

AMBASSADOR

TEACH



“My son, if you accept
my words and store
up my commands
within you, turning
your ear to wisdom
and applying your
heart to understand-
ing, ... then you will
understand the fear
of the LORD and find
the knowledge of
God” (Proverbs 2:1-5).

He listens



The Lord recently reminded me that He really does understand our circumstances and is here to help us if we but call on Him. You see, I had called out to the Lord the other day, asking if I was being too tough on one of my children. We weren't having major problems, just the daily mothering stuff. But it had been bothering me for a few weeks. I was uncertain, weary, and God knew it.

During one late afternoon as I was beginning to make supper, one of my children brought in the mail and dropped it on the counter beside me. "Here's one for you, Mom."

I glanced at the letter and saw that it was from the sweet young woman who had recently helped me at the cell phone store. I opened the small card and slumped into a chair to read the note.

Jeanine, the store employee, wrote that she appreciated the exemplary behavior of our children when we were in her store. She wrote that she sees many kids each day who act so disrespectfully to their parents. She just wanted us to know that she saw a different attitude with our children and we should be proud of them.

"Thank you, Lord," I whispered. "I knew you would answer my prayer, but I certainly didn't know how."

Isn't it wonderful that our living God cares for our needs, guides us and speaks to us? That message from the Lord was the jump start I needed to press on with lovingly disciplinary parenting.

The Lord graciously answered my call to Him. He knows I'm dust and need Him. When we are tired and start to carry the load ourselves, we're in real trouble. I Peter

5:6-8 says, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he cares for you. Be sober and vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour."

It doesn't matter what is on our hearts or minds; we must tell the Lord about it.

He wants us to ask Him for help so that He can abundantly give us what we need. Philippians 4:6-7 says, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Praise God for His wonderful ways, His mercy, grace and love to us!

Later, I dropped by the cell phone store to visit with Jeanine. She is a mother of two young boys, an infant and toddler. We talked about raising children in today's world with all of its distractions and dangers that lure our children away from the family. I thanked her for her card and kind words. I shared that any good parenting skills I have acquired come from God and His Word. It was a privilege to share with her and get to know her on a personal level.

Parenting can be trying at times, as can all aspects of life, but let's not tire of doing what is right as we "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14).

Andresen is a member of Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Madison, S.D.

July 2008 >>

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR vol. 46, no. 7

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.

Born-again adults spend an average of seven times more hours each week watching television than they do participating in spiritual pursuits such as Bible reading, prayer, and worship.

— George Barna

[Nothing can be rightly known, if God be not known; nor is any study well managed, nor to any great purpose, if God is not studied. We know little of the creature, till we know it as it stands related to the Creator.]

— Richard Baxter

The supreme end of education is expert discernment in all things — the power to tell the good from the bad, the genuine from the counterfeit, and to prefer the good and the genuine to the bad and the counterfeit.

— Samuel Johnson

When schools flourish, all flourishes.

— Martin Luther

THE HARD QUESTIONS

JIMMY: DADDY, HOW DO I KNOW THE BIBLE IS TRUE?

DADDY: GO ASK YOUR MOTHER.

JIMMY: MOMMY, HOW DO I KNOW GOD EXISTS?

MOMMY: ASK THE PASTOR.

JIMMY: PASTOR, WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

PASTOR: BECAUSE THE BIBLE SAYS SO AND THAT SETTLES IT. MEMORIZE JEREMIAH 29:11.

Face it: We've all been part of these conversations. Unfortunately, Jimmy asked three very good questions to three of the greatest influences in his life. But he didn't get answers. He was pushed away. The presumably Protestant pastor in my example almost gave him penance!

Questions are an opportunity to discover the truth. God's Word is truth. Therefore, nothing in God's Word is false, and nothing discovered to be true outside of God's Word will contradict God's Word. This does not mean that all truth is contained in God's Word, or that we have complete knowledge of God's Word. But it does mean that followers of Christ have no reason to fear questions.

Questions, assertions, arguments

A question is an inquiry: *What is the moon made of?*

An assertion is a statement: *The moon is made of green cheese.*

An argument is support for an assertion: *Samples from Apollo 11 contained entirely green cheese.*

A wise listener will discern the difference between these three objects. Sometimes assertions come in the form of a question: *How can you trust a book that's full of fairy tales?* And sometimes people try to pass off an assertion as an argument: *The Bible is full of fairy tales.* The actual argument being made looks like this:

If the Bible is full of fairy tales, then you cannot trust the Bible.

The Bible is full of fairy tales.

Therefore, you cannot trust the Bible.

The best way to clarify the question and form your answer is to ask a few questions of your own.

QUESTIONS

PASTOR WADE MOBLEY



SOMETIMES YOU DON'T HAVE THE ANSWER

Terms, facts, logic

Every argument contains terms, facts and logic. Errors in an argument come from misusing terms or using inaccurate facts and logic. You can make most of an opportunity for the truth by learning to ask three kinds of questions.

Definition of terms: *What do you mean by fairy tales?*

Establishing facts: *How do you know the Bible is full of these fairy tales?*

Questioning logic: *How does the presence of these accounts prohibit trust in the Bible?*

Argue well, but don't be argumentative

At this point in a discussion you may well be accused of being "argumentative." *What do you mean by "argumentative?"* Of course, all you are doing is trying to argue well. Sometimes people don't like to have their points-of-view questioned. But someone who is confident of the truth has no reason to be defensive or accusatory. As stewards of God's truth, followers of Christ hold the sacred trust of answering the questions of others and asking good questions of them in return. Attacks on the truth aren't a threat, but an opportunity. So pray for and make the most of these opportunities.

But don't be a jerk. The truth is not a club, and using it as such will poison the well for an eternal soul. If you beat a dog with a stick he won't play fetch. So argue well, but don't be argumentative.

But we can't leave Jimmy hanging

I will give you the starting point for answering all three questions.

How do we know the Bible is true?

