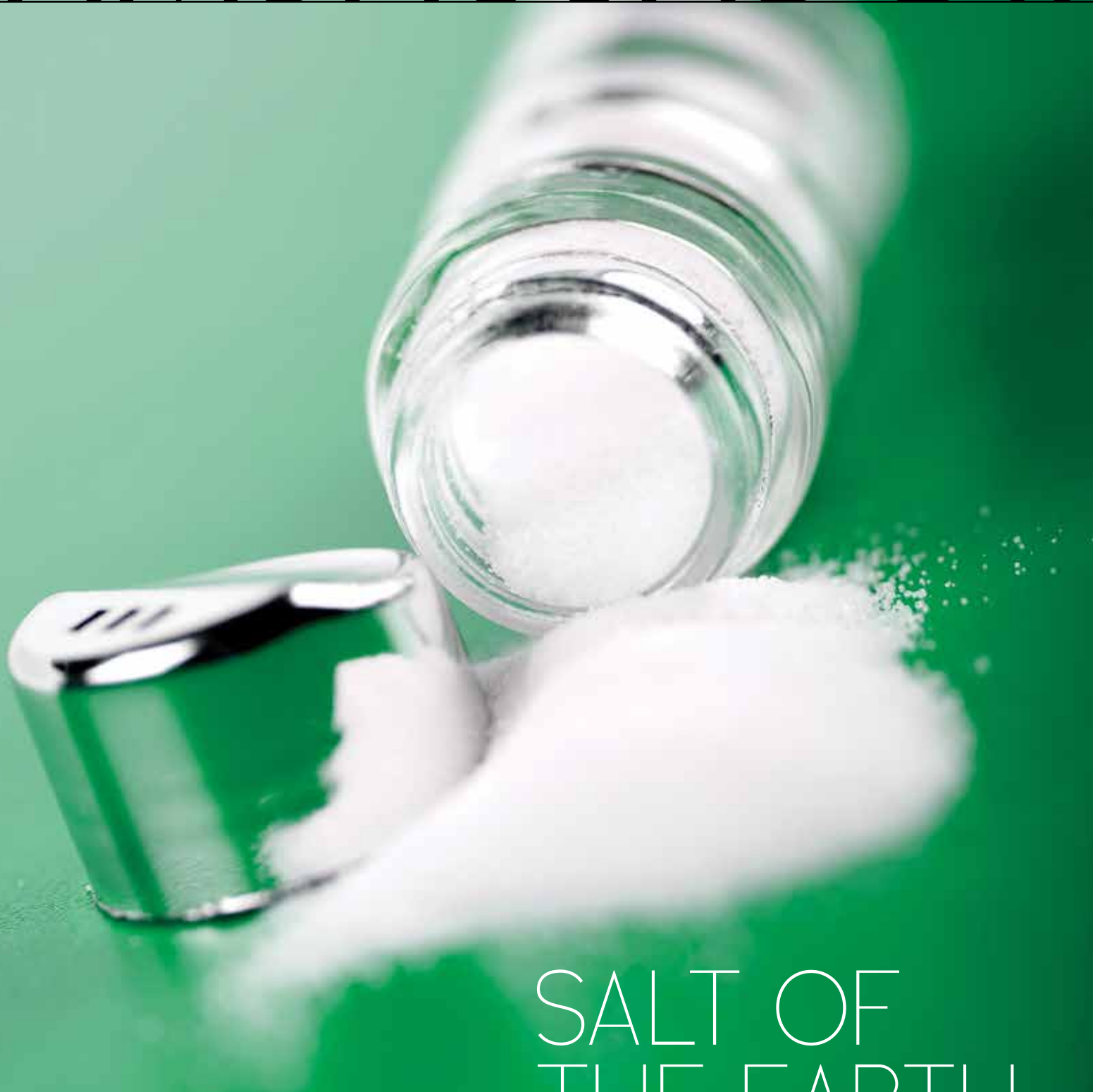


THE LUTHERAN 

JUNE 2012

AMBASSADOR



SALT OF
THE EARTH

Matthew 5:13

Evangelism's goal

BY CHRISTINA OSTHUS

This may seem obvious to you, but I will ask the question anyway: what is the endpoint of evangelism? I would like to suggest a few that are rather unbiblical, or at least simplistic, and then suggest an explanation that better encompasses God's master plan.

The endpoint to evangelism is not growing the church numerically. I am incredibly thankful that when God examines our works at the final judgment, as Paul describes in I Corinthians 3, He will not judge us by the notches in our salvation stick. As easy as it is to get confused, the number of souls saved through our ministry has very little to do with us. God will always provide the increase.

Though salvation does mean another soul is bound for heaven, selling "fire insurance" is an unbiblical and hollow way to look at evangelism, as well. Immediately after Jesus' ascension, some of His followers apparently hoped following Him had gotten that simple as they looked up into the clouds in wonder. They were given a gentle hint when the angel asked them in Acts 1:11 what they were doing staring into the sky. I am understating greatly when I say that the Christian just waiting to meet his purpose in heaven is missing out.

The endpoint to effective evangelism is also not (nor should it appear to be) easier lives. This may seem to conflict with the purpose I explain below, but I hope you will see there is a marked difference between reconciliation and a world or a life being "fixed." Though I have been walking with Jesus for most of my life, and so do not really know life without Him, I would be hard-pressed to name a way in which He has made my life easier. Instead, I would say He makes my life livable. In responding to critics and skeptics who ridicule the concept of God as a crutch, I would agree with a pastor who said God is not a crutch but a pacemaker.

In his compelling book *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In*, James Choung includes a timeless diagram that goes

deeper than other similar illustrations. (A Web search for "True Story Big Story" should bring up the visual for those interested.)

In one of the clearest mission statements in the New Testament besides the Great Commission—II Corinthians 5—Paul makes it clear that the desire of God's heart is to reconcile the entire world to Himself, and that He has a part for us to play in this redemptive work. Choung, through his illustration, invites the audience to become part of God's body and His kingdom, both temporally and eternally.

The illustration consists of four circles which represent different parts of God's plan of redemption. They represent creation, when the world was "Designed for Good;" the fall of man, when the world was "Damaged by Evil;" the way that our Savior provided, when the world and its inhabitants were "Reclaimed For Better;" and His servants fulfilling His plan for His kingdom on earth: "Sent Together to Heal." Though we always keep our hope of heaven in sight, God has many "good works that He has prepared in advance for us to do" while we are on earth (Ephesians 2:10).

As we endeavor to follow our Master together, I exhort you to abandon all fixation on numerical growth, fire insurance, and easier lives. Every single one of these pitfalls may result in false converts, disillusioned evangelists, and believers who will neither mature nor experience the divine, abundant adventure for which we were created.

Osthus is from Eagle Butte, S.D., and serves on the 2013 Free Lutheran Youth Committee.



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Evangelism is not salesmanship. It is not urging people, pressing them, coercing them, overwhelming them, or subduing them. Evangelism is telling a message. Evangelism is reporting good news.

—Richard C. Halverson

Every single preaching of the gospel must be related to strong content. We must not fall into the cheap solution of beginning to use these cool means of communication and cause people to seem to make professions of faith. If we fall into this type of manipulation, we have cut Christianity down to the ground because we are only adding to the lack of reasonable control. We are throwing ourselves wide open to future problems. Christianity must fight for its life to insist that it deals with content.

