

THE LUTHERAN 

NOVEMBER 2012

AMBASSADOR

.....

Awaken

MY SOUL



The heart of Luther's theses

BY RACHELLE KLEMMME

When Martin Luther picked the day before All Saints Day to post the 95 Theses—back in the day when they physically posted stuff on actual wooden boards or doors rather than “posting” on online “message boards”—he probably didn’t realize his challenge would go viral on the recently invented printing press. And he definitely wouldn’t have imagined that October 31—All Hallow’s Eve—would later be best known and commercialized for costumes and candy, that purchasing indulgences would have something to do with fun-size chocolate bars in the junk food aisle, and how Lutheran bloggers, pastors, teachers and *The Lutheran Ambassador* “Encouraging Word” column writers would totally have fun with this juxtaposition close to 500 years later.

In fact, when I was attending the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, I was all about peasant tops and thrift store finds, so I was excited to find a sale on a generic Renaissance-inspired costume dress at our local Ridgedale Mall. Later on I noticed the colors and pattern actually looked quite a bit like the clothes worn by Martin Luther’s wife, Katharina Von Bora, when you do a Google image search on her. I’ve used my “Kitty Von Bora” costume at least once—particularly during an All Saints Day costume party hosted by an Anglo-Catholic acquaintance during my later college years.

Costumes and candy are all good in lighthearted fun, but



Martin Luther was challenging what he considered a more serious “trick or treat”—the abuse of religious authority and a money-making project costumed as piety. Of course, fund-raising projects and money management are practical aspects of churches and other nonprofit organizations, but what Luther protested was the unhealthy mixture with spirituality, where the claim was made that souls would be released from purgatory at the sound of the cha-ching.

Of course, it’s not like that sort of conflict of interest has never happened again. Late 20th century celebrity televangelists subsidizing their lavish lifestyles through promises of spiritual blessings to donors are an easy enough example.

What Luther promoted in the 95 Theses was authentic Christianity: money spent on indulgences is better to be spent on the real needs of the poor rather than invented bad theologies, and true repentance is from the heart and not from the wallet.

An artificial theology teaches that we must approach God and our fellow Christians with the mask of perfection and the costume of false piety to hide the real issues inside.

Thankfully, God’s grace approaches us as we really are and forgives us the same.

Klemme is from Wadena, Minn., and attends Zion Free Lutheran Church.

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Inspired Bible Doctrine and Living Personal Experience must always go hand in hand; otherwise there will be no true advance and no spiritual riches in Christian life. We shall turn in on dangerous side-tracks either to the right or to the left.

—P. Ljostveit

Take heed of spending too much of your precious time about circumstantial, about the minor things of religion—as “mint, dill, and cumin;” or in searching into the circumstances of worship, or in standing stoutly for this or that ceremony, or about inquiring what fruit it was which Adam ate in paradise, or in inquiring after things which God in His infinite wisdom has concealed. It is one of Satan’s great designs, to hinder men in the great and weighty duties of religion, by busying them most about the lowest and least matters of religion.

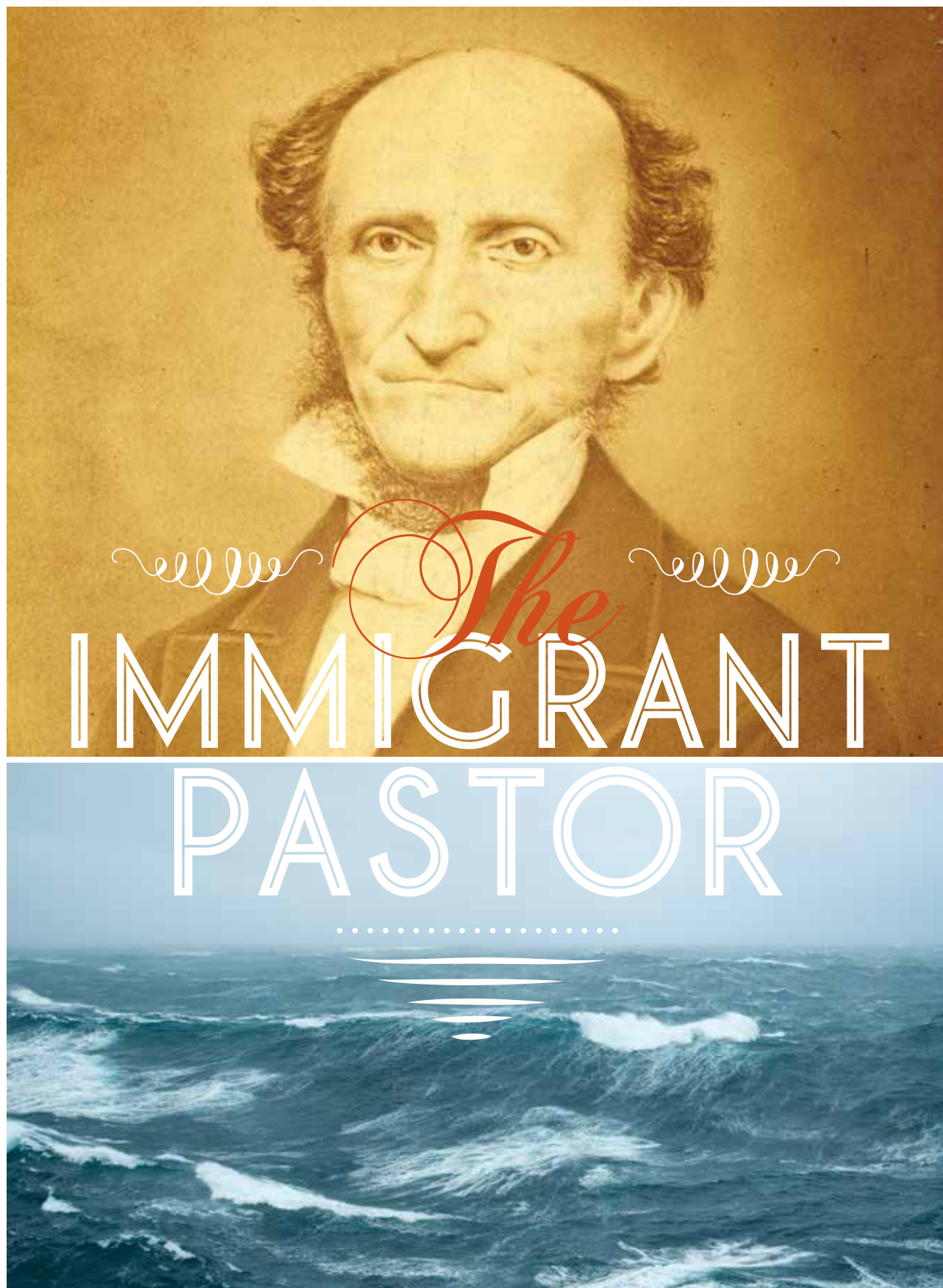
—Thomas Brooks

We cannot attain to the understanding of Scripture either by study or by strength of intellect. Therefore your first duty must be to begin with prayer.

