

THE LUTHERAN 

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AMBASSADOR



GOING
DEEP



All-sufficient grace

BY RACHELLE KLEMMER

One day while checking Facebook, I noticed that an acquaintance re-posted “A Failed Gospel Tract,” which stood out from the usual film references, political quips and cute cat pictures.

This meme, which apparently originated from a theology blog about three years ago, juxtaposes the caption, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” with an illustration of early Christians about to be devoured by a lion during the Roman persecution.

It is a rather dark and snarky little reminder that the prosperity gospel—roughly analogous to what Martin Luther called “theology of glory”—is not the true message of Christianity.

Few people believe in prosperity gospel in the narrow sense of expecting material blessings after writing a check to some washed-out '80s televangelist's personal Lear jet fund.

But the broader concept is there sometimes even in mainstream Christianity: if you just have faith enough, and follow a set of rules well enough, you have the promise that life will be uplifting and wonderful, and you'll never have to go through a failed relationship or family problems or mental health issues or trouble with finances or general disillusionment with life.

And if you do, then you must have asked for it.

This is not to denigrate the role of personal responsibility where it should be applied, but the other extreme is to over-spiritualize things beyond our control.

During my college days in California, a popular self-help book called *The Secret* taught that bad things happened to people who attracted negativity. Apparently, victims of genocide, persecution, war and natural disasters didn't get the memo that they just need to think positively.

On a much smaller scale, I have gone through those times in my life when there was that grating little voice inside me adding insult to injury: not only was I dealing with whatever I was going through, but if I couldn't make the issue go away by sheer force of will then maybe there was something wrong with my relationship with God, too.

“What, you already surrendered it to God? Then surrender louder!”

“What do you mean you already laid it on the altar? You must have done it wrong the first time; lay it down harder!”

This feel-good legalism—a theology of glory—is a trap. Nothing is ever enough.

Theology of the cross, however, teaches that Christ is enough and He has already reconciled us to Himself. There is nothing we need to add and nothing we need to prove.

Being constantly happy, or at least pretending to, is not a requirement of the faith.

Although faith in Christ does not guarantee sunshine and roses, it does lift the burden that we *need* to have said-perfect life in order to be assured of our relationship with Him.

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (II Corinthians 12:9, ESV).

Klemmer is from Wadena, Minn., and attends Zion Free Lutheran Church.



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Editor Pastor Robert L. Lee
rlee@afcl.org

Managing Editor Ruth Gunderson
ruthg@afcl.org

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

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He may be a pipefitter or an executive; she may be a lawyer or a homemaker, but the faithful, available and teachable (F.A.T.) person who can follow a Sunday school quarterly or lesson plan, will be able to minister meaningfully to students.

—John R. Cionca

[This life, therefore, is not righteousness but growth in righteousness, not health but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise; we are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it; the process is not yet finished, but it is going on; this is not the end, but it is the road; all does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.]

—Martin Luther

I don't mean to be cruel, but I'm compelled to be honest: If all those involved in Christian teaching had to become salesmen and saleswomen to make a living, most of them would starve to death. We're teaching the most exciting truth in all the world—eternal truth—and doing it as if it were cold mashed potatoes.

—Howard G. Hendricks

Education without [Christian] values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make man a more clever devil.

—C. S. Lewis

Youth: Feed them, work them, love them—and you'll have them.

—Henrietta Mears



WHOSE JOB?

BY PASTOR DAVID JOHNSON

I n any discussion of education the question will eventually be asked, “So who is ultimately responsible for a child’s instruction?” The answers given to this question can range from the simplistic, “It’s the father’s job,” to the unnecessarily complicated, “The intricacies of education demand a multi-pronged address from various perspectives.”



With this in mind, we must be wary of these extremes as we seek to understand God's heart on the subject of education. The truth is that God's Word is both specific and inclusive in its handling of instructing our children.

For example, Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it."

This is a precious passage, and is frequently quoted when discussing the importance of godly parenting. But where the verse is long on exhortation, it is vague on assigning the duty to a specific person or institution. The verse is not set in the midst

of other parenting instructions; it stands alone amongst other general counsel. Therefore, we fall back on another important passage with a clearer delegation of duties.

Deuteronomy 6:6 says, "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up."

This is a broad command to the nation of Israel to give serious attention to the godly instruction of their children, and it seems to bring the focus

of attention down to the individual home. And yet, as you see the term "sons," the inference of the exhortation can imply a larger application than the single family dwellings we often think of today. This allows for the involvement of extended family, even generations, in the shared responsibility of education, which was and is the norm in many parts of the world. This is reinforced in passages like II Timothy 1:5, where we see Timothy influenced by both his mother and grandmother.

Apparently, the passing of godly wisdom and instruction was something in which the whole family participated. But before we slide into a modified "it takes a village" mentality, we should address another passage which brings an even finer point to the delegation of duties.

Ephesians 6:4 says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Now we come down to the parents, the primary teachers of our children. This would seem to echo many passages in Proverbs where we see God challenge children to heed and apply the instruction of their parents (Proverbs 1:8; 6:20).

However, when the apostle Paul addresses the Corinthian believers, he refers to them as "letters of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God ..." (II Corinthians 3:2-3). The Corinthians were spiritual children who had received instruction from their spiritual superiors. Paul and others were pencils, so-to-speak, in the hands of the Holy Spirit as He wrote His instructions on their hearts.

In the same way, God has called a variety of instructors to the high and holy calling of teaching and training our children, including those teachers outside the family.

I Corinthians 12:28 says,

"And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, ..." (see also Luke 2:46; Ephesians 4:11).


Martin Luther felt this principle had even broader applications. From his introduction to the *Small Catechism*, we see this exhortation:

"You should also take pains to urge governing authorities and parents to rule wisely and educate their children. They must be shown that they are obliged to do so, and that they are guilty of damnable sin if they do not do so, for by such neglect they undermine and lay waste both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world and are the worst enemies of God and man. Make very plain to them the shocking evils they introduce when they refuse their aid in the training of children to become pastors, preachers, notaries, etc. ..."

