

# **Encouraging Word**

# Prayer life

— Karina Olson Faith Free Lutheran Minneapolis, Minn.

It is His will that we have spiritual life, that we come to Him, that we have peace with Him, that we do not live in fear.

rayer is vital to the Christian life. We hear this all the time. Many Christians have a daily time set aside for prayer, diligently praying for the needs of their loved ones, churches, the lost, and world events. Many are in a blessed state of constant communication with God.

Thinking about it, I remember a time when this was the case for me. It was natural for me to thank God for things, ask Him for guidance, pray for those around me. I praised God in the events of daily life - at my job, in the car, grocery shopping. God was bigger than life to me, so to speak. He was right there. And it felt great.

Now I don't feel great. I feel discouraged. God seems far away. Unreal. There have been times in the past years when I couldn't seem to say anything to God. My sin, my sadness, my indifference, my deadness, whatever it was, it was too great. I couldn't do anything under it. Certainly not pray. When I tried nothing came out but begging, "Don't leave me, don't leave me, don't leave me!" Now, commonly, when I pray I feel like I'm really not. It's not sincere enough. I'm doing it because I know I should, not because I really want to. I can't figure out how to really mean what I say. The pressure is enormous.

I am not currently a model for prayer, so I don't have any insights to share about how to begin a more consistent prayer life or advise about a method of prayer. However, one truth concerning prayer has been clearly shown to me recently. I John 5:14 says, "This

is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us ... we know that we have what we ask of him." This verse recently gave me some confidence in prayer. It speaks about our asking God in prayer for things according to His will. So what is God's will? Thankfully, as regards our spiritual needs, God's will is to fill them. It is His will that we have spiritual life, that we come to Him, that we have peace with Him, that we do not live in fear.

Scripture speaks clearly and obviously about this. "... The Lord longs to be gracious to you, He rises to show you compassion" (Isaiah 30:18). "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11: 28). "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). "The Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (I Peter 3:9). "... God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Timothy 2:4). "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy, and eat! ... Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live" (Isaiah 55:1,3a).

We have many needs as humans. We need prayer for physical, mental, and emotional needs. Our greatest need is spiritual. We can have confidence and encouragement that when we see this need in ourselves and pray to God for help that He will not leave us, but will hear us, have compassion on us, and give us life and rest.

November 2004 Volume 42, Number 11



# **<b>ELUTHERANAMBASSADOR**

Editor

Pastor Craig Johnson craigi@teleport.com

**Managing Editor** 

**Editorial Board** 

Ruth Gunderson ruthg@aflc.org

Pastor John Mundfrom Oryen Benrud Pastor Jerry Moan Pastor James L. Johnson

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. Phone: (763) 545-5631; fax: 763-545-0079.

For subscription changes and information: The Lutheran Ambassador, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55441. 763-545-5631 or e-mail at luthamb@aflc.org

**Subscriptions rates:** 

\$15 a year, Group Rate, U. S.

\$16 a year, Individual, U. S.

\$18 a year, International

Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, MN, and additional mailing office.

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

## **Sound Bites**

This past Fourth of July weekend I went into the hospital for heart bypass surgery. Due to the tremendous technology and the goodness of God this type of surgery is almost commonplace today. I'm a survivor, and what can I say but God is so good.

Isaiah 26:3 says, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee." Whatever the concern, whatever the need may be, keep your mind on the Lord and take your burdens to Him. Tell Jesus about your problem. He wants to be your Savior and Rock. When you have that kind of relationship with Him, then your Thanksgiving can be full and good.

> — Pastor Ted Berkas Bloomington, Minn.

You may recall when heavy burdens lay upon your heart. Perhaps it seemed impossible that things could be right again. But the Lord heard your cries. He was your help. He continues to offer his compassion, forgiveness, and his tender Shepherd-care.

God only asks that we respond with a thankful heart. This is cause for rejoicing.

> - Carl O. Rosenius Rosenius' Daily Meditations

See what great evil this lack of gratitude is! It brings along a love of vanity, which produces blindness; this in turn results in idolatry, and idolatry leads to a whirlpool of vices. On the other hand, gratitude retains the love for God, and thus the heart remains directed toward God. It therefore becomes enlightened, and once enlightened, it worships only the true God.

> — Martin Luther Lectures on Romans







# Suther's early \*\* REBELLON

By Pastor Anthony Striffler

It is the most widely held belief among Lutherans that the nailing of the "95 Theses" on the door of the castle church at Wittenberg inaugurated Luther's life-long rebellion against the Roman church. Hammer in hand and parchment unfurling, we see him almost ethereally, saintly, beginning a course of events that would, in effect, change the world and alter the face of Christianity forevermore.

However, although the events of Oct. 31, 1517, undoubtedly led to what we now call the Reformation, Luther's public rebellion began with a document practically unknown to most Lutherans that dealt with theological issues very different from those of indulgences and Church practices.

The "Disputation Against Scholastic Theology," which Luther penned in the early fall of 1517, was a direct result of his years of deep biblical study" and his

continued inability to feel at peace with God through church teaching or practice.<sup>iii</sup> It began as one academic's official invitation to debate contemporary, widely held, and commonly espoused theological stances on such issues as human nature, free will, and humanity's ability to merit God's grace. Scholastic theology taught, among other things, that humanity, despite the Fall, still possessed an innate ability to act correctly according to nature, and to thus please God and effect the

beginnings of justification/salvation. It was also believed, based on the teachings of Saint Augustine, that sinners who were justified worked together with God's infused grace to perform works through love that were pleasing to God, thus also effecting salvation. Luther vehemently disagreed with both fundamental precepts.

It is in this context that Luther writes, "It is false to state that man's inclination is free to chose between either of two opposites. Indeed, the inclination is not free, but captive. This is said in opposition to common opinion.iv It is false to state that will can by nature conform to correct precept ... As a matter of fact, without the grace of God the will produces an act that is perverse and evilvi ... One must concede that the will is not free to strive toward whatever is declared good."vii

In these first disputations, Luther attacks the foundation of scholastic teaching and its hold over medieval theology and the church; the fact that sin has not corrupted all nature and will, and that humanity is capable of choosing obedience or sin with only limited assistance from the divine. Luther responds with one of his earliest expositions of the will's total captivity and distortion by sin and the Fall, which will later become the "Bondage of the Will," one of his greatest and most popular treatises.viii

In later disputations Luther writes, "It is not true that God can accept man without his justifying graceix ... The grace of God is given for the purpose of directing the will, lest it err even in loving God<sup>x</sup> ... To love God is at the same time to hate oneself and to know nothing but God."xi

As Luther's arguments come to a close, he reveals what he has truly come to believe and where he at last has found peace of mind, body, and soul; that apart from nature, reason, and will, the only way a person can be justified before Almighty God is by desperately clinging to the promise of forgiveness in the person of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross. Luther refutes the scholastic understanding of "free will" with the argument that there is nothing left in a person that is not distorted by sin and evil in some way as a direct result of the Fall, and that apart from grace given through Christ crucified for our sins, no person can stand as righteous before the Almighty. There is and can only be total dependence upon Christ.

