

THE 

MARCH 2017

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



Students of the Word

AFLC Schools



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

MARCH 2017
VOL. 55 NO. 3

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THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

(USPS 588-620 ISSN 0746-3413)
is published monthly by
the Association of Free
Lutheran Congregations.
AFLC headquarters and
publications office is at
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Plymouth, MN 55441.
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SUBSCRIPTION CHANGES AND INFORMATION

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Plymouth, MN 55441.
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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

\$19 a year, Group, U.S.
\$20 a year, Individual, U.S.
\$22 a year, International
Periodicals postage paid
at Minneapolis, MN, and
additional mailing office.

POSTMASTER

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

THE FAITHFUL PREACHER

BY PASTOR STEVE LOMBARDO

"Some pastors and preachers are lazy and no good. They do not pray; they do not study; they do not read; they do not search the Scripture ... as if there were no need to read the Bible for this purpose ... They are nothing but parrots and jackdaws ... The call is: watch, study, attend to reading. In truth you cannot read too much in Scripture; and what you read you cannot read too carefully; and what you read carefully you cannot understand too well; and what you understand well you cannot teach too well; and what you teach well you cannot live too well ... the devil ... the world ... [and] our flesh are raging and raving against us. Therefore dear sirs and brothers, pastors and preachers, pray, read, study, be diligent ... this evil, shameful time is not the reason for being lazy, for sleeping and snoring.

(Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*)

These forceful words from Martin Luther are certainly a challenge to those who preach. Every age calls for faithful preachers and our day is no exception. In the words of Tim Keller, the preacher's task is to "communicate faith in an age of skepticism." The battle for absolute truth rages and proclaimers of the Word of God must hasten to the front lines with courage and conviction.

Preaching begins with a call of God upon the life of the preacher. A man can do nothing else or not want to do anything else but preach. As Paul wrote: "... for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (I Corinthians 9:16). The preacher is a man of one Book even as he reads many books. Yet, he doesn't only read, he studies diligently and prays fervently. The preparation of a sermon is a very serious task. Before ever stepping into the pulpit, the Word of the living God must march into the heart and mind of the preacher.

This is an ongoing process. Someone asks: "How long does it take to prepare a message?" The preacher's response: "A lifetime!"

Giving a message is the imparting of a life in glad service to the One who gave His life. And He is worthy of the most careful proclamation. According to Luther: "A good preacher ... should venture and engage body and blood, wealth and honor, in the word ... he should suffer himself to be mocked and jeered of everyone" (*Table Talks*).

While contemporary "feel good" preaching entertains, bold biblical preaching encourages. It declares the wages of sin and delivers the wonders of grace. It is preaching that doesn't always please the masses but surely pleases the Master.

Lombardo, retired AFLC pastor living in Yorkville, Ill., spoke on "Luther As Preacher" during the fall Revival Conference at the AFLC Schools.

The mission of the Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary and Bible School is to establish students in the eternal and inerrant Word of God for a life of faith in Jesus Christ and faithful service in His Kingdom.

—AFLC Schools Mission Statement

The proper subject of theology is man guilty of sin and condemned, and God the Justifier and Savior of man the sinner.

—Martin Luther

Give me an open mind, O God, a mind ready to receive and to welcome such new light of knowledge as it is Thy will to reveal to me. Let not the past ever be so dear to me as to set a limit to the future.

—John Baillie

The most faithful theology we can teach is summed up in our doxology before God whose majesty and mystery exceeds our imagination and formulation. To learn to love God truly and passionately is the goal of theological education.

—Carnegie Samuel Calian

We need theologians who can lead the way to a fresh application in our contemporary situation of the authority of the Bible. Nothing could be more necessary.

—Carl F. Wisløff

Luther's legacy

By Meagan Olson

I grew up in a Christian home where I was taught the Word of God, and I always assumed I would attend AFLBS. My family regularly attended AFLC churches and I went to Bible camps and the FLY Convention, where I heard all about how great Bible school was. Furthermore, my grandparents and parents attended AFLBS, as well as quite a few other family members. It seemed to be the next logical step for me after high school.

But as I got older and college got closer, I started to question this decision. Will I have enough money? After I graduate, will I be able to apply for scholarships at my

that I made the decision to come to AFLBS. And my time here has been unimaginably valuable. I have learned so much more about the Bible, about my faith, and about Lutheran doctrine than I ever thought I would. And in the process, questions have been answered that I never realized I had.

Why are we Lutheran? What *is* Lutheranism?

When Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the church doors in Wittenburg, he didn't intend to start a reformation or to begin a new denomination. He merely wanted to point out the heresy and abuse occurring in the Catholic Church of the time, and to try to bring the Church back to grace through faith in Christ. The problem was that the Church had departed from doctrine based in Scripture alone, and this was what Luther ultimately desired to correct. This was Luther's foundation: a theology based on the Bible above all else.

Five hundred years later, when we say that we are Lutheran, we certainly do not mean that we worship Luther himself. We regard him as a great teacher and scholar of the Word and honor him for his work in reforming the Church. The church at Corinth was rebuked by Paul for saying as much: "What I mean is that each one of you says, 'I follow Paul,' or 'I follow Apollos,' or 'I follow Cephas,' or 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (I Corinthians 1:12-13, ESV). In much the same spirit, Luther opposed the use of the word "Lutheran" when referring to his teachings or followers. We trust Christ, not Luther, for our eternal salvation. So, then, we are not Lutheran because we believe in Luther.

On the contrary, we are Lutheran because we believe Lutheran doctrine is biblical doctrine. In all matters, we emulate Luther in seeking the full counsel of Scripture above all else. We look to the Bible when we have a question about a particular issue. We look to the Bible when some doctrine is unclear or doesn't seem to make sense. We look to the Bible for guiding principles for daily life. We dare not go further than what the Bible says; we dare not try to add to it using our own reason or logic. And while we don't disregard other sources and other works of Christian doctrine, we always test them against Scripture and remember that the Bible alone is God's holy Word.

Ultimately, however, we look to the Bible as the



Olson is a third-generation AFLBS student.

chosen college? Will the AFLBS credits transfer? Will my scholarships apply to AFLBS or can I defer them for two years?

Now, as I sit in an AFLBS classroom and reflect upon my first semester of Bible school, I can see God working very powerfully in the entire situation. He answered some of these questions and calmed my fears about others, so



foundation of our faith not only because we believe the Bible is, as *Luther's Small Catechism* says, "the only safe rule of our faith and duty," but because it delivers salvation to us. Christ on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins is the center and the focus of Lutheran theology because it is the center and the focus of the Bible. The two are intrinsically linked; trying to find salvation outside of the Bible leads to false hope in false religion, while reading the Bible without finding Jesus misses the point entirely. In John 5:39-40, Jesus says, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life." Lutheran theology, the theology of the cross, is biblical theology.

We honor Luther this year, on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, for his actions in pointing us back to that biblical theology, and praise God for working in and through him so powerfully.

Because of Luther and the Reformation, I am blessed to be able to attend the only Lutheran Bible school in America. Each and every class I have taken uses the Bible as the main textbook, and has delivered Christ to me through the preaching of the gospel. Here, I am being equipped to share and defend my faith, and to teach it to others. This is Luther's legacy: a faith based not on man, but on the Word of God and the gospel contained within, and faithful Christian men and women have worked to preserve that faith through the teaching of the Word. May the Bible school continue to stay true to the foundation of Scripture, and continue also to work in students' hearts through the power of the gospel.

Olson, a junior at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, is a member of St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D.

His Powerful Word

By Alex Amiot



I started seminary with a misconception: I thought three years of classroom training should be enough time to figure everything out. When year two began I was thankful for two more years to get it all together. But by the start of year three, I finally figured out that I wasn't going to figure everything out. Seminary wasn't there to give me all the answers.

I should have listened to my professors. They told us on the first day that seminary training teaches you how and where to look for answers without handing them all to you. I have found internship to be much the same. One year of internship doesn't give you every answer and experience. It exposes you to more questions, and scenarios arise that send you looking for answers.

When a distressed parishioner entered my office, my mind began to race. What do I do? What do I say? I hoped that discussion, Scripture, and prayer would suffice. When it became clear that the parishioner was looking for direct answers, not evasive encouragement, I had no answers of my own to give.

The moment I feared had arrived. I've never been good at giving advice or thoughtful guidance. I'm quick to empathize, but slow to advise—to a fault. In seminary I learned that pastoral counseling was more about shepherding the flock of God than about giving good advice or having all the right answers. That was a comfort in the classroom. But here, far from the seminary, I was being asked for advice and answers.

When the parishioner first entered my office, I listened for a minute, took aim, and fired off a Bible bullet. A Bible bullet is a verse or two that an untroubled person is convinced will answer all of a troubled person's questions.

Why don't Bible bullets work? The reason isn't that there's something wrong with the Word of God. Bible bullets don't work because it is ultimately the Holy Spirit, not us, who wields the sword of His Word. If we think we can rightly diagnose a troubled heart in under 60 seconds and put down the problem with a Bible bullet, we're playing the role of God and doing so very poorly.

The answer eventually came by the grace of God, and in four parts. One part was situational. Completely unrelated visits prior to this meeting had made me aware of multiple perspectives of the situation. The parishioner needed help seeing the situation from more angles.

One part was theological. The parishioner appreciated the reminder that while the weight of the burden was real, it had already weighed down our crucified Christ and He was still willing to bear it.

One part was being realistic. The parishioner needed to hear again that only God can change someone's heart, and our search for the perfect thing to say to change someone else will always end in frustration.



The final part of the answer came in the words of Scripture. I opened to Colossians 1:11-14. We read together a prayer for strength, endurance, and patience with joy. We read that our acceptability to God doesn't come from our Christian performance. Rather, God has qualified us for forgiveness and heaven by grace in Christ Jesus.

When the parishioner left relieved and thankful, I was stunned. What just happened? God was shepherding his flock in spite of me, and it was wonderful.

I'm not quite introspective enough to know exactly what part seminary played in preparing me for that interaction. To be sure, it was an interaction any Christian might experience in the fellowship of believers.

We don't need a shelf full of books to be qualified to minister to one another. And yet, there must have been so many bits and pieces of seminary lectures and studies that prepared me to be God's instrument in that moment.

Pastoral counseling isn't ultimately about having the right piece of advice to give someone. It's about coming alongside the body of Christ and going to the Word of God together. God's Word will not fail. He will continue to use it to soften hard hearts and restore broken ones.

Three years of classroom training won't give you all the answers, and firing a Bible bullet won't fix every problem. Yet the Word of God is still the sword of the Spirit, the means by which He works in our hearts. By God's grace may we be built up in the truth and minister to one another with humble hearts and confidence in God's Word.

Amiot has served his internship year at Ruthfred Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa. He will graduate in May.

Amiot presented a paper at the annual Georg Sverdrup Society meeting in January.

God gave me the life of a missionary kid. I still don't understand why, and I suspect I never fully will. But during the Missions Conference here at AFLBS this past January, my gratitude for that life and my grasp of how much it meant were both strengthened in ways I didn't even know I needed.

In my relatively few years in the world, I've realized that we as humans rarely catch the complete view of each stage in our lives until it's over. I didn't miss being a child until I had no choice but to see the world through older

eyes. I didn't miss grade school until I hit the awkwardness and angst of junior high. When I went home to Mexico for Christmas, it was like discovering in myself a Mom- and Dad-shaped hole that wasn't exposed until I saw them again.

In a similar, far deeper way, I think growing up on the mission field itself meant that I couldn't take in the full frame of it. That may sound counter intuitive, but I suppose it's like trying to glimpse your own face. It takes a mirror or a photo to see the eyes and nose and mouth that are so closely yours.

Missions Conference granted me the sight of my face—or rather, my

life. As Pastor Jeff Swanson brought us the Word each night, he reminded us that God's love alone is our call and our message to the shattered world in which we live. He pointed out that no other motivation besides God's Word can propel us to missions, can make us willing to offer ourselves to God and to wherever He would send us. No story, no statistic is enough for our selfish, fearful hearts to love so profoundly that we sacrifice anything for the sake of the gospel. Only His Word can call out of our own hearts the cry of Isaiah: "Here am I. Send me!"

Somehow, my parents' ministry came under the

light of that truth more clearly for me during Missions Conference week. That first night, flashbacks and memories of some of the deep griefs and valleys they have passed through swept before me and took my tears along with them. I watched their faces in a World Missions video, saw the kids they've loved and the church they've devoted themselves to. And on both that night as well as those after, there seemed to be this still, small Voice tenderly whispering to me, "This is why—this is why they went. And this is why they've stayed. For Me."

For a split second, I saw in an eternal light the heart of each of these missionaries, pastors, and laymen who have answered that Isaiah call. I saw the heart of my parents, a heart given to them by the Lord Himself. If they had gone for the sake of a story or a statistic, if they had given up their own parents, their siblings, their community for any reason other than this fervent love for the Word of God—they wouldn't be there anymore. If they had arrived and faced the dividing walls and hearts of stone and broken souls, and relied on a mere sense of duty to bear them through—they wouldn't have stayed. And if they had grasped ahead of time all they would have to bear as a result of their calling—they may not have gone at all.

The second night we sang a missions hymn entitled, "So Send I You." Pastor Swanson commented after we finished that "it still hits close to home," and I found myself thinking the same. One stanza in particular moved me: "So send I you to loneliness and longing, with heart ahung'ring for the loved and known, forsaking home and kindred, friend and dear one—so send I you to know My love alone."

His love alone. I saw it those nights not simply as the message we were sharing, but as the reason we were going and staying. For Brent and Emily Raan, it's the reason they're begging God to return to India. For Nate and Rhoda Jore, it's the reason they've pleaded to stay in Uganda. For my parents, it's the reason they've labored so long and still wait on the Lord for the harvest.

My family once referenced the film *Chariots of Fire* in saying that, for our experience on the mission field, we had regrets—but no doubts. And with a more eternal perspective than my eyes can almost bear, I see now that only such a love as Christ's could bring us to say that. Only the love of Jesus can make me and my fellow students at the Missions Conference offer our lives to the Lord, give up anything and everything, and call out with hope, "Here am I. Send me!"

Schierkolk, a junior at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, is from Jerez, Mexico, where her parents are AFLC missionaries.



Schierkolk is a junior at AFLBS, following in the footsteps of her father and two older sisters.



So send I you

By Kirstie Schierkolk

Christ lives in me

By Megan Thonsgaard

There has never been a time in my life when I did not know Christ. I was born into a Christian home, and baptized as an infant. My family would start and end the day reading from the Bible together. When I was around the age of 6, I invited Christ into my life as my personal Lord and Savior.

As I grew older, I began to feel more distance from God, as though He wasn't enough to satisfy my needs. As a result, I spent more time talking with friends and worrying what people would think of me than I spent in God's Word and talking to Him. At the FLY Convention in Colorado in 2015, I thought about how I always feel so close to God there. I thought that being there would be enough to make me feel close to Him again. That didn't happen. I felt just as distant from Him as ever. Through many long talks with close Christian friends and my parents, I began to realize

that closeness to God is so much more than a "feeling." Instead, I can know that He is always there, regardless of my emotions. One of my favorite analogies of this is of a tree in the desert. There's one tree standing alone in the middle of this vast desert. Every few years, water will fill the desert and the tree feels so alive and refreshed, but as the years go on and there isn't any rain, the ground becomes dry and cracked. You would think that this tree would die because it doesn't seem to be getting any water, but this tree has roots that stretch deep below the dry surface. Much like God's presence in our lives, this tree has water still coming to it, even though the refreshing rain hasn't fallen in a long time.

During the summer of my senior year, I read a highly recommended devotional book. However, I was struck by the writer's emphasis on law and it only reminded me of past struggles in my life. I knew I had been forgiven, but the guilt kept resurfacing as I read this book. I finally stepped away from the book and was soon reminded of some Scripture verses. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one can boast." I can do nothing in my own power to be saved—it is entirely what Christ has done in me. I am so glad that God has led me to AFLBS where I can continue to learn and grow in His Word and His grace.

Hebrews 10:22 says, "... let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." My sins have been washed away, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

Thonsgaard, a junior, is from Louise, Texas, and grew up as a member of Faith Lutheran, El Campo, Texas.



“O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds” (Psalm 71:17).

Seminary. It is filled with unlikely people. Here is my unlikely story.

It all begins in a large farmhouse on the Wisconsin countryside. The house was multipurpose. It was my schoolhouse where ideas were planted in my mind. It was my discipleship center where God’s Word was planted in my heart. It also became my business headquarters as I planted two to three acres of sweet corn each summer.

I loved the life in the country. My summers revolved around my sweet corn business, a local strawberry farm, and the neighboring dairy farm. Just like any high schooler, I began to dream about my future. The sweet corn business was growing and I continued to enjoy farming. A dream was planted.

Never one to sit around, I investigated how to make my dream of farming become a reality. I settled on a fast track to an online business degree.

I finished high school in 2012. During that summer, God planted within me an acute thirst for His Word. After hours of secular college training, I longed for the pure message of God’s truth. I chose to attend the Association Free Lutheran Bible School that fall.

At Bible school, God’s Word continued to change me. I began to view people around me through an increasingly biblical lens. Instead of a means to an end, these people are fallen sinners loved by their Creator. These people must hear God’s Word (Romans 10:17). Through thoughts like these, a new idea was planted. Was God calling me to seminary and full-time ministry?

The English word *seminary* comes from the Latin word *seminarium*. It literally means “nursery,” or “seed plot.” Right now God has planted me in the AFLTS nursery. Miles from corn fields and dairy farms, I now sit and listen to top-tier professors as they plant God’s Word in my heart and mind.



I am an unlikely transplant. Uprooted from farmland and replanted in the city. Books and libraries have taken the place of sweat and fields. But one thing has not changed. I am still in a seed plot. God is preparing me to plant His seed—the Word.

The seed of His teaching,
Receptive souls reaching,
Shall blossom in action for God and for all.
His grace did invite us,
His love shall unite us
To work for God’s kingdom and answer His call.
—Omer Westendorf

“... and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21b).

Pillman, who grew up in rural Wisconsin, is a middler at the Free Lutheran Seminary.

An Unlikely transplant

By Matthew Pillman

Where in the world

By Andrew Kneeland

Minneapolis is quickly becoming a hub of international representation. People from all around the world are settling in the Minneapolis area, and the campus of the Free Lutheran Schools has also been blessed with an international presence.

Tasked with taking the gospel into all the world, it has been a privilege for the AFLC Schools to teach and equip students from other countries. Here is a snapshot of the international students currently on campus:

Kirstie Schierkolk, Jerez, Mexico

Kirstie is the youngest daughter of Pastor Todd and Barb Schierkolk, AFLC missionaries to Mexico, and a junior this year at the Bible school. The Schierkolks, who have been missionaries since 1996, have been living in the city of Jerez for the past several years, ministering to the community through youth and kids programs. Both of Kirstie's sisters—Rachel and Megan—also attended the Bible school. Kirstie is involved with the Dinkytown water bottle ministry as well as Student Mission Fellowship.



Israel is from Central Mexican Lutheran Church in Leon, Mexico. His uncle Pastor Milton Flores attended the Free Lutheran Seminary 25 years ago, and more recently his cousins Milton and Josué have attended the Bible school. "I have experienced communion with God in a special way while at seminary and I have also met wonderful friends." Israel is living in the men's dorm of the Bible school, where he is able to develop friendships with the other students. He also led some of the Bible school students through a mid-week study of the book of Job.

Israel Vazquez-Flores, Leon, Mexico



Mishel hadn't given much thought to moving to the United States to attend the Bible school. Home on Christmas break from seminary, her brother, Israel, brought her an application and encouraged her to come. It was difficult to put her college and career pursuit on hold, but she is glad to be attending AFLBS. "I have come to the point of saying that I do not want to be in any place other than here where everything is about God and where I know I'm fine."

Mishel Vazquez-Flores, Leon, Mexico

Andre Vogel, Stanta Catarina, Brazil

Andre and his wife, Sharon, are from the state of Santa Catarina, near the southern border of Brazil.

Andre attended a Christian retreat several years ago where he first felt the call to full-time ministry.

He graduated from a seminary in Brazil with a theology degree, and is now a student at our Free Lutheran Seminary. "AFLTS has been a blessing for me and my family," Andre said. "It is a wonderful place to be well trained for God's mission. The school has a high view of Scripture and loves to reach the lost." He lives on campus with his wife and their 2-year-old daughter, Lisa.



Ganzorig Enkhjargal, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Ganzorig and his wife, Namuun, were married last summer, and moved to campus late last year.

He is a student at the Bible school for the spring semester and will enroll at the seminary in the fall. Ganzo, as he is known, graduated from a Bible school in Mongolia in 2011, and spent several years serving as a youth leader and managing a soccer ministry. He first heard about AFLBS from missionary David Olson, who served in Mongolia under the Norwegian Lutheran Mission.



Henna is Indian by nationality, but was born and raised in Ibadan, Nigeria. She came to the United States for her undergraduate degree from Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, and heard about AFLBS from a couple of alumni who were attending the school—Rachael Ballmann and Tim Carlson.

She plans on returning to Moody to complete her degree. "I came here in search of my identity in Christ," Henna said, "and I have received more from this school than I expected to."

Henna Bhagwanani, Ibadan, Nigeria



Holmes, his wife, and 1-year-old daughter moved to campus last summer to attend our seminary.

He had been studying paleontology and paleobotany previously at Changchun University.

He was a visiting scholar at Indiana University, and graduated last summer. "God is working on our hearts," Holmes said, "so we want to serve Him better. I realized that I have the heart, but I do not have the right knowledge, so I was praying for God (to lead me to) a place to study His words." He heard about our school from his friend, Aaron Voth, who studied for one year at the Free Lutheran Seminary.

Holmes, Changchun, Jilin, China



ABOVE: David and Bernetta Johnson from Morris, Ill., participated in the continuing education courses offered during J-term.



ABOVE: Dr. Owen Strachan led a two-day workshop on gender roles and sexual orientation.

TOP: Seminarians Ryan Patenaude and Nick Schultz talk with Dr. Charles Aling during a break.

Continuing in the Word

By Phil Engebretson

In January I attended the continuing education classes at the AFLC Schools, also known as J-term. It was my second time to take a break from the physical pressure of my job and instead exercise my mind through excellent teaching. Thankfully my work is quite seasonal and allows for such impromptu propensities. I needed a break, I had the time, and the classes looked interesting. So, why not?

Somewhere in the past few months I came across the list describing the classes for J-term and my interest was piqued. History was a major focus this year, and also issues concerning Scripture, like Pastor Jerry Moan's class on hermeneutics (dealing with interpretation of Scripture). Later I found out that 90 minutes was way too short for a class on hermeneutics.

Pastor Robert Lee's week-long class on the "History and Aims of the AFLC" sounded interesting, too. Having been a history major in college, gaining a deeper understanding and perspective of the roots of the AFLC was of interest.

The format for this year's classes changed dramatically from years past. Rather than offering classes for one week, specifically aimed at seminary students, the classes spanned three weeks plus a weekend Bible conference. And the content was aimed at including the average church member. Special speakers were also brought in to highlight specific topics.

Among those speakers was Dr. Charles Aling, history professor emeritus at University of Northwestern—St. Paul. He was a favorite professor of many who attended college there, including myself. This was one of the classes I especially looked forward to attending. It was a joy to hear him lecture again, this time on the biblical history of Egypt and the life of Joseph through archeology. The opportunity to visit with Dr. Aling and inquire about new developments in the sphere of biblical archaeology was gratifying to my nostalgic and inquisitive senses.

A second featured speaker was Dr. Owen Strachan, a professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo., and director of the Center for Theological and Cultural Engagement. Dr. Strachan's lecture topics concerned the pervading issues in society relating to gender identity and sexual orientation. This extremely relevant topic touched all areas of life, and he spent a significant amount of his lectures guiding seminarians in how to navigate this issue in future ministry. His presentation helped to put pieces of this puzzle together while illuminating direction for a biblical response.

A one-day board governance workshop was specifically directed toward church members who serve their congregations in leadership roles. Topics included the basics like how to understand a financial statement, and more thought-provoking topics like making service on a board joyful and effective.

I could go on and on about all the teachers who spoke this J-term and the importance and relevance of their subject matter. To be honest, there were doubts in my mind about the relevance of some classes for my life. Although certain subject matter was unfamiliar or seemingly uninteresting, I refrained from skipping out on class with the reasoning there would likely be good information gleaned and perhaps applicable in the future. I was not wrong. But I had forgotten how challenging sitting in classes day after day could be, and at times struggled to remain attentive. This was not for lack of interest. I was soaking up all I could and enjoying every bit.

In retrospect, I have realized that the classes were challenging in beneficial ways. They caused me to think, question, view, and ponder issues in ways I had not necessarily done before. How exciting it is when you can have a new or different perspective presented that challenges or illuminates an issue or position. This also put context to certain issues that have been, for me, in the peripheral of church life. It was like having the information at hand but not knowing the question that illuminates the information. This was exciting. How encouraging it was to be able to listen to all the talented instructors blessed with insight into the unfolding of Scripture.

The two weeks I spent in the cities were about more than just attending classes. Visiting with others was worth so much in itself. Questions and discussions were interspersed through the duration, adding a special richness to the time. What is better? What is more beneficial? What can be of greater value than discussing, learning, and growing in understanding of the very Words from our Abba Father?

Encouragement seems to be a lost practice in this age. It was a blessing to fellowship with new friends and visit older friends from my days in Bible school. With like-minded believers, the fellowship poured encouragement and joy into my soul. Lord, help us to be salt and light in whatever facet that presents itself.

Engebretson, who graduated from AFLBS in 2003, lives in Clearbrook, Minn.



Luther was indeed a man of prayer. It is fitting, then, that he would write a hymn explaining each part of the Lord's Prayer. In fact, this hymn is called a catechism chorale, based on the Luther's catechism section of the Lord's Prayer. For the church service, this chorale could be separated into two or three stanzas. The melody for the chorale is of unknown origin. No doubt, Luther adapted it for his text. Many people regard this as the finest of his hymns.

One thing to note is that the old musical masters always felt that the Lord's Prayer was too sacred to ever be the setting for an elaborate musical piece. They thought it should be prayed by pastor and congregation or by the pastor alone with the congregation responding with the doxology. There are no musical compositions of the Lord's Prayer by Bach, Pachelbel, Schumann, Schubert, or Beethoven. In this hymn, Luther didn't write a musical piece on the Lord's Prayer; rather, he explained each part in the stanzas.

~Pastor Gordon Waterman
Crown of Life Lutheran
Tomball, Texas

Our Father thou in heaven above

1. Our Father, Thou in heav'n above,
Who biddest us to dwell in love,
As brethren of one family,
And cry in ev'ry need to Thee,
Teach us no thoughtless words to say,
And from our inmost heart to pray.
2. Thy name be hallowed. Help us, Lord,
In purity to keep Thy Word,
That to the glory of Thy name
We walk before Thee free from blame.
Let no false doctrine us pervert;
All poor, deluded souls convert.
3. Thy kingdom come. Thine let it be
In time and in eternity.
Let Thy good Spirit e'er be nigh
Our hearts with graces to supply.
Break Satan's pow'r, defeat His rage;
Preserve Thy Church from age to age.
4. Thy gracious will on earth be done
As 'tis in heaven before Thy throne;
Obedience in our weal and woe
And patience in all grief bestow.
Curb flesh and blood and every ill
That sets itself against Thy will.
5. Give us this day our daily bread
And let us all be clothed and fed.
From war and strife be our Defense,
From famine and from pestilence,
That we may live in godly peace,
Free from all care and avarice.
6. Forgive our sins, Lord, we implore,
Remove from us their burden sore,
As we their trespasses forgive
Who by offenses us do grieve.
Thus let us dwell in charity
And serve our brother willingly.
7. Into temptations lead us not,
When evil foes against us plot
And vex our souls on every hand,
Oh, give us strength that we may stand
Firm in the faith, a well-armed host,
Through comfort of the Holy Ghost!
8. From evil, Lord, deliver us;
The times and days are perilous.
Redeem us from eternal death,
And when we yield our dying breath,
Console us, grant us calm release,
And take our souls to Thee in peace.
9. Amen, that is, So shall it be.
Confirm our faith and hope in Thee
That we may doubt not, but believe
What here we ask we shall receive.
Thus in Thy name and at Thy Word
We say: Amen. Oh, hear us, Lord! Amen.

These hymns are included in a new booklet from Ambassador Publications, *12 Reformation Hymns by Martin Luther*. Featuring a hymn of Luther for each month of the year, the booklet is available for \$2/each. For more information, visit ambassadorpublications.org.



FLY

FREE
LUTHERAN
YOUTH

BY RACHAEL BALLMANN

Recently I went to the doctor for an eye exam and part of the routine checkup included a chemically induced eye dilation. This was a new adventure for me, and although it was for my greater good, it was an altogether unpleasant experience. Hours after the initial dilation, light still stung my eyes. Everything within 15 feet was blurry, and all I wanted was to close my eyes and stay in a dark room.

Although it was frustrating and somewhat painful, I needed to have the detailed and in-depth checkup to be sure my eyes were in good condition. Eventually, the pain subsided. The blurriness became clarity and I was never more thankful for clear vision in my life.

Like the eye exam, God has been giving me an intense and in-depth heart examination these past several weeks. The eyes of my heart have been experiencing similar symptoms as I did after visiting the optometrist: sensitivity to the light of truth and blurriness in understanding the depth of my sin. Amidst this there is also a growing beauty in seeing

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

the truth shining into my heart as Christ slowly brings sins to light and His power into focus. The Holy Spirit has been using some of the verses that will be shared in more depth at the 2017 FLY Convention to mold my heart. I John 1:5-7 is a passage especially meaningful to me lately: “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

When God reveals our sins, He will also enable us to fall into His open arms. He is ready to clean our wounds and heal us. As God has been bringing to light some of the dark areas in my own life, I find myself completely humbled before Him and dependent upon Him for my every ounce of strength. Illumination is sometimes beautifully painful and often an ongoing, slow process.

My sister recently reminded me that one of the reasons that God sometimes does not miraculously remove difficult circumstances from our lives is so that we will remain dependent

upon Him. In I Corinthians 12:9b Paul declares, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” Let our prayer not be that God would make us strong, but that He will be our strength. We must rest in God and pray for the eyes of our hearts to be open so that we can receive clear vision.

On our own, everything is blurry. Coming into the light and allowing Jesus to remove our sin will always be painful at first. Left to our own desires, we would certainly beg to remain in the dark. But, God is faithful to unite us to Himself. He became human and lived a wholly faithful life. He died and was raised so that we, too, can fully share in the Christ’s inheritance. Praise be to God for showing us truth and giving us the ability to “walk in the light, as he is in the light.”

When Christ illuminates our darkness, we see what we were missing and long for more and more of His glorious light.

Ballmann, who is the secretary of the FLY 2017 Board, is a dorm assistant at AFLBS.

Molstre called as next seminary dean

Hiring completes restructuring of Schools leadership team

Pastor James Molstre has accepted a call from the AFLC Schools to be the next dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary. Molstre, who serves Helmar Lutheran, Newark, Ill., will begin his new role on June 1.

As dean of the seminary, Molstre will oversee the academic program, provide guidance and support for the student body and their families, teach half-time, and serve on the administrative leadership team for the AFLC Schools.

Molstre said that while he feels sad about leaving his congregation, he does see the seminary as a ministry of the AFLC congregations, which are the “right form of the kingdom of God on earth.” He stated that he sees the role, in a sense, as “pastoring, shepherding a different kind of flock,” future shepherds who are preparing to serve AFLC congregations.

Pastor Wade Mobley, who has served in the dual role as both seminary dean and president of the AFLC Schools since 2014, will continue as president.

“I will still have substantial student contact in both programs, and more interaction with congregations and other AFLC departments,” said Mobley of his changing role on campus.

Members of the AFLC Schools Board of Trustees began their search for a full-time seminary dean last fall following changes to the

AFLC Schools Corporation’s bylaws proposed at the 2016 annual conference. The changes allowed the board of trustees to create the separate full-time role of seminary dean, and follow the hiring process as they would for full-time faculty. The hiring of the president remains under the purview of the annual conference.

The need to separate the role of president of the schools from the dean of the seminary became obvious after Mobley began serving in the position in 2014. The administrative duties added to the role of academic guidance and teaching, especially as the schools work through the process of accreditation, has proved to be an overwhelming workload for one person to handle.

“Everything we do at the Free Lutheran Schools is designed to impact local congregations for the positive,” said Mobley. “Pastor Molstre’s addition is a significant step. It is the final block in the administrative foundation that will allow us to train all of our students better, while at the same time accommodating future growth of the Bible school, seminary, and the AFLC.”

Molstre’s hiring is the final step in forming the administrative foundation at the AFLC Schools as it transitions through the accreditation program with TRACS (Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools).

“It is both humbling and awe inspiring seeing God work out His plan over a period of years,” said Steve Jankord, chairman of the AFLC Schools Board of Trustees. “It is very hard to ask a pastor to leave a congregation ... but we are trusting this is God’s plan and that He will provide for all of our needs at the schools and in our AFLC congregations as we prayerfully follow His lead.”

Molstre graduated from high school in

Dickinson, N.D., attended one year at the Free Lutheran Bible School, and graduated from North Dakota State University with a degree in history and education. He graduated from the Free Lutheran Seminary in 1993 with an MDiv, and earned a DMin from Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pa. For the past 23 years he has served three AFLC congregations: Our Savior’s Lutheran, Zumbrota, Minn.; Ruthfred Evangelical Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa.; and Helmar Lutheran, Newark.

“Pastor Molstre understands that the end goal of congregational health only comes through the ministry of the gospel to precious, eternal human souls,” said Mobley. “His presence on campus will provide the resources necessary to allow our faculty to disciple, mentor, and shepherd our future pastors—just as we want them to shepherd their future congregations.”

Molstre and his wife, Kristin, have three children: Jordan and his wife Meredith of Lynchburg, Va.; Rachel of Dayton, Ohio; and Mikaela, a senior at Aurora University in Illinois.

—ED





THE GIFT OF HOSPITALITY

BY LYNN WELLUMSON

I have been thinking about the ministry of hospitality lately. It is an often-overlooked gift, but remains a vital aspect of church life and fellowship. In the life of the reformer Martin Luther, his wife Katie provided a service of hospitality which enriched his ministry.

Ernst Kroker, author of *Mother of the Reformation: The Amazing Life and Story of Katharine Luther*, devotes a section of his book to Katie Luther's well-known hospitality. "Friends were always welcome to Katie. Having so many guests visit from out of town was often a heavy burden, yet we hardly ever hear a word of complaint from her about it. The mother and homemaker, who was very busy otherwise, took it for granted that her house was like a guesthouse

during quiet times, and like a hospital during the years of plague. Sometimes not a single room in the large building was vacant. When Katie had become a widow, Chancellor Bruck dared to speak before the Elector of the large household about the wasteful way she managed it. We have learned about Luther's income, and we have seen how well Katie understood keeping expenditures lower than revenues, and how she succeeded in gradually bringing them out of the great poverty of the early years to a certain affluence. We don't hear much about how she actually managed to satisfy all these obligations, how often she must have dreaded and worried, how untiringly she must have worked and pitched in herself."

Martin Luther himself once said of his wife, "She has served me not only as a wife, but also as a maid. God reward her for it!"

Scripture also provides teaching on the correct role of service in hospitality. Luke 10:38-42 says, "Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister

has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.'"

Perhaps you were greeted at church last week with the news: "It is our team's turn to serve at Lenten soup and supper next week. Would you like to bring a large soup to feed 20 or two dozen large sandwiches? Can you be here an hour early to set up or will you be cleaning up? It would be very helpful if you could do both."

Does your response closely resemble any of the people mentioned above? Sometimes our response is one of reluctance or even bitterness. We would rather say no, but in these requests God provides us opportunity to love our brothers and sisters and work for His glory. Let's count it a privilege to joyfully make small sacrifices to serve our neighbors.

Wellumson, of Williston, N.D., is the president of the Women's Missionary Federation.



Schools hosted continuing ed classes, videos now available

The AFLC Schools hosted a three-week January term full of classes for both seminarians and visitors. The classes began with a week-long look at the history of the AFLC with Pastor Robert Lee. A series of workshops on board governance and council ministry was offered the following week. During the third week, classes were offered on biblical history in Egypt and others on social trends and gender identity. A midwinter Bible conference capped the series of special classes. Many of the classes are available online through the AFLBS Vimeo account. Visit vimeo.com/aflbs to revisit these classes.



PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Brian Ricke has accepted a call to serve as senior pastor at Hope Free Lutheran, Minneapolis, starting on March 15. He currently serves Living Hope, Rogers, Minn. The congregation has been served by Pastor Gene Enderlein, interim, and Executive Pastor Ben Sollie.

The Free Lutheran Seminary announced 2017-2018 internship assignments for students who are currently in their final semester of three years of classroom education. The seminary internship allows students to get practical experience while working with an experienced AFLC pastor. Internships will begin June 1 and continue through graduation in May 2018.

The following students have been given their assignments:

- **Kendall Flaten** will serve Our Savior's Free Lutheran Church and First English Lutheran of Lostwood, Stanley, N.D., under the supervision of Pastor Rodney Johnson.
- **Matthew Nelson** will serve St. Ansgar's Lutheran Church, Salinas, Calif., under the supervision of Pastor Scott Stroud.
- **Matthew Quanbeck** will serve Ruthfred Lutheran Church, Bethel Park, Pa., under the supervision of Pastor Steven Carlson.
- **Nicholas Schultz** will serve Good Shepherd Free Lutheran Church, Camarillo, Calif., under the supervision of Pastor James L. Johnson.

Alaska Gift Registry hosts ministry needs

Did you know that you can help share the gospel with men and women from 44 different countries this summer? How is that possible?

In 2016, visitors from 44 countries and 406 states from the US came through the doors of The NET, our coffee house ministry in Naknek, Alaska. These visitors were greeted and welcomed as our staff shared the love of Jesus with them. Bibles and tracts were generously given to these visitors, as well as cups of coffee and baked goods. Our volunteers gave out 325 Bibles, 290 New Testaments, numerous tracts and 1,313 dozen cookies, cupcakes, etc.

You can share the gospel by helping provide the literature, Bibles, cookie mixes, coffee, and

paper goods needed at The NET—all found on our Alaska Gift Registry. The needs of our missionaries are also identified on the registry. Because the closest superstore or grocery store is more than 300 miles away, our missionaries appreciate the care packages that come from the lower 48. This online registry allows us to keep an up-to-date list of their needs, and avoid unnecessary duplication.

To donate to the needs of The NET or our missionary families, please visit our website at aflchomemissions.org and click on the "Alaska" tab to find the registry. Or go directly to: myregistry.com/visitors/?registryid=337412



Gift Registry

To give to the registry, visit:

- aflchomemissions.org
- or
- myregistry.com/visitors/?registryid=337412



BY PASTOR BRENT RAAN

I

t is interesting to see how churches in different cultures recognize and celebrate

Lent and Easter. We arrived in India about a year ago right as Lent was in full swing. We were expecting that the church there would do something special with Lent, but were surprised when we found out just what that was: they met every evening through Lent. It was encouraging seeing the church come together in such a way and worship Christ, His sacrifice, and life.

Yes, at first it was hard on the family to go to the services every evening, especially while we were adapting to the heat, learning the language, and struggling through culture shock. It is easy for me to look back on that time and say that we enjoyed celebrating Lent with the church, but with everything else going on in our lives, the season felt very different from most.

A SEASON ABROAD

The day that stuck out to us the most was Good Friday. We loaded up a bus and a vehicle and headed into town with speakers, a cross, and people dressed up as soldiers and Jesus. We don't remember the distance that we walked, but it took at least three hours. We walked through the city center while one of our friends, dressed up like Jesus, carried a huge cross and was whipped by the ones dressed up as soldiers. Meanwhile, music and sound effects blared out through the speakers.

A few times while we were walking, Jesus stumbled and fell to the ground with the cross landing on him. I remember a couple of times really thinking about what Jesus physically went through. Is grace cheap? No, it cost a tremendous price, and yet it is given to us freely and fully. It is tremendous to know that we have a God who spent everything He had because He wanted to have a relationship with us. Who does this? Yes, it is Christ the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world—He did this for the entire world.

It was amazing to pass by businesses and homes, and even pass Hindu temples, proclaiming a God who is living and loves people so much.

There are many aspects of the celebration of Lent and Easter in India that are similar to those we celebrate here in the States. On Palm Sunday, the children had palm branches and, yes, on Easter we did have a meal together as a church. Even if the food was not an egg bake, it was good and spicy. It was fantastic to see the similarities between the two cultures and note that even though we were not able to understand any of the language, we were able to worship Christ our King with the nationals who have now become dear friends of ours.

Raan and his wife, Emily, are missionaries with AFLC World Missions.



In Memoriam

Larry L. Behne, 74, of Wheatland, Iowa, died Jan. 23 at Wheatland Manor nursing home.

Born Nov. 25, 1942, in Clinton, Iowa, he was the son of Louie and Laura (Miller) Behne. He married Janice Dickel Jan. 4, 1964, in Wheatland.

Behne served on the AFLC Schools Board of Trustees, and was a member of the Schools Corporation for many years. He was a charter member of Christian Free Lutheran, Wheatland, Iowa.

Surviving are his wife; two sons, Rick Behne, Rock Island, Iowa, and Ryan (Kellie) Behne, Elk River, Minn.; two daughters, Renee (Nathan) Forster, Hudson, Wis., and Rochelle Behne, St. Paul, Minn.; two brothers, Lyle (Donna) Behne, Milan, Iowa, and John (Michelle) Morahn, Carbon, Ind.; three sisters, Geraldine Schutt, DeWitt, Iowa; Vicki (Terry) Anderson, Wausau, Wis., and Becky Whitetaker, Davenport; and seven grandchildren.

The service was held Jan. 28 at Christian Free Lutheran, Wheatland, with Pastor Eric Swenson officiating. Burial was in Rose Hill Cemetery, Calamus, Iowa.

AFLBS hosts Campus Days

Spring Campus Days at the Free Lutheran Bible School, Plymouth, Minn., has been planned for March 17-19. Prospective students are invited to stay on campus and experience the life of a Bible school student through worship, classes, and fellowship time with current students. Potential students also have the option of participating in an 18-hour preview, which is scheduled for March 26-28. For more information, visit the AFLBS web site at (aflbs.org).

JANUARY MEMORIALS

AFLBS
Ruth Claus

AFLTS
Eugene Nesland
Thomas Hill
Matthew Hill
Delmond Borg

Ambassador Inst.
Pastor Ted Berkas

Parish Education
Margaret Ellertson (2)

Home Missions
Margaret Theis
Fred Werder

FLAPS
Jordan and Jasmine
Linder

WMF
Mary West
Adeline Kvam



Home Missions hosts winter retreat in Arizona

The annual Home Missions Retreat was held February 6-9 at Calvary Free Lutheran in Mesa, Ariz. The more than 80 attendees enjoyed teaching and training from speakers, Dr. Steve Lombardo and Bob Baldwin, who shared from the theme, "Equipped: The HOW of Discipleship," and a devotional by Pastor Dale Finstrom. We praise God for the fruitful time under the Word and rich fellowship shared together.

ARC reopens with schedule of AFLC events

The Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis., has reopened and is hosting a schedule of retreats and camps for the AFLC this spring and throughout the summer.

The ARC closed in December and January due to a budget shortfall. In that time, staff were temporarily laid off. During a restructuring of the leadership, several staff members resigned to pursue other employment opportunities, including Pat Flanders as director and Dan

Shilson as director of development. The ARC Board will continue to seek a director, operations manager, development director and other staff.

Upcoming events include a Women's Retreat March 17-19, an iDisciple seminar March 31-April 2, Men's Retreat May 5-8, Fire Up Youth Camp June 18-23, Beginner 101 Camp June 23-24, and AFLC Family Camp, scheduled for July 30-Aug. 5. For more information visit arc-aflc.org.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-January 31, 2017

FUND	REC'D IN JANUARY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$35,113	\$35,113	\$31,829
Evangelism	8,278	8,278	11,483
Youth Ministries	5,734	5,734	6,935
Parish Education	10,740	10,740	10,093
Seminary	17,710	17,710	23,858
Bible School	24,126	24,126	37,876
Home Missions	68,413	68,413	57,351
World Missions	29,655	29,655	39,250
Personal Support	40,053	40,053	38,892
TOTALS	\$239,822	\$239,822	\$257,567

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

JESUS STILL SPEAKS

Jesus still speaks. He speaks to us through the Word. This is a foundational truth, for it is the faith “once for all” handed down to the saints (Jude 3), and so one should not be surprised that it is under attack.

The attack may come from the cults. Dave Breese, author of *The Marks of a Cult*,



Pastor Robert Lee

maintains that the first and most characteristic mark of a cult is extra-biblical revelation, the allegedly inspired words or writings of its founder or leader that are held to be equal or superior to the Bible. It may come from prophetic messages, even introduced by, “Thus saith the Lord,” that presume to claim divine authority.

Your editor was asked several years ago to evaluate a women’s Bible study course, written by a popular conference speaker and produced by a major Christian publisher. The introduction urged the reader not be content with a “second-hand” word from God, but to seek new and fresh words from Him. It was not necessary to read any farther, after realizing that the “second-hand” word was the Bible. Recently many are uneasy, too, with the author of a series of devotional books who writes in the first person, as though her words are the words of God.

Perhaps it may be our own hearts that lead us astray. If only Jesus were here! If only He stood by our side and we could hear Him speaking to us! Surely then any doubts would vanish, and our faith would be firmly established. Maybe all of us have thought like this at times. But this is false. For there was a time when He walked on earth among men and women. People saw Him and heard Him speak, and yet most of them refused to believe.

If the heavens were opened above us, if the air was filled with angels, and if God Himself from the midst of the heavenly host shouted down to us, “I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by name; thou art mine!” we would have the same uncertainty and doubt, if we did not believe what He said (Ludvig Hope, *Thy Kingdom Come*).

This does not mean that God does not lead and guide us by His Spirit, and at times His direction may seem to be quite specific. But we are fearfully capable of confusing what we want with God’s leading, or falling under the control of some who may falsely claim to have a word from God for us. So Christians are admonished to “test the spirits” to see whether or not they are from God (I John 4:1). Our plumb line, the trustworthy point of reference, must always be the Bible.

And God forbid that we ever rank any sense of guidance as a new word from Him or with the foundation of the prophets and apostles upon which the Church is built.

A more subtle temptation may be to look to the writings of others about the Bible more than to the Bible itself. A dear lady from Ferndale, Wash., comes to mind, who said that she had to put her favorite devotional book aside for a time and spend more time reading the Bible itself, because she was thinking too much of the author of the devotional, and wanting to be like him,

than she was thinking of Jesus. There are many fine devotional resources available, with faithful expositions of Holy Scripture in them. We are grateful to God for their authors and their insights, as well as for their skill at expressing them, but these should not take priority over the Word of God itself.

Jesus still speaks. The Bible is the Word of God, and He speaks to us in it. We need nothing new, for the Bible contains all that is needed for life and salvation, enough to see us safely home. It is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). It

is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). We can affirm confidently without apology that the core curriculum of our AFLC Schools is the Bible, whether it be in the seminary or the Bible school, for Scripture not only leads to salvation, but also equips us for every good work (II Timothy 3:15-17). We confess that it is without error and that it will never fail.

Open your Bible, friend, read it and listen. Jesus is still speaking to you.

We need nothing new, for the Bible contains all that is needed for life and salvation, enough to see us safely home.

God’s Word is our great heritage
And shall be ours forever.

To shed its light from age to age
Shall be our chief endeavor.

Through life it guides our way,
In death it is our stay.

Lord, grant while words endure
We keep its teachings pure
Throughout all generations.

— Nikolai F. S. Grundtvig

something to share

A LESSON IN SELFLESSNESS

BY JENNIFER THORSON

When our first child was born back in 2006, my husband, Kirk, and I lived in the men's dorm at the Bible school in Plymouth, Minn. He served as the men's resident head and I worked in the AFLBS office. Living on the second floor of a building with 75 college-aged young men and having a newborn at the same time was a very enjoyable time of life, but also required some sacrifices.

Calling out, "Woman on floor!" each time I went up the stairs and learning how to quickly calm a crying baby in the middle of the night so the guys across the hall could sleep proved to be challenging. Giving up the opportunity to have "our own place" to bring our first child home to in order to serve at the schools was also a shift in thinking from what I envisioned about our married life.

The guys had to make a few sacrifices too, like turning their music down and not bouncing their basketballs against our apartment wall during late night hallway conversations. Thankfully, they were all very welcoming to our son and eager to carry

my groceries and car seat up two flights of stairs, so those other things were easy to forgive.

As Christians we are called to "count others more significant" than ourselves, as Philippians 2 instructs us. But our natural inclination is to think only of our own needs. Although the challenging or changing circumstances of life require selflessness and sacrifice, too often we find ourselves drawn to self-preservation instead.

The sacrifices we had to make while living in the men's dorm were simple in nature and didn't require much effort, but it was still tempting to think of them as inconveniences that made life more difficult for us. We've likely all found ourselves in a situation that requires us to look not only to our own interests, but to the interests of others (Philippians 2:4), yet we may find this difficult to do with a joyful heart.

When we are striving to be Christ-like in this way and desiring to be giving and selfless, the message of the rest of the Scripture passage in Philippians is clear: look to the cross.

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (vs. 5-8).

Our hearts and minds are drawn again to this eternal gospel truth, that Christ made the ultimate sacrifice for us and then was exalted for the glory of God. His sacrifice was much greater than any temporary sacrifices we will be called on to make, and only by His grace is it possible for us to live in a way that puts others' needs before our own.

Thorson is a member of Living Word Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D. Her blog can be found at thepurposefulmom.com.