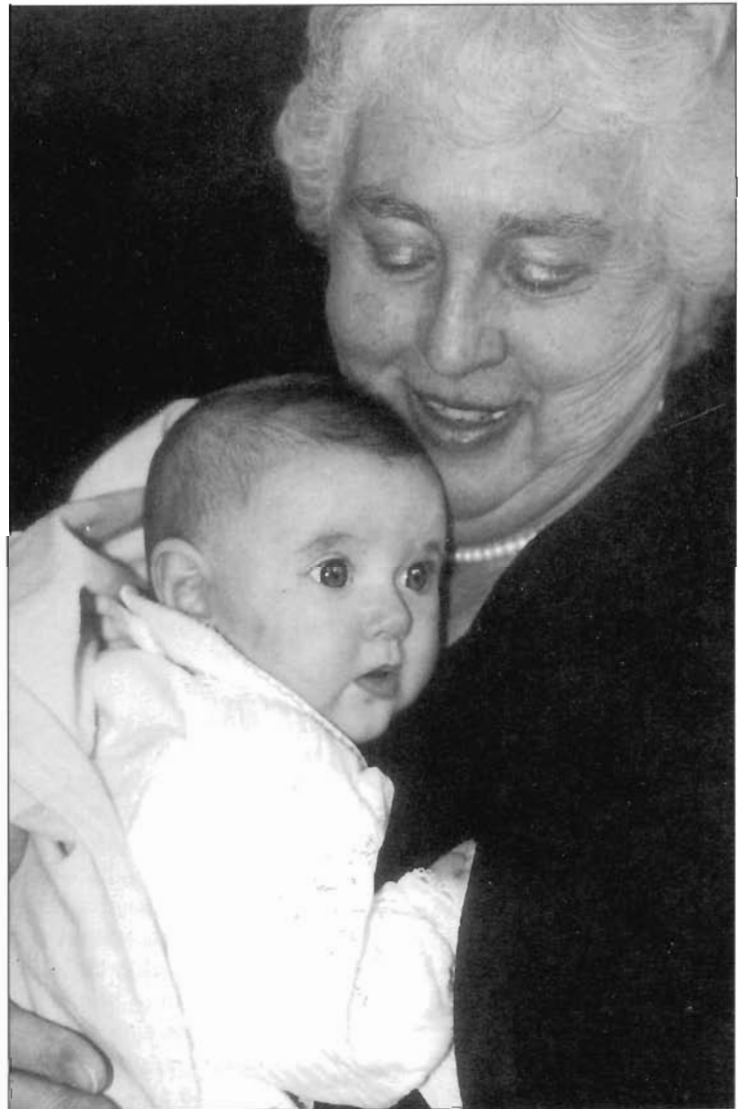


# THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

June 12, 2001

*Train a child in  
the way he should  
go, and when he is  
old he will not  
turn from it.*

*Proverbs 22:6, NIV*



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them into the Word?  
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# THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

June 12, 2001  
Volume 39, Number 8



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## AN ENCOURAGING WORD

# God's gift, God's tool

I remember well the day each of my children were born. My wife and I looked forward to their coming, and tried to prepare, as best we could, for their arrival. We took all the necessary precautions; even those that weren't necessary! When our first daughter was born the television show, "All in the Family," was popular. In one episode Gloria, who was nine months pregnant, became stuck in a telephone booth. This episode prompted my wife's grandmother to jot off a note to us requesting that I keep her out of phone booths. We all had a chuckle over it; but we knew where grandma's heart was! Like the writer of Psalm 127 says, "children are a treasure (gift) from God above." It is debatable who teaches who when a new child comes into the home. The baby certainly programs mom and dad to jump at their beckon-call. Even Scripture tells us of children teaching adults. When Jesus sought to teach the disciples the essence of faith, He brought a little child into their midst. The disciples had been discussing among themselves who was the greatest. Jesus answered them saying, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of God. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

This was not the only time God taught adults a lesson through using a child. Another time, Jesus told His disciples to have the people seated, and then to serve them. The disciples were aghast! All they had to work with were the contents of a young lad's lunch: five barley loaves and two small fish. This lad willingly gave this lunch to Jesus; and Jesus fed over 5,000 people that day with those meager supplies! This

child learned that no resource is insignificant when it is placed in Jesus' hands!

Young people have a lot to offer us. They have enthusiasm, fresh ideas, seemingly unlimited energy, and a desire to make a difference in the world they live in! I cannot imagine a better missionary candidate to reach their own generation for Christ than another youth. They may even be more effective in reaching their grandparent's generation. I remember my younger brother going over to visit our neighbor one afternoon. He was demonstrating his musical talents for her, and then encouraging her to join him in singing gospel choruses. When my father returned home from the office, he heard our neighbor, Mrs. Berg, singing at the top of her lungs. As he glanced around the corner, there was my younger brother directing her and singing as well! Who knows what result came from the harmless little encounter between my brother and our neighbor lady.

Young person, you have much to offer! Would you consider being a tool in God's hand? He can accomplish marvelous things with you that will reap eternal dividends.



— **Pastor Edward Strom**  
**Emmanuel and Hauge**  
**Lutheran Parish**  
**Kenyon, Minnesota**

We can direct our kids to a serious commitment to Christ, but we must start by addressing the hypocrisy and inconsistencies in our own lives. Next, we

**1** need to make sure that we are following God's leading by studying His Word daily. ... our relationships with our teens must be authentic and built upon trust and love. If our faith is to reach them, we've got to live it out in our relationships with them.

—Walt Mueller

**4** It may be that one of the best things the church can offer its youth is the active and assertive presence of those who have gone before them, been through things, and are willing both to share and to listen, but not, in false kindness, to abdicate the authority that gives value to the gift they bring.

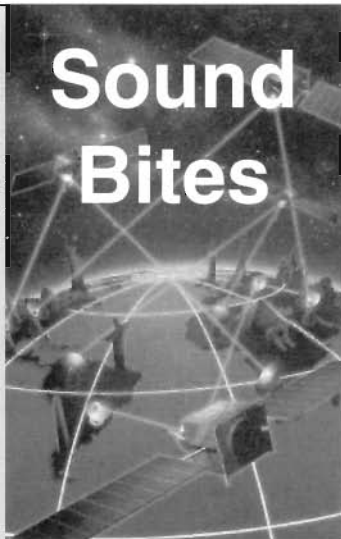
—Marilyn Chandler McEntyre

**6**

Twenty percent of 6th- through 12th-graders say they have not had a good conversation lasting for at least 10 minutes with at least one of their parents in more than a month.

—Peter Benson

## Sound Bites



**2**

Don't compare your youth ministry to ours or anyone else's. Comparing isn't productive — you'll either feel bad ("We're worse") or arrogant ("We're better").

—Doug Fields

A Christian family is a family where relationships with each other are patterned after the way God communicates and relates to His children. It is a place where truth is lived out, not merely talked about.

—Gary Oliver

**3**

Teens with parents who are at home at key times of the day — such as breakfast, after school, at dinner and at bedtime — are less likely to try alcohol, tobacco or marijuana. Shared parent-teen activities and high parent expectations appear to be protective as well.

—Michael D. Resnick

**5**

# Toward a healthy relationship

Take a moment and think about the way in which your congregation is reaching students for Jesus and growing Christian students in the Lord. How effective you are in sharing Christ with teens will be one good indicator of how healthy the relationship is in your congregation between the youth worker, the pastor, and the congregation.

— *Rev. Jason Holt*  
*Youth Worker, Pastor,*  
*and Congregational Member,*  
*Calvary Free Lutheran,*  
*Fergus Falls, Minnesota*



Encouraging  
youth workers,  
pastors and  
congregations  
in youth ministry.

I seek to author this article as a representative of all three areas. I am a youth worker in my congregation. I am a pastor in my congregation. I am an active member of my congregation. Therefore, the things that I share in writing this is not as a member of one side taking aim at another. Such a thought of “sides” between youth worker, pastor, and congregation is part of our problem to begin with.

Why is a “healthy relationship” important?

The easiest answer to this question is to look at the situation if a healthy relationship

doesn't exist for a congregation's youth ministry. What does that look like? The pastor questions the youth worker and the youth worker doubts the pastor. The congregation doesn't trust the youth worker and the youth worker does things his own way, without regard for the congregation. The congregation resists the pastor's direction and the pastor seems to just push the congregation harder.

These attitudes and actions are contrary to the Lord's direction for a local congregation to walk in the love of Christ (Ephesians 5:1-2). What can be done in growing a healthy relationship with the goal of a healthy youth ministry? We need to have three things in common: vision, service, and agreement.

## A common vision

The first step in developing a healthy relationship is establishing a common vision between youth worker, pastor, and congregation for the youth ministry. This common vision must be Christ-centered. It must be clear. A typical way in which tension rises between youth worker, pastor, and congregation is a different emphasis in vision.

For example, the youth worker's vision may be for a strong outreach and evangelism emphasis in the community and schools. Meanwhile, the pastor's vision may be for a strong discipleship emphasis in small groups and Bible studies. At the same time, the congregation's vision may be for a growing one-to-one ministry of adults and teens. These are all good visions, but it is not a common vision. The result is that the youth worker hears that he is spending too much time "hanging out with kids who aren't even from our church." Disagreement follows.

A common vision could include evangelism, and discipleship, and adult mentorship, but it would have to be a shared direction from youth worker, pastor, and congregation.

Everything from the youth worker's job description to the youth worker's expected schedule contributes to making certain that a common vision is in place.

Galatians chapter five has some lessons which apply to our discussion of a healthy relationship. The first verse states: "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm." As a youth ministry in a local congregation, we need to keep our eyes on Jesus and the purpose of sharing Him with students, and then stand firm on that common vision.

## A common service

When I hear about a disagreement within a youth ministry, I often wonder who or what is being served. It seems that we have many people serving their ideas of what the youth ministry should look like. A quick follow-up to a common vision is a common service.

A common service is a commitment within the ministry to serve Jesus Christ and to serve one another by His love. I am convinced

that a majority of congregational conflicts over youth ministry would be at least reduced, and more likely resolved, if this idea that it's "my (no matter who the person is) ministry so I'm going to do with it what I want" was changed. This attitude is truly turning freedom in Christ into an opportunity for the flesh. An attitude for a healthy relationship carries the idea that it's "His ministry so I'm going to serve Him in it."

## A common agreement

The last part of this growth process is a common agreement concerning staff roles. For a healthy relationship and a healthy ministry, we need distinct and complementary roles within our staff. Here, youth worker and pastor agree to respect and support one another in their individual roles within the congregation. It's not a matter of who is more important. Both staff positions have an equal importance of carrying out the mission of the congregation. It reminds me of Paul's discussion of the body of Christ in I Corinthians 12. It is as silly for a youth worker or pastor or any other member of a congregation to think his role is more important than another as the head saying to the feet, "I have no need of you" (v. 21).

Distinct roles, where the overlap of responsibility is at a minimal, gives the needed structure where the ministry is at a maximum. If the roles are not distinct, we are inviting conflict. Galatians 5 closes with these two verses: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another."

Without a common vision, a youth ministry will struggle to do what it is called to do. Without a common service, a youth ministry will battle with one another. Without a common agreement, a youth ministry will fight with its identity.

With all three, the Lord will work in us for His sake, reaching students and families for Christ. With all three, the Lord will move us toward a healthy relationship. With all three, the Lord will make us free and living congregations in youth ministry.



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*Galatians 5:13 "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."*

---





—Bradley Darge  
Youth Director,  
Helmar Lutheran  
Newark, Illinois

# Get them into the Word

A distraught mother came to me once with a valid concern for her troubled teen. She was upset at the lifestyle and friends that her son kept, and wondered what she could do to get him “back involved in church.”

I can feel for this mother. As I work with youth, I am continually concerned time and again as I watch kids come and go spiritually. Some once seemed to be on track and loving God, but now they are never seen at any Bible studies or attending worship services. “If we could just get teens to read their Bibles more.” Doesn’t that sound like a valid remedy for our troubled youth? But as those who work with kids can attest, that in itself is the great hurdle to get over, or even to approach.

In this day and age, it seems we try to pack so many “to do” items into already busy schedules. Teens are becoming busier and busier, with the increased focus on sports involvement and so many other extra-curricular activities. Those things are not necessarily wrong in themselves, but when a teen never has the time or the energy to be involved in Bible studies or even worship on Sunday mornings, we should not be surprised at their spiritual atrophy.

In his book *Right from Wrong*, Josh McDowell, one of our nation’s foremost Christian youth speakers, writes that the generation now embarking on adulthood has been raised wholly under the influence of television and electronic media. Some kids do not even know what life was like without the internet. Many of these kids have been raised without the influence of extended family, and with parents who have never known deprivation or want. McDowell describes this generation as the first in history to be raised by parents who assign the primary responsibility of their children’s education to someone else.

The affluence and entertainment of teens is on a ballistic rise. So, in this video game-crazed culture, how do we get teens to spend more time in God’s Word? It may be a bitter pill to swallow, but I have to put the ball first in the hands of the Christian parents of these youth. Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” When I was growing up, in my house the first person to be up in the morning was always my father. Sometimes I would wake up early enough to catch a glimpse of him at the kitchen table surrounded by commentaries, with the Bible at the center of it all. Parents need to set an example for their children. If parents are not seeking after Christ in their own personal life, it would be nearly impossible to expect that of their own children.

But the example does not stop at home, it must continue outside the home as well. What I’m referring to is the whole family having regular, active involvement in what happens at church, and in fellowship with the body of believers. When teens see that Bible study and worship are a vital and necessary aspect of their parent’s spiritual walk, and that it makes a difference in their lives, the children will want to know the same fulfillment. They will have a literal example of what fellowship is all about.

Youth also need to be encouraged by their parents to take part in these things. When parents, by example, encourage youth to get involved in Christian happenings, I believe they will respond favorably. In Ephesians 6:4 it says, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” Children will understandably be frustrated when they are forced into being involved, but the parents do not by example show the need for it.

I understand we cannot overnight turn our youth into Bible-studying prayer warriors. Nor do all kids grow up in Christian

# Youth work without fund raising

**Y**outh ministry without fund raising; sounds like an oxymoron! Where does the money come from for all the pizza the junior high group consumes? What about pioneer club supplies or those cool t-shirts that the high school group wears with their logo on it?

It is possible to do youth ministry without any fund raising at all. I know it is true. That is how youth ministry is funded where I had the privilege of being the full-time youth worker for seven years.

Each year I presented Ruthfred Lutheran Church in Bethel Park, Pennsylvania with a budget for the youth work. After figuring

homes. So how do we get our students from the position they're in, to a new level of commitment? If we look at an example in the Bible, I believe Jesus answers that for us.

Christ met with Nicodemus one dark night on a rooftop, as recorded in John chapter 3. He helped Nicodemus see his need of a Savior, and proclaimed His love for the world. In a similar way, youth are brought to a place where they start reading God's Word when we help them see their own personal need for it. By constantly pointing to Christ, and to God's Word to deal with the issues teens face today, we begin to show them the validity of the Christian walk and the importance of Scripture.

Recently our local school invited a hypnotist to perform a demonstration for the kids. His claim was that through the power of hypnosis a person will be able to trick and deceive his or her mind into handling and overcoming their problems and struggles. The world's methods for helping teens deal with the struggles they go through are, in many ways, little more than attempts at trickery and deception. We need to get our youth to take a good look at themselves and see the reality of their need of truth and a Savior. And then we pray we will see kids at the feet of Jesus Christ.



camp costs, pizza prices and potential attendance increases, I would come up with an estimated amount of money that the youth group would spend in the upcoming year. This dollar amount was submitted to the board and they would work it into the budget of the church. Our entire fund came from the tithes and offerings of the body of Christ at Ruthfred. God didn't need to work things out on paper. He was the provider of our financial needs. He opened the hearts of the people to give cheerfully when there was a need.

