Wives Retreat

The AFLC Pastors' Retreat will be held Jan. 20-22 at the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis. The opening service, led by Pastor Joel Rolf, will begin at 7 p.m. Jan. 20. Sessions on Jan. 21 will include a Bible study by Pastor Dale Finstrom, a focus on "Renewal for Life" by Dr. James Lamb from Lutherans for Life, "Dealing with the Difficult" by Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, "Pastors' Financial Planning" by Cory Buck, and "Personal Finances" by Steve Jankord. An evening banquet will feature Pastor John and Ruby Abel speaking on "Reflections of God's Faithfulness," followed by a service of Holy Communion. Sessions on Jan. 22 will include "Addressing Relationship Struggles," by Pastor Michael Brandt, followed by AFLC departmental updates.

The cost is \$85/person. Please call (715) 294-2877 or email arcregistration@centurytel.net to register for any or all of the retreat.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1- Nov. 30, 2008

FUND	TOTAL (subsidy)	REC'D IN NOVEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$360,331	\$23,467	\$318,183	88
Evangelism	113,084	4,335	77,391	68
Youth Ministries	71,249	4,681	94,076	132
Parish Education	116,771	6,426	88,598	76
Seminary	220,252	15,190	178,637	81
Bible School	346,706	18,161	335,967	97
Home Missions	332,985	29,135	268,223	81
World Missions	288,948	20,276	275,391	95
Personal Support	457,495	33,514	420,627	92
TOTALS	\$2,307,821	\$155,185	\$2,057,093	89
TOTALS 2007	\$2,220,688	\$208,447	\$2,101,091	95

Goal 92%

These are the Annual Conference-approved budgets but do not reflect all the financial needs of the departments. Contact the individual departments for further information.

Why WORRY

In 1981 the cult leader Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and his followers started a commune on a piece of property in Central Oregon called “the Big Muddy Ranch.” It was more than 64,000 acres near the little town of Antelope.

Followers from around the world started flocking to the ranch, which they named Rajneeshpuram. Originally the cult claimed the commune would only have a few residents. That quickly proved false as thousands moved in and construction took off.



Pastor Craig Johnson

At first many considered the cult somewhat of a novelty and a joke. Rajneesh didn't speak to his followers, but drove around the commune each day in one of his many Rolls-Royces. All work would stop and people would line the sides of the road to wave as he drove by. They would all be wearing red, as that was the required color of clothing for all the Rajneeshes.

Before the cult and all its followers moved in, Antelope had less than 100 residents. Some of those residents were concerned about their new neighbors. They started pointing out land use laws that were being broken and other regulations that were being ignored. The Rajneeshes combated this by getting their cult members registered to vote, pushing through measures they wanted in local elections and getting some of their members elected to city council. After, in some ways, taking

over the city, they started to set their sights on the county and state government.

People were getting worried.

In 1983 I was doing a college internship in the Oregon State Capitol. When a guy in a red suit came walking down the halls you knew it wasn't Santa Claus. It was the lobbyist for the Rajneeshes. They were trying to find senators and representatives who might be friendly toward them and help them with legislation.

“They took over a town. Now they're trying to take over a county. They're going around the State Capitol. What are they going to do next?” That was the talk around the state.

What they did next was self-destruct. In 1985 some of the Bhagwan's top aides abruptly left the country. They left behind accusations of crimes, recordings of conversations and other evidence that implicated other members of the cult, including the Bhagwan. The authorities investigated and uncovered evidence of poisonings, attempted murders, wiretapping and numerous other crimes. Arrests were made and Rajneesh was deported.

The ranch was eventually put up for auction. A family bought it and gave it to the Young Life nondenominational Christian youth organization. They have developed it into one of the finest facilities in the world for Christian youth camping. Since the camp opened in 1999 tens of thousands of young people have heard the good news of Jesus there. Each year lives are being transformed.

A lot of worrying was done 25 years ago. Many saw terrible disasters on the way. I doubt that anyone envisioned what God was going to do with that property in Central Oregon. “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20, NIV).

We often imagine the worst. It was easy to do that in Oregon 25 years ago. It would be logical to do that if all we had to rely on were our own resources. But we serve the God who has said, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, ... With man

Instead of going forward with hope too many congregations cower in fear. We see what might go wrong but we fail to look at Scripture to see what God has promised to do.

this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 6:34, 19:26).

Worry can take over a person's life. It can spread through a congregation and destroy their mission. Instead of going forward with hope too many congregations cower in fear. We see what might go wrong but we fail to look at Scripture to see what God has promised to do.

Worry didn't stop the Rajneeshes. It just cost a lot of people some sleep. What made the difference was prayer. Worry won't help your family or congregation, but it could cause a lot of damage. Instead of worry, pray to the God who is still in the miracle business.

association retreat center

BY BOB DIETSCHKE

Celebrating 30 years

"Come and see the works of God; He is awesome in His doing toward the sons of men" (Psalms 66:5).

Whoa! It's 30 years already? We have to pinch ourselves once in awhile to believe it has actually been 30 years since the AFLC purchased the Association Retreat Center. Maybe you have heard me say, "We should have called it the Miracle Center," because of the many miracles that have taken and are taking place here, confirming that God is in the midst of the work. As Pastor Phil Featherstone, a longtime ARC supporter, often said, "It's holy ground".

The ARC is God's facility and His blessings have been on this place. Briefly, here is a list of some of the miracles I have seen.

- The original purchase was a miracle, including the price paid.
- Swimming lake built with borrowed equipment.
- Underground tanks removed at no cost.
- Gymnasium built in-house and furnished with free sports equipment.
- Just last fall the funds for the steel needed to roof 10 buildings was miraculously provided. Three are already completed.

God has provided volunteer workers to come alongside our staff and the funds and materials needed for many projects. There are literally hundreds of other provisions, too numerous to mention here, that God has provided.

There is more. The ARC has had international exposure. The International Bible Society, after finding the ARC's Web site, sent out a video crew from California. As a result the ARC was featured in a segment of an international TV program.

Also, at a recent retreat we had people in attendance from 13 countries. Another retreat group had a fellow from The Netherlands who came specifically to hear their speaker. One weekend, Director Pat Flanders said he could hear the gospel being preached in four different languages as he walked between buildings: English, Spanish, Russian and Chinese.

Of course the greatest miracles of all are reports that souls are being saved. We are thrilled to hear of people coming to salvation, 25 in one weekend. Several thousand people have become first-time believers while at the ARC, and many others have had their faith revived.

We realize that the fruit of our ministry here at the ARC is blessed also because of your prayers and gifts. We want to thank all of you for your support as you are part of the ministry here. Share in the blessing of seeing folks come to Jesus, finding rest for their souls and bodies.

The message of Mark 6:3, the ARC's motto, is extended to you. "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

Dietschke, a member of Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis., is the former director and longtime supporter of the ARC.