—Francis Schaeffer

If the Gospel cost God His Son, if it cost the Son His life, and if it holds the destiny of every soul on earth for heaven or hell, for time and eternity, then it cannot be a matter of ordinary significance. If it is what we claim for it—then it cannot be merely one of our interests like the club and the lodge and golf and antiques and ceramics and stamp collecting

—Vance Havner

The sum and substance of the gospel is Jesus Christ. Not only is Jesus Christ involved in the gospel. He is the gospel.

—Geoffrey J. Paxton



WHEN GOD GIVES OPPORTUNITY

BY JON NELSON



When I was in Peru climbing to Machu Picchu in November 2010 I met a man by the name of Yu Yang and had a conversation with him that I'll never forget. Yu, a Chinese man, was traveling alone. He was one of the most talkative travelers I ever came across.

He told me his life story, starting with his life in China, how he left his family and ended up in the United States.

The road he took was a sad one filled with mistakes that marred his path and continued to lead him into a lifestyle that was far from what God would want. He was talkative and outgoing, but not really happy. He had a sort of sadness that was

really quite curious.

Thinking back to my brief time with Yu, I'm ashamed of my actions. I listened and I talked with him, but I never went deep. In fact, I put up a wall. I chose not to talk about God; I was busy. I needed to get to the top of Wayna Picchu (the peak overlooking Machu Picchu), snap a couple pictures, and hike two other smaller

peaks in the area before I could call it a day. It was a goal I had, and I basically told God that He wasn't going to get in my way.

As Yu and I continued on our trek up the mountain I listened to stories from his childhood, stories about him walking away from his family, and his current life in America. After some time he looked directly at me and said, "I've been talking a

lot about me, what's your story?"

I brushed off the question in a way that was shallow and non-threatening. I talked more about my travels then about the mission I had in Brazil that year. I talked about the beauty of the countryside in Brazil but not the powerful, life-changing time that it was. I had my mind set elsewhere.

Looking back, I'm disappointed. My meaningless goals got in the way of a life-changing conversation. Why was it so important for me to throw this opportunity out the window? Why didn't I want to share the powerful story of Christ and what He had done and was continuing to do in my life?



The opportunity to share Christ and His love fell right into my lap. But I ran as fast and as far from it as possible. I remember more vividly the conversation I had with Yu than almost anything else that day. I remember points I could have interjected about Christ's love. I remember different areas where I could have praised God openly for His creation but I was just too busy, I just didn't want to get into it.

Everyone has regrets in their lives, I know that. Maybe it's a place where they opted to not share the love of Christ even though the opportunity presented itself perfectly. I'm still convicted of not sharing after

my pledge to serve the Lord in all that I do. It brings pain to my heart thinking about Yu and where he could be had I talked about Jesus Christ and the hope that He gives.

I'm reminded so much of Peter's denials of Christ in the Gospels. After Peter had denied Jesus he wept bitterly. My favorite part, however, is what the angel said after Jesus was resurrected from the dead, "Go tell his disciples and Peter" (Mark 16:7). Peter was singled out even after he denied Jesus three times. Later on, Jesus reinstated Peter to be the rock on which the Church would be built.

We all screw up. There will be times when we don't do

what we should, when we won't share when we need to share. Remember that God forgives. Build off those times. Remind yourself of the pain that came with denying an opportunity and use that pain as a reminder to reach the lost as Jesus taught.

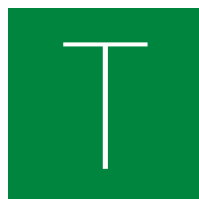
When I think back to Yu, I find myself praying for him. I pray that someone else didn't get in God's way to tell Yu about a life-changing God who cares for and loves him. I pray that the Lord would continue to remind me of the importance of sharing His love with everyone.

Not everyone knows of the life-changing power of Jesus Christ, but we do! God is calling each of us to be a part of His

work. Whether we choose to participate or not, God is working. I can choose to be obedient to God's call or I can pass it off and let the next person be blessed.

My heart's desire is to choose wisely and be ready when He places me in situations like the one I had with Yu. The task at hand is to overcome obstacles I put in my own way and make God's desires mine. I pray that you would also take up this task. Let's join together and be used by God to change people's lives, one person at a time.

Nelson is a minister of equipping and youth at Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont.



Tioga, N.D., is a town where you get to know everybody and their dogs. It's where I spent the first 18 years of my life. My friends and I spent time playing

baseball and the newest video games—mowing lawns to pay for them—exploring the creek by the railroad tracks, and even sticking the younger neighbor kids in trash cans and rolling them down “Dead Man’s Hill.”

Even though our town had no real attractions to speak of other than a peaceful life, it was home and it was a place that had stability.

That all changed sometime around my senior year when we found out that the oil activity in our area would cause our town and the towns around us to expand by a large amount. Our small town of about 1,100 people would grow to about 1,500, maybe even more.

Fast forward a bit to the spring of 2010. I attended and graduated from AFLBS the previous spring and was just finishing up a one-year program at the Ministry Training Institute. Soon after, I received and accepted a call to come back to my home town as a youth director/pastoral assistant. Since then, I have joined our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ in trying to reach our new neighbors with the love of Christ. At the same time, we've sought to nurture the congregations that God has entrusted us with. The task is great and the laborers are few, but the Lord has placed us here for a reason, and I don't think He makes mistakes.

So what does our town look like now? The only word that pops into my head is “different.” We have expanded far beyond the growth estimates. No one really knows how many people

are living in our town and the towns surrounding us, but it sure is more than anyone predicted. Most of the newcomers are here temporarily, so we can't measure their numbers effectively. Some guesses have the population at 2,000 but some say 4,000 with a thousand or so others using Tioga as a support base.

So how does a town handle all these people when its infrastructure was made to handle a population of 1,100-1,700? The answer has been a combination of temporary and permanent camper parks and sparse (but increasing) new permanent developments like hotels, apartment buildings, full houses, and the ever-controversial “man camps.” Those range from glorified military barracks to nice hotel accommodations. But even so, the housing market has doubled and tripled in some cases. It is very common to see an apartment that used to be rented out for \$400 a month now cost from \$1,000-2,500 per month. (It was almost a year and a half until God provided a place where I can afford to live.) Much of the population is made up of men without families, but we are seeing some new families in town.

As you can imagine, this story is much bigger than Tioga. You can basically cut and paste

Tioga's situation over onto Stanley, Ray, Williston, Minot and the other surrounding towns. We all are experiencing a large increase in population, pollution, crime, and an assortment of financial strains. The oil field jobs pay amazing wages, but the support jobs such as police officers, city workers, nurses, teachers, etc., have not increased to match the local inflation. Financial burdens have risen for the people who were just getting by before. The result is that we are experiencing great prosperity and intense poverty. Churches in our area are receiving calls daily from people needing help.

The response from the communities to this oil boom ranges from anger toward the newcomers to a joyful reception. This has affected us in many different ways. I have seen neighbors turn into a different group of people. Greed is everywhere. Children have seen their parents turn into workaholics who just can't get enough money. They have seen them turn into people who will overcharge a man who needs a place to stay. They have seen money become an idol.

However—and this is a big—there are still many faithful residents who are trying to do the right thing, even when it costs them everything. I am so grateful for not having to worry about how our youth can pay for the FLY Convention or our other youth outings. People have money to give, and many of them are just looking for opportunities to give. Praise God for the financial wealth He has entrusted to us!

How are we responding to this mission field? By doing the same thing we have been doing, and then some. It is easy to forget about nurturing our own when there are so many

lost souls in our community, but we must not let that happen. At the same time, the task of reaching new people is incredibly daunting to the point of despair. Many of the new residents work from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. seven days or even two weeks in a row. With those kind of hours, a church service is not how we are going to reach them. Some of us have been offering men's Bible studies with some success. Our pastor in Stanley has had success distributing some *Daily Bread* devotionals at the man camps. Some congregations have depended on radio ministry. Our youth group distributed cookies with a list of our local churches' service times to the trailer/camper parks around town.

