

THE LUTHERAN 

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AMBASSADOR



FROM ONE
GENERATION
.....
TO ANOTHER

That the world may know

BY ANDREW KNEELAND

I feel called to be a missionary.” Maybe you have heard that from a friend at some point in your life. And if you’re anything like me, the first thought or emotion that rushes to your head is guilt, followed closely by rationalization. It’s embarrassing, really.

Are they trying to guilt me into something? I sometimes think. Won’t happen. They always seemed like the missionary type. Now that they’re going to the jungles of Brazil or wherever, I’m not as needed. I’ll just stay home.

But I’ve got news for people like me: being a missionary isn’t just for certain types of people. Whether in the jungles of Brazil, the deserts of Africa, or your own hometown, God has called you to be His missionary. And most of us aren’t doing a very good job of it.

David understood his role as an ambassador for God. He was a simple shepherd boy, tending his father’s flocks one day, when the mighty Philistine army invaded his homeland. He didn’t shrink from the opportunity to represent the Israelites and his God on the battlefield, but “ran quickly” to face Goliath.

And David wasn’t after fame or riches as he toppled the giant with just a sling and a stone; he was representing Yahweh to the world.

“This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands,” the young boy boldly shouted to his taller, stronger, bigger opponent in I Samuel 17, “that all the world may know that there is a God in Israel.”

If you’ve been given an opportunity to go overseas to share the story of Christ crucified, praise God! Go for it. But even if you



stay at home, like David did, God has still called you to be His missionary.

Years after David lived and reigned, King Hezekiah also properly assumed his role as an ambassador of Yahweh to the pagan influences surrounding him. With the king of Assyria and his army of nearly 200,000 men destroying Judean cities and threatening Jerusalem, and with the rest of the world watching, Hezekiah’s chief aim was to let his God’s name spread everywhere it could reach.

“Now, O Lord our God,” Hezekiah prayed in II Kings 19, “Deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, O Lord, are God.”

Is that our cry? Do we yearn for God to use us to make His name great?

God placed the nation of Israel in a very particular place. It wasn’t an accident that His chosen people settled at the crossroads of the world, with major world powers on every border. Just like the Israelites, God calls us to live public, front-and-center lives, not shying away from the pagan cultures around us, but influencing and shaping them for the glory of God.

We’re all called to be missionaries. Jesus accomplished a marvelous thing on the cross, and He wants to share that gift with everyone. And we are His tools to reach the world. Let’s live our lives in such a way that when people see us, they see God.

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The end of learning is to repair the ruin of our first parents, by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love Him, to imitate Him, to be like Him.

—John Milton

Education is not filling a pail but the lighting of a fire.

—William Butler Yeats

But he [God] has given and entrusted children to us with the command that we train and govern them according to his will; otherwise God would have no need of father and mother. Therefore let everybody know that it is his chief duty, on pain of losing divine grace, to bring up his children in the fear and knowledge of God, and if they are gifted to give them opportunity to learn and study so that they may be of service wherever they are needed.

—Martin Luther

[We] must continually point pupils to Christ and the necessity of a commitment to him. Christ says, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." When we teach Him we teach everything. We will never be satisfied until we see young hearts and lives committed, not to his teachings, but to Him.

—Henrietta C. Mears

The soul that wishes to live according to the will of Christ should either learn faithfully what it does not yet know, or teach openly what it does know. But if, when it can, it desires to do neither of these things, it is afflicted with madness. For the first step away from God is a distaste for learning, and the lack of appetite for those things for which the soul hungers when it seeks God.

—Thomas Merton



beyond

GRADUATION

BY SHARON RYKHUS

Most of us have heard or read the statistics. Somewhere between 60 and 90 percent of young adults raised in evangelical churches are leaving the faith by age 20. Only 30 percent of those who walk away from the Church ever return. Why are we letting this happen? What should we be doing?

I was one of those young adults. I went off to college and walked away from church. I had been a leader in our small senior league at church and was at every youth event. At age 16, I understood what Jesus had truly done for me and He became my personal Savior.

Flash forward several years, married and having children, my husband and I knew that we wanted to raise our boys with a faith in Jesus. We started attending church regularly. I joined a Bible study. Faith became something that I relied on each day. In Deuteronomy 6:5-7, God instructs us as parents: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 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*" (emphasis mine).

God intended faith to be taught in our homes. People often assume that God intends us to bring our children to Sunday school and confirmation, but God is very clear here when He places the family as the primary source for teaching and training our children in the Christian faith. Parents

have the responsibility and the honor of raising their children to understand faith. However, because churches offer a plethora of programs, parents have relied on the Church to pass their faith to their children.

When we hear the statistics, or experience in our own churches the alarming exodus of our young adults, we often turn to our pastors, or youth directors, asking them to change the programs offered at church. Pastors and youth directors do play a huge role. Church worship, Sunday school, and youth groups are an important supplement to the training that the next generation needs to acquire and grow in their faith. But the responsibility of teaching our children should not rest solely on our churches. Studies also show that parents are 60 percent more influential in the lives of our children than anyone else, and that factor alone must encourage us to seek more opportunities to teach our children.

Today's young adults are hungry for spirituality. And they are seeking it everywhere. If we do not equip the young people in our churches to know what they believe and why they believe it, they will not be prepared to defend the faith that we have passed along to them. Again, churches continue to play a key role in the discipleship of believers. Worship attendance is key. Sunday school and youth groups are important to the building blocks of faith. Young adults who have been instructed in the Word and who know what they believe are far less likely to leave the Church.

But for all the good churches, youth groups, and ministry outreaches can accomplish, our children's faith development must be a priority in our homes. God also

instructs us in I Thessalonians 5:11, "So encourage each other and give each other strength ..." When our children participate in sports, we encourage them to train both physically and mentally to be prepared for the competition. We attend their games, and cheer them on. How much more important is the goal of an eternity with Christ, and how much are we cheering them on in this vital area?