—Martin Luther

God does not demand more from you than his grace works in you and you cannot give him more than he has given you.

—Johan Arndt



BY PASTOR PATRICK LOHSE

The year 2011 marked two significant anniversaries for Christians. The first being the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible, and the second one was the 200th birthday of Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther.

Though this second anniversary may be a bit unknown for non-Lutheran Christians, Walther's life and legacy should not be considered less significant.

Born on Oct. 27, 1811, Walther was reared in a Christian home. His father, Gottlob Heinrich Wilhelm, and mother, Johanna Wilhelmina Walther, made sure of that. He was part of a family of Lutheran pastors. His great-grandfather, grandfather, and father were all pastors in Saxony.

Walther's spiritual education outside of the home, however, was lacking. German churches and theological schools during the 1800s were influenced by rationalism and theological liberalism. Walther overcame these pitfalls and was ordained on Jan. 15, 1837.

Less than two years later, Walther and nearly 700 Saxons would leave Germany for America. These Saxons sought a free land to practice their Lutheran faith. They believed their faith was in danger due to the influx of rationalism

and also the Prussian union of 1817. In 1817, King Frederick William III of Prussia thought it would be a good idea to marry the Lutheran and Reformed churches to form a new union church. The Lutherans who held unreservedly to the Augsburg Confession saw the danger of such a merger. Even though Saxony was not part of Prussia, the Lutherans feared they would be forced into the merger.

It is out of this background that nearly 700 laymen and pastors, under the guidance of Martin Stephen, agreed to leave Germany for a free land in America. This was no easy task. Travel was by ship and often this was treacherous. The *Amalia*, one of the five ships that left from Bremerhaven, Germany, in November 1838, sunk to the bottom of the Atlantic. In addition to these deaths, two small boys, ages 2 and 1, died aboard the *Olbers*. Without question, these brave men, women, and children gave up their lives for God's Word and the Lutheran confessions.

While sailing across the Atlantic, the pastors voted to make Pastor Martin Stephen their bishop. They soon realized this was a grave mistake after it became evident that Martin Stephen was a serial adulterer. It was Walther, who had years earlier received the sweet gospel from Stephen, who was given the task of sharing with the immigrants the grave sins of their bishop. A council met and agreed to remove Stephen from the ministry due to sexual immorality, mismanagement, and teaching false doctrine.

News of Stephen's sins and his excommunication left the 700 immigrants wondering what to do. Some believed they should return to Germany, while others questioned if they were even a church. To help resolve the issue Franz Adolph Marbach challenged Walther to a debate to answer the question "are we a church or not?" Walther prepared for the debate by studying God's Word and Luther's writings. He came to the conclusion that the Church is all believers in Christ where the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered. This is exactly how Augsburg Confession article VI defines the Church. Thus, Walther made it very clear that their little immigrant group was the church and they had a right to call pastors. His theses for the debate led to his book *Church and Ministry*, which is still published today.

Six years later Walther, with 11 other pastors and 20 congregations, met to form The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and the other States, which is the church body we know of today as the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. He also became the first president of the synod.

Walther's legacy today continues in large part due to his most well-known book *Law and Gospel*. This book was originally a series of lectures Walther gave from Sept. 12, 1884, to Nov. 6, 1885. He is absolutely correct when he says in Theses IV, "Understanding how to distinguish Law and Gospel provides wonderful insight for understanding all of Holy Scripture correctly. In fact, without this knowledge Scripture is and remains a sealed book." Because of this fact, pastors and laity do well in honing this skill. *Law and Gospel* has gone through a number of publications, the most recent one being the Reader's Edition. The historical context, as well as the editorial notes, are very helpful in this edition.

Like all the saints who have joined the whole company of heaven, we say blessed be the memory of Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther.

Lohse, a 2009 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, serves Bethlehem Lutheran, Morris, Ill.

Martin Luther was born Nov. 1, 1483, at Eisleben in Saxony, Germany. He was baptized the next day and named Martin after that day's saint.

Born of strict Roman Catholics, Martin was brought up in a rigid religious climate. The boy had a good mind, and at the age of 18 entered the University of Erfurt, where he became known as "the learned philosopher." Previous to this he had attended the village school at Mansfeld and, later, schools at Magdeburg and Eisenach.

Luther's father, Hans, wanted his son to become a lawyer, but several tragic experiences led him to choose the monastery. He became a consecrated monk in 1506 and was consecrated priest in 1507. In 1508 he became a teacher at the University of Wittenberg. After further study, he received a Doctor of Theology degree in 1512. The same year he became Professor of Theology in the University of Wittenberg.

Though Luther was now a Doctor of Theology, he had no assurance of salvation. This experience he received later as he studied Romans 1:17: "The just shall live by faith." Little wonder, then, that the main Reformation principle is that man is justified by faith alone and not by works. A second principle followed—namely, that every Christian can come to God without the mediation of a priest or of the Church, for the forgiveness of sins depends on faith in Christ only.

Providentially, Luther had

gained these spiritual insights before the monk John Tetzel came to Wittenberg to sell indulgences, which in practical language means that a person could buy an indulgence and thereby receive forgiveness of sin. This traffic in selling indulgences was related to a huge project in Rome—the construction of St. Peter's Basilica.

After repeated protests by Luther against this traffic in men's souls, the hammer blows were heard when on Oct. 31, 1517, he nailed to the Castle Church in Wittenberg 95 theses setting forth his views and inviting a debate. The Reformation had begun.

At once the ecclesiastical machinery was set in motion in an attempt to crush Luther and the young movement he headed. As in the time of Jesus, there was a "fullness of time." Criticism of the Catholic Church had been growing for several centuries. The Renaissance—the rebirth of learning—had made the masses more aware of the Church's proper function. Influential princes chose to take Luther's side in the fight against a power-hungry hierarchy which wanted to run both Church and State.

Probably the high point in the controversy between Luther and the Church was reached at the Diet of Worms on April 18, 1521. Frederick the Wise, Elector

of Saxony, a friend of Luther, had persuaded Emperor Charles V to have Luther appear in person before the assembly, so that Luther might have a chance to defend himself and his teachings. Luther was bluntly ordered to recant; his answer included his famous statement, "Here I stand—unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments—I cannot and will not recant anything." Luther was excommunicated by Pope Leo X and banned by the emperor. Anyone could legally murder him.

We note a remarkable similarity in the Apostles' stand before the religious hierarchy in their day and the stand Luther made at Worms. In both places we see a case of religious tyranny and dictatorship. In both situations "defendants" declared their allegiance to God rather than man. In both cases, hammer blows were dealt against a system developed by man instead of the Spirit of God. And the bitterest battles within the confines of so-called Christendom have been fought between religionists and twice-born men.

What Luther now lived for and risked his life for bore abundant fruit. The Reformation spread over large areas of Germany as well as other northern European countries. The Scandinavian lands are nominally 78- to 97-percent Lutheran. "The Word alone," "grace alone," and "faith alone" were pillars on which the New Testament church was built.

The Reformation was soon to feel the wrathful counterblows of its antagonists. But

not even the Thirty Year's War (1618-1648) could undo the work of God.

