

THE LUTHERAN 

JANUARY 2010

AMBASSADOR



Money Matters

Our



BY SARAH VANCE

encourager

My patient cried softly. I had just helped the elderly gentleman as he finished getting ready for bed. He needed much assistance following his surgery. Cancer had been a long battle for him. He was so weary and brokenhearted, not knowing if he dared to hope that he could win this fight with cancer.

My heart ached for him. It seemed he was all alone—no wife, no family, no friends were close beside him. Yet, as I sat by his bedside, he opened up to me and told me of a friend who had never left his side ... Jesus.

I was immediately stirred in my spirit. I knew that God had planned this moment and that I was sent as His voice, His hands, His feet to this wounded saint. Not only that, but our wonderful Lord had prepared me for this moment. I had read Psalm 34 in my devotions before I left for work that day. God had also prepared for this moment through our faithful brothers, the Gideons. I am so thankful for the Gideon Bibles placed in hospital rooms. They come in handy all the time!

I asked my patient if I could share Scripture and prayer with him, and he quickly said yes. I read Psalm 34:17-19, "The righteous cry and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all."

I was encouraged by this man's testimony. After I read these

verses, he shared that he was at peace even if God did not deliver him from his battle with cancer. He was so thankful that Jesus had been right there by his side during his whole life. His tears kept coming.

"The Lord is my strength, Sarah," he said. "He alone has been the source of my strength during this long fight. I wouldn't still be here if it hadn't been for Him."

I read the last verse of the chapter to him.

"The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned."

Our conversation turned to the hope of heaven: no more pain, no more tears, and best of all we will see Jesus face to face.

He said, "Sarah, I can't wait to see Jesus. Heaven is going to be so wonderful."

I took his hand in mine and we prayed for God's continued peace, presence, and strength for this battle.

Those who are crushed in spirit and are brokenhearted are all around us. We are called to "encourage one another and build up one another" (1 Thessalonians 5:11a). Your words of encouragement offered at the right moment can be the difference between finishing well or giving up in despair. Please look around you for opportunities to encourage one another. May God bless you as you minister to others in need of encouragement.

Vance is a registered nurse in an intensive care unit in Staples, Minn. Her husband, Pastor Jeremy Vance, serves Zion Free Lutheran in Wadena, Minn., and Bethany Free Lutheran Church of Bluegrass, Sebeka, Minn.

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God gives every bird its food, but He does not throw
it into the nest.

—J. G. Holland

[God has given us two hands—one to receive with and the other to give with.
We are not cisterns made for hoarding; we are channels made for sharing.

—Billy Graham]

Money that comes easily disappears quickly, but
money that is gathered little by little will grow.

—Proverbs 13:11 NCV

Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can.

—John Wesley



My fruit is better than fine
gold; what I yield surpasses
choice silver. I walk in the
way of righteousness, along
the paths of justice, bestowing
wealth on those who love
me and making their
treasuries full.

Proverbs 8:19-21



Delusions & delights

BY KENT WIGG

Years ago, as the breadwinner of our young family seeking to survive on one income, my highest aspiration was often just making it to the next paycheck—a week away—on a \$10 checking balance. After all, I was a banker. I should be able to handle money.

We wore our clothes until they were often too worn to give away. Special trips with our three kids consisted of a stroll down the main hall of the shopping mall, stopping to enjoy cheeseburgers—purchased as hamburgers and adding our own cheese from slices stowed away in my wife's purse. It saved 10 cents a burger!

I did virtually all the work on our home, with no particular skill but loads of incentive: avoiding spending money. I put on a new roof, painted (over and over and over), put up a new fence and retaining wall, and remodeled every room.

We went on a cash envelope program for 20 years, avoiding credit and somehow making ends meet each month, even if dinners the last week of the month consisted of a lot of mac 'n cheese.

Yet through all of this thriftiness I often sat up at night worrying about where we were heading, feeling guilty that we hadn't mustered the funds for that Disney World trip everyone else our age seemed to be taking. If those worries didn't seem enough, I could always fret about how we could pay for future expenses years down the road: kids' braces, college, weddings.

Failure often crept into my thoughts: I

wasn't passing the course of "Dad, Husband & Provider 101" because I was measuring our progress as a family both by our checking balance and by the stuff we could purchase.

In short, I was living in the midst of lies, or at least delusions based on lies, from the greatest deceiver of them all. "... for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44b).

The Bible makes this all clear, but it was years before I could see what was happening. Where some buy into "delusions of grandeur," I had bought into delusions of failure, a nasty virus infecting my attitude toward our tight money situation.

At a time when I thought I was simply making the best of what resources God had provided, in truth, I was also allowing a preoccupation with money and stuff to rob me of precious moments—the delights of the heart—appreciating the family God had given me!

And worse, I wasn't trusting God to provide what He knew we needed to sustain our lives. Yet in His infinite patience and wisdom, He allowed me the learning experience of trying, often unsuccessfully, to take care of things myself, trusting in my own abilities and calling on the Lord only for the major fires.

As years passed, my wife returned to teaching and money worries lessened. It was during this period that my eyes slowly opened. We actually made it through the dreaded braces, college and wedding ex-

penses. For all of the worries and delusions I had accepted, we emerged whole and solvent. The Lord had seen us through despite the time I had wasted on worrying.

Now our family often laughs at those days of smuggling in cheese for our burgers. Our daily problems are different, having less to do with money, but always, there will be problems of some sort.

Looking back, I learned what my wife knew all along. The true wealth and delights of the Lord have been and still are our small but warm home, my loving wife and family, and now five (going on six) amazing little grandchildren.

And through all this, the Lord will provide His delights!

It's simple and so biblical: Don't buy the lies. Don't trade delights for delusions. What money buys cannot be your end-goal or it will steal your joy, and you may not even know it. "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:12-13).

Stuff the lies in a bag and give it a boot out the back door. Immerse yourself in the Bible's wisdom and love the Lord for all He is and the fullness of what He has chosen to provide—and delight in it!

Wigg is a member of Living Word Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.



I SIT AT A TABLE IN A SIDE-WALK CAFE IN MY BELOVED CITY OF AGUASCALIENTES, MEXICO, SIPPING A COLD CONCOCTION OF COFFEE THAT WAS ROASTED THIS MORNING, PRAYERFULLY CONSIDERING MATTHEW 6:25-34. THAT'S THE PASSAGE THAT SAYS, "DO NOT WORRY, SAYING 'WHAT SHALL WE EAT?' OR 'WHAT SHALL WE DRINK?' OR 'WHAT SHALL WE WEAR?'" ENJOYING A FEW HOURS OF WHAT FEELS TO ME LIKE LUXURY, I ASK, HOW DO THESE VERSES APPLY TO MY LIFE AT THIS MOMENT?

I notice that the passage begins with "Therefore." I can imagine my dad asking, "What is the 'therefore' there for?" The previous verses say that "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," and, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be loyal to the one and despise the other." *Therefore* do not worry about these things. Jesus isn't telling us not to think about what we'll eat, drink or wear because they're unimportant. He's acknowledging that they *are* important and He's promising to take care of them so we can serve Him with an undivided heart.

We cannot serve God and money. I thought about that often in a different chapter of my life. Back when I had a nine-to-five office job in Minnesota, the temptation was to compromise my principles: to spend time on Sunday trying to meet a deadline, to go along with the rest of the research team in making it seem that the project had to continue as long as there might be grant money available, even to accept a freelance translation job when I didn't believe in the ideas that would be published. These are

all seemingly little things, but each one is a choice—to serve God or to serve money. He says we can't have it both ways. And we have His Word that our needs will be met if we serve Him.