What an awesome privilege and responsibility God has placed on our shoulders as parents. We need to be in the Word, studying for ourselves, modeling the Christian faith, walking it out in our daily lives. It's not too late to draw back those young adults who are walking away. Parents need to invite their adult children to church. If a daily faith was not lived out at home while raising them, parents need to sit down with their young adult children and discuss faith and its importance. Talking about why we believe what we believe is crucial. Equipping our young people with the means to defend the hope they have in Christ is key.

We should ask ourselves: What am I being called to do to encourage young adults to stay involved in our churches? Am I praying for my own children and the youth in our church? Am I including them in the body of Christ? Answering those questions will help us keep our young adults from leaving the Church.

Rykhus, a member of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., serves on the AFLC Youth Board.

pass IT ON

BY RACHEL JONES

When I consider the powerful passage of Scripture found in Psalm 78:4-7, I am humbled by the responsibility of passing on the faith and yet excited at the joy it is to be able to pass down the wonderful promises and truths of the Bible.

Looking at this text, I learned so much of what the Lord wants for us and from us. I considered five ways in which we as parents can pass on the faith to our children and the next generation. And in keeping with my father's love of alliteration in his message points, I would like to suggest the "Five Cs" of passing on the faith.

COMING to the Lord in prayer is an essential beginning to passing on the faith. How can we begin to pass on the faith, to nurture our children in the faith, without first coming before the throne of God earnestly seeking His face? Faith Nelson, a fellow member at Grace Free Lutheran, told me once that she outlined each of her children's hands on a piece of paper and then wrote specific areas of need for that child on the drawing of the hand. This is something that I have adopted as I pray for them daily, "laying hands on them."

CULTIVATE a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in your children. There is no greater joy from a parent than when one's own child accepts Jesus as Savior and desires to live a life full out for Him. Verse 5 talks about "establishing a testimony." Reminding your children of their commitment to the Lord by asking, "How is your walk with the Lord?" or, "What are you discovering in your devotional times?" are important steps to take with your children, not only when they are young, but all throughout their lives, "That they not forget the works of God" (vs. 7).

My mother is one who has been an incredible example to me as one who loves her devotional time and encourages me as a busy mother to not forsake it. As a little girl, I would often see my mother's Bible lying open on the counter, and every so often as she would pass through the kitchen throughout her busy day, she would pause and read for a few seconds and then carry on with her daily tasks. I once asked her about why she did this. She answered, "I didn't get to spend as much time as I needed in my devotions this morning, so I am snacking on the Word throughout my day." What a powerful testimony that was to me. I have embraced that habit of



keeping my Bible open on the counter on those more demanding days and have loved "snacking and ruminating" on the Word of God throughout my busy days. What a blessing this has been.

CONVERSATIONS of Christ is the third consideration. Verse 4 talks about "showing to the generation to come ... the wonderful works he has done." Saturate your everyday conversations with your children about the wonders of God. Our youngest, Ruby, has grown accustomed to saying now after every cut or scrape, "Well, God will be working on healing that owie while I sleep." When your child can look at the beauty of God's creation and know without a shadow of a doubt its miraculous origin



and praise the Creator first and foremost, that is something to get excited about. “God sure made gardens and growing things cool!” our 7-year-old Bennett announced to me the other day.

CONSISTENCY in worship is also a vital part of passing on the faith. If we are to pass on the faith as commanded in Psalm 78, can we do that adequately if we are neglecting our times of worship? Hebrews 10:25 declares this so well, “Not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.” We as parents need the encouragement of other believers and so do our children. We need the faithful teaching from the Word and so do our children. Worship with a church family, as well as one’s own

family devotional worship, is so important.

COMFORT of the Scriptures is the final thought. My father was one to encourage memorization of Scripture. As a young teen, I still remember sitting in the living room with my mom, my two brothers and two of my sisters reciting from memory the entire book of James. Memorization of Scripture has always been stressed as so important in our family. The other night, as my dear husband, Justin, was leading devotions, we had a time of sharing Bible verses. On and on went the sharing, each child speaking up with a verse and then another and then another. After several minutes of sharing, we had to finally say, “It’s time for bed!” But as I sat in the darkness of that

bedroom and listened to each one of my children speak up, I couldn’t help but cry. Tears of thankfulness to the Lord for allowing me to be able to share the ultimate joy of my Savior with my children and knowing that they embrace it as well, brings me tremendous happiness.

Passing on the faith: It is something we as Christian parents need to be diligent about. It needs to be intentional. I am encouraged by II Timothy 3:15, “... and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.”

Jones is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.

redefining

With the plethora of statistics indicating that a large percentage of students leave the Church when they graduate from high school, many churches members are starting to recognize there might be something wrong—or at the very least lacking—with the way we are teaching and training teens. But before we can address some of these realities, we need to take a hard look at some incorrect assumptions we have about our youth groups and churches.

Incorrect Assumption No. 1: “It is the church’s responsibility to attract students to its ministries.”

This assumption leads to questions like, “Why aren’t the teens in our congregation coming to church or youth group?” and, “How can we get them to come?” But the answers we get to these sorts of questions are not really going to help us solve our problem. Instead, they will leave us trying to do something that isn’t our responsibility—namely, attracting students to our ministries. The responsibility to decide these sorts of things lies with the parents of our teens. So instead of our churches asking why students aren’t in church, and where are they instead, a better question would be, “What can we do to equip parents to take responsibility for the spiritual formation of their children?”

Even if students have a personal testimony of faith, they still often make poor spiritual decisions. They have homework, sports, band, choir, work, friends, video games, social media, TV, family time, and

many other activities that beg for their attention. They don’t need a youth director or pastor to make church more entertaining than any of these other activities. Rather, they need parents to actively help them decide which activities will be on the top of their priority lists. In this case, passive parenting simply won’t work. It will only create students who are passive about their faith.