Luther understood that in the shaping of a healthy society, the governing authorities shared in the responsibility of education. Luther urged princes and civil rulers to establish schools in which all children could be taught religion, languages, history, singing, instrumental music, and mathematics. Luther felt that since an educated population benefited the state, the state should share in the cost and administration of the process.

So who is responsible for the training of children? From a biblical perspective, the authority and responsibility begins in the home, both immediate and extended. But God has also provided the additional teaching resources of church and society to aid in that daunting task. It is my prayer that parents will seek God's Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to tap into all available resources resulting in generations of godly and responsible young adults.

Johnson serves St. Paul's Lutheran, Cloquet, Minn.



Bible Study Aids

THE BASICS

BY JAN STRAND

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Colossians 2:6-8).

Back to the basics. We've heard that phrase over and over again in the educational world. For Christians, that is where our devotional lives need to be also. But with a plethora of books to choose from, how do you pick a devotional book that will guide your time with God? Devotional books picked for the individual or family time need to focus on the very basics of our faith—the Word of God. As Colossians 2:6-7 says, once we have received Christ, we need to walk in Him, be firmly rooted in Him and built up through Him. As we look at daily devotional books, there are things we need to question.

Is it Word based? Are there portions of Scripture printed in

the book, or are there Bible passages to be read along with the writer's words? Once again, the Bible needs to be the absolute basic part of the devotional. As we preview a devotional book, we need to prayerfully consider if it will bring our hearts closer to Him.

If you are selecting a book for younger children, is the text understandable to them? When our children were young, we went through a devotional book based on hymns. The author of the devotional expressed the biblical meanings, so even as we sang through the more difficult to understand hymn texts, the message was remembered. Devotions on Bible men and women and missionary stories

are also a great way to engage our families in conversation to build faith. Then in our prayer time we can express gratitude for the examples laid before us.

Did the devotion we read in the morning come back to our thoughts throughout the day? The Holy Spirit will cause His Word to dwell in our hearts. If our devotions are forgotten before we leave the table, perhaps we need a different plan.

Let's go back to Colossians 2:8. Notice it says, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception ..." As we pray for guidance in selecting a devotional, beware of an author spending time on little-known doctrines, traditions of men,

or current social trends. Don't become bogged down by questionable theology.

Ambassador Publications has many devotionals thoroughly tested to bring readers back to the basics. Authors such as Martin Luther, Carl Olof Rosenius and Ole Hallesby along with contemporary writers are available. Ask your pastor or a trusted Christian friend if you are having trouble finding something suitable.

Remember to start with the very basics—the Word of God.

Strand, a member Emmanuel Lutheran, Kenyon, Minn., is a former member of the Board of Publications and Parish Education.

IN THEIR WORDS

BY KRIS BERTUS



Do you remember the old TV shows with Art Linkletter and Bill Cosby interviewing children, asking questions and receiving answers that regaled us with laughter or tenderly touched our hearts with childlike truth? As we spoke with our Sunday school teachers and our Train Up A Child preschool teachers at Abiding Savior in Sioux Falls, S.D., they too shared children's responses that could draw a smile or evoke a tear.

In Mrs. Sharon's second grade Sunday school class:

Sara shared that being a Christian means "having faith and loving others," and that the best thing in her life this year was that "my family is saved!"

Katie said that if she were going to talk to a friend who didn't know Jesus, she would remind them, "You should believe in Jesus; don't you want to go to heaven?" When asked about what Jesus had done in her life this year, she responded, "He helped me not get scared of the wobbly bridge in the rain forest at the Omaha Zoo."

Another student shared that she was really glad that "Jesus rose from the dead," but she was also thankful that "my mom helped clean up my doggy doo doo."

Preschooler Maylee said, "We can sing 'cuz Jesus is watching over us."

Allison added, "I learned that Jesus died on the cross to take our badness away."

Isaac wanted others to know that he asked Jesus into his heart "in the car with daddy,"

and that he would tell a friend about Jesus by sharing, "Jesus can do anything!"

The three Post girls ages 3, 6, and 9 liked learning about Jesus from Pastor Kirk Flaa because "he yells a lot." I suspect that reveals that he means business.

Finally, one of our preschool moms shared that learning Bible verses can be helpful in locating a lost child at Lowes. She knew exactly where her child was when she heard, "Never get tired of doing good," (II Thessalonians 3:13) being shouted through a PVC pipe.

Often in ministry we question whether God is at work, whether the Holy Spirit is reaching hearts, or whether our work is in vain. Hearing these children share about the realness of God in their lives is a powerful reminder that He is doing exactly what he says He will do! Amen!

Bertus is retiring after serving six years as director of Children's Ministry at Abiding Savior, Sioux Falls, S.D.



FAMILY DEVOTED TO GOD'S WORD

BY ROBIN JOHNSON



salm 119:11 says, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." As followers of Christ we are encouraged to study the Bible. As a family we can gather for a time of Bible reading, discussion, prayer and maybe even sing a hymn.

My husband, Philip, and I have four children: Luke, Bethany, Olivia, and Joey. They range in age from 25 to 17. When our children were young, Phil and I began reading devotional books to them at bedtime. The books were geared for preschool-aged children. Our favorites were: *The Bible in Pictures for Little Eyes* by Kenneth N. Taylor, *Read-N-Grow Picture Bible* (Tommy Nelson Publishers), and *The Beginners Bible* by Karyn Henley.

As our children grew older and learned how to read, we started using the Bible exclusively. We gathered in the living room right after supper or before bedtime with our Bibles. Each evening began with a short prayer asking for God's guidance in reading and understanding His Word. We took turns reading a verse from a chapter in the Bible. Then we had a time of discussion about what we read, and we always ended with a longer prayer time when each of us participated.

We didn't have devotions

every day, though that was the goal. We probably averaged three or four times a week. Sometimes we had good streaks and bad. But we always kept coming back to the goal of daily family devotions. We knew we needed to be in God's Word, not only for us as parents, but also for our children.

Psalm 1:3 has this promise for those who study God's Word: "He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." As parents we want to see our children live strong lives for the Lord, with a firm stance on His truth. We want them to grow and flourish.