Luther rejected scholastic theology in all its forms and teachings as contrary to Scripture, as regurgitation of ancient philosophical Aristotelian logic, and as a contemporary form of Pelagianism<sup>xii</sup> — a controversial Christian teaching from the fourth century. For Luther these positions were not only contrary to God's free grace in Christ, but a clear and distinct danger to it; for it pointed Christians away from the cross and toward themselves and their own actions.

Although no monumental historical event ever came of the "Disputation Against Scholastic Theology," there is no doubt about its importance to Luther and the Reformation, and its connection to his subsequent writings. The "Disputation" clearly demonstrates a first phase of Luther's radical "new" theology, with its sole dependence upon salvation by grace through faith apart from works of the law, which would become the foundation of all "Lutheran" theology. For just as the "95 Theses" indicates that no human or ecclesiastical practice has the power or ability to justify a person before Almighty God — i.e. indulgences, — so the "Disputation" claims the same about innate nature, will, and reason.

What contemporary Lutherans learn again from Luther's theological "Disputation" is to put our trust, as he did, not in the flights and fancies of well educated and erudite philosophers and theologians who understand complex logistics and have read hundreds of books and articles, but in God's perfect and eternal grace as it has been revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. In 1518 Luther begins to articulate his "Theology of the Cross" in direct response to the many ongoing controversies regarding God's grace, and it is this theology that has become the backbone of the Reformation. What he wrote to the Augustinian Order meeting in Heidelberg almost 500 years ago is still the most poignant and beneficial lesson that is ours to learn and communicate: "To say that we are nothing and constantly sin when we do the best we can does not mean that we cause people to despair (unless they are fools); rather, we make them concerned about the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."xiii Luther's thoughts, his theology, never strayed from the cross; nor should we.

<sup>1</sup> In Luther's Works, Career of the Reformer I, Volume 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), pp. 9-16.

By the time of the *Disputation* Luther had already had his tremendous "Gos-

pel breakthrough." This occurred for him continually while he lectured on the Psalms (1513-1515), Romans (1515-1516), and Galatians (1516-1517). iii For an excellent treatment see David C. Steinmetz "Luther Against Luther"

Luther in Context (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 1-11. iv Ibid, pg 9; Disputation 5.

V Ibid, pg. 9; Disputation 6.

vi Ibid, pg. 9; Disputation 7.

vii *Ibid*, pg. 10; Disputation 10.

viii Luther first developed the idea of human will's captivity in the "Heidelberg Disputation" of 1518. He then wrote the Bondage of the Will in 1525 as a rebuttal to Erasmus of Rotterdam's A Discourse Concerning Free Choice.

ix *Ibid*, pg. 13; Disputation 56.

X Ibid, pg. 15; Disputation 90.

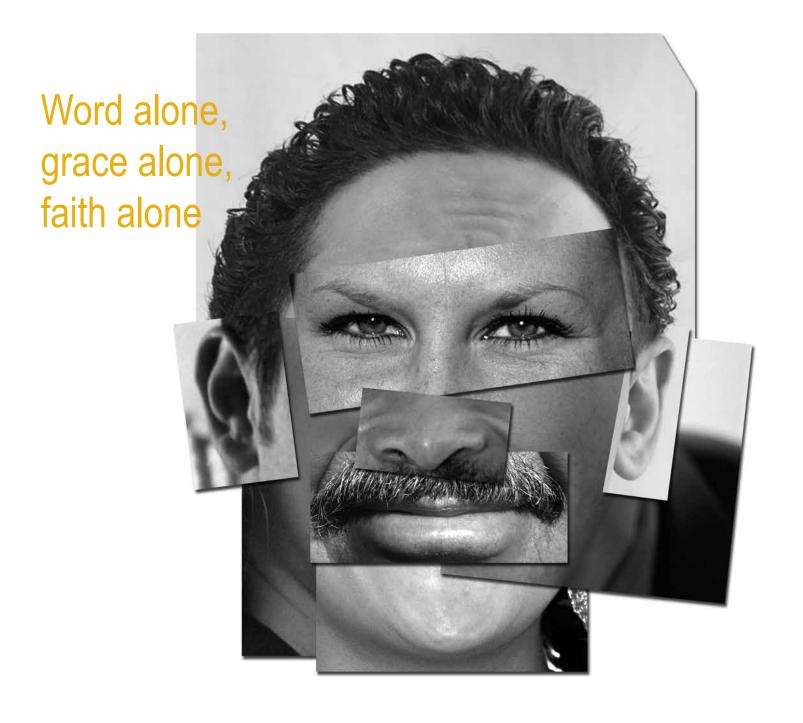
xi *Ibid*, pg. 15; Disputation 95.

xii Pelagius was a British Christian ascetic who made his way to Rome by the end of the fourth century (390). A contemporary of St. Augustine of Hippo, who believed that salvation was effected by love of/for God, Pelagius demanded severe external obedience to the Law.

xiii "The Heidelberg Disputation," *Ibid*, pg. 51.

Striffler, a Th.D. candidate at Trinity Theological Seminary, is serving as interim pastor at St. James Lutheran, Garden City, Kan.

# What Us a By Pastor Jason Holt



# utherar

magine standing in the entryway of your church after a Sunday morning service. Your brothers and sisters in Christ are talking together and catching up on personal news. Out of the corner of your eye, you notice a visitor. You recently overheard your pastor commenting on how important it is as the body of Christ to welcome visitors, so you step across the room to greet this person. After the normal greetings are exchanged, the visitor asks, "Do you go here often?"

You smile at the question and nod, since this church has been your home for years and years. The visitor pursues your knowledge a little more. "This is my first time here ... actually, my first time in church for a long time. I have enjoyed being here this morning, but I've got a question. What's a Lutheran?"

#### $\mathbf{W}$ here to $\mathfrak{A}$ ar $\emptyset$

Your mind races back through scenes of Sunday school teachers and confirmation classes. What do you say? "This is most certainly true"... no, that doesn't answer it. Where does a person start?