Incorrect Assumption No. 2: “If we can keep teens in the church until they graduate, we’ve been successful.”

We are often short-sighted when it comes to our students. We look for bodies in our chairs now, and will often do whatever it takes to keep them there: bribe them (give them food and play dodge ball), trick them (tell them it’s going to be “super, ultra, mega-mega fun”), guilt them (tell them they are a bad Christian if they don’t come), or indulge them (make it all about them).

We cannot overlook the current needs of the students in our ministries. There are students who are struggling with doubts about faith, are addicted to pornography, have suicidal thoughts, and—most importantly and usually overlooked—don’t really understand the gospel. These issues need to be addressed and these students need caring adults to come alongside of them. And they need it now. But if how we address the needs of these students is only focused on the “now,” we will never equip them for the “someday.” Our teens won’t be teens forever. So instead of churches asking questions like, “What can we do to keep our teens coming now?” a better question is, “What can we do to equip our teens to leave our youth groups someday?”

Asking these sorts of questions completely redefines what a successful youth ministry looks like. Success would no longer be measured by the percentage of teens who come to youth group, but by the percentage of our students who continue on in the faith when they graduate. I would challenge you to consider a change like this for your own youth ministries. Seeking to equip your teens to leave your youth ministries someday will actually help you discern how to meet their needs now.

Parents, I hope you find that your pastor, youth director, or other adults from your congregation can come alongside of you to equip you and to encourage you as you raise the young disciples in your family. You will have the greatest impact—for good or for bad—on the spiritual life of your children. “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6, ESV).

Church leaders, I hope you start to take a long-term view to equipping the families in your congregation. Parents and teens need you. It is why God has called you to them. “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

McCarlson serves as youth director at Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.

YOUTH MINISTRY

BY ADAM MCCARLSON



LIFE parallels

BY ADAM LEE

This past semester at Concordia University Irvine, the California school where I work, a junior student named Taylor Bundy worked as my assistant for a class I teach every spring called “Film as Literature.” Each week we discussed a movie with a significant religious theme, and led a lecture on how various film techniques gave specific meanings to the images on the screen. In addition to both of us being from Minnesota and having a passion for cinematic images, we also share two Lutheran schools in common: Concordia University and Heritage Christian Academy.

Teaching film has taught me that parallel images are always significant. The longer I teach the more I also find that God uses parallels in life to draw our attention to specific themes of growth or provision. For instance, the Psalm writer uses these themes as he parallels his readers’ faith with that of the following generations: “We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done ... Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands” (Psalm 78:4, 7). The imagery God has used in my life is drawn from similar themes.

The box office in September 1981 was dominated by *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and I entered the classroom on my first day of sixth grade like a young Indiana Jones, ready for any adventure that God had scripted for me at Medicine Lake Lutheran Academy (the predecessor of Heritage Christian Academy, Maple Grove, Minn.). My desk was next to Nathan Monseth in the back row of a classroom nestled into the first floor of the AFLBS girls’ dorm. Nathan

and I were the only sixth graders in a cast of 13 total students under the direction of Barb Moland, our epic teacher.

The school’s website still has an old pixelated photo of our class under a section titled, “From Small Beginnings.” During the past three decades Medicine Lake Lutheran Academy has grown from that one classroom and transformed into Heritage Christian Academy. Heritage now has about 70 staff serving more than 440 pre-kindergarten through twelfth-grade students on its spacious Maple Grove campus.

Studying the history of film has taught me that the best source for understanding the meaning of cinematic images is the previous generations of movies. The best directors understand their place in this history and layer their movies with shots that honor, preserve, or even restore the images that have influenced them.

Some images from that first class in 1981 have been indelible in my mind: (1) low-angle shot from desk level looking up at all six feet of Principal Beverly Enderlein leading our weekly chapel time, (2) wide-angle shot from the back of our sole classroom as the students progressively get shorter leading up to the front first-graders’ row as we stand in preparation to sing “God’s Word is Our Great Heritage,” (3) bird’s-eye shot down into my top-opening desk revealing a King James Bible, *Concordia Hymnal*, stacks of textbooks, and the ubiquitous H.A.B. (Homework Assignment Booklet).

Unlike a painting or a novel, a film needs many people for the creative process. It is always thrilling to see God’s direction at work through the vocations not just of individuals, but of entire Christian communities spanning generations and decades.

A clear understanding of vocation is one of the strengths of Lutheran education shared by Concordia Irvine and Heritage Academy. “Vocation is a matter of Gospel, a manifestation of God’s action, not our own” wrote Gene Veith in *God at Work*, his classic study of vocation. While many Christian traditions teach the shoulds and musts of vocation, Veith reminds us that through Luther’s writings we have a liberating emphasis on “what God does in and through our vocations.”

Flash forward to the first months of 2011, *The King’s Speech* won Best Picture at the 83rd Academy Awards. Taylor graduated from Heritage later that spring ready to hone her own voice and writing gifts at



university. Two years earlier and halfway through her sophomore year, she decided to transfer into Heritage from Orono High School (Orono, Minn.) to get a stronger Christian community for the last two years of her secondary education. HCA provided not only a strong spiritual narrative, but also a strong academic community.

Taylor also has a list of indelible images from her final semester at Heritage: (1) close-up of hay stuck on a Heritage sweat-shirt with the blurred image of a wagon passing behind during the annual hayride, (2) medium-shot of a student working on a Celtic-inspired mural, while in the foreground, art teacher Mrs. Cindy Dreblow talks with a student about her clay vase, (3)

long shot of friends, teachers, families and their blue-gowned graduates filling up the large atrium with their presence and voices.

