

Serving one another in love

## THE LUTHERAN **AMBASSADOR**

July 9, 2002 Volume 40, Number 9



The magazine of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, 3110 East Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441.763-545-5631

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## The Lutheran Ambassador

(USPS 588-620 ISSN 0746-3413) is published every three weeks except monthly in June and July (16 issues per year) by the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations.

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## **Subscriptions rates:**

\$15.00 a year, Group Rate, U.S. \$16.00 a year, Individual, U. S. \$18.00 a year, International Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, MN and additional mailing office.

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

## AN ENCOURAGING WORD

## Don't wait for the perfect opportunity

ne Sunday afternoon we needed to make the 130mile trip to Barron, Wis., to see my fatherin-law who was in the hospital. We just grabbed extra clothes, toothbrushes and took off. Grandpa was on the mend so the kids felt like having some fun. They wanted to go fishing yet that evening!

## No Fishing Gear

We hadn't given one thought to fishing before we left. Our poles and tackle were back in Cloquet. But I did remember that I had a couple of poor old rods stored in Wisconsin along with a 20-foot cane pole that Dick Heinecke had given me back when I was pastor at Section Ten in Cumberland. Fortunately, the Holiday gas station had a pack of hooks, and I found a couple of bobbers in an old workbench. We dug some worms and off we headed for Horseshoe Lake as the sun sank low in the west.

## Loads of Fun

We got to the lake just in time for that little burst of feeding that goes on right before sunset. Ancient line reluctantly came out of those old Zebco 202s. With 50-year-old string stolen from an antique openfaced reel, we got the cane pole flinging into action too — something the kids had never seen before! And the fish were biting. Small sunfish, perch and a couple of nice bass came in to be fried for some tasty eating. It all happened with worn out, worthless equipment, a dollar's worth of hooks and a last-minute idea. The joke of it all is that our children will probably remember that night better than some of the well-planned and more costly vacations we will take over the vears.

## **Unexpected Opportunities**

Life is full of special moments and divine opportunities that we need to grab. Don't wait for the perfect timing and ideal equipment if vou want to have fun and "eat fresh fish." Someone once said that life is what happens while you are waiting for life to happen. If we can have a great time fishing on our way home from a hospital visit, you can experience blessings in the midst of your unexpected troubles, too.

## **Wonders from Weakness**

This incident reminds me of what God spoke through Paul in I Corinthians 1, where we he says, "God has chosen the weak things of this world to shame the strong." These words proclaim the truth that God can use unimpressive me, and can turn a discouraging situation into a happy ending. This keeps me in the ministry. It doesn't take lots of talent, fine equipment or a perfect situation for blessings to happen. What I am saying is this: live today, seize the moment, use what you have, it's not too late. Serve God where you are at, behind the scenes, in the midst of trouble, right now. And while you are at it, get that old tackle out and take a kid fishing.

> — Pastor Tom Olson St. Paul's Lutheran Cloquet, Minn.



## SOUND BITES

o matter the society or culture, the city or town, God has never lacked the power to work through available people to glorify his name.

— Jim Cymbala

n all of our experiences, whenever people have sensed that they were a part of what we call "a God thing" — something that God was a part of — you never have difficulty motivating people or getting them excited about the activity and the mission. People want to sign up in droves if they think that what they're part of is something that God is orchestrating and guiding.

— Richard Blackaby

Take away service and you take away the church's power, influence and evangelistic effectiveness. The power of the gospel is combining the life-changing message with selfless service.

— Eric Swanson

The church is only the church when it lives for others.

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer

## THEY BEHINDE

"Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."

Colossians 3:23-24

s I look around our congregation and at all the people here, I think about all of the different things people do as ministry to others — both known and unknown.

People help in many areas that we don't realize. The difference they make in the working of our church isn't noticed.

There are those who volunteer to give relief to individuals who are caring for family members with health problems, by sitting with them so the care-giver can go to church, run errands or just take a break. There are ladies in our church who love to bake and are willing to bake cakes, pies, breads or whatever is needed for various functions. There are those who willingly help out in the area of visiting our shut-ins and people in the hospital. We have people who stuff the bulletins on Saturdays for our Sunday services. There are faithful prayer warriors who are always ready and willing to remember others before the Lord. At our Lake Chapel we have faithful people who set up our schedule each year and are there every Sunday to welcome the people and open the service. Others spend time caring for church plants, the grounds around the church and the church itself.