Many lines from our historical documents could help here, but very few people who pose the question "What's a Lutheran?" will find much assistance in a response about the unaltered Augsburg Confession. Do not misunderstand me — all the documents we affirm as an AFLC are key to our identity as a fellowship. My encouragement would be to start at a point that may be more helpful for the visitor off the street, someone without a background in church jargon.

There are three Reformation truths that defined the first "Lutherans" that can provide a helpful approach to answering this visitor's question: Word alone, grace alone, faith alone.

#### Where to stand

By taking a stand in our answer on the Reformation truths of Word alone, grace alone and faith alone, we draw the defining boundaries as Lutherans from the historical, biblical perspective.

With a visitor, Word alone allows us to speak to the centrality of God's Word. As Lutherans, we confess that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of

God (II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:20-21). God is the Author. It is 100 percent true. It is 100 percent reliable. We have God's revealed message to people in the Holy Bible.

Grace alone allows us to explain what the Bible tells us about ourselves and God. As Lutherans, we affirm that we are born with a broken relationship with God, severed by our sin. Maybe you have learned the acronym for grace: "God's Riches At Christ's Expense." We stand with grace, because it is God's action toward us in Jesus at the cross. We did not earn it (Ephesians 2:9) — none of it.

Lastly, faith alone allows us to describe how a right relationship with God is established. As Lutherans, we stand dependent on the Word of God and grace of God that declares to us that we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). Faith in the Lord Jesus is the basis for a saving relationship with God.

#### $\mathbf{W}$ here to stop!

These three truths give a great approach to the visitor's question. Is there more that could be said? Absolutely! As biblical Lutherans, we have great truths to share about the means of grace. As an AFLC, we have such a rich and wonderful heritage to share of polity, piety, and theology leading to a heart for evangelism and discipleship. But to the visitor's question, these statements will not have much depth without the basis of the Word alone, grace alone, and faith alone.

Sometimes when answering this question we are drawn into making explanations along the lines of denominational differences. This approach may be useful if the visitor knows the terminology. The pitfall of this approach is the increasing ignorance among Americans when it comes to denominations. The same visitor who asked you what a Lutheran is will likely ask you what a Baptist is.

Ultimately, the three Reformation truths lead us to the core of who Jesus is and what He has accomplished through His death and resurrection. No matter how we answer, one name must be part of our response: Jesus!

Holt is associate pastor of Youth and Family Ministry at Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn.

# Don't keep heart at By Joel Warne

I was 6 years old the day my brother, Mark, taught me not to cry. He didn't intend to teach me anything.

He only meant to whack me. And he did. It was an ordinary big-brother smack, delivered in fun (for him) like many I was in the habit of dodging in those days. But on this particular night, as the tears started to well up inside, a novel thought presented itself to me: "Hey Joel, have you ever considered not crying?"

"What?" I thought. "Not cry? But I always cry when I hurt."

"That's true," answered the New Idea, "but what if you didn't? You'd look so tough. Grown up. And it would bug your brother that he couldn't hurt you."

I grabbed hold of my new idea in less time than it takes to tell, and at that moment I left an important part of childhood behind.

My new idea served me well that very night and for years to come. When Mark's whacks didn't get the desired effect, he got bored and went away. And later, when a school bully grabbed me from a pile of huddled grade-schoolers to practice his hammerlock, he didn't get total satisfaction. Although he nearly cranked off my head he couldn't crank out my tears. Throughout my school years I learned that not crying helped weave the illusion that I was in control, untouchable, a strongman who couldn't be hurt.

I haven't cried much since until a few years ago.

For some weeks I noticed myself hovering at the edge of a strong desire to weep. About what, I didn't know. There was nothing especially sad going on in my life at that time. Besides, I don't weep. So this pull toward tears was mystifying and a little embarrassing. I thought, "No, I'm strong. What is this nonsense? Go away, you strange feeling. This isn't how I operate. Besides, mature Christian men don't sink into tears for no particular reason. This smells like self-pity. And what might that lead to? A man could start to cry and never stop."

With thoughts like these, for a while, I successfully kept my heart at bay. But as the philosopher Pascal said, "The heart has its reasons which reason knows not of." And what my mind at that moment struggled not to know was that God was calling me, wooing me, inviting me to meet Him in tears.

In the midst of this unusual struggle, I picked up a book about a small Russian hunchback woman, caught up in the Holocaust. In a holding camp, awaiting the train that would take her to her death, it was her habit to move among the other prisoners, offering spiritual comfort and doing what she could to relieve their suffering. One day the woman confided to a friend the

deep anguish that her calm exterior disguised. The hunchback woman let go a deep sigh. "Some days," she said, "I wish I could swim away in my tears."

That did it. Somehow, the lament of the grieving woman sliced deep into me and opened full force a torrent of

tears in my own heart. Over the next to experience a reservoir of pain that I did storing up for some

time. And only then did I begin to understand the reasons for my tears.

I cried for many things: For hurting family and friends. For tragedies and crises nearby and far away. I cried for my long dead Russian hunchback sister. I cried for the crucifixion of truth — a way of life in the culture in which I live. And I cried for the deep sense of personal facture I often feel. Because though I am no longer lost, having been found in Christ, there is still a lostness that courses through my thoughts and behaviors, constantly harassing the budding found-ness of my relationship with God.

It was easy to let myself cry, to leak pain, to express the grief felt by a human traveler in a world under assault by the enemy of our souls. Yet, I was surprised and comforted to find that I met God on the river of those tears. In fact, I found that the tears weren't mine alone.

He who wept over Jerusalem, who called out to His Father during the days of His earthly ministry with loud cries and tears, has wept an ocean of tears over the world's pain and perplexity — including mine.

I wept with the Friend of Heaven in an intimate, redemptive grief

that helped salve my own pain as I entered with Him into the weight of His own. A mystery, a privilege, and deeply consoling.

And I was reminded that this is intimacy with God — this letting go, this following one's heart into the heart of God. How often do I

And I was reminded that this is intimacy days I allowed myself with God — this letting go, this following one's heart into the heart not realize I had been of God. How often do I dare go there?

> dare go there? In the face of a chorus of objections flung up by a reluctant mind, or the culture, or sometimes, sadly, even the church, how often do I dare meet Christ in the secret, unnamable place to which He calls me?

"The heart has its reasons that reason knows not of." Our spirits. made alive by the Holy Spirit, constantly urge us into deeper country, the map of which is often unclear to our minds. But we are like the Apostle Paul, sons and daughters of God who are led by a Spirit living deep within. Where is that Spirit calling you presently?