As with any ancient document, we must ask three questions: How many manuscripts do we have, how close are they to the time of authorship, and how well were they copied? Answers to these questions establish that we have reason to trust the Bible more than any other ancient document. After that we must look at internal consistency (does it agree with itself) and external accuracy (does it agree with outside evidence). While skeptics will disagree, the results are very favorable to the authority of Scripture. And remember, *how do you know the Bible is false* needs answering, too.

How do we know God exists?

If someone asks for proof of God's existence, ask what kind of proof they will accept. There is a chance that they

won't consider what you're about to say, so ask first. Don't be fooled: *There is no proof that God exists* is an assertion, not an argument. While there are several strong extra-biblical reasons to believe that God exists, we need the revelation of Scripture to know Him intimately. But start with these three arguments:

*The universe exists. Followers of Christ have an answer for "In the beginning ..." (Genesis 1:1).

*The universe exhibits design. This implies a designer, for, "In Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17).

*Moral law exists. Everybody knows it's wrong to torture babies for fun, cut in line, or hit your mom with a shovel. This implies a moral law-giver. "The law of God is written on their hearts" (Romans 2:15).

Why do good things happen to bad people?

Be sensitive on this one, especially if someone in pain is doing the asking. This is the most difficult question posed to followers of Christ, and oddly, one of the easiest to answer. The answer comes from Genesis 3, the fall of mankind. Where are all the good people? There aren't any. The real question is *how great is the mercy of God that would spare us from the penalty of sin?* Further, we see what God intended (in creation) and what God has prepared (in heaven). The sin, death and darkness we experience in-between is brief, and specifically a result of sin. The follower of Christ has the only answer that is sufficient. The more difficult version of this question relates to the sovereignty of an all-powerful God, but the basic answers hold.

Sometimes "Jimmys" in your life will ask questions you just can't answer. Remember the best answer of all when you don't know: *I don't know*. Some skeptics will claim that because you don't know something it isn't true. That is false in itself. To quote Dr. Jonathan Strand (Concordia University, Edmonton), "The fact that you don't know something doesn't entail anything significant, except that you don't know everything, which, of course, you already knew."

Finally, when faced with difficult questions, never tell someone, "Well, you just have to take it by faith." This answer tells the world that we think faith is a blind leap taken in spite of evidence to the contrary. Biblical faith is nothing of the sort.

Pastor Wade Mobley (pastorwade@livingwordfreelutheran) serves Living Word Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D. For a list of helpful resources on this subject, see page 22.

BIBLICAL GLASSES FOR YOUR CLASSES

PASTOR TODD ERICKSON



"THE B-I-B-L-E, YES THAT'S THE
BOOK FOR ME, I STAND ALONE ON
THE WORD OF GOD, THE B-I-B-L-E."



The words of that song bring our teaching into focus. Whether we are teaching young, middle-aged, or older souls, we must always view them with biblical glasses, after all ... “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

When we sing songs like these we can use actions, hand signals or other props. They serve to help make it fun, and they are also great teaching tools and reminders. We should not be afraid to use every moment as a teaching tool. We use what we have to make the biblical truth clear and easily remembered. When we teach let's bring home the message of God's Word.

See them with biblical glasses

See your students — all people — with the eyes of God. The first question listed in H.U. Sverdrup's *Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism* asks: “What is God's will concerning man? God wills all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (I Timothy 2:4). The Bible was written for this very purpose (John 20:30-31). Kids, young and old, are full of life, and the reason we teach is that they may know Jesus Christ and grow in Him.

Remember the words of the baptismal service: “We believe that God gives the gift of faith in baptism, but that this gift will be lost unless the child is *taught the Word of God*, upheld by prayer and given a Christian example to follow. This is first the responsibility of you parents, then of the sponsors, and the entire congregation. May we be faithful in this responsibility and privilege. Peace be with you. Amen.”

Let them see with biblical eyes

There are many visual learners out there. Don't be afraid to use visuals, but use Scripture and bring it home to God's Word.

A good example is the use of object lessons. When students see that object in the future it will hopefully remind them of a truth from God's Word. To this day a wheat penny reminds me of working in the harvest field of souls. The empty Easter egg will always cry out, “He is not here, He is Risen! Just as He said.”

An area I want to encourage you in is the use of DVDs and movie clips. They are not just baby-sitting tools. Good media or portions of them can be used effectively and biblically. It will, however, take work on your part to watch and be discerning. Prayerfully prepare and tweak whenever necessary, but always bring it home to God's Word.

Touch them with biblical creativity

Use your skills, gifts, abilities and ideas to engage their senses. Always use biblical glasses and give them what they need, not necessarily what they want. Don't do things half-heartedly, fearful of what others may say. Be creative, but always have a biblical reason for doing what you are doing. Don't do something just for the sake of doing it.

Don't be afraid, but always humbly and graciously listen to those who have suggestions or criticize. They may have something that God wants to use to help you teach His Word. Sometimes we can take advantage of other's

creativity, but make sure there is Scripture there, so that God's Word, not your word, stands out. Remember, it is not your creativity that will change a life, but God's Word (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Speak biblical truth

“Thus says the Lord.” I once put a red dot in the book of Jeremiah by every place where the prophet says words such as these. My Bible has measles there. Unofficially, 392 times. (I knew you were wondering.)

Do not just give them morality. Give them Jesus, the real reason behind why we do what we do. In Rich Christiano's movie, “Time Changer,” he tackles this very issue by noting how the movie and TV industry used morality without Jesus, without God, to get into our households. Let us not just tell people, “don't steal,” or, “be kind,” without telling them the real reason why. Include God and His Word. Include Jesus, for that is viewing things with biblical glasses.

Eat biblical food

Look at the sweet and sour of Psalm 119:103 and Revelation 10:9-11. Consider the Bread of Life — body and blood. Talk with them about the real presence of Jesus Christ. Help students to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8).