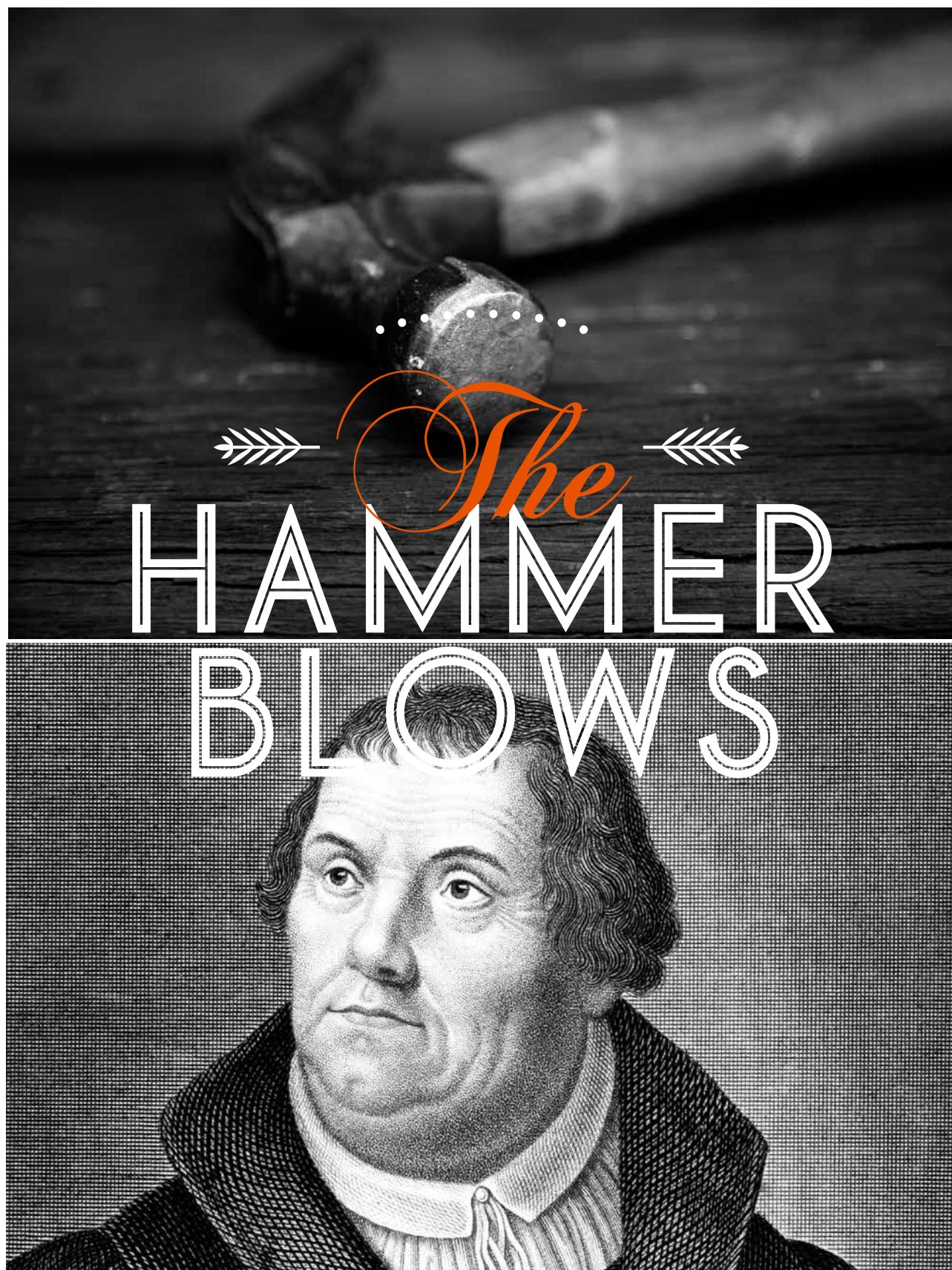
What Luther by the grace of God accomplished is well known. The pulpit, not the altar, became again the most important place in church. People heard the Word proclaimed in their native tongue. The Bible, once again an "open Bible," became now a personal possession, not the possession of the official church. Men and women were told that Christ is the only mediator between God and man.

But the Reformation made impacts upon education, economics, and political life. Once the ecclesiastical yoke had been broken, men surged ahead in their newfound freedom.

And the hammer blows of the 16th century can still be recorded on our 20th century spiritual seismographs, notwithstanding the inertia prevailing in much of Protestantism. The emphasis for the need of a 20th century reformation is a healthy note. ...

Do we need a reformation? What is the remedy? We thank God that very many Lutherans are saying "Here I stand!" For they are twice-born, redeemed "by the blood of the Lamb" (Ephesians 1:7). We must pray for faith, courage, vision, truth and love. The Lord will not fail us. In the words of Luther's famous hymn, "A mighty fortress is our God."


Stendal, who passed away in 1989, was one of the founding pastors of the AFLC. This article has been excerpted from the Oct. 22, 1963, issue of The Lutheran Ambassador.





BY JEN ERICKSON

"It is not a man's thanksgiving that he has been set free from suffering. It is a thanksgiving that he has been set free through suffering: 'Thou has enlarged me when I was in distress' (Psalm 4:1)." (George Matheson)

 Can one enter into thanksgiving during a season of lament? Can one participate in a harvest celebration when it's been a season of drought and loss? Can a grieving heart offer true thanksgiving?

I've contemplated these very questions over the past several weeks. I lost my dad unexpectedly last October only days before we learned that Jeremy, my husband of ten years, would need to endure a bone marrow transplant in hopes of saving his life. Eight months after burying my dad, I buried my husband, the cherished father of my three young sons. I lament daily what they have lost, what I have lost—these are not thank-inducing circumstances. This is not a year that I care to celebrate. There is no praise that stirs my heart for what has been taken away.

But as I've experienced these losses and lament them, I've been surprised to find that my heart does not *always* wallow in grief. My heart, at times,

is glad. My tongue *does* still speak of the goodness of God. I do still worship. How can this possibly be?

Over the years I've come to believe that a heart of thanksgiving must find its source much deeper than one's tangible circumstances. Our circumstances are forever changing—blessings and hardships come and go like the tides of the sea. And so I thank God not only for material provisions or for the life He's allowed me to live with all its blessings untold, but rather for being the Rock on which I stand, for allowing and inviting me to be sheltered under the shadow of His wings, for leading me through the valley instead of making me walk it alone. I am thankful that He has authored the story of our lives and the world in which we live and that He promises to redeem the broken; He promises it will all be made right again. If not for these things, there would be very little to ground our thanksgivings upon, even in the good years.

I know, as well, that thanks-

giving is not an emotion. We cannot offer thanks only when we feel it. Rather, we must know God intimately enough to know He is worthy of it, no matter the circumstances. When it feels as though God is letting my world fall apart, the reality is He's the only one holding any pieces of it together. In knowing this, and in knowing that I am His, my acknowledgement of this ends up being the very means of my sustenance. So I will thank Him this year for calling me His own—and for hope—because thankfulness for the temporary things suddenly pales in comparison to the rock-heavy weight of gratitude to God for promising that better things are to come.