What does your heart yearn for today? What are you hungry or thirsty for? Where, perhaps, do you hurt? In the deep, deep roots of your life, what is stirring? What is important? What should you be listening to?

Jesus Himself waits at the center of your hunger, your pain, your secret yearning — hoping you'll risk the journey within.

Warne, a member of Vision of Glory Lutheran, Plymouth, Minn., is the founder of Well-Spring Life Resources, a non-profit ministry that helps individuals experience life transformation through growing intimacy with Jesus.



ometimes I feel like no one could appreciate adopted parents more than I do. During the Thanksgiving season I especially remember and thank God for Pastor Albert and Lillie Hanson, pioneer Lutheran Free Church missionaries to South Madagascar.

They prayed often for a child to replace the baby they lost in Madagascar. Several of the early Lutheran missionaries lost children in the tropics due to Blackwater Fever and other dreaded diseases. Lillie also suffered anthrax boils, caught from Malagasy cattle and lanced by the legendary Dr. Dyrnes on the mission field. Because of these medical problems they were unable to have children of their own, and they looked to Almighty God for a family. He answered their prayers just before Thanksgiving in 1932 when they were able to adopt a 16-month-old boy.

My birth mother was 16 years old when I was born. She had become pregnant through a relationship with a 28-year-old technician installing a wind-generated electric lighting system (one of the first in the area) on her parent's large dairy enterprise just east of the city of Moorhead in 1929. When my birth mother began to show her condition the parents wanted her to leave home and not come back until the newborn was put up for adoption. My birth mother didn't see it that way. She wanted to keep the baby, and she was counting on the promise of marriage by the baby's

# Every year at Thanksgiving time I especially remember my adoptive parents and also my birth mother as a great blessing from God.

father. But this promise was probably only given to help settle the criminal charges, and the girl's parents would not give needed permission for a marriage that embarrassed them so much.

The new mother still planned to keep the child in spite of her parent's attitude and the economic depression developing across the Midwest. After 16 months, my birth mother could no longer survive in Minneapolis during those difficult times. She gave up custody of me to a Lutheran adoption agency and then went home to Moorhead to finish high school as her parents had wanted her to do. She started her new life over again without her son, whom she had reluctantly given up in despair just to survive. She graduated from high school and eventually became a very successful businesswoman in Moorhead.

Pastor Hanson graduated from Augsburg Seminary in 1918. He and his wife were medically retired missionaries from the Lutheran church mission field in Madagascar (1919-1925), and they prayed often for a child. God in His all-knowing wisdom gave me to them to adopt. At this time in 1932, I suffered from rickets and was undernourished and weak in spite of all of my birth mother's efforts to try to keep me and still survive during the Great

Depression.

Less than two years later, the Hansons would also adopt an infant girl to complete their family. They lovingly nursed us back to health. Daily they thanked the Lord for these two beautiful children He had given to them.

Every year at Thanksgiving time I especially remember my adoptive parents and also my birth mother as a great blessing from God. He gave me godly parents and a new Christian home, and he gave my adoptive parents the child they had always wanted. I also thank God for my birth mother who tried to keep me in spite of all the obstacles she endured. Each of these individuals was a part of God's plan for my life, and I am eternally thankful for His blessings. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

I am so thankful for my adoptive missionary parent's Christian home where I learned to know Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.

Hanson is founder and chief executive officer of Lutheran Prison Ministry, a nationwide Bible outreach to prisoners. He and his wife, Jeanette, grew up in the Lutheran Free Church in Fergus Falls, Minn., before moving to Concordia, Mo.

# inspiring

By Jean Quanbeck

{ your } child



# thankfulness

Two cars and one van. Thirteen bikes, trikes and other riding machines. Three trombones, two trumpets, two guitars, one French horn, one accordion, one violin and one piano. Five baby dollies for one little mommy. A cupboard full of toys, games and movies. A freezer and pantry stocked with delicious food. These are just some of the things owned by our family as we live in our comfortable home on Terrace Drive.

How do we teach our children to be thankful when we have so much? How can we instill an attitude of gratitude when affluence is all around us? These are questions that my husband and I have pondered and discussed as we endeavor to raise our six children with a passion for the things of God. Though we are far from wealthy by the standards of Wall Street, we live with great abundance. Though our children don't have everything that their peers do, their rooms are full to overflowing.

Instilling thankfulness in our children is not easy, and it isn't accomplished overnight. But thankfulness is crucial in their spiritual development. Our children's relationship with the things of this world will have a profound impact on their relationship with God. Here are some things we can do to encourage their relationships with God and an attitude of thankfulness.

### Daily and verbally point out God's provision for your family

True thankfulness comes as a response to knowing the Giver and recognizing our own undeserving nature. When we fail to thank God for the daily provisions in our lives, we quickly forget how dependent we are on Him. We fall into the sinful trap of self-sufficiency.

Deuteronomy 6 tells us to make use of opportunities "when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." There are unlimited blessings all around us that we can point out to our children. The very air we breathe and the food we eat come from the hand of God.

I love to remind my children of how miraculously God formed them and how their strong, healthy bodies are gifts from Him. One evening last week we viewed a spectacular rainbow and a beautiful sunset that inspired us to sing the Doxology in front of our house.

Regularly remind your children of God's promises in His Word. As you pass that field of sunflowers or hear the geese overhead, marvel with them in God's creativity. Remind them that God also has a plan for their lives. Constantly bring before your children the eternal gifts of God — their personal salvation and the privilege of a daily relationship with Him.

### **Examine your own attitudes** toward material possessions

Our children watch us, as parents, very closely. They see our attitudes regarding material things. Is it evident that we trust God for all that we need? Do

they sense contentment in what He's given us? Do they hear us thanking God for everything, even the difficult situations in life? Do they see that we value our relationship with Jesus above all else?

There are powerful examples from our own lives and the lives of others that we can use to point out the unhappiness or dissatisfaction that the world provides. Perhaps as a parent you have life stories you can share emphasizing how something failed to deliver what you thought it would. These can be effective teaching tools in our parenting.

Within the Christian community there has been a subtle change of attitude toward the pursuit of wealth and worldly possessions. We'd sometimes like to believe that God isn't terribly concerned about how we spend our money. Whether we're rich or poor financially, God desires that we consult Him on how we use what He's given us.

James 1:17 says, "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." Reminding our children that everything they have comes from God and belongs to Him helps them develop a thankful heart and protects them from a love of money and possessions.

One other effective way to model our thankfulness to God is to be generous with our money, time and possessions. Be an example to your children by giving a tithe to the Lord. Teach them to see the needs around them and to be willing to share with others sacrificial-

### Learn to pray daily for yourself and your children

In every area of child rearing we need God's wisdom to be successful. James 1:5 says, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." I rely often on that promise. As we observe the world around us, we can become overwhelmed at the negative influences that are impacting our children. It seems impossible to raise them to live holy lives, free from the love of the world. A wonderful encouragement to me is that God loves my children beyond what I ever could, and He is always ready and waiting to help me with the important job He's entrusted to me. I need only to ask Him and He promises to give me the wisdom I need.

Jean is the wife of Lloyd Quanbeck, pastor at Bethel Free Lutheran, Minot, N.D. They are the parents of six children, ages 3-14.

ue to unforeseen circumstances, I found myself president of our WMF for a second year. Could I keep the same energy and commitment? It was shortly after these thoughts consumed my mind that I decided to keep a "thankful journal." It is a blessing to recount some examples from my journal.

#### Humility

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9a).

Early in my second year of leadership, it became very evident that I could not do it all myself. I humbled myself and asked others for help and guidance. The morning of our annual Christmas dinner found me in bed with a high fever. How could I be thankful for being home sick in bed instead of being at the party I had helped plan? All I could do was lie in bed, cough, and *pray*! The success of the evening dinner and program was literally out of my hands. What a relief to lay the burden at Jesus' feet.

### Forgiveness

"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13).

As a leader, I had to learn to forgive myself. Continually recounting past mistakes was not productive. I also needed to forgive others. My thankful journal reminded me that shortly after I had felt disgruntled by someone's actions, that same someone called me with a great idea and an offer to help.

#### Freedom

"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Forgiveness brings freedom. Freedom breeds creativity. I wonder if Martha fretted over the menu selection for Jesus and His disciples? In a "Martha moment," we found ourselves worrying over the menu for an auxiliary luncheon. Two of my board members announced they had a surprise for our board meeting. They served us samples of menu ideas for the luncheon. I was so thankful for these women.

#### Joy

"Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints" (Philemon 7).



Finally, my thankful journal taught me to seek joy. Many creative hands had transformed our fellowship hall with a bright, festive decor the evening of a baby shower. To our delight we saw that the bright colors on the cover of the book we were to give the mothers perfectly matched the colors of the decorations on each table. We joked with each other that we had that all planned. We knew better. We stood in awe of our God of details.

I can echo with Paul, Silas and Timothy the words of I Thessalonians 1:2-3: "We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

May our work for the WMF always be grounded in our faith in our Lord Jesus. Find yourself with a role or task you feel completely overwhelmed with? Be thankful, learn to be humble, forgive yourself and others, enjoy your freedom in Christ, and remember to seek joy always.

> — By Gail Mitchell Abiding Savior Free Lutheran Sioux Falls, S.D.

## **World Missions**

# provision

"I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart;
I will tell of all thy wonders.
I will be glad and exult in Thee;
I will sing praise to Thy name, O Most High."
— Psalm 9:1-2

We, members of the World Mission Committee, together with our missionary families, truly give thanks to our Lord for His provision through His people. Yes, God is sovereign, and He sends His Holy Spirit among His people to support our collective mission endeavors with prayer and financial support. We wish to thank all of you for that response. We truly have a wonderful AFLC family.

become two-point parishes. This has happened in Londrina and Foz do Iguacu, with most of the support for the construction of the church buildings coming from the Northwestern Minnesota District. May we as the whole AFLC continue to support this effort as our southern sister church grows toward a mature and growing Association of Free Lutheran Congregations.

We also praise God for the support provided for more permanent church buildings for our AFLC India.

Our greatest need for Mexico at this time is prayer for the newly established churches. Satan is strongly attacking, and it will only be by the prayers of His people that our brothers and sisters there can stand. Please make this a priority.

We give thanks to our God and to our AFLC family for all of your prayers and support.



## **Youth Ministries**

- Pastor Alan Arneson AFLC Youth Board chairman Ottawa, III.



"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." — Matthew 6:33-34

ecently Matthew 6:33-34 resonated with me about what really matters in life. I know that the greatest investment I have made is becoming God's child and one day spending eternity with Him. While on this earth, however, God's Word states that I am to trust Him with the long-term — salvation and yet be responsible in balancing the short-term opportunities that come my way. Thankfully, I know that through faith and trust He gives me the confidence to invest my life in short-term opportunities. He also gives me wisdom, provides for me and blesses me for the ways I have invested my life for Christ in this life.

One way I have been so blessed is through the giving of my time, talents and resources to AFLC Youth Ministries. Let me share with you some ways God has directed Youth Ministries to invest recently:

Sabbatical — Pastor Kevin Olson and his family are in the midst of a nine-month sabbatical to Tanzania. We know that this was part of God's plan and that Pastor Kevin will return back to us refreshed and renewed to serve the Lord in a greater way. Through this cross-cultural experience, AFLC ministries such as our seminary and world missions are also strengthened.

Student Missions — We rejoiced this past summer that four student mission trips were offered under the direction of former AFLBS/ MTI student Karisa Finstrom. These trips gave 56 people the opportunity to build relationships with others and share the love of Christ. They visited Jerez and San Rafael, Mexico, Springfield, Mo., and the inner city of Minneapolis. A minimum of two missions trips are already in the works for next summer.

#### **Leadership Training Conference** —

Approximately 140 youths and adults were stretched and blessed in their faith in the area of discipleship and evangelism as we met this summer at the ARC in Osceola, Wis. The week focused on training and equipping youths to be witnesses for God and giving them hands-on opportunities to share their faith.

College-Age ministry — In the past two years Youth Ministries has developed a presentation and resources for congregations to support this very versatile age group. Remember that you do not have to be in a college town to have a college-age ministry. It is so important to continue to build relationships with our college students to keep them in the faith.

As with any ministry, so much more could be done. However, with the resources available we believe that we are truly following God's plan. I would welcome you to consider adding AFLC Youth Ministries to your prayer list. Perhaps the Lord may be directing you to give financially. In whatever way you can invest, you are an important reason why the work is going forth!



One quarter of first grade CD project complete

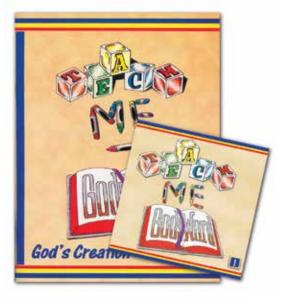
arish Education recently released a second CD for children. This CD is one of a sixpart series of recordings created to teach the truths of the Bible to young children. The series includes 72 Old and New Testament Bible stories, memory verses, and music to help children learn about Jesus the Savior and grow in their faith. Produced to supplement the Ambassador Sunday school curriculum for kindergarten and grade one, these recordings are helpful classroom tools and may also be used to bring the gospel message to family and friends. The music introduces children to a variety of musical instruments such as harp, flute, oboe, violin, viola, cello, bells, marimba, and guitar in addition to piano and organ.

Recordings and correlating illustrated books in this series will include:

Kindergarten's "Tell Me the Story of Jesus" with three quarters: Jesus Loves Me, Jesus Cares for Me, and Jesus Died for Me.

First Grade's: "Teach Me God's Word" with three quarters: God's Creation, God's Provision, and God's Leading.

We are grateful to Thrivent Financial for Lutherans for providing a grant to fund a large portion of this recording project. The grant will enable Parish Education to send a gift copy of this CD to all AFLC congregations this fall. Production was made possible through the active participation of members of AFLC congregations who served as leaders, narrators, and musicians. A special presentation was made to the children's choir at Grace Free Lutheran Church in Maple Grove, Minn., on Sept. 12 to thank the children and their families. director Mary Jo Dyrud, and assistants



Rachel Jones and Sara Johnson for the many hours spent practicing and recording music and memory verses over a two-year period.

One of the goals of this project is to further the education and outreach ministry of Lutheran churches. These CDs can help you share the wonderful gospel message with others by

- Giving to children in your neighborhood
- Giving to grandchildren or nieces and nephews as Christmas or birthday gifts
- Giving to children in your church to help reinforce Bible truths
- Playing the CDs in your home when children come to visit

For more information on the project, contact AFLC Parish Education at 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441. Phone: (763) 545-5631. Email: parished@aflc.org. Website: www.aflc.org.

# **Eben Junction church turns 100**

# Calvary Lutheran has Finnish heritage

Members of Calvary Free Lutheran at Eben Junction, Mich., celebrated the congregation's 100th anniversary Aug. 14-15 with the theme, "Jesus, Faithful for All Times." The event began with a pig roast as a community outreach, serving more than 200 people. A praise concert followed by singer/songwriter Yvonne Blake of Ontonagon, Mich., with guest speaker, Eric Westlake (Chatham native) from Osceola, Wis. Festivities continued with a worship service followed by a potluck dinner. Calvary's current pastor, Tom Schierkolk, accompanied by Steve Woimanen from Minneapolis, led an informal praise time. The centennial celebration service featured guest speaker Pastor Robert Lee, AFLC president. Former Pastor John Mundfrom of Eugene, Ore., shared a greeting.

The church history dates back to May 15, 1904, when a group of Finnish men held an organizational meeting with the intent to start worship services for Finnish residents of Eben. With 19 families represented, the first church service was held on May 31, 1904, which stands as the official date for the founding of the congregation. The name "Eben Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church" was adopted. In 1905, the church affiliated with the Suomi Synod headquartered in Hancock, Mich.

Construction of the first church building began in 1908. It was completed and dedicated in the fall of 1914. The original church bell is located on the present-day church premises. A furnace was added in 1923; electricity was installed in 1928. During the summer of 1939, the old circular steps to the sanctuary of the church were replaced with new cement steps built in front of the church.

Services were conducted in Finnish until 1945. A schedule of one English service and two Finnish services a month continued through 1953.

Sunday school began in 1907. In 1909, the Finnish Ladies Aid Society was formed. Another ladies group was started in 1945 called "The King's Daughters" — the English language sister organization of the Finnish Ladies Aid. The Luther League was started in the 1920s. The Men's Brotherhood was formed in 1950.

In 1955, the church parsonage was built and the first resident pastor, Herbert Franz, was called. He





ABOVE: Calvary Lutheran Church's current building was built in the early 1960s by volunteers.

LEFT: The original building was constructed from 1908-1914. Services were first held in Finnish.

served the parish consisting of Eben, Munising, Skandia, and Trenary churches with continued affiliation with the Suomi Synod.

Construction of a new church building began in 1961 with the cornerstone inscription, "The Lord is my Rock." The church was built by volunteers under the direction of skilled carpenter, Viljo Hautamaki. The first service was held on Easter Sunday, 1963. It was completed and dedicated on Aug. 25, 1963, with a new name, Our Savior's Lutheran.

The 1960s brought about many changes. The Suomi Synod merged with other Lutheran denominations to form the Lutheran Church of America. Our Savior's voted against the merger, but local churches had no choice in the matter. In 1966, the congregation voted to separate from the LCA and join the AFLC under the present name of Calvary Free Lutheran. However, the church property remained in the possession of the LCA. For the next two years, church services were conducted at the Eben School, Chatham Town Hall, and the old Eben Post Office. The LCA accepted a bid to purchase back the church building and parsonage. During the transition, church activities have continued proclaiming Jesus Christ through the Word of God.



New members were received at Grace Lutheran, Buckley, Wash. Pictured (left to right) are: front row: Carol Ann Sanderson, Beverly Enders, Susan Matthewson, Karen Anderson and baby Almond Tucker, Karen Stebner and Mary Moberg. Back row: Larry Sanderson, Brian Enders, Chip Anderson, Carl Stebner, Richard Moberg and Pastor Joseph Schultz.



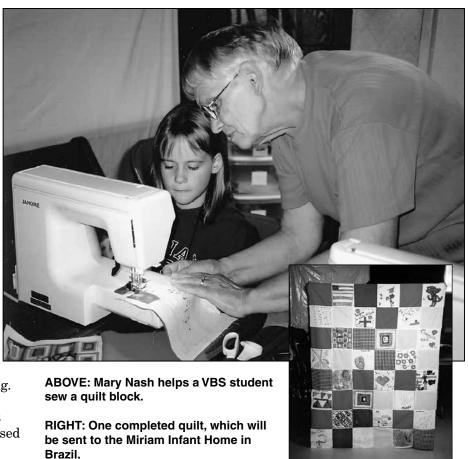
New members were received at Bethany Free Lutheran Church of rural Abercrombie, N.D. Pictured, from left, are: Blane Plecity, Denise Plecity, Larissa Plecity, Vicki Myhre, Pastor Jim Christenson, Raeann Zander, Greg Zander, Thomas Zander, Deena Zander and Nikita Zander.

# VBS project will be sent to missions

### Students make quilts

**During Bethany Free Lutheran** Church's annual vacation Bible school week in rural Abercrombie, N.D., students enjoyed a special craft project by making quilt blocks for missions.

With the theme "Mission Possible," the VBS project allowed students to color a quilt block that was later sewn into small quilts. Everyone did at least one block and the older kids were able to do some sewing. The result was four crib-sized quilts, which were sent to the Miriam Infant Home in Brazil. The students also raised \$400 to send as well.



Pastor Alan Arneson, Ottawa, Ill., has resigned as pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, Ottawa, and accepted a call to serve Calvary Free Lutheran Church, Fosston, Minn.

Pastor Peter Ward, Vernon, B.C., Canada, will be teaching a course entitled "Synoptic Gospels" at the Canadian Lutheran Bible Institute, Camrose, Alberta, Dec. 6-10.

The Coordinating Committee removed Pastor Bruce Dalager. Sebeka, Minn., and Pastor Walter Enquist, Jacksonville, Fla., from the clergy roster at their request.

# Sarasota, Fla., congregation joins AFLC

Holy Cross Lutheran was chartered as a new American Lutheran Church congregation in 1960. At that time, its tiny sanctuary sat in the midst of orange groves off a two-lane road. That road has grown to seven lanes, and Holy Cross now sits at the second busiest intersection in a rapidly growing and diverse community.

In April, Holy Cross moved its affiliation from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the AFLC. Every contact we have had with those who are part of the AFLC has confirmed the

decision we made. We share a common vision and enthusiasm for the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. We embrace with joy a new freedom that will allow the Holy Spirit to shape and empower us. There is a holiness and an opportunity with the new freedom we have in the Lord for which we are deeply grateful.

There are a couple of ways we would like to introduce ourselves to the AFLC. First, we would like to share with you our mission and vision statements. Our mission is to "be a church for others ... making fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ." Our vision is to "be



Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Sarasota, Fla., joined the AFLC this spring.

a Spirit-filled biblical community that lives and serves with love and integrity." There are times when congregational vision and mission statements are more of a dream than a reality, but these two statements really do reflect our heart and ministry as a congregation. Second, we invite you to visit our website at www.holycrosssarasota.org.

Holy Cross is a progressive, Spirit-filled church in worship, prayer, staffing, technology, small groups, and vision. We are anxious to share with others what the Lord has shared with us.

### Worldview DVD series now available

The AFLC Youth Board is excited to make available a new resource titled: "Here I Stand: A Biblical Worldview for a New Millennium."

The 12-part series in DVD format is divided into 30-minute sessions and comes with a reproducible study/discussion guide. AFLC Youth Ministries had this series produced to help individuals and congregations train people in taking a biblical stand on issues in our day.

The DVD features Dr. John Eidsmoe, an AFLC pastor, colonel and chaplain in the Alabama State Defense Force and professor of constitutional law at Thomas Goode Jones School of Law, Faulkner University, Montgomery, Ala. Eidsmoe has a unique way of teaching on complex subjects in a way that anybody can understand.

My adult Sunday school class just finished lesson four and learned principles of logic that can help in reasoning with unbelievers concerning why they believe what they do. We look forward to the sessions on the relationship of church and state. I highly recommend this resource for youth or adults!

"Here I Stand" is available through AFLC Youth Ministries office at the introductory price of \$50 through the AFLC Annual Conference in Valley City, N.D., in June 2005, after

HERE I STAND
A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW
for a new millennium

which the price will be \$75. For more information or to order the series, contact Tara at (763) 545-5631 or email: youth@aflc.org.

Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck
 AFLC Youth Board member



A one-year's subscription is just \$16. Or give the Christmas issue for \$1.

Name:\_\_\_\_\_

Address:\_\_\_\_\_

City:\_\_\_\_

State:\_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_

Indicate the giver?

Yes:\_\_\_\_\_ No:\_\_\_\_

Your name:\_\_\_\_\_

Send to 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441



# AFLC memorials September

**AFLBS:** Gertie Olson, Pastor Mauritz Lundeen, Vernon Fransen, Frances Hass, Lester Mickelsen

AFLTS: Alice Dorseth, Norman Haugen, Pastor Mauritz Lundeen, Pastor Lynn Hanson Luthard, Pastor Rudolph Hanson family, Pastor E. N. Carlsen, Lester Mickelsen, Marvel Hinkelman

Evangelism: Mayme Erickson General Fund: Lester Mickelsen Home Missions: Jan Fatland, Lester Mickelsen

Miriam Infant Home: Anna Richard-

Parish Ed: Janice Harney, Mary Lindquist

**Vision 2004:** Arvey Hartsoch, Lester Mickelsen, Mike Davidson

WMF: Viona Wiskow, Ingemund Peterson, Kevin Knudson, Lester Mickelsen, Michael Davidson, Arvey Hartsoch

**World Missions:** Lester Mickelsen, Lorraine Foehringer

#### WMF scholarship

Members of the WMF presented seminarians Nate Jore and Andy Coyle with a mission scholarship of \$1,000 each. Jore, a senior, is a missionary candidate for Africa and Coyle, a junior, has worked in Eastern Europe.





Nate Jore

**Andy Coyle** 

#### **Association of Free Lutheran Congregations**

3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

#### AFLC Benevolences (9 months) - January 1 - September 30, 2004

FUND	TOTAL Subsidy	REC'D IN SEPTEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$288,771	\$38,490	\$230,052	80
Youth Ministries	54,024	3,056	42,916	79
Parish Education	82,062	5,833	62,396	76
Seminary	154,195	11,727	144,846	94
Bible School	264,089	26,930	243,127	92
Home Missions	287,115	21,090	199,156	69
Church Extension	24,576	643	11,847	48
World Missions	256,326	15,621	152,062	59
Personal Support	328,311	30,513	263,309	80
TOTALS	\$1,739,469	\$153,902	\$1,349,712	<b>78</b>
TOTALS 2003	\$1,740,325	\$123,010	\$1,147,820	66
Goal 75%		,	,	

The Evangelism Department received \$6,226 in September. The office of director of Development received \$442 in September.

#### Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation

The Lutheran Ambassador Publication No. 588-620, Filed 9-28-04 Issued monthly. Twelve issues annually.

Annual subscription price \$16
Mailing address of Office of Publication and headquarters of General Business Office: 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Minneapolis, MN 55441.

Publisher: The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations.

Editor: Craig Johnson, 575 34th St., Astoria, OR 97103

Managing Editor: Ruth Gunderson, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55441

Owner: The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55441.

Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders: None.

The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal income tax purposes has not changed during preceding 12 months.

Publication Name: The Lutheran Ambassador.

Issue date for circulation data: September 2004

Total number of copies (net press run): Avg. copies each issue during past year: 4297

Copies September 2004 issue: 4184 Paid and/or requested circulation: Paid/requested outside-county mail subscriptions stated on Form 3541: Avg. copies each issue during past year: 3997

Copies September 2004 issue: 3884 Through counter sales:

Avg. copies each issue during past year: 100

Copies September 2004 issue: 100 Total paid and/or requested circulaon:

Avg. copies each issue during past year: 4097

Copies September 2004 issue: 3984 Free distribution by mail:

Avg. copies each issue during past year: 50

Copies September 2004 issue: 50 Total distribution:

Avg. copies each issue during past year: 4197

Copies September 2004 issue: 4084 Copies not distributed:

Avg. copies each issue during past year: 100

Copies September 2004 issue: 100 Total:

Avg. copies each issue during past year: 4297

Copies September 2004 issue: 4184 Percent paid and/or requested circulation, average and September 2004 issue: 99%

Publication is required and will be printed in the November 2004 issue of the Lutheran Ambassador.

/s/ Ellis L. Bloomfield, Printer

## [Editorial]

# Glad to be in the

t was the last day of major league baseball's regular season. Mickey Lopez, after nine seasons in the minor leagues, finally got his first major league hit. He was playing for a losing team in a meaningless game, but still Lopez had a smile on his face. He was just glad to be in the game.

It was a different story in San Francisco with Barry Bonds. Part way through their last game his



the results of other games had eliminated them from playoff contention. When Bonds, the best player in baseball. heard the news he grabbed his bats and headed to the clubhouse. He was

team learned that

Craig Johnson

tired after a long season and not interested in playing if the game didn't count for anything.

The Apostle Paul served the Lord and His Church the way Mickey Lopez played baseball. He was thankful to be in the game. He was inspired by God to write, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service" (I Timothy 1:12, NIV).

Paul knew what he had been like. He described himself as "the worst of sinners" (I Timothy 1:16). He was aware he didn't deserve to be on God's team. He viewed serving the Lord not as a burden he had to bear but as a privilege extended to him by God. He was grateful the Lord let him be on the team and put him in the game of serving and spreading the good news of Jesus. He saw it as an honor to be appointed to God's service.

It is easy to develop an attitude toward service that resembles the attitude Bonds had toward the end of his team's final game. Some get tempted to think they have been in the game a long time. They believe they have served enough. They have done their part. They want to sit back and relax. They want out of the game. Their attitude is: "Let somebody else take my position."

Many of our congregations have annual meetings in January, so nominating committees start meeting in November and December. The AFLC Nominating Committee has begun meeting as well. The committees seek individuals to serve in various positions. Often they're not enjoyable committees to serve on. You hear "no" a lot. When you do hear "yes," too often it comes grudgingly and not with gratefulness.

I remember with fondness the times when I've approached somebody about serving in a particular way in the church and they've thanked me for asking. I recall with joy the occasions when people have been asked to write for this magazine and they've responded by saying they were honored to be asked and would be glad to serve.

None of us has the right to claim we're the "Barry Bonds" of the church. We are not indispensable. God could get by without us.

But God, in His grace, lets us be on the team. He lets us play an important role: the role of sharing with our words and our actions the good news of Jesus and His love.

We may feel at times like Bonds on the last day of the season. It seems like everything has already been decided and our service is meaningless. But we trust

He was grateful the Lord let him be on the team and put him in the game of serving and spreading the good news of Jesus.

in the Lord that our work has eternal significance, even if it may not appear that way in the here and now. Encouraging a young person by showing up to watch his or her game or concert is important. Taking time to visit with the senior citizens has meaning. Listening to your neighbors share about their problems makes a difference.

A thankful, servant attitude flows out of a proper focus. A focus totally on what we have done and must do can lead to thinking we should be thanked for our accomplishments. A focus on the good news of what Jesus has done leads to thanking God for letting us serve.

By faith in the crucified and risen Jesus we're graciously permitted to be part of God's team. He has an important position for each one of us to play. What a reason for thanksgiving; what a privilege it is to be in the game.

#### THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd. Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

## **Building the Base**

# Nothing like the real thing

emember the Coke commercial jingle? "There's nothing like the real thing, baby." Imitations and fakes are never as good as "the real thing." So it is with Christianity. Being religious, trying to be a better person, observing some rituals and rules — or churchianity — are not only not like the real Christianity, they aren't Christianity.

William Wilberforce wrote a book in the late 1700s called, "Real Christianity." Wilberforce was a British Parliamentarian who was converted to Christ at age 25 and stated, "God Almighty has put before me two great objects, the abolition of the slave trade and the reformation of the manners of England." Wilberforce's concern was that there was much religion and religiosity in England but little true Christianity.

I think his concern is true for America today. Wilberforce's chapter titles are good food for thought for us today, personally, as a church, and as a nation. He traced the spiritual problems of England to the following: Inadequate Conceptions of the Importance of Christianity; Inadequate Conceptions of Human Nature; Inadequate Conceptions of God and Christian Behavior; and Inadequate Conceptions Concerning the Nature and Discipline of Practi-

cal Christianity.

He concluded by addressing:
"The Excellence of Real Christianity:
A Brief Inquiry into the Present
State of Christianity."

"Christianity especially has always thrived under persecution. But when religion is in a state of quiet and prosperity the opposite effect tends to take place. The soldiers of the church militant will then forget they are at war. Their ardor slackens and their zeal languishes ... still more so, Christianity declines when those elements which are incompatible by nature, such as pride, luxury and worldly mindedness (the general conditions accompanying the rapid rise of wealth) are allowed to increase. This decline intensifies even more, especially among the laity if they have been subjected to the abuses of hypocrisy or fanaticism among some of the clergy."

Prosperity and being comfortable dulls and deceives in many ways, including spiritual life. What then is real Christianity? It is a real understanding of sin and its eternal consequences. Real conviction of sin brought by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Real repentance: daily turning from sin and self to the

only Savior. Real conversion: new life; changed life through faith in Christ. Real daily walking by faith with a real living Savior. Real hope

Wilberforce said persecution has always strengthened the church, but prosperity weakens the church and tempts us to complacency.

in Christ's return and an eternal heavenly home. Real peace and joy in Jesus.

Friend, get real with God. Get real about sin. Repent and live in daily repentance. Get real about coming to God for grace, mercy and forgiveness.

Experience real rest for your soul and peace with God through faith in Jesus (Romans 5:1).

By Pastor Jeff Swanson
 Helmar Lutheran
 Newark, Ill.