At the beginning of this year at our council meeting it was suggested that we recognize people in our congregation who have been an inspiration to us or an encouragement in one way or another. People have been writing in our newsletter about those who have inspired and encouraged them. Here are parts of two of the articles:

"Many come to mind, but I decided to honor Darline Bjornson as she has an unusual warm and loving spirit. I think of the many ways she has shown that loving kindness to me through the years. She has always been willing to pick up the load to lighten it for the rest of us. How many remember Darline's blue Cadillac taking a load of women to a retreat or a rally? How many have been waited on in her home for Bible study, showers,

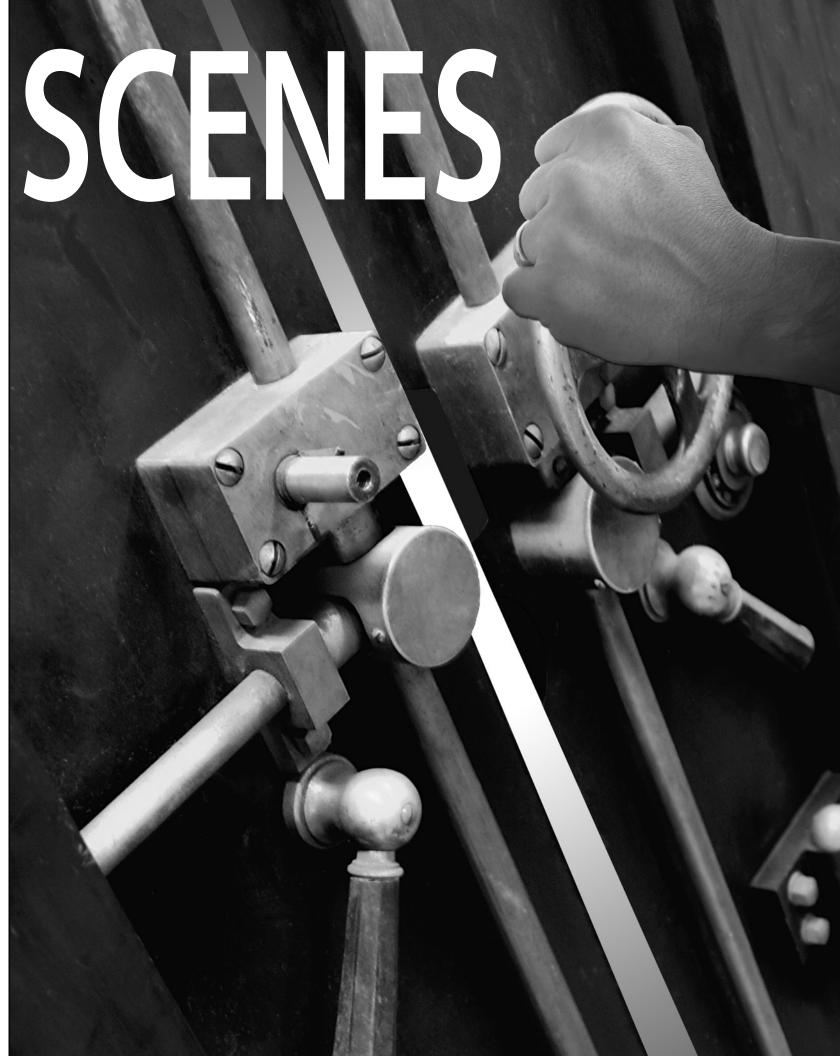
swim parties, Swedish pancakes, New Year's Eve parties and many more? A home away from home. Darline, you truly have the gifts of loving kindness and hospitality" (written by Grace Larson).