When I first came to Jerez, Mexico, as a short-term assistant, I thought I had it figured out. I knew I wasn't serving—or depending on—"mammon;" therefore I must be serving and depending on God, right?

Not quite. I was very independent. Eight years after going to the States for my higher education, I had graduated from college without debt. I was responsible for myself, and through hard work I had done well. Living as a single woman, making a name for myself in the Latino community of Minnesota, and working my way through college without debt made me even more independent than I had been before—even though I could not have done it without help from my family.

Now the rules had changed. I had moved in with my parents for an indefinite period of time, and I couldn't even contribute toward the rent. I was not able to take care of my own needs!

To live in faith

BY INGRID GILES

When my parents left Mexico, God provided for my bills more directly. However, I still struggled with pride. As a short-term assistant, there seemed to be no direct correlation between the work I did and the money I made. If my entire income one month was less than the electric bill, it was completely unrelated to whether I had been lazy or diligent, wise or foolish. It hurt my pride to live on “charity” and to be unable to support myself by my own effort.

By the way, God has never failed me in His promise to provide. Even when my income has been low in terms of dollar amounts, He has met all my needs. He has not always done so in ways that nurtured my independent spirit, though.

I slowly came to realize that although I had previously tried to serve God in the workplace, I had really been depending on *myself* to provide my needs. Learning to depend directly on God was a difficult transition.

Not living for money does not mean that we should be lazy or foolish. It does mean that our first priority should be to serve, honor and glorify God in the arena to

which He has called each of us. When faced with a choice between glorifying God and making money, we should choose God. He *does* give us the things we need.

A woman in our church has experienced this first-hand. When her husband left her with four children and she had to get a job, she was faced with choices. She has tried to make choices that honor the Lord, even though at times that has meant turning down options that might have resulted in more money. God has provided for all her family’s needs in spite of a low income, and her faith has been steadily growing. Now when she faces a decision she says, “God has blessed me and my children, and He keeps blessing us. I need to keep walking on this path of blessing!”

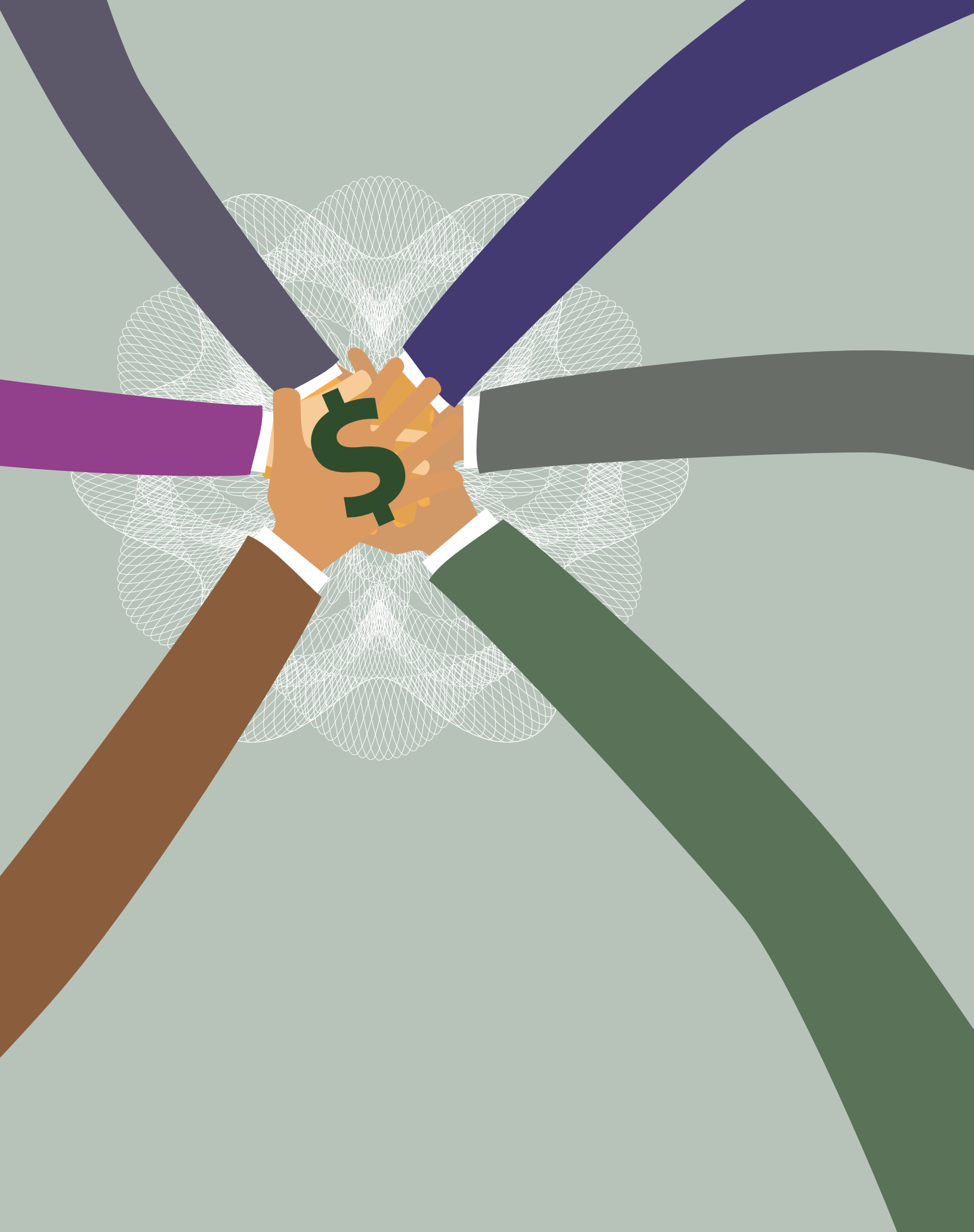
There was the time about a year and a half ago when I had to leave the country to renew my visa, but had little money. I knew that the God-honoring course would be to obey the law, so I went ahead and left, trusting Him to somehow provide along the way. My brother and I had just enough money to get us to the border on the night bus. God provided us with more than we could eat

and a painting job to pay for our lodging. When it was time to go home He provided a ride for part of the way and money for the rest of the way, and even food enough for the next several days!

Whether we work in the corporate world with a steady salary or in full-time ministry with no guaranteed income or anything in between, we are called to a life of faith. Living by faith doesn’t mean some kind of voluntary poverty in which we count on God to miraculously provide our needs. It means living as faithful servants of the Most High God, being faithful stewards of the resources that He gives to each one of us, making choices that honor Him, knowing that He *will* provide our needs.

He even provides a few of our wants, I reflect, as I savor the last spoonful of creamy vanilla-coffee-ice-cream float on a day off in my favorite city.

Giles is a short-term missionary assistant with the AFLC serving in Jerez, Mexico. She grew up on the Mexico mission field, the daughter of Pastor Dan and Debbie Giles.



The Common

Good

BY PASTOR LYNDON KORHONEN

The Bible tells us in the book of Acts how the early believers handled their possessions and finances. In Acts 2:44-45, "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need." In chapter 4, verse 34, we read, "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had."

The book of Acts is a record of the "Acts of the Apostles." It tells what the apostles and the early Church did. I admire the oneness that they had, but I am not convinced that this passage is in Scripture to tell us that all of our churches should do the same. Let's see if the rest of Scripture would call us to do this or not.

In Matthew 25 Jesus told the parable of the talents. "To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability" (v 15). When the master returned, he rewarded the ones who had gained more, but the one who had hidden his master's talent was thrown outside. God gives different amounts to each believer and different abilities to manage His resources in this life. According to Matthew 25:29, "Everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance." Part of life on earth for the believer is to manage well what God has given. It is also important to see that the talents are the Master's; they are not the servant's possessions.