I'll also mention that in the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, thanksgiving precedes the miracle; it precedes his resurrection (John 11:41). If we find our hearts to be wanting, it may be that our thanksgivings will precede the healing of our hearts, as well.

For some of you, this year *has* been plentiful—thank Him all the more. Those material possessions, those practical needs met, those boundless providential experiences you've had this year—thank Him. Those things do matter; their source is God. Then when a year of drought comes, you may find your heart already positioned in its proper place, knowing full well that all you had was

ultimately His from the beginning. "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21).

We do not need to pretend that our hearts are thankful when our greatest loves have been taken away. But we can continue to seek God's heart in the matter, to lament our losses, to plead our cause, and maybe, to be able to say even still:

"Though the fig tree does not blossom,
And no fruit is on the vines;
Though the produce of the olives fails,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock is cut off from the fold,
And there is no herd in the stalls,
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD;
I will exult in the God of my salvation.
God, the LORD, is my strength ..."
(Habakkuk 3:17-19)

The harvest will one day be plentiful again. I pray until then that He would enlarge my heart, to free it from distress—and possibly make it more grateful, too.

Erickson, wife of the late Jeremy Erickson, is a member of Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn.

BY CHRIS LAUTNER

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

February 27, 2012, was a day that I will not soon forget. It was the day that many of you received a prayer request for our son, Andrew, and our family. It was the day that he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma.

At the time, Andrew was living with friends in Minneapolis while he finished his senior year. The rest of our family was in Sioux Falls, S.D., where my husband, George, was serving out his seminary internship.

We had just attended the mid-week Lenten service at Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, and I remember singing and praying through tears as I watched my daughter, Hannah, play her violin at the start of the service with the youth praise team. How appropriate it was that Pastor Kirk Flaa was preaching on David and Goliath. God knew we needed this message before any word was spoken. We would soon find out that we had a Goliath on our hands, and this mes-

sage encouraged us to fight full charge ahead, with God on our side. How appropriate that our family is a part of the larger AFLC family as we moved to engage and conquer our giant: cancer. “Nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).

Our heartfelt words cannot express enough the thanks from our family for all the love, support, and encouragement received from you dear prayer warriors, friends, family, coworkers, congregations, and many whom we have never even met. “A friend loves at all times,” says Proverbs 17:17, which we have truly found evident by all of the prayers, thoughtful notes, kind and encouraging words, hugs and kisses, smiles, and hands that held mine. When words could not be found, many surrounded us with tears of sorrow and joy, hot meals, desserts, and cups of coffee. Others gave freely in the form of blankets, books, jewelry, monetary support and gift cards. Some donated to a worthy cause in Andrew's name. Still others purchased Gideon Bibles,

opened their homes to us or anonymously paid our hotel bill. Some gave us the means to repair our van. Others took me to the mall to take my mind off of things. Many of our supporters have had cancer themselves, some the same type as Andrew, or have a family member or friend who has struggled with cancer—your wisdom and words were and continue to be a blessing.

Before cancer was a part of his life, Andrew could be heard saying, “What doesn't kill you will make you stronger.” He is strong, physically, which is evident, but also strong in his faith in God and what He is doing in his life. Through your kindnesses and prayers I, too, have been strengthened through Christ. I love Isaiah 40: 29-31 and what these verses proclaim regarding strength: “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” This gives us encouragement and confirms the promise and assurance of our salvation. May we always build each other up, as we are bound in our faith in Jesus Christ. May we always remember each other in prayer in this way.

“Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Let the earth hear His voice; Praise the Lord, praise

the Lord, Let the people rejoice; Oh, come to the Father, through Jesus the Son, and give Him the Glory; great things he hath done!” (*To God Be the Glory*, by Fanny Crosby).

We praise the Lord! Recently, Andrew was pronounced cancer free. He has deferred the start of college and is living with us in Deshler, Neb., until he reports to the University of North Dakota on my birthday, Jan. 7, 2013.

Andrew could not wait to see what God would do in him through this struggle. One thing that is evident to me is the call that God has placed on each of your hearts to reach out to others. Never doubt the gestures extended in Christian love, no matter what they may be. The impact on a family who is in need or suffering is tremendous.

Thanks and praise to God for all that He has done and for what He will continue to do in your lives. I pray that you have been blessed, and that you will continue to be motivated in your walk. We thank you for faithfulness in your unceasing prayers. “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). Our God is an awesome, gracious, and merciful God. May you be blessed and continue to be a blessing.

Lautner and her family live in Deshler, Neb., where her husband, Pastor George Lautner, serves Abiding Word Lutheran.



The PREVAILING SPIRIT

BY EULA MAE SWENSON

In looking back over the past 30 years of our AFLC, I'm reminded of the importance of making a beginning.

The AFLC exists because individual God-fearing men and women filled the gap and rallied people to come apart and begin anew. Our hearts should be filled with gratitude to God for His faithfulness in calling and preserving our Association. We also need to remember individuals who had the courage and commitment to carry the torch of leadership for us. The Lord strengthened and guided as they obeyed. The rest of us followed with mixed joy and fear.

Today we can look back with thankful hearts. To God be the glory! We believe the AFLC was born and sustained as the Lord worked through individuals. Thus we can claim the promise of Philippians 1:6, "That he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion."

In recalling those first years of our fellowship, I think particularly of the spirit of its people:

There was joy. We were like toddlers taking those first steps. Each experience was new and wonderful.

There was commitment. Many joined at a great cost. For

some it meant separation from former church affiliations and even family.

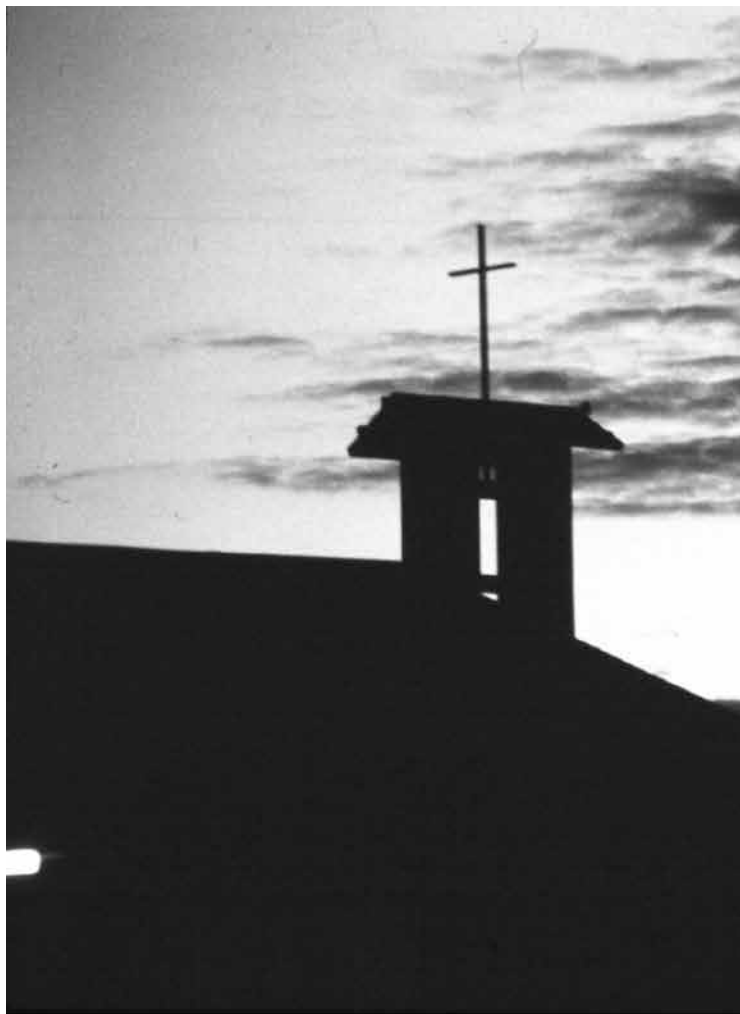
There was enthusiasm. Attendance often exceeded expectations as opportunities for fellowship were given. People were eager to share their faith through testimonies when opportunity was given.