Leaving the school where I had studied 30 years earlier, Taylor made her way across half of America to California where I had studied 20 years earlier. She decided to study English, as I also had done. Since first meeting two years ago, God has paralleled my vocation as professor and Taylor's vocation as a student in ways which have enabled us to work together in serving a student community of hundreds on campus.

God has drafted the storyboard of Taylor's life and my life into Venn Diagrams of decades to remind us to honor our

Lutheran education, preserve the images of our spiritual formation, and through our small part in God's "big picture" to restore these narratives for future generations. I'm not sure how many "generations" the poet of Psalm 78 could have imagined compressed into a decade, but by my analysis God has already made it impossible to count how He has used this AFLC school to bless lives since 1981.

Lee, a 1990 graduate of AFLBS, is a professor in the English Department at Concordia University Irvine. This fall he will be collecting images in ten countries while teaching literature and travel writing to 28 students on his third Around-the-World Semester.



spiritual GREENHOUSE

BY PASTOR RAY BALLMANN

You've probably been in a greenhouse—a place that allows plants to flourish. Our homes should be spiritual greenhouses. Psalm 78:4-7 makes clear that the parent's top priority is to pass on a love for God to their children. As parents we perform many tasks in life, but none is more important than the spiritual training of our children. In light of biblical principles, it is the highest form of discipleship. To be sure, the Church should be there to enable and equip parents, but spiritual training is primarily the responsibility of parents.

ROOTING OUR CHILDREN IN GOD'S WORD

First, parents need to take an active role in the spiritual formation of their children. This includes, foremost, rooting our children in God's Word, much like a plant roots itself in fertile soil. We must teach early that, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). A home where God's Word is lifted up produces an ideal environment to cultivate and strengthen a child's faith. Consistent, godly parental training in God's Word is able to build a solid foundation and sustain a genuine faith.

PRAYING TOGETHER

Second, spiritual formation includes praying together as a family. As we do, we model the importance of thanking and praising God for blessings received, interceding for others, and praying over family problems, needs, and burdens. Thanking and praising God in family prayer fortifies

the soul. Intercession for the pastor, church, missionaries, fellow believers, the sick, unsaved friends, and neighbors cultivates a mighty passion for intercessory prayer in our children. Praying as a family demonstrates unity in faith and reassures us of God's providence and presence.

MODELING PRIORITIES

Third, spiritual formation means modeling priorities. The example we set teaches our children spiritual priorities, which involve "set[ting their] minds on things above" (Colossians 3:2). It is interesting how circumstances affect our priorities. As the Titanic was sinking, one lady aboard raced to her state room and pushed aside her diamonds and furs to grab three oranges. Half an hour earlier, she would not have chosen a crate of oranges over even the poorest of her diamonds. But, as death loomed and she knew food would be scarce, her definition of "priceless" changed.

As a pastor, I've talked with people at the end of their lives who said if they had to do it all over again, they would do things differently. Thankfully, we don't need to wait until we are on our deathbed to think about the priorities we want to pass on to our children. Do your priorities reflect the importance of daily personal devotions and building relationships to further the gospel? How you spend your time and money—in fact, every decision you make—says something about your priorities.

TEACHING A DISTINCTIVE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

Fourth, spiritual formation means teaching our children a distinctive Christian worldview. This means teaching them what

they believe and why they believe it. Doing so gives them the ability to stand up against their peers, and if need be to stand alone, because they have well-grounded convictions from a biblical perspective. A child's first Bible school is the home, where they are given the tools to face the me-first, humanistic philosophy that pervades our society.

This is why selecting how they are schooled is so critical. A big part of the spiritual formation of children extends and is intimately connected with what they are taught outside the home. We must choose wisely.

Last year the AFLC annual conference passed an education resolution that supports parents who seek a Christian education for their children. To my knowledge, the AFLC is the first major evangelical body to pass such a resolution. The resolution does not tell parents how to school their children, rather it affirms and encourages that they do so in a way that allows God's Word to be pre-eminent. The resolution also supports AFLC members who teach in public schools and encourages them to labor in their work as for the Lord. I thank God for that conference wisdom.

God has given parents the privilege and the responsibility to train their children into a biblical worldview and into "godly offspring" (Malachi 2:15). Spiritual formation is a formidable task in a godless society where Satan roams about as a roaring lion, "seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8). But an all-powerful and merciful God is with us in the endeavor, and His Word will equip us for the task.

Ballmann serves Word of Truth Lutheran, Kopperl, Texas.

grand PARENTING

BY PASTOR WES LANGAAS

Whether there is only occasional contact, or a more consistent presence, grandparents have a special place in the lives of their grandchildren. Proverbs 17:6 says, “Grandchildren are the crown of old men ...” Many parents eagerly await grandchildren, with whom they can play, then stop and rest when they are tired. That’s not always an option with one’s own children.

What can grandparents contribute to those young lives? In what biblical way can they make a difference? At times it might be the grandparent whom God uses to nurture or even rescue a child and enable him or her to walk in the way of righteousness. On a personal note, we have had the opportunity to raise our oldest granddaughter who is

now 11 and has lived with us for seven years.

God’s commands to the children of Israel often included more than one generation, for example: “Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons” (Deuteronomy 4:9; see also 6:2 and Exodus 10:2).

Some grandparents mentioned in the Bible had great influence on their grandchildren. Jacob, the father of Joseph and grandfather of Ephraim and Manasseh, lived with Joseph and his family in Egypt for many years and blessed Joseph’s sons (Genesis 48-49). Psalm 78 says that “God established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel ... He commanded our fathers that

they should teach them to their children, that the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born ... that they should put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments” (vs. 5-7).

Lois was the influential grandmother of the young pastor and evangelist Timothy (II Timothy 1:5). The apostle Paul refers to this relationship when he says, “You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writing which are able to give you wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (II Timothy 3:14-15).



If you are a Christian grandparent, you can share your life's experiences with your grandchildren so that they can learn how, by the grace of God, you handled difficult times, or when you made decisions that were not popular but were the right thing to do. Next to their parents, you are possibly the greatest influence that these children will have. They will see your faults and failures, but if you are honest about them, your grandchildren can see that it's good and right to admit when you are wrong and ask for forgiveness. Your grandchildren should know that you are not perfect, but the Lord you trust in is, and that He will never fail them.

Your grandchildren are watching you.

Your words will be drowned out by what you do. When you say one thing and then do another, you teach them that being a hypocrite is okay. When they see you do the right thing and that it matches what you say, that is a powerful lesson that will teach them to trust God's promises and faithfulness.

Children are a gift of God—and that includes grandchildren. Thank God for them. Pray for them that they might know and walk in saving faith with a repentant heart and a godly spirit. Give them the hope of an eternal future. Tell them about Jesus and His Father who want to be with them in heaven someday. When you are no longer with them, they have the hope that they will

meet you again in the Kingdom of Heaven.

How do we do all this? Only God knows, and only He can do it. There is no one way. Every grandparent has their own story as to how they influence or teach their grandchildren. But we do not go by what others do or how we feel about it. We do as we are led by the Word and Spirit of God to do the work God has prepared for us to do. That is true in all matters of life; it is true of our place in a grandchild's life. And if we trust God in this, He will work for good and accomplish what He intends in our lives.

Langaas serves Abundant Life Church, Thief River Falls, Minn.



WHY WE SING

BY JOAN CULLER

Lutherans are known as “the singing church,” and Martin Luther has been called “the father of congregational singing.” But why do we sing? Is it simply our tradition? Is it an appropriate way to express our emotions of gratitude and love toward God? Is it a biblically sanctioned part of worship (Psalm 66:1-2)? Does it help bind us together as a community? The answer is yes to all these questions about communal Christian singing in the Church. However, there is another excellent reason Lutherans sing: hymn singing is an important part of our Christian education.

Maybe you thought the children were just having fun singing all those Sunday school songs. They are having fun, but they also teach about important people in the Bible (“Father Abraham”), the essentials of the faith (“Jesus Loves Me”), the proper

response to God’s love (“Praise Him, Praise Him, All You Little Children”), and what it means to be part of the church (“We Are the Church”).

Setting words to music is an aid to memorization. Young people often learn the books of the Bible (in order, no less) by singing a song. Adults who participate in a Lutheran liturgy discover they’ve memorized many Psalms and other portions of Scripture by taking part in the worship service. Well-chosen hymns also serve to reinforce the theme of the sermon and the readings of the day. And in times of crisis in our lives the comforting words of hymns bring the reminder of God’s eternal concern for His people to our minds and hearts.

Good hymns teach. They help us understand the different church seasons (“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”). They prepare us for communion (“Let Us Break Bread

Together”). They tell us about the attributes of God (“A Mighty Fortress”). They convict us of our sin (“Amazing Grace”). They explain theological concepts (“The Church’s One Foundation”), and give lessons in how to serve (“Hark the Voice of Jesus Calling”) and be more generous (“We Give Thee But Thine Own”). Some hymns are almost a sermon in themselves (“Salvation Unto Us Has Come”).

Church music can touch our hearts and sink into our souls in a way that is hard to explain or understand. Church music can lift us up into the very realm of God’s presence. No wonder Luther called it “a fair and glorious gift of God.”

Culler is a member of St. Paul’s Evangelical Free Lutheran of Leitersburg, Hagerstown, Md.

Victory in Jesus

BY BECKY ABEL

“We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power, and the wonders He has done” (Psalm 78:4).

Missionary Paul Abel had the wonderful privilege of preaching on this text and baptizing the newborn daughter of one of our Brazilian pastors on June 1. Emanuely Vitória was born on May 20, an answer to the many prayers of Pastor José Oseias and Tirsia who have been married for ten years, patiently waiting for the Lord’s answer to their plea. José Oseias has served one of the Free Lutheran congregations in Vitória, Espírito Santo, for 13 years since his graduation from our seminary in Campo Mourão. The congregation has participated with their pastor since his internship days as a single man, rejoicing with him as he was united in marriage to Tirsia in 2003, crying with them as they gave birth to a stillborn baby, and now jubilantly witnessing the baptism of their 12-day old “victory” baby.

This is a true spiritual victory. José Oseias was raised in a non-Christian home and was introduced to the church through an invitation to play volleyball at the Free Lutheran church in Londrina. His new friends invited José to attend a spiritual retreat at the ARCA in 1996. The theme of the camp? Victory in Jesus. At camp José was impacted by the preaching of the Word and by the testimonies of Christian youths. It was at this retreat that José became a Christian and started his new life in Jesus. His enthusiasm for his newfound faith led him to Bible school the following year. A boy from humble means with no previous Christian influence was transformed into a man of God with vision and purpose. He met his wife at Bible school, and together they have prayed for their daughter since before she was born. Emanuely is now blessed to be a part of the family of faith through the means of baptism. Her parents and sponsors and the congregation in Vitória have promised to “tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power and the wonders He has done.”

This is just one in hundreds of testimonies of lives transformed by the Holy Spirit through the mission of the AFLC in



Brazil. Perhaps those who give financially and prayerfully for the work of missions have difficulty imagining the far-reaching effects of their participation in the Great Commission. Most likely the young boys who first invited José Oseias to play volleyball at church had little thought of the impact he might have on future generations. Those who planned the camp where José was converted, the pastor who disciplined him as a new Christian, the teachers at the Bible school and seminary, the example of mature Christians, the opportunity to grow into ministry with a congregation who was willing to take an inexperienced, young seminary student—all of these are examples of the many people who invested in José Oseias’ life along the way. And now this servant of God is investing his life in ministry and the proclamation of the gospel. That’s victory in Jesus.