All of our work is just scratching the surface of what could be done. I don't believe that we need a set program, rather, we need men of God to work on job sites while treating them as mission fields. We need our own men to be the “outreach meeting” at work. There is more work that we can do as a corporate body of churches here, but ultimately it comes down to our men standing up for their faith in Christ and sharing it with their fellow workers.

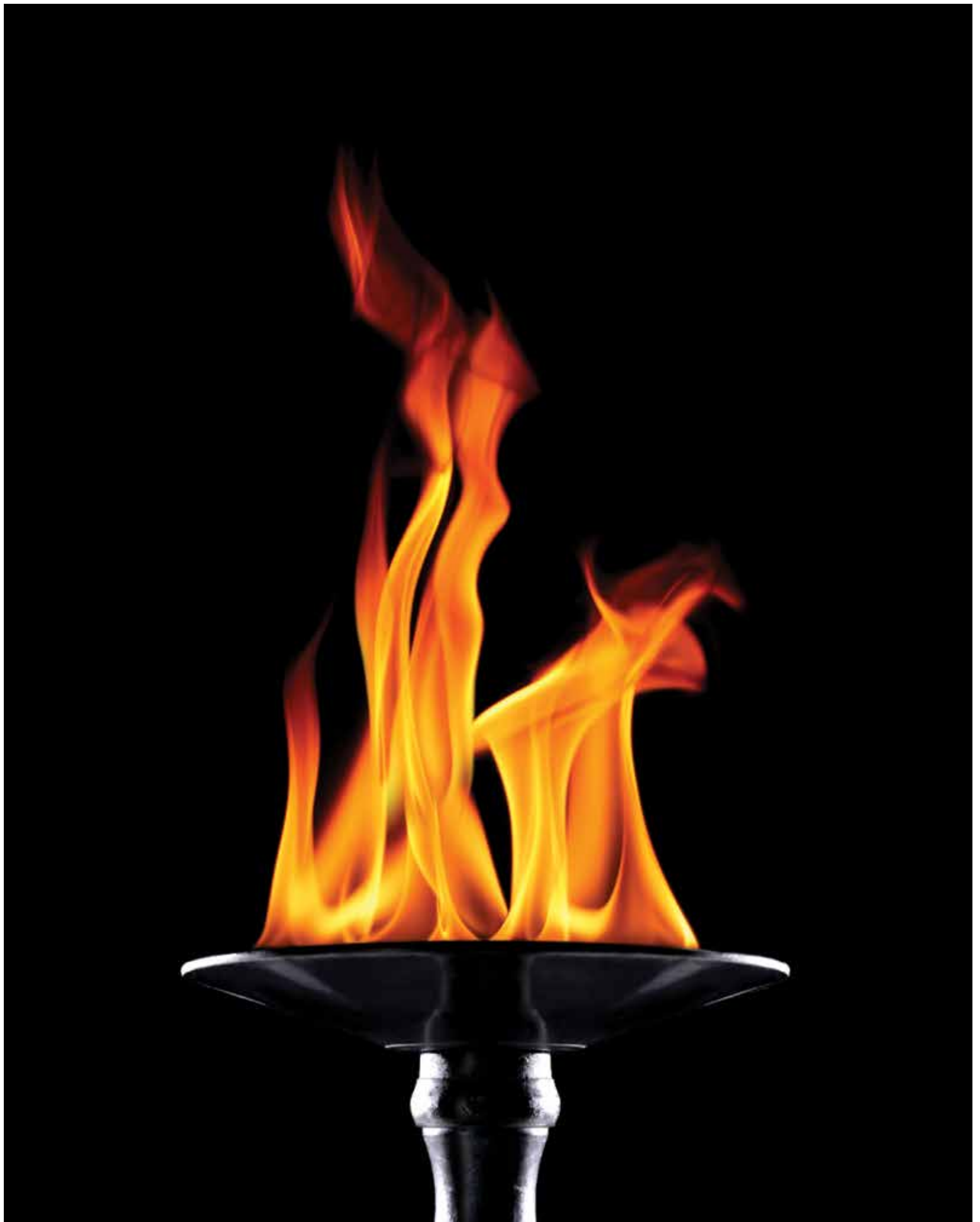
Pray that our church leaders would be effective in equipping the saints to do the ministry God has called them to in their own mission field. Pray that the Holy Spirit will convince the lost of the truth. Pray for workers to be sent out into the harvest. Praise God for the work He is doing in our midst.

Rieniets is a youth director and pastoral assistant at Zion Lutheran, Tioga, N.D.



THE WILD WILD MIDWEST

BY MATT RIENIETS



TENDING THE FLAME

BY PASTOR JAMES L. JOHNSON

I was a fourth grade Sunday school student at Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn., when I first met Gene and Doris Quist.

Gene was an executive at a prominent utilities company in Minnesota, my father told me. Doris was the bold and fascinating large-group teacher of our Sunday school group—leading 50 to 70 fourth to sixth graders, as I recall. Gene was a long-time member of our church, but a recent convert to Christ.

He would later resign from his high-paying position at Minnegasco to take a position at Campus Crusade for Christ. Years later Gene also served on the AFLC Commission on Evangelism and encouraged me often when I was dean of the Association Free Lutheran Bible School.

But it was Doris who captured my attention each week when I was a kid. At the start of the Sunday school hour, she told stories of her witnessing experiences. “I’m praying for you,” she would tell friends and acquaintances to their faces. “You need to be saved.”

“How can she say that?” I thought to myself. But week after week, I would listen and wonder. Those edgy, poignant and sharp conversations made me think for days on end.

Many of those people started coming to our church. Their testimonies were convincing. I studied them and stared.

They were real, live people, impossible to ignore, joyful and confident. They were friends of the Quists and now friends of Jesus. They told their stories of forgiveness and freedom, and I loved hearing them.

I was not yet a devoted follower of Jesus, so I didn’t want to get too close in those days. I often veered from personal contact with both the Quists and their new friends. But I couldn’t help but listen—Doris’ stories of salvation astounded me and Gene’s personal energy and warmth were hard to ignore. Gene would often quote from his training at Campus Crusade: “Witnessing,” he said, “is taking the initiative to share Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God.”

I liked the definition, but I doubted that I would ever be a witness—even if the results were up to God. I was shy and a non-disciple. And scared to surrender to Christ.

I became a true follower of Jesus when I was in high school. Many of the young students the Quists encouraged and disciplined were the ones who became influential in my own conversion. They were happy and honest and effective Christians and part of a 40-member youth choir that Doris helped organize. I wanted to be like them.

Gene and Doris are aging now. I see them at Emmaus when I visit there—I saw them at my parents’ funerals and remembered that fourth grader they helped inspire. Many times when I’m witnessing to a dad at a baseball practice, or counseling in a coffee shop with a young father who wants to repair his marriage, or praying with a high school student to embrace Christ as Lord, I think of Gene and Doris. When I read the verse in Jeremiah 23:29—“Isn’t my word like fire or like a hammer that shatters a rock?”—I feel like Gene and Doris are quoting it to me sometimes.

Austrian composer Gustav Mahler once said, “Tradition is tending the flame, it’s not worshiping the ashes.” I agree. Promoting evangelism isn’t worshiping the ashes of the great evangelists of the past. It’s doing what they did. It’s sharing Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, leaving the results with God. Georg Sverdrup would say the same, I think. I’ll mostly leave evangelism history to the historians. I want to be a tender of the flame. They make disciples. Like Gene and Doris did.