Ask biblical questions

Use examples from the Bible like Acts 16:29-34, where the Philippian jailer asks, “What must I do to be saved?” Or Psalm 119:9-11, “How can a young man keep his way pure?” Or John 14:5, “Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’”

Do not only ask biblical questions, but hear with biblical ears — listen to their questions; what are they really asking? Ask God for help and wisdom to listen and to answer. Never be afraid to say, “I don't know.” Then take the time to search for an answer with them. Enjoy those in your class who ask questions everyone else wants to ask.

Encourage them to act on God's Word

God wants a living faith. Are we out to create just hearers, pew sitters, or doers of God's Word with personal, living relationships with Jesus? (Matthew 7:24-29; James 1:22)

Teachers, go all in! Give it your best shot with God's help. Be enthusiastic and creative, persevere, and humbly take and give instruction. There is much responsibility, but also much potential for true joy. Love people with God's everlasting love. Put your biblical glasses on and keep plugging away for Jesus.

Erickson serves Rose Free Lutheran and Spruce Free Lutheran, Roseau, Minn. He led a workshop on this topic during a parish education expo hosted by Our Saviour's Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn. See pages 14-15 for more information on the expo.

The Life connection

Teaching the pro-life message in
Christian education is easy. All it
takes are some biblical connections.

By Dr. Jim Lamb



Life issues are controversial. But at their core, they are spiritual because the thread that ties them together is death — the death of embryos, unborn babies, the infirm. Death becomes the god society turns to for hope. Lutherans have what it takes to address life issues. The gospel is the most powerful and positive pro-life message in the universe.

Nothing speaks more profoundly to such issues than the gospel of a crucified, risen, and ascended Lord who poured out His Spirit upon His people. Nothing offers more hope. The gospel is central to our teaching; that is the connection that needs to be made by Christian educators.

An exhaustive list is not needed. Once a few ideas are shared, more will follow. Let's start with the basics.

First, we are created by God in His image. The Apostle's Creed is a pro-life document. Everything God created was *for* human life. Only human life bears the image of God. The creation of Adam and Eve gets special recognition (Genesis 2:7, 22), a very "hands on" intimate creation. To be sure, sin mars God's image in us, but this original lofty position still affords special value to human life (Genesis 9:6, Psalm 8).

God then set into motion a biological process for pro-creation (Genesis 1:28). But He still involves Himself intimately, knitting us in the womb (Psalm 139). Every human life is handmade by God.

Here are five pro-life teaching connections:

- Teaching creation goes beyond "God did it" to "God did it and it shows the value He gives to life."
- Every human life has value as the work of God's hands. This basic concept can be taught to all ages and is the foundation for developing a Christian pro-life attitude.
- Abortion goes way beyond politics and morality. It is more than taking a life. It takes a human life created by God.
- The infirm in nursing homes have value as the work of God's hands.
- It's not what we look like or how useful we are that gives value. It's who made us.

Second, we need a Savior who lived with us. Because of sin, a need exists for re-creation. God loved what He made with His hands so much He sent His Son to buy humanity back. This redemptive process did not begin in a manger, but in a fallopian tube. Jesus' incarnation happened at the moment of conception. Jesus passed through all the stages of our development to redeem us from our unclean development (Psalm 51:5).

When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the price for all sins for all humanity. His resurrection signals victory over sin, death, and Satan. His ascension tells us He is reigning over His people in grace for all eternity.

Here are eight pro-life teaching connections:

- Jesus beginning as an embryo gives value to all embryos.
- Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit attests to His divinity and our humanity at that moment.
- Jesus died for all humanity — embryos in Petri dishes, babies in wombs, grandma in the nursing home. All were "bought with a price" (I Corinthians 6:19).
- The message of Jesus' atonement for all sins speaks powerfully of hope and healing to post-abortive men and women.
- God understands suffering because He suffered.
- God brings good from suffering.
- Jesus' resurrection tells us that life wins. Death is a defeated enemy.
- Jesus' ascension tells us that He controls the lives of His people.

Third, the Holy Spirit unites us. In baptism, God calls us through His Spirit and unites us with Christ (Romans 6:3-4). We live with the assurance of His abiding presence. God holds us in His hands (Isaiah 42:6, 49:16; John 10:28-29). We rely on His faithfulness, not ours. Nothing exists in the universe that can separate us from this love (Romans 8:38-39).

Here are four pro-life teaching connections:

- The indwelling of God's Spirit enables us to make God-pleasing decisions.
- No matter what — crisis pregnancy, disease, terminal illness — the Spirit of Christ is present.
- The Holy Spirit prays even when we cannot (Romans 8:26-27).
- The Spirit is always at work doing more than we can imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

See how easy that is? The same can be done with the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, etc. Pro-life Christian educators can integrate life issues into what they already teach.

For further study, I recommend, *Implementing a Pro-Life Theology in a Lutheran Congregation*, available from Lutherans for Life. LFL offers many resources to aid congregations in making the above connections and more. Check us out at www.lutheransforlife.org.

Lamb is the executive director of Lutherans for Life.

Hymns of faith

The passionate purpose behind the
AFLC's Ambassador Hymnal

By Pastor Tom Olson



God moves in mysterious ways. The seven weeks I spent taking radiation therapy in Minneapolis last fall turned out to be a great blessing. Driving to and from Methodist Hospital for treatment took about 90 minutes, and the rest of my day was free. I decided to dig out my dusty boxes of research material and finish my Master of Divinity thesis from the AFLC seminary some 20 years late.

I originally started the thesis in 1987 on the topic of *The Need for a New Lutheran Hymnal in the AFLC*. After chapter one was completed the Coordinating Committee asked me to be chairman of a new hymnal committee. The paper was put on hold and I devoted the next five years of my life to the development of the *Ambassador Hymnal*. After that I got married, had a family and free time evaporated. Finishing my degree seemed impossible. But now cancer slowed me down enough to get the job done and in the process I rediscovered the passionate purposes that our hymnal committee poured into that miraculous book.

The 13-year-old *Ambassador Hymnal* that has amazed us with more than 27,000 copies sold is much more than a song book. It is a tremendous Christian education resource. The hymnal committee worked hard to include more than 600 excellent hymns. About 70 of them are in a children's section and can be used for Sunday school singing. You might be surprised how much children enjoy good hymns if they are taught with enthusiasm.