In Romans 12:8 we find some of the spiritual gifts mentioned: "If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously." Here Paul suggests that this spiritual gift needs to continue to be used. I don't see it being used as one church treasurer handling all the monies of the families in the congregation.

In I Corinthians 16:1-2 we read, "Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come, no collections will have to be made." If each of these believers were setting aside a sum of money, they certainly didn't have it all pooled into one common purse.

When I moved to Montana to pastor in the 1980s, I had one Norwegian farmer tell me that he didn't think the practice of pooling all the resources in the early church worked. They did it initially, but found out it didn't work very well. I don't always drift the way of Norwegians in my interpretation of God's Word, but in this case I have come to agree with his conclusion. Acts 5 tells of one of those couples who may have gotten caught up in the emotion of giving all, only to hold back a portion. Ananias and Sapphira agreed to lie to the Holy Spirit and came to a swift and terrible end.

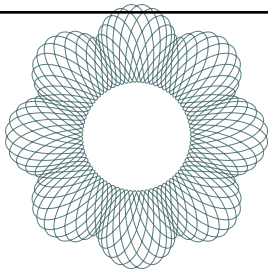
God does not want each of us to do the exact same thing with our finances. He has made us individuals with different gifts and abilities. He wants us to live in the realization that we are mere stewards of all

we have, and He is the owner. It is all about stewardship of what He has entrusted to us for a time.

The book of Proverbs gives us wisdom in the use of finances. There we read in 21:5, "The plans of the diligent lead to profit." God encourages us to plan for the future. He doesn't want us to have to depend on our government for help, or on the church, unless we are unable to work. Paul reinforced this in II Thessalonians 3:6-8: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it."

God wants us to meet each others' needs, but I believe that each believer must decide how to meet those needs by living in a relationship with Jesus and giving out of love for Christ and the family of God. II Corinthians 8:13 says, "Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need." This is the body of Christ functioning by helping each other. Take up offerings for one another when a need arises, but keep managing God's finances individually.

Korhonen serves Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Cokato, Minn.



Beyond reason

BY ANDY NEMZEK

I became a homeowner about two years ago. There are so many exciting experiences that come with moving into a house. One includes the opportunity to meet new people. However, a few months ago I started to think about how I have not really connected much with my neighbors. I also started to think about how present-day society no longer fosters or values such relationships and how this has negatively impacted our culture. What can Christians do to fight this?

Though Americans are rich with material blessings, we can be some of the neediest people when it comes to relationships. This is evident in the current structure of our communities. We go to work, we come home, close the door and repeat. We have been taught to keep to ourselves and to avoid offending anyone. We go through each day without really getting to know, much less love, the people we live next to. Our neighbors.

It's no wonder our culture is degrading. I'm convinced that one of the reasons the world hates Christians is because it sees us simply as a group of people who are always telling others what to do and that they will burn in hell if they don't comply. Though, this may be true in one sense, there are other ways to present God's truth. The presentation of truth through politics, laws and regulations is usually not received well in the secular world. But I think today's Christians are relying on these avenues to bring about peace. We do this because we're afraid. We sometimes advocate Christian

politics because we are afraid that we will lose our worldly comforts if we don't live in a Christian society. Unfortunately, the emphasis of this paradigm is worldly comforts. American Christians need to shift focus from this world to the one to come. If we seek God's Kingdom first, the rest will fall into place (Matthew 6.25-34).

Christians need to start being Christ again. Part of this is the active involvement of every Christian in his or her own community. We are called to bloom where we have been planted. Christians need to be known in their communities as those who help and love others beyond reason. We need to forsake the things that cause others to believe that we live for worldly gain. People need to see that we truly believe that our permanent residence is somewhere else.

All of these thoughts led to a practical application. I decided to advocate for community outreach in my church. It's all about Christians performing acts of love in their communities, no strings attached. We are not asking for anything in return. Rather, the idea is to give beyond reason. At least that is how it appears to the secular community. To us, however, it is simply living out the belief that we will be rewarded some day for the way we live. We are storing up treasures for ourselves for the life to come (Matthew 6:19-21).

Recently, we had our first outreach event. It took the shape of raking leaves for people. A week before we did it, I went door to door in my neighborhood and introduced myself and what we were doing. Though I'm not a fan of door-to-door

ministry, this was different for two reasons. First, I am a neighbor of these people. Second, I was offering something to them instead of pressuring them for something. For those who did not want/need us to rake their lawns, they still accepted a handout with my contact info on each. I told each person to give me a call if they ever needed someone to watch their house, pick up mail or anything else. I felt that this was actually a really good way to connect with people and it was received very well by those I talked to.

Nine people from my church, including myself, ended up meeting on Halloween to rake three yards. It was a very successful event. This is what I'm talking about. Christians need to become visible and need to start doing acts of love that make those on the outside ask questions. It's not just Christian "duty." It's about loving people. Our love must be sincere (Romans 12:9) and it must be rooted in our future homeland so that people don't become suspicious of our motives. Instead, we hope they will question where we get this love and will hopefully be attracted to it.

I have no authority to request people to start living out love, but as a follower of Christ and as one who shares in the Holy Spirit, I'm making a plea. For the sake of Christ, love out loud. Get involved in your communities. Raking leaves was only one idea. What is yours?

Nemzek is a member of Vision of Glory Free Lutheran, Plymouth, Minn.





Are you secure?

BY AMBER DAHL

I was living this quote from pastor and author Adrian Rogers until recently: "I know what I want, and I know what you want. I want to have some money in the bank, and I want to have something there so that when tomorrow comes, then I don't have to worry about it. Isn't that what you want? We call that security. But is that really security? Who is more secure: the man who has a warehouse full of stale bread that the rats or thieves can get or the man who has a father who is a very, very rich baker?"

What is security? Is it money in the bank? I used to think so. A person doesn't have to be rich to be deceived by the false security of money. Even someone living paycheck to paycheck is still liable of falling for the deception that he is solely responsible for his financial future, forgetting that it is God who gives us our daily bread.

I was the insurance provider for my family. I convinced myself to stay in jobs solely because of money and the insurance benefits, even though I was miserable. Looking back, I can see now that I believed I was responsible for providing in this way. The Lord convicted me recently that He alone is the Provider.

After 18 months of working and experiencing burnout like never before, I finally asked myself why I was staying in my job. It was because of the money, the great benefits, and the prestige of the company. I decided to ask God to help me find purpose because this job wasn't giving me any fulfillment.

I went to God, through prayer and the Bible, and I asked Him what He wanted me to do. The answer was clear. He wanted

me to leave my job and stay home, and He didn't want me to look for another job right away. My husband was fully supportive of this decision, but fears about money and insurance made me question God's answer. I asked Him for a sign because my faith was lacking. He gave me direction through every sermon I heard, every devotional quiet time I had, e-mails from friends who wrote me Bible verses, and, finally, a literal sign that a friend gave me with "Faith" written at the top of it and Hebrews 11:1 below it, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

I couldn't question God anymore. I knew I had to quit my job. I realized no amount of money would make up for being in a place where God didn't want me.

I left my job last fall. Since then, God has brought a jail ministry across my path. I went for a tour of the jail and felt God calling me to the ministry. Today I am leading a Bible study in our county jail with 10 women inmates for an hour and a half on Monday and Wednesday mornings. I have never been happier or more fulfilled than when I am with those ladies in the jail studying God's Word. They have such a hunger for learning about God and a passion for Jesus that now rivals my own.