When I get the privilege to pray with a senior woman on a hospital visit, or help a college student respond to God’s call to missions, or sit with a man in his 40s at the Camarillo Starbucks to receive the Lord Jesus as Savior, and when I see the tears coming down his face, I think to myself, “I wish Gene and Doris could see this.” They would praise God.

My guess is that you know couples like Gene and Doris Quist. They live and serve in northern Illinois. They teach classes in Iowa, and they make disciples in western Washington. They share the gospel in Camarillo and say, “You need Christ.” They lead Beth Moore and “The Way of the Master” Bible studies. They sometimes use “Sharing Jesus Without Fear,” a curriculum that Gene liked. Some teach at our seminary and pray for souls.

Some are executives. Some are IT net workers. Some are auto mechanics or home school moms. Some are as articulate, bold and edgy as Doris used to be, back in my boyhood. Some do it more quietly and gently. But either way is fine with me. They all come from God. They are sent out by the Lord of the Harvest.

And some are fourth grade students who want to tend the flame.

Johnson serves Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Camarillo, Calif.

BY PASTOR DEL PALMER

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time (1 Timothy 2:1-6).

God gives us great opportunities for fruitful work in His Kingdom. AMICAN, a ministry to reach troubled teens in Brazil, was a prime example.

AMICAN was a teen farm in Campo Mourão. It helped young people see the reality of Christ and taught them to live productive lives. The teens were trained in farming, beauty school, barber school, computer technology, restaurant work or baking. The program was government sponsored, but they allowed our churches to be the administrators. The churches served at the pleasure of the currently elected officials.

Teens in trouble with the law were often given a choice by a judge to go AMICAN or go to jail. Most thinking teens chose AMICAN. When people are stuck in the mire of their sins, they look for a rope to pull them out. Faith in Jesus and the mercy of God is exactly what they need. Many souls were

saved and given eternal life at AMICAN. When Jesus enters a life He doesn't leave it as it was. He begins the work of changing it from the inside.

There are many personal examples of changed lives at AMICAN. Silvio, a local businessman, remarked that 20 percent of his current employees are former AMICAN students. These are examples of lives that were heading the wrong way, but were rescued by Jesus. They were rescued as individuals shared Jesus and worked with these troubled young people. A number of the teens from AMICAN ended up going to our Bible school in Brazil. They were able to face life with the wisdom that comes from studying God's Word. Some even went into full-time ministry.

Greyce, from AMICAN, went to Bible school, where she met Fabio. Fabio was in the Bible school because he sensed God's call to be a pastor. Fabio

and Greyce fell in love and were married. Today Fabio pastors one of the churches in Campo Mourão and they are joyfully expecting their first child. Greyce has come a long way from being a troubled teen.

God instructs us to pray for those in authority, so that the gospel will advance. Glorious things happen when society allows the people of God to work with the people of this world.

A few years ago there was a change in the elected officials overseeing AMICAN. The new officials turned the administration of AMICAN over to people who helped them get elected. The troubled teen farm existed for a while under the new administration, but after a short period of time it disbanded and now stands deserted.

Soria, AMICAN's former administrator, and Silvio, the business manager, recently stopped by the deserted site. What they saw was enough to

bring tears to anyone's eyes. The farm was overgrown, the buildings had deteriorated, and every room and piece of equipment had been vandalized.

Soria said, "It would be better to tear it all down than have this stand here as a reminder of what has happened."

Silvio replied, "This place will again serve those in trouble with the law. They are going to build a big wall around it and construct a prison here. It will then be home to 600 to 800 men."

We wonder how many of those would have been helped if they were reached for Christ by AMICAN, or a ministry like it.

Yes, we're instructed to pray for those in authority so that the gospel will advance. Wonderful things can happen when the people of God enter the doors that He opens.

Palmer is director of AFLC World Missions.



PASTOR FABIO AND GREYCE

PRAYER

for those in

AUTHORITY

THE STORY OF AMICAN

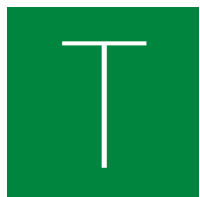


THE RED THREAD

an evangelism workshop for your congregation

BY PASTOR RON PULSCHER





he Red Thread—what a special name for an evangelism gathering. “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin” (Hebrews 9:22). When so many are trying to do away with “the bloody religion” and whitewashed doctrines, it is refreshing to know that we emphasize the blood of Christ for salvation through the Red Thread conferences.

Besides my wife, Doris, and I, three couples attended a recent Red Thread conference from the Pukwana Lutheran (Pukwana, S.D.) and St. Olaf Lutheran (Chamberlain, S.D.) parish. The conference was both inspirational and challenging for those of us who attended from our churches. It was a time to share, not only amongst ourselves, but also with others.

The devotional times and general sessions were uplifting to all who attended. The meals were awesome and the fellowship around the table sweet. It was so much fun to share with people from other churches and hear their thoughts, as well as to share our own thoughts with them.

In general terms, the Red Thread conference solidified several things for us. One of the thoughts that stands out to me is that lifestyle evangelism should be the norm for the children of God. It should be as natural for us to talk about salvation as breathing.

Another truth highlighted during the retreat is that the Holy Spirit is our power source for evangelism. It is He who guides us and brings our paths to cross with those in need. Our task is to follow His leading. For instance, consider Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. “The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it.’ ... The eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?’

Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus” (8:29, 34-35).

Understanding that “a little child will lead them” (Isaiah 11:6) we have put ourselves to the task of reaching boys and girls for Christ through Sunday school, vacation Bible school, and confirmation classes. Even if we only have one contact with a child, we believe God can use that contact in miraculous ways. We have renewed our stand that it is through biblical preaching (the law and gospel) that people will be saved. Lifestyle evangelism, then, is one tool we can use to take our faith into the community in which we live.

If evangelism is to be intentional, then the Church must have swinging doors. In other words, the majority of our ministry will be outside the church walls. We are not to be an exclusive club, but a soup kitchen set up to meet the needs of people where they are.

More specifically, the Red Thread conference helped us in several ways. First, by sharing with those on the Commission on Evangelism and people from several AFLC churches, we gained, if not a new vision, a clearer vision and purpose for why we exist as a congregation. You ask what that may be. In a nutshell: We are to be salt and light in our corner of the world.

Second, the Red Thread conference introduced us again to several tools for evangelism. Resources like the Easter Cube,

the Plan of Salvation Cube and tracts help us to feel more at ease about sharing the gospel with others. We thank the Lord for how these remind us to share our faith.

Third, the conference gave us access to interacting with others of like faith. Our general sessions were encouraging and challenging, allowing us to not only hear what others had to share, but to put into words our thought and ideas. The exchange of thoughts and ideas with others gave us a new perspective. Because of the exchange of ideas, the things we heard became things we adapted in our local congregations.

One question that remains is whether or not there has been a lingering mind set from the Red Thread conference. The answer is yes, in several ways.

First, it has given us permission—in knowing that others are doing the same thing—to move forward in evangelism.

Second, we have continued, as we make plans for the future, to think in terms of whether or not what we do will affect lives for Jesus.

Third, we’ve asked some pertinent questions concerning the thing we do. Can we/will we share the gospel intentionally or on purpose in this setting?

Last, we never need to be “ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes ...” (Romans 1:16).

We encourage everyone to attend a Red Thread conference. You will be blessed and more fully equipped for the task of evangelism.

Pulscher serves Pukwana Lutheran, Pukwana, S.D., and St. Olaf Lutheran, Chamberlain, S.D. For more information on the Red Thread retreats, contact AFLC Evangelism.

ALWAYS AN EXAMPLE

BY DAVID OLSON



ave you ever watched a family that made you stop and wish for a moment that you were a part of it? Maybe while watching a boy stick up for his brother, or a man come home and scoop up his kids in the driveway, or perhaps while parents are piling their kids into the mini-van for the thousandth round of school and sports practices with smiles on their faces despite the busy monotony.

Perhaps you've watched a family in tragedy and seen them come together and comfort one another.

Maybe you've seen more of the other, darker, side that made you cringe—a mother screaming at her children or siblings who can't stand the sight of each other. In those moments we breathe a sigh of relief that we are not in that family. So when an observer looks inside our Christian family, what do they see? Do they wish they were inside, or are they sighing relief that they are not?

Paul, in his letter to Titus,

sends a request for Titus to instruct believers toward sensible, dignified and right behavior. He ends with this reasoning in 2:10, "So they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect." Paul explained that the fruit of believers' lives made the teaching of Christ, the gospel, look attractive. Jesus instructed His disciples on what they should look like to outsiders: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

But what happens when we disagree? It happens. How can

we disagree well? How shall we "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior" when conflict arises?

The time is short here. I will not pretend to have unraveled the secret to maintaining harmonious union with people in 800 words. But I hope to offer some direction for us to contemplate.

Fighting by not fighting

There are things worth fighting over and there are things that are not. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for suing each other in open court. "Actually, then, it is already a

defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?" (I Corinthians 6:7). For Christians, there are times when by fighting to win, we have lost already. Fighting over property, money, for example, exposes our true master—possessions—not Christ. Sometimes it is better to be defrauded and remember Christ is our portion. Let love cover a multitude of offenses even when it costs us.

Holding ground

Some things are worth dy-



ing over. Just ask the Apostles. As far as we know, John is the only one who died of natural causes. Tradition and historical records point to the martyrdom of the rest of the apostles. So what is worth dying over? Truth. Evangelical culture has actually been pretty good at this. Conservative denominations will fight tooth and nail over moral issues: abortion, sexual issues, prayer. The list goes on. But there are things too few of us seem willing to die for—the gospel and sound teaching. Here, Paul, the very man who told the Corinthians

that it would be better to be defrauded than to sue one another, takes a very different side: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6). And in exhortation to his young protégé, Timothy, he writes, “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (I Timothy 4:16). Most things we are upset about are not worth crying over. But if

our disagreement crosses these lines, we must hold our ground.

Fighting well

Assume for a moment that we have weighed our disagreement and are compelled to continue. How shall we proceed? Paul speaks that we must pursue all things in love. Without love we may possess all knowledge and wisdom and yet be nothing more than an annoying noise. We must avoid seeing those with whom we disagree as an enemy. Our goal, instead of winning, should be to persuade and edify—never to crush and

humiliate. Being right is not the end goal and winning an argument is no cause for celebration.

The love we have for one another, even when we disagree, is a bridge for evangelism. “Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness” (James 3:18).

Olson, Sioux Falls, S.D., is the first vice president of Free Lutheran Youth.

Obedience and trust

BY OLIVE IVESDAL

*"O magnify the LORD
with me, and let us exalt
his name together"
(Psalm 34:3).*

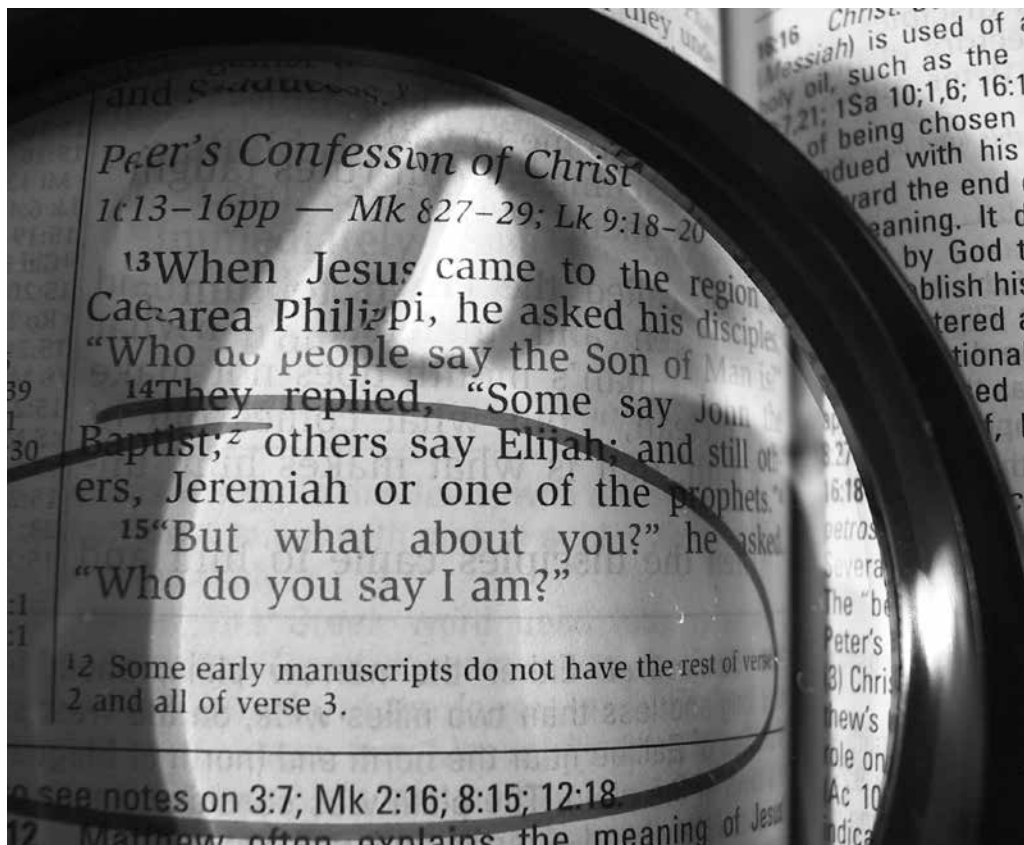
When asked to give this meditation, it was with a humble spirit that I decided to write, knowing that only as the Lord laid something on my heart would I have anything to share with you.

Oh, how I feel for God's children these days, in trials, temptations, sufferings, and persecution. It seems to be a time of much heartache, but, thanks be to God, we are able to rise above the streams of difficulties knowing that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Timothy 3:12).

And the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be ours in that great and notable day of our Lord's appearing for His own children. "They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed" (Psalm 34:5).

What a tremendous heritage is ours to share with each of our own households, through the different church organizations, and with the whole world. How we need to guide and direct the lives of our young people the Lord has entrusted to our care, teaching them the Scriptures that they may rest on the truth of God's Word in these days of much error. For we know that it is the power of the gospel that brings salvation, not the wisdom of men through eloquent words. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

"An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength" (Psalm 33:17). In these days of science, so called, let us remember to teach the children that "God said and it was so." How complicated are man's theories and how low. When our heavenly Father has accomplished everything to bring men up



to His own level, why should we settle for anything less and go lost besides? May we be in much prayer these days and take time in secret with our Lord and Savior. I am reminded of a verse from a hymn, "Take time to be holy, the world rushes on." And how much business and hurrying there is in this present world. We need to be careful that we are not caught up with the cares of the day. It is not easy, for it requires discipline.