I recall times when special financial needs came up among the youth. At those times, I began with prayer. God always provided. His storehouse is limitless. Even when the need was not financial, prayer was always the key. Sometimes it was a need for prayer warriors, drivers, discipleship leaders, or just encouragement from the adult members to our youth. There were times when I told no one of the needs I saw among the youth. I spoke only to the Lord in prayer and He would send someone with the ability to meet the needs. What wonderful faith-building experiences these were for me!

When we arrive at the end of our own resources, only then do we allow the Lord to step in and do the miraculous. In a sincere effort to "take care of business" properly, sometimes we limit God to our own resources. In reality, He has a much larger supply than we could ever dream of having ourselves.

Youth ministry without fund raising may not sound possible, and in our own efforts it is not! However, with God in it, then all things are possible.



— **Brenda Stilley**  
**AFLBS women's**  
**resident head**  
**Plymouth, Minnesota**

# There is hope

— Marty Moser  
Medicine Lake Luthern  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

I was only a child when I first turned to drugs and alcohol — seven years old to be exact. By age 14, I used them often and within three years, I was an alcoholic. Before I turned 21, I was part of a drug manufacturing “business” and had a boat, cars, money, and lived in the fast lane. Then the law caught up to me and I faced a prison term that left me desperate.

I was desperate to fill my heart with something. I did not really know what I needed, but I knew there was something very wrong inside of me. One night years earlier, I had tied up at a wealthy resort dock and as I stepped off the boat, I was overwhelmed with that feeling of emptiness. It was a feeling I have never forgotten.

As a child, I was raised with the philosophy that to get through this life, I had to do whatever it took to be successful. It was all about looking out for number one — me. Yes, I was baptized as an infant by parents who did care for me and loved me. For them baptism was just something one did, but their lives demonstrated no spiritual life. Little did they know that God would use

that later in my life.

One night at age six, I woke up frightened with the thought of dying and wondering what would happen to me. I woke my mother and asked her what happens when we die and she just simply said, “You go to heaven.” It settled my childlike fear for the time being.

Not long after that, my mom became ill with cancer and I saw her deteriorate before my eyes. Our family did come together and pray, but I don’t think we prayed with believing

faith. After years of treatment, Mother died. That was a turning point in my life and my occasional use of drugs and alcohol grew into a daily need.

When I became a part of the criminal manufacturing of drugs, I started doing prison time. In the early 1990s, I was sentenced to a long term and I thought my life was over. I was just going to end up being another state number and considered ending my life. That night the Lord knocked on my heart’s door. It came to me very hard and real that I should pray. I asked Jesus that if He was who He said He was, would He save me just as I was? I prayed most of that night and God answered me. With the dawn, I arose filled with something very right and that emptiness I experienced on that dock many years earlier was gone. Now I had hope. Now I had Jesus. It was a new man who faced the long road to complete my prison term.

I like the testimony of David in Psalm 40:1-4: “I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay; and he set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. And He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; many will see and fear, and will trust in the Lord. How blessed is the man who has made the Lord his trust, and has not turned to the proud, nor to those who lapse into falsehood.”

I think of all that the world is and what it has to offer. It is all a lie. I am blessed and the Lord is my trust. The Word of God is real in my life this day. Many verses have leaped off the pages of the Bible bringing me hope, encouragement, and true joy. It’s the kind I never knew before. Now I live for Jesus. After studying at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School in Plymouth, Minnesota, I am involved with different inner-city ministries in ways that I can’t even fathom. God alone deserves the praise.

I have written a psalm of praise to the Lord.

“My Lord, My God. The beauty that surrounds me, and the beauty that is seen. Thy hand has put before me, the promise You gave to me, as I gaze at what Your hand has made I fall to my knees and pray. To You, Oh God, and only You. You take my breath away. The joy to be in Your presence, Oh Lord. The joy that comes from Thee is the joy that can be found in no one else. It is the joy of Jesus in me. Amen.”



*The Lord is near to the  
brokenhearted, and  
saves those who are  
crushed in spirit.”*

— Psalm 34:18





# They were smoking in our yard

**T**roublemakers, problem kids, and druggies were all descriptions of the group of kids that were smoking in back of Community of Grace Lutheran in Omaha, Nebraska. They would walk across the street from the junior high and go to the church for a cigarette before school. The church's pastor, Brad Hoefs came to the youth director's office with this problem asking, "What should we do?"

The church already had in mind what they would do, and Amos Gray was their solution. Amos had worked at "Boys Town" in Omaha and was experienced in dealing with youth like this. He started his new job as youth director in the fall before school started. Those early fall mornings found Amos hanging around the kids in the back of the school as they smoked. Surprised and a little confused the students began talking to Amos and he got to know them by name.

One morning Amos brought donuts to share. Appreciative but still confused, the students relaxed a little and Amos got to know them better. Before long they were coming across the street after school just to hang out and talk with this man who was showing them something different. Soon Amos and the donuts became a regular part of their day. Their new friend was attracting them to come for more than just the donuts.

The cool fall weather soon forced them inside the church for their morning meal and, of course, when they were in the church they couldn't smoke. While enjoying breakfast, Amos started reading some things for them to think about; it happened to come from the Bible. Before they knew it, they were studying the Bible every morning before school. This was new stuff. They had never heard much about Jesus before except in swearing terms. Amos challenged them and they met the challenges. They started praying and they started to personalize this faith that they were learning about. They began asking questions like: "What if your dad beats you? What if your mom is dating a Muslim?" They didn't have time for the cigarettes any longer because their morning Bible study took all of their time.

At the end of that school year many of the students were going on to senior high. So Amos made pancakes, eggs and bacon for their last morning together. After school they all went to a skateboard park to show off a little. Their home lives were still hard and the concept of a loving God seemed difficult to believe in, but because they had seen a living example of Jesus in their lives some were changing by God's grace.

What would your church do?

— **Pastor Kevin Olson**  
*AFLC Youth Ministries Director*  
*Minneapolis, Minnesota*

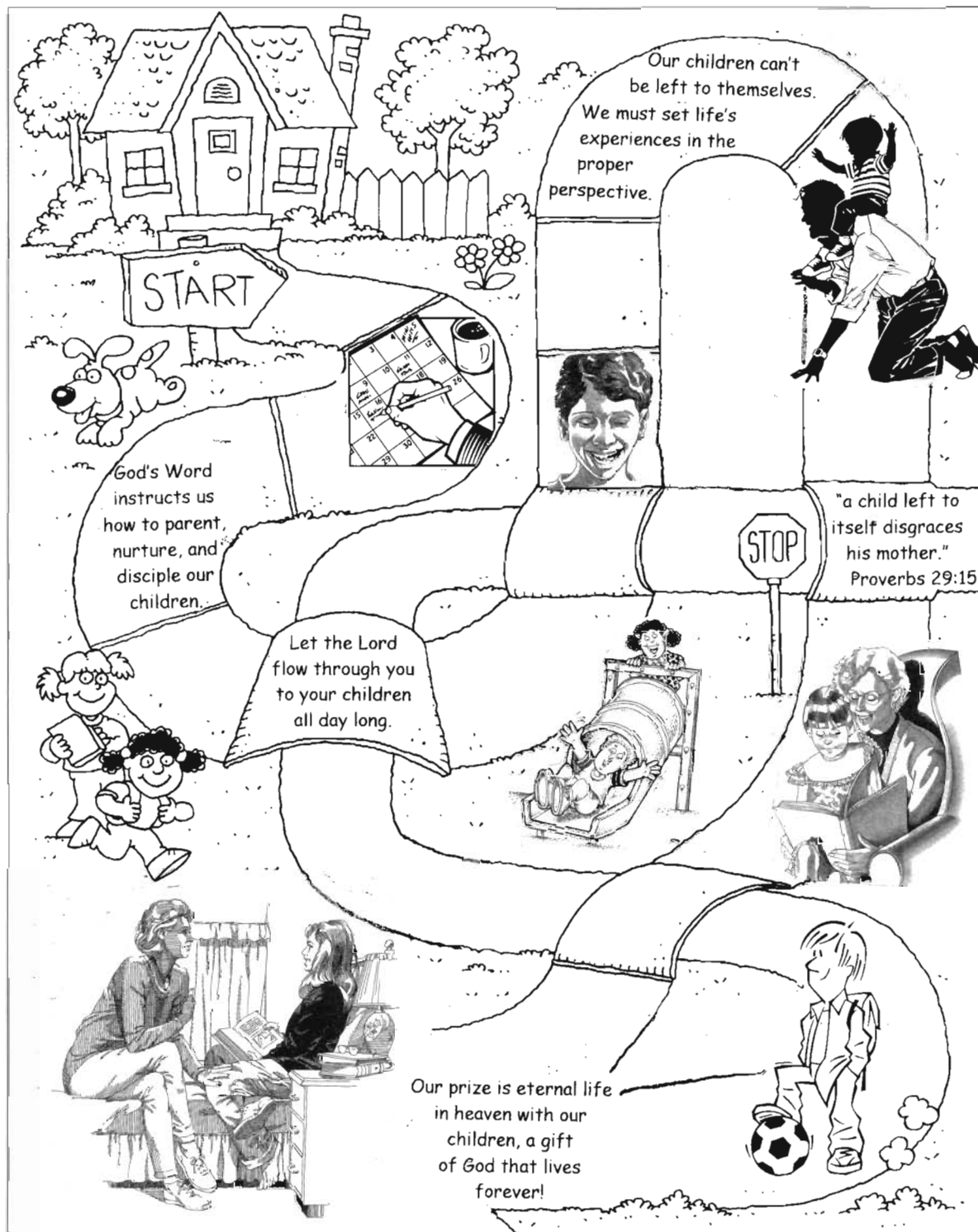


**Amos Gray**  
(center) and  
his friends.

# PARENTING WITH VISION

—Larry and Carri Williams  
Atonement Lutheran  
Arlington, Washington

In the midst of crying babies, runny noses, piles of laundry, sleepless nights, long to-do lists, it's easy to lose sight of the high calling of parenting. To parents in the midst of what seems like a whirlwind, we offer some words of encouragement and some long-term goals of parenting the Lord has placed on our hearts. They have fine-tuned our lives as parents and give us joy as we keep our eyes on God as He renews our minds to His pattern.



**S**o what are these goals? We all have short-term goals set: solid food, potty training, education, marriage. Some say "We raise our kids the best we can and hope that when they are grown they serve the Lord." However, God's Word says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6, KJV). It does not say, if they depart they will come back. It's a wonderful promise to parents. It's our responsibility to train. So where do we begin and what do we train for?

The ultimate goal is that we will be together in heaven. To meet this goal, we train them to be productive Christians in God's family. You say, "what is a productive Christian?" One who gives himself in humble service to be used by the Lord, whatever His will may be and all to the glory of God. It's a life that's always pointing others to Jesus. It's our responsibility to train, ever leading them to Jesus.

The training begins immediately at birth! We must be willing to live it ourselves. We must dedicate our lives to serve the Lord. More is caught than taught. Second Corinthians 2, verse 14 says, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him"(NIV). In chapter 3:2-3 it says we are a letter from Christ known and read by everybody. We are this and much more to our children through our life lived for Christ.

We not only show our children Christ by living as a productive Christian in God's family, but we actively train our children in all aspects of life. If we live an exemplary Christian life but don't actively train and disciple our children by aggressively training them in the ways of the Lord, their sin nature will naturally lead them down the wrong path. The Holy Scriptures says, "Train up a child," not let them grow up in a Christian home and hopefully they will serve the Lord. Keep in mind our goal — that they might be a fruitful and productive Christian who will be with us in

paradise.

This is a very active process as Romans 12:1-2 says, "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — His good, pleasing and perfect will." We live it and follow His precepts, His pattern.

We are so blessed to have God's personal letter to us. In it He instructs us on how to parent, nurture and disciple our children. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 (NIV) clearly says, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

Let the Lord flow through you to your children all day long. Grab every opportunity and use it wisely. In our home we read the Bible at breakfast and discuss it, read biographies of godly men and women at meals, listen to character building tapes in the car, discuss godly living while learning work ethic together, sing together, pray together, pass on our interests, do lots of positive things together and spend time together. Our children can't be left to themselves. We must

set life's experiences in the proper perspective. They are not to be left to fend for themselves. Until they are old enough to be accountable, we are their conscience so they don't get a false idea of good and bad. It's so plain in God's Word — "a child left to itself disgraces his mother" (Proverbs 29:15, NIV).

Parenting takes time and lots of it. You have time for what you make time for. Take the time to pray, read God's personal letter of counsel to you, apply it and give it everything you've got. Take an aggressive part. If you don't, someone or something else will. God did not give us our children to just say the sinner's prayer with them but to disciple them. If you don't disciple your own children but set out to disciple others around you, you have lost your high calling as a parent. In the day-to-day business of life, let's always remember God's goal — "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish" (II Peter 3:9, NIV). God does the saving work in their lives. He uses us to do the discipling and training!

Oswald Chambers said, "It is never do do and you'll be with the Lord, but be be and I will do through you." Philippians 3:12 says, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." In I Corinthians 9:24 we are told to "Run in such a way as to get the prize." Ours is eternal life in heaven with our children, a gift of God that lives forever!



## O Lord, Our Little Ones To Thee

— William Whiting  
Ambassador Hymnal  
No. 273

O Lord, our little ones to Thee  
In faith and hope we give;  
We know that through the mystery,  
Their newborn souls shall live.

We pour the water on their brow,  
The sacred words we say;  
Baptize them with the Spirit now,  
And keep them Thine away.

Help them to go from strength to strength,  
Until, full-grown in Thee,  
They come before Thy face at length,  
And all Thy glory see.

Fourth in a series of "women of excellence."

# Queen Esther, bold yet wise

— Carol Dietsche, Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wisconsin

**T**he dictionary defines bold in several ways. The one that best describes Esther, our "woman of excellence" this month, is "showing or requiring courage."

Travel back in time to the Persian kingdom. Esther was of Jewish descent, a race often discriminated against. She was an orphan raised by her cousin Mordecai and part of the group of young virgins chosen to be part of the harem of King Ahasuerus. This was not a matter of choice for these young women or their families. It is easy to imagine that there could have been some competition within this elite group as to which one would gain the king's approval and become the next queen. Perhaps there was apprehension as they thought about what happened to the previous queen, Vashti, and the degradation she was subjected to because of her refusal to do the king's bidding.

As Esther entered the scene she found favor with the king's representative, Hegai, to whom these maidens were entrusted. Her submission to his advice demonstrated a spirit of humble acceptance, which required courage on her part. Esther was then crowned as queen by King Ahasuerus.

Meanwhile, Haman, an official who despised Jews in general and Mordecai in particular, persuaded King Ahasuerus to order the annihilation of all the Jews in the empire. Though Mordecai had instructed Esther never to reveal she was a Jew, after learning of Haman's plot, he challenged Esther to act on behalf of her people and go to the king to plead for mercy.

Both Esther and Mordecai knew that if she approached the king without being summoned, she could be sentenced to death. She reminded Mordecai of this and he responded with a message that even though she was the queen, her life would not be spared. "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish" (Esther 4:14).

What an example Esther set for us as she faced this challenge. Desiring to not make a hasty decision, she asked her people to fast with her for three days. This must have been a time of serious supplication to the Lord as Esther sought God's wisdom and courage.

The day came when she did go before the king with no promise that she would be received with his blessing. The king did hold out the golden scepter to her and gave her his attention. However, her responsibility did not end at this point.

She still needed to face and defeat her people's enemy. This required more faith and courage. Esther, with God's help, was able to unmask the enemy and save her people from destruction.

In the beginning of Esther's story, the king's elaborate plan that served his appetite for gorgeous women is described. This really was not his plan, someone commented, but part of God's plan to have a young Jewish maiden waiting in the harem. May we, too, as women of excellence have the courage to accept where God has placed us and allow Him to use us. We may never be called to save a nation, but if we are God's women we will be called to serve Him wherever we are.

Like Esther may we seek God's wisdom, be teachable, humble in spirit, seeking God's will in all things and may we be bold, seeking courage from God when needed. I know He will supply all this and more because he has supplied this for me. Boldness is not my strong trait and there have been times when in my own strength and wisdom I would have failed except for the courage God has given me to accept the challenges placed before me.

May Mordecai's challenge to Esther challenge us also: "and who knows but that you have come to the Kingdom for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14).



Shakopee, Minnesota — Speakers at the recent Minneapolis District WMF Spring Rally: (L. to R.) Vicky Johnson, Amery, Wisconsin; Barb Elmquist, Cloquet, Minnesota; Jeannie Brandt, Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Kim Schmitke, Alexandria, Minnesota; and Sharon Olson, Cloquet, Minnesota.

## Record attendance at WMF spring retreat



Nola Johnson and Bonnie Timm, Wisconsin, Wisconsin.



Sherrill Erickson, Barronett, Wisconsin.



Good Shepherd Lutheran of Cokato, Minnesota, was one of several women's groups attending the retreat.

The weekend of May 4-5, 2001 was the Women's Missionary Federation Spring Retreat at the Association Retreat Center in Osceola, Wisconsin. The weekend featured a seminar about "Growing Healthy Women in Ministry." In previous years, attendance has been around 40 to 60 ladies, but this year, God brought 172 ladies together for this life-changing event.

The national WMF officers express thanks to the following for their assistance in making this weekend possible.

The ARC — \$4,560 in reduced rates.

Lutheran Brotherhood — \$3,000 in grant money.

WMF \$1,785 expenses exceeding income.

Attendees — \$8,200 registration fees.

God — His matchless grace.

Total cost for the weekend was \$17,545 for 172 women. It was above and beyond all that we could ask or imagine.

— *The national WMF officers*  
*Tammy Vukonich, treasurer*

## WMF Memorials

Marilyn Newshwander, Morris, IL  
Harriet Dalager, Webster, SD  
Hans Joens, Eagle Butte, SD  
Boe Stocklin, Faith, SD  
Myrtle Jorstad, Tioga, ND  
Art Olson, Tioga, ND  
Lee Quanbeck, McVile, ND  
Tobe Aukland, Valley City, ND  
Mavis Berkland, Morris, IL  
Mary Haugen, Wallace, SD

## ARC to build chapel

**Osceola, Wisconsin** — The Association Retreat Center is preparing to build a prayer chapel tucked into the wooded area on the edge of their property. The "A-frame" style chapel will hold 20 to 25 people and be 500 square feet. Donations for this project may be sent to: The ARC, 2372 30th Ave. & King's Way, Osceola, WI 54020.

## The strongest person

— *Micah Sheldon*

*(The author is a senior at Ray High School and is an active member of the youth group at Emmanuel Lutheran in Williston, North Dakota. He wrote this in tribute to the late Linda Odegaard who was always involved in district camps and activities in spite of her poor health. Her life and testimony will continue to impact the youth of the district whom she dearly loved.)*

The strongest person I ever met  
Was tiny and frail  
Her body was shutting down and failing.

Yet she faced each day with  
New courage and strength  
Her spirit bright and fiery.

For in her weakness Christ's strength  
Came shining through  
There was never a doubt about her faith.

Today she is at home  
With her heavenly Father  
And now both her body and spirit are anew.

Thank you, Jesus  
For someone who showed your love  
Thank you, Father, for Linda.



## Missionary care boxes

One of the more practical ways your congregation can minister to AFLC missionaries is through the sending of care packages. Missionary Becky Abel wrote of their used clothing sale last May 5: "This is a great blessing to people who struggle to make ends meet. We're thankful for the wonderful boxes of donated clothes churches have sent our way." Missionary Tamba Abel in Campo Grande and Missionary Carolyn Dyrud in Campo Mourao share the same testimony as they use the donations to reach out in ministry.

Send the boxes to:

Pastor Jonathan and Tamba Abel  
Caixa Postal 2150-20  
79008-970 Campo Grande, MS  
BRAZIL

*(Care packages of clothes only for the Jonathan Abels should be sent in their name to Campo Mourao — see the Connely Dyrud address below.)*

Pastor Paul and Becky Abel  
Caixa Postal 12125  
82021-970 Santa Felicidade, PR  
BRAZIL

Pastor Connely and Carolyn Dyrud  
Caixa Postal 44  
87300-970 Campo Mourao, PR  
BRAZIL

## What to pack in your care package

Used clothing in good condition — all sizes needed, all seasons for both genders. Layettes to give to new moms — diapers, plastic pants, and clothing wrapped in a receiving blanket.

Vitamins — especially multi-vitamins for children and vitamin C and E.

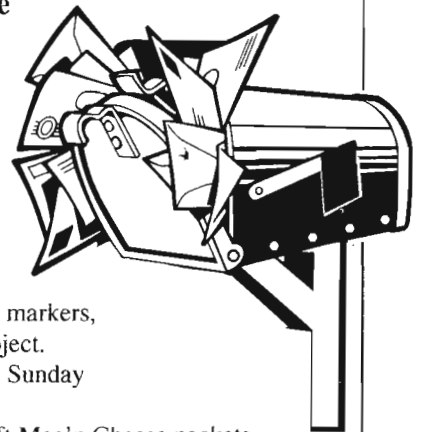
Medicines — Ibuprofen, band-aids, antibiotic cream, Tums.

Craft materials — construction paper, magic markers, stickers, crayons, ideas for a simple craft project.

Goodies — candy and gum, prizes to give to Sunday school children.

Food — cake mix, instant pudding mix, Kraft Mac'n Cheese packets, peanut butter, chocolate chips, special seasonings of spaghetti, taco, sloppy jo, oriental, gravy, salad dressing.

Thank you. Remember to not send anything in glass.



Pastor Joel visiting a home in an area called the "Back 40."



**Curitiba, Brazil** — Pictured is Missionary Paul Abel baptizing one of eleven adults last April at the congregation in Bateias. He led a profession of faith class for about 15 people during April. Missionary Becky Abel left Curitiba on May 17 for three weeks in the United States where she will attend the graduation of their daughter, Joanna from Hillcrest Academy in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.



Breakfast at the Paul Abel home. Pictured are members of short-term mission teams from Arlington, Washington, and the AFLBS Missionary Training Institute.

**Jerez, Mexico** — Medicine Lake Lutheran Academy of Minneapolis, Minnesota sent 25 high school students and nine adult leaders to work with Missionaries Dan Giles and Todd Schierkolk for twelve days earlier this spring. One of the adults making the trip was Pastor Gary Haug of Emmaus Lutheran in Bloomington, Minnesota. He shared some reflections in his May, 2001 church newsletter.

"It is clear that God has so ordered His Kingdom that He chooses to work through the prayers of His people. This truth took on a new reality for all of us who were on this trip.

"God showed His power with great clarity by answering our specific prayers very quickly. Early in our time at Jerez, we found that the size of the crowds made a better public address system essential. We had brought only a small battery-operated music system. At one of our first ministry venues, we found that the city had just what we needed; but at a rental fee of \$500 American dollars which was beyond our budget. That afternoon our group prayed fervently that God would provide some other way of getting more adequate sound. Instead of providing some "other" way, He provided that same system. The city officials had decided that we could use their system for the rest of the week, free of charge!

"Another time when we were presenting our mime and puppet ministries at a street market, we were approached very abruptly by two police officers in charge of keeping the crowd moving. Upon noticing the confrontation, our students who were designated for prayer that

day, began to seek the Lord. Immediately, and I do mean immediately, the demeanor of the officers became pleasant and they began instead to inquire if we were being treated with due respect from the local people. They did not ask us again to curtail our presentation."



The AFLBS concert choir returned to Minneapolis on May 7 after a three-week tour through Eastern Europe. Pictured is Christian Talley of Newark, Illinois, looking at the beautiful Slovakian countryside. A complete report will be in the next *Lutheran Ambassador*. Photo by Micah Hjermstad.

## Bible school students attend language camp

On May 28, seven Bible school students left for the English language camp in Petrozavodsk, Russia. They joined over 20 other men and women from the U.S. for the three-week camp sponsored by East European Mission Network. The seven AFLBS students are: Ruth Borgersen, Norway; May Britt Garvik, Norway; Sarah Kjos, Zimmerman, Minnesota; Cara Mackey, Champion, Mississippi; Jessica Nelson, Glyndon, Minnesota; Monica Olsen, Dupree, South Dakota; Esther Palmer, Shakopee, Minnesota.



Barnabas South: Carey Buhr, Milford, Illinois; Tomasz Chimiel, Czech Republic; Carmen Oelkers, Culbertson, Montana; Mike Borg, Cokato, Minnesota (not pictured).



Barnabas North: Paul Quam, Fergus Falls, Minnesota; Amber Nelson, Glyndon, Minnesota; Gabe Moteberg, Ada, Minnesota; (not pictured, Masha Ploprkova, Petrozavodsk, Russia.)



## Foundation

Amy Hecker, Dickinson, North Dakota;  
Paul Blom, Alexandria, Minnesota;  
Anne Haugen, Crystal, Minnesota;  
Kevin Subbert, LaCrosse, Wisconsin;  
Betsy Parsley, Pipestone, Minnesota

## Majesty

Kristin Knutson, Centerville, South Dakota;  
Micah Hjermstad, Bruce, South Dakota;  
Emily Forness, Wahpeton, North Dakota;  
Mike Knapp, Kandiyohi, Minnesota;  
Laura Finstrom, Glyndon, Minnesota



## Cornerstone

Liga Plaveniece, Riga, Latvia;  
Niklaus Forstbauer, Chilliwack, California;  
Lisa Baxter, Arlington, Washington;  
Eric Folsland, Oldham, South Dakota;  
Becky Rudebusch, Lakeville, Minnesota

## Ambassadors

Nicole Papillon, Wadena, Minnesota;  
Lucus Anderson, Lisbon, North  
Dakota; Erika Jensen, Barronett,  
Wisconsin; Caleb Berge, Fargo,  
North Dakota; Ona Brandt, Sioux  
Falls, South Dakota



## 2001 AFLBS summer ministry teams

Pray for us as we travel, sing, teach, counsel ... that God would prepare  
hearts for His Word as we faithfully proclaim it.  
We look forward to meeting and serving you.



## Camp Team

Joe Spencer, Morris, Illinois;  
Shannon Mundfrom, Greeley,  
Colorado; Kara Crimmin, Oswego,  
Illinois; Josh Britz, Houghton,  
Michigan; Annie Jorgenson,  
Beulah, North Dakota; Sara  
McClenahan, Hillsboro, North  
Dakota; Mike Anderson, Jewell,  
Iowa



## Graduation service held May 26 at the AFLC school's chapel



The 2001 Free Lutheran Seminary graduates are (L. to R.): Todd Erickson, Peter Makadi, Steven Carlson, Peter Ward, and Jon Bylka. The Degree of Master of Divinity was awarded to Pastor Earl Kornhonen, Pastor Ivars Krafts, and Peter Kakadi. The other four men received their Degree of Graduate in Theology. The two men receiving a Certificate of Recognition were Pastor Philip Hooper and Terry Wall. As of the May 25, 2001 board of trustees meeting, sixteen men have been approved to begin their studies at FLS next fall, making that the largest class of incoming seminarians in the school's history.



This year's graduation ceremony was the first ever for the AFLC school's Ministry Training Institute. Pictured is Thomas Lumpio being congratulated by AFLC President Robert Lee. The other graduates were Lidia Herrera, Carla Mattson, and Alex Yambrick. Pictured at the podium is one of the new co-directors of MTI, Missionary Richard Gunderson. The other co-director is Dr. Norvald Yri, a Norwegian Lutheran theologian and missionary to Tanzania. Eight students are currently committed to the second MTI class beginning in September 2001. Dr. Yri will teach at FLS fall semester.



Two of the 51 AFLBS graduates: Cara Mackey, Champion, Michigan and Midori Aizaki, Japan.



Sarka Klus and baby watched as seminarian Mikal Klus sang "Great is Thy Faithfulness," with the seminary chorus. The Klus family is from the Czech Republic.



## No longer a slave

— *Jennifer Tollefson*  
**AFLBS Junior**  
*for evangelism and discipleship*  
*class at AFLBS*  
*Spring Semester, 2001*

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV).

It is so awesome to know that there is a God that loves us so much that He would take the time to lay out the course of my life. My name is Jennifer Lynn Tollefson, and Jesus Christ chose me by name (Isaiah 43:1b), knowing that I’m a sinner, to be part of His glorious kingdom!

I grew up in a wonderful Christian home with loving, godly parents. I was blessed to have been baptized when I was an infant. All my life I have felt the presence of Jesus, and at the age of seven I committed my life to Him at a Bible camp at the ARC. It was very hard growing up and going to school and being the only Christian. By the time I got to high school I was fed up with the struggles of the “church life.”

In high school I fell away from my Lord and forgot about Him. I struggled with many things trying to fill the hole that you have without

Jesus. I struggled with depression, anorexia, cigarettes, drinking and sexual immorality. Even though I was having worldly fun, the hole was still empty. There was something missing and deep inside my heart I knew I needed to come back to Jesus.

By the grace of God, I have always had a desire in my heart to come to Bible school and when I got here my world was changed. I rededicated my life to Christ at the ARC (again), and at that moment Jesus began a wonderful work in me. I have changed so much in the past few months because of the love and patience that Jesus has for me.

I am becoming the woman God intended me to be. His love gives me hope and strength for every day and more and more I am learning of His will for my life. In Him I am a new and wonderful creation.

“If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been freed from sin” (Romans 6:5-7, NIV).



Mr. David Borg, chairman of the board of trustees and Dr. Francis Monseth, dean of FLS.



The campus chapel was overflowing with family and friends of the 64 graduates of the AFLC school.



Pastor Don Richman, director of East European mission network, AFLC President Robert Lee and former FLS dean Amos Dyrud awaited the start of the graduation ceremony.

### Dear Editor

A couple months ago, I had the privilege of going to the evangelism conference in central Illinois. It was hosted by Pastor Alan Arneson and the congregation in Ottawa, Illinois. The place was great and the food was fabulous, but the most important thing for the 150 or so people that were there, was the challenge from the Word that we received to reach out to our friends and communities and try to win them for Christ. Dr. Steve Lombardo challenged us with "Catching the Vision," the vision of the glory of God — "Deity on display," the vision of the misery of sin and the vision of the ministry of grace. Pastor Don Greven spoke of "bridging, proclaiming and nurturing" and how the first line of witnessing is the testimony of our lives. Pastor Kevin Garner spoke about "us moving from not bearing (fruit) to bearing much fruit." Each message again sounded the call, "we have communities that are dying without Christ, reach out."

The conference went on to challenge us in a practical way. There were workshops with programs that we could implement in our congregations as tools to reach out and touch lives for Christ. I was impressed with the programs that were introduced and our congregation is looking at implementing one of them this fall. To add to the day, the fellowship was excellent.

My prayer is that the evangelism commission will continue to sponsor these conferences in every district of the AFLC and that the people of the AFLC will take the time to go, learn and be refreshed. If one is coming to your area, don't hesitate to set aside the time to be challenged and refresh your soul.

May I say to Pastor Jim Rasmussen and the AFLC Evangelism Commission, thank you and may God bless you and keep going with these excellent conferences.

— **Pastor Curtis Emerson**  
*Trinity Free Lutheran*  
*Janesville, Wisconsin*

### Dear Editor

"If it is encouraging, let him encourage ..." (Romans 12:8)

The congregation and I have been encouraged by the ministry of our AFLC Commission on Evangelism. The evangelism grants from Lutheran Brotherhood we received gave us an impetus to step forward with a fresh boldness in intentional witness for Jesus. In particular we were able to host two separate events with Faith Studies: "Friend to Friend" training in personal evangelism and a "Faith Study" seminar as an outreach event.

Most recently, we attended the evangelism conference hosted by the evangelism commission at Our Redeemer Lutheran in Kirkland, Washington. The conference was

well organized and offered several practical workshops in evangelism training, outreach and discipleship training. My personal favorite was "Lighthouses of Prayer." Prayer is the foundation for all evangelism, and I was encouraged to persevere in encouraging the congregation to pray for their neighbors and friends.

I encourage every pastor and congregation to take advantage of these evangelism conferences hosted by the evangelism commission. I believe the Lord wants to bring revival and make us living congregations, "the flaming, evangelizing force it was intended to be," as John Stensvaag wrote.

— **Pastor Joel Lohafer**  
*Triumph Lutheran*  
*Ferndale, Washington*

### Dear Editor

A few sad days ago a Lutheran church of another church body ordained a practicing lesbian, giving her the title of "Pastor." In the "letters to the editor" during recent weeks and in various articles and media reporting on this questionable event, the reporters quoted pastors, church leaders, others with backgrounds in sociology, psychology, etc. The implication was that the church involved was going to challenge the church authorities to see if they could get away with it. As a Lutheran, I have been awaiting the church's clear and official response.

Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." Why would we who love the Lord care about the views of these individuals — be they persons in leadership or otherwise? There is only one authority whose opinion matters in the arena of morality — God almighty. Let God be God. When a disciple is fully taught, he is like his teacher. The misdirection by Lutheran teachers is bearing fruit. The longer a gangrene in the body of Christ goes unopposed, the harder it is to restore health.

I sense the Lord is sad. God's

plan for sex has always been one man for one woman for one lifetime. What happened was wrong. Let those who are in error be disciplined and the gangrene removed. And if the church leaders prefer man's approval rather than God's, let those leaders step down and courageous ones put in their place. A father disciplines a legitimate child out of love. Isn't it better that discipline be handed down now, resulting in repentance, than that even one soul end up being disciplined for eternity? To the theologians involved, I ask, "Where is the Scripture which says practicing homosexuals can be ordained as pastors? What are the scriptural guidelines for leaders?"

— **Dale M. Stone**  
*Maple Grove, Minnesota*

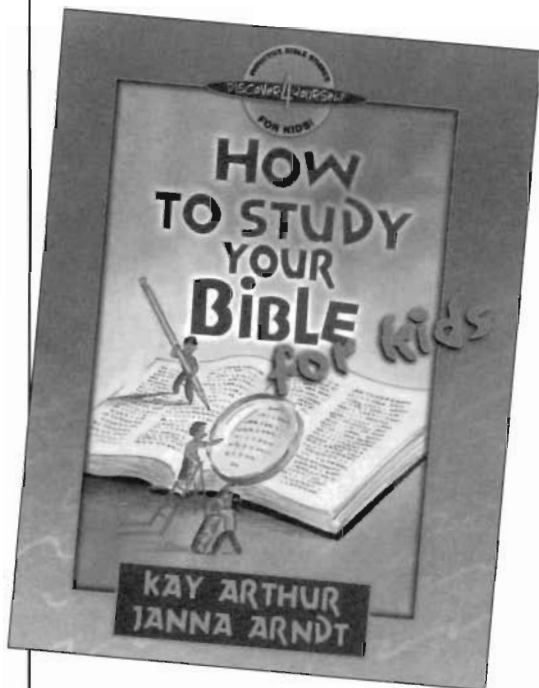
**Estate planning is for everyone. Guard your legacy and make a difference, for Jesus' sake.**

**For free consultation, call Mark Johnson at 1-800-950-2109.**

# We serve more than just your Sunday school!



Monthly devotional booklets are available from the AFLC Parish Education Office.



Resources to help teach your children. Call us!  
AFLC Parish Education  
763-545-5631

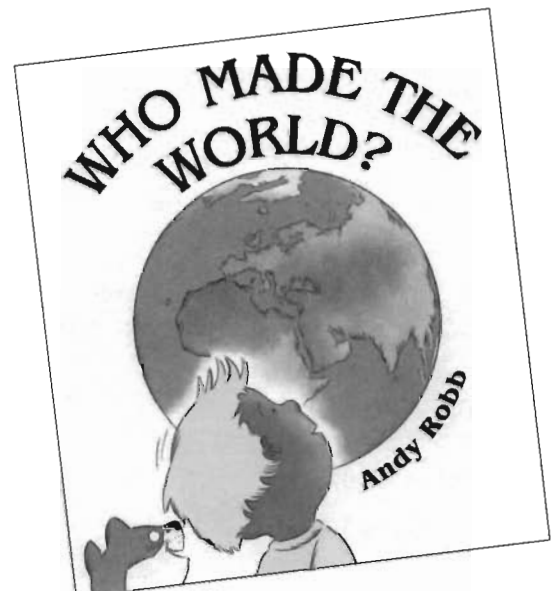
Few things are more important for a child than to discover the joy of reading. Give him a love of reading, and you have given him not only the most satisfying and useful of all recreations but also the key to true learning.

The home is still the greatest educational force, and parents who make reading attractive contribute immeasurable to their children's intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development.

— Frank E. Gaebelstein



Other devotional books for children and you are also available.



**Pastor David Wold**, Pipestone, Minnesota traveled to Brazil last April. He shared in the three congregations in the Curitiba area, including a session on creationism for their youth rally. He went on to Campo Mourao to teach a seminar at the Bible school.

**Pastor Dennis Gray**, Newfolden, Minnesota has consented to help Pastor Gerald Mundfrom and his ministry with Mercy and Truth Publishing. Pastor Gray serves the Bethel Free Lutheran church in Grafton, North Dakota as an interim pastor.

Pastor Gray served Bethel at the beginning of his ministry and the Mundfrom family were members of the congregation at the time. The print ministry owned a press which was located in the basement of the Bethel parsonage. The pressman was Dennis Johansen, son of Pastor and Mrs. Henry Johansen.

Pastor Gray is available for informational meetings on the subject of depression. If your congregation is interested in having Pastor Gray or another member of the board of Mercy and Truth share with your congregation, write to Pastor Dennis Gray, 19594 350th St. NW, Newfolden, MN 56738-9286.

**Oklahoma City, Oklahoma** — First Lutheran Church is sorely missing David Slocumb who passed away on April 17, 2001. He was president of the congregation and active in the restoration of the sanctuary in preparation for its centennial celebration next year and in numerous congregational activities.

**Missionaries Tim and Renata Hinrichs** have moved from the Czech Republic across the border to Poland where they are devoting their time fully to the Bible school in Dziegielow. They live in the mountain community of Ustron, which is only a 10 minute drive to the campus. Their new address is:

Katowicka 5  
Ustron 43450  
Poland  
phone: 0048-33-854-4352  
e-mail: timandrenata@quick.cz

**Gloria Lee**, Crystal, Minnesota, wife of AFLC President Robert Lee has been suffering in recent weeks from a serious medical condition that causes breathing difficulties and a hypersensitivity to odors, foods, etc., leading to growing weakness. Numerous doctors have been consulted and tests taken without a solution. Your prayers are appreciated.

**Pastor Philip Rokke**, Newfolden, Minnesota, has accepted a call to serve Westaker Free Lutheran in Newfolden. He was interim pastor of Westaker until last fall when seminarian Peter Ward began his internship there. Pastor Rokke will continue to provide pastoral service to Hegland Lutheran in rural Karlstad, Minnesota.

**Pastor James Johnson**, Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, has resigned as pastor of Solid Rock Lutheran where he has served since 1994 and has accepted a call to serve as senior pastor of Calvary Lutheran in Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

**Pastor Richard Anderson**, Elk River, Minnesota, has resigned as the pastor of King of Glory Lutheran in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, where he has served since 1996. He will pursue other interests for the present time.

**Sheldon Mortrud**, 73, Fargo, North Dakota, passed away on May 5, 2001. Funeral services were held at St. Paul's Lutheran in Fargo and interment was at Alma Lutheran Cemetery in Argyle, Minnesota.

Sheldon was a long-time member at Our Saviour's Lutheran in Thief River Falls, Minnesota before moving to Fargo in later years. During the early days of the AFLC, Sheldon and his wife Delores were camp managers for the Lake Geneva Bible Camp and at Galilee Bible Camp. They could often be found in the kitchen with Pastor Kenneth and Bea Anderson, then of McVile, North Dakota. Sheldon was also camp manager at the AFLC Wilderness Camp for a short time. He served on the AFLC Coordinating Committee for perhaps longer than any other member of that committee during the 1970s and 1980s.

His first wife, Delores, preceded him in death. He is survived by his wife, Mary of Fargo, North Dakota and four children: Sonja Balmer, Marilee Johnson, Deb Benson and Cindy Petsinger.

Blessed be his memory.



New members were recently received at Trinity Free Lutheran in Janesville, Wisconsin. The congregation's pastor, Curtis Emerson, is in the picture's far right.

## Being the umpire isn't easy

U ntil the other night I had successfully avoided the job. But at a recent youth softball game there was no one else willing to do it. "We need you to umpire. It's just a scrimmage. It'll only be a few innings."

I had always thought I would not enjoy being an umpire. That thought has now been confirmed. I hope never to do it again.

I was thinking afterwards, what was it about being an umpire that I found so unpleasant? There can be a lot of things to keep track of — how many outs, how many balls and strikes, where the baserunners are. That takes some concentration, but it's not all that difficult. An umpire has to make some quick decisions. If you start to waver or ask someone else what they think, then you can open yourself up to big trouble. But I often have to make decisions and I don't mind doing it.

What I really didn't like about being an umpire was that every call you made, somebody was unhappy. Every call you were in effect telling someone they were wrong, they had made a mistake, they were out. By the end of the game, nobody likes the umpire much. I didn't find that an enjoyable position to be in.

An umpire is needed in athletic contests. The pitch was either a ball or a strike, the runner was either safe or out. It can't be both. Somebody was successful and in the right, and somebody wasn't. The umpire is needed to make the call.

In the game of life some would like to call everybody safe. It is tempting to say everybody is in the right. But that's not the case. The Bible says, in regards to us trying to stand in our own merits before God, everyone is in the wrong. "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10-12, 23, NIV).

We have to let the world know that we have all struck out in our attempts to keep God's law. That truth is not one the world likes to hear, but it is one that must be shared.

Not every runner in softball is safe, and not

everyone in life is safe. The popular philosophy of the world is to tell everyone they are fine, regardless of what they believe. Jesus said, however, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, NIV). The Bible also declares, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, NIV). Belief in some other god, even if it is sincere and accompanied by great works, does not save.

I didn't like being the umpire at the youth softball game, and I don't particularly like doing it in life either. But sometimes it must be done. Sometimes we have to tell youth, and adults, that what they're doing is wrong, what they're believing isn't true; if they continue down the path they are on they'll be out — out of a relationship with God.

Warning and correcting does not put you on the path to popularity. Being well liked can easily become a dominating goal of parents and others who work with young people and are involved in their lives. We like to be liked. But in the long term what matters most is that students know Jesus and are trusting in Him.

The umpire doesn't call everyone out. He tells some people they are safe. The Bible as well announces the good news that those who believe in Jesus

are safe. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21, NIV).

It is important that young people hear this good news. Some feel as though they are hearing nothing but strike calls. They hear how they have messed up. They hear how they have failed. That is all they have heard and so they get tempted to quit playing the game. Some young people feel as though life is pointless. They need to be given the assurance that victory is possible through Jesus. "For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4, NIV). The ultimate Umpire, the Lord of all, declares safe all those who are trusting in Jesus.

We are not the chief Umpire who makes the final calls or the big decisions. That position and authority belongs to God. But we do get to tell people — young, old and inbetween — the good news of how they can safely reach home through faith in Christ.

—Pastor Craig Johnson

"Belief in some other god, even if it is sincere and accompanied by great works, does not save."



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## BUILDING THE BASE

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### The art in me

**T**here are times I feel quite foolish for having agreed to write these articles on evangelism. Evangelism is a mystery to most people, and I am by no means an exception. There are stories I could tell of my own evangelistic efforts — as they may serve as a means of encouragement for some — but I find myself reaching for the art of brevity. And stories can only convey so much.

So I'll choose this time to share a thought which has recently encouraged me and my own life of witness. Every now and then, someone will say something to rekindle my passion for reaching lost people, with a shot of hope that strengthens my heart in the matter — as confidence most often evades me.

One who actually steps out from the role of "casual" Christian (a social position perfectly accepted in our culture) and into that of a practicing believer (a life of witness and worship) often risks being labeled a fool. Most of modern society will write off sold-out Christians as unintelligent, crippled citizens who "just don't get it." Witnessing to our family or friends puts us in this position. But because of our love for them, we likely end up saying something anyhow.

But what about those we don't know as well — those from backgrounds and lifestyles much different than our own? What of those

tuggings to witness where our own inclination to love is insufficient to meet the demands. Can we abandon our affinity for affluence when the soul of a child whom God loves is on the line?

This is a struggle — we know He loves all His creation, we've read about it in His Word, but do we really believe it? Sometimes their sins are so obvious, and their lifestyles so repulsive, we choose to do nothing but, at best, pray for their souls at a distance.

Perhaps if we better understood the eternal worth of a soul, we'd be more inclined to play the fool when the opportunity arises. Or perhaps we'd not be so blind to the opportunities that exist every day.

I was privileged to attend a women's retreat earlier this month. Being a man, I was there only because they needed a guitar player for their Sunday morning service. I was privileged as the only man to hear their testimonies of God's faithfulness and change in their lives, from a perspective I can't say I know so well.

One such testimony conveyed this very common concern: how do we love the unlovable? This woman of God saw the question being reconciled by the fact that God is an artist. And as an artist, He pours much of Himself into everything He creates. Not only this, but most works of art (particularly the more abstract) fare better if there is some

explanation — some sort of story — given for every color and shape.

God assures us this is the case with each of His children. The making of a life is a precious thing to our Father, and if we are able to take the time, and overcome our own impatience, we may begin to discover the story behind a life, unlocking the beauty and the art in a person we previously didn't understand.

In understanding, we may find compassion — the compassion inspired and empowered by Christ — which, when accompanied by the Word and prayer, contains the very power of the gospel to draw souls unto the heart of God.

The youth culture of any generation is often seen as wayward and lost by the church, and rightly so, beyond our understanding and void of our compassion. We'll shake our heads and offer pity, and pray in our closets, while a generation passes unknown by those who claim to be the hands and feet of Christ.

Sometimes, God calls forth fools to seek an understanding of this culture to give of time and, perhaps, reputation to develop relationships with these wayward souls. And most often they, too, wind up seeing the beauty and art in the lives of the unlovable.

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