Our Lutheran doctrine is in the hymnal, too. It was my conviction that many of our congregations were getting out of touch with the Reformation teachings that are the foundation of our Church. So the *Augsburg Confession*, *Luther's Small Catechism* and the three creeds were put in the hymnal, handy for all to find. I like to use parts of the catechism for confessions of faith during Lenten services and other special times. It would be good for us to put more effort into teaching our people the liberating, biblical Lutheran doctrine that has been entrusted to us.

One interesting hymn, "Salvation unto Us Has Come" (no. 410), was included with all 10 verses. It alone is a theology course. Even if you don't sing the hymn, every church should read all or parts of it in classes or during sermons.

A great pietistic hymn from our heritage is no. 219, "Jesus, I Long For Thy Blessed Communion." Hans Nielsen Hauge was meditating on verse three of this hymn when he received his mighty conversion, which catapulted him from peasant farmer to national revival preacher in Norway some 200 years ago. The AFLC may not exist today if he was not singing that powerful prayer of consecration so long ago. We all should read and pray that prayer today.

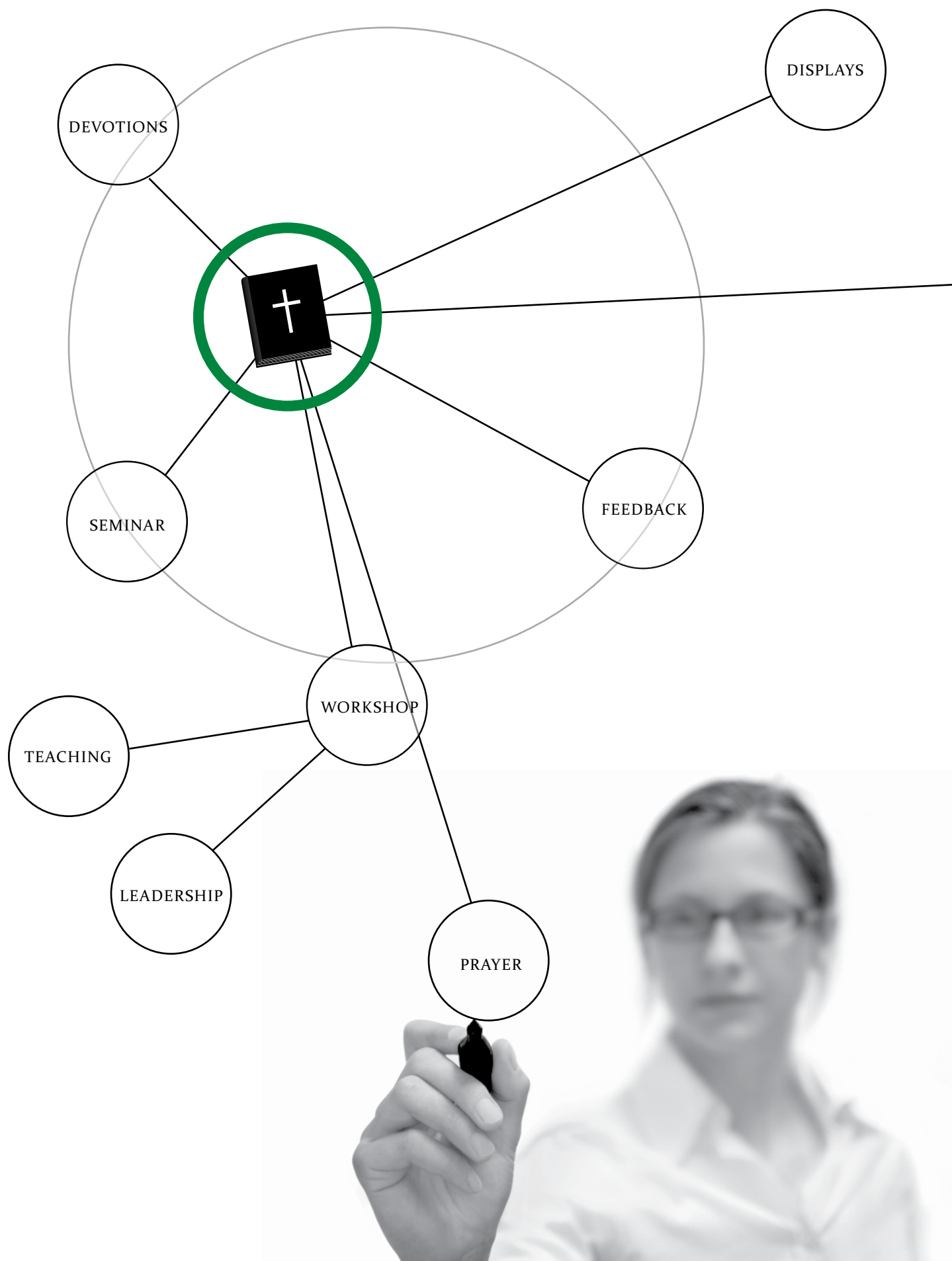
I could go on and on with examples of the riches of our hymn heritage. I personally have been lifted from discouragement to rapture time and again as I flee to hymn no. 419, "Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain" for encouragement or hymn no. 583, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way," for perspective.

Take out the hymnal for yourself and look at the table of contents. You will find worship resources, Bible reading plans, lectionaries, the "way of salvation explained" and a large section of responsive readings taken directly from the Holy Bible. A whole sermon series could be drawn from that section alone. The worship services can be used for private devotion as well as public worship. Even if you are from a low church background you might find it very uplifting to read through the "Common Service" (page 25) with its deep repentance and high words of praise. These words have been used to praise the Lord for almost 2,000 years. Use it in your personal devotions or use parts of it in special services.

There is a trunk in my parents' living room which my great-grandfather, Ole Odegarden, used to carry his life possessions from Faaberg, Norway, in 1888. When we were children we used to look through its ancient contents. I remember three Norwegian books in that box that must have been precious to my ancestors. One was the Bible, the other a copy of *Pilgrim's Progress* and the third was *Lanstad's Hymnal*. The hymnal was a powerful devotional and educational resource in the lives of pioneer Christians. I pray that we would let go of the shallow substitutes that have taken the place of our hymnals and place into the hands of our children more than 1,000 of the best poetry, doctrine and worship resources the Church has preserved.

Don't wait to get derailed by cancer to rediscover the riches of our hymnal like I did. Get a copy today and put it under your Bible, alongside of the chair where you have your personal time with God each day. Use it to teach your family or Sunday school class. You will be blessed.

Olson is an AFLC Home Missions pastor serving in Mineral Point, Wis.



Hosting an education



expo

By Brenda Leier

Another meeting? Oh no!” In today’s busy world, volunteers may often be saying that — some of them even out loud. Members of the Northwest Minnesota District Parish Education Committee realized that they needed to balance jam-packed family schedules with the need for solid and proven resources as well as Christian fellowship.

The district has some diversity in its membership, so a survey was sent last fall to each church asking about their needs. After discussing a variety of ideas, the committee chose a Saturday morning this spring to host a parish education expo at Our Saviour’s Lutheran in Thief River Falls, Minn. Because of the predominantly rural nature of our district, we wanted to avoid the fall harvest season and the winter roads.

The meeting was held from 9-11:30 a.m., with half-hour sessions and a short opening and closing. To further keep the time frame short, there was no scheduled refreshment time. Muffins and coffee were available — with lidded cups — to carry to the meetings. Participants were welcome to go to whichever sessions they’d like to attend, but free to leave if they had an errand to run. The narthex was set up with display tables for participants to browse the various materials as they had time.

We found that several publishers were willing to send us catalogs and flyers. Pastor Dennis Gray set up a display showing Mercy and Truth products. One table featured Sunday school curriculum and other teaching aids from the AFLC’s Parish Education department. Another table featured vacation Bible school materials and Christmas program ideas. The Christian Bookshelf store of Grand Forks, N.D., donated several door prizes. Teachers were also given the opportunity to write down their phone numbers and/or e-mail addresses to develop a contact list for idea sharing.

The day opened by meeting in the sanctuary for a welcome and devotions. Pastor Todd Erickson then led a session for everyone entitled, “Biblical Glasses for Your Classes” (see pages 7-9), which focused on using all of the senses to present lessons, but always bringing it home to its biblical basis.

The participants could then choose three sessions to attend. In one room, the topics were directed toward classroom teaching, including: presenting a Bible lesson, memorizing Scripture and teaching missions. In the other room, the topics were directed toward the leaders: vacation Bible school, opening and closing exercises, and Christmas programs. The sessions were set up so the facilitator could share ideas that he or she had tried and also open it up to the group for sharing further ideas and questions. If the discussions were finished, participants could leave and browse in the narthex. Facilitators came from five of the churches in our district.

The expo ended in the sanctuary again, where door prize recipients were chosen, feedback forms were filled out, and we closed with prayer. Nearly 25 people attended the expo.

The feedback was very positive. Some of the advice shared was that the sessions weren’t long enough — although no one wanted the overall time to increase. Others were also disappointed that they had to choose one session over another. Perhaps in future expos, fewer topics will be chosen, rotating from year to year.

As planners, we weren’t sure what to expect at a district meeting. The day turned out to be a real blessing because of the support, enthusiasm and sharing of the passion for educating our parishioners. Everyone seemed to leave with renewed energy and at least one good idea. As one person shared, “An unexpected bonus — I found out we were doing some things right.”

Leier is a member of Our Saviour’s Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn.

True stories

Parish Education publishes missionary book

By Marian Christopherson



As I child I often remember missionaries visiting our church to show slides and tell about their work. Their pictures were posted on the church bulletin board, and we heard their names frequently. We also had a monthly mission club for elementary age children. There we would hear mission stories, sing mission songs, read letters from missionaries, sign birthday cards to send to them and their families, participate in mission projects, and pray for missionaries. We also regularly prayed for missionaries by name in our home.

Teaching about missions is an essential part of Christian education in the congregation and in the home. Children should be taught from a young age to have *beautiful feet*. "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!'" (Romans 10:14-15).

In the fall of 2000, Ambassador Publications decided that publishing a book of mission stories would be a valuable tool for teaching children about missions. A notice was posted in *The Lutheran Ambassador* inviting people to send mission stories to our office to be compiled in a collection of short stories. The invitation was open to anyone from an AFLC congregation who either currently or previously served on a foreign field through any mission organization, whether short-term or long-term. Personal letters were also sent to a large number of people, inviting them to participate in this project. Only a few stories were received at that time. Through public notices, letters, and phone calls, we continued encouraging people to submit stories about their mission experiences. People always seemed excited about the idea when it was presented, but only a few more stories trickled into our office during the next few years.

In 2003 the Board of Publications decided that in order to move forward, we needed an individual who could commit a large amount of time to the project and take it on as a personal ministry opportunity. This person would be responsible for making contacts with prospective writers, seeking commitments from them to submit one or more stories, and regularly following up on their work. The board approached former missionary, Clara Gunderson,

about this task, and she willingly consented to serve. We are grateful to Clara for her humble service and for the extensive work she has done, communicating regularly with writers and helping them put their accounts into an interesting story form with active dialogue and vivid details. Thanks also to Fern Bohling and Loiell Dyrud, who have given valuable assistance in this enormous task. We are also grateful to the Women's Missionary Federation (WMF), who has always been a key supporter and promoter of mission work and has encouraged this project from the beginning, generously providing funding for it.

The 43 stories that make up *Missionary Chronicles* reflect God's work in mission endeavors on five continents.