May the Lord grant each one of us grace to be obedient and to trust Him for all things. "The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles" (Psalm 34:17).

"O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who has set thy glory above the heavens" (Psalm 8:1).

Ivesdal, who died in January, lived in Edmore, N.D. This article was originally printed in the July 30, 1963 issue of The Lutheran Ambassador.



JUNE 19 WATERS IN THE WILDERNESS

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God”
(Ephesians 2:8).

Grace is everything for nothing. It is helping the helpless, going to those who cannot come in their own strength. God owes me nothing; but He offers me salvation. That is grace. Man could do nothing whatever to plan his own salvation. It was planned by God before the foundation of the world. The world, the devil and the flesh separated me from God; but by His mercy, love and grace He saved me.

No works of man could put him in right standing with God, for then would he have whereof to boast. But God has justified us by His grace in order that not any one should glory. From the start to the finish salvation is a free gift from God. Faith is the instrument by which we receive the gift; but even faith is a gift which

comes to many by the hearing of God's Word. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17).

God's plan of salvation for the soul of man is finished, and redemption is free. This is yours to believe. Take the promises of God into your heart as real. Then you will be made alive, and God will save you for eternity. Man seems to be so constituted that he wants to contribute at least a little bit toward his salvation. But he comes too late; Christ has already done everything for us. Grace alone counts.

Rev. Harry C. Molstre served AFLC parishes in Winger and Dalton, Minn., and Valley City, N.D. He also served as secretary of the AFLC and on the Coordinating Committee.

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.

Remembering our first leaders

BY PASTOR GENE SUNDBY



TOP: Pastor John Strand (left), Pastor Richard Snipstead (seated) and Pastor Trygve Dahle (far right) were instrumental leaders in the formation of the AFLC.

ABOVE: Pastor John Strand (right) at the ordination of Pastor Ken Moland (kneeling).

When God has something to do, He has someone picked to do it. We don't know how many people He calls before He gets a willing heart. However, I believe God knows the heart before the call is made. The one He wants will make him or herself available.

But what kind of man would He call to motivate a group of people to commit themselves to an organizational meeting? Would it be someone with very little to do? No, it was a man who served seven congregations. Yet he used his time on the road to write letters and use every means possible to contact people he knew who were interested in such a meeting. He knew they needed encouragement to stand up, actively participate, and commit to attending the organizational conference of the AFLC. His contacts then encouraged others. Thus, momentum grew for a founding conference in October 1962. It is well for us to remember that it was Pastor Richard Snipstead who was the catalyst for the conference.

October 1962 arrived and great things were about to happen in Thief River Falls, Minn., as the numbers assembled soon outgrew the original meeting place. When God is in it, the cup overflows. Those gathered adopted the name "Lutheran Free Church—Unmerged." Consequently, *The Fundamental Principles and Rules for Work*, formulated in 1897 by founders of the Lutheran Free Church, remained unchanged. They could be considered constitutional documents for the AFLC. Though an American Lutheran Church court action later forbid the use of our original name (Lutheran Free Church), it did not forbid the use of the founding documents, nor any important subsequent documents.

Then came the daunting task of finding people to fill the many positions on various boards and committees. But what consumed our prayers and attention for some time was who would lead us in this trying and difficult time. Understandably, there was no one who stood out or who offered to take on the task. We did the only sensible thing. We prayed. And we talked and suggested various candidates. But nothing seemed to jell until they talked to another man who was also serving seven congregations. Consensus mounted that this was God's choice, but could he be persuaded to let his name stand? Finally, prayerfully, he consented to let his name stand for president until the first annual conference to be held in June 1963.

Pastor John Strand was elected and later re-elected, continuing to serve as president for 16 years. God knew before the beginning that he was the man.

The formative years of the AFLC were not easy for those in leadership. It is probably true that a thorn in the flesh is what we all need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who alone is the author and finisher of our faith.

Pastor Strand was truly God's man, and we owe God our heartfelt thanks for him and his faithful wife, Mildred, for their years of service.

Sundby, Outlook, Saskatchewan, Canada, is the past president of the AFLC-Canada. He is a member of Bethlehem Lutheran, Hawarden, Saskatchewan.



Treasure in jars of clay

BY PASTOR JONATHAN ABEL

One recent morning I woke up and prayed for what seemed like everybody and their brother, as well as all the challenges of the ministries with which I am involved. At the end of this time of prayer, a song by Frances R. Havergal (1836-1879) popped into my mind and lingered all morning. Consider the words of “Take My Life and Let It Be” (*Ambassador Hymnal*, no. 453):

Take my life and let it be Consecrated, Lord to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,—Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move With the impulse of Thy love:
Take my feet and let them be Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice and let me sing Always, only for my King;
Take my lips, and let them be Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold, —Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect, and use Ev’ry pow’r as Thou dost choose.

Take my will and make it Thine; It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart, it is Thine own; It shall be Thy royal throne. ...

Furlough is not only a time to share about and encourage others with the joy of being involved in Christ’s Great Commission, it also is a time for missionaries to review, renew, and reflect on the great task God has given us. As I do this I think of many things.

One thought I reflect on is how frail I am. In II Corinthians 4:7, Paul states, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” I have been reminded of my need for God when I get tired on the road as

we travel, along with the health challenges I have had this year. We truly depend on the Lord. The Bible says, “... apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). How true.

Another thought I reflect on is how blessed I am. During our travels here in America we have been so impressed with the love we received from you in our churches. Now when I read Paul’s words, “I thank God every time I remember you,” in many of his letters, I can relate to that phrase. We greatly appreciate learning of your prayers on our behalf. You have upheld us with your financial support, which helps us in the effort of fulfilling the Great Commission. You have blessed me when I was sick. You have made me feel at home and loved. You have encouraged me in the ministry. For all this I am so blessed.

Finally, I realize that I as we go back to the field, I am encouraged. This may seem crazy when considering all the challenging circumstances we will face as we return to Brazil—like finding a house to live in and a place for the church in Maringá to meet. We also have a lot of paperwork to tackle and board meetings with big decisions that will be coming our way in the middle of this year. It is tempting to be discouraged. Yet, as I look ahead, I am encouraged and excited to see all that God is going to do.

Thank you to those who pray, support and encourage us, individually, and collectively through your local congregation, and through the AFLC. May God bless us as we take our hearts, hands, feet, wealth and lives and give them all to Him for His glory, for our good, and for the opportunity to bless others.

Abel, an AFLC missionary, serves in Brazil. His family will return to Brazil this summer after spending some time on furlough.

District spring rally held for metro WMF

The Twin Cities metro area district spring WMF rally was held April 21 at King of Glory Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn., with approximately 60 women in attendance. The theme verse for the event was Jeremiah 29:11 and the theme song was "The Solid Rock."

Pastor Todd and Barb Schierkolk, AFLC missionaries, shared about their ministry in Mexico. Both gave testimonies of God's care for their family and those with whom they minister.

New officers elected include Charlotte Fruehauf, president (Faith Lutheran, Minneapolis); Sue Walz, vice president (The Gathering, Hastings, Minn.); and Jan Tollefson, mission secretary (Living Word, Eagan, Minn.).

TOP: Members of the King of Glory Lutheran praise team led worship during the spring rally. RIGHT: Pastor Todd (left) and Barb (right) Schierkolk shared about their ministry work as AFLC missionaries in Mexico.



Presteng served as president of Women's Missionary Federation

Dorothy Presteng, 94, of Grafton, N.D., former WMF president and longtime AFLC member, died April 21.

Born Jan. 29, 1918, she was the daughter of Henry and Julia Holt of rural Grafton. She married Herbert Presteng, her high school sweetheart, in June 1937. He preceded her in death.

She graduated from Grafton High School. After marriage, they lived on their farm west of Grafton. She was a charter member of Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, where she taught Sunday school and was the Sunday school superintendent for many years. She served as president both of her district WMF and also the national WMF. She was an active member of her community, serving as president of the Homemaker's Club, Hospital Auxiliary, and Parent Teacher Association. She moved to Lutheran Sunset Home five years ago.

Surviving are two sons, Allan (Debbie) Presteng, Grafton, and John (Anne) Presteng, Grafton; three daughters, Carol (Don) Fossum, Puyallup, Wash., Jean (Terry) Olson, Grafton, and Lois (Lyle) Forde, Arlington, Wash.; two sisters, Harriet (Murphy) Callahan, Grafton, and Marilyn Withy, Naples, Fla.; 18 grandchildren and 29 great-grandchildren.

The service was April 29 at Bethel Free Lutheran, with Pastor Richard Gunderson officiating. Internment was in Grafton Lutheran Cemetery.

Lay Pastor Dale Radke was voice of dial-a-prayer line for 40 years

Radke served Milwaukee congregation

Lay Pastor Dale Radke, 78, of Milwaukee, Wis., died April 18, at Froedtert Hospital, Milwaukee, of injuries sustained in a March 16 automobile accident not far from his home.

He was born July 9, 1933, in Sheboygan, Wis. He moved at age 14 to Milwaukee, where he graduated from Concordia Lutheran High School and attended what is now Concordia University. He married Diane Simon in 1958. They lived near Dineen Park, Wis. He managed Badger Paint stores and later served as executive director of the Greater Milwaukee Federation of Lutheran Churches-Missouri Synod. He took over the dial-a-prayer line in the early 1970s, rising each morning for 40 years to record a daily devotional for anyone who dialed 463-5683 (GOD-LOVE). He served as lay pastor of Servant of the Savior Free Lutheran, Milwaukee, joining ministry full-time at the age of 60. He served on the city's safety commission and volunteered with the Capitol West neighborhood association, schools and nursing homes, often as his alter ego, Rollo the clown. He also served as chaplain of the Milwaukee Fire Department and County sheriff's office.

Surviving are his wife; one son, Jay (Heidi) Radke; one daughter, Dr. Laura (Paul Nowakowski) Radke; one brother, Earl (Erica) Radke; and two grandchildren.

The service was held April 24 in the Chapel of the Chimes at Wisconsin Memorial Park, Brookfield, Wis. Burial was in the chapel cemetery.



Your mission, should you accept

BY JORDAN LANGNESS

When I was younger, I really enjoyed watching some of the older TV shows in my spare time. These shows ranged from “The Andy Griffith Show” to “Mission: Impossible”—hence the article title. Besides being a classic reference to the beginning of the “Mission: Impossible” series, the title also alludes to the calling that is placed on the life of every believer.

As we read in the last verses of both Matthew and Mark, Jesus gives a clear directive for all Christ-followers to be active in the work of evangelism. In a very real sense, He says to each one of us that our mission on this earth is to preach the gospel and make disciples. It is a personal commissioning for each one of us. I know that this information is nothing revolutionary or new, and to be honest we have probably heard it multiple times in our lives by now. However, I would like to spend a few moments pondering how we should go about accomplishing this mission of ours.

Consider with me the following passage of Scripture: “Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness” (Romans 12:6-8).

This passage is an excerpt from a larger portion of Scripture about being a part of the body of Christ. We learn that we, as a part of Christ’s body, are individually gifted to accomplish our

evangelistic mission in a unique way. We see from this passage that these gifts include prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, and mercy. Noticeably absent from this list is the specific mention of evangelism. So, how is this applicable to evangelism? Consider this: if God has given us each a specific gift that is uniquely ours and His final exhortation to us to go and make disciples still stands, then it would make sense that the gift He has given each of us is to be used in accomplishing that purpose.

When we approach our lives with this knowledge, the question changes from, “How can I tell people about Jesus?” to, “How can I use my gifts to reach out to others with the gospel of Christ?” As an example, this summer I will be putting on a few tennis camps that will have a daily gospel presentation after practice. I hope to use my knowledge of tennis to open the door to share Jesus with students whom I otherwise might never meet.

So, what about you? How can you use your gifts and skills in what you are currently doing or could be doing as a platform to reach out and share Jesus with others? Luke 6:45 tells us that our mouths speak from the overflow of our hearts. What I am suggesting is to reach out by simply sharing about Who you love while you do what you love. After all, Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples is meant for all believers—including you. This is your mission, should you choose to accept.

Langness, a member of the AFLC Youth Board, is the youth director at Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah, N.D.

AFLC memorials: April

AFLBS

Ruth Claus
Jonathan Rinden
Marian Ness (2)
Randy Strand

Home Missions

Kenny Lee

Vision

Dorothy Presteng

AFLTS

Richard Relph
Richard Fink

World Missions

Gordon Olson
Alpha Johnson

ARC hosts summer camps

A look at upcoming AFLC retreats and camps at the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis.

• Fire Up Youth Camp

Ages: Grades 4-7
Dates: June 24-29
Cost: \$190*
Theme: Follow Me
Speaker: Pastor Eric Westlake, Our Savior's Free Lutheran, Zumbrota, Minn.

• Kid's Camp

Ages: Grades 1-3
Dates: June 29-July 1
Cost: \$75*

• Family Camp

Dates: July 29-August 4
Cost: Family rates apply
Speaker: Pastor Todd Erickson, Maple Grove, Minn.
Youth leader: Pastor Joe Faldet, St. James, Minn.
Vacation Bible school will be available for those 3 years old through sixth grade.

*Must be postmarked by June 14. Add another \$20 if mailing registrations after June 14.

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

Lutherans For Life conference

The 2012 Lutherans For Life National Convention will be held August 3-4 at the Westin Chicago Northwest. The theme will be "Equipping the Saints for Life." Online registration may be done at www.lutheransforlife.org.

Conference information online

Information and registration forms for the AFLC's 50th Annual Conference are now available online (www.aflc.org). The conference will be held June 12-15 at Lincoln High School, 101 Knight Ave. S., Thief River Falls, Minn., and hosted by Our Saviour's Lutheran in Thief River Falls.

People and Places

Pastor Todd Erickson has accepted a call to serve the rural Roseau, Minn., parish of Rose Lutheran and Spruce Lutheran. Erickson has resigned from his position as president of Heritage Christian Academy, Maple Grove, Minn. Erickson and his family will move to Roseau at the end of the school year.

Pastor Marc Rakow has accepted a call to serve Grace Free Lutheran, Valley City, N.D., as discipleship pastor, serving alongside Pastor Steve Mundfrom. Rakow has resigned from United Lutheran, Laurel, Neb.

Pastor David Peterson, who serves the Landisburg-Loysville parish (Tressler Memorial and Mt. Zion), Pennsylvania, was accepted on the AFLC clergy roster during the April meeting of the Coordinating Committee. Members of the committee also appointed him as East Coast AFLC representative contact, a new part-time position.

Correction: The site for the WMF Day was listed incorrectly in the May issue. The convention will be held in Thief River Falls, Minn. We regret the error.

Pastor Jason Siemens has resigned as pastor of St. Matthew's, Edmonton, Alberta, where he served for the past eight years. He and his family will continue to live in Edmonton for the present, and he is available for pulpit supply.

Members of the Coordinating Committee removed **St. James Lutheran**, Garden City, Kan., from the congregational roster at their own request.

Dr. Francis Monseth, dean of the AFLC Seminary, served on a panel during the Pietism Colloquium at Bethel Seminary, Arden Hills, Minn., on April 20. The topic for the roundtable discussion was "Pietism, Churches, and a Usable Past."

Members of **Maranatha Free Lutheran**, Glyndon and Ulen, Minn., will celebrate the congregation's 25th anniversary on Sunday, July 8. A worship service will be at 10 a.m., followed by lunch. A special program will be given at 1 p.m., followed by cake and coffee.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-April 30, 2012

FUND	REC'D IN APRIL	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$23,074	\$92,160	\$96,893
Evangelism	9,853	50,543	36,683
Youth Ministries	7,273	29,838	52,698
Parish Education	7,719	31,988	40,102
Seminary	23,047	81,505	78,026
Bible School	62,688	140,554	152,379
Home Missions	35,135	176,134	139,787
World Missions	24,259	124,745	165,065
Personal Support	40,239	173,542	131,624
TOTALS	\$233,287	\$901,009	\$893,257
Contact the individual departments for further information about specific financial needs.			

Evangelism's three prefixes

What is evangelism? Many would simply and unfortunately limit the answer to making a decision for Christ, period. Yet it is vital that we see evangelism as a much, much larger venture than this, and the following three aspects of evangelism are neglected to the peril of the Church's total mission.

Pre-evangelism

This might be defined as preparing a path for evangelism. At times it may involve answering the honest questions that unbelievers have concerning the faith. The field of apologetics (the defense and proofs of Christianity) may be a special tool for this task, and materials such as *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell or *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel are helpful resources. Some believers have a special ability for this type of ministry.



Pastor Robert Lee

But pre-evangelism is more than apologetics. It includes prayer, a consistent Christian walk, establishing friendships with neighbors and fellow employees, planting seeds of witness, etc., that the Spirit may utilize when opportunities arise for believers to give a reason for the hope that is within us "with gentleness and reverence" (I Peter 3:15).

Post-evangelism

A new commitment to Christ can be compared to the birth of a baby. We would never bring a baby home from the hospital and say, "Here's your bedroom, there's the bathroom, let us know if you need anything." Oh, that little one would let us know soon enough!

A new believer needs special care and consideration, just like a newborn

child. All the questions may not have been answered, and doubts may arise about the reality of the new commitment. (I recall a new Christian who lost his temper, cursed, and then concluded that his conversion "did not take.") He or she needs to receive nourishment, to feed on the Word of God and talk with Him in prayer, to connect with a fellowship of other believers in a local congregation, and to learn how to walk in the ways of the Lord.

New believers, like new babies, can make lots of noise and lots of messes, and our loving care of them and persistent prayer for them may be called post-evangelism.

A representative of the Graham Association once stated that the follow-up after a crusade was more important than the decisions that were made during a crusade, as the percentage of people who completed the studies for new believers was quite small. A spokesperson for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, with its strong evangelism program on the campuses of our country, declared, "Our mandate has never been to make converts but to make disciples."

Re-evangelism

This refers to the reclaiming of those with a Christian background or who may have once professed faith in the Lord but currently are rejecting Him. In a broad sense it may be applied to whole nations. The term was used by Pope Benedict XIV two years ago when he established an office dedicated to "re-evangelize" the Western world and to roll back the advance of secularism. Also, an Anglican bishop, Graham Cray, speaks of the need to re-evangelize Great Britain.

What does this term mean to a local congregation or to the individual Christian? In a narrow sense it addresses

the need of too many people who have "tasted" some form of Christianity or another and have eventually turned away. Others have been raised in the Church but drifted away. It is said that some of the mega-churches in the United States have a larger exodus than an influx. The fastest

The fastest growing religious group in America today is the people who claim to have no religion ...

growing religious group in America today is the people who claim to have no religion, and some suggest that most of them formerly had a church affiliation.

Why? Ex-Christians may have been disappointed or disillusioned by hypocrisy among church people or by apparent rejection in the midst of personal struggles. They may have been burned by a legalistic or moralistic emphasis ("I couldn't measure up") or by congregations and denominations where biblical authority had seriously eroded in the pulpits as well as in the pews. Perhaps there are as many stories as there are people.

More important than "why," however, is "how" ... how may we re-evangelize those who have turned away from the faith? The heart of the answer, which also must permeate our pre-evangelism and post-evangelism, is GRACE, what God has accomplished freely through His Son Jesus Christ for our salvation, and the message that the pre-Christian and ex-Christian worlds—and the current Christian world as well—so desperately needs to hear and receive is, "Look to Jesus!"

something to share

Winter conferences

BY PASTOR RAYNARD HUGLEN

The first issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador*, the one with a cover picture of President Abraham Lincoln kneeling in prayer, reached me on Feb. 19, 1963. I jotted down these words: "It looks good. So I am an editor." Little did I know what lay ahead for me in that work. But we were under way.

The first winter Bible conference was held in McVile, N.D., even before the first regular annual conference of the association in June 1963. The conferences were invaluable in helping people to get better acquainted, to meet the pastors of the fellowship, to find encouragement in what was an entirely new venture—all in sessions which included Bible studies, inspirational preaching, presentations on doctrine and practical subjects, and prayer opportunities.

Another value of the winter conferences was that they were held in many different locations, some of them too small to ever host an annual conference. All reports of the conferences tell of the good hospitality of the host congregation. Many homes were open to housing attendees overnight. Perhaps the record for opening a home was one at Grafton, N.D., where 13 people were taken in, maybe not all at the same time.

Because of a funeral for a 2-year-old boy in my parish (one of the most difficult a pastor deals with), I arrived late at the first conference. The emphases in McVile were on the doctrine of the Word and the Spirit-filled life.

Those early conferences were usually four-day events, Thursday evening through Sunday afternoon. As an example of the programs offered, consider the one at Grafton in 1972. Pastor Francis Monseth preached at the three evening services. Pastor Eugene Enderlein was the Bible teacher in four studies on the Book of Jonah. Morning devotional sessions were led by lay pastor Sidney

Swenson and Pastor Forrest Swenson. Clarence Quanbeck spoke on free and living congregations, while Aini Myking discussed the Christian home. In a Saturday morning hour, Pastor John Strand elaborated on "Establishing Free Congregations." Pastor Amos Dyrud considered the topic of repentance in one session and Myrtle Hove showed slides from Brazil in another. Pastor Dennis Gray, host pastor, took the Sunday school hour and Pastor Albert Hautamaki used the theme "A Gallery of Hearts" during the Sunday sermon on the Parable of the Sower and the Seed. Finally, two gospel teams from the Bible school put on the afternoon program.

There were some peaks in attendance. About 270 were present on a weekday afternoon in the city auditorium in Winger, Minn., but that was topped by more than 300 who observed the commissioning of Pastor George and Helen Knapp to the field in Brazil at the 1969 conference in Grand Forks, N.D. In 1966, approximately 220 were registered at the Willmar, Minn., conference.

In addition to places already mentioned, other conferences were held in the Minnesota cities of Dalton, Thief River Falls, Stacy, McIntosh, and Spicer; in the North Dakota cities of Tioga, Valley City and Fargo; and Radcliffe, Iowa.

This isn't a complete history of the winter conferences. Other cities were added, and there came to be several conferences held each winter. Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee gave over the planning to regional areas. Some conferences are still held—northwestern Minnesota, for one—but the glory days are over. For a time, the conferences met a real need in the fledgling fellowship, and we thank God for them.

Huglen, founding editor of The Lutheran Ambassador, lives in Newfolden, Minn.