I realized recently that I rarely think about money anymore. In fact, a friend paid me to watch her children, and the first thought that ran through my mind was, "I shouldn't take this. I don't need anything right now." This is so different from what I used to think when I got my paycheck. There were so many things I wanted that my mind was constantly stimulated with what I would buy next, leaving me with a feeling

of restlessness. I realize now I used money and material objects to fill a void in my life. Satisfaction with material things is so short-lived compared with the ongoing joy I have when I'm serving God.

The friend who gave me the faith plaque serves God in her job because she knows that is where God wants her. My husband serves God in his job because he knows that is where God wants him. Not everyone is called out of his or her job, but this was what God asked me to do.

The Lord is already providing for my husband and me. His job as a framing carpenter is usually slower from November through May. He came home recently and said that his crew has so much to do that they can work as much as they want; they will be busy all winter and probably into spring. His exact quote was, "This is unprecedented!"

I believe this is from God's hand. Like the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-15) who gave Elijah the very last of her oil and flour during the drought and found "the jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah," so, too, God will provide for us when we trust Him enough to put Jesus first in our lives. Knowing our Heavenly Father is "a very, very rich and generous baker" gives us the peace of mind and confidence we need to live in this material world. That is true security.

Dahl attends St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D., where she and her husband serve as volunteer youth leaders for both junior and senior high students.

Do you manage your money, or does it manage you? Is money your main focus every day or is pleasing God your focus? Wouldn't you rather live a more peaceful life?

The Dalton Free Lutheran Parish in Dalton, Minn., recognized that in today's society money and materialism are too often the main focus of daily life. So in the spirit of Dave Ramsey and other financial advisors—who teach and preach about “financial peace”—our parish decided to host a Financial Expo to offer help to our parish family and those in the community who might be struggling with money issues.

Our committee discussed several approaches to presenting the material, and it was decided to conduct our financial expo as a single evening event. As we met and prayed together we sought the advice of a representative of Crown Financial Ministries, a Christ-centered mission dedicated to teaching others how to become free from the bonds of debt and poverty and who teach biblical principals of stewardship.

We knew the topic might be of interest to both the older and younger generations in our church and community. Our intentions were to do as much as possible to include young families and young singles. In order that the event be a Christ-honoring blessing to all, we also decided that the evening should include the following characteristics:

- Solid biblical principals of stewardship should be shared.
- It should be free of all costs to the attendees.

- Provide a meal to encourage fellowship and an early start.
 - Provide free childcare so young families would be more able to attend.
 - Provide gifts and prizes, given by area businesses, and give away copies of Randy Alcorn's *The Treasure Principle* to the first 50 attendees.
- We also wanted to make sure that we had something to give to youths and younger children.

We offered the event on a weeknight because weekends are usually full with family and community activities. And we chose Wednesday night because it is a night in our community that still is considered a night for Bible study and other ministry activities. It was our goal to end at 9 p.m. so that parents could get their children home to bed and get ready for the next day.

After a light meal from 5:30 to 6:15 p.m., the rest of the evening was divided into three periods of approximately 40 minutes each.

Crown Financial Ministries offered two free seminars, paralleling the two-day program they offer on a fee basis. The first seminar, titled “Finding Financial Peace,” addresses the joyful state that occurs when we figure out what is most important in life. What is God's plan for us? What does God's Word tell us about His wish for us to have all we need for food, clothing and shelter, of His boundless grace and mercy? The main focus here is to let God change attitudes about money, to realize that God owns it all. If we can truly believe that God owns everything, then we are on the first step to reaching financial peace and freedom.

The second seminar, titled “The Money Map,” instructs participants on how to reach financial peace from where they might be now. Emphasis is placed on specific steps:

- Inventory monthly expenses and establish a budget.
- Start a modest savings plan.
- Get out of debt by paying off credit cards and consumer debts.
- Start a major savings plan to build emergency funds and save for big purchases like cars, furniture, vacations, and children's education.
- Advance to buying a modest home or starting a business.
- Saving for retirement.
- Planning your estate.

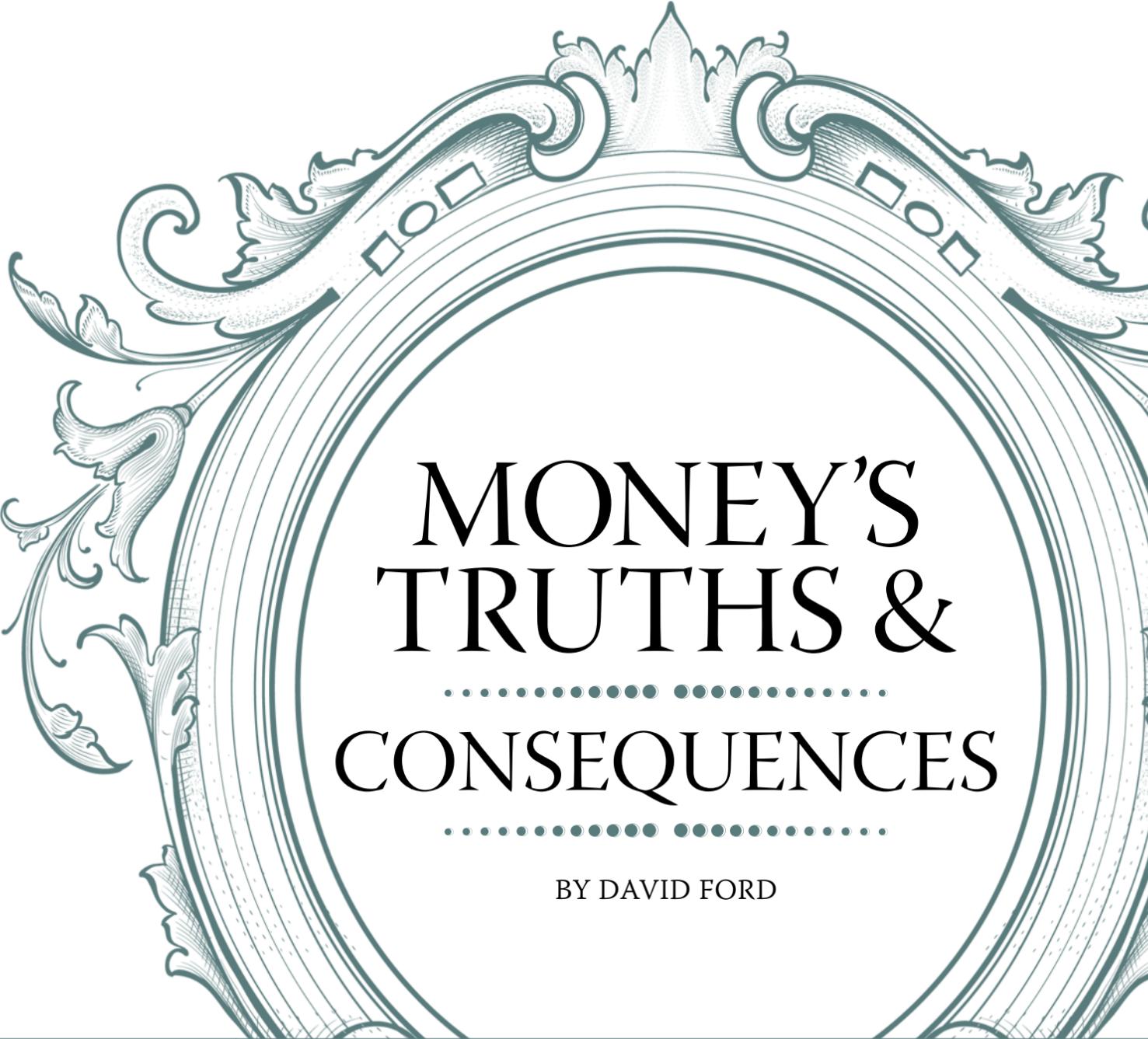
The third seminar, titled “How Money Works,” (offered by Primerica Financial Services) is a tutorial on various money terms and concepts like “time is money;” pay God and yourself first; forms of credit and credit traps; types of insurance; ways of saving and investing using certificates of deposit, stocks, bonds, mutual funds; systematic investing; dollar-cost averaging; and IRAs.