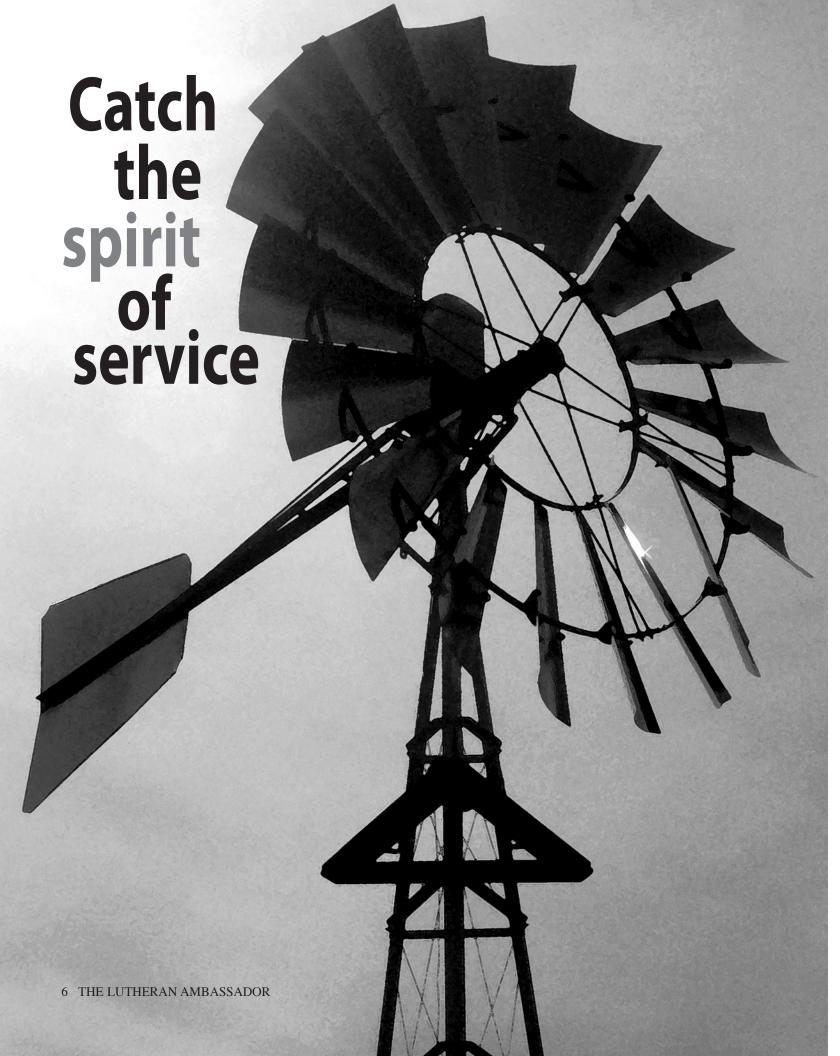
"Today, I would like to remember Arlene Simpson and share how she has been an influence in my life. Her continued support and devotion as a loving, kind wife to John in his illness, Arlene was always there morning, noon and night. It seemed many of her days contained 36 hours, but Arlene graciously accepted the challenge God laid upon her until the Lord saw fit to call John home. Arlene's ability to work and still keep up the great attitude during these trying times in her life with family has been a great inspiration to me. Arlene always relied upon the Lord for the strength she needed and He always provided as He promised. Arlene always finds time to help when called upon. The endless hours she has devoted in speech therapy to the progress of Darlene Bjornson's recovery from her stroke cannot be measured. Arlene always found the time to assist us in caring for Anne when things seemed to pile up on us. She was just a phone call away. Her God-given talents are many — artist, florist, Sunday school teacher, just to name a few. Arlene shares these talents and gives the entire honor and glory to the Lord" (written by Diane Olson).

These are just a few of the ways our congregation has served one another. I thank God for all the people in our congregation and consider it a real blessing to be a part of such a caring and loving church family that lives out Galatians 5:13: "Through love serve on another," and 6:2: "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the love of Christ."

— Shirley Bjornson Grace Free Lutheran Valley City, North Dakota







om Wilson cast a harried look across the room. The members of the Time and Talent Committee were getting nowhere fast.

"Perhaps we are approaching this problem in the wrong way," he said. "We've tried phone calls and surveys, volunteer days and visits, and we seem to be getting nowhere. It seems that half of our congregation volunteers for choir or teaching, but the others are satisfied to attend Sunday services and participate in nothing else. How do we reach them?"

As the chairman of the committee. Wilson was leading the group as they brainstormed ideas to get "fringe" members of Ruthfred Lutheran Church in Bethel Park, Pa., more involved in congregational life.

Committee member Mary Olsen spoke up: "I was really hesitant to get involved in the work of the church until one day I had a visit from Mrs. Weber. You may not know her. She's very quiet and unassuming, but she was kind and caring and encouraged me to help with the nursery. I think it was her spirit of love and caring that caused me to change my attitude. Later, I asked her why she spent time visiting strangers. Her reply surprised me. 'We are children of a servant God. As Christ gave Himself for our salvation, so must we serve His children and reach those who do not know Him. The Holy Spirit touched my heart years ago, and daily He calls on me to serve. I find that more and more I reach out in a spirit of love."

There was a moment of hesitation as the group thought about this. Finally the chairman spoke out.

"Are we so wrapped up in our problem that we fail to see the obvious answer? We have prayed for help, but perhaps we should be praying for a heart that loves and cares for those who feel no need to serve and those who hesitate to volunteer. Let's pray together that the Holy Spirit will guide us so that our thoughts, words and actions will reflect His love."

When the members of the Time and Talent Committee met the following week, they were renewed in their desire to tackle their problem. Wilson, their chairman, challenged them to look at the situation with eyes of love.

"Often, we do not know the people we are trying to reach," he said. "In order to encourage them to serve, we need to know their interests and why they hesitate to be more active in the church. Along with this, we need to challenge them with their need to serve the Lord."