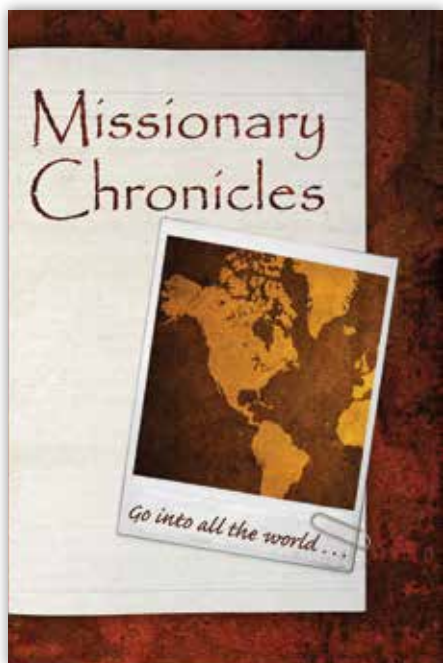
The included maps are intended to give geographical context to the stories they represent. The stories, arranged by continent, are illustrated by children ages 4-18. A series of discussion questions follows each story, along with a brief biographical sketch about each writer. Also included are creative ideas for teaching missions to children and several hymns with a missions focus.

The goal of the book is to create an awareness of mission work around the world, to awaken an interest in missions (especially of AFLC missions), and to encourage people to pray for missionaries, give to missions, and consider God's personal calling to missions both at home and abroad. This collection of short stories, just more than 200 pages, is intended for use in family devotions, opening chapel time, or Sunday school classrooms.

Many of these stories set in far-away lands describe adventures unlike the typical American experience. Yet the timeless truths they teach are not bound by the location or age level of the reader. The varied stories give a realistic picture of the missionary experience. They tell about the call to missions,

painful separation of loved ones, difficult circumstances, disappointments, and rejection of the gospel, but they also show God at work on the mission field through answered prayers, God's provision and protection, and the salvation of souls. May God use this book to awaken in our hearts a desire to bring the wonderful words of the gospel to our own communities and to the remotest parts of the earth.

Christopherson is the director of AFLC Publications and Parish Education. Art by Susan Welsch, 17, a member of Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis.



Missionary Chronicles is available for \$10 from Ambassador Publications, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN, 55441. E-mail parished@aflc.org or call (763) 545-5631.



Saying FAREWELL

BY PASTOR DANIEL GILES

In January of this year we came to Phoenix, Ariz., on what we thought would be a short leave of absence, to help my parents after some recent health problems. We came with only two suitcases, leaving all our “stuff” behind. We also left our adult children, who had joined us in the work, our two granddaughters, our dear friends, Pastor Todd and Barb Schierkolk, and their daughters, Rachel, Megan, and Kirstie, who have been like family to us. A part of our hearts will always remain in Mexico.

God had other plans for us once again. We came to the conclusion after much prayer that His call to us is to stay and take care of my parents. With hearts at once sad and joyful we have turned in our resignation to AFLC World Missions and taken up residence in Phoenix with my parents. I will be working for my brother's software development company as a linguistic consultant, which allows me to work from home so we can both be here with my folks when we are needed.

The work in Jerez is in good hands! Our children are still working with Todd and Barb, living together in the house we shared. Our daughter, Ingrid, is translating the

Ambassador Sunday school material, teaching Sunday school, leading Bible studies and counseling women.

Our son, Daniel, is the youth director and worship song leader at church. His wife, Marcela, is a wonderful help to Danny in his work, as well as full-time mom to Ari and Andi.

Todd and Barb have successful Kid's Clubs in various locations in the city, as well as taking over the position of head pastor in the local congregation.

They are all busy, productive, and living for Jesus with all of their strength!

So, we say goodbye as your missionaries; we have loved and appreciated each one of you with all of our hearts. You have been faithful, loving supporters of us, our family, and the work of the Lord in Mexico. Thank you! It helps us in this transition to know that we leave the Schierkolks and our dear children in God's hands and your faithful care. God bless you!

Giles and his wife, Debbie, have been AFLC missionaries since 1985.

There's no GRADUATION from Bible study



BY JONI HAGLIN

For several years I've had the privilege of being superintendent of our Sunday school. This has involved a variety of tasks — teaching classes, balancing the books, ordering curriculum, recruiting teachers, picking out music, and organizing holiday programs. I enjoy it all, but I especially enjoy working with the children. Every age is fresh and exciting, bringing new challenges. Something I've learned through my experiences with Sunday school, Bible studies, home schooling my kids, and in my own life is that we never graduate from Christian education. There are different circumstances or degrees in which our Christian education occurs, but we must never stop growing.

Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." How do we do that? We plant seeds when students are young and keep nurturing them as they grow.

A few years ago we had seven children in our preschool class. Class periods were 45 minutes long and during that time the children were very concerned about their snack, getting something to drink, and using the restroom. They all seemed more interested in telling their own stories than listening to the lesson. I really loved those preschoolers. They kept me on my toes and challenged me because I often wondered if anything I taught was sinking in. One Sunday I had just begun telling a story when a boy interrupted and said, "You're talking too much!" Another time

I brought an animal puppet and a girl burst into tears because she was afraid of furry things.

But then one day a boy's mom came and told me what her son was learning in Sunday school. He had said to her, "Mom, did you know that Jesus died on the cross for our sins? And that He rose again? We can ask Him to come into our hearts. And then we can live with Him forever in heaven!" He was 4 years old, and he got it. The seed was planted.

But there's a tender age in which many children begin drifting away from spiritual things and toward things of the world. It's like an invisible wall goes up and we, as their teachers (or parents), are on the other side. As adults, our natural tendency is to pull away, giving them space. But then I began thinking, Jesus doesn't pull away. Psalm 139:5, 7 says, "You hem me in — behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. ... Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?"

As a Christian teacher I need to be like Jesus to our youth — interested, available, and persistent. In Sunday school, youth group, vacation Bible school, or at home as the kids grow, change, and search for answers in their adolescent ways, I need to be consistently "growing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10) so that when they see me they see the Savior.

Haglin is a member of Zoar Free Lutheran, Hampden, N.D.