Our three oldest children had this to share about what family devotions meant to them:

Olivia wrote: "Sometimes I had a negative attitude toward devotions, but I know that those were the times I could ask serious and thought-provoking questions. It provided a foundation for us to discuss our morals and beliefs based on God's Word. Sharing prayer requests

simplified the process of communicating what was happening in our lives. My character was formed in those times, and I was challenged to put to death the flesh that wanted to keep me from hearing the truth. Family devotions gave us a better understanding of what was going on in the world. My dad, usually, could inform us on critical events and we could discuss them in light of God's Word, expanding our biblical worldview."

Bethany wrote: "Thinking back on family devotions brings a smile to my face. My basic Bible knowledge started then. One of my earlier memories is of us praying in my room. I distinctly remember praying, asking Jesus to come into my heart. Besides building knowledge and becoming familiar with the Bible, I also learned how to pray. Our prayers started off brief and humorous, but slowly we began to expand the scope of our prayers. I moaned some about having to have devotions, but looking back I wouldn't trade those moments for anything."

Luke compares his experi-

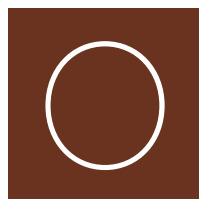
ence of having family devotions to that of a coworker who had so many questions left unanswered about God in his youth. Luke wrote: "Growing up in a family that had family devotions meant I was disciplined in the Word of God. My questions were answered as we read together from the Bible. I am thankful for the commitment my parents had to teaching us from the Bible. It equipped me with the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His Word, which leads to everlasting life."

I have to give God the glory for using the Holy Spirit to prompt Phil and me to teach our children from the Bible. I Peter 5:8 says, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." The stronger our children are in the Lord, the better they will stand against the devil.

Johnson a music teacher living in Esko, Minn., is a member of St. Paul's Lutheran, Cloquet, Minn.

SOWING SEEDS

BY EMMA TWEDT



In a summer Sunday morning, a woman from church, Linda, announced that our church, St. Paul's Free Lutheran, in Fargo, N.D., was going to start an after-school program. I can't describe the feeling

exactly, but I knew that I needed to be a part of that program. As I prayed about it, the feeling only grew stronger.

I talked to Linda and joined a group of volunteers varying from grandmothers to a middle school student. In addition to those of us working with the children, a prayer team was formed, which became a vital part of this ministry.

Planning continued throughout the summer, with the hopes that we would start around the beginning of the school year. As Linda and her daughter, Janna, continued to work with details, it became apparent that God had other plans. As Proverbs 19:21 reminds us, "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand." He blessed us with great communication with the counselor from the local elementary school. She was supportive of the program and went to great lengths to help us. We got a notice put in the school newsletter and she even

arranged transportation for the students.

Finally, in late fall we were able to start. Our group was small at first, with four young boys from the school (although we added more later), as well as two families of homeschooled kids from the church, which proved beneficial for building relationships and created a bridge between the church and the school children.

From 3-6 p.m. on Wednesdays and Thursdays, the church was filled with energy. We had activities ranging from recreation and crafts to Bible time and homework time. Bible time was the part of the day that caused the most joy—and the most frustration. I had days when I was questioning why God even put us there. Why have us teach these kids if they won't listen? Why have us tell His story if they were going to talk and giggle through it? We

only had a few hours with the children each week. Could that really make a difference?

A few months after we started, two of the boys moved away. I was even more frustrated until I heard some of the other volunteers talking. Janna had been talking with one of the boys when he asked her, "Ms. Janna, will we really go to hell if we don't believe in Jesus?" She replied that yes, we would. "Wow. That was me before I came here!"

I was taken aback at how God was able to use the small amount of time we had with him to change his life. Despite my faults and shortcomings, I was still able to be used by God, "who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began" (II Timothy 1:9). I was reminded of the importance of using each opportunity God gives us to reach out. God can give us years to witness to someone, or just a couple of months. It was a sobering thought for me as I considered the many others in my life to whom I had been less than a diligent witness.

I was also reminded of the power of God as we studied His miracles. We taught the stories of Moses, Joshua, and of course, Jesus. I was astonished as I realized how many children hadn't

heard these stories before. I thought that surely even if they didn't believe in Jesus, everyone around here had at least heard of Him. Maybe there were people in New York or Chicago who hadn't heard about God, but Fargo? I was very, very wrong.

It was incredible to watch these children as they heard the stories that I took for granted. One boy walked up to me after we studied Moses. "Ms. Emma, did God really push apart the sea so the people could walk through? That's awesome!" I was taken aback as I realized the power of a story I had taken for granted. I had heard these stories for 17 years; they were nothing new to me. It was almost like seeing these stories for the first time as I watched the kids learn them.

I hope and pray that the seeds we have sown will bear fruit, but I may not find out here on Earth. What I do know is that working with these kids has impacted me. It has given me a sense of urgency for evangelism, and also has helped me rediscover the amazing things God has done for His people. As Mark 10:14 says: "... Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God."

Twedt, who will be a senior in high school this fall, is a member of St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D.



THREADS OF GRACE

BY PASTOR JOHN MUNDFROM

A

n active devotional life has long been an emphasis within our AFLC. Believing that God's Word is our only source for spiritual life, our pastors and lay leaders encourage us to take time every day to read the Bible and seek the Lord in prayer. Spiritual nourishment comes through these quiet times.

This emphasis led to the publication of a daily devotional book, *Waters in The Wilderness*, more than 40 years ago. The daily readings in this book were contributions from pastors and lay people within the AFLC. It was both educational and inspirational in its approach, serving our people well. This devotional has been out of print for several years.

Lately, many people have suggested that the AFLC publish a new devotional book similar to *Waters in the Wilderness*. Realizing it might be a rather long and arduous process to find and organize enough writers and articles to fill the needs of a year-long devotional guide, members of the Parish Education board struck on another idea. For more than 25 years Ambassador Publications has provided weekly articles on the back of our AFLC bulletins. Using writers from across the spectrum of our church body, these articles are primarily devotional in content. We thought, "Why not take a selection of these bulletin-back writings and compile them into a daily devotional book?" Thus was born the concept behind our new publication, *Threads of Grace*.