"I think we need to be more welcoming at church services," said Mary Brown, a member of the committee. "After the final hymn, it seems that people cluster with their friends and ignore those who are outside of their circle. If we appear to be a clique, no one will volunteer."

As the members of the committee thought about their problem in the light of God's love and their need to serve, they came up with many new suggestions:

- · Try a buddy system to invite inactive members to attend a group meeting. Offer to pick them up and introduce them around.
- Create a prayer circle or prayer chain so that we can share in the concerns of other people.
- · Shut-ins could call one another to pray together and visit.
- · Use teacher's aids to encourage new participation in Sunday school.
- Announce and publish a list of the needs in the church and encourage people to use their gifts to serve the Lord, whether it be visiting, cooking, painting or typing the bulletin.
- · Ask the pastor to challenge us to return to God's love with our service.

As the meeting closed and a new agenda firmed up, the chairman spoke.

"We know how fulfilling our life in Christ can be when we find a place to serve in God's Kingdom. Let's pray together for the help of the Holy Spirit to enable us to reach our brothers and sisters in the light of His love."

> — Wilma Wissner Ruthfred Lutheran Church Bethel Park. Pa.

"For you have been called to live in freedom — not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature, but freedom to serve one another in love."

Galatians 5:13



## Hello, my name

It isn't up to your pastor to make every first contact with visitors. It's up to each of us. It is a privilege to work for Christ in His church.

ave you ever attended a church service where you didn't know anyone? Was it a bit awkward as you walked in the front door and didn't know where to go? Most of us at one time or another have experienced that.

The Apostle Paul was a master at greeting friends. In I Corinthians he is quick to greet and is always a source of encouragement. Wouldn't it be nice to have a person like Paul at your church? You do — it's you! We as Christians are called to greet and encourage each other.

Remember the first time you were walking into a church and someone approached and said, "Hi, my name is ..., what's yours?" It puts you at ease. And that is what our work should be, to welcome friends and strangers in the house of God. First impressions are lasting impressions. If you weren't greeted or welcomed personally, you probably would think, "I really don't want to be part of this church. It seems cold and uncaring."

It was tradition in the home I grew up in that when company came, we met them at the door with a greeting. After the visit, we would walk them to the door or even to their car. We should have that same concern when visitors come to our church. Greet them with a smile, show true concern as to who they are and where they are from, calling them by name if you remember it.

We don't know what burdens people are carrying when they walk into our church for the first time. They may be there because they don't know where else to turn to due to some trials or heartache. I Thessalonians 5:11 tells us, "Therefore, encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing."

At Bethel, our theme is to "Build Followers of Jesus Christ." One of the ways that is accomplished is by being a church where people feel welcome and comfortable so they will be open to hearing the message of Jesus. Laymen and the elders volunteer to greet all visitors and members alike. Romans 12:4-7 teaches us that as members of a church, we have different functions and gifts to contribute, and that we should exercise them. Verse 13 tells us to contribute to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

My point is, don't wait for someone else to greet others. Pray about it and God will give you what you need to say. I John 5:14 says, "This is the confidence which we have before



Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He will hear us."

It isn't up to your pastor to make every first contact with visitors. It's up to each of us. It is a privilege to work for Christ in His church. Psalm 100:2 tells us to serve the Lord with gladness. If our attitude is anything but gladness, it shows through to visitors. Matthew 5:14 tells us that we are to be the light of the world and that our light should "shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father, who is in heaven."

If you consider yourself unskilled in speech or feel inferior in meeting new people, don't lose heart. All of us at one time or another have felt that way.

Paul tells us in Galatians 6:10, "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

When you see someone walk through the door of your church — be it a newcomer or someone you would like to know better — you be the first to go to them and say, "Hi, my name is ..., what's yours?" It may be because of your greeting that someone becomes a follower of Jesus Christ.

> – Bruce Wolla Bethel Free Lutheran Minot, N.D.





tems leave congregations straining to hear, reducing the efficacy of the message. They concentrate on hearing instead of understanding. The individual feels isolated, alone and apart from the body of the congregation. Bottom line — the individual cannot hear the Word of God and participate fully in corporate worship.

The poor sound system may also impede ministries outside the church. A taped ministry for those unable to attend physically, a CD or cassette for outreach ministries, or a radio or television broadcast ministry — all are rooted in the sound system's ability to accurately record (and therefore share) the message.

Without an appropriate, easy-to-use, reliable sound system, we are not fully using the resources available to accomplish God's will, and we may limit the reach and efficacy of our ministries. As good stewards of God's gifts, we need to fully make use of the tools available to reinforce the message to our congregations, as well as reach the seeker and the unchurched in a measure of sound quality at least equal to secular environments.

