

THE LUTHERAN 

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AMBASSADOR



THANKFUL
FOR LIFE

Our God of promises

BY ANDREW KNEELAND

It's comforting to know that someone is taking care of you. I recently saw a picture of a little boy being carried by his dad in a swimming pool. The son, not more than 2 or 3 years old, was terrified and had his arms tightly wrapped around his father's neck. As the dad went deeper and deeper in the water, the son's death-clench got tighter and tighter.

The son had every right to be nervous. He wouldn't have been able to touch even in the shallowest part of the pool. But if he could analyze the situation, the son would see that his father could easily touch the bottom and was very much in control.

That reassuring message is something God promised the Israelites thousands of years ago. And He promises the same to us today, too.

The Israelites had been in slavery in Egypt for hundreds of years, and I'm sure despair and hopelessness weren't uncommon. But God had a four-fold promise for them, which we can read about in Exodus 6: God promised to save them from their bondage, He would take them and protect them, He would reassure them of His steadfast love, and He would deliver them to the Promised Land.

God knew what His people had gone through for those hundreds of years. He watched every whipping; He witnessed each abuse. When it seemed like God was far off or distant and uninvolved, He wasn't. He still loved them and was about to rescue



them. And He was very much in control, which was an especially important promise for Moses to hear.

Moses wasn't the best public speaker, and I'm sure he didn't fare too well in front of one of the most powerful kings in the world. But God assured Moses that his success wasn't dependent on his fluency of tongue or sense of confidence; God would provide the strength, deliverance, and salvation.

So, God delivered to the Israelites these four messages: that He would save them from captivity, that He would protect them, that He would assure them of His love, and that He would safely deliver them to the Promised Land.

God gave the Israelites that message those thousands of years ago, and He wants to give it to you today. God was in control back then, and He's in control now, too. And He loves you just as He loved the Israelites.

It's easy for us to relate to the son who had his arms wrapped tightly around his dad's neck in the pool. When bad things happen to us, it can seem like the water is about to go over our heads. But it's important to remember that we've never been in control. We've always been held up by the loving, merciful arms of our Father, and our Father promises to protect us.

And there's no place in the pool too deep for our Father.

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The Law saith, Where is thy righteousness, goodness, and satisfaction?

The Gospel saith, Christ is thy righteousness, goodness, and satisfaction.

—Patrick Hamilton

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith ... Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.

—Martin Luther

Centuries ago, Johann Gerhard, a Lutheran pastor and theologian, wrote that every word of the Bible is to be read as if it were printed with ink that is the very blood of Jesus. God caused every single word of the Scriptures to be written with this objective in mind: to show us His Son, our Savior. By showing us Jesus, God brings us to faith in Him, and with faith comes life.

—Daniel Preus

The story of Christian reformation, revival, and renaissance underscores that the darkest hour is often just before the dawn, so we should always be people of hope and prayer, not gloom and defeatism. God the Holy Spirit can turn the situation around in five minutes.

—Os Guinness



The Father *Creator*

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

By Tim Herset

A paintbrush quietly whispers while crossing a blank canvas. Each stroke by the wrinkled hand tells a piece of an untold story. The scene comes to life in the faint glow of the evening light.

Swooshing and scraping, the ballpoint pen fills in lines on the yellowed pages of inherited stationary. A grandchild testing the theory that "a picture is worth a thousand words." His poem puts words to the silent song in his heart while staring at the painting hanging on the wall.

Fingerprints left on faded ivory. The piano that sat silent for so many years has come to life. A melody made by a mother. Her son's poem turned into a song.

Behind the sounds of slipping wrenches, crunching knuckles, and frustrated friends a stereo gives the garage a soundtrack on a warm September evening. That old poem inspired by Grandpa's painting and put to song by Mom has become a regular on the local radio station. Now an English teacher in his mid-40s, the boy who wrote the poem has grown round but not tall. Under the hood of his grandpa's '53 Ford, he looks to his slender mechanic friend and breaks the silence:

"My grandpa drove this old pickup to the edge of town to watch the sunset one night before my mom was even born."

"Your grandpa probably did ... so what?"

"Well, that night, grandpa painted a picture. He always said watching sunsets and painting pictures helped him understand God."