There was a vision. Needs for a Bible school and seminary and missions were presented early in the AFLC's life. Where would the finances be found? Vision became reality in a relatively short time as people gave their talents and finances.

There was a sense of dependence on God. Aware of our insignificance in the eye of men there was also the conviction, "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31).

We can't go back to those days of our beginning. They are over. We can remember and unite in that same spirit of dedication that prevailed in those beginning days. May God so help us!

The late Swenson, Fargo, N.D., was a member of St. Paul's Free Lutheran. Reprinted from the Oct. 13, 1992 issue of The Lutheran Ambassador.





REFLECTIONS

EXCERPTS FROM OCTOBER 13, 1992

When it comes to the reason for taking the course we did I can only speak for myself. Two of the most important reasons for me were my belief in the sovereignty of the Christian congregation on earth and the infallibility of the Word as given to us in the Bible. For these and many other reasons I am thankful for the successful formation of the AFLC in Thief River Falls 30 years ago.

*Dale Quanbeck,
McVille, N.D.*

Another clear recollection of those days in Thief River Falls was the Sunday morning communion service and the message on forgiveness. Many of us were hurting, but now it was time to join together in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us."

*Ray and Olive Jacobson,
Wadena, Minn.*

Those were troubled times for which, in one sense, we are thankful. It was a time of soul-searching. Rather than radical and emotional rebellion against a merger ... God gave us a conservative boldness to speak and the strength to stand firm in His grace. ...

We prayed for revival of soul, cleansing of heart and clarity of mind to discern God's will. We are called to do so now in these days of our church.

*Vernon and Betty Nelson,
Grand Forks, N.D.*

In conclusion, with Samuel let us raise an Ebenezer and say, "Hitherto the Lord has helped us." Having done that, let us then advance for Christ, assured that there is a great work to do for Him and that we are privileged to have as large a part as we have the faith and will to assume.

*Pastor Raynard Huglen,
former editor of The Lutheran Ambassador.*



BY PASTOR ELDEN NELSON

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? ... As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things’” (Romans 10:14).

Throughout this year we have been celebrating the 50th anniversary for our Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. The 2012 Pastor’s Conference in January was the first time of corporate celebration as pastors from many AFLC churches gathered under the theme of “Jubilee,” remembering His faithfulness to us over the last 50 years. The 2012 Annual Conference was a special time, too, with more than 600 conference attendees looking back over our history of beginnings, happenings and experiences through which our Lord has led and blessed the people and ministries of the AFLC.

It was very fitting that the 2012 conference was held in Thief River Falls, Minn., the very place where concerned and interested people had gathered in 1962 to reaffirm their convictions and belief that the Word of God is indeed complete and preserved to us by the Holy

Spirit for our salvation and instruction, as stated in paragraph one under Doctrine in the AFLC Declaration of Faith. This Declaration of Faith was presented at the organizing conference and then later adopted. The Guiding Principles of the Lutheran Free Church were also adopted at the 1962 conference, which we refer to as the Fundamental Principles. They clearly state what we believe and how we function as congregations working together to proclaim the truth of the entire Word of God.

We continue our celebration of 50 years within our local congregations by giving special attention to the celebration of Reformation on Reformation Sunday, Oct. 28, and to a celebration of Thanksgiving on Nov. 25, the Sunday following Thanksgiving. Both of these occasions provide us with opportunities to celebrate God’s gifts to the church, as follows:

On Oct. 28, we celebrate the Reformation and are

reminded of the great blessing that has been given and preserved for us in God’s Holy Word. That Word is living, and within that Word we are blessed in finding life and salvation. It is life as found only in the person of Christ, which is bestowed freely upon all who seek and ask Him for forgiveness and life eternal. Our heritage is so rich and so alive today as the lost continue to be brought into the presence of the most Holy God.

Our second Sunday of celebration, Nov. 25, is a celebration of Thanksgiving. On this Sunday which follows Thanksgiving, we consider I John 4:19, “We love Him because He first loved us.” And from Romans 5:5 we are wonderfully reminded with these words, “Now hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” With this in mind we encourage all AFLC churches to receive an anniversary love offering, which will be used to help with a ministry of reaching out with the gospel to the workers in the western North Dakota oil fields. There is a mission field that is on our doorsteps in western North Dakota, and our response to His love for us is to make that same love known to people in this part of our country.

As we celebrate God’s work over the years past we are keenly aware of the awesome

task of carrying on our heritage in the days ahead. Times have changed so much in recent years. We are constantly faced with making adjustments to how people live and new technologies. We must not lose sight of the purpose and goal of the church as the Word has made it known to us. Every man, woman and child is not only in need of His saving grace, but are entitled to it, because He is their creator and He loves them, just as He loves us. Listen to these powerful words from Romans 10:14, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things.’” And so we forge ahead in His power and with His marvelous Word.

Thank you for your partnership. We share in such a task as we have been commissioned to do in His Name. May the blessings of these Reformation and Thanksgiving seasons be with you and yours as we seek and find Him through His Word.

Nelson, a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., is the president of the AFLC.

A new Reformation challenge

BY PASTOR WADE MOBLEY

Five hundred years ago the Reformation was hastened along by the invention of the printing press a half century before. The words of the reformers—which pointed to the newly-printed words of God made available to the masses—were important because they *meant* something: Words and reality walked hand-in-hand. Men were united in this regard, even though they were lost and confused theologically.

Today, men are just as lost and confused theologically, but they cannot agree even on something as fundamental as the relationship between words and reality. For this reason modern heirs of the Reformation face a communication challenge.

Most of what we teach to followers of Christ today is how to refute the error of modernists who teach that evidence and reason rule over Scripture. But the postmodern culture in which we live rejects not only Scripture (in which God speaks), but also evidence (observation of what God has made) and reason (which suggests a reasonable Creator).

We are left with errors of empty deceit (Colossians 2:8). For instance, words themselves are suspect as social constructs meant only to disguise attempts by a few to obtain and maintain power over the many. We also see that truth is not defined by any correspondence to reality (as in the biblical worldview), or any objective observation or reason that follows from it (as in the modernist worldview). Rather, truth itself is held in derision, with subjective “true for me” claims flowing from personal experience. The result is that ethics—what one ought or ought not do—is irrelevant, and the world is left with some variety of relative morality, finding good in what we do, or in what is of personal gain to me, or in what we have agreed to do as a culture.

This cultural divide—which represents thinking itself, not



just manners and customs—presents both challenges and opportunities for those seeking to introduce Reformation principles to their loved ones. This is especially applicable for anyone ministering to those most exposed to the faulty thinking of our age: Our young people.

For this reason, members of the AFLC Youth Board have been working with the Association Free Lutheran Bible School to hone our approach for youth worker training. In doing so, principles from this article have been incorporated, and as you read this a one-student pilot program will be 10 weeks old.

Likewise, great opportunities exist for wise Christian ambassadors. In conversations with post-modernists, be prepared to define and describe the

concepts you are using, assuming little prior knowledge. Use theological terms sparingly and precisely. If you are not sure what people mean when using a certain term, ask them to define what they are saying. There is a good chance that they are not sure, either. Also, use Scripture. If the listener is opposed to such, intersperse the verses without citation. The power is in the text, not the references.

No one—despite their pleadings to the contrary—lives by the desperate worldview described above. The crisis flowing from man’s attempt to “create a world and then live in it” (Francis Schaeffer) presents a great opportunity for the Christian. Remember that the truth is on your side. Your claim as a Christian is not the mere existence of truth, but personal knowledge of the One Who is “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6).

Mobley, who serves Living Word Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., writes on behalf of the AFLC Youth Board. For a more detailed treatment of this subject view the author’s blog at www.lwflc.org.



NOVEMBER 9 WATERS IN THE WILDERNESS

"There shall be a root out of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust" (Romans 15:12).

Have you read the last two chapters of Romans recently? It is quite true that we often look into the Book of Romans for much information, inspiration, and doctrine; but we seldom get so far as to read the last two chapters. In our text today Paul is praising God for grace. He had received grace to pass from darkness to the light of the glorious knowledge of Jesus Christ. He had received grace to be given a call to witness for Christ and to serve Him. He had been given grace to be called as a minister of Christ and to the Gentiles. By God's grace Paul had myriad brethren and friends in Christ in many lands, speaking various languages and belonging to many nations. For a list of some of those many friends in Rome we may turn to Romans chapter sixteen.

What has God's grace brought to you? Certainly it is offering you forgiveness, salvation, and a new life in Christ. Have you accepted this grace given to you? Take time today, as Paul did, to stop a bit and summarize all the things that God has brought into your life. Paul did this, and became the more joyful and victorious as he witnessed to the light of the Holy Spirit. We can be grateful for this root out of Jesse, given to Gentiles, for we were of these. In Him can the Gentiles trust today.

Pastor John H. Abel, now retired, was one of the first AFLC missionaries, and served many years in Brazil. He now resides with his wife, Ruby, in Hitterdal, Minn., and is a member of St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D.

Waters in the Wilderness is a daily devotional published by the AFLC Board of Parish Education in 1971 with Dr. Iver Olson, editor. All 365 meditations were contributed by AFLC members from many walks of life. "Here, they offer each a glass of cool and refreshing water each day to thirsting souls," wrote Olson in the preface. Reprinted by permission. The volume is out of print.

Pressing forward in Christ

BY BARBARA STRAND



"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

I recently returned from my first national Women's Missionary Federation board meeting in Minneapolis at our AFLC headquarters, having been elected as the correspondence secretary for the national WMF board. I must admit that being the newest and greenest member of the board resulted in many questions, maybe some deer-in-the-headlights moments, and many "ah ha" moments. I was blessed immensely. As a board we talked about the annual conference and how "thus far the Lord has helped us" (1 Samuel 7:12). We are now looking forward to the coming year, knowing the Lord is indeed faithful. "His faithfulness continues throughout all generations" (Psalm 119:90).

One of the privileges of our time together was the opportunity to meet with AFLC President Pastor Elden Nelson and with the directors of the various aspects of the work within the AFLC: World Missions, Home Missions, Development, Parish Education, the Association Free Lutheran Bible School and Theological Seminary. Each director shared their passion for the ministry for which they work. They all emphasized their appreciation of the women of the WMF, and expressed thanks for the support of the

local, district and national WMF. Each director had the opportunity to update us on their project needs and prayer concerns. One of the things that really impacted me was the passion each of them has for reaching the lost for the Lord, and the ministry they direct. That is a good thing! It got me thinking, what is my passion in the work for the Lord? What is your passion?

As a national WMF, our membership supports the various aspects of the AFLC ministries throughout the year. We partner with these ministries of the AFLC, both prayerfully and financially. What an honor and awesome responsibility. As we partner in this way, it is important that we first examine our own hearts and remember what the Lord has done for each of us. I want to encourage you to be thankful and allow God to use you to spread the gospel. Allow God to work in your heart and find your passion. Then, be faithful in your response to His calling.

Find confidence in what the Lord has promised in His Word from Philippians 1:6, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." Find your passion and hold fast to the Word; let the Lord use you in the work of the kingdom.

Strand, a member of Bethany Free Lutheran, Abercrombie, N.D., is the newly elected correspondence secretary for the WMF.

Pastor Connely Dyrud

Members of the World Missions Committee have approved a status change for Pastor Connely Dyrud. Dyrud has been living in the U.S. serving as a missionary at large while leading the Ministry Training Institute program at AFLBS. Dyrud will now be considered a missionary emeritus.

As a missionary emeritus Dyrud will volunteer his time and talents for AFLC World Missions by speaking at missions events and WMF rallies. The World Missions Department has asked that congregations and individuals continue to give to his personal support. Even though this is a volunteer position, we will continue to provide ministry expenses from his personal support. We thank God for the services of Pastor Dyrud over the last 42 years.

Pastor Todd and Barb Schierkolk

After considerable prayer, study and deliberation, members of the World Missions Committee have given Pastor Todd and Barb Schierkolk approval to return to Mexico in January. This decision was made following a recommendation from the World Missions Crisis Management Board.

AFLC World Missions and the Schierkolks understand that there is still a considerable amount of violence created by drug cartels in Mexico. With that in mind, it seems that missionaries are not being targeted. Everyone in the Schierkolks immediate family agrees that God is still calling them to work in Mexico and are comfort-

able with their return in January. Please keep the Schierkolks in your prayers as they return to Mexico.

Short Term Missionary Assistants

AFLC World Missions has a program that allows mission volunteers can go to the field with the blessings of the World Missions Department. The World Missions Committee has approved three new short term assistants.

Matthew Abel

Matthew Abel has been approved to work on our mission field in Brazil. He is the son of Pastor Paul and Becky Abel, AFLC missionaries in Brazil. Matthew's long-term goal is to follow God's leading in full-time ministry, most likely missions.

Jacob O'Flanagan

Jacob O'Flanagan is a graduate of our Ministry Training Institute in cross cultural ministry. O'Flanagan has sensed God calling him to build up the congregations of Brazil in any way that he can. This will be his third time in Brazil, having served as a short-term assistant several years ago. He desires to study and learn Portuguese better in a classroom setting next year.

Brent and Emily Raan

Brent Raan is in his second year at AFLTS. Along with his wife, Emily, the Raans are AFLC missionary candidates. They traveled to India in the summer of 2012 and sense God calling them to India. They plan to serve as short-term assistants in India during the summer of 2013.

Pastor Bill Mitchell was ordained Sept. 16, with Pastor Elden Nelson officiating. Mitchell is pastor of care ministries at Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.

Pastor Todd Erickson was installed Sept. 23 at the Roseau Parish of Rose and Spruce Lutheran, Roseau, Minn., with Pastor Elden Nelson officiating.

Pastor Gary Skramstad has accepted a call to serve Badger Creek and Oiland Lutheran churches, Badger, Minn.

Pastor David Nelson was installed Oct. 28 at Trinity Lutheran Church, Brookings, Ore.

Licensed Pastor Don Edlund will be installed Nov. 11 at Dovre and Union Lake Lutheran churches, Winger, Minn.

Pastor Lester A. Dahlen, 95, died Sept. 25. A son of the Faith (Rosedale) congregation in south Minneapolis, he was a graduate of Augsburg College and Seminary, and pastored the Pukwana, S.D., parish (Pukwana and St. Olaf) before service as an army chaplain, missionary to Taiwan and Hong Kong, and the last world mission director for the Lutheran Free Church. Blessed be his memory.

AFLC congregations celebrate milestone anniversaries

Several AFLC congregations are marking anniversary milestones this fall. They include:

Calvary Free Lutheran, Arlington, S.D., celebrated 25 years on Aug. 19.

Valley Free Lutheran, Portland, N.D., celebrated 50 years on Sept. 12.

Faith Lutheran, El Campo, Texas, celebrated 25 years on Sept. 30.

Faith Lutheran, Fairbury, Neb., celebrated 25 years on Sept. 30.

Westaker Free Lutheran, Newfolden, Minn., celebrated the congregation's 125th anniversary on Sept. 30.

Grace Free Lutheran, Edinburg, N.D., celebrated 25 years on Oct. 21.

Abiding Word Lutheran, Deshler, Neb., celebrated 25 years on Oct. 28.

Trinity Lutheran, Brookings, Ore., celebrated 50 years on Oct. 28.

Updates from AFLC Home Missions

Alaska gift registry

Our Alaska missionaries have limited access to stores, and their remote location often brings up needs for unique items. Many of you have been gracious in calling the Home Missions office to inquire about sending care packages to our Alaska missionaries. Just like using an online baby or wedding shower registry, we have set up an online Alaska Hospitality Registry on MyRegistry.com. This allows us to keep an up-to-date list of needs and avoid unnecessary duplication. A link to this registry with directions is on our Home Mission website under the Alaska tab. Thank you for your gifts and generosity!

Come Join Us

Come Join Us presentations share the vision for our AFLC Home Mission church planting ministry. Come Join Us includes personal testimonies by Home Mission ambassadors, visual presentations, online resources, and specific opportunities for every age to get involved. Informing and equipping congregations on the work of Home Missions is crucial for the future of this ministry. Please contact our office about hosting a Come Join Us presentation in your worship service or Sunday school and we'd be delighted to share what God is doing. Visit our Web site and sign up for our weekly Knee Mail. Most of all, we covet your prayers for this conservative Lutheran church planting movement.

A light for the darkest soul

BY PASTOR NATE JORE

"The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (Isaiah 9:2).

I heard a testimony recently at Fox River Lutheran, Norway, Ill., that was very powerful. Anne Campbell had grown up in a dysfunctional home and had been abused by her older sister. She began to believe such thoughts as, "Anne is not wanted." "Anne is not valuable." "Anne has no protection." "Anne should die." Later in life, Anne sank into a deep depression with these same thoughts of her own unworthiness still plaguing her.

Through godly counseling and God's healing, Anne has made a complete recovery. The lies she had believed were replaced by the truth of God's Word confirming her worth as a child of God. Anne forgave her sister one afternoon as she sat in church and wrote out a letter to her recalling the pain her sister had caused and declaring her forgiveness.

Sometimes the darkness that people are living in is a deep darkness of the soul. Jesus came to give us life. The light has dawned.

Africa has been called by some "the Dark Continent" and, in terms of spiritual darkness, the name is appropriate. The disregard for human life brought on by the slave trade made Africa a place where people lived "in the land of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4). Darkness is epitomized in witchcraft as people live in fear of the retribution of the demons. Africa historically has been full of dictators and violent rebel leaders who take advantage of the poor and weak for their own profit.

As bearers of Christ's Great Commission, we have the great privilege of announcing to those living in darkness and in the land of the shadow of death that the light has dawned. Is there any greater news? Light. Hope. Peace. Joy. When all around is darkness and despair, there is nothing greater than light.

Jesus taught that the truth will set you free (John 8:32). The Devil is out to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10), and he loves to take advantage of pain to plant lies in people's hearts as he did



Bosco, once captured by Joseph Kony's LRA, now lives in God's light in Uganda.

with Anne. The truth dispels the lies. You are loved. You are valuable. You are protected. You are worthy. Jesus Christ gave His life for you to shield you by the power of God (1 Peter 3:5).

In our work in Uganda we have met many believers who have had deep wounds from the past. Bosco was abducted by rebel leader Joseph Kony's LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) and spent three months with them before escaping. He witnessed grave atrocities during that time, memories which he prefers not to speak about. Godfrey witnessed murder firsthand as a member of a ring of thieves during his childhood and teen years. "Betty" was raped by her cousin and consequently gave birth to her first child at the age of 14. Sarah was sold to a soldier for sex at the age of 16. She is now a mother and has AIDS.

The darkness of soul that results from such experiences is immense. Praise be to our God that light shines in the darkness! We serve the healer of the broken-hearted (Psalm 147:3).

Jore and his family serve as AFLC missionaries in Jinja, Uganda.



AFLC Schools host Revival Conference

A campus-wide Revival Conference was held Sept. 23-26 at the Association Free Lutheran Schools, Plymouth, Minn. The featured speaker for the event was Pastor Don Richman (pictured at right), who founded East European Missions Network. Also featured was Daniel Scot (top) from Voice of the Martyrs. Scot, originally from Pakistan, spoke to the campus about the Muslim faith. Students met for special chapel services and prayer (center picture by Abbie Carlson).



AFLC memorials: September

AFLBS

LaVon Mickelsen (2)
Ragnild Herset
Pastor Laurel Udden
Doris Nesland (2)
Skip Milton
Ruth Claus

AFLTS

Skip Milton
David Brenner
Doris Nesland
Lloyd Bendt
Carroll Stahl
Merle and Goldee Gray
Arnold and Alice Rokke

All departments

Doris Nesland

Evangelism

Arthur Arneson

FLAPS

LaVon Mickelsen

General Fund

Duane Kinnoin
Pastor Laurel Udden
Cliff Johnson

Home Missions

Arthur Arneson
Dale Monnier
Clifford Kling

World Missions

Arthur Arneson
Gary Ulland
Dr. Ernest Thorsgard
LaVon Mickelsen
Olivia Ness

Youth Ministries

Arthur Arneson

... in honor of

Miriam Infant Home

Pastor Connely Dyrud



Eight AFLBS gospel teams were chosen to serve AFLC churches and local ministries. Pictured above is the nursing home team. To have a gospel team visit your church, look for the link on the AFLBS Web page.

Silent prayer retreat at the ARC

The Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis., will host a silent prayer retreat Nov. 30 through Dec. 1. The cost is \$65/person, with the option to stay through Dec. 2 for an additional fee. For more information on this retreat, contact the ARC by e-mail at arcregistration@centurytel.net.

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/s/ Ruth Gunderson, Managing Editor

The world of 1962 and the AFLC

One of the things that this writer finds fascinating when he is invited to speak at a church anniversary is to research the year when the congregation was established, picturing the background of national and world events. Fifty years ago, when the organizational conference of the AFLC was held, does not seem like such a long time for many of our readers, including your editor. But a look back to 1962 may contain some surprises for all of us.

The president of the United States was John F. Kennedy, and his vice-president,



Pastor Robert Lee

Lyndon Johnson, would succeed him the next year after the assassination. (Most of us who were old enough to remember Nov. 22, 1963, will be able to recall exactly where we were when

the news was heard.) The international news focused on the Vietnam War and the so-called "Cold War," and concerns about international communism were reflected in "A Statement on the Historical Situation," an AFLC foundation document. The month of October, when we met in Thief River Falls, Minn., was highlighted by the Cuban Missile Crisis, which many felt could lead to international war.

Our own country was experiencing the pain of the civil rights struggle, and the first black student at the University of Mississippi had to be escorted to classes in October by federal marshals. The Columbus Day Storm struck the Pacific Northwest with wind gusts up to 170 mph, leaving 46 people dead, and millions of dollars in damages, including billions of board feet of timber blown down.

We may not recall that the largest

Lutheran church body in America at the time was also organized in the same year as the AFLC, when the United Lutheran Church in America, the Augustana Synod, the Suomi Synod, and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church merged to form the Lutheran Church in America (LCA).

The list of events continues: The World's Fair opened in Seattle, Wash.; the Supreme Court ruled that mandatory prayers in public schools were unconstitutional; the first Wal-Mart store and the first Target store were opened; the U.S. Navy SEALs were activated; Johnny Carson took over as host of NBC's *The Tonight Show*; and Wilt Chamberlain scored 100 points in a single NBA game. Finally, Richard M. Nixon lost the race for governor of California, and announced to the press the less-than-prophetic words that "you won't have Dick Nixon to kick around anymore."

Were all these things really going on at the same time that our association was born? The older ones among us often exclaim, "Where has the time gone?" It is almost mind-boggling for this writer to ponder even this small sampling of national and world events and to relate them to what we were experiencing in 1962.

What were we experiencing that led us to Thief River Falls 50 years ago? It would be good for all of us to re-read "A Statement on the Historical Situation," which was mentioned above, and to consider once more the concerns that led our pioneers to lay the foundation for a new beginning of the Free Lutheran movement in America. We believed that biblical church polity was congregationally cen-

tered and that was threatened by a growing centralization in the merged church. Our heritage in Lutheran pietism with its evangelistic emphasis was challenged by a sacramentalist spirit and by what seemed to be a de-emphasis on Christian living. Our desire to instill new generations with a confidence in the Bible as God's Word

*If we merely look back,
it will indeed be difficult
for us to see beyond our
own fruitless efforts,
wasted hours and regrets.*

was in danger of being undermined by new approaches to Scripture in our church schools. So we were constrained to stand and to "press on" (as our conference theme from Philippians 3 declared).

The words of the hymn "I Look Not Back" (Ambassador Hymnal, #400) are most fitting. If we merely look back, it will indeed be difficult for us to see beyond our own fruitless efforts, wasted hours and regrets. The look around us can also be discouraging, as the tumults of this dark world do not provide any comfort; the look within can even be more fearful, for there is nothing to be found on which to ground our trust.

AFLC friends, do we dare to look forward to the next 50 years? To multiplied challenges and changes? Only if we first look up "into the face of Jesus, for there my heart can rest, my fears are stilled: and there is joy, and love, and light for darkness, and perfect peace, and every hope fulfilled."

building the base

A spiritual awakening

BY PASTOR JOHN STRAND

Most congregations have recently entered a very busy fall and winter program. As we launch out, we ask ourselves, "What do we want to accomplish with our church this year?" Unless we have a goal, the work will not produce the results it should.

The question should not be, however, "What do we want to accomplish?" but rather, "What do we need in and through the church?" Sometimes our wants aren't very sanctified. God knows our needs, and we should seek the "higher good." Each congregation should examine itself to see what is really needed.

What is true for a congregation is also true for our Association. There are many things we want. It would not take long to make a long list of wants—and undoubtedly many of these wants are very wonderful. But we must be more concerned with what our Lord knows we need. Only as we make our goal what God knows we need will the greater blessing come our way.

There is one basic need in our Association, our congregations, and in our individual lives. This need is a spiritual awakening. ...

A spiritual awakening will result in several wonderful blessings. I shall mention just a few.

A spiritual awakening will produce holier living on the part of the children of God. An awakening must begin among Christians. ... Many Christians are so much of the world that no one can tell if they are Christians or not. God would have each of His children be a real witness for His Lord. The most effective witness is a consecrated life. I Thessalonians 4:3 says, "For this is the will of God,

even your sanctification." An awakening always results in a deeper awareness of personal sin, a sincere repentance and a greater commitment to God.

During a spiritual awakening sinners are converted. ... There ought to be a great burden on our hearts for the unsaved. II Corinthians 6:2 says, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." ...

During an awakening, eyes are opened to the task before the church. "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? I tell you, lift up your eye and see how the fields are already white for harvest" (John 4:35). The Apostle Paul had an unceasing anguish in his heart as he thought of the fields, the task to do. Many are blind today. They see only very little of the tasks and opportunities. They need to be awakened.

An awakening results in better stewardship. Paul appealed to the Romans to present their bodies as a living sacrifice. Awakened people do that. They give of themselves, their time, their talents, and their treasures. And as they live giving lives, the fields white for harvest are entered in upon.

Are we prepared for an awakening? I don't know. Perhaps we would be genuinely frightened if one came. Regardless, this is what we need. Will you, too, pray this prayer, "Dear Lord, begin with me."

Strand, now deceased, was the first president of the AFLC. This column is excerpted from the Sept. 24, 1963, issue of The Lutheran Ambassador.