The evening concluded with prayer and inviting attendees to seek the Lord in every way in regards to finances.

We are thankful for the AFLC Commission on Evangelism, with a grant provided by Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, which made this night of ministry in trying financial times possible.

Ford is a council member at Kvam Free Lutheran, Dalton, Minn.

How one congregation is helping



MONEY'S
TRUTHS &
.....
CONSEQUENCES
.....

BY DAVID FORD

its members tackle money issues



Uphold Life

By Fern Bohling

David was dismayed and discouraged as he looked at the world around him. But he found encouragement when he entered “into the sanctuary of God” (Psalm 73:17). We, too, are dismayed when we hear that more than 500 million babies die from abortion resulting from “inconvenient and unwanted” pregnancies and more embryo deaths due to increasing medical experimentation. But we, like David, can take heart when we come into the Lord’s presence. His word declares, “... the battle is not yours, but God’s” (II Chronicles 20:15). Are you willing to be in His infantry? What can you do to be His hands, His feet, His voice in this battle? A review of AFLC resolutions on the sanctity of life will give us some help in answering these questions.

In 1977 the annual conference took a stand for truth by formulating and passing a resolution to support life. In 1986, biblical references were included in the resolution (Job 10:9-10, Psalm 51:5, 139:13-17, Jeremiah 1:5, Luke 1:41-44, Genesis 9:6, Exodus 20:13, Numbers 35:33, Acts 7:19, I John 3:15). Would you consider meditating on these verses to strengthen your stand for life?

The 1986 resolution also encouraged support of pro-life groups such as Lutherans for Life. At the pastors’ conference in January 2009, Dr. James Lamb, executive director of Lutherans for Life, unveiled a new program entitled Renewal for Life in an effort to get more pro-life information to pastors, enabling them to present the life-affirming message of the gospel. To be effective, a congregation member who is passionate about pro-life issues can be designated as a life advocate. This person will help the pastor by sifting through the enormous amount of information made available by Lutherans for Life and other sources. Are you willing to be a life advocate for your congregation?

A resolution adopted in 1995 expressed “opposition to violent actions of some abortion opponents, convinced that the violence of abortion will not be overcome by further violence. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (Ephesians 4:15). Will you speak up in love for life through your words and actions? January 17 has been set aside as Life Sunday. Recognize this day and uphold life.

A resolution adopted in 2000 affirms “the sanctity of human

life from conception to natural death,” denouncing “abortion, including partial birth abortion, infanticide and euthanasia as sin.” It also extends “a heart and voice of compassion and forgiveness in Christ to those who are experiencing crisis pregnancies or have been involved in abortion.” Have you considered helping out at a crisis pregnancy center to be a “voice of compassion and forgiveness”?

The most recent resolution, passed at the 2009 annual conference, builds on the previous ones and covers some new areas that might need some study and careful, prayerful thought:

WHEREAS we believe all life is precious, and our culture continues to devalue human life, AND WHEREAS we believe that life begins at conception and should be protected and cherished, BE IT RESOLVED that we encourage the AFLC congregations to support life in preaching, teaching and practice.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we do not support medical procedures or tests that end life particularly through embryonic stem cell use and therapeutic cloning.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that pastors warn their people that birth control pills can be abortifacients.

Are you willing to learn more about embryonic stem cell use, therapeutic cloning and other means that are potentially used to destroy life? Materials are available from Lutherans for Life and other pro-life organizations to help you better understand these issues. A DVD, “Stem Cell Research and Cloning 101: A Primer,” by Dr. James Lamb is a study resource for individuals or groups. Let us together search for the truth concerning life issues.

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful” (Colossians 4:2). This is the most important task for life. Let us devote ourselves to being prayer warriors in God’s infantry.

Bohling, Golden Valley, Minn., is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis.



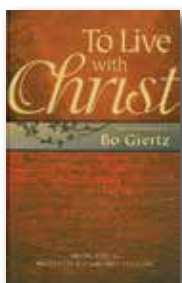
Devotional resources for 2010

These resources and more available from Ambassador Publications. Visit their Web site at www.afc.org/publications or contact Parish Education at (763) 545-5631 or parished@afc.org for more information.

"Let me hear Your lovingkindness in the morning; for I trust in You.

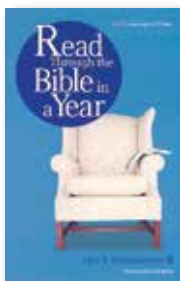
"Teach me the way in which I should walk; for to You I lift up my soul."

Psalm 143:8



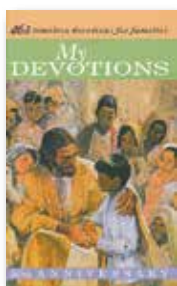
To Live with Christ

This collection of daily devotional readings by Bo Gertz points readers to the cross of Christ, offering the assurance of God's grace, love, and forgiveness, and helping them draw closer to their Lord. Each daily meditation organized according to the Church Year begins with a Bible passage followed by a brief exposition of the text and a prayer. \$16



Read Through the Bible in a Year

Start reading through the Bible at any time of the year with this helpful booklet including background information for each book of the Bible and an easy reading order. \$5.95 Also available: "One Year Bible Reading Plan" and "Through the Bible in a Year" tracts for \$.15 each.)



My Devotions

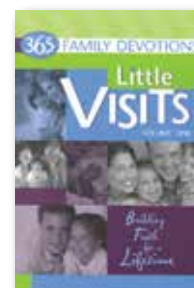
A compilation of 365 devotions from the devotional magazine "My Devotions," teaching children to depend on God for all aspects of their lives. Age 8 and up. Hardcover \$11.75 "My Devotions" (age 8+) and "Happy Times" (preschool) are also available as quarterly subscriptions.



Beside Quiet Waters

These 366 daily devotions and prayers speak of rest from life's worries through the peace and stillness of God's Word, encouraging readers to take all their cares to Jesus daily and to be reminded of God's presence and goodness in their lives. \$14.50

parish education



365 Family Devotions

These short devotions with Bible readings, discussion questions, and prayers demonstrate how God is ever-present with His children, offering His gifts of love and forgiveness. Available in Volumes 1, 2, 3, 4. \$9.50 each



Jesus Our Family Guest

This book of 100 family devotions follows the fictional Bailey family through life's issues and stages, demonstrating the importance of incorporating Jesus into every situation. Each devotional begins with a short Scripture text and concludes with a brief prayer. \$14.50

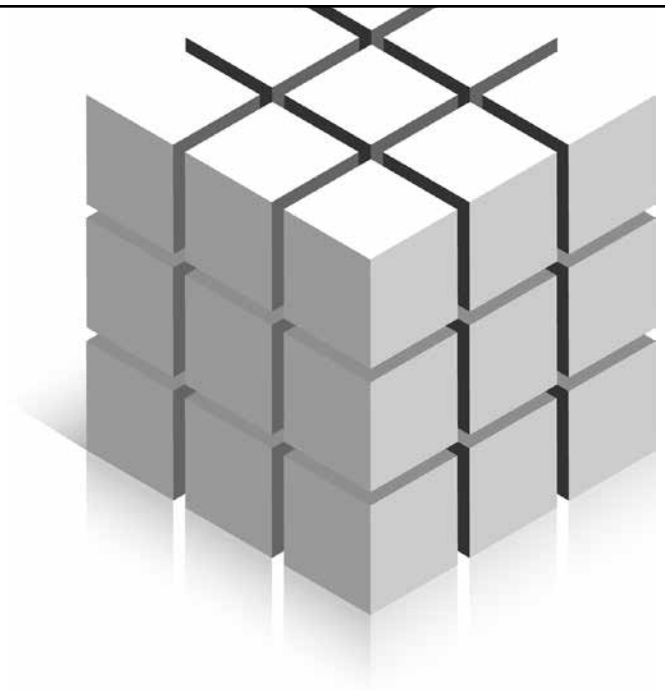


Day by Day

Twelve daily devotional booklets, one for each month of the year, with Gospel-centered writings by well-known Swedish author, Carl O. Rosenius. \$24.00/set of 12