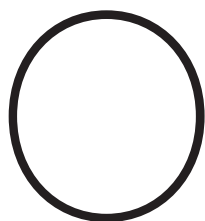
Abel and her husband, Pastor Paul, serve as AFLC missionaries in Curitiba, Brazil.



JULY 15

WATERS IN THE WILDERNESS

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (1 John 3:14).



One who manages well as a paper boy will no doubt prosper as a businessman. 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 that we may go into this 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.

“Honor lies in honest toil,” said Grover Cleveland. We go in Christ’s name to honest and faithful work.

You are called today to a great task. You begin with the talents that you have been given by God and the opportunities which He as 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, Nogales, Ariz.

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.

Taking the GOSPEL on the road

BY ANDREW KNEELAND

What's better than a road trip across the country with three dear friends? A road trip that spreads the name of Christ with every mile traveled.

I've had the opportunity to spend two summers on the road as a part of Home Missions' South Barnabas vacation Bible school team, and they were two of the most important summers of my life (not just because one of my teammates is now my wife). We crossed dozens of state borders and racked up thousands of miles on our van's odometer, all for the purpose of teaching as many kids as we could about Jesus' love.

We saw too many children who didn't have a basic grasp of biblical truths during our summers on the road. It broke our hearts, but it's a problem we were able to combat by the grace of God. With the help of the Home Missions department and the Bible school, we took the gospel on the road.

And when we stepped out in faith—trusting God to do mighty things through us four sinful youths—we weren't disappointed. God went before our minivan and was powerfully at work everywhere we went. It was such a treat and privilege to be used as an ambassador on Christ's behalf, sharing His victorious message and watching Him transform lives. Even through puppet skits.

But perhaps the most significant Christian education that took place during those two summers I spent in a minivan was learned by me, the teacher.

I had a front-row seat to a better show than anything Hollywood has ever produced. I saw God at work, and I'll never be the same. I witnessed God giving strength when we were weak; I saw God open doors that we thought were closed. But most significantly, I saw first-hand the power of the simple gospel message.

I have had the tendency to get bogged down in minute details of obscure doctrines. There's nothing wrong with deep study of Scripture, but I sometimes found myself distracted from the cornerstone and main foundation on which all of Christian education is based: the cross, where Jesus died for me.

I was convicted last summer when I saw kids' jaws drop and eyes bulge when I told the story of the cross to some who had never heard it before. I long for that child-like response to Jesus' powerful display of love; the oft-told story should never be treated as drab or monotonous.



"Why did He do that?" "Why did He have to die?" were questions I received more than a few times last summer, sometimes from kids who had grown up in church-attending homes. But I didn't bemoan their parents' neglect or mourn the missed opportunities of their childhoods. Instead, I praised God for the opportunity to start a child's education exactly where God wants it to start: at the foot of the cross.

"Why did He have to die?" "Because He loves you."

Kneeland, a 20013 graduate of AFLBS, is a member of Atonement Free Lutheran, Arlington, Wash.

AFLBS Alumni and Friends Day

The AFLC Schools will host the AFLBS Alumni and Friends Day on Saturday, July 26. Several events are being offered throughout the day.

Choose any or each of the following options:

- AFLBS Golf Scramble: Noon, at Baker National Golf Course in Medina, Minn.
- Sporting Clays Event: Noon at Wild Marsh Sporting Clays in Clear Lake, Minn. Contact Tonnes Pollestad for further details at tonnes@afcl.org.
- Family BBQ: 5 p.m. in Heritage Hall on the AFLBS Campus in Plymouth, Minn. Silent Auction, games, and inflatables for kids, as well as testimonies from AFLBS students.
- Class of 2004 Reunion: Contact Brett or Theresa Boe for more details at btboeo6@gmail.com.

The day of events is aimed at providing scholarships for AFLBS students and fellowship for alumni and friends of the AFLC schools. For more information, and to register, visit aflbs.org.

AFLBS teams train for summer ministry



TOP: Pastor Eric Westlake leads a session on puppet ministry during the week-long training for AFLBS summer teams held on campus May 26-30. A total of 38 students make up nine ministry teams that will serve AFLC congregations throughout the United States this summer through music ministry, camps and vacation Bible schools. Four AFLBS graduates are leading VBS programs in Alaska.



AFLC Schools host graduation event



AFLBS graduate Amanda Syverson, Baltic, S.D., receives her diploma.



AFLTS graduates Gerald Steele (center), Josh Skogerboe, Ben Jore and Jesse Kneeland greet well wishers following the May 17 graduation service at the Plymouth, Minn., campus.

He leads me

BY MONICA COYLE



Psalm 23 is a well-loved passage, and a dear one to many. When our daughter, Moriah, was memorizing this Psalm at her Ukrainian school, it seemed appropriate for our family to memorize the English version.

God's Word truly is a gift beyond measure. I am reminded again and again of how valuable it is in our lives. Josiah, our 3 1/2 year old, is quick to point out when I'm lagging behind in the actions. More than once, with his arms wrapped around himself and a smile on his face, he has emphatically shown me how to "properly" express "I shall not want." What humbling and timely reminders!

The Word is powerful, sinking deeper into our hearts as we meditate on it. The Lord has refreshed me through these verses, revealing how deeply and personally our Good Shepherd cares for us, provides for us, and guides us.

"He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul" (vs. 2-3). Have you recently found yourself in a situation or season of life in which contentment was difficult to find? It can be difficult at first to see how situations that bring us to a place of greater dependence on Him are His very gracious gifts to us.