Why may the current system no longer be efficient? It is not uncommon to find sound systems still in operation that were installed 10, 20 or 30 years ago. As these systems age, they no longer function as designed, and the previous design no longer fits our current function. We are no longer tolerant of poor sound as we are immersed in technological improvements in our everyday lives. We simply expect not to have to work to hear well.

Why may the small congregation benefit greatly from a good system?

A limited budget. The first issue to arise in consultation with the small congregation is usually budget. Budget is often cited as the reason why an older system has not been replaced, or why an inferior system was installed. The converse is true: the *smaller* the budget, the *more important* it is to design and install the right system at the right time.

A well-known industry colleague states that most churches will buy three sound systems over the course of a decade due to lack of experience, planning, or poor design. The first system may be installed by a well-meaning individual within the church; the second by a local electronics shop; and only the third time by an experienced professional knowledgeable in the needs of the congregation. If the appropriate system was installed initially, a sizable reduction in both budget and frustration could have been realized, and the system would have been available to aid the ministry many years earlier.

It is crucial the church seek out and consult with established, trained professionals with the knowledge, attitude, and heart to aid the technical ministries of these smaller churches. While it is ideal to hire a professional to assist the church, a number of individuals have made resources available at low cost or no cost to churches with limited budgets.

Diversity of worship participants. Within the small

church we often find the layperson directly involved in the worship service more so than in the larger church. This can present added challenges to the sound system and the operator, as often these participants do not use microphones and sound system elements on a routine basis. This makes it all the more important that the system be designed to accommodate both the experienced and novice worship participants.

Dependence on volunteers. While the larger church may have someone on call for worship services, weddings and funerals, the small church may need to rely upon the pastor and volunteers. The sound system does not have an assigned "operator." Instead, these duties are ascribed to the ushers or a pool of volunteers of varying experience in both sound and music. Those with the most experience often actively participate in the music, which tends to limit the pool of qualified, willing individuals. The system must be easy and intuitive to operate, not intimidating to the novice, and yet fully meet the audio needs of the church for many years.

An aging demographic. The average age of our population is rising, and this is evident in the small congregation. Unlike fine wines and cheeses, our hearing does not improve with age — it diminishes. The sound system becomes all the more important as most hearing loss starts in the higher frequencies. The elements of crispness and detail, and hence clarity, of the message, can be missed. A well-designed sound system will allow a large percentage of those with slight to moderate hearing loss to participate fully, and a variety of wireless hearing systems can accommodate those with more advanced loss. It is important to the church that we continue to benefit from the wisdom of the elders, and not let sound quality limit their participation.

A rural geographic area. The small church in a rural environment has a special need to use a quality sound system. A rural setting often means limited availability of rental equipment for that special music on Sunday, or limited emergency service or "loaner" equipment when a problem is encountered. For the small rural church, the benefit of reliability and longevity of the sound system is to be appreciated.

The small church, perhaps more so than all others, can benefit greatly from a well-designed, reliable, and easy to operate sound system. May the Word of God be heard, and through the hearing of the Word may they understand, and in the understanding may they come to know Jesus Christ.

— Paul Mobley Brookings, S.D.



Paul Mobley is an audio engineer, consultant, and worship leader who works with congregations in promoting excellence in technical ministries. Paul may be reached at pmobley@brookings.net.

# **GIFT**

n Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he writes, "Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (5:15-16). One might ask, "Who gives us life, health, strength and mental abilities and enough time?" If the answer to all these questions is God, then we ought to consider how He wants us to use them to bring glory to His name.

God challenges us to be stewards of many things: our talents and mental abilities, our management of relationships, the management of our finances and use of our time. Each one is granted exactly the same number of minutes and hours in a day, and a great majority

of us have 70 to 80 years to make use of that time.

Where do we get time? How shall we use it? What will be the results if we are good stewards of our time? Thousands of books have been written and millions of words have been spoken about this precious commodity. Time is simply a gift from God given lovingly in equal portions to us all. As Paul tells us in Ephesians, we must be careful how we live not as unwise, but wise. In other words, he suggests that we have a choice in how we manage our time. We can choose to give the Lord our best time, or whatever is left over at the end of the day. Looking at Christ's use of time, the Bible writes how He would rise early in the morning to go pray and fellowship with God. Jesus also made time to minister to the sick or those in need when others would have had other ideas for His time.

Poor management of time can be a major source of stress. However, if we give this precious gift into God's hands and ask for His help, He promises that



than all we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). Therefore, it is critical that we ask Him to help us manage the needs of our family, our work and service to the Lord. Finally, God promises us that if we use our time wisely, we will advance the work of the Kingdom and bring glory to His name.