Pieces of One

By Pastor Paul Nash



In 1980 the world's best-selling toy was introduced into the retail world. Originally called the "Magic Cube," Rubik's Cube started out as a three-dimensional geometry lesson and quickly turned into an international hobby. There are six different colors on a Rubik's Cube, and the goal is to arrange all the sides with a matching color. No doubt we've all twisted one in our hands. I spent hours as a child trying to unravel the colors; it's a brain tease. Usually when I see a Rubik's Cube in someone's office or home, the colors are jumbled.

Describing Home Missions is sort of like working with a Rubik's Cube. There are distinct faces of Home Missions outreach, but most often the ministries mix so that it's not easily apparent where one ends and another begins. This is good, but a blurred understanding can also cause people to miss out on seeing and participating in the unique outreaches extended through Home Missions.

Embarking on a new initiative called "Come Join Us," Home Missions is pursuing creative ways to share a vision for Home ministry. "Come Join Us" includes personal testimonies by Home Mission ambassadors, PowerPoint presentations, online resources, and specific opportunities for every age to get involved. Informing and equipping congregations on the work of Home Missions is crucial for the future of this ministry.

So what *does* Home Missions do? I'd love to sit down over a cup of hot apple cider and share the answer. I know that you won't be able to help but respond when you understand the full picture of God at work in this mission.

Home Missions is intent on making disciples for the Lord Jesus Christ. Our unique focus, however, is on **establishing new congregations** within the United States. We are active in training and equipping pastors and laity for new ministry works, providing direction, support personnel, and—most importantly—prayer covering. Our Home Mission churches are trained to be evangelistic, disciple-making centers that proclaim the Word.

At least 27 percent of current AFLC congregations started as

Home Mission plants. Your church may be one of them. Currently, our office works with 14 Home Missions congregations in a dozen states, with five on subsidy. Subsidy is when a Home Mission congregation calls their first pastor and requests assistance for pastoral compensation. This monthly subsidy is given by faith, on a declining scale for five years, as the church has opportunity to grow. Not all Home Mission churches need subsidy. A mature church graduates from Home Mission status to the regular AFLC roster.

Parish Builders are another innovative face of Home Missions. Parish Builders move into a Home Mission community, providing assistance to a pastor in areas like teaching, visitation, canvassing, and working with youth. This winter we have seven Parish Builders in the field, with more churches waiting for volunteers. A comprehensive DVD training program is near completion and we are eager to share it with new Parish Builders and the leadership team of churches that receive them.

Builders Fellowship is another face. As funds are available, grants are given to Home Mission congregations in financial need for building or remodeling. Our office coordinates volunteer teams to help with the work. We also steward the **Alaska Mission**, running a Christian radio station and aviation ministry to remote Alaskan villages. **Barnabas Summer Teams** receive special training in ministering to Home Mission congregations during summer months.

Please contact our office about hosting a "Come Join Us" presentation in your worship service or Sunday school. Better yet, come by our office. We'd be delighted to share what God is doing. Visit our newly updated Web site and sign up for our weekly **Knee Mail**. Most of all, we covet your prayers for this conservative Lutheran church planting movement in the United States.

Nash, the director of AFLC Home Missions Department, is a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn.



the un- expected

By Becky Abel

Everyone has expectations as a new year begins—expectations of ourselves and of others, and of situations and opportunities. As missionaries we are filled with expectations for the ministry in Brazil. Expectations are an encouraging way to help us fulfill our calling. However, many times our expectations are frustrated and result in just the opposite—discouragement. As we complete 25 years of missionary service, we are still learning that the only sure expectation any person can have is based on the Word of God and built on the solid rock of Jesus Christ. In the words of the Hymn, “My Hope is Built on Nothing Less,”

My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ the solid Rock I stand;
all other ground is sinking sand.

This past year, people with whom we have worked for years left our ministry team; young people who have been instructed in the truths of God's Word since childhood made unfortunate choices; and our hopes that our present church-plant would experience significant growth did not meet our expectations. Discouraging? Yes. Yet, as we look to God's Word, we are comforted to know that the God we serve is faithful and never disappoints those who trust in Him. People disappoint us, circumstances disappoint us, and we disappoint ourselves. This is where grace comes to the rescue, bringing us back to the true hope we cling to now and for eternity.

God surprises us with the unexpected in positive ways, too.

The Missions Conference in November was planned and carried out by a capable group of young adults. Others have volunteered to help plan camps for this year. God called Augusto, a very capable lay leader, to assume the pastoral responsibilities in Campo Largo during 2010. A relatively new Christian, Robson, has been bold in his testimony and recently declared that he feels called to the ministry. Unlikely people respond to the gospel message and are converted. People who had no church tradition begin to participate regularly. Church members share testimonies of the ways God is molding them and using them for His glory. Sometimes the “unexpected” exceeds our own limited expectations.

Our life on the mission field is full of the unexpected. We have expectations for our day, but our real ministry consists of the unexpected “interruptions.” A poor lady appears at the door asking for food, neighborhood kids fill our porch needing activities and affirmation, the phone rings with a request for counseling and prayer, the town drunk comes looking for help to break free from his sinful lifestyle, someone arrives wanting to see the camp and book a retreat, an emergency medical need calls for a quick run to the hospital, a staff member needs help in making an important decision, and the list goes on. Ministry is all about wisely responding to the unexpected things God allows to fill our days.

Sometimes we still fall into the trap of expecting too much of people. But as we start another year, let's all remember to expect great things from God and rest in Him as our only sure hope. “My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him” (Psalm 62:5).

Becky and her husband, Pastor Paul, serve as AFLC missionaries in Curitiba, Brazil.

WMF offers Bible study for 2010

Study looks at the history of freedom in the U.S.

The 2010 Women's Missionary Federation Bible study, *Sweet Freedom's Song*, is now available. The WMF study, written by Mary Christenson, a member of Calvary

Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn., focuses on how God, after preparing and giving His people this land and having established this nation, has continued to be

with and has worked through His people in the United States.

The biblical studies will focus on the Psalms, which are the ballads, hymns and songs of the Israelites. These songs express all of the emotions and experiences of God's people, from which God's people continue to learn even today

The study will not look so much at political history of the United States, but the social and cultural experiences in U.S. society from 1870 through the first quarter of the 20th century. The life applications presented will be reflective of people, experiences, or inventions of these times. The other portion of the study will show the direction and influence of Christians during each decade. The U.S. history will focus on Chicago and the Midwest.

Payment, at a cost of \$10 each (including postage), is due with each order. To order the study, send a check, written out to "National WMF," to Executive Secretary, Dawn Johnson, 2991 30th Ave., Wilson, WI 54027. Include your name, address, home church, and the number of books you are ordering. For more information, you may e-mail Dawn at ctk@wwt.net or call (715) 772-4454.



Mary Christenson



Twelve new members (one not pictured) were received Nov. 22 at Lisbon Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran, Newark, Ill. Two families completed a 10-week adult confirmation class and one family transferred their membership. Pictured are the families, along with Pastor Randy Nelson, at right.



A men's retreat was held in the Western North Dakota/Eastern Montana District. The featured speaker was Ron Clem, a former policeman with the Los Angeles Police Department, who gave his testimony and appealed to the participants to be the fathers, husbands, and Christians God has called them to be. Pictured are the participants on the last day of the retreat, including (seated, from left) Pastor Ron Dahle, AFLTS interns Michael Johnson and Tom Olson, Ron Clem, Pastor Rodney Johnson, and Pastor Kris Nyman.

New Bible study on Confession of Sin

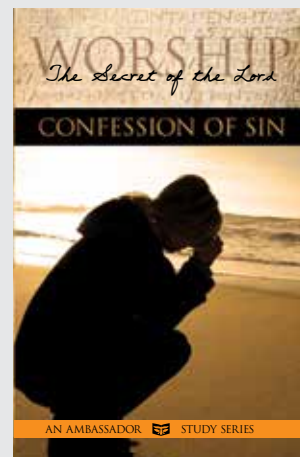
Worship: The Secret of the Lord

Part 1: Confession of Sin

To "worship" means to revere, honor, or adore some one or some thing. With a focus that is biblical, simple, and straightforward, this eight-lesson study will help you better understand your true self and the God you worship as you study the truths of a well-known Confession of Sin.

(Part 2: Confession of Faith coming spring 2010.)

Contact Parish Education to order your copy for \$5. Call (763) 545-5631, e-mail parished@aflc.org, or visit www.aflc.org/publications.





Pastor Mark Johnson (center) was ordained Nov. 15 at the Dalton, Minn., parish. Pictured are (front row, from left), Pastor Elden Nelson, Pastor Gordon Grage, Pastor Les Johnson and Pastor Raynard Huglen; (back row, from left) Pastor Erling Huglen, Pastor Mark Johnson, and Pastor Wendell Johnson.

Ethel Mohagen

Ethel Mohagen, 87, of Grand Forks, N.D., died Nov. 16, 2009. Born Sept. 2, 1922, in Dupree, S.D., she was the daughter of Carl and Hazel (Martin) Anderson. She married Roy Mohagen, an AFLC pastor, June 29, 1941, in Inglewood, Calif. He died Sept. 29, 1996.

She graduated from Dupree High School and worked as a waitress in a local café. After her marriage, they lived in Roscoe, Calif., until 1945, when they moved to Grafton, N.D. They started farming in 1947, and she worked at a bakery. In 1962, she began working at the Lutheran Sunset Home, retiring after 25 years as a dietary supervisor. She moved to East Grand Forks in 2001. She moved to Grand Forks in 2005. She was a member of Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D., and the Walsh County Historical Society, where she served on the board.

Surviving are two sons, Donald (Carol) Mohagen, Minot, N.D., and Pastor Henry (Linda) Mohagen, Reva, S.D.; one daughter, Delores Fast, Thompson, N.D.; seven grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren.

The service was Nov. 21, 2009, at Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D., with Pastor Terry Olson officiating. Burial was in Grafton Lutheran Cemetery.

Lorriane Brandt

Lorraine Brandt, 88, of Sioux Falls, S.D., died Nov. 22, 2009, at Sioux Falls. She was born July 22, 1921, to George and Aletta (Opstedahl) Larson. She was the wife of AFLC Pastor Erwin Brandt, whom she married Aug. 17, 1941.

She attended schools in Rutland and Madison, S.D., and Augustana Academy, Canton, S.D. She graduated from Lutheran Bible Institute, Minneapolis. After her marriage, they lived in Corson, S.D.; Minneapolis; Nunda, S.D.; Hettinger, N.D.; Lake Preston, S.D.; Bloomington, Minn.; and Sinai, S.D. They retired to a farm near Garretson, S.D.

Surviving are her husband; one son, Pastor Michael (Colleen) Brandt, Sioux Falls, S.D.; three daughters, Pamela Howe, Reeder, N.D., Gracia (Keith) Goodhope, Winner, S.D., and Priscilla (Derk) Stevenson, Anacortes, Wash.; one brother, David Larson, Nunda, S.D.; 14 grandchildren and 26 great-grandchildren.

The service was Nov. 25 at Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., with Pastor Kirk Flaa and Pastor Elden Nelson officiating. Burial was in Split Rock Lutheran Cemetery, Brandon, S.D.

Pastor Robert Giles

Pastor Robert Giles, 82, of Mesa, Ariz., died Nov. 17, 2009, in Mesa.

He was born June 23, 1917, in Millvale, Pa. He married Muriel Shiell in 1946 in Westchester, Calif.

He graduated from high school in West Virginia and attended business college in Pennsylvania. He moved with his family to California when he was in his early 20s, where he attended Western Lutheran Bible Institute and was a Sunday school superintendent at Westchester Lutheran. After marriage, they moved to Seattle/Tacoma, Wash., in 1947, where he studied at Pacific Lutheran College, earning a degree in education. They moved to Minneapolis, where he studied at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. He was ordained in 1954, joining the Evangelical Lutheran Church. He served Westchester Lutheran in California. He eventually pastored churches and taught in Christian schools in Westchester, North Hollywood, Redondo Beach, Hawthorne and Orland, Calif.; Laurel, Mont.; Tulia, Texas; and Kingman, Tucson, Casa Grande and Phoenix, Ariz., several of them as new mission starts. He also served under the Capetown Lutheran Synod in the Republic of South Africa. He earned a PhD in biblical theology from California Graduate School of Theology, Glendale, Calif., and became rostered with the AFLC.

Surviving are his wife; five sons, Pastor Daniel (Debbie) Giles, Mesa, Ariz., Seth Giles, Obed Giles, Nathan Giles, and Paul Giles; one daughter, Naomi; fifteen grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

The service was Nov. 28 at Calvary Free Lutheran, Mesa, Ariz., with Pastor Allen Monson officiating.

Home Missions hosts conference Jan. 18-19

The AFLC Home Missions Conference will be held Jan. 18-19 at the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis., as a precursor to the Pastors and Wives Conference.

For more information, contact AFLC Home Missions at (763) 545-5631.

Redeemer Free Lutheran Church, Canton, S.D., is currently served on a part-time basis by Pastor Perry Bauer.

Pastor Karsten Baalson, who helped found Lord of Life Free Lutheran, Mount Vernon, Wash., died Nov. 26.

Pastor John Mundfrom has resigned from Spencer Creek Lutheran, Eugene, Ore.

Pastor Al Bedard was ordained on Dec. 6 at Sunnyside Free Lutheran, Stacy, Minn., with Pastor Elden Nelson officiating. Bedard is currently serving as interim pastor at Timberland Ringbu Free Lutheran, Barronette, Wis., and Hosanna Free Lutheran, Cumberland, Wis. He also serves as a chaplain with the Chisago County Sheriff's Department.

Pastor Michael Burke was installed Dec. 13 at Ebenezer Free Lutheran, Humboldt, Tenn., with Pastor Elden Nelson officiating.

Pastor Steven Heilmann, Morris, Ill., was moved onto the regular AFLC pastor's roster from the fellowship roster by members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee.

The AFLC Schools Mission Conference will be held Jan. 24-26 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. Featured speaker is Pastor Jeff Swanson, who serves the Alaska Mission in Naknek, Alaska. Services will be held each evening at 7:30, with a mission focus preceding each service at 6:30.