Our first step was to compile the best of this 25-year library of material. Aware that our AFLC would be celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2012, we hoped to publish this book in commemoration of that Jubilee celebration. We began by contacting several individuals with a strong faith in the Lord and deep roots in the AFLC, asking each to select the articles which stood out to them. Pastor Walter Johnson, Pastor Raynard Huglen, Mildred Strand, Vivian Christenson, Margaret Mundfrom and Charlotte Quanbeck graciously agreed to serve us in this way. After this preliminary work was completed, we then reviewed all the articles which had been selected by one or more of our editors, making the final selections for inclusion in the book.

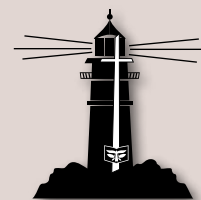
Those of us involved in this process found it encouraging. We came to realize in a new way the fountain of spiritual wisdom and knowledge contained within our church family. We appreciated the variety of writing styles and perspectives evident in these articles, finding spiritual direction and doctrinal soundness—which serve to draw us closer to our Lord Jesus Christ. In choosing our title, those of us on the board realized that there was a common message of grace evident throughout. Writer after writer emphasized the treasure of God's Word and the theme of His gracious work of salvation through Jesus Christ. A thread of grace was woven within the writings, and so we chose the title, *Threads of Grace*.

As with almost any project undertaken by our board, we discovered that what seemed at first to be a rather simple way to produce a new devotional book actually was much more time-consuming and complicated than we imagined. But God has blessed these efforts. The work has been worthwhile. And the book is a good one, in my opinion.

We trust that *Threads of Grace* will nurture the spiritual life of all who read it, both now in this 50th year of Jubilee, and in the years that follow.

Mundfrom, chairman of the Board of Publications and Parish Education, serves Skreftsrud Lutheran, Beresford, S.D.





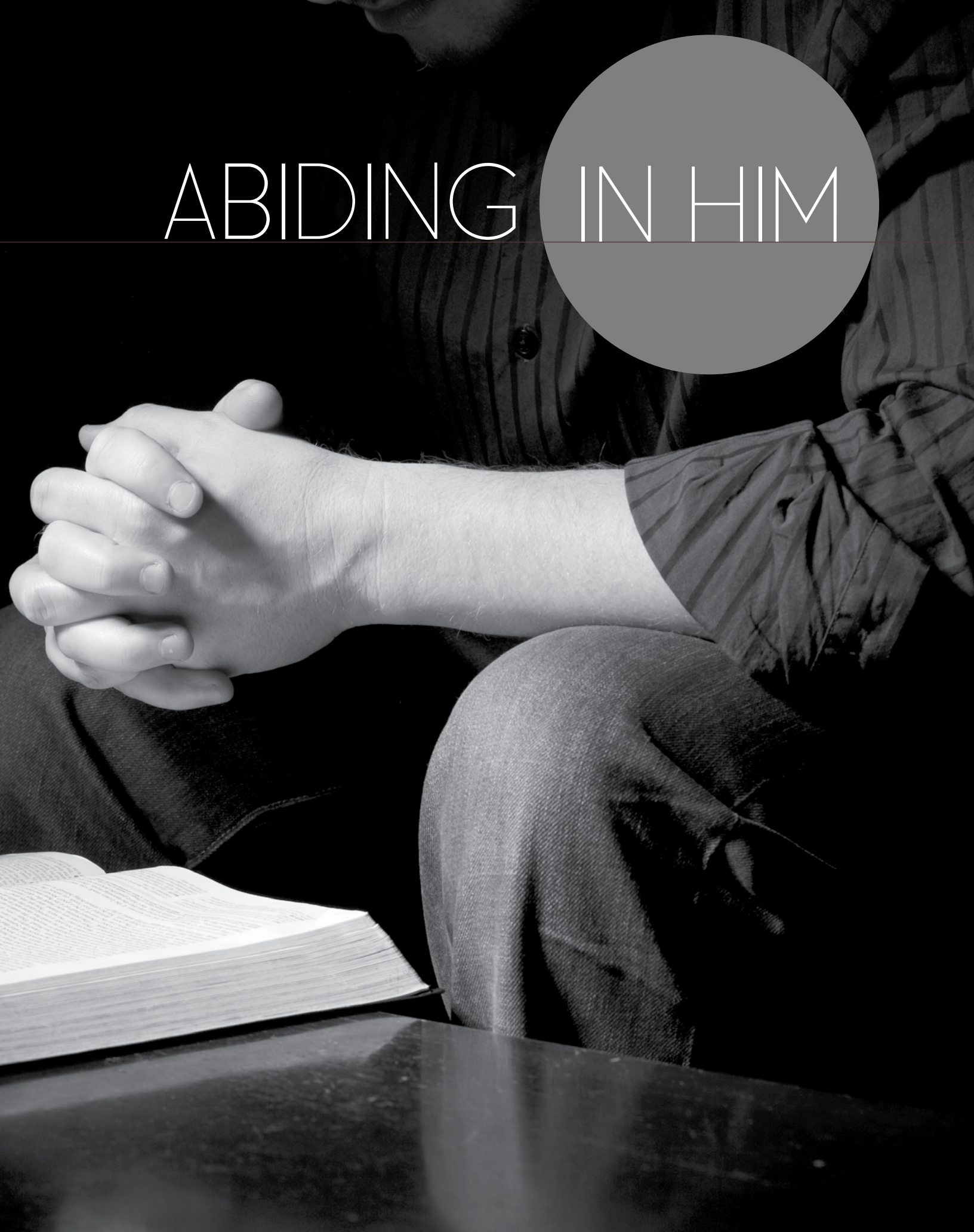
Parish Education: A brief history

We thank God for His provision, guidance, and blessing throughout the history of AFLC Parish Education:

- The first Committee on Publications and Parish Education consisted of Pastor Raynard Huglen, Lee Quanbeck, and Betty Nelson.
- Helen Hanson served as the first executive secretary beginning in 1966, followed by Judith Wold (1969-81).
- During the late 1960s and 1970s, members of the Board of Publications and a large number of volunteers produced Sunday school curriculum for kindergarten through grade nine as well as confirmation materials.
- *Waters in the Wilderness* devotional book was published in 1971.
- The 1981 Annual Conference passed a resolution to revise and produce the Sunday school materials in color. New grade two curriculum was introduced in 1987 and grade four in 1991.
- New Kindergarten and grade one curriculum was completed in 1997 and 1998.
- The AFLC Heritage Series was established in 1999 with the publication of the first volume, *Romans: A Devotional Commentary* by Carl Olof Rosenius.
- The new millennium brought the beginning of the Ambassador Bible Study Series with I, II, III John being published in 2000. More new curriculum was printed in color: Grade three in 2003, preschool in 2005, and grade five in 2008. *Luther's Small Catechism and Explanation* was updated and republished in 2007. And our Sunday school material was translated into Spanish and made available on the internet.

Many other publications have been completed over the years. As we continue to publish more curriculum and other resources, our prayer is that God's Word and the wonderful Gospel message would be effectively communicated through them all.

ABIDING IN HIM



BY JOSIAH NELSON



Read your Bible, pray every day, and you'll grow, grow, grow!" Our evangelical American Christian culture often points to the importance of what are called personal devotions, quiet time, devos,

etc. We emphasize the need for this so much that it may become simply another thing to check off our religious lists.

Though the Bible may not specifically mention personal devotions or quiet times as such (and therefore, they are not commanded), these practices certainly have roots in biblical principles.

In John 15, Jesus tells us that He is the vine and we are the branches, and whoever abides in Him will bear much fruit. Reading a chapter in the Bible a day isn't bad, but *abiding* means far more than reading a few minutes every day and calling it good. It's bigger than that. It doesn't describe a task that needs to be finished, but an on-going relationship where Jesus holds and keeps us continually.

Even though we deserve nothing but to be continually and eternally damned and held under the wrath of God for every evil thing we have done, Jesus was sentenced to death under the wrath of God, died in our place, exchanged our sinfulness for His righteousness, and now holds us to be with Him

forever. Who would reject that offer? To the Christian, hearing the gospel fills you with an eagerness to learn more about God through His written Word, to praise Him, and to cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.

Many times the stories of people we call "great men and women of God," such as Hudson Taylor, Corrie ten Boom, Charles Spurgeon, and Martin Luther, encourage us with their great passion and sacrifice. However, we need to be careful to not forget John 15 lest we esteem them too highly. (Don't worry, I like them, too.) But the reality is that they were not great and extraordinary people in and of themselves. Even though they were weak, sinful, and flawed people, they relied on a great, powerful, and loving God. So rather than merely mimicking their methods, we should follow their pattern of trusting in Jesus, seen through the amount of time they spent

in prayer and Scripture.

But because of our sinful nature, we don't always feel like spending time in prayer and the Word. Whether because of our poor attitude or our lack of context, Scripture can sometimes feel dry or pointless; we can lose sight of the greater redemptive history and what it is telling us about Jesus. Praise God that our feelings don't stop Him from doing His work. Isaiah 55:10-11 says, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

Reading the Bible will not magically make us perfect, but the Bible is important because it shows us who Jesus is and what He has done for us. It is a means of grace. The Holy Spirit through the Word creates faith in us by opening our hearts and minds to the gospel. It is not magic, but it is the primary and only objective way we can learn about God.

God comes to us through His Word. Think about it. God—who created planets, solar systems, and galaxies—chose you to be with and enjoy Him forever. He compiled a book over centuries that tells you about Himself and how much

He loves you. Who wouldn't want to hear what He has to say?

Unfortunately, our default mentality is not focused on the gospel message, but the law. In our minds we twist "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28), to "I need to be a better Christian by reading the Bible and praying better so I can do more good things."

Even in response to the clearest gospel message, we by nature act like we want it to tell us to do something for God rather than accept something God has done for us. The Word became flesh; His body broken for us, His blood shed for us, so that our sins may be forgiven. The Word still comes to us every day when we open up our Bibles.

Are regular Bible reading and prayer a good thing? Yes. Are we saved or do we become more righteous because we do them? Not at all.

Let's live in the freedom Christ bought for us and use our freedom to serve the only good and gracious Master and grow to know Him better. He waits to welcome us as we listen to Him through the Word and talk to Him in prayer.

Nelson, from Ontonagon, Mich., is a 2011 graduate of AFLBS. He is currently serving on the South Barnabas summer team.



Earthen vessels

BY DOROTHY PRESTENG

Do you wonder why God chose to put such a wonderful treasure, Christ, in such a frail vessel? It is only to reveal that the power of a Christian's life is of God and not of self. God shines in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. As we allow ourselves to be broken vessels, the treasure within will be seen by men. Christ is our power and our purity. He longs to fill us so others may see Jesus in us.

When we are troubled on every side, perplexed and persecuted, we can choose to be distressed, in despair and be cast down; or we can let the power of Christ within be revealed, and die to self, so that Jesus might be manifest in our bodies. We need the love of God shed abroad in our hearts if we are to meet the circumstances of this life and react in the right manner.

God has seen fit to record the story of many great women in His Word. We read of them in both the Old and New Testaments. He has given to women great talents and abilities. Their intelligence is equal to men, their stamina and emotional endurance are often greater. He does not want women to bury their capabilities, but He wants to channel them. A wife's primary responsibility is to give of herself, her time and her energy to her husband, children and home. This does not mean that women cannot have responsible positions of leadership and not be in God's plan. God seems to have honors for women: they were last to linger at the cross and the first to come to the tomb. It was a woman, Mary Magdalene, to whom Jesus first appeared after His resurrection. It was just a humble woman, most blessed among all women, Mary, who brought our Savior into the world.

We as women of the church today must do as God has said,

"Humble yourselves" (II Chronicles 7:14), if we are to be used of Him. When God poured out His Holy Spirit, it was to men, women and children—in other words, to all people. It is Christ and His blessed Holy Spirit who can give us an attitude of repentance, which is the only way for fruitful Christian living. When Christ is all, and we are nothing, then God can use us to further His Kingdom.

In the Bible, God used women like Rebekah, Hannah, Deborah, Esther, Ruth and many others because they were obedient to God's will for their lives. They prayed and trusted God, not self. Their faith was in the living God.