Emmaus hosts VESPERS for young adults



More than 100 people gathered for the latest young adults worship event on May 4 at Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn. VESPERS at Emmaus offers young adults a time to gather for worship music, prayer, and fellowship, as well as a devotional given by Pastor Nick Dyrud. The next VESPERS at Emmaus has been planned for 7 p.m. Sunday evening, Sept. 21. For more information, and to view additional pictures of the event and hear a live recording, visit the congregation's Web site at <http://www.emmauslutheran.org>.

TOP LEFT: The worship team leads praise and worship during the May 4 VESPERS at Emmaus, a young adult event hosted at Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn. TOP RIGHT: Mike Borg (right), director of celebration ministries at Emmaus, leads the worship event.

South Dakota congregation dedicates new building



Pastor Bill Buck led the dedication service at Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Madison, S.D.



The Home Missions congregation at Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Madison, S.D., dedicated their new building on May 4. Pastor Paul Nash, Home Missions director, was the special speaker for the service.

[ANY] age

BY ALISON KNUTSON

Can a child be taught to grasp the way of salvation? What begins faith in a child? Does a relationship with Jesus require the ability to memorize verses and answer questions about Him? These are some questions that I contemplated as I served on the Southern Barnabas Home Missions team last summer.

My team and I taught vacation Bible school in churches in the southwestern part of the country. In the beginning of June we left Minneapolis after a week of training. I was feeling confident and prepared to teach preschoolers about Jesus as we reached our first destination, St. Francis, Kan. Much to my surprise, I had almost 20 preschoolers to teach on my first night! Those feelings of confidence and preparedness quickly changed to panic and fear as the noise and chaos level in my room increased. Thanks to my adult helpers, I survived that first night.

The next morning I was in tears thinking that I would have to do this every day for the whole summer. I found myself asking God why there were so many preschoolers. It seemed like a waste because they are so young. How could I get them to understand any truths about God when I couldn't even get them to sit still? What was the value in teaching such young children?

The Lord showed me through His Word that there is value in working with those precious children. On my own I could only fail, but as it says in II Corinthians 12:9a, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I needed to humble myself and trust in the omnipotent God to work in the lives and hearts of these children.

I was motivated to take action when I read Romans 10:17, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." It was no longer about me, my preparedness, or my desires. Faith was not something I could give the children, no matter how much I desired it. But I could

share the Word of Christ with them and trust Jesus to give them the gift of faith.

The Lord continued to reveal this to me throughout the summer, especially in Bertrand, Neb. I only had two boys in my class. Isaiah was 4 and very advanced for his age. Three-year-old Reese did not talk very well yet. I've thought about Reese a lot recently. While Isaiah and I were memorizing Bible verses, Reese was content to just sit and play. This was difficult because it seemed like he wasn't learning anything. After spending a lot of time in the Word and prayer, I finally came to the realization that God is the author of salvation, so who am I to say this child knows Him and this child doesn't?

I kept teaching Reese and Isaiah about Jesus Christ who died on the cross for their sins. After presenting the gospel to them, Isaiah told me that he already knew Jesus and that He lived in his heart. What a joyous moment! Praise God! At the end of the day I asked the boys if they would like to pray and Reese prayed, "Dear God, please be with Mom, Dad, Grandma, Britney, Destiney, and Alex. Amen." Such a simple prayer but so beautiful when coming from the mouth of a 3-year-old.

I thank God that He used these two young boys to show me that He can begin faith in a child of any age. As I prepare to teach VBS on South Barnabas again this summer, I am reminded that I don't know what goes on in the hearts and minds of my preschoolers, but I just keep loving them and, most importantly, praying for them. And I leave the rest up to God.

Knutson, a senior at AFLBS, is from Centerville, S.D.



Speakers chosen for 2009 FLY Convention

A year from now, close to 2,000 students and adults will be gathering in Estes Park, Colo., for the 2009 Free Lutheran Youth Convention. Our evening speakers have been confirmed and are excited to share God's Word with us. The theme is "Firmly Planted" from Psalm 1:1-3.

The convention opens Monday night with Pastor Wade Mobley from Living Word in Sioux Falls, S.D. On Tuesday night, Eric and Leslie Ludy from Set Apart Life Ministries [www.setapartlife.com] will be sharing. Pastor Tom Brock from Living Hope in Minneapolis, Minn., will be sharing

on Wednesday night. AFLTS instructor Pastor Bob Lee will be our speaker on Thursday night. On Friday, which is the last night of the convention, Nick Vujicic from Life Without Limbs Ministry [www.lifewithoutlimbs.org] will be sharing with us. To close out the convention, we have invited Christian musician artist 33Miles [33milesonline] to perform following Nick's message.

We hope to see you at the 2009 FLY Convention, July 6-11 at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park.

By Daniel Keinanen, 2009 FLY Committee president.



PEOPLE AND PLACES

Members of **St. John Evangelical Lutheran**, Milford, Ill., dedicated a new parish hall on June 1 with a special dedication service and program in the recently-completed hall. Pastor Elden Nelson, AFLC president, spoke at both the morning service and afternoon dedication service.

Marc Rakow, a 2008 graduate of AFLTS, has accepted a call to serve United Lutheran, Laurel, Neb. Rakow served his internship year at Bethel Lutheran, Minot, N.D.

Pastor Stephen Odegaard married Patricia Schuman on June 8 at Calvary Free Lutheran, Everett, Wash., where Odegaard serves as pastor.

Members of the Coordinating Committee accepted a resolution of affiliation from **East Marsh River Lutheran**, Halstad, Minn. Dale Finstrom, who serves Resurrection Free Lutheran, Beltrami, Minn., is serving the congregation on an interim basis.

The 20th anniversary of the AFLC in California was celebrated recently. Pastor James L. Johnson of Camarillo, Calif., invited the AFLC pastors of the state to gather in the Camarillo area. AFLC Vice President Michael Brandt of Sioux Falls, S.D., was the guest speaker for the retreat. The AFLC presently has seven congregations in California.