How are you using your time? Do you acknowledge it as a gift from God? Are you wise or unwise in its use? Ask God to show you where you can make more time for Him and use your time more wisely. It's a precious commodity that can only be used once. May God grant you His peace and wise use of your time.

> — David Bjornson **AFLC Stewardship Board Member Grace Free Lutheran Church** Valley City, ND



Pastor Les Galland is pictured with new members received on May 5 at Calvary Lutheran, Everett, Wash. Pictured are Pastor Galland, Ken and Susan Riker with Andrew and Neal; Shawn and Tracy Watkins with Tylar, Kirstin and Jordan: Tomiko Matteson and Leta Jones, Not pictured is Jay Jones.



Darwin and MaryAnn Jackson, on home assignment from mission work in Mexico with WMPL, recently visited the Twin Cities area. Pictured with them is their newly adopted daughter, Grace. The Jacksons plan to spend most of their assignment in Sammamish, Wash., and continue taking courses at Trinity College in Issaquah, Wash.

## **Schools Corporation** votes on next phase of Vision 2004 project

## Additional \$2 million by 2003 set for next goal

On June 13 at the AFLC Annual Conference in El Campo, Texas, members of the AFLC Schools Corporation met to discuss the Vision 2004 project. They heard recommendations from the building committee and reviewed information regarding the reports from the financial institution recommendations. According to the financial institutions, the only feasible option for the current amount of cash and pledges may be the dormitory/classroom combination. Any other building options would require more cash and pledges to pursue.

Upon hearing the information, members of the Schools Corporation voted to raise an additional \$2 million in cash and pledges by March 1, 2003, and to build the student center in 2003. This will involve an intensive capital campaign over the next few months. Because the 80 percent cash requirement for the building project has been removed, Vision 2004 can now emphasize pledges. Site work for the building project should begin this summer, as the School Corporation voted, with a cost of \$606,000. The site work needs to be done first for any building project as required by the city of Plymouth.

For more information, contact Karen Floan, Vision 2004, at 3100 East Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441. Or call 763-412-2004. Email: kmfloan@aflc.org or vis2004@aflc.org.

## Congregation to host LMS annual convention

St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church will host the annual convention of the Lutheran Mission Society from August 16 through 18 at Cloquet, Minn. Event organizers

hope to have Alaskan missionaries Henry and Linda Mohagen as special speakers, as well as mission aviation instructor Pastor Michael Crowell at the convention. All are welcome. For

more information, contact Pastor Thomas Olson for details: (218) 879-5956, 879-3113 or email him at pastortomolson@aol.com.

Pastor Larry Severson, Rose and Spruce Lutheran churches, Roseau, Minn., accepted a part-time position as chaplain at Roseau Area Hospital and Homes. He has served as hospice chaplain for Northern Communities Hospice since 1996 on a contract basis.

Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee clarified the relationship with **Lutheran Church of the Cross**, Laguna Woods, Calif., accepting the congregation as associate members. The transitional relationship will be reviewed in two years.

Pastor Mark Homp has accepted a call from Our Saviour's Lutheran, Zumbrota, Minn., and has resigned as pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Ponca City, Okla.

Pastor Eugene Enderlein, who recently resigned as director of AFLC World Missions, has accepted a call to serve as an interim pastor at Redeeming Love Lutheran, St. Joseph, Minn., beginning later this summer.

Pastor David Johnson has accepted a call to Zion Lutheran, Silverhill, Ala. He has resigned as associate pastor of Faith Lutheran, Minneapolis.

**Pastor Alvin Sather** has accepted a call from Pukwana and St. Olaf, S.D., parishes.

Pastor Bruce Peterson has accepted a call to serve on the staff of Living Word Lutheran, Eagan, Minn., as visitation pastor. He leaves Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran, Buxton, N.D., and Valley Free Lutheran, Portland, N.D.

## 19 AFLC congregations receive AAL/LB grant

The AFLC recently received a \$40,000 grant from Aid Association for Lutherans/Lutheran Brotherhood to reach out to unchurched people. The grant, made available through the Church Extension Fund of the Lutheran Brotherhood Foundation, provides resources that support evangelism and outreach projects among established congregations and assists in planting new mission congregations. The funds will be distributed to 19 AFLC congregations.

## **AFLC BENEVOLENCES**

## Received in May

Department given to ...

In memory of...