There were also some very wicked women in the Bible. Jezebel, who was the daughter of the King of Tyre, made Baal worship the state religion of Israel. She was beautiful, but she had the wiles of a serpent and heart for blood. Her husband, King Ahab, repented so that God sent His wrath upon Jezebel after Ahab's death. You may want to read about her death in II Kings 9:30-37. Surely the wrath of God upon the wicked and unbelieving is something to be feared.

There has never been a perfect woman in the world, and only one perfect man, Jesus Christ. So then, my dear friends, let us have faith in God. Let us not forget for one minute that every woman in the past, present and future is saved by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8).

Presteng, of Grafton, N.D., recently passed away. She was a past president of the national WMF. This article is reprinted from the July 30, 1974, issue of The Lutheran Ambassador.

His plans > our plans

BY SUSIE SCHLECHT

I distinctly remember the summer of 1982, spent in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. It was the summer I attended my first vacation Bible school and was introduced to puppets by an AFLBS Barnabas team. It was the summer I invited Jesus into my heart. Although I am now 35 years old, I remember that week and that special prayer as if it were yesterday. Being surrounded by young adults who modeled Christ's love and truly demonstrated the joy of Jesus made an eternal impact on my life. Parents and siblings who gathered for evening devotions and prayer consecrated the decision I made at VBS.

My dad is a pastor who served Home Missions congregations. His passion and dedication for people to know Jesus was something I have always admired. Our entire family worked together as we served Home Missions congregations. The fruitful blessings of lives changed from hearing the gospel and being fostered into a loving Bible-believing church was well worth the time and effort.

Life has come full circle, and I now have the privilege of once again being part of a Home Missions church. Hope AFLC is a newly formed Home Missions congregation in Enderlin, N.D. As people started to gather at Hope AFLC, even before it was an officially organized congregation, we were blessed with the ministry of Pastor Lee Hoops from West Prairie Free Lutheran of Kindred, N.D. At first Pastor Hoops drove over weekly to lead us in studying *The Truth Project*, which was life-changing for several who attended, including my husband and myself. Later Pastor Hoops, with the blessing of his congregation, began preaching at Hope AFLC on Sundays. We are so thankful for the countless times that Pastor Hoops shared the Word with us; it did not return void.

Another special gift was having seminarian Sam Menge serve us over the course of several months. Having Sam, Rachel and their children was a blessing to us and also to Sam's family, as he hails from the Enderlin area. In addition, Pastor Mark Richardson of Abercrombie, N.D., and my own father, Pastor Gary Skramstad, have made special trips to preach God's Word to us. Lay people from surrounding AFLC churches have also faithfully been serving us on Sundays, including Jeremy Larson of Fargo, N.D., and Duane Burchill of Valley City, N.D. So many have poured their time and talents into helping this new church plant be grounded and fed in the Word of God. As I write this article we are eagerly preparing for the arrival of a summer Parish Builder, Brandon Marschner, who is a first-year seminarian.

In August 2010 we welcomed the Home Missions North Barnabas team for VBS. We were blessed beyond measure with



Members of the 2010 AFLBS Barnabas summer team—(from left) Janna Fugleberg, Matthew Quanbeck, Josiah Nelson and Julia Prichard—helped members of Hope AFLC church in Enderlin, N.D., as they hosted a summer vacation Bible school program.

their love for children, their enthusiasm, and their desire for people to know Christ. Attendance for VBS was great, but far more valuable was the relationships that were built. This June we look forward to hosting our third VBS with a Barnabas team, building on those relationships.

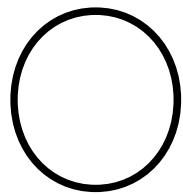
Our congregation is currently in the midst of a call process and committing our future to the Lord. While we are so grateful for all the congregations that have shared their pastors with us, we are praying God will provide us with a pastor of our own to serve in Enderlin. Please join us in that prayer request. As we wait upon the Lord, the words of Romans 12:11-12 encourage us, "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."

Schlecht, a 1997 AFLBS graduate, is a member of Hope AFLC, Enderlin, N.D., along with her husband, Shane, and son, Nolan.



JULY 15 WATERS IN THE WILDERNESS

“He that is faithful in very little is faithful also in much; and he that is unrighteous in very little is unrighteous in much” (Luke 10:10).



One who manages well as a paper boy will no doubt prosper as a business man. The badge of honesty is the simplicity of life. No task is so trifling but that it should be done well.

Christianity reaches into all areas of life: work, money, business and government. Faithfulness in all areas spells out honesty and righteousness. The greatest work given to a man is to work for Christ. May we be found faithful in that we may go into the great field of labor.

This work begins with a small choice seed planted into the heart. There is much room for growth before a great tree brings out fruit or shade. “Before honor is humility,” says the Book of Proverbs [15:33]. “Honor lies in honest toil,” said Grover Cleveland. We go on in Christ’s name to honest and faithful work.

You are called today to a great task. You begin with the talent that you have been given by God and the opportunities which He has provided. There are certain abilities which you have; you have some time, some health, some money. Each of us has a certain place to fill in home, church and community—even in the state.

In any and all of these activities one is required to be faithful to God.

Great heights may be reached merely by remaining on the level.

Rev. Lawrence Dynneson, who served Triumph Lutheran Church, Nogales, Ariz., from 1963 to 1979, died in 2002.

Waters in the Wilderness is a daily devotional published by the AFLC Board of Parish Education in 1971 with Dr. Iver Olson, editor. All 365 meditations were contributed by AFLC members from many walks of life. “Here, they offer each a glass of cool and refreshing water each day to thirsting souls,” wrote Olson in the preface. Reprinted by permission. The volume is out of print.

I am the Gate

BY BECKY ABEL



"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved" (John 10:9).

My husband, Paul, and Shepherd, a 16-year-old boy who is living with us, built a sturdy gate for the horse pasture at the ARCA. As they worked together, Paul was modeling the Christian life and sharing life values. That's at the heart of Christian education. Not all education happens in a classroom sitting at a desk. In fact, most Christian education is not a matter of acquiring knowledge, but rather learning how to live the life of a disciple, Christ's disciple.

Incarnation education was best modeled in the life of Jesus. John 1:14 affirms, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory." The first Christian education was not done in a classroom. The disciples followed Jesus into everyday life and learned by His example. We, too, must realize the importance of modeling Christian concepts in all we do so that those who are watching might learn from us.

Christian education, in essence, is living what we teach. If you are a Christian you are automatically a Christian educator. Your students are those who are observing your life day after day. You have a wonderful opportunity and great responsibility to gently guide and mold character, to wipe away a tear, to listen to a hurt, to admit your own errors and ask for forgiveness, and to be genuine and let the joy of knowing Jesus overflow into the lives of your students. Luke 6:40 reminds us, "Everyone who is fully trained

will be like their teacher." What a tremendous responsibility Christians have to influence lives and to impart values and faith.

As missionaries in a different culture we also understand that our role is to be Christian educators. Certainly we have many opportunities for formal teaching, but all of that teaching is authenticated by the way we live out our lives in front of people. We are the incarnation of that which we teach with our lips.

A group of adolescents in Bateias requested to do their Profession of Faith classes with Paul, who has been their example and mentor over the years. He teaches and lives out his faith as he rubs shoulders with them each day. Our goal is to prepare individuals to live lives of integrity, to become disciples of Jesus. We do that as we incorporate Jesus naturally into all aspects of living.

The gate that the guys made is a gate to a beautiful pasture. Going through the gate will guarantee good grazing for the horses in a protected place. Jesus called Himself the Gate and encouraged people to boldly walk through that gate to be saved. He is the guarantee of finding a protected place to be fed and nurtured, a place that leads to eternal life. Our ultimate goal as Christian educators and missionaries is to lead our followers to the One who can wash away their sins and lead them through eternity's gate. "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14).

Abel and her husband, Paul, have served as AFLC missionaries to Brazil since 1985. They live and minister in Curitiba, Paraná.

AFLC Schools hosts 2012 graduation



TOP: Graduates of the Free Lutheran Seminary include Jerry Nelson, Roger David, Barry Nelson, Adam Osier, Douglas Mmari, George Lautner and Terry Kruger.

MIDDLE: AFLBS graduate Jonathan Moan (left) is greeted by Jeremy Langness.

ABOVE: Luke Westlake greets graduate Katelyn Gudim.



ABOVE: AFLBS graduate Katy Dahl shakes hands with Pastor Martin Horn, chairman of the AFLC Schools Board of Trustees.

TOP RIGHT: Music Director Andrew Hanson leads the AFLBS choir.

NEAR LEFT: Rachel Schierkolk and Upendo Mmari are both AFLBS graduates.

FAR LEFT: Pastor Brent Olson gave the commencement address.



New members at Portland, N.D., congregation



Five new families were welcomed as members of Valley Free Lutheran in Portland, N.D., on May 20. The new members are Gary and Joyce Berger; Jonathon and Christy Berger and family; Dave Moeller, Keith and Dorene Shuck and family; and Chad and Lisa Helwig and family. Pastor Keith Quanbeck led the service to receive the new members into our congregation.

Washington congregation dedicates expansion



Members of Atonement Free Lutheran in Arlington, Wash., dedicated a church expansion on Sunday, May 13. The expansion includes additional fellowship area, offices, rest rooms, and a commercial kitchen. The congregation asks for your prayers for faithfulness in utilizing the expanded facility to fulfill God's plan for them as a congregation. Pastor Rick Long has served as Atonement's pastor since 1982.



AFLC memorials: May

AFLBS

Ruth Claus
Dorothy Presteng (10)
Georgia Blankenship
Aggie Oelkers
Pastor Dale Radke

AFLTS

Georgia Blankenship (2)
Dorothy Presteng (4)
Darrel Albrecht
Wallace Dormier
Pastor Dale Radke

Evangelism

Dorothy Presteng
Betty Nelson
Phyllis Peterson

FLAPS

Dorothy Presteng

General Fund

Ernie Miedema

Home Missions

Yvonne Swanson
Ray Evenson
Ernie Miedema

Parish Education

Dorothy Presteng
Dr. Mary Lindquist

World Missions

Lyle Simmons
Dorothy Presteng
Luella Krause

... in honor of

World Missions

Pastor Walt Beaman

People and Places

Pastor Connely Dyrud has resigned as part-time director of the Ministry Training Institute (MTI), the third-year program of the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, effective May 31, a position he has held for eight years.

Jerry Nelson, Dassel, Minn., is the new pastoral assistant and music director at Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Cokato, Minn., and has been licensed for lay ministry by members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee. Former music director at AFLC Schools, Nelson has served for the past four years on the staff of congregations in Sioux Falls, S.D., and Camarillo, Calif.

Adam Osier, a 2012 graduate of AFLTS, accepted a call to serve Zion Free Lutheran, Wadena, Minn., and Bethany Free Lutheran of Bluegrass, Minn., and will be ordained and installed on Sunday, July 1.

Barry Nelson, a 2012 AFLTS graduate, has accepted a call to serve First American Lutheran Church, Tripp, S.D., and Hope Lutheran, Delmont, S.D., as their first AFLC pastor. Nelson was ordained at the AFLC Annual Conference in Thief River Falls, Minn.

Ryan Mairs, a 2011 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, was ordained March 18 at Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn., with Pastor Elden Nelson, president of the AFLC, officiating. Mairs has accepted a call to serve as part-time assistant at Mt. Sion Lutheran, Kasson, Minn.



Worship conference set for August 17-18

Pastors, worship leaders, and members of AFLC congregations are invited to attend ADORATION: A Worship Leadership Conference August 17-18 at Emmaus Free Lutheran Church in Bloomington, Minn. This conference is designed to equip believers to effectively facilitate worship ministry in their home congregations through building a biblical philosophy and by offering practical tools and training for worship and worship-related ministry.

Join us Friday night at 7 p.m. for a night of worship led by local AFLC worship leaders and a full worship team, including organ and brass players. The evening will focus on a life-changing encounter with God. Saturday events will feature main sessions, times of worship, and workshops that will equip attendees for worship ministry in local congregations. Friday night is open to everyone; a free-will offering will be taken. Saturday's registration fee is \$30. Pastors are welcome to attend free of charge.

For more information or to register for the Saturday workshops, please visit www.adorationconference.com.