Eric Christenson has accepted a call to serve Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis. Christenson, currently called as an associate minister at Amery, will meet with members of the Coordinating Committee in order to pursue licensing with the AFLC fellowship roster.

In the April 2008 issue of the Lutheran Ambassador it was incorrectly stated that **Ebenezer Lutheran**, Northwood, N.D., is an AFLC Home Missions congregation. The congregation began in 1898 and joined the AFLC in 2000.

Resources: Timely help for answering your students' tough questions

Pastor Wade Mobley, Living Word, Sioux Falls, S.D., has compiled this companion list of aids to go along with his article, "The hard questions," printed on pages 4-6.

Books

The Bible: Know the truth so well that lies become obvious.

A Ready Defense, by Josh McDowell: A compilation of great basic writings on finding the truth.

Handbook of Christian Apologetics, by Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli: General answers concerning the Christian worldview.

Common Ground Without Compromise, by Stephen Wagner: Twenty-five questions to create a dialog on abortion.

Philosophy Made Slightly Less Difficult, by Garrett J. DeWeese and J. P. Moreland: A beginner's guide to life's big questions.

Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview, by J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig: A bit technical, but a great primer on philosophy, logic and methodology for finding answers.

Ministries

Stand to Reason (www.str.org): How to be an ambassador for Christ's truth.

Answers in Genesis (www.answersingenesis.org): Biblical creationism with scientific analysis.

May benevolences

Due to an early editorial deadline, the chart of benevolence giving for Jan. 1 through May 31 is unavailable for this issue. If you would like an update before the August issue, please contact the AFLC's bookkeeping department at (763) 545-5631.

[GOOD] TEACHERS

Some of the best teachers I've ever had never preached a sermon or taught a class. My dad was one of them. He wasn't the type to give a long lecture. The lessons came from watching how he lived.

He was a good teacher because he was patient. Some students don't pick things up the first time they're told. It may take a lot of showing and telling before the lesson is learned. My dad didn't get frustrated and give up if something wasn't understood right away. He would gently and lovingly try to get the point across in another

way. "Encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone" (1 Thessalonians 5:14, NIV). That's good teaching.

My dad was also a good teacher because he made things fun. He liked math and he also liked baseball. He used all the numbers and statistics of baseball to teach me math, make it enjoyable and show how it was practical.

Our goal in Christian education is not just to entertain people, but to see God's truth planted deep in the hearts and minds of our students. It is not a sin, however, if while they are learning, the students have fun. If the lesson is enjoyable, it's more likely that what is being taught will be received and remembered. The good news of Jesus is the most interesting and incredible story ever. It is a shame when teachers give the impression it is boring.

Lately the little ones in our congregation have been teaching me a number of things. We are to teach them, but we can also learn a lot from them. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

The little ones are often good examples of honest confession. At times something has been found knocked over or broken and the question is asked, "Who did this?" The 3-year-old freely admits, "I did it." No explanations or excuses. No pointing fingers at somebody else. Just an honest admission of what happened.

When the Psalmist "kept silent" about his sin he was

miserable. When he said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" (Psalm 32:3, 5) he found forgiveness.

On Easter Sunday a teacher was sharing a lesson about what Jesus had done. She was using visual aids to teach. At the same time the little ones were teaching lessons on having a sense of wonder. The teacher shared objects that represented the various parts of the story of Christ's death and resurrection. For some of the little ones, as they looked at the objects and held them, it was all new and caused, "oohs and aahs."

Too many teens and adults act like they've seen it all. Nothing causes them to say, "wow," or fills them with wonder.

After God brought the people of Israel through the Red Sea they were, in a way, like children full of awe. "Who

Our goal in Christian education is not just to entertain people, but to see God's truth planted deep in the hearts and minds of our students.

among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you — majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" (Exodus 15:11). What God has done for us is always worthy of childlike wonder.

Little ones are good about expressing their likes and dislikes. When they are excited to see friends they'll let them know. We adults too often can be slow in letting somebody else know what they mean to us. We hesitate to express our appreciation for others. Proverbs 27:5 says, "Better an open rebuke than hidden love." Little ones don't hide their love. We adults can learn from them, especially when it comes to our love for God.

Babies sometimes have those moments when they only want their mom. Nobody else is an adequate substitute. They cry until they're in their mother's arms. We ought to be the same with our heavenly Father. No one else will do. He alone satisfies. When we're in His arms, the crying stops and contentment comes.



Pastor Craig Johnson

association retreat center

BY GENE VUKONICH

Living SPIRITUALLY

It wasn't until the last couple of years of college that the Christian part of my education began. I hadn't read a Bible before, and God wasn't included in my plans. How exciting it was to begin reading the Operator's manual: God's Word. It has always been around, I just hadn't been reading it. Without food, air, rest and exercise, we cannot live. So, too, without spiritual food, air, rest and exercise, we die spiritually.

Our food is the Word:

I Peter 2:2 says, "Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation" (NASV).

Matthew 4:4 says, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (NASV).

Our breathing is prayer:

I Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (NASV).

Our rest is abiding in Christ:

Matthew 11:28-30 says, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (NASV).

John 15:10 says, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (NASV).

Our exercise and strength is the Holy Spirit:

Acts 1:8 says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (NASV).

We have many opportunities in this wonderful country of ours for spiritual nourishment: Sunday school, Bible studies, Christian schools, and vacation Bible school, to name a few. If it is desirable that children be kind, appreciative, and pleasant, then those qualities should be taught — not merely hoped for (Proverbs 6:23).

Ken was a fellow who spent about three weeks at the ARC each year. His church had junior camp one week, and senior camp the next. He helped where he could during those camps, but spent the week prior to these camps making sure things were ready. He said he figured one week of camp was comparable to a year of Sunday school. What a testimony he was to me for his heart.

My thanks go out to those dedicated teachers who continue their labor of love. I pray that they would be encouraged by the fruits of their labors.

Virtues do not happen by accident or as a natural part of growth. As with any skill or means of success, they must be taught.

Vukonich serves as head of the maintenance staff at the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis.