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LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



The Evangelist





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EDITOR

Pastor Robert L. Lee
rlee@aflc.org

MANAGING EDITOR

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ruthg@aflc.org

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charlotte@aflc.org

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763-545-5631
luthamb@aflc.org

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THE JOY OF A MEAL SHARED

BY PASTOR STEVE SNIPSTEAD

I like to eat, but it's not because of the food. Well okay it is the food, but it's not just the food. I don't like to eat alone. I like eating with people. There's something about sharing a meal that brings us together.

I took the train awhile ago. While the food available onboard is passable, one of the most interesting things about a meal aboard a train is that you are seated with random people. I had breakfast with a couple from Yorkshire, England, on their honeymoon, dinner with some folks from Chicago, Minot, N.D., and Indiana. One evening I joined the editor of the Wolf Point, Mont., newspaper and a pastor and his wife from Singapore. Some folks are friendlier than others, but in every case I felt like I knew them better after sharing a meal.

Isn't that always the case? At a meal we talk and tell stories about our lives and our day. We reflect on what's happened to us and what is on our minds. We nourish our bodies and souls, and we serve one another. Eating together brings connection and communication that can't be duplicated anywhere else.

In the case of the pastor and his wife from Singapore, it was like meeting a long lost relative. I had more of a connection with them than the dining partner who shared many of my interests and hobbies—we had hunted some of the same coulees and draws of eastern Montana and even gotten stuck in some of the same places. But my special connection with the pastor and his wife made me think of the great feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb, when believers sit down to that great feast with people from every tongue and nation and tribe.

The Bible often uses the image of eating to describe God's plan for His people. Isaiah 25:6 describes a lavish banquet. The aged wine and rich foods picture a sumptuous celebration. Isaiah was written in a time when meat and fine food were hard to come by. Food like this was a tremendous blessing. Picture a birthday party or special occasion, a Christmas or holiday meal filled with gifts and happiness. Try to imagine what kind of celebration you enjoy most, and you will begin to see what God has in store for His people. Sometimes we think of God as the one who casts a disapproving eye on celebrations and fun. Does a feast of the finest food and wine sound like a disapproving God? "However, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived' the things God has prepared for those who love him" (I Corinthians 2:9).

I think that's the reason Jesus chose the setting of a meal to remind us of the essentials of Christian life. There is great theology in the language and imagery of the bread and the cup, but keep in mind that communion was originally part of a meal. Each time we gather, Christ shares and nourishes us with the bread of His presence and the cup of the new promise. The body of Christ comes together around the table to experience His love and the love of each other. In this meal we proclaim the Lord's death, what He has done for us, until the day when we sit down with Christ to celebrate the great feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb, with all our long lost brothers and sisters.

Snipstead serves Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont.

Isn't it time that concerned Lutherans get concerned about reaching the lost for Jesus Christ?

—Olaf Friggstad

Satan would love to see you discouraged, despondent, and defeated. But, in Christ's power, the victory is already ours. Let us enter the world of the unchurched not wishing for victory but claiming victory. Let us not be defensive; instead, let us mount a powerful offense.

—Thom S. Rainer

Congregations functioning in the unchurched society see themselves as mission outposts in a mission field. These congregations perceive mission as starting at their property line. As people leave the church building, they see a sign above the door that says, "You are now entering the mission field."

—Alan C. Klaas

This is the Trinitarian shape of all authentic evangelism. It is the Word of God the Father, that focuses upon the death and resurrection of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. May God keep us true to this Trinitarian evangelism.

—John R.W. Stott

Evangelism at its very heart is the natural response of believers and congregations in love with and on fire for Jesus Christ.

—George Carey

Oh to REMEMBER

BY PASTOR JOHN ABEL

Our U.S. Navy ships had been with General Douglas MacArthur's forces since New Guinea and on to the invasion of the Philippines and Okinawa. When Japan surrendered to the Allies on Sept. 2, 1945, hundreds of our ships went into the Japanese home islands on occupation duty.

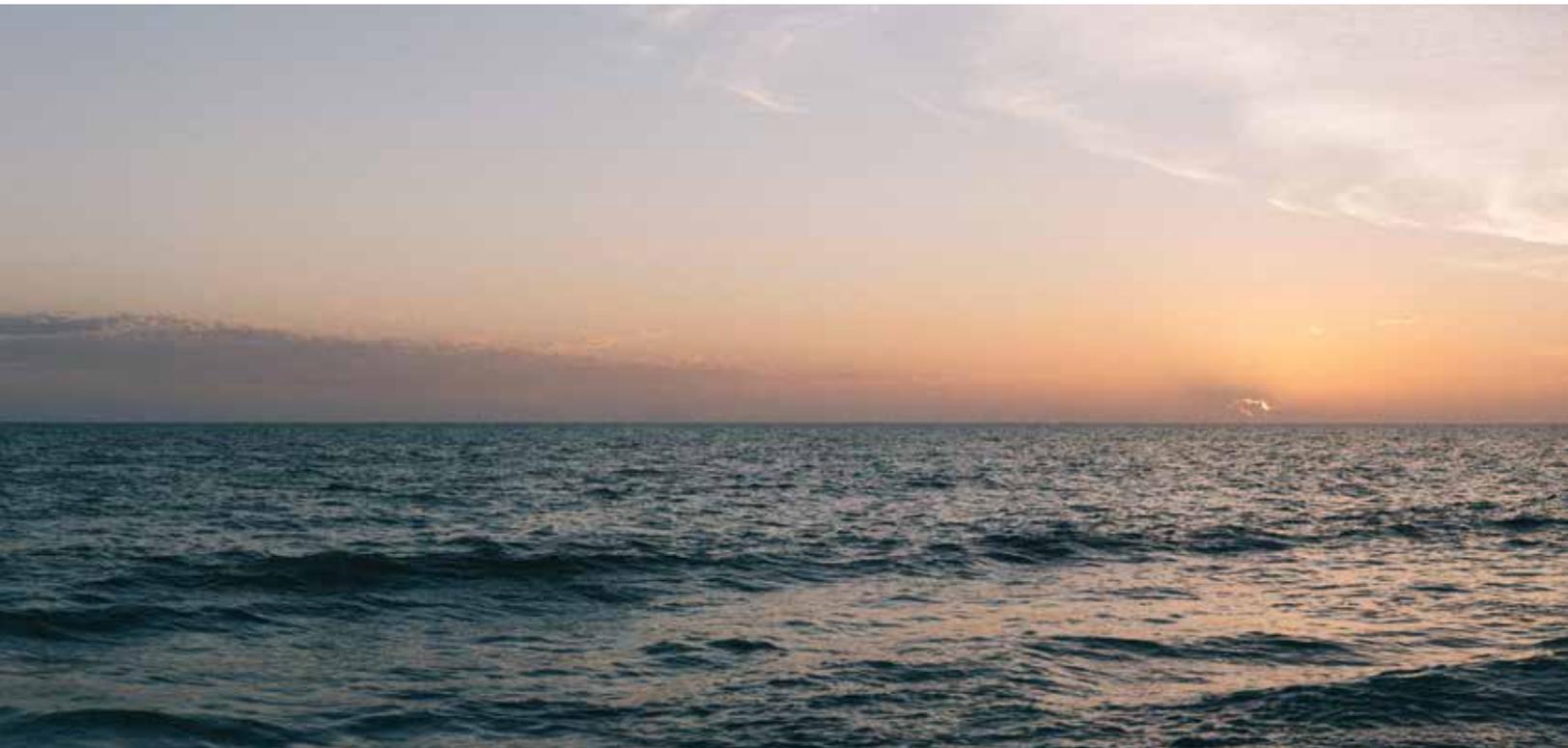
I was on our small ship in Japan for six months at the large port city of Sasebo, Kyushu. Often, several of our ships (landing craft tanks) would tie up alongside each other at the pier. Then we would walk across several ships to get on shore. Here's where a unique story begins.

In Sasebo we had several barracks filled with Army and

Marine personnel on occupation duty. This former naval base also had several large Quonset buildings which were used for offices, a movie hall, a chapel, etc. Soon after we arrived, our chaplains were promoting Saturday night Youth for Christ meetings in a large Quonset building that could seat several hundred people. I was a quartermaster and Navy signalman, so I could send out information and invitations, which I happily did for these meetings. Gradually I got to know several sailors who attended the meetings, and one of them, Ernie Gilmore, often came with me on Saturday nights. It was a thrill to hear several hundred young men singing gospel choruses and hymns, and at times we listened to Japanese Christian quartets and trios.

Returning to our ships one night, I asked Ernie if he had ever accepted Christ as his personal Savior and if he died, I asked if he have the assurance that he would go to heaven. He said that he was not sure. I offered to pray with him and he agreed. On our little ship the only private place was a room called the paint locker, which had no lights in it. When we went in, sat on some five-gallon paint cans, and closed the door, it was pitch black. Fortunately I had been memorizing Scripture through a course given by the Navigators, so I shared the Way of Salvation verses with Ernie. He prayed to receive Christ as his personal Savior.

God says in Isaiah 55:11, "My word shall not return unto Me





empty, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it." This promise should encourage us when we share Bible promises or give our testimony. We never know what the Holy Spirit will do when we share God's Word.

A few days after our prayer time, Ernie's ship received orders to get underway to a new port. And shortly thereafter my ship also received orders to move out. I thought we'd never meet again.

Now fast-forward nine years to 1954. My wife, Ruby, and I were in the city of Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil, where we had just finished a course at the missionary language school along with 40 other couples from various denominations. We would soon spread out around Brazil, which is larger than the continental United States, to evangelize and plant churches.

At that time, Campinas was a modern city about 50 miles south of São Paulo. It had a large post office building, and I went there to see if we had any mail since we were ready to move 500 miles away into a new frontier town. As I walked along the hall in the post office building, someone called my name: "Abel, Abel, is that you?"

I took a hard look at the man who called me. He was much heavier than I remembered, but I asked, "Are you Ernie Gilmore?"

"Yes, sir, and you are John Abel," he replied.

"Ernie, it's so good to see you," I responded. "What are you doing in Brazil?"

"Well, Brother Abel, a lot of ups and downs have happened to me since we prayed in the paint locker, but God never let me go. After college I went to seminary and now I'm here as a Presbyterian missionary, and I'll be starting language training soon."

I praised God! Ernie came as a single missionary, later married, and spent many fruitful years on the field in north Brazil.

The Bible says that Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). In my new encounter with Ernie, God graciously showed me again that when we share the way of salvation from His Word it will not return unto Him empty. Our God says that it will

accomplish what He pleases and prosper in the thing for which He sends it.

After many years of personal evangelism I want to encourage every Christian to memorize a short presentation of the way of salvation with its respective verses. The following is the outline that I have used to help hundreds of people come to assurance:

- The Fact of Sin: Romans 3:23
- The Penalty of Sin: Romans 6:23
- The Penalty Paid by Christ: Romans 5:6, 8
- Salvation a Free Gift: Ephesians 2:8-9
- Receive the Gift: John 1:12, Revelation 3:20

After sharing these verses, offer to pray and encourage the one with whom you share to pray out loud with you. Who knows what the Holy Spirit will do. Jesus said that there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7). We may not see the work of the Spirit immediately, but we can safely leave that with Him (Philippians 1:6).

Abel, Hitterdal, Minn., helped establish the AFLC mission work in Brazil. He is now retired.

Photo: General Douglas MacArthur signs as Supreme Allied Commander during the surrender of Japan on Sept. 2, 1945, aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay, Japan. Courtesy of the National Archives.



Where are the EVANGELISTS?

BY ANGELA LOMBARDO

He was tall and slim, and a shock of white hair crowned his square face. His dark, laser eyes seemed to look right through me. I was only 11 or 12 years old when the evangelist came to our community. Every year our church invited an evangelist to come for special meetings. His mission began Sunday morning and every evening thereafter until Thursday. The purpose of these meetings was to not only reach and win the spiritually lost to Christ through the preaching of the gospel, but to revive and deepen the spiritual lives of fellow believers.

The man and his message intrigued me. As I sat under the preaching of the Word, something stirred in me. God was speaking to me. At the final service the evangelist invited people to come to the altar to pray to receive Christ or to rededicate their lives to Him. My heart was pounding like a jackhammer. I wanted to go forward but I was scared. What would dad think? What would people think? After all, my dad was the pastor.

My experience probably isn't unusual for those of us in an older generation who were raised in a conservative Lutheran context. Evangelistic services were the norm. At one time Lutheran church bodies such as the American Lutheran Church (ALC), Lutheran Church of America (LCA), and AFLC, had full-time evangelists

on their staff. These men traveled to churches, upon invitation, for a series of meetings lasting four or five days. Everyone was invited to come and hear the evangelist speak. There was much interest in spiritual things and the meetings were well attended.

For a time, my husband, Steve, was a full-time evangelist with the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement (LEM). For those younger than 40, who, like the new king of Egypt, did not know who Joseph was or what he had done [Exodus 1:9], LEM was a free, spontaneous movement within Lutheranism which sought to revive believers and reach unbelievers for Christ. They employed a staff of full-time evangelists.

The AFLC, too, at one time employed a full-time evangelist. First, Pastor David Molstre, then Pastor Ken Pentti. In a *Lutheran Ambassador* editorial marking the death of Pastor Pentti, Pastor Raynard Huglen wrote, "... We must continue to

stress the need for and give high priority to evangelism in our AFLC." Pastor Pentti "was widely accepted as having the gifts of an evangelist" (Sept. 10, 1985).

The Bible recognizes the legitimacy and importance of the evangelist. In Ephesians 4:11, the evangelists are listed alongside the apostles, prophets, shepherds, and teachers. They are a gift to the church (Ephesians 4:7-8). As such, it appears that the evangelist has an office in the church. In Acts 21:8, Philip is called an evangelist.

So there's biblical precedence for having evangelists, but that doesn't answer the question, where have all the evangelists gone? Why aren't there full-time evangelists anymore?

When Steve began traveling as an evangelist, there were already signs that the tide was beginning to shift away from inviting an evangelist to come for a series of special meetings. Fewer people were attending. People were so busy (sound



familiar?) that the LEM decided to shorten the length of the meetings by a day.

It appeared, for some churches, that meetings were becoming just another chore, another duty to accomplish. It's as if people were plagued with special meeting fatigue, losing sight of the purpose. A spiritual sleepiness settled in.

Another noticeable shift came from some of the pastors themselves who were not in favor of having evangelistic services. This seemed to coincide with the teaching that was then worming its way into some seminaries (not the AFLC) that the Bible was not the inerrant and infallible Word of God; the Bible wasn't supposed to be taken literally. There was also a heavy emphasis on the sacraments. Therefore some pastors believed that preaching evangelistically was unacceptable since every church member was already saved.

Where are we today evangelistically? Do some of us long for the good old days? Is the

church stuck in a strategy rut? We must remember that although the evangelistic message of salvation doesn't change, the methods of bringing that message must and will change. We are living in a rapidly changing, post-Christian culture. What worked five, ten, or twenty years ago probably won't work today. According to a Baylor University Religion Survey, 44 percent of respondents said they spend no time seeking "eternal wisdom." Forty-six percent of those responding to a Lifeway Research survey never wonder whether they will go to heaven. Millions aren't asking spiritual questions. Rather, they're saying, "So what?" That's chilling.

The take away is this: engage people in eternal matters. Realize that life is not the same as it once was. The internet, Facebook, twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat have changed everything. We must be like the men of Issachar who understood the time in which they lived and

knew what Israel ought to do. We need God's wisdom, too, to look forward, plan, pray, and promote new ways to spread the fantastic news that Jesus is relevant to people's deepest needs. Who knows, maybe the pendulum will swing back and what's old will become new and the evangelist will once again be a prominent part of the church.

In the meantime, we pray, speak the Word, and do whatever we can to spread the message of God's salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

Lombardo is a member of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran, Gifford, Ill.



Called to be DISCIPLERS

BY PASTOR DAVID JOHNSON

Is parenthood defined by birth alone? That may seem like a deceiving way to start a discussion on evangelism, but trust me, I am asking in all sincerity. After all, much of the church today has wrongly equated giving birth spiritually to being a parent, or discipleship. For years, we have been so focused on getting people into church that we've forgotten about conversion, and parenting the baby up to adulthood. We say welcome to the family, put a Bible in their hands, find a place for them in a pew, and call it done.

We currently live in a culture that defines "family" as a group of any number of people, made up of any variant backgrounds, bound together by the simple presence of affection and loyalty. On the surface that may seem wonderfully inclusive and endearing, but it would be both biblically and historically wrong. With the added consideration of adoption, the following has always been the understood definition of family: "Children of a Father and Mother; offspring ... all of a person's relatives; group of related people—tribe or clan" (Thorndike Barnhart Dictionary).

In other words, families are not bound together by something as flimsy as emotions, convenience, or even loyalty; they are bound

together by blood. To be part of a family has always meant being cemented together through a common heritage for the long haul; through joys and triumphs, through desperation and loss. Likewise, to be a parent isn't so much about "childbearing" (with today's medical technology we've even bypassed childbearing) as it is about the process of "parenting and nurturing" until maturity. Repeatedly, we hear God incorporate this truth into his parenting instructions: "Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). And, "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:6).

You don't get the idea from these passages that parenting is simply about having a baby; rather, parenting is raising or training up a child to adulthood. This process is carried out in the circumstances of everyday life; maturity happens in the course of routine daily activities. Which begs the question, when did the church lose sight of this principle in the process of disciple-making?



Somewhere along the way, the church has drifted away from the critical job of long-term nurturing. Over recent decades, the church family somehow became any group of spiritually interested people (no conversion necessary), and parenting (discipleship/evangelism) became making sure everyone had a place at the table. Somehow we lost the conviction that family requires a blood connection—rebirth through Jesus’ blood—and that parenting is a long, dedicated commitment to discipleship and mentorship.

Our AFLC Director of Evangelism Pastor Jim Rasmussen recently told me, “We’ve lost our understanding of true discipleship. It’s kind of like we see discipleship as putting several bottles and a week’s supply of diapers in a newborn’s crib and telling him we’ll be back in a week.” He continued, “We’ve left discipleship up to the pastor, something that happens in church on Sunday morning, in Sunday school, or at the occasional Bible study. We’ve fallen for the misconception that evangelism is about giving birth, and forget that we are called to be disciple-makers. Disciple-making is a process that requires dedication, commitment, and time. We need to think in terms of adopting the disciple into our family, nurturing and empowering them to become a

disciple-maker themselves.”

The church in general and the AFLC at large must get back to their roots. We have always been an association grounded on the intrinsic power of God’s Word, the indwelling empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and the burning call of God to be a disciple-making people. It’s in our blood, our heritage. But sadly, the evidences of that reality have faded in many corners of our family. We have grown lethargic and complacent. We have fallen for the worldly perspective that “if we build it, they will come,” when all along we have been commissioned, “as you are going, make disciples ...” (Matthew 28:19).

The AFLC Department on Evangelism is determined to assist each local congregation to grow in the Bible’s definition of God’s family as a people bound together in community with God the Father through the blood of Jesus Christ. The Department on Evangelism is intent on seeing churches filled with converted souls, not simply people with a spiritual interest. They want to encourage AFLC churches to use a host of discipleship resources in the process of parenting their young, investing themselves one-on-one for the long haul, until each spiritual child is ready to disciple children of their own.

God’s command to Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply” wasn’t only a physiological challenge, it was a parenting command to replicate themselves (and their faith) in their progeny. We as spiritual parents carry the same basic mandate in our churches. Yes, we are to “be fruitful,” bringing the lost to the Father by contrition and rebirth through the blood of Christ. But we are also called to “multiply” by means of the glorious, and sometimes messy, process of disciple-making. May all our church programs, and our times of fervent intercessory prayer, be directed to this end.

Johnson serves Disciple Lutheran Fellowship, Reading, Pa., and Living Faith Lutheran, Boyertown, Pa.



Have you ever contemplated a theology for evangelism? Perhaps your initial reaction, like me, is to quote Matthew 28:18-20 and declare your task complete. After all, these verses remind us that Jesus has authorized us to represent Him in the work of evangelism. They also lay out the scope of the work and the means by which to accomplish the task.

And yet we need a more comprehensive framework for understanding and effectively sharing the message God has given us to communicate to the world.

We need a theology for evangelism.

There are several spiritual truths foundational to the concept of evangelism, of which I will attempt to briefly remind you. The first and most essential to our study is that the Bible is God's Word. God alone is the author of Scripture, therefore it is inerrant and completely reliable. As such, it is the ultimate source to which we look for doctrine and spiritual life. We are dependent upon the Bible to discover a theology for evangelism.

Next, as we consider the people we wish to reach, we must remember that God is their creator. God created life out of nothing—He didn't

let it happen, He made it happen. And He wasn't experimenting; He was intentional and purposeful in creating all things. And the crowning achievement of His creation is mankind. God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Genesis 1:26). Unlike any other part of creation, mankind was created to know God and live in a perfect relationship with Him. As the Apostle Paul explained to a crowd of seekers in Athens, mankind cannot function properly or purposefully without recognizing our dependence upon God alone. Paul said, "for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children'" (Acts 17:28).

If we agree with this foundational truth, and then look at the culture we live in, we must conclude that something has gone wrong. The great need for evangelism—for Christ's commissioning task—stems from the reality of sin. Humanity, though made perfect in God's image, has rebelled against God and sinned. Romans 5:12 records the effect of sin: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned ..." This death is both spiritual and physical. We cannot make atonement for our sin or make ourselves presentable to God through any amount of effort.

This must cause us great grief as we consider what lies ahead in eternity for the masses of mankind who have chosen separa-

A THEOLOGY *for evangelism*

BY PASTOR GARY JORGENSON

tion from God. But wait, there is an answer. This very God, righteous and holy, our creator, sent His Son Jesus to be our Savior. To do so meant two things: Jesus would forever bind Himself to human flesh, and He would also die. The reason? He loved us that much! Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Jesus once asked the Apostles, “Who do you say that I am?” With this very personal question, the apostles had to give an honest answer for themselves. Peter answered correctly: “You are the Christ, the Son of the loving God” (Matthew 16:15-16).

This is the question at the center of our theology, which all men must be brought to con-

sider and answer honestly. Why? Because salvation is in Jesus alone on the basis of His finished work on the cross. Jesus said of Himself, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

There is much to be said about the need for the law—which brings mankind to the point of realizing our need for a savior besides ourselves—and the gospel, that sweet news of God’s abiding love for mankind and of His gracious provision for our salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is in this context that our theology for evangelism must find its place. Without the law, man would not realize his need for the gospel.

It is at this point, as well, that evangelists must recognize their dependence upon the Holy Spirit to complete the task. For it is the Holy Spirit alone who convicts men of their sin (John 16:8-11). And it is the Holy Spirit alone who convinces us of the righteousness of Jesus earned in our place and offered freely through faith alone. And it is the Holy Spirit alone who works repentance in men’s hearts—creating a sorrow for sin and a turning away from self to God. Even the

faith to believe in Jesus and accept Him as one’s Savior is a gracious gift from God worked in our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Here’s the exciting part: the Holy Spirit works repentance and faith in the hearts of men through the message we share. This demonstrates why we need a biblical theology for evangelism: so that we will know and recognize our place in the work, so that we don’t get in the way of God and try to do the Holy Spirit’s work, and so that the task of evangelism gets done properly and effectively.

All glory to Him.

Jorgenson serves Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Brainerd, Minn.

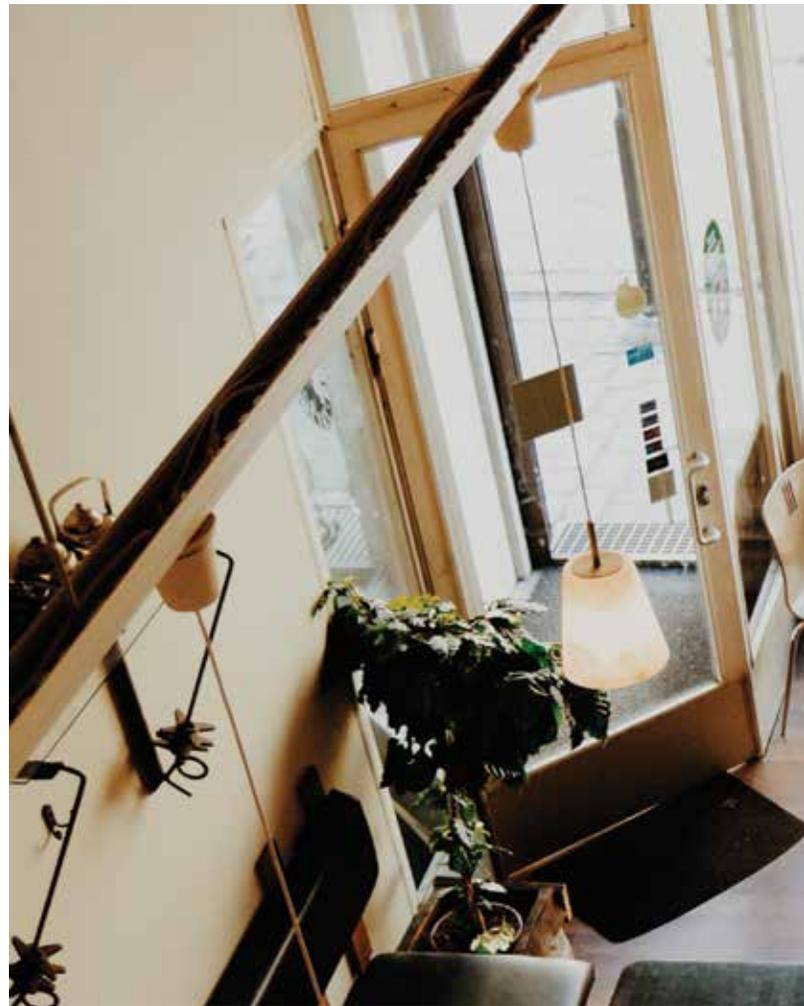
ATTRACTIVE

BY PASTOR KEN FINNESTAD

We have many ways of indicating that we got the message. Hearing, “You got that right,” makes us feel good, although it may imply that you don’t usually get things right. “Tell me about it” usually means not quite what it sounds like, either. It really implies, “I know more about that than you do.”

A cousin of mine, when he was feeling agreeable but not really listening to what I was saying, would say quite carelessly, “I’ll tell the world.” He was in his teens and I was about 10 when that expression was a habit with him. I sometimes wondered uneasily if I would really like to have my tentative ideas proclaimed to the entire planet.

During such special days as Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, we who are parents often wonder if we have been very successful at communicating, even to our own families, those things that we believe most deeply and which are most precious in our hearts and minds. During the rest of the year, we often are reminded that God, our heavenly Father, as a most



loving parent, yearns over those who are still outside His Kingdom, and longs for us to tell the world.

Through Peter’s first epistle, God urges us to be role models even for those who maliciously slander us, and to lead the kind of lives that will quench all rumors and attract people to faith in Jesus. Peter offers several suggestions (I Peter 3:15-18) to help Christians live the kind of lives that will attract people to our Savior.

“In your heart, set apart Christ as Lord” (vs. 15). Christian witnessing is not a program or technique or way of manipulating people. It flows from our real, sincere inner self. And the way we live often says much more than what we say, although both are important and one should flow from the other.

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have” (vs. 15). This assumes that the Holy Spirit will draw people to us, because of our attitude and conduct. We should be ready at any time to direct them to Jesus.

It is not wise of any of us to criticize too harshly those fellow Christians who seem overly zealous and run ahead of God, or who use human techniques of persuasion, since God calls each of us to

LIVING *for Christ*



different forms of witness. And Jesus himself said that anyone who speaks for Him should not be discouraged by other Christians. But we have to admit there are many people who have suffered at the hands of Christians who obviously have an axe to grind or have something to sell. Some well-meaning Christians do use friendship, directed conversation, stern rebuke, and other methods for satisfying an all-too-human need to succeed, to collect trophies, to influence and to conquer—all in the name of Jesus. While these mistakes due to misapplied zeal do happen, it's likely that most of us fail as witnesses more often by keeping silent through indifference or fear than by being overly zealous. To us, Peter writes, "Do not fear. Do not be frightened" (vs. 14).

Peter goes on to explain to his flock how to answer those who, because of their Christian gentleness, confidence, and warmth, will ask them about their faith: "Do this with gentleness and

respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander" (vs. 15-16).

The message for us today is very relevant. Actions speak louder than words. The best form of Christian witnessing in this world is to be a role model for our children, extended families, neighbors, and the world at large. Often, simply living a dedicated Christian life, and letting the love of Jesus for this suffering, confused, and morally-bankrupt world show forth in our own attitudes is the most powerful form of witnessing available to us.

We resist this kind of knowledge. It's much easier to quote a Bible verse, point out an obvious truth, repeat a well-accepted platitude, and walk away, feeling that we are witnessing. But what we say has to be a result of and be backed up by what we are, deep inside. And deep inside, Peter

says, we need to remember that "Christ died for sins, once and for all, to bring you to God" (vs. 18).

Let us pray constantly that God will keep on changing us, molding us, and making us such a reflection of Himself that He will be able to draw people to Jesus through us. And let's not forget to pray that when they wonder what makes us different, we will always be ready with an answer—a gentle, respectful answer, concerning our own faith.

Finnestad, now retired, served as interim at Bethel Lutheran, Elbow, Saskatchewan. He lives in Saskatoon.



FINDING WAYS TO SHARE JESUS ABROAD

▶ PASTOR MARK OLSON

The “Introduction to Cross-Cultural Ministry” class has the longest description given to any listed in the AFLBS catalog, yet most central to this class is the desire to help students connect to the very heart of God for all people as revealed in the gospel, and then to equip them to share this good news in cross-cultural contexts. This spring the capstone experience of this course was a missions trip to Cuenca, Ecuador. Fourteen students from AFLBS joined with AFLC missionaries Justo and Tricia Pillman and members of the Paz de Dios Lutheran Church for the task of making the gospel known at the Bilingue Interamericano School in Cuenca.

What a joy it was to see each of the AFLBS students find ways connect, love, and share Jesus with the hundreds of elementary and high school students living in a significantly different culture and primarily speaking Spanish. The opportunity to partner with many Christians from the church was also of great value. Ask any of the AFLBS students to share about their new friendships in Christ with Taty, Leslie, Josue, Pocho, Giovanni, Claudia, Kevin, Anabel, Dario, Gloria, Victor, Santiago, Blanca, Paola, Darwin, Kirsten, Pedro, Dario, Gloria, and German, and their faces will beam and then they will likely include the names of additional people overlooked by this list. How good it was to witness lives being changed by the power of the gospel to bring forgiveness, hope, and love to all people.

Olson, who teaches the class along with Pastor Kevin Olson, is the AFLC School's chief academic officer.



TOP: Kirsten Winston and Emily Olson chat with a group of boys before a chapel service.
 ABOVE: Two girls follow along in their Bible.



► **MADI CARLEY**

John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” Coming into this trip, I didn’t expect to be afraid to serve in another culture as I had done it previously. However, getting up in front of a crowd of more than 300 high schoolers was a little more terrifying than I anticipated. Looking at the first day we were there compared to the last, I can clearly see the Lord working to cast out the fears in my life. From the small things such as being brave enough to start a conversation with someone sitting alone to giving my testimony in a completely different language to a crowd in the park, I’m able to see God’s faithfulness towards me. We serve a big God who loves His children. He equips us to do the work He has called us to, giving us everything we need, even when we don’t realize we need it. I encourage you to trust the Lord with the things that bring fear into your life. Let Him perfect you with His love.

Carley, a junior at AFLBS, is from Brainerd, Minn.



► **KIRSTEN WINSTON**

I have always considered myself an extremely open-minded person. And perhaps I am in American culture, but I wasn’t initially in Ecuador. Once the excitement of being in a new place died down I began to realize how I’d closed my mind to new things. For example, I struggled with the strange foods I consumed like chicken-foot soup. Or the different way they view time—nothing started when it was set to, and quick play practices turned into rewriting the script entirely. Things like this bothered me because I didn’t have the right mind-set.

So I started to retrain myself. Every time I was exposed to a culturally new situation, I stopped and thought about why their culture is the way that it is. God opened my eyes to see that although I’d always said, “there is no right and wrong” when it comes to culture but that there was “simply different,” I wasn’t living it. One passage that came to mind was Romans 14 where it discusses the different mind-sets of people and how as long as it honors God, it doesn’t matter. I can now apply this to my future endeavors in missions.

Winston, a junior at AFLBS, attends Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.



TOP: Madi Carley and Leslie Landivar, who attended AFLBS, talk with elementary students during craft day. MIDDLE: Patrick Howat (center) poses with a group of students. LEFT: AFLBS students join student leaders from Paz de Dios Church during the elementary program.

► **REGAN JOHNSON**

This trip to Ecuador was truly amazing and such a blessing to be a part of. Going into this trip I didn't really know what to expect and there wasn't much that could prepare me for everything we did. This trip opened up my eyes to some things God could be leading me to do in my life. I found a joy in working with kids, and it's so exciting to see how God can have such a big influence in their lives. It's also encouraging to be reminded of how simple things in life can be.

The experience of being in a completely different culture and having to adjust is something really awesome. Having the opportunity to be where God's heart is at work is where we should always be putting ourselves. God commands us to be disciples to all nations, whether that's in another country or in your backyard. It's what God calls us to do, and people in other countries need to hear God's Word just as much as we do. There aren't any words to describe God's work that was done in Ecuador for us or the students. It was such a weird experience coming back here and seeing people in our country that don't have that same fire for the gospel.

Johnson, a junior at AFLBS, is a member of Calvary Free Lutheran, Fosston, Minn.

► **ERIK NELSON**

A highlight of the trip that shaped my view of missions and the global church was being able to worship with the Paz de Dios congregation. We started the service by singing the Spanish version of "Holy, Holy, Holy." During the sermon, Pastor Darwin Paccha emphasized that despite the fact that we look different (he referred to us as "the blue-eyed people"), we Americans are part of the same Body of Christ as the Ecuadorians. We all worship the same God, whether we call Him Jesus Christ or Jesús Cristo.

We also received communion with the Ecuadorian church. I knew that Sunday was also the same day my little brother Ben would be receiving his first communion back at our home church in St. Francis, Kan. To receive the body and blood of Christ alongside Ecuadorian Lutherans, when at the same time I knew my little brother, parents, and home congregation were receiving it, was amazing. It revealed to me just how special it is that we get to be part of the Body of Christ, which supersedes nationalities and classes. We truly are all one in Christ.

Nelson, a junior at AFLBS, is a member of Peace Lutheran, St. Francis, Kan.

TOP: AFLBS students practice with Ecuadorian song leaders before an evangelism event. MIDDLE: The drama team presented a sketch for the high school students. RIGHT: Justo Pillman narrates the story of Gideon for the elementary.





TOP: Hannah St. Cyr signs her autograph for students during a break from the Spiritual Emphasis Week at the Bilingual school. ABOVE: Regan Johnson (right) prays during a skit for the elementary school students.

► MORIAH GRAHAM

We were told to continually pray for the language barrier that we were bound to face, but language didn't seem to be a barrier. This by no means meant that we spoke enough Spanish or that they spoke enough English. Through our lack of Spanish-speaking skills, God provided a way of communication with the people in Ecuador.

On one occasion, Hannah St. Cyr, Adry Sari, and I went to the home of a family who recently joined Paz de Dios Church. They had two sons: Andres and Max. Neither of them spoke English, and we were told that Andres had decided that he was an atheist. We sat and listened as the pastor talked to them and Adry translated for us. Toward the end of the night, their mother brought out some pictures Andres had drawn. I recognized the inspiration for two of the drawings and out of excitement I pointed them out. The boys seemed to love that I knew what they were. It was a small connection, but seeing God work in that situation was amazing.

Graham, a junior at AFLBS, is a member of Christian Free Lutheran, Wheatland, Iowa.

H

is name is John. He is always there. I don't know how he does it. Wait a second, maybe I do.

As our kids are involved in a variety of extra-curricular activities, I can hardly remember a time that John hasn't been there. He has given his life to serve kids with a local parachurch ministry. As such, he knows what is going on in the lives of the students with whom he works and has made it a priority to go to games, meet with kids, and be involved with people in a way that I have hardly ever seen before.

Likewise, as the apostle Paul went from church to church, preaching "Jesus Christ, and him crucified," (I Corinthians 2:2), you get a real sense that he loved to be with people, that he loved people deeply, and that they loved him. In Philippians 1:3 Paul wrote, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer with joy" (1:3), and later wrote, "It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace" (1:7). Here Paul showed his love for souls, his love for the church, and that he knew the needs of the people to whom he ministered. These

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

BY PASTOR MARK JOHNSON

are important qualities to have when reaching people for Jesus Christ and seeing believers built up in their faith.

Jesus, in His earthly ministry, modeled for His followers the importance of connecting with people. In many instances, as He met with people, He asked what or who they were seeking. He wanted to get to the core of their desires.

As we seek to reach generations for Jesus Christ, plan and strategize, study generations, and seek to communicate the gospel effectively, let's never forget the importance of being with people, living life with them, and understanding to the best of our knowledge what is going on in their lives. But first, whose role is this? And how does it happen?

Let's start at home. Parents, do you spend time with your children, asking questions about their day, striving to see life from their perspectives? Do you listen to them when they do share with you, and do you seek to understand what is going on in their peer relationships? Do you talk about things that really matter? Do you make time to have conversations with them about what is taking place in our culture and how we should

respond as believers?

Congregations, are we making it a priority to provide good teaching and resources on reaching all ages for Christ? Are we encouraging people to get out and engage our culture? Are we pointing our friends and neighbors to Jesus, Who came to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10)?

Youth workers and volunteers, are you taking time for relationships? You may not be able to attend every game, concert, or event that your youths are involved in, but are you really taking the time to get to know them? As parents we notice and appreciate when people take time to invest in our children's lives. Kids also notice and feel valued and appreciated.

No matter your age, let's purpose to know what's happening in the lives of those around us. We'll have a ringside seat as we watch God work in their lives, for He desires the salvation of souls.

Johnson, chairman of the AFLC Youth Board, serves the Dalton, Minn., Parish.



Help me, God, to minister to and be real with people, despite me. This

was my prayer as our choir was riding on a bus towards the Pacific Northwest. I knew that the next two weeks would be long and tiresome with lots of concerts, socializing, and traveling ahead. As in any type of ministry, we can often feel the strain as we continually give of ourselves.

However, God promises that He will be with us and provide us with the strength we need. God brought to my mind II Peter 1:3-4, which particularly touched my heart during this time. It says, "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature ..."

We can praise the Lord knowing that He will accomplish His gracious will in us, and that He has given us "all we need for a godly life." I realized more and more during each concert that God was using me

THIS IS GOD'S WORK

BY JENAYA CRESTIK

as His vessel to bless others, despite the fact that I am broken (II Corinthians 4:7-12). All He asks of us is to have a willing and obedient heart toward Him, but even that is imperfect. Praise the Lord that He will accomplish His purpose in us despite our brokenness. Most importantly, He has called us "by His own glory and goodness," so the ministry we are a part of is not about ourselves anyway.

Singing praise to God through song was only one aspect of choir tour. Hearing personal testimonies of God's faithfulness in people's lives and having meaningful conversations with believers in the congregations we visited were also part of the ministry. At one point, I observed my brothers and sisters in Christ around me and a thought came to mind. It was the realization of how precious and unique each life is. A desire to show each one the love of Christ filled my heart. I saw the work of the Holy Spirit as described in Romans 5:5, "... God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Elizabeth Elliot put it well when she said, "God has promised to supply all our needs. What we do not have now we do not need now." What a

comforting promise knowing that our Lord gives us what we need at the time that He knows we need it. In the example above, I see how God gave me a love for my brothers and sisters in Christ as I did ministry with them. In addition, He answered my prayer at the beginning of the trip: He gave me the strength to minister to and be real with people despite my brokenness and weakness.

God's promise to accomplish His work in us is a truth that we need to be reminded of every day. Each day is a gift that we should use to glorify our Lord and Savior. Ministry in the Bible school choir is only one aspect of that. Let us remember not to measure our usefulness upon our own standards but remember God's faithfulness to His promises. He will give us the grace we need to minister wherever He has called us.

Crestik, who just graduated from the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, is a member of St. Paul's Lutheran, Cloquet, Minn. She will work as an STA in Cuenca, Ecuador, serving with AFLC missionaries Justo and Tricia Pillman.

WATERS IN THE WILDERNESS

JUNE 13

“And Jesus said unto him, ‘No man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God’” (Luke 9:62).

T

o put one’s hand to the plow means that we have undertaken some task with determination. It also signifies that we mean business with the duties which are at hand. We must constantly keep looking ahead to see where we are going. We cannot plow straight furrows while looking back.

In spiritual matters one cannot act halfheartedly. If we say that we are following Jesus, and are still looking back to the things of the world which we left behind when we decided to become Christians, Jesus makes it clear that we are not fit for the Kingdom of God. How searching the test is here. We have no business looking back to the things upon which we once turned our backs because they were sinful.

Paul speaks of pressing forward to the goal of the high calling to which he had been called. To do so he had to forget that which lay behind. Some of that which he had to forget was his persecution of the Christians earlier in his life. This he would like to forget. He also had to forget the great accomplishments which were his in the Kingdom of God. Let the past be past and bygone. We shall even have to forget that we have so often looked back. Let us keep our eyes upon our great leader, the Lord and Savior that we have.

Ida Walla, a past president of the Women’s Missionary Federation, was the wife of Melvin Walla, a lay pastor in the AFLC.

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.

Pastor George Lautner was installed Feb. 21 at Middle Grove Lutheran, Mekinock, N.D., and Living Faith Free Lutheran, Larimore, N.D., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating.

Pastor Michael Johnson has accepted a call to serve Peace Free Lutheran, Canal Winchester, Ohio. Johnson formerly served Abundant Life Church, Thief River Falls, Minn. Peace Free Lutheran has been served by interim pastors David Barnhart and Ken Thoreson.

Pastor Tom Gilman has accepted a call to serve Redeemer Free Lutheran, Canton, S.D. Gilman formerly served Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn.

Phil Dahlof has resigned from his position as pastor of children, youth, and family at Vision of Glory Lutheran, Plymouth, Minn. He has accepted a position with Thrivent Financial.

Pastor Gary Haug has accepted a call to serve as assistant pastor of Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Cokato, Minn. The congregation is served by Pastor Rob Edwards.

Members of the AFLC’s Coordinating Committee voted with thankfulness to the Lord to restore **Pastor Einar Unseth** to the clergy roster of the AFLC.

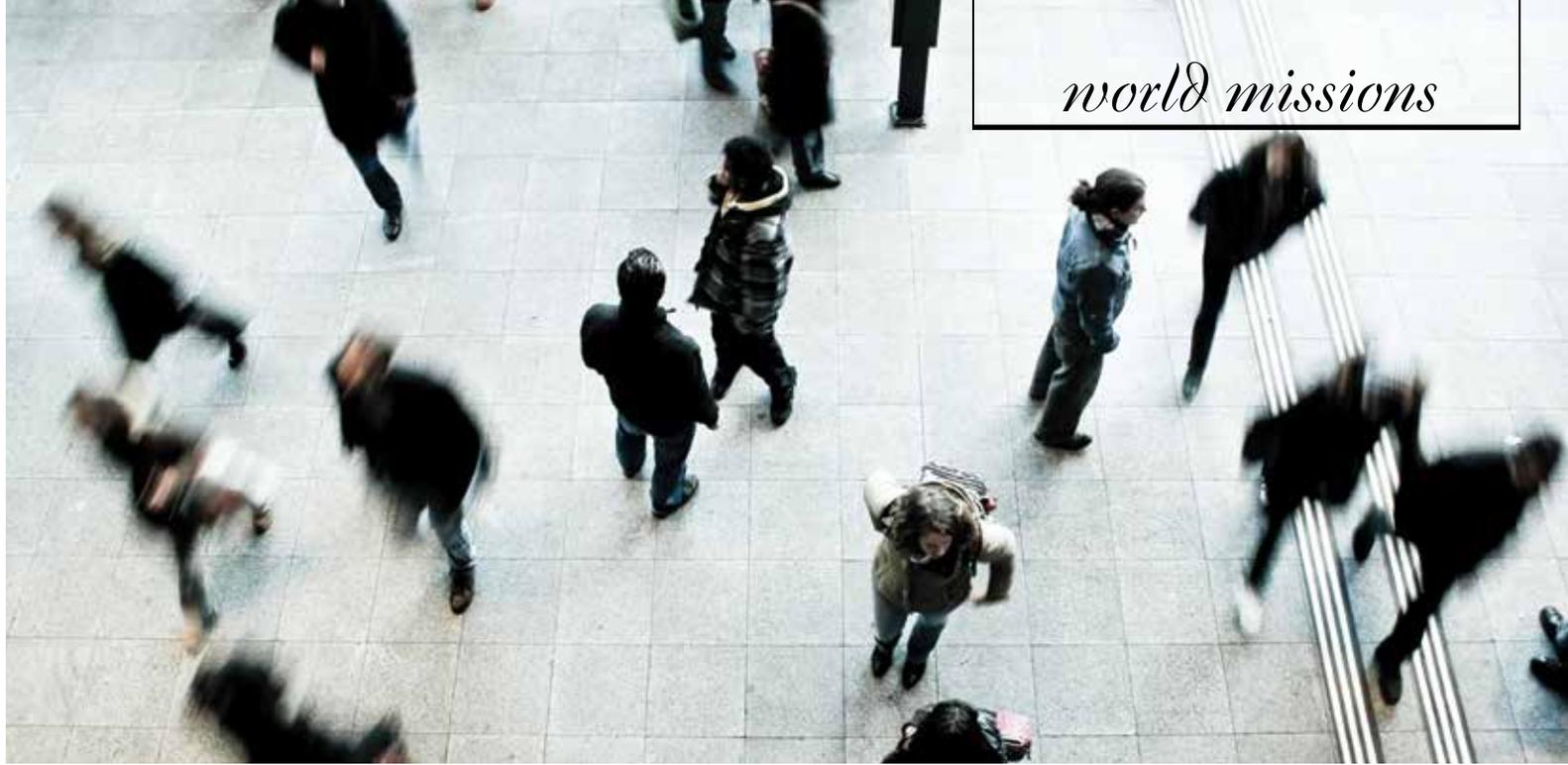
Members of the Coordinating Committee voted to receive three congregations onto the roster of the AFLC:

- **Shiloh Free Lutheran**, Rapid City, S.D., is served by Pastor Andy Coyle
- **Cross and Crown Lutheran Church**, Montebello, Calif.
- **Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**, China Grove, N.C.

Members of the Coordinating Committee voted to receive two men onto the licensed pastor roster:

- **Kent Klawonn**, Viborg, S.D., serves Bethany Lutheran in Viborg. The congregation is currently applying for membership in the AFLC.
- **Kevin Borg**, Valley City, N.D., is serving as interim pastor at Grace Free Lutheran, Valley City, N.D.

Three graduating men from the Free Lutheran Seminary will be ordained during the closing service of the Annual Conference on June 17: **Aaron Olson**, **Jon Langness**, and **Brandon Marschner**. The service will take place at the Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis.



On my way from Maringá to teach at the seminary in Campo Mourão, I observed the changes made to the highway as a 20-year project of widening the 50-mile stretch between the two cities nears completion. As I contemplated the improvements, I started to think of the Parable of the Wedding Feast, in which is found a call to “go ye into the highways and byways and compel them to come in” (Matthew 22:9).

The parable concerns the Kingdom of God and in it, the king—God—prepares the wedding feast for his son—Jesus. Through his servants—prophets, priest, pastors, and Christian workers—God sends out an invitation to the feast. He wants all of those who call themselves His people present. This is the wedding feast of the Lamb, the day of the Lord. It is the great banquet that God is preparing, when the bride goes to live with the groom.

The King joyously prepares for this event. When all is ready, He sends His messengers to tell His invited guests the good news that they are to come. Many of His people, however, reject the invitation because

HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

BY PASTOR JONATHAN ABEL

they have gotten caught up in the affairs of this world, which have become far more important than their relationship to the King. So He sends His servants into the streets (the city squares), the lanes (the avenues and boulevard of the cities), the highways (other little towns and villages) and the hedges (small country lanes). His desire is a full banquet room.

I have worked in all sorts of areas in Brazil, big cities and small villages alike. On the small farms here many people don't have money to build fences, so they plant a hedge around their house called a live fence. They are the poor, usually rejected by those who call themselves, “God's people.” But as the parable relates, the command is to “compel,” or constrain, them to come in. This means hard work for the servants of the King. They are to convince the poor that the invitation is no joke. And they must carry the lame and lead the blind to the feast until the house is full to the King's satisfaction.

As I ponder this, I ask myself how I can make this a part of my approach to ministry. How do I convey this kind of heart to my students? I want them to understand that God has commanded us to go, and that there is urgency in this command because He wants His house full. He also wants us to go to every area. To those who are liked and those who are not; to those who have needs and to those who do not; to those in large cities, and to those who are in the remotest part of the world.



This is our goal, challenge, responsibility, and joy. Psalm 126:5 reminds us, “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.” The work is hard, but the rewards are great. May we be true to God's call and true to His command so that they may know we are truly of God as we invite them to His awesome banquet. Do we have His heart that wants all of humanity in a relationship with Him? Are we faithful to this end?

Abel is an AFLC missionary serving in Maringá, Brazil.

Bible school to host 50th anniversary celebration

AFLBS will host a weekend celebration as the school marks 50 years. The free event will take place July 28-31 on the campus of the AFLC Schools in Plymouth, Minn., and all are invited. The weekend will feature Bible classes, workshops, worship services, class reunions, recreational outings, a 5K run/walk, and a 50th anniversary gala, featuring speaker Wayne Pederson.

Registration for the event is now open. To register, go to aflbs.org/50. For more information, email 50thAFLBS@gmail.com.

FLY Beyond July 18-22

The AFLC Youth Ministry department will host FLY Beyond July 18-22 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis. The youth leadership camp will feature evening sessions with Pastor Tim Carlson, Adam McCarlson, Pastor David Nelson, and Pastor Matthew Ballmann as speakers. Daily Bible studies in Acts will be taught by Pastor Robert Lee. And morning training sessions will focus on the theme, "A Christian in this Culture." For more information, visit the Youth Ministry web site (aflc.org/youth).

APRIL MEMORIALS

AFLBS

Alex & Emilia Alt
Lynn Estrem
Lila Dudenhoefer
Percy Strand (5)
Betty Borg (2)
Kenneth Rolf (20)
Ruth Claus
Betty Lou Strand
Dorothy Nelson
Agnes Rolf
Pastor Gene Sundby
John Larson (4)
Ingvald Berdal (2)

AFLTS

Alex & Emilia Alt
Percy Strand
Dorothy Nelson
Phil Grothe
Kenneth Rolf
Ron Mohr (2)
Pastor Gene Sundby

Ambassador Inst.

Alex & Emilia Alt

Builders Fellowship

Alex & Emilia Alt

FLAPS

Alex & Emilia Alt

General Fund

Pastor Gene Sundby
LaVonne Kallevig

Parish Education

Sylvia Fatland
Don Jorde

Home Missions

Pastor Gene Sundby
Kenneth Rolf

World Missions

Leo Boger
Alex & Emilia Alt
Lloyd Melby



New members were accepted recently at Newark Lutheran, Newark, Ill. Pictured, from left, are Pastor Luke Emerson. Michael, Autumn, Alexander, Damien, Matthew, Kaliee, and Conner Walsh, Genny Haggard, Sharon Anderson; and Larry and Wanda Fullmer.

Seminary offers Summer Institute classes

The Free Lutheran Seminary will host the Summer Institute of Theology Aug. 1-5 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. SIT courses offered this summer include:

"Studies in Colossians," with Dr. Phil Haugen, instructor. This verse-by-verse class will examine the themes of the sufficiency of Christ's work, congregational life, and personal and corporate worship.

"Content-Driven Corporate Worship," with various topics covered over five days by a panel of teachers including Pastor Robert Lee, Chelsea Chen, Andrew Hanson, and Ryan Egan.

"Choral Conducting and the Church Choir," taught by Andrew Hanson.

"Equipping the Saints," taught by Pastor Wade Mobley. This course will establish the biblical necessity, definition, and methodology of equipping congregational members for service in God's kingdom.

Also offered will be several workshops on practical skills such as audio/visual, organ, voice, percussion, Luther's hymns, and working with creatives.

For more information, and to register visit aflts.org.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-April 30, 2016

FUND	REC'D IN APRIL	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$37,385	\$132,895	\$122,190
Evangelism	6,409	36,311	49,658
Youth Ministries	10,428	32,568	42,234
Parish Education	7,409	37,551	46,871
Seminary	20,805	79,602	89,211
Bible School	62,007	158,499	139,834
Home Missions	39,668	167,837	154,583
World Missions	59,360	196,718	121,007
Personal Support	67,423	217,403	162,624
TOTALS	\$310,894	\$1,059,384	\$928,212

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

WHO ARE THE EVANGELICALS?

There are words whose meanings have changed over the years. What does it mean in the terminology of today, for example, when we sing, “Don we now our gay apparel,” in the familiar yuletide song? To call a congregation a “reconciling” church has taken on a strange new connotation, too, and so the list could go on and on.

What does it mean to be “evangelical?” First of all, it’s a Bible term, from the Greek word for “gospel” or “good news.” It is also a Reformation term, and Martin Luther was probably the first to use the term “evangelical church” to distinguish Protestants from Roman Catholics. This broader usage is still used in Europe for mainline Lutherans and other Protestants. In his book *The Spirituality of the Cross*, Professor Gene Veith rightly states that Lutherans were the first evangelicals.



Pastor Robert Lee

Today so-called Evangelical Christianity is a worldwide Protestant movement—crossing denominational lines—that emphasizes the centrality of the message of salvation by grace through faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. This application of the term stems back to the spiritual awakenings in Europe and North America during the 18th and 19th centuries, and are often traced back to German Lutheran Pietism and English Methodism. Historian David Bebbington writes that Evangelicalism (with a capital “E”) is marked by an emphasis on personal conversion, a high view of Holy Scriptures, the message of the atonement of Christ, and active evangelistic outreach and social ministries.

An article in a recent issue of *Christianity Today* (CT) magazine notes the interest that researchers have in evangelicals, especially in regards to politics, since they are seen as a significant voting bloc

in America (“Defining Evangelicals in an Election Year,” by Leith Anderson and Ed Stetzer, April 2016). Yet evangelicals are not and should not be defined by their politics, and some would never use the label yet clearly belong in that category on the basis of their faith convictions. To add to the confusion, apparently there are open evangelicals, post-evangelicals, progressive evangelicals, neo-evangelicals, etc.

So what is an Evangelical? The CT article suggests four statements which define an evangelical Christian today:

- The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.
- It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.
- Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.
- Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God’s free gift of eternal salvation.

Some of our congregations use the word “evangelical” as part of their name; some Lutherans may use the word in its historic Reformation sense and others merely as mainline Protestants. We would surely want to expand the above statements to more adequately clarify who we are, yet by God’s grace the AFLC is an evangelical fellowship in the simple and correct sense of the word. Who are the evangelicals? One would hope that they are us.

There is another step to take in our consideration of the term. Based on the four statements above, are you an evangelical? Am I? My answer means more than determining the religious category to which I belong.

IN MEMORY OF GENE SUNDBY

It was in 1963 that Gene and his family became part of the newly organized AFLC, when he accepted a call to serve as lay pastor of the three-congregation Newfolden, Minn., parish. Later he would serve the Culbertson, Mont., and Greenbush, Minn., parishes, and was a frequent guest evangelist in many congregations. But in 1974 a life-long chronic health problem became a disabling illness, and he was forced to resign and move back home to Canada. It took almost five years for his health to stabilize, and eventually he was able to accept some limited ministry opportunities.

In 1983 he was contacted by some people in Lake Alma, Sask., who would organize a new congregation and then the AFLC in Canada, of which Gene was elected president. He continued in that position until 2005, guiding the new church body as it grew, and he wrote that these were some of the most fulfilling years of his life.

Professor Gene Veith rightly states that Lutherans were the first evangelicals.

Gene knew who we are as “free” Lutherans, and why we are who we are. His counsel was wise and thoughtful. Most of my contacts with him in recent years were by phone, and we usually were able to settle all matters of church and state during long visits. I will miss my friend. Blessed be his memory.

something to share

HOW FAR IS JERUSALEM?

BY PEGGY BERGLUND

Several years ago our son gave me a ring, not one of great monetary value, but highly valued by me. While washing my hands, I noticed it missing.

The search began, looking under furniture, going through wastebaskets, checking out pockets—all to no avail. It was lost. Six years later, while staking out the dimensions of where our new home was to be built on land we had camped on for years, my ring was spotted safely nestled in the grass at the base of a tree. The lost was found, and we rejoiced!

The woman mentioned in Luke 15:9-10 called together her friends and neighbors, saying, “Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.” Jesus went on to say, “... in the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

According to The Barna Group (www.barna.org), there are, “156 million U.S. residents who are not engaged with a Christian Church” (*Articles in Faith and Christianity*, Dec. 10, 2014). That is close to half the total

population of the United States. The Barna Group’s research also shows that only 19 percent of those claiming to be “born again” have a biblical worldview (*Research Releases in Faith and Christianity*, March 9, 2009). That greatly increases the number of people yet to be evangelized and discipled.

Before His ascension Jesus told His disciples, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jerusalem, where they lived, was where they were told to start. Their neighbors, those they worked with, family, friends—they were to tell them about Jesus. It was a call to evangelism. Holy Spirit-empowered evangelism.

How far is it to “Jerusalem”? Just step outside your door and you’re there. Wherever you live, your neighborhood is your Jerusalem. Where we work, where we shop, the restaurants we eat at, the parks we walk in, some unusual places we find ourselves in—all are our Jerusalems. Some of those 156 million or more people needing

the Lord live in our Jerusalems. That’s where Holy Spirit-empowered evangelism begins.

The good news is that we’re not left on our own as we “plant a seed” or “water” what has been planted, because it’s God who makes it grow (I Corinthians 3:7-8). I love how our calling is described in v. 9, “For we are God’s fellow workers.” The Holy Spirit empowers us to partner with God in His ministry of rescuing the lost and discipling those new to following Him.

I could hardly wait to tell anyone who would listen about my ring that had been lost but was now found in a most unusual place. But it’s no comparison to the joy expressed by the angels in heaven over one who has repented—someone who has been found, and sometimes in the most unusual places. Even in our own Jerusalem. And then we can rejoice together with the angels.

Berglund is a member of Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis.