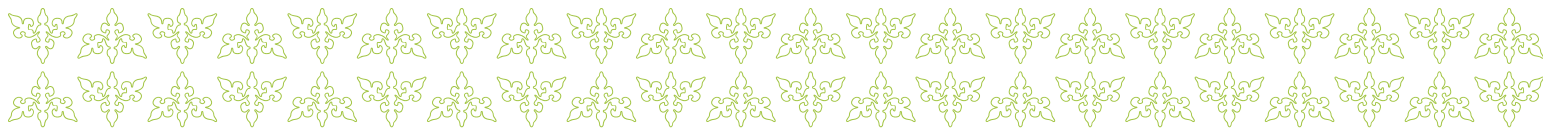


THE LUTHERAN 

NOVEMBER 2008

AMBASSADOR



a time for
THANKS
GIVING



Looking



back

BY AMY ANDRESEN

The images are still vivid nearly 30 years later. The place was a downtown Chicago hotel, surrounded by the city's towering structures and people walking with a purpose. There were men in caps waiting to take luggage for some, but not for our group. I don't blame them. Hundreds of college students were descending upon the hotel to attend a Campus Crusade for Christ convention.

We had arrived in the Windy City with anticipation and excitement. No one seemed to need the assistance of porters as our luggage nearly carried itself. My friends and I made our way toward the nearest elevator, keeping our eyes open and hoping to catch a glimpse of the guest singer B.J. Thomas.

The elevator took us to the sixty-third floor. My roommates and I were so grateful to be able to attend this event. It was Christmas break, which was time usually spent with our families. With our parents' permission and support, here we were, east of Cedar Falls, Iowa, and the UNI campus and in Chicago with leaders from Campus Crusade for Christ as our guest speakers.

Weeks before, in our dorm rooms, many of us had been praying that our parents would let us attend this conference. What made it so spectacular in my eyes was that we would be praying in the New Year with hundreds of college students from around the Midwest. We'd also be meeting other people involved with Campus Crusade for Christ, and that appealed to me.

The New Year's Eve dinner was held in a large hall filled with crystal chandeliers and dimmed lights. The young believer, B.J. Thomas, sang a few songs to us, and then a speaker delivered a moving speech. The theme of his talk was that of the future. He had our minds wondering as he questioned us. Where would we be living and what would we be doing with our lives? More

importantly, what would we be doing with God? The words that pierced my mind and heart most were, "Many of you in 20 years will walk or drift away from the faith and be caught up with family, jobs, and life. You won't feel the passion for God that you may be feeling right now."

Those words made an impact. During the prayer time that followed I prayed from the depth of my heart. It was something to the effect of, "Please, Lord, please don't let that happen to me! I don't want to lose my love for you. I don't want to get caught up in life. I want to always be close to you."

God told the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6:5-6, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up ..."

That is what I wanted to be doing as an adult. Thankfully, God is faithful and hears the prayers of even His unfaithful children.

God tells us in Hebrews 12, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."

He is the One true God whom we cling to. He is our hope and help in this life. Praise Him for His loving kindness. He alone is worthy of our praise!

Andresen is a member of Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Madison, S.D.

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God is always trying to give good things to us, but
our hands are too full to receive them.

— St. Augustine of Hippo

[It is God's will not only to hear our prayer, but to give us the best and the
richest answer which He, the almighty and omniscient God, can devise. He will
send us the answer when it will benefit us and His cause the most.

— O. Hallesby]

The devil sees nothing more abominable than a
truly humble Christian, for [that Christian] is just the
opposite of [the devil's] own image.

— Hans Nielsen Hauge

I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost
them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands,
that I still possess.

— Martin Luther



sing out your THANKSGIVING

By Andrew Hanson

LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU
richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Colossians 3:16



As a music teacher, Colossians 3:16 is a verse that I love to use. In Paul's letter to Colosse, he implores the church to sing! As the body of Christ, we, too, are charged to sing praises to God. What more could a choir director wish for?

However, when one looks further into this passage of Scripture, there is so much more there. Notice that we are to sing "with *gratitude* in our hearts to God." I sense that this gratitude is a very important aspect to this passage of Scripture. Notice the verse which precedes it: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be *thankful*." Notice the verse that follows it: "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving *thanks* to God the Father through him." This recurring theme of thankfulness

and gratitude is of tremendous importance.

Are you thankful today in all that you do? Do you ever have a day where you find it difficult to be grateful? I believe we all face this challenge from time to time. What can we do when we face challenging times? The answer is right in the Scriptures: Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly ... and sing!

God gave us the gift of music to worship Him. When we sing to God, our soul praises Him. (Praise to the Lord, o let ALL that is in me adore Him!) Furthermore, songs that reflect Scripture—that allow the Word of Christ to dwell in us—bind us together as a body of believers. They fix our hearts and minds on the author and perfecter of our faith. They teach and reinforce those truths that Christ wishes for us to know, which, in turn, allow us to be thankful.

It is no coincidence, then, that so many of our psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are written with thanksgiving as a key element within the song. "Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King. His love endures forever!" These words are found numerous times throughout the Psalms and are a theme verse to a common praise and worship song. "Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song" (Psalm 95:1-2). "Now thank we all our God, with hearts and hands and voices" (Ambassador Hymnal #145). I am sure you can think of so many more songs with this theme. Scriptural music and thankfulness have such a strong and clear correlation with each other.

Even songs that do not have the words *thanks* or *thankful* in them can express



our gratitude. I think of one of my favorite hymns, “It is Well With My Soul.” Perhaps many of you know the story behind the poetry. The author who penned the words, “when peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say: It is well, it is well with my soul,” had quite a lot of sorrows rolling in his life. In 1871, as Horatio Spafford and his wife were grieving over the death of their son, the Great Chicago Fire swept through the city. Spafford, a lawyer, owned quite a bit of land in the area, and fire took out nearly everything he owned. Two years later, Spafford decided his family should take a vacation to Europe. Last minute business plans kept him back for a couple of days. On the way across the Atlantic, the ship on which his family traveled was struck by another vessel and 260 people aboard died, including all four of

his daughters. His wife was somehow saved and sent word back to Spafford. When he received the news, he immediately left to meet his wife. On the journey, the captain pointed out where the previous ship sank. It was at that moment of grief and despair that the Lord visited Spafford’s heart and inspired him with the words to the hymn, “It is Well With My Soul.”

This past summer, I was reminded once again how much the words to this song express gratitude. My wife, Angela, and I were blessed to take a music missions trip to Fiji, where Angela’s grandparents started a Bible school. In Fiji, more than 50 percent of the population live at or below the poverty level. Despite difficult economic times and primitive living conditions, we were welcomed and blessed with a generosity and genuineness that only the Holy Spirit could lay on these precious souls. Spafford’s hymn

is a favorite of a young man whom I got to know quite well—Vilimone (Philemon), one of the Bible school teachers. Seeing his faith in action, and seeing his gratefulness in the midst of his circumstances, humbled me. I saw thankful Christians living with much less than I have here.

I want to encourage you to sing a song today. Find a song that ministers to you. Recall a song that has had important meaning in your walk with the Lord. Let Jesus put a song in your heart, and allow Him to give you a heart of gratitude through singing, so that whatever you do, whether in word or deed, you can do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God!

Hanson is the director of music at the AFLC schools, Plymouth, Minn.

THE FACT IS THAT no
one will ever be
fulfilled unless they
have a connection
with Jesus—unless
they are plugged into
His grace via faith.
The world will never
be able to fill the void
in their lives
without Jesus.



When it comes to a thanksgiving testimony, I could write about my deep thankfulness for Martin Luther and his stand on “faith alone, grace alone.” As a graduate of the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, I could talk about the biblical foundation that I gained during my two years on the campus in Plymouth, Minn. Perhaps since I spent my whole life in the Church, I could easily write about the pastors and youth leaders who have shaped and impacted my life (thanks Audrey Gilmore!). Being the oldest of six children, my parents Jerry and Kristi deserve a heaping helping of thanks for putting up with all of us. In addition, I have always been thankful for the AFLC’s belief concerning the inerrancy of the Word of God (thus I am a member of an AFLC congregation). As a husband, I am very thankful for my wife who loves me. And I am thankful for all my friends who hold me accountable and keep me walking in the right direction.

Each one of these is a wonderful reason to be thankful. However, there is something above all those things and people that causes me to thank God for His grace and His provision.

During my first year at Bible school, my friends and I returned from Christmas break amidst a huge snow storm. Most of the students were delayed in returning back to campus. I was one of the few students who were able to make it (the Greyhound runs even in snow) back to the school on time. That Monday morning we had a small chapel service with those students who were able to make it back to school. Pastor Jim Johnson, dean at the time, shared a couple of simple verses from 1 John 1:9-10 and John 1:12. He then asked us if we had assurance of our salvation; if we knew 100 percent that we had heaven in our future.

This hit me hard. I knew that I needed to have my sins forgiven. I needed to become God’s child—His child for the first/last time. Since I had grown up in the Church, I had heard many salvation messages. I had gone forward to pray the prayer of salvation several times. In fact, *any* time there was a call for salvation, I responded. It wasn’t until that wintery day that I realized that I *am* a child of God (John 1:12) and my sins *are* forgiven (1 John 1:9). These promises found in Scripture were not weak, nor was God a liar. I finally found His grace and assurance completely.

It is this grace for which I am most thankful, this powerful love that takes the dirtiest sinner—“while we were yet sinners” (Romans 5:8)—and makes them whiter than snow. It is this grace that allows us to have a deep and powerful relationship with the One who created us.

We live in an age where people are searching for connections. Facebook, text messaging, e-mail and cell phones are all designed to improve our connections with those around us. We *need* to be able to reach out and get a hold of someone right away. We desire to connect with our acquaintances at a moment’s notice. Clearly, this is a relational generation with a desire to know others and to be known.

I wonder if we really feel more connected today than before this technology boon. While these gadgets are handy and can be fun, they will never fill the need that we have to be forgiven. They will never meet the need for true fellowship which only believers can have with their Savior.

The fact is that no one will ever be fulfilled unless they have a connection with Jesus—unless they are plugged into His grace via faith. The world will never be able to fill the void in their lives without Jesus.

That is what happened to me. I had struggled for 18 years with the concept of trying to be “good enough” to make God like me. Something was missing and I knew it. I knew that my efforts were not good enough; I wasn’t able to get it done on my own. That is where God’s grace came in that day and took over. I became a child of God with heaven as an inheritance. This wasn’t just an eternal 401K retirement plan—where I only have heaven assured for me. Nope, becoming a child of God is much more than that.

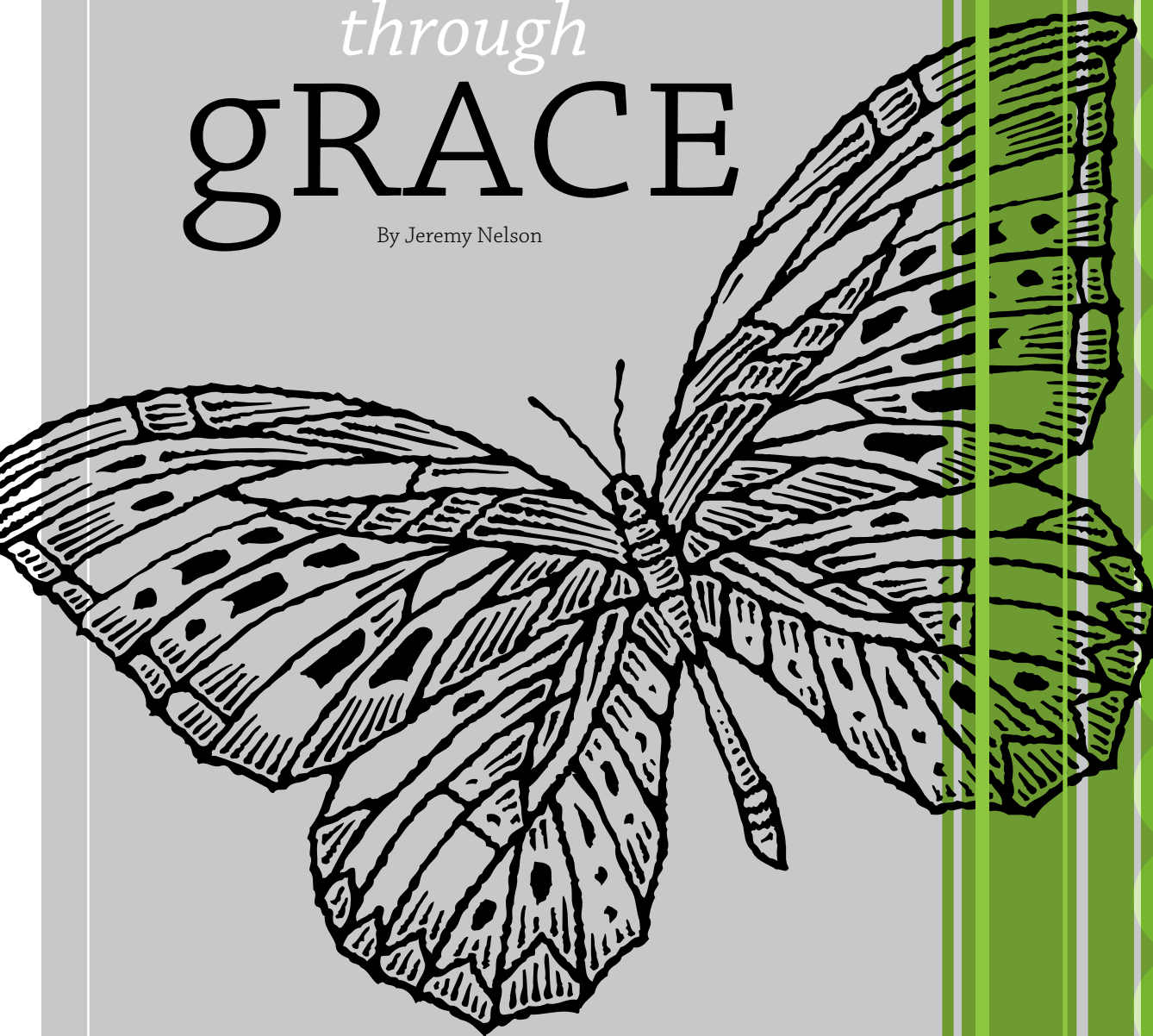
That grace is having a relationship with my heavenly Father. It is the true fellowship that I can have with other believers. It’s the filling of the spiritual void in my life.

I cannot give God enough thanks for all the blessings in my life. I can never repay Him for His saving love. Good thing He isn’t looking for us to repay Him. I think that is called grace.

Nelson is a member of Faith Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn.

*thankful for a
transformation
through*
gRACE

By Jeremy Nelson





thankful in all CIRCUMSTANCES

Thank you, Lord, that I didn't track the stepped-on blueberry onto the living room carpet. We both know how hard blueberry stains are to remove."

"Thank you, Lord, that cousin Linda's strong faith in You has not been shaken by the return of cancer to her body. Please continue to strengthen her and grant her healing again."

Each Thursday morning a group of six women, of varied ages and experiences, gathers in our church narthex to grow in relationship with the Lord and with each other. We begin by sharing what we have seen the Lord do in the past week, and of course what He has done prompts us to thank Him. We remind ourselves and each other that the Lord cares about every aspect of our lives—major issues like cancer and little things like blueberry stains, as well as everything in between.

Somewhere in a lifetime of walking with the Lord, I learned to be conscious (much of the time) of His continual presence and, thus, to be aware of His involvement in my life. With that comes frequent thanks, for there is much for which to thank Him. Perhaps that has increased in my retirement years simply because a significant portion of my day is no longer occupied with thinking about the job I am doing.

The Lord has blessed us so with this retirement! He blessed us with the wisdom of the friend who has managed our IRAs and made retirement possible. He guided us to the church He had chosen for us as we contemplated a move from Illinois to Minnesota. Because He is a God of surprises, we didn't know that one of the "perfect" aspects of the house He enabled us to buy would be how well the layout of the kitchen accommodates serving Sunday lunch to Bible school students once a month. At that point we didn't even know there was a Bible school, being new to the AFLC.

We thank Him for that and other opportunities He has given us in these

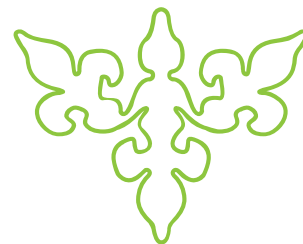
three years, some equally unexpected. My husband, Wayne, has always had a photography hobby. His retirement gift from his company was a good digital camera. It took him awhile to get used to digital, but it has been a great blessing as he has used it to serve as photographer not only for events at our church, Solid Rock Free Lutheran, but also for New Life Family Services (Anoka Walk for Life), Lutheran Renewal (Master's Institute graduations), and East European Mission Network (spring banquets and Friendship English Language Camps in Russia). Imagine what it would have been like to handle film and then prints of the 3,000 pictures he took on a trip to Russia this year. "Thank you, Lord, for the camera, and for the opportunities to use it for you."

A friend much younger than I recently said, "Surely, Diane, you've learned by now to never say never to God." He was commenting on the fact that I'm teaching Sunday school for the first time in 18 years. How could I resist this small class of pre-teen girls in need of a grandmother's influence? And yes, the Lord must have chuckled when I said "never again" to that long flight across the Atlantic after a vacation in 2002. He knew I'd do it again for a mission trip with EEMN in 2007.

I've learned to say, "thank you for the opportunity" instead of, "not me, Lord." But along with that I've learned to pray through every opportunity to make sure the ones I step forward into are ones from the Lord. I have friends who are as overly busy in retirement as they had been while working. The Lord knows how much time I have left on this earth, and He also knows how He wants me to use it.

Then there are the things that are hard to be thankful for, but I've grown there, too. Admittedly I met cancer with acceptance and trust, not with thankfulness. Now I can thank Him for having brought me through those experiences that have enabled me to bless others. I can be a greater encouragement to people with cancer simply because they know I've been there. I also find that I

By Diane Peterson



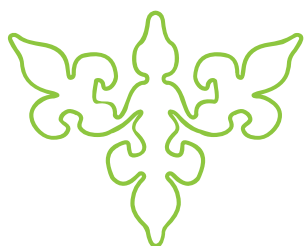
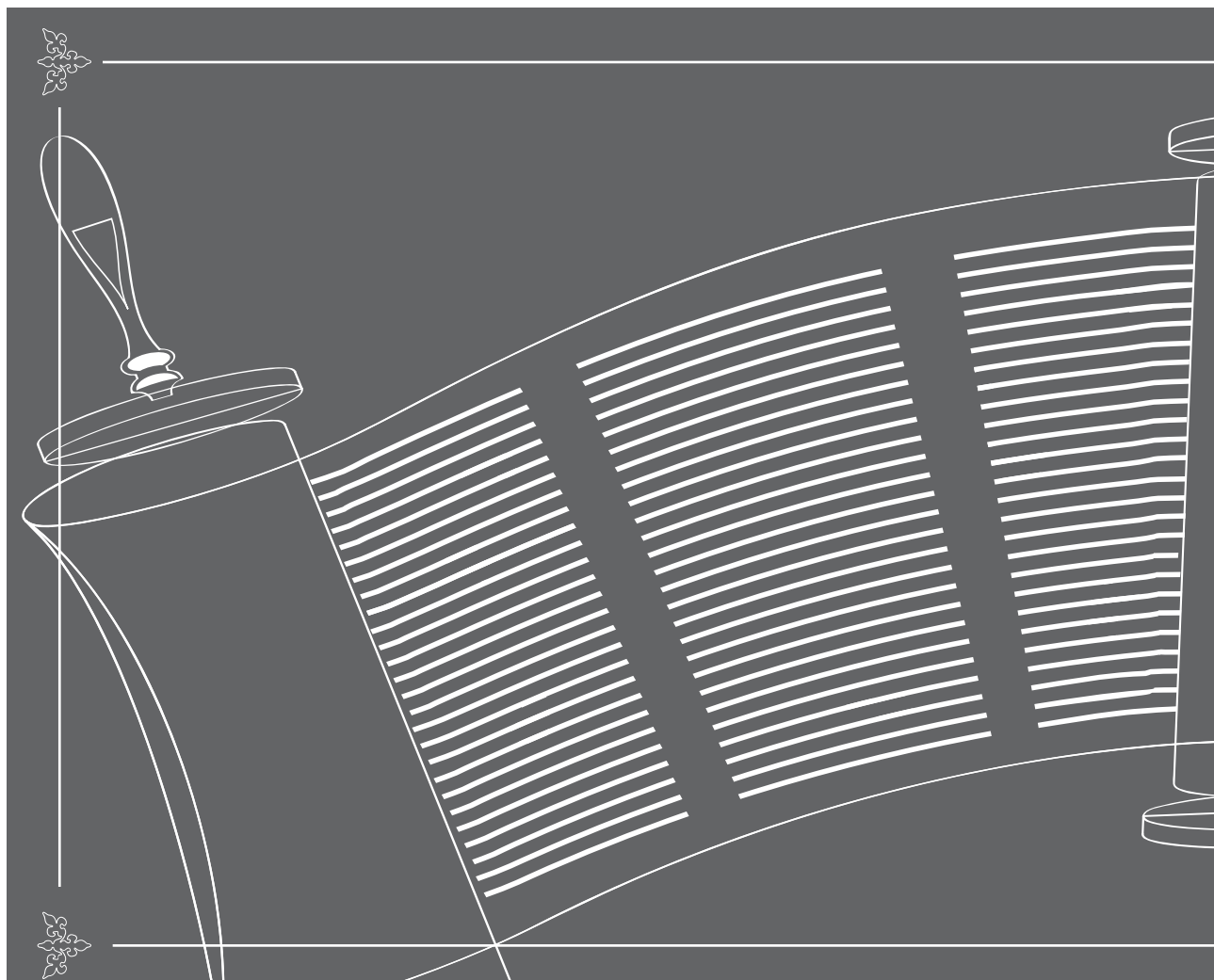
I'VE LEARNED TO SAY,
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now have a particular commitment (perhaps a commission) to pray for people with cancer, even friends' relatives whom I've not met.

The number one answer to "for what do you thank God?" has not changed with lifestyle changes or anything else. We are ever thankful that our children and grandchildren know the Lord. Praise God for this great blessing!

"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (I Thessalonians 5:16-18). Impossible? Not with the Lord's help.

Peterson is a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn.



HEARING THAT GOD
loves you may make the
unbeliever feel good,
but it does nothing
to bring the lost to
a saving knowledge
of Jesus Christ.

While driving home from the funeral of a friend, I began to realize that some very important things were missing from the message and comments made by the officiating pastor. The church, with a very large, constantly growing membership, is well-known and influential in the community.

"God loves you" was repeated over and over again. The eulogy for the deceased was a detailed listing of all the good things she had done. But, most of all, God loved her. Many were impressed. This is a very loving church, God is an all-loving God, and the deceased was an exceptionally loving person.

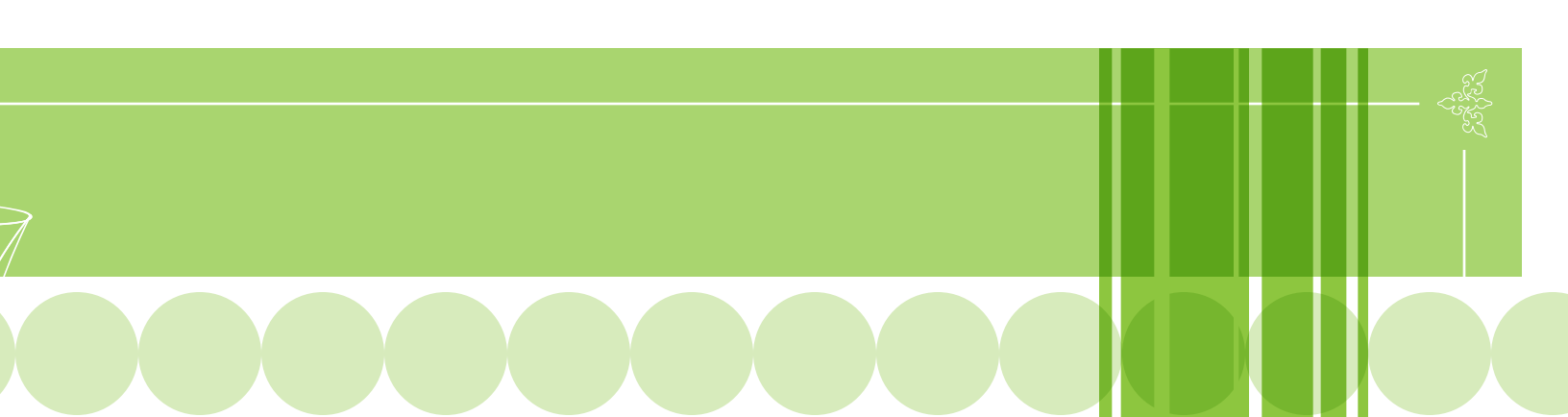
The absence of essential parts of the gospel of Jesus Christ presents a seriously flawed view of the Christian faith and an incomplete understanding of the revealed nature of God.

Gone is the biblical picture of the perfect holiness of God and the fallen, help-

less sinful nature of all people. Gone is the story of the atonement of Christ, the One who gave His life as a payment for the sins of the world. Gone is the presentation of the absolute standards of God's law with its demand of perfect obedience. Gone is the presentation of Christ as the One who perfectly fulfilled the law in our place, covering the believer with His robe of righteousness. "Righteousness from God comes by faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (Romans 3:22). Gone is the worthy cry of the child of God, "I am a helpless sinner saved by grace."

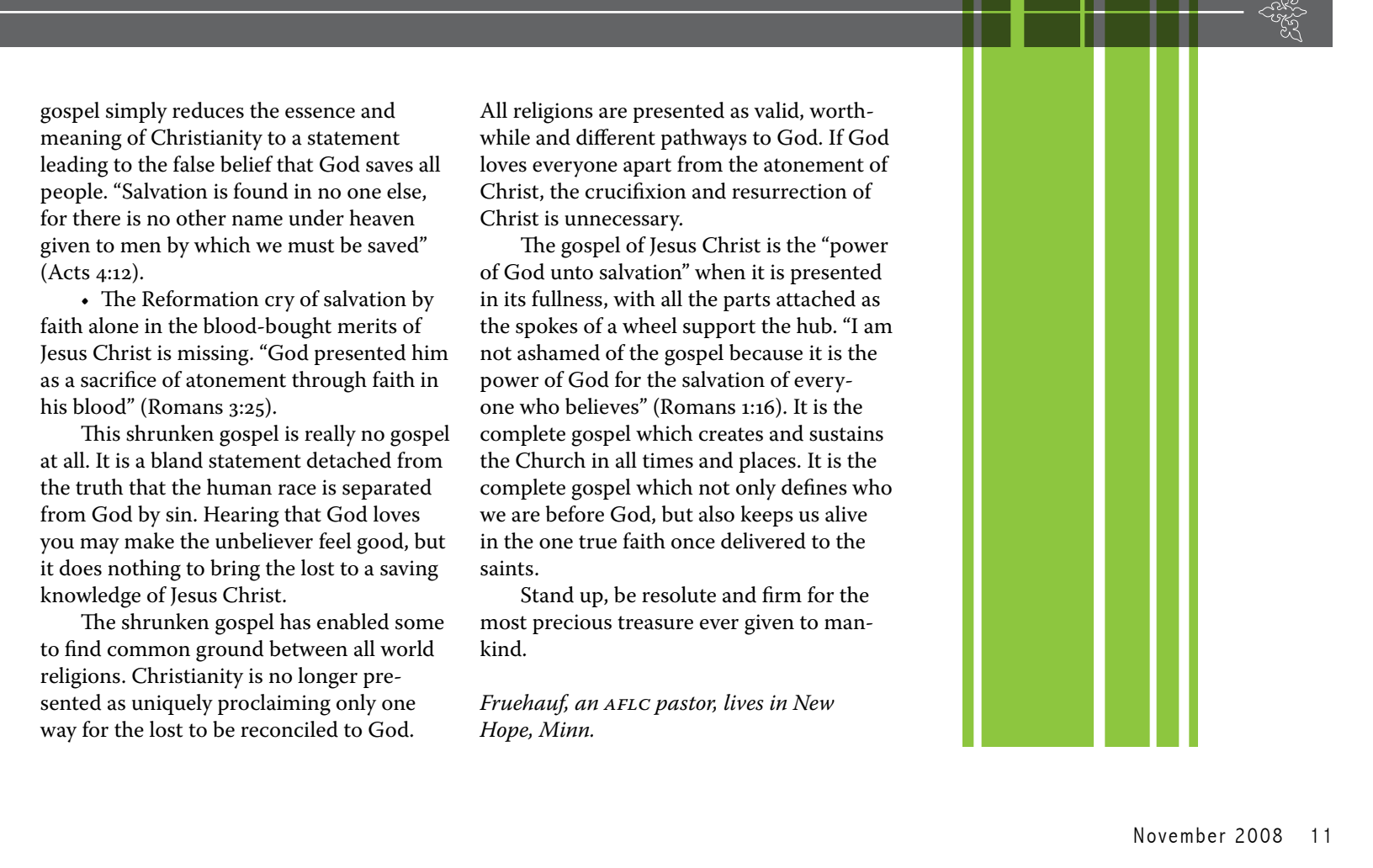
Without the presentation of the law ...

- The unconverted do not clearly know why a Savior is needed. "... through the law we become conscious of sin" (Romans 3:20).
- The separation of mankind from God because of sin and the penalty for sin is not mentioned. "... for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).
- The crucifixion of Christ, the shedding of His blood as atonement for sin recedes into the background. The shrunken



the incredibly shrinking gOSPEL

By Pastor Dave Fruehauf



gospel simply reduces the essence and meaning of Christianity to a statement leading to the false belief that God saves all people. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

- The Reformation cry of salvation by faith alone in the blood-bought merits of Jesus Christ is missing. "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood" (Romans 3:25).

This shrunken gospel is really no gospel at all. It is a bland statement detached from the truth that the human race is separated from God by sin. Hearing that God loves you may make the unbeliever feel good, but it does nothing to bring the lost to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The shrunken gospel has enabled some to find common ground between all world religions. Christianity is no longer presented as uniquely proclaiming only one way for the lost to be reconciled to God.

All religions are presented as valid, worthwhile and different pathways to God. If God loves everyone apart from the atonement of Christ, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ is unnecessary.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the "power of God unto salvation" when it is presented in its fullness, with all the parts attached as the spokes of a wheel support the hub. "I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). It is the complete gospel which creates and sustains the Church in all times and places. It is the complete gospel which not only defines who we are before God, but also keeps us alive in the one true faith once delivered to the saints.

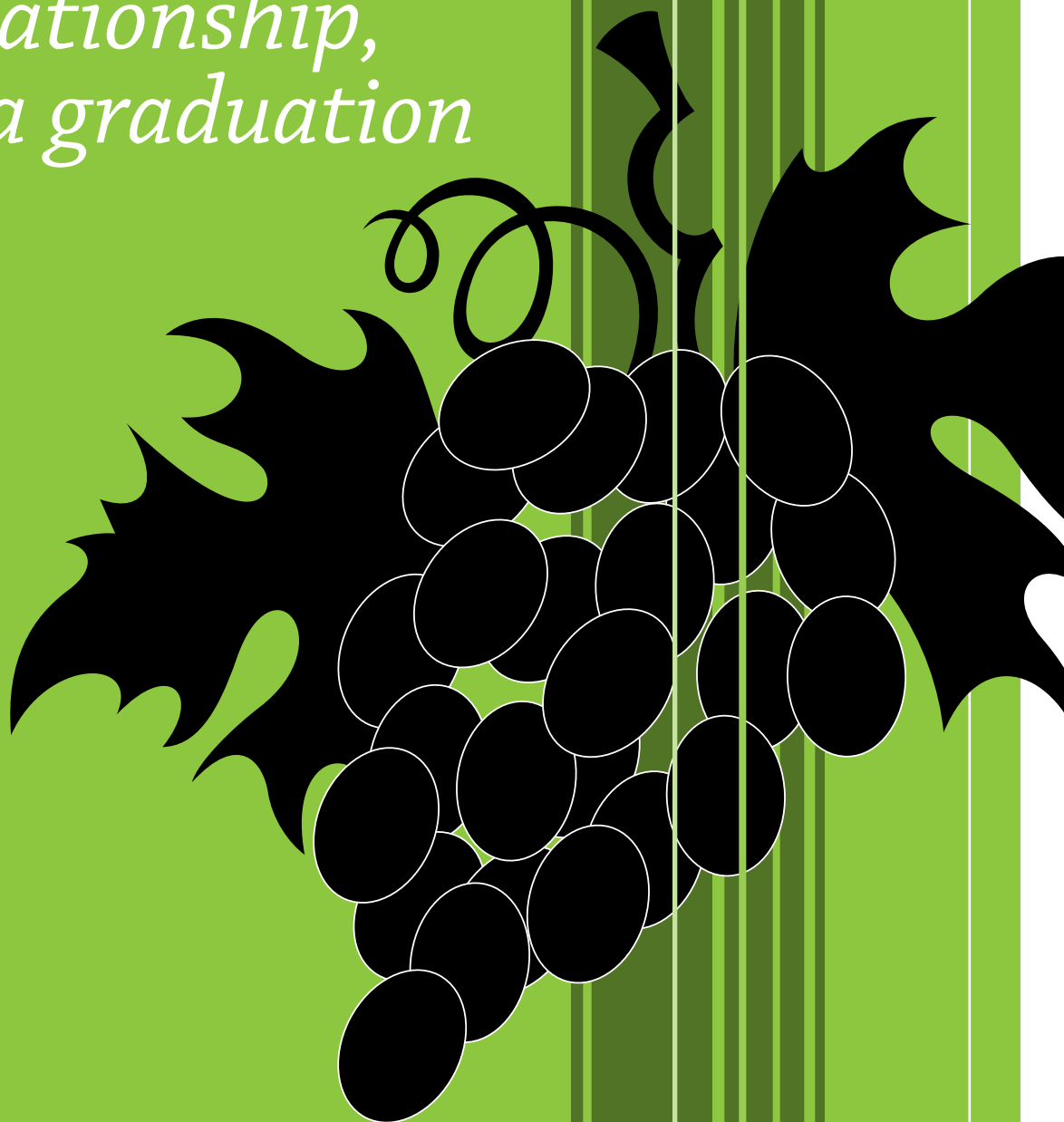
Stand up, be resolute and firm for the most precious treasure ever given to mankind.

Fruehauf, an AFLC pastor, lives in New Hope, Minn.

By Pastor Gregory Lenz

CONFIRMED

*a relationship,
not a graduation*



You've maybe heard the joke about the church that had a bunch of mice in the building. They tried everything but couldn't get rid of them. So finally someone suggested, "Let's confirm them, and we'll never see them again."

That kind of situation is sad but true in many congregations. Freshly scrubbed youngsters, often in white robes standing before proud family and dear friends, promise to be faithful to the Lord ("even unto death" in some traditions), and the pastor lays a hand of blessing on them and prays for them as they kneel at the altar. But after the service is finished, the pictures are taken, and the party is over at home, they may not darken the door of the church again (except for a baptism, wedding or funeral when someone they know is hatched, matched or dispatched). Maybe they'll attend on Christmas and Easter if they feel like it, but even that's changing in the post-modern (post-Christian) secular society.

Confirmation is a blessing from the emphasis of Lutheran Pietism on personal assurance of salvation, but so often confirmation is like graduation in recent decades. Why?

Perhaps because we treat it that way as parents and leaders of the church. "At least we got them through confirmation," parents sigh in relief. "At least I taught them two years of Catechism," pastors declare with pride. "Now it's up to them."

Many take it very seriously. Remember how that first communion almost made your hands shake when you received the Lord's body and blood in such a mysterious way? Some teens jump right into youth group without missing a beat. Some may find their way to a Free Lutheran Youth Convention and get fired up for Jesus for a week. Some may go to a Bible camp and marvel at God's creation a couple of times. A few may even attend Bible school a year or two. They are exceptional, but too often exceptions to the rule.

What happens to the others, statistically the vast majority? Pollsters decry a lost generation of Christians in our country. The results are devastating for our culture.

What can we do? More than wring our hands in dismay. The AFLC has taken a

forward step in producing a new edition of *Luther's Small Catechism and Explanation* to help young (and older) people learn the basic truths of God's Word. A new curriculum is being developed as well. Pray God that will help! Looking at other confirmation materials, such as Faith Inkubators (a Lutheran educational laboratory in Stillwater, Minn.) and its high tech lessons with upbeat music and hands-on applications, I learned a lot about how kids learn today. As instructors of adolescents we need to do the best we can to be "with it" or we may be "without them" before long.

But one key seems consistent regardless of format: Involvement!

Not just parental involvement, although that is essential, but also student involvement in the life of the church. There must be opportunities for young people to participate meaningfully, to take ownership of their Christ-given ministry. More than ushering (an entry-level expectation), more than baking cookies for a fund-raiser (a charitable experience), more than helping with vacation Bible school (a wonderful way to pass it on), more even than playing in a praise band (a good start to worship). Confirmed Christians will be contagious, committed, compassionate—sharing, serving, showing the faith they have learned for a lifetime—only if they keep living their faith for a lifetime. Jesus assured us: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31, ESV).

Perhaps the apostle Paul had that in mind as he wrote under inspiration what has become a Lutheran precedent for the rite of confirmation: "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim), because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:8-10).

Experimenting with different ages for confirmation (should it be communion younger and confirmation older?) doesn't seem to make much difference in the long run. But if we can teach by example that we all must be immersed in the Word to swim in the world, then, by God's grace, Christians won't "graduate" until they are "confirmed" in bliss.

*Lenz serves Faith Free Lutheran,
Minneapolis, Minn.*



... CONFIRMATION IS
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AT OUR SAVIOUR'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, Thief River Falls, Minn., Pastor Greg Schram asks the confirmation students to write a paper addressing several questions: why I need Jesus, what Jesus has done for me, why He did it, what Jesus wants from me, and what Jesus means to me now. On confirmation Sunday, each student gives his or her testimony to the congregation. They can either read their paper or pick a Bible verse and share its importance.

On Oct. 28, 2007, Reformation Sunday, confirmation was held at Our Saviour's Lutheran. One of the students being confirmed was Kari Hanson. Kari is now a junior at Lincoln High School in Thief River Falls. She is visually impaired and does most of her reading by Braille. She chose to read her paper to the congregation that Sunday.

"It was quite a moving experience for all," said Pastor Schram. "It might have been one of those things where you just had to be there."

"She combined what she had learned in confirmation class with her own personal testimony," said Steve Dahl, who was there that Sunday. "It was a wonderful paper pointing to Christ. What made it even more special, this gal is legally blind. As she read the paper in Braille, not once did she mention this handicap or in any way feel sorry for herself."



what **JESUS** *means to me*

By Kari Hanson

I need Jesus because I am a sinner, and there is no other way to heaven except through Him. I cannot be saved by my own works because it is impossible for me to live a completely godly life. I need Jesus because I am saved by His sacrifice.

Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for me and the rest of us. He died on the cross so that I may have everlasting life with God in heaven. Without Jesus I would be doomed to eternal separation from God. He has given me hope, peace and joy. He provides a rock for me to stand on.

Jesus died on the cross because of His great love for me. He died so that God may show mercy upon me, a sinner. He gave me hope, peace and joy because those are things that all people need. He provides a rock for me to stand on because without Him and God's Word to believe, I would fall into all the wicked ways of the world.

What Jesus wants from me is for me to live by God's Word and do God's will. He wants me to obey the law set for me and all people in the Ten Commandments. Jesus wants me to love my neighbor as myself, and love God because He first loved me. He wants me to believe in Him and to recognize God as being the one and only true God. He wants these beliefs to show in my everyday life, and in who I am. Everything I do and say should glorify God's name.


To me knowing Jesus means knowing that there is a plan for me. It means that I can think I know what I am meant to become, but I don't have to worry about every detail of everything that is in my future. It doesn't make any difference what I think will happen in the near future or in the distant future because God will do what He wants with me, and put me wherever He wants me.





the true LIGHT

By Linda Lein



When our youngest son Matthew had a nightmare, he called us in the middle of the night. “Daddy! Mommy! Come sleep with me!”

If Keith heard Matthew’s call first, he responded, “Come in here and sleep with us.”

But Matthew was afraid of the dark. He didn’t want to venture one foot out of his bed even though there is a lighted nightlight path just outside his bedroom door. In fact, he usually covered his head with his blankets and continued to call for one of us to come to him.

Usually I went. I removed the covers from his head and extended my hand.

“Come on, Matthew,” I said. “I’ll take you to Daddy.”

When Matthew heard my voice and saw my face, he felt secure. He climbed out of bed, took my hand, and walked across the hall to our bedroom. Then he crawled into bed and snuggled next to Keith, falling back to sleep, unafraid of his nightmares and the darkness.

In many ways this little night ritual reminds me of Jesus bringing us to God the Father. Much darkness exists today in the world: terrorism, war, hunger, sickness, natural catastrophes, sin, etc. We call out to God to rescue us from these pain-filled realities. And like, Matthew, perhaps we feel small and afraid, unwilling to step forward from under our security blankets.

Jesus said, “I have come into the world as a light” (John 8:12). It is a good thing that Jesus hears our calls and comes to us in our darkness. He calls us by name, takes our hand, and leads us to God the Father.

He said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). With that assurance we can face tomorrow unafraid as “we walk in the light, as He is in the light” (I John 1:7).

Lein is a member of Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn.

Thanksgiving

BY MOLLY WIESEN

A time to praise and serve

Have you recited a list of what you are thankful for to someone this season? Does your list include having an English-speaking school to send your kids to? How about accessing the kind of food you like when you want it? Are you thankful for that hot shower and a house that's free of bugs?

Do any of these questions remind you of some very special people who are serving the Lord in our AFLC mission fields? As we count our blessings, let us remember to be thankful for those people who have given up not only the daily conveniences of life, but the more significant things such as close connections to family. Our AFLC missionaries have surrendered their lives in service to our almighty God to make disciples of all nations.

Here are two challenges. First, go to the AFLC World Missions Web page and pull up the picture, story and prayer needs of each missionary family (www.aflc.org/world-missions). As you do so, take time to consider the daily activities, trials, and joys in each person's life. Think about how you would provide for your children's needs and well-being in that setting. Praise God for the ways that He has used our missionaries to further His Kingdom. Thank Him for their ministry in each country, and pray for them using the list of their current needs.

Next, ask yourself if you have an-



swered God's call regarding the service He has prepared for you. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." God's Word is very clear—"You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19b, 20). This Scripture is not just for those who are called to foreign mission fields. As believers, we are to look for opportunities of service in every phase of our lives.

This year, in addition to our thanksgiving for all of God's blessings, let us dare to ask Him, "Is there something more that I can be doing with my time, talents and re-

sources to serve you, Lord?" Consider what He has commanded us to do regarding the hungry, those with no shelter, the sick, and those in prison (Matthew 25:35-36). Think about all the people in your immediate surroundings (family, neighborhood, work) who are perishing because they do not know Jesus as their Savior. "How, then, can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard?" (Romans 10:14).

Now consider how you can serve your congregation further. Do you visit regularly in the hospital or nursing home to share Scripture with someone? Have you organized a Bible study? Do you donate regularly to World and Home Missions? Can you spare \$25 a month to sponsor a needy child? What can you do to help those at a homeless shelter in your area? Is there a single mom in your church or neighborhood who could use some help? God has given us so much! Let us be thankful and then give back to Him.

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Isaiah 52:7).

Wiesen is a member of Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D.

A life of *exploration*

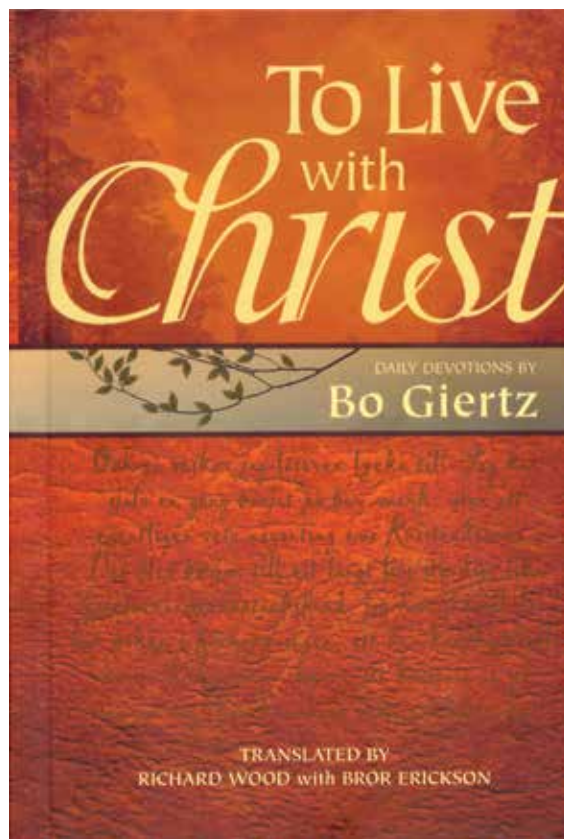
A new translation of Giertz devotional

BY MARIAN CHRISTOPHERSON

Considered by many to be the most influential Swedish church leader of the 1900s, Bo Harald Giertz (1905-1998) was a prolific writer, completing his last book in 1995 at the age of 90, *The Living God—A Guide to the Christian Faith*. Regrettably, most of Giertz's writings are not available in English. The translators and Concordia Publishing House have done a great service to the Christian Church by providing this newly translated devotional book, *To Live with Christ*.

Giertz is perhaps best known among Scandinavian and North American Lutherans for his novel, *The Hammer of God*, which presents the stories of three recent seminary graduates serving their first parishes. These new pastors are challenged to demonstrate Christian faith in action through everyday life as they learn about God's holiness, love, and grace. *The Hammer of God* has been required reading at several Lutheran seminaries because of its clear presentation of law and gospel. (A downloadable study guide is also available for this volume.)

Born Aug. 31, 1905, into a very prominent family, Giertz was raised as an atheist. His father, being an acclaimed surgeon, likely influenced young Giertz to enroll in medical school at the University of Uppsala. However, through the influence of theology students, Giertz embraced the Christian faith and enrolled in the University School of Theology. He later became the bishop of Gothenburg in the Lutheran Church of Sweden and wrote numerous booklets, articles, essays, novels, doctrinal and devotional books, and trans-



lated the New Testament.

Bishop Giertz called people to individual piety and personal holiness and became known as a bold and gifted expounder of Bible doctrine, trusting in the promise that the Word of the Lord would not return empty (Isaiah 55:11). He is remembered for emphasizing confessional Lutheran theology and for defending the orthodox Christian faith against the inroads of liberalism. Translator Bror Erickson likens Giertz to the "North Star" in the Church of Sweden, who "served as a compass for many faithful Lutherans in Sweden throughout a dark century of liberal theology that set upon his homeland

TITLE:

To Live with Christ

AUTHOR: Bo Giertz

TRANSLATORS:

Richard Wood with Bror Erickson

PUBLISHER:

Concordia Publishing House

Available from Ambassador Publications

COST: \$16

ALSO AVAILABLE:

The Hammer of God, \$15

like an ugly sunset before a great storm. ... Bo Giertz remained true to the biblical faith and the Lutheran Confessions. His writings served as a vehicle bringing the gospel to the people."

To Live with Christ offers devotional readings with evangelical clarity. Each daily reading begins with a Bible passage followed by a brief exposition of the text and a prayer. Organized according to the Church Year, these Christ-centered meditations give an overview of the Christian faith for the learned or the novice. Giertz writes, "I myself once began with a clean slate, not knowing much at all about Christianity. It was the beginning of a long life of continuous exploration. I have written this book in the hope that it will help some reader follow the same path. He will not regret it."

Christopherson is the director of the AFLC's Publications and Parish Education department.

A man with a MISSION

Ruthfred Lutheran loses founding pastor, inspirational leader



BY PASTOR BRENT OLSON

Sunny and welcoming as a morning in May, Pastor always left us warmed and smiling. This last time was no exception, as Pastor ministered to the very end with his remarkable repertoire of grace. There were, even then from his bed, mini-sermons on God's goodness, memorable aphorisms on living for Christ, and jokes that only he could tell. It was always his way, as he left another's hospital room, to approach the door, then turn on his heels, and say something like, "Do you know what the ancient name for Ethiopia is?" A few moments of silence. And then ... "Abyssinia" ... "And do you know how they say goodbye in Ethiopia?" ... "A-by-ssin-ya." He'd smile and wave and he was gone. It was corny; it was fun; it was Pastor.

Pastor John H. Dennis left us to be with his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on Sept. 19, after a year-long battle with esophageal cancer. This is the same Jesus he had served tirelessly for 58 years as pastor of Ruthfred Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bethel Park, Pa.

Arriving straight out of Capital Seminary at the age of 24, Pastor began building a congregation with this simple mission in mind: "to build a good, strong Lutheran church in the South Hills of Pittsburgh." From a core group of 40, the church grew rapidly as word got around that a young, energetic minister with a friendly personality and a booming speaking and singing voice was in charge down at the corner of South Park and Patterson. If neighboring people didn't go to see him, inevitably they'd hear a distinctive knock on their door. It was the young Pastor come to invite them to church. And maybe to join them for dinner.

Rarely do you find a combination of such tremendous gifts in one person—an unforgettable charisma, an unflagging



energy, a servant's heart, a leader's courage, a beautiful booming voice, and a mind that never forgets anyone. You could visit Ruthfred Church one Sunday, meet Pastor Dennis, and return 30 years later. He'd remember your name, and most anything else you had told him. Jesus said in John 10 that the good shepherd knows his sheep and calls them by name. That's truly difficult when you have 700 attending on a Sunday, and at least 600 more who fervently claim membership at Ruthfred. But if you ask many why they attend Pastor Dennis' church today, they will say, "Because he remembered my name." And then they would recall his powerful preaching and heart-melting singing.

Pastor Dennis was born Aug. 17, 1925, to Arthur and Margaret (Keller) Dennis of Marion, Ohio. His siblings were Robert and Mary Elizabeth Staub, and Charles and Jeraldine Dennis. Jeraldine and her

husband, Bill Barnhart, continue to reside in Marion. Their family's church was and is Emanuel Lutheran Church in Marion. During Pastor's formative years, Emanuel was led by Reverend M.E. Hollensen, who remained to the end, along with Pastor's mother, Margaret, the greatest single influence on his life. From his mother he inherited his buoyant charm and conversational brilliance, not to mention his German penchant for order and neatness. From Dr. Hollensen he learned how to preach and how to lead. Together, these influences made Ruthfred Church, under Pastor's leadership, a beacon of ecclesiastical order and unwavering theological conviction, and a place where you felt safe and knew you were loved.

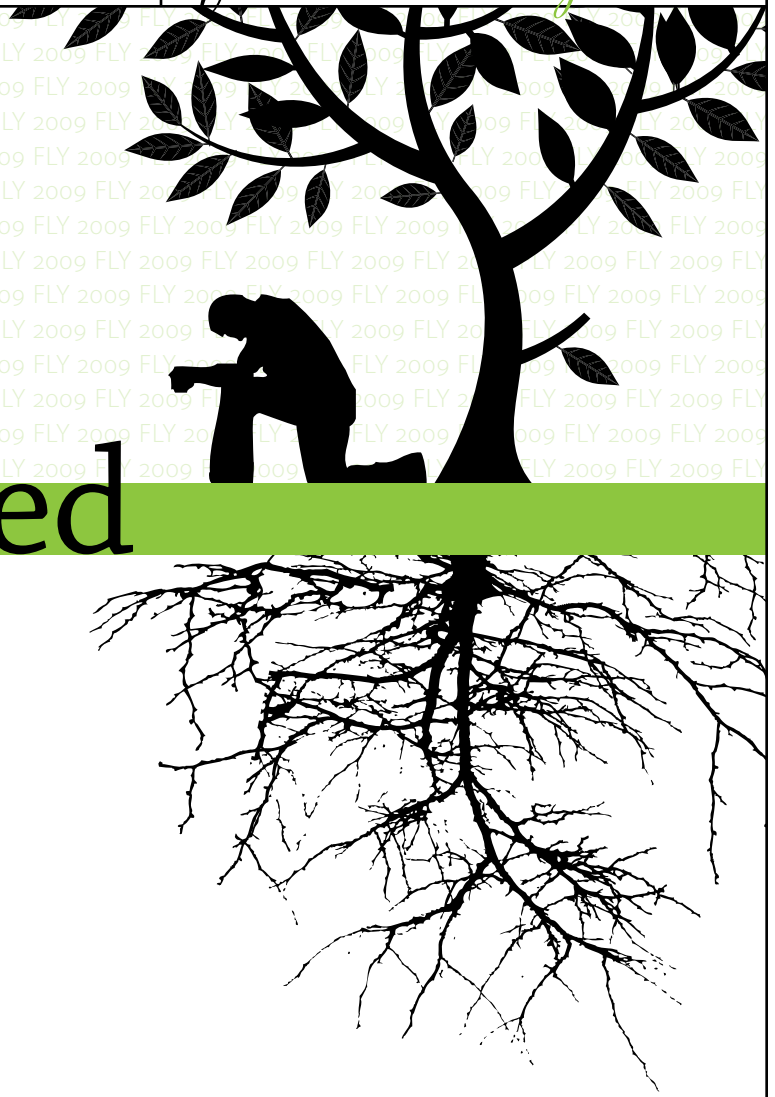
If you've ever been to the Bethel Park area and come across an older man dressed impeccably, shoes shining, hat on his head, warm smile on his face, striding purposefully; if you've ever come across such a man who looks as though everyone is his friend, who smiles at you and says hello or has something funny to say as you pass by, you may have met Reverend John H. Dennis of Ruthfred Lutheran Church. The world has truly lost a great man in Pastor. But those who trust Jesus Christ, as Pastor taught us, have not lost. For, as he said, "Nothing is lost if you know where it is." And we know where Pastor is and where we will see him someday.

The funeral service was held Sept. 27 at Ruthfred Evangelical Lutheran with Pastor James Molstre and Pastor Brent Olson officiating. Pastor Dennis requested that any gifts in his memory be dedicated to the organ fund of Ruthfred Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Olson serves Ruthfred Evangelical Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa.

Firmly Planted

By Ryan Patenaude



Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Rejoice in the Lord always; I will say it again rejoice,” from a dank prison cell. Horatio Spafford, days after losing his four daughters, penned the words to the hymn, “It is Well With my Soul.” After having every possible thing taken from him Job said, “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21).

Every day, millions of Christians walking through the valley are trusting in the Lord for the strength they need to carry on. Their hearts and minds are “guarded by a peace that transcends all understanding,” as Paul puts it.

Christ came to save sinners not only from sin’s eternal consequences but also from our bondage to sin on this earth. Praise the Lord that He does not save us and then leave us the way He found us! Rather, He sanctifies us through His Word and the Holy Spirit. He makes a difference in the next world and this one!

Justification is the first step on a long journey toward righteousness. With this in mind, the FLY Committee has always aimed to impact students both deep and wide—preaching salvation *and* sanctification.

Our theme for FLY 2009, Firmly Planted, is taken from Psalm 1:1-3:

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel
of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

This passage paints a beautiful picture of the righteous life. Recently, hurricane-force winds ravaged the area where I live in Ohio. It became obvious which trees had firm roots and which did

not. The firmly planted trees survived the winds effortlessly. As we are rooted in the Lord we also have the faith and hope to endure the storms like Paul, Horatio, Job and others. God does not promise rosy circumstances, but He does say that Christians are to be marked by love, joy, and peace.

Our prayer is that FLY 2009 will strengthen the students who will attend, that their faith will be fixed on God’s promises, that their roots will become firmly planted, and that they will be able to survive coming droughts and storms. The need for strong roots seems to be greater than ever. Young people are falling away in appalling numbers. Freshman in high school are encountering temptations and tribulations that most of us were unaware of until college. Oh that the Lord would raise up a generation that will stand firm for the Lord!

Join with us in praying for the 2009 FLY Convention and the students who will attend. Pray for the planning committee, staff, and speakers. Pray that the Lord’s will be done and that He will give students what they need in order to stand firm on the promises of God.

Patenaude, a youth worker at Peace Lutheran, Canal Winchester, Ohio, is the first vice president of FLY.



See You At the Pole 2008

AFLBS students gathered around the campus flag pole on Sept. 24 as students around the country gathered on their local campuses to pray for the United States during See You At the Pole.

People and places

Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee accepted resolutions of affiliation from three congregations wishing to join the AFLC.

- **Salem Lutheran**, Elizabethville, Pa., is served by Pastor John Schaertel and Nathan Minnich, vicar.

- **Disciple Lutheran Fellowship**, Reading, Pa., is currently without a pastor.

- **Augustana Lutheran**, Duluth, Minn., is served by Pastor Gary Ries.

Pastor Carl Voelker, Canton, S.D., was removed from the AFLC clergy roster.

Pastor Robert Grebel, who serves Egeland Lutheran, Waubay, S.D., and Ortleigh Free Lutheran, Ortleigh, S.D., was added to the AFLC's licensed pastor roster.

Pastor Vernon Pierson, who serves Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., was added to the AFLC's licensed pastor roster.



New members were installed Sept. 14 at East Marsh River Free Lutheran Church, rural Halstad, Minn., in conjunction with rally Sunday. Pictured, from left are Tom and Yvonne Carlson, Gaylen and Sharon Larson, Jeremy and Courtney Anderson, and Pastor Anders Macy (not pictured Pastor Dale Finstrom). East Marsh River was accepted into the AFLC this past summer and is served by the pastoral staff of Resurrection Free Lutheran Church of Beltrami, Minn.

Kruse, longtime AFLC pastor, dies

Retired, Kruse served as interim pastor for Windom congregation

Pastor Marlyn Kruse, 68, died Sept. 14, 2008, at his home in Mankato, Minn. Born Nov. 3, 1939, in Slayton, Minn., he was the son of Thomas and Minnie (Kruse) Kruse. He married Gayle Stevens March 7, 1964, in Iona, Minn.

He graduated from Slayton High School in 1957, and attended Mankato State University and graduated from Christian Heritage College, El Cajon, Calif., in 1979. He graduated from AFLTS in 1977. He served the AFLC congregations of Calvary Lutheran, Everett, Wash., (1981-1983); Salem Lutheran, Radcliffe, Iowa, (1983-1988); Living Word Lutheran, Eagan, Minn., (1988-1991); Hosannah Free Lutheran, St. James, Minn. (1991-1995); and Word of Life Lutheran, Mankato, Minn. He was currently serving Living Word Lutheran, Windom, Minn., as an interim pastor.

Surviving are his wife; two sons, Steven (Robin) Kruse, St. Michael, Minn., and David (Courtney) Kruse, Mankato; two daughters, Debra (Clide) Hinds, Oceanside, Calif., and Melissa (Stephen) Jameson, Earlville, Ill.; three brothers, Verland (Darline) Kruse, Bloomington, Minn., Leon (Patty) Kruse, Eden Prairie, Minn., and Tom (Gracia) Kruse, Bakersfield, Calif.; one sister, Idella Hackett, Tulsa, Okla.; and ten grandchildren.

The service was Sept. 29 at Word of Life Lutheran, Mankato, with Pastor Paul Nash officiating. Burial was in Woodland Hills Memorial Park, Mankato, Minn.





The deep water

BY PASTOR TIM HINRICHS

The Polish Lutheran Bible School, Ustron, Poland, kicked off its school year on Sept. 28 with a special gathering of students as well as graduates. October marks 10 years since the first classes were held in the Bible school. We praise God that He has bountifully given us a great harvest of students the last couple of years. This year we will again have more than 60 students enrolled, most of them via extension on Saturdays.

We're continuing to broadcast our classes through the Internet to two satellite locations in Poland. This year we opened a location about a one and one-half hour drive east of Warsaw (Węgrowo) and have nine students enrolled.

Who are the students who come to study? They come from all areas of society: doctors, a lawyer, university students, a retired military officer and his son, bankers, an interior design specialist, engineers, and factory workers. One retired man from the Czech Republic was sent by his church to Bible school as a requirement to serve as a lay pastor.

Another opportunity we have will be teaching those coming from other church bodies. This year an unusual amount of Catholics (seven) are enrolled in our school. In getting to know some of these students, we find they have a desire to study the Scriptures but they have nowhere to do so. As a result, they are coming to us. What a great responsibility! We are praying that the teaching of the Word will especially have an impact on them. I think of two retired couples who are coming to Bible school—that alone is amazing. More amazing is the fact that both wives are

Catholic. May their eyes be open to the teaching of God's Word!

This openness to the Word is what is most rewarding for Bible school ministry. Students begin to see that Jesus is so clearly found throughout the Old Testament. They see themselves and their own struggles in the characters of the Bible. They are shocked to see the Word come alive before their eyes.

Fellowship is another precious part of the ministry as students from various church and work backgrounds gather together united by the study of God's Word. It really is an amazing work of God's Holy Spirit.

This year God is fulfilling another dream as one of our Bible school graduates will begin to teach. Bartek Cieslar was just ordained this last spring, and he has been teaching Bible classes since the school year started. We pray for God's leading upon him as he begins to take over some of my classes this year.

As was emphasized at the opening of the school year, we pray that the students will answer the call to "head out into the deep water." Jesus commanded His disciples to go deep and He is doing the same for our students. God will challenge their thinking, their lifestyle, and their vision with His calling—and the fruit will be enormous. We covet your prayers for the precious opportunity to disciple God's people. May our nets and theirs continue to be full!

Hinrichs, an AFLC missionary on loan to the East European Missions Network, is the director of the Polish Lutheran Bible School. He lives with his family in Dzięgielów, Poland.

September memorials

AFLBS

Audrey Moan (11)
Delbert Jones
Esther Danielson
Dorrcyce Brintnell
James Johnson
Gladys Rugland
Vercel Wik

AFLTS

Audrey Moan (12)
Clarence Berg
Esther Brustad
Esther Danielson
Eloise McKee

Evangelism

Vercel Wik

FLAPS

Robert Olson

General Fund

Ervin Larson

Parish Education

Alice Rokke
Shirley Olson

Home Missions

Alice Rokke
Elaine La Rock
Dorrcyce Brintnell

Vision

Audrey Moan
Clarice Ulland

WMF

Dorris McWilliams
Adolph Skound
Arlene Brue

World Missions

Lillian Sundby
Vicki Miller
Shirley Olson
Eloise McKee

ARC hosts Christmas musical presentation

Silent auction dinner and lutefisk/torsk dinner will be held in conjunction with Christmas musical

The Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis., will host "The Carol," a musical adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, as a gift by the ARC and Osceola community. Evening performances begin at 7 p.m. on Dec. 5-7, and 12-14, with a 3 p.m. matinee on Dec. 14. Admission is free for all performances and everyone is welcome.

In conjunction with the musical, the ARC will host a benefit and silent auction on Dec. 6 at the ARC's gymnasium. The event begins when doors open at 10:30 a.m. to view and bid on auction items. A gourmet luncheon will be served at noon, followed by a short time to finish bidding. A performance of "The Carol" will begin at 2 p.m. and auction items will be awarded following the performance.

If you have items you'd like to donate for the auction, such as new items, antiques and crafts or homemade items, please contact the ARC.

Please call for reservations for this event as seating is limited.

The ARC will host a lutefisk/torsk supper and a Christmas bake sale Dec. 14, with serving from 4:30-6:30 p.m. Tickets are available starting Nov. 1.

For more information on these events and to purchase tickets, call 1-800-294-2877. Event information is available on the ARC's Web site (www.arc-aflc.org).

Shirley Olson served with husband

Wife of Pastor Oliver Olson pursued nursing license late in life

Shirley Olson, 86, of Fargo, N.D., formerly of Fergus Falls, Minn., died Sept. 12 at Merit Care Hospital in Fargo. She was the wife of Pastor Orville Olson.

Born March 13, 1922, in Kanawha, Iowa, she was the daughter of Ole and Bertha (Ogland) Carlson. She married Orville Olson March 18, 1942, in Clarion, Iowa.

In 1960, they moved to the Otter Tail lakes area so that Orville, who had left farming in Clarion, could attend the Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls. She worked as a nurse's aide to help put him through school. Shirley and Orville served a church in Hagen, Saskatchewan, one summer while Orville was still in seminary. Immediately after graduating from seminary in 1963, they set sail for Japan where they were house-parents for two years until 1965. She and Orville served churches in Greenbush, Minn., McIntosh, Minn., and Hatton, N.D. While they were living in McIntosh, she returned to Fergus and received her LPN degree when she was nearly 50 years old.

Surviving are her husband; four sons, David Olson, Reston, Va., Dennis Olson, Hastings, Minn., Joseph Olson, Minneapolis, and Jim Olson, Fargo; sisters, Clarice Thompson, Clarion, Iowa, Eleanor Jacobson, Eagle Grove, Iowa, and Ruby McCormick, Sioux Falls, S.D.; numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The service was Sept. 15 at Holmes Lutheran Church, Holmes, Iowa, with Pastor Rodney Stueland and Pastor Joel Rolf officiating. Burial was in Holmes Lutheran Cemetery, Holmes, Iowa.

Coordinating Committee chooses conference theme

Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee at their meeting during the September All-Boards meeting on the AFLC campus in Plymouth, Minn., chose a theme and theme verse for the 2009 annual conference. "My

Word—A Fire and a Hammer," has been taken from Jeremiah 23:29, "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" The 2009 annual conference will be held June 16-19 in Fergus Falls, Minn.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1- Sept. 30, 2008

FUND	TOTAL (subsidy)	REC'D IN SEPTEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$360,331	32,585	\$262,640	73
Evangelism	113,084	4,278	65,085	58
Youth Ministries	71,249	5,074	82,278	115
Parish Education	116,771	6,914	73,848	63
Seminary	220,252	28,138	145,230	66
Bible School	346,706	29,165	288,781	83
Home Missions	332,985	19,775	202,136	61
World Missions	288,948	23,652	216,979	75
Personal Support	457,495	35,791	342,913	75
TOTALS	\$2,307,821	\$185,371	\$1,679,890	73
TOTALS 2007	\$2,220,688	\$184,720	\$1,672,771	75

Goal 75%

These are the Annual Conference-approved budgets but do not reflect all the financial needs of the departments. Contact the individual departments for further information.

Thankful for leadership

I was on my dad's fishing boat as we were going from the Columbia River out into the Pacific Ocean. I had fallen asleep, but as the waves started tossing the boat around, I woke up in time to catch myself before falling out of the top bunk. The sea was a little rough, but I wasn't scared because I knew the captain of the ship.



Pastor Craig Johnson

Our country has experienced some storms lately. The economy is in turmoil. When people who supposedly have knowledge and influence

use phrases like "financial Pearl Harbor" and "worst economy since the Great Depression," it causes you to sit up and take notice.

I had confidence in my dad's ability to guide the boat we were on. I'm afraid I do not have a similar kind of confidence in our political leaders' ability to guide our nation through the storms we are facing. Still we need not fear for the future, because we know who is truly in charge.

In this information age, with so many TV news reporters with hours to fill and newspaper and magazine writers and Internet bloggers searching for stories, we find out more about our political leaders and candidates than we maybe need to know. Their humanity becomes quite apparent. Sometimes they misspeak, like we all do. Their mistakes get discussed and analyzed for days on cable TV and talk radio. Like our families, their families aren't

perfect. Fortunately for us, though, our family misdeeds aren't plastered all over the Internet.

The problems we face are too much for us, and our leaders seem like one of us. In some ways we want our leaders to be like us. We want them to understand what kind of challenges we face and be able to relate to our situation. But we also want leaders who understand the economic situation better than the common person on the street. We want leaders with a better grasp than most of us on how foreign affairs and the military works. Maybe the reason we're often disappointed with our leaders is because we want too much. We have expectations that no mere mortal can fulfill.

One of the 1992 presidential debates had a town hall format in which questions came from the audience. One member of the audience described citizens as being like children of the president. He wondered how these candidates were going "to meet our needs, our needs in housing and in crime and you name it." I wish one of the candidates had humbly answered: "I can't meet all your needs. I'm only human. All I can do is the best I can at whatever job I'm given."

"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19, NIV). We pray for our leaders, that they might have wisdom to make good decisions. When we vote we pray for wisdom for ourselves. But

ultimately we depend on God to meet our needs. "Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. ... Blessed is he ... whose hope is in the Lord his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—the Lord, who remains faithful forever" (Psalm 146:3, 5, 6).

We give thanks that there is One who both understands the challenges we face and is far wiser and stronger and more powerful than we are. Jesus is able to sympathize and to save.

Maybe the reason we're often disappointed with our leaders is because we want too much. We have expectations that no mere mortal can fulfill.

The storms our country faces are challenging, and it could get even worse. Our leaders will often stumble. But we need not fear. No matter how the elections go, we know who is in charge. Jesus will always be the King of kings and the Lord of lords. "Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging." No matter how the elections or economy may go we will not fear because "The LORD Almighty is with us" (Psalm 46:2, 3, 7).

building the base

BY PASTOR RICH CARR

What we **DIDN'T WANT**

As quickly as summer seemed to come, it left even quicker. Autumn is upon us with all the usual signs. The leaves have changed and mostly fallen, the crops have been harvested, and even the local retail stores have put their Christmas paraphernalia out before Thanksgiving has been celebrated.

Thanksgiving conjures up thoughts of pumpkin pie loaded down with fresh whipped cream and juicy turkey with bright red cranberry sauce. It is also a time to reflect on the things for which we are thankful.

Good health, plenty of food, a warm and happy home—these are all things for which we thank God. But the most important reason I have to thank God for is the faith He gave me. What makes our faith in Jesus so special is that we have done nothing to deserve it, or even want it! The Bible says that Jesus is the author of faith, not man (Hebrews 12:2). If God decided that He wouldn't move us to receive Christ as our Savior, we would never choose God on our own. Faith in Jesus is given to us, just as medicine is given to a small child who has no desire to swallow the bitter medicine needed to cure him. We take it against our will, kicking and screaming.

Sometimes when I try to feed my youngest daughter, Naomi, she literally throws a fit and does everything a 2-year-old can do to not eat. Even if I have something like ice cream on a spoon, if she thinks that what I am feeding her is bad, she won't open her

mouth. Once I fed her pudding on a spoon by forcing it in her mouth. After she cried and had practically the whole mouthful fall out, creating a huge mess, her little taste buds overrode her stubbornness. Like flipping a switch she stopped crying and opened her mouth for more pudding.

The Bible says that at our core being, in our very nature, we hate God and are objects of wrath toward God (Ephesians 2:1-3). We are like stubborn children who are not willing to eat food that not only tastes good, but is good for us. Just as I had to force that pudding in Naomi's mouth against her will, so God in His mercy gives us what we don't want when we don't want it—namely salvation in Christ Jesus our Lord. This grace of God changes our hearts from being dead to being alive. Ezekiel 36:25-27 says "... I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes."

This Thanksgiving, let's be sure to give thanks for our loving Father's desire to give us what we didn't want as dead creatures of wrath, so that we can be full of life through the Spirit and become new creatures in Christ.

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