AFLC Pastors and Wives Conference Jan. 19-21

The AFLC Pastors and Wives Conference will be held Jan. 19-21 at the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis. The schedule includes an opening service on Jan. 19, followed by a day of workshops and Bible studies on Jan. 20. Those sessions include a study in the morning by Pastor Jim Johnson, Fergus Falls, Minn. John Talley, Newark, Ill., a lawyer and member of the AFLC Schools Board of Trustees, will present a session on pastoral liability. Featured speaker Tom Kraeuter, an author and worship specialist, will lead a seminar on worship. John and Valerie Westby, Burnsville, Minn., will present a session titled, "Surprised by Grace, Broken Pieces in the Potter's Hand." A banquet will be followed by a service of Holy Communion.

Events on Jan. 21 will include a Bible study, as well as updates by various AFLC departments. For more information, contact the AFLC at (763) 545-5631.

ARC hosts winter retreats, conferences

The Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis., has set its retreat and camping schedule for 2010. Packets of information about the 2010 ARC retreats were mailed to AFLC churches mid-November. Please contact the ARC if your church has not received the information.

The 2010 schedule is listed at right. Highlights include: Pastors' Retreat Jan. 19-21—contact Karen Floan at the AFLC for more information: 763-545-5631.

SIDExSIDE and Sno Daze Retreats Feb. 5-7—SIDExSIDE leader Jeremy Erickson, Minneapolis, Minn., and Sno Daze leader Pastor Todd Erickson, Roseau, Minn.

Couples' Retreat Feb. 19-20 with an option to stay an extra night (21). Leaders are Pastor David and Vicki Johnson of Cloquet, Minn.

For more specific information on the camps, visit the ARC's Web site at www.arc-aflc.org or call 800-294-2877.

2010 schedule

- SIDExSIDE (grades 4-7), Feb. 5-7
 - Sno Daze (grades 7-12), Feb. 5-7
 - Couples' Retreat, Feb. 19-20 (21)*
 - Women's Retreat, March 26-28
 - Men's Retreat, April 23-24(25)*
 - Fire Up Youth Camp (grades 4-7), June 20-25
 - Kids' Camp (grades 1-3), June 25-27
 - Family Camp, July 25-31
 - Classics' Retreat (55+), Sept. 17-19
 - Chosen Child Conference, Nov. 5-7
 - Prayer Retreat, Dec. 3-4(5)*
- *option of extra night stay with breakfast

AFLC memorials: November

AFLBS Ethel Mohagen	Kathleen Rothering	Parish Education Larry Fladeland
AFLT Dr. Warren Jensen	FLAPS Harvey Hoops	World Missions Pastor Milo Gudim Pat Krasen Pastor Robert Giles Gladys Lunden Marilyn Hopkins
Evangelism Ethel Mohagen Lorraine Brandt	Home Missions Lila Peterson Ethel Mohagen Lorraine Brandt	

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1- Nov. 30, 2009

FUND	TOTAL (subsidy)	REC'D IN NOVEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$434,087	\$26,755	\$276,820	64
Evangelism	112,642	5,713	87,761	78
Youth Ministries	78,909	5,347	78,839	100
Parish Education	135,207	5,052	87,185	64
Seminary	244,110	11,617	168,824	69
Bible School	398,910	15,839	331,606	83
Home Missions	375,908	22,873	303,541	81
World Missions	327,017	27,104	235,248	72
Personal Support	435,500	29,552	371,505	85
TOTALS	\$2,542,290	\$149,852	\$1,941,327	76
TOTALS 2008	\$2,307,821	\$155,185	\$2,057,093	89
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.				

An everlasting treasure

A man who worked in the financial services area was telling us about how pastors could opt out of Social Security during their first year of serving in the ministry if they had a religious or moral objection to the system. He told us if we put the same amount we would pay into Social Security into our own savings plan we would get a much

better rate of return. I didn't dispute that but I had a question: "Doesn't the law say we can only opt out if we have a religious or moral objection?" He agreed that was what the law said. He then

encouraged us to find a religious or moral objection because we could get a much better rate of return if we did.

I am sure some people do have religious objections to the system. Social Security, however, was my mother's main source of income at that time and I had received checks myself after my father's death, so I thought it would be rather hypocritical of me to say I had a moral objection to the system.

We are often faced with a choice between doing what will make us more money or what is ethically and morally right. The questions we are to be asking are: What does the Bible say? What is the right thing to do? Not just: What is going to bring in the most money?

We wrestle with those questions

individually and in our congregations and ministries. We need money to operate. In our efforts at raising money it is tempting to follow the world's advice rather than considering the example of Scripture.

The ways of the world are to go after the big donor. Become friends with those who have a lot of money and make a big deal over them.

Some people have been blessed with an abundance of resources, and they are to be encouraged to use their gifts in God's service. If someone's gift is "contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously" (Romans 12:8, NIV). The donor, however, whom Jesus made a big deal over was a poor widow who put two very small copper coins in the temple treasury. Jesus said, "This poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on" (Luke 21:3-4).

When events are held to thank donors who have contributed to a project, instead of seating at the table of honor those who have given large amounts, maybe we should give those spots to the widows who have sacrificially given out of their meager monthly checks. Isn't that the kind of thing Jesus would do?

People like to hear their name announced or see it on a plaque or in print. Fund-raising experts tell us these efforts encourage people to give more. Jesus said, "So when you give to the needy, do

not announce it with trumpets ... when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret" (Matthew 6:2-4). Announcing the gift probably does bring in more money, but it often does so by encouraging people to give for prideful reasons. It is more important to consider whether what we are doing is in line with Scripture rather than

We need money to operate. In our efforts at raising money it is tempting to follow the world's advice rather than considering the example of Scripture.

just being concerned with how it will affect our financial bottom line.

While the world panics about finances we can live in a whole different way. We rest in the promises of God. "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them" (Matthew 6:31-32). "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

Following the world's advice often leads to mere temporary riches. Following Christ brings joy, peace and life that lasts for all eternity.



Pastor Craig Johnson

association retreat center

By Gene Vukonich

Back to the beginning

I can't help but chuckle to myself as I am penning this. What possible qualifications do I have to write about economic issues? Just look at the car I drive to work. It uses just as much oil sitting in the driveway as it does on the road. Someone could look at me and ask, "What advice could he give me? He doesn't have the pieces put together himself?" They'd be right. But there is a source I often go to when in need of reliable, trustworthy answers—God's Word.

Through God's Word we have been given a small glimpse of the future and final outcome of everything. Our worldly possessions, the stuff we place on the shelf, the things we put in frames, the trophies and whatnots we shine and want to show off, the things we're so proud of—they're all headed for the final bonfire.

II Peter 3:10-12 says, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming."

Reading these verses helps me identify and evaluate my priorities. Only two things on earth are eternal: God's Word and people.

I Peter 1:22-25 says, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again, not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is through the living and abiding word of God. For all flesh is like

grass, and all its glory like the flower of field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord abides forever. And this is the word which was preached to you."

There are all kinds of self-help books available these days that tell us how we can be successful. But how do we measure success? God's Word is still our best measuring stick. Think of it this way: God's book is God's voice. If our Lord made Himself visible, returned to earth, and spoke His message, it would be in keeping with this book. His message of truth would tie in exactly with what you see in Scripture: His opinion, His council, His commands, His desires, His warnings, His very mind. When you rely on God's voice, you have a sure foundation.

Years ago, my wife and I went to a benefit dinner for the World Home Bible League. The speaker told us of a tour he had taken to two separate villages in Africa. The first one was dirty, the people sickly and despairing of life, just trying to live from day to day. However, even before meeting the people in the other village, he saw that it was clean and the people were healthy and had a purpose. What made the difference between the two villages? One chief had gotten hold of a Bible, the Word of God, which told the people they were important, loved by God, giving them a purpose in life.

Could it be that if we went back to Scripture for direction more often, we would see better results with our decisions?

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