My sinful heart would deceive me to believe that times of uncertainty, challenge, loneliness, and discouragement are definitely not "green pastures." I imagine myself as a restless sheep, easily discontented and wandering in search of the green grass I desire, trying to find my way out of those unlikeable circumstances. Yet verse two says, "He makes me lie down in green pastures." I wonder if I really am that stubborn and blinded to miss the "green pastures" right before me? Deep down, I know it's true. And as He

graciously calls me to rest in Him—to offer up everything I have and feel and struggle with—my soul finds peace. Perfect peace, in spite of what my flesh desires or my emotions might feel. For in those green pastures and still waters of dependence on the Good Shepherd, my soul is restored. Because of those circumstances, I can more clearly see my sin and my need for more of Him.

What a Shepherd! And what a Savior. John 10:11 tells us of how the Good Shepherd gives up His life for His sheep. Through His work on the cross, He restores our souls. Daily He desires to lead us to the cross, where He trades all of us for all of Him. All of our sins, for all of His perfect righteousness.

"He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (vs. 3). He not only provides nourishment and restoration of soul, but He also faithfully leads His sheep onward in His good purposes. We can trust that our Good Shepherd has plans for us and specific roles in His Kingdom's work (Ephesians 2:10). Even when the path seems uncertain, undesirable, or even impossible, we can take heart knowing that our Good Shepherd will never leave us nor forsake us. May we remind ourselves and each other that He is faithful! He is working out His righteousness in us, and His eternal purposes in His Kingdom.

In our work in Ukraine at the International Bible School—Petrodolina, Andy and I, as well as the staff and school board, look to the Lord to lead this school according to His will. We are so grateful to those who are praying on behalf of this ministry and the country of Ukraine during these uncertain times.

Coyle and her husband, Pastor Andy Coyle, serve as AFLC missionaries on loan to East European Missions Network in Ukraine.

AFLC memorials: May

AFLBS

Pastor John Mundfrom (2)
Mildred Peterson (3)
Ruth Claus
Clinton Jensen
Bernice Wolla

AFLTS

Dr. Francis Monseth
Allan Forness
Pastor John Mundfrom (2)
Joyce Deubner
Phyllis Davidson
Richard Edwards

Home Missions

Allan Forness
Barb Ranum
Adeline Ruden
Kenneth Nash

Evangelism

Loran Johnson
Lillie Sauer

Parish Education

Pastor John Mundfrom
Phyllis Davidson
Dr. Mary Lindquist

World Missions

Elaine Haven
Pastor Amos and Ovidie
Dyrud
Pastor John Mundfrom

... in honor of

AFLBS/AFLTS

Pastor Richard and Clara
Gunderson

Mobley nominated as next seminary dean

Pastor Wade Mobley, Sioux Falls, S.D., has been nominated by a committee consisting of the AFLC Schools faculty and members of the AFLC Schools Board of Trustees to serve as the next dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary and president of the AFLC Schools. The board presented the nomination to the AFLC Annual Conference, which was held June 10-13 at Valley City, N.D.



In a letter sent to pastors and members of the AFLC, the nominating committee wrote, "The President/Dean of AFLTS will be called to serve primarily as spiritual leader of AFLC Schools, and overseer of faculty, students, and the program of the Seminary. He will also be responsible in the area of public relations connected to both schools."

Mobley is a 1997 graduate of AFLBS and a 2003 graduate of AFLTS. He is married to Michele (Deubner) and together they have two children, Hannah (5) and Benjamin (4). He currently serves Living Word Lutheran in Sioux Falls.

LBT celebrates 50 years

Lutheran Bible Translators, an independent Lutheran mission organization, is celebrating 50 years of ministry. The ministry has 72 missionaries serving in 15 countries as they work to make God's Word available to those who do not have it in the language of their hearts. Josh and Ruthie Wagner serve as AFLC missionaries on loan to LBT in Sierra Leone.

Grace Free to celebrate 50 years

Members of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., will celebrate the congregation's 50th anniversary on Aug. 17, with a celebration service at 9:30 a.m. All are invited to the service and dinner following.

The congregation was founded in 1964 as Medicine Lake Lutheran. At the first annual meeting of the congregation in January 1966, Pastor George Soberg addressed the congregation by saying, "It seems now that the acorn that was planted in the fall of 1964 has not only sent down a strong root but now has started a strong upward shoot that can and will under God's guidance through His Holy Spirit grow into a sturdy tree that will be able to withstand the pressures from within and the storms from without that seek to destroy it. Let us stand firmly on the Word of God, for it is the only sure foundation upon which to build. Here is the heart of our work. Herein lies our strength."



People and places

Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, will officiate at two installations: **Pastor Jesse Kneeland** will be installed July 6 at Hope Lutheran, Northome, Minn., and Bethesda Lutheran, Mizpah, Minn. **Pastor Todd Klemme** will be installed July 20 at Chippewa Lutheran, Brandon, Minn.

Pastor David Skordahl is serving as interim pastor at Living Word Church, St. Michael, Minn. Pastor Bob Halvorson, who served the congregation, has stepped down from his role.

Galilee Family Bible Camp will be held July 7-11 at Lake Bronson, Minn. Pastor Brett Boe, Shakopee, Minn., will be the evening speaker, Pastor Peter Franz, Maple Grove, Minn., will lead the adult Bible study, and Lyle Mattson, Greenbush, Minn., will lead the youth.

Family camp will be held at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis., July 27-Aug. 2. For more information, visit the ARC website (arc-aflc.org).

Correction: The writer of the WMF column in the June issue was misidentified. Pastor Jon Wellumson was the author.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-May 31, 2014

FUND	REC'D IN MAY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$29,078	\$144,044	\$146,275
Evangelism	16,746	69,520	65,299
Youth Ministries	6,675	57,684	50,329
Parish Education	8,820	51,111	47,708
Seminary	21,125	103,400	127,600
Bible School	50,368	197,233	224,513
Home Missions	42,681	181,372	183,709
World Missions	53,388	204,831	187,601
Personal Support	30,517	182,206	189,010
TOTALS	\$259,396	\$1,191,402	\$1,222,045

Contact the individual departments for further information about specific financial needs.

More on decisions

It has been interesting and encouraging to reflect on the responses received to the editorial in the last issue, entitled “Decisions,” and one of the issues raised concerns the language that we use in our teaching and preaching. If we are convinced on the basis of God’s Word that “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him,” then should we use terms that imply action on our part?



Pastor Robert Lee

A pastor comes to mind who objected to inviting people to “accept” Christ or “receive” Him ... until he was reminded of John 1:12 and Colossians 2:6.

It is significant that we cannot speak of individual salvation without using action words. Believe, come, accept, receive, trust ... all sound like we are called to do something, don’t they? The late Dr. Francis Monseth used to call this “the evangelical imperative,” and the correct use of these terms is grounded in the conviction that it is the Holy Spirit who “has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts.” He is the one who gives grace to accept, to receive, or to decide.

These action words are found throughout our Lutheran confessions. In the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, for example, we read that “it is impossible to love God unless faith has first accepted the forgiveness of sins.” “By freely accepting the forgiveness of sins, faith sets against God’s wrath not our merits of love, but Christ the mediator and propitiator.” “To avoid the impression that it is merely knowledge, we add that to have faith means to want and to accept the promised offer of forgiveness of sins and justification” (Tappert edition, pages 112-114). Certainly none of these

statements should suggest that people possess the ability in themselves to accept or receive forgiveness of sins; rather, they seek to highlight the necessary response of faith to the working of God’s Spirit through the Word in our hearts and minds.

No one has expressed this more clearly than Dr. Monseth. A study entitled, “Principles and Practices of Lutheran Evangelism,”

was prepared by him at the request of our Evangelism Commission and presented at the annual pastors’ conference in 1988. In it he sought to strike the special balance that has always characterized our AFLC evangelistic convictions. He warned against the “synergistic” error that fallen humanity can contribute in any way to obtaining salvation, but also noted that this did not prevent our Lutheran confessors from employing terms that imply action. Nor should our concern to guard against synergism hinder us in our evangelistic efforts “so that we approach people with the Gospel on the basis of merely telling the story without the accompanying call for response.”

Many know of spiritual abuses in the name of evangelism, where human pressure was placed on people to “make a decision” for Christ. This writer recalls an evangelist who spoke without apology of “placing the cookies on the bottom shelf” and “creating a psychological movement toward the front,” both based on the belief that there is a spiritual power in everyone to come to Christ once it is unleashed. More common in Lutheran circles today is the presumption of eternal security in baptism, considering the evangelization of the baptized to be totally inappropriate.

A pastor said to this writer that to be baptized is to be evangelized, period. Both errors must be avoided.

Some may recall the old illustration that compares conversion to the entrance of a gate. Walking along the road of life, we see the gateway of salvation, and over it are the words of invitation, “Whoever will let him come.” We respond in faith and

If we are convinced on the basis of God’s Word that “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him,” then should we use terms that imply action on our part?

enter the gate, only to discover that different words are written on the inside: “You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (John 15:16). There are two Scriptural truths here which cannot be humanly reconciled.

The solution to the paradox of a salvation that is freely given to those who cannot come, and the need to invite people to come and receive, is found in our teaching and preaching ... at home with our families, at church in Sunday school and Bible classes, from our pulpits, in our Bible school and seminary classrooms. The law is presented with all of its stern demands, as well as our inability to cooperate in the smallest part in our salvation. The gospel is proclaimed with all of its precious promises, calling for a response.

So then we invite: Sinner, come to Jesus! Come with empty hands! The way is open, the price has been paid. Come and receive.

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

association retreat center

What is Christian education?

BY PASTOR KARL ANDERSON

Nearly 200 years ago Daniel Webster's 1828 Dictionary noted that education "is intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper, and form the manners and habits of youth, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations." Christian education seeks to prepare our children for adulthood in the same way, by enlightening, correcting, forming and fitting.

Christian education should enlighten our children's understanding of the message of the gospel: that Jesus died to save sinners. Some years back the AFLC hosted a series of seminars called Passing The Baton. The speakers asked those present to consider what they were passing on to their children. Was it a building? An organizational structure? Or a living faith? The primary goal of Christian education should be to lead our children to Christ. "Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven'" (Matthew 19:14, ESV).

In addition, learning the teachings of the Bible helps correct the tendency of our fallen nature to live according to the world's standards. Christian education should teach us about God's commandments so that we have guidance to live out our love for God and love for our neighbor. Moreover, teaching of the law will convict us of sin by showing us how far we fall short of God's ideal for our lives. Only then can we see clearly the impossibility of salvation by works and be led to cry out for God's mercy and to trust in His grace. Psalm 119:9 echoes this thought, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word."

It's important that these truths are taught at a young age when manners and habits are still forming. The devotional habits we form in our early years tend to characterize our actions throughout life. Christian education should uphold and reinforce godly habits such as Bible memorization, along with daily prayer and Scripture reading. Scripture reinforces this teaching, "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Christian education is also a preparation for life, fitting our young people for usefulness as future Sunday school teachers, music leaders, deacons, or even as pastors. God called His people in Deuteronomy 31:12-13 to gather together so that "they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God."

Family Camp at the Association Retreat Center provides a great opportunity for both children and adults to grow in their faith through the study and teaching of God's Word. As children see their parents and grandparents applying themselves to hearing and understanding the Word of God, they are reminded of the importance God's Word to them.

Anderson, a member of the ARC Corporation, serves Alida and Rice Lutheran churches, Bagley, Minn.