Vision 2004

Marie Schlenk Arnold Haugen Lloyd Nelson

**Home Missions** 

Arnold Haugen Mr. and Mrs. George Stockeland Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Bowder

Ella May Bowder Pearl Normand (legacy)

**AFLBS** 

Marie Schlenk Arnold Haugen Nels Flom

**AFLTS** 

Kirsti Ferig Harold Mogen

**Parish Education** 

Dominick Petschl Marie Schlenk Junith Christenson **World Missions** 

Helen Overland Selma Woodsend Ernest Oien Pearl Normand (legacy)

**Miriam Infant Home** 

Dominick Petschl

MTI

Ray Miller

**FLAPS** 

Marie Schlenk

In honor of ...

Kuster

Vision 2004

New families at Valley
Free Lutheran,
Portland, N.D. (Ben
and Sheila
McClenahen, Douglas
and Sara Taylor, Alan
and Julie Twedt)
Mr. and Mrs. Gerald

**Association of Free Lutheran Congregations** 

3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

AFLC Benevolences (5 months) - January 1 - May 31, 2002

| FUND                    | TOTAL<br>Subsidy     | REC'D IN<br>MAY | TOTAL REC'D<br>TO DATE | %<br>TOTAL |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|------------------------|------------|
|                         | Subsidy              | WAI             | TODATE                 | TOTAL      |
| General Fund            | \$268,060.00         | \$18,400.50     | \$100,394.83           | 37         |
| Seminary                | 118,938.00           | 8,959.93        | 65,486.08              | 55         |
| Bible School            | 217,227.00           | 27,641.70       | 126,787.54             | 58         |
| Home Missions           | 278,872.00           | 16,344.21       | 84,403.00              | 30         |
| World Missions          | 199,994.00           | 17,848.30       | 97,034.91              | 49         |
| Personal Support        | 288,000.00           | 31,247.33       | 154,138.89             | 54         |
| Youth Ministries        | 55,413.00            | 2,197.74        | 17,523.77              | 32         |
| Parish Education        | 71,687.00            | 8,199.36        | 25,358.14              | 35         |
| Church Extension        | 23,093.00            | 2,810.87        | 13,377.19              | 58         |
| TOTALS                  | \$1,521,284.00       | \$133,649.94    | \$684,503.35           | 45         |
| TOTALS 2001             | \$1,119,759.00       | \$94,386.20     | \$492,047.64           | 44         |
| Goal 42%                |                      |                 |                        |            |
| The Evengeliam Departme | ent received \$2 202 | in Mov          |                        |            |

## Serve where God wants you

The best place to

serve in the church

is in the place

where God has

called you.

inston Churchill, the leader of England during World War II, recognized his country's need to increase its production of coal. He called together labor leaders to enlist their support. He closed his presentation by urging them to picture in their minds a victory parade that would be held in London after the war. He said sailors who had kept the sea lanes open would march. Then would come soldiers from the battlefields. After them would come the pilots who had made safe the skies.

"Last of all," Churchill said, "will come a long line of sweat-stained, soot-streaked men in miner's caps. Someone will cry from the crowd, 'And where were you during the critical days of our struggle?' And from 10,000 throats will come the answer, 'We were deep in the earth with our faces to the coal."

Some jobs in God's army involve having your "face to the coal." Some callings are not very glamorous. The people doing them are a long way from the limelight. They don't receive much immediate recognition. Their work isn't applauded. Often they are only noticed when they don't do their job.

But God notices. He views each area of service as significant. In I Corinthians 12 Paul writes of how the church is like a

body. It has many different parts. Each one is uniquely important. "Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other" (v. 22-25).

Since God gives greater honor to the parts that lacked it, then we should do the same. Unfortunately, at times in the church we glorify the presentable parts and ignore those that might be considered unpresentable. Some give excessive praise to the ones who are up front during services and events, while others are envious and longing to join them.

The trend in many churches toward worship teams to assist with music comes with this danger. Attention that should go to the Lord sometimes gets focused on the team. A worship team is doing its job correctly if it is pointing people to Christ. But if the main thing that happens is impressing people with the team's skill and equipment, then it would be better if they stayed sitting in the pews.

The role of pastor and preacher comes with a similar danger. The Bible does say, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" (I Timothy 5:17, NIV). But honor is not something any of us should seek after. We strive to give honor to Christ. The glory belongs to the One we talk about, not to those who do the talking.

The best place to serve in the church is in the place where God has called you. It's great when a person shares their musical talent — when that is what God has called them to do. But it shouldn't be done just to

get attention and applause.

Congregations are in need of pastors and proclaimers of the Word, but only ones who are called to that role. Some have maybe entered the ministry because they have felt obligated. Family or friends might have pressured them. Some have maybe been enticed by the supposed power and prestige of the position. Ones who enter the ministry for these motives are not to be applauded. Ones who

do not believe God is calling them to serve as pastors or missionaries are not to be pushed or looked down upon. They are to be encouraged to seek the special plan God has for their lives, whatever that might be.

Even though I'm a pastor I've wondered a little about Pastor Appreciation Month. Why don't others get a month — or at least a week? How about the ushers, the janitors, the ones in the nursery, the folks who mow the lawn and take care of the flowers, the organist, the people who count the money, and all those others who do a lot but don't get much attention? We ought to show them some appreciation too.

The good news is that even if we don't, God does. Service done in Christ's name, even that which is ignored by the world, is noticed by God and pleasing to Him. "The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:11-12).

— Pastor Craig Johnson

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## **Praying for encouragement**

ou know how you hear about those experiences that some Christians have? The kind where they get to witness to a total stranger in some kind of unusual circumstance in some unforeseen way? Well, I had never had one of those experiences and I was beginning to wonder why.

Coming home from the AFLC conference this June I was privileged to have one of those experiences. I'd like to share it with you because it was so encouraging to me and I hope it will be for you as well. The best part is that I can take no credit for any of it. This was a God-thing all the way.

First I need to tell you about my mood. I was flying home early because I had committed to participate in an art show and I was already regretting my decision. Feeling down about flying home alone, guilty for leaving before the ARC luncheon, tired from fighting off a cold, tired from not getting enough sleep for several days and drained from all those meetings, I was pretty low. So low, in fact, that I prayed a little pathetic prayer as I was falling asleep on Thursday night. "Lord, I am really feeling down. Really down. Could you, Lord, please just send somebody, maybe on the plane tomorrow, to encourage me? A nice motherly type to, you know, mother me? I would really appreciate that Lord."

That's what's so funny about the whole experience. God works in mysterious ways. The truth of II Corinthians that, "when I am weak, then I am strong," was never more apparent to me than on that day.

On the connecting flight from Atlanta to Minneapolis, I was seated next to a man named Steve. We had a polite, casual conversation for about 10 minutes. I found out that he had worked at one brewery or another all his life. I immediately stereotyped him as someone not interested in spiritual things. He asked me why I was flying (church conference) and where I lived (a Bible camp). The conversation turned to religion, and then things got interesting! It turns out that Steve was not what you would call a casual observer of religion. He had some real problems with Christianity and Christians who claimed to have "the answers." He didn't believe that the Gospels were written by the men whose names are attached to them, and the idea that the Bible could be considered inerrant was pretty preposterous. He didn't believe that Jesus ever claimed to be divine. He had explored some of these things on his own.

Here's the neat thing. I didn't get defensive or upset about his views. I don't know, maybe I was just too tired. There were a lot of questions he raised that I couldn't answer. But that's not what he needed. He needed to hear that God loved him enough to send His own Son to die for him. I got to tell him that!

I had an overwhelming sense of this man's need for Jesus. He had heard a lot of the law and he'd become resentful. He was definitely searching. At one point in the conversation he turned to me and said, "I just want to know who Jesus *really* is!" I had the privilege of telling him. Steve had all kinds of reasons why he couldn't believe that what the Bible said was true. But I'm so glad that God gave me that opportunity to share. I know it was for a reason.

About a half an hour into our conversation, a young man seated directly in front of me turned around and said, "Excuse me, I've overheard some of your conversation and I'm wondering if

I could turn around and just listen in?"

I had no idea where this guy was coming from and neither did Steve, but we both agreed that he could listen. I found out later that his name was Nathan. Nathan listened quietly for about 30 minutes and then turned around and sat back in his seat. Steve and I continued our conversation right up to the gate.

As we were taxiing to the gate Nathan turned around again and said, "I think I've got this figured out." He pointed to me and said, "You believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven, right?"

I nodded.

Then looking at Steve he said, "And you believe that you need to live a good life and not do too many bad things and then you'll be alright. Right?"

Steve nodded.

"Well, if you're right," he said, looking at Steve, "then she's still O.K." He paused, "But if she's right ... well ... then ... you're in trouble."

Steve nodded and conceded that, yes, he had considered that.

Steve and I ended our conversation well. I recommended that he read Lee Strobel's *The Case For Christ*. He recommended that I read a book called *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*. We thanked each other for the conversation and said goodbye.

Walking down the concourse I saw Nathan and asked him, "So, Nathan, are you a believer or just inquisitive?"

He smiled. "No, I'm a believer. I was praying for you the whole time."

Praise God. I was so encouraged after that plane ride. God answered my prayer. But He did it in a way I wasn't expecting, and I'm so glad that He did! Please pray for Steve; I'm sure God is not finished with him yet.

— Wendy Westlake Osceola, Wis.