ARC hosts summer family camp

• Family Camp

Dates: July 29-August 4

Cost: Family rates apply

Speaker: Pastor Todd Erickson, Maple Grove, Minn.

Youth leader: Pastor Joe Faldet, St. James, Minn.

Vacation Bible school will be available for those 3 years old through sixth grade.

For more information on this camp or upcoming retreats, contact the ARC by e-mail at arcregistration@centurytel.net or call 800-294-2877. You can also visit the ARC Web site at www.arc-aflc.org for more information.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-May 31, 2012

FUND	REC'D IN MAY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$26,086	\$118,246	\$117,605
Evangelism	10,770	61,313	44,238
Youth Ministries	6,486	36,324	58,704
Parish Education	13,060	45,048	51,547
Seminary	18,903	100,408	92,530
Bible School	56,692	197,246	201,433
Home Missions	34,579	210,713	190,663
World Missions	42,918	167,663	196,956
Personal Support	52,414	225,956	157,715
TOTALS	\$261,907	\$1,162,916	\$1,111,392
Contact the individual departments for further information about specific financial needs.			

Moralism or the gospel

A recent series on youth ministry discussed a major concern that behavior modification is emphasized over the gospel. “Many youth pastors preach moralism over the gospel in order to protect students from self-destruction,” said the director of youth ministries for a large congregation in Alabama. “Unfortunately law-driven ministry often yields the opposite of its intention; law and pressure often inflame rebellion.”

A mother and daughter have written a book entitled *Give Them Grace* (Crossways, 2011), highlighting the same concern for Christian parents. “Let’s face it,” they write, “most of our children believe that God is happy if they’re ‘good for



Pastor Robert Lee

goodness’ sake.’ We’ve transformed the holy, terrifying, magnificent, and loving God of the Bible into Santa and his elves. And instead of transmitting the gloriously liberating and life-changing truths of the gospel, we have taught our children that what God wants from them is morality. We have told them that *being good* (at least outwardly) is the be-all and end-all of their faith. This isn’t the gospel; we’re not handing down Christianity” (p. 19).

What is *moralism*? Here is one definition: “Teaching children to be good and to do good without motivating them with the gospel.” William Fischer, in his booklet, *Teaching Law and Gospel* (Northwestern, 1996), describes a VBS course entitled “God’s Love is Jesus,” in which not one word of Christ and His saving work is mentioned. Righteousness is defined as “doing what is right.” Children are urged to pray, to resist temptation, to live good

lives, etc. Good behavior, in other words, is motivated by the law.

It is my impression from teaching a Bible school course on Christian education for several years that this has been the experience of many of my students. As I think back on my memories of long-ago Sunday school classes, this was probably my experience, too. We hear of the courage and commitment of Bible characters, without Christ as the central focus, and are urged to emulate them so that we do not incur the displeasure of God. “Be a good boy/girl,” children are told positively, “and God will be pleased with you.” We may even be taught the stories of the events in the life of Jesus Christ without a gospel motivation for Christian living.

First things must come first. Did God forgive Zacchaeus, for example, because he was willing to do good works, or did he do good works because God forgave him? Our answer to this question points either to works righteousness or to the righteousness that is accounted to us through faith in Christ. We want our children to be good, of course, but how easily a child may transfer the threat of being bad and the rewards of being good to his spiritual life!

Training children—and adults—for obedience is not wrong. The law of God is a guide for Christian behavior as well as a curb to govern behavior and keep order in human society “to keep us from killing and eating each other” (Todd Wilken). The error of antinomianism (the teaching that the law of God is of no use or obligation to the Christian) must be firmly rejected.

We are commanded to teach right and wrong, but to also clearly declare that doing or not doing these things will not save us. The Bible is so much more than a guidebook for clean living; it is the means of grace through which we meet Jesus

We hear of the courage and commitment of Bible characters, without Christ as the central focus, and are urged to emulate them so that we do not incur the displeasure of God.

Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection save us. We are not able to live perfect lives, but He is ... and He did! For you and me! This is the good news; this is the gospel.

“For if by one man’s offense death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as by the offense of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Romans 5:17-19).

association retreat center

With your whole life

BY MIKE FISK

"Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.' So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him" (Luke 5:10-11).

I can't imagine what it must have been like when Jesus called the disciples to follow Him. In every instance their lives and the lives of their loved ones were radically changed immediately and forever. Peter, James and John were known as the fishermen in the group. We can gather from Scripture that at least one apostle was married in the bunch—Peter.

While we get only glimpses of the other men's lives, we can assume that leaving to follow Jesus had a traumatic effect on the lives of those around them. It's also interesting to note that, at least from my study, Jesus said, "Follow me and you will fish for people" to the fishermen in the group. To the others, the command was simplified to "Follow Me."

Regardless of His invitation, the men couldn't really know what lay ahead. The fishermen could have had a notion, or thought they did. "Fishing for people can't be much different than fishing for fish, right? We just use different nets?" To the others, it was a complete mystery.

Jesus makes the same call to each of us today. He calls us to leave everything we have behind and follow Him. Leave the baggage of your past. It weighed you down then and there's no reason to let it continue to be an anchor to you. Jesus' death on the cross offers

you the forgiveness you need for healing. His resurrection gives you the new life you need to proceed on the journey.

Traditional ways of doing things can be left behind, too. Imagine the disciples thinking they could fish for men the same way they could fish for fish. Were there similarities? In some ways, perhaps. But they certainly couldn't rely on old habits when it came to reaching people. Jesus' ministry style didn't help matters any, either. He would heal people in different ways at different times. He challenged the way religion had operated for years, as well. His focus was always on the cross; His mission was always centered on people.

When following Christ be ready for new ways of thinking. Those who followed established religion thought they had this Messiah person all figured out: He'd come and save His people from the Roman occupation. He'd offer people the political freedom and restore Israel to the greatness they had under David and Solomon. But when Jesus began to speak of a spiritual kingdom, they became disillusioned and many quit following Him.

Following Christ isn't a part-time job. It's not an easily spelled out, predictable journey. But we know our future is in the hands of the One who walks with us each step of the way. Jesus promises to never leave us. All He asks in return is for our full devotion to Him.

Fisk is the director of development for the Association Retreat Center located near Osceola, Wis.