"Okay ..." the mechanic responds with patience wearing thin.

"During summers spent working at Grandpa's farm, I would stare at that painting every morning while sipping my coffee and eating scrambled eggs," the stout poet continues.

"This is getting random."

"Thursday after Grandpa died, we were going through that old house and I stopped to look at the painting again. In my hand were a pen and a pad of paper from

Grandma. I scribbled down a little poem, smiled to myself, and set it on the piano in the next room. Little did I know, my mom sat down at the piano the next day and wrote this song that's playing on the radio right now."

"Really?"

"Yeah! I understand now what my grandpa was talking about when he said watching sunsets and painting pictures helped him understand God."

The tall mechanic responds, "What? Now I'm even more confused."

"You remember what we said every week at church and memorized in confirmation?"

"Yeah, they called it the Creed."

"How did it start?"

"Uh ... I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven Maker of earth."

"Do you agree that if you truly believe something it will change the way you act?" the short man asks, looking up at his best friend and favorite mechanic.

"I do. And I believe we should keep working on your grandpa's old pickup. This thing has potential," the mechanic responds.

"Do you remember what the Bible says about how God created humanity?"

"Out of dust? With some of His breath?"

"Yes, but that's not the part I'm getting at. Remember anything else?"

"Hmm. Well, God made man and woman in his own image."

"Exactly! Grandpa looked at what God created and took the opportunity himself to create—to paint a picture of a sunset. He believed that God was the 'Maker of heaven and Maker of earth,' and that changed how he lived. I didn't realize it, but it also changed the way I live, and my mom, and now us!"

"Okay, you're gettin' a little weird now."

"Stick with me. Here we are, restoring my grandpa's old truck. You were the one who saw potential in this thing—I thought it was junk taking up precious space that could be a garden. We are putting time and energy into making this thing new."

The mechanic looks down toward his friend and says, "If you keep rambling like this it's going to take a lot more time and energy ..."

"Hang on. You agree that the image of God is hard to see in me, right?"

"Yup, especially when you stop working and keep waxing philosophical like this."

"God is all about making us new."

He wants to restore His image in us.

Remember, He is the Creator. He's all about taking His broken creation and making it new. My grandpa was unlike any other man. He made eye contact, shook your hand, pulled you in for a hug, and never forgot your name. He was never too busy to love someone in a tangible way. He saw the potential in people rather than all their problems. He was not perfect. But my grandpa was like a pile of clay on a potter's wheel; he was soft enough to let the Creator make something beautiful."

The short school teacher and towering mechanic seem to be closer than ever before.

"Maybe that's why I'm a mechanic. Remember when my parents got divorced? Your grandpa spent time with me. We figured out how to make my rusty old bicycle ride like it was brand new. Then I got a driver's license and we got his old farm truck working so I could have my own wheels. He acted on what he believed. He lived that Creed!"

"That Creed was more than words to him. It made him who he was. He studied the Scriptures. He prayed constantly. His eyes were guided by the Spirit. He let His Maker make him new. He noticed beauty. He painted pictures. He knew God."

With a smirk and a look that said more than words could say, the two friends went back under the hood and turned wrenches as the light of the setting sun filled Grandpa's old garage.

Herset is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont.



The Son *Redeemer*

"And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilot, Was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, And is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead."

By Pastor Joel Walde

As I reflect on the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed, I am reminded of my first year in seminary; I started in the fall of 1984. Professor Paul Sonnack taught the class on "Early Christian/Church Tradition." As I recall, we had three hours of lecture and one hour of preceptorial study per week. The preceptorial hour to review and discuss the assigned reading was student led. A reoccurring experience burned deeply in my mind. Week after week, you could set your watch by it. The leading pair of students inevitably tried to dazzle the class with their great wisdom gleaned from the readings. As we watched, Dr. Sonnack got redder and redder in the face. Five minutes before the class ended he would exclaim in a loud voice: "What really is at stake? Is it the Incarnate Son of God or not?" The first few weeks this happened, I thought our aging professor was losing it. But as time went on, I looked forward to that last five minutes when we were again and again grounded in what really mattered.

How does one write about such a tremendous subject as Jesus Christ? It is beyond anyone's ability to try to cover in a short article. One could easily write an entire dissertation on the subject of Jesus Christ covering such topics as: "Without Beginning Or End"; "His Characteristics"; "The Offices of Prophet, Priest, and King"; "The Person and the Work"; "The Humiliation and Exaltation"; and "The Incarnation" etc., and still not cover the wonder and awe of this Person of the Trinity. So let us ask the question, what really is at stake? What is of most importance for us as Christians—those anointed ones who bear the name of Christ?

First, a simple observation: when looking at the three articles of the Apostles' Creed, it is quickly noted that the Second Article is the longest. That is not because God the Son (Jesus Christ) is more impor-

tant than God the Father or God the Holy Spirit. Each is equally God, but yet distinct from each other. I would suggest that the Second Article is the longest because Jesus Christ is our key to unlock the door to the Bible's true treasure. The writer of Hebrews states:

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power" (1:1-3a).

This is an eloquent way of saying that Jesus Christ is God's way of making the invisible God visible. Look to the conversation of Philip and Jesus (John 14:8-11). Jesus is quite simply stating that He makes God visible through His very person, words, and works. John 1:18 states: "... he [Jesus] has made him [God] known."

What really is at stake? How is God and God's will for us made known? Martin Luther writes: "The first article, of God the Father, explains creation; the second, of the Son, redemption; and the third, of the Holy Spirit, sanctification."¹ Luther goes on to write:

"Here [The Second Article] ... we see what we receive from God ... that is, how He has completely given Himself to us, withholding nothing. ... we shall take up one phrase which contains the substance of the article; from it we shall learn how we are redeemed. We shall concentrate on these words, 'in Jesus Christ, our Lord.'"

"If you are asked, 'What do you believe in the Second Article, concerning Jesus Christ?' answer briefly, 'I believe that Jesus Christ, true Son of God, has become my Lord.' What is it to 'become a Lord'? It means that he has redeemed me from sin, from the devil, from death, and from all

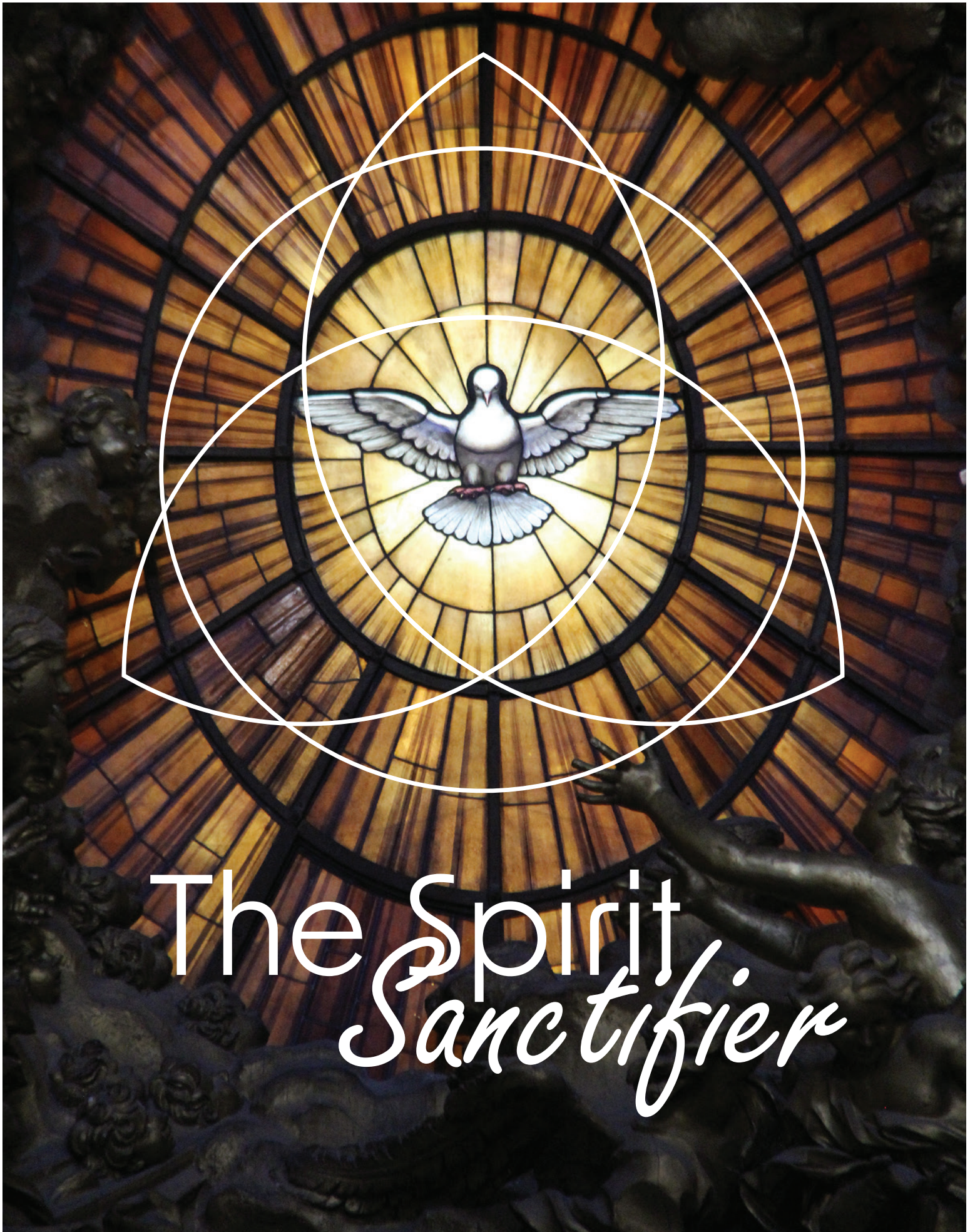
evil. Before this I had no Lord and King but was captive under the power of the devil. I was condemned to death and entangled in sin and blindness. ... We lay under God's wrath and displeasure, doomed to eternal damnation, as for we had deserved. There was no counsel, no help, no comfort for us until this only and eternal Son of God, in his unfathomable goodness, had mercy on our misery and wretchedness and came from heaven to help us. ... He has snatched us, poor lost creatures, from the jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and restored us to the Father's favor and grace. ... 'Lord' simply means the same as Redeemer, that is, he who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and now keeps us safe there. The remaining parts of this article simply serve to clarify and express how and by what means this redemption was accomplished—that is, how much it cost Christ and what he paid and risked in order to win us and bring us under his dominion."²

What really is at stake? "In him we have redemption through his blood" (Ephesians 1:7). With great joy and praise to God, let us boldly proclaim the words of Luther's explanation of the Second Article: At great cost "Jesus Christ has redeemed me" (bought me back/repurchased me/set me free—from the state of slavery to sin) "a lost and condemned creature ... with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. This is most certainly true."

Walde serves Our Savior's Lutheran, Dillon, Mont.

¹ Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 411.

² Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 413-414.



"I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church, The Communion of Saints;
The Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body; And the Life everlasting. Amen."

By Steph Nelson

What happens to you when you die and how you live until then are two of the most fundamental and practical questions each of us must face. Yet, one of the critical factors in the quest to answer both of these questions is someone we rarely discuss: the Holy Spirit. As we studied the third person of the Trinity in a Bible Doctrine class at AFLBS, we learned that the fact that He doesn't get much attention is actually both intentional and biblical.

The Holy Spirit is often referred to as "the shy person of the Trinity," because everything He does points not to Himself but to Jesus (John 15:26). As He performs this work of pointing us to Christ, one of the most fascinating things about the Holy Spirit is the way He uses a unique and personal approach to guide and direct each one of us toward Jesus and the life-giving hope of the gospel.

In our society we have a tendency to put labels on people, summing up the critical aspects of their nature and character with one simple word: good, bad, kind, rude, insecure, arrogant, brilliant, careless, etc. This helps us quickly sort and characterize people, but it ignores the complexity of the spectrum these labels fall on, the way they are interconnected, and the unique experiences we each have that give context to why we do what we do. While this clouded human perspective keeps us from understanding the whole picture, it does not limit the Holy Spirit. The mysterious way He works—both in calling people to salvation and in sanctifying them in the truth—is uniquely tailored to each individual's needs according to the Father's perfect plan.

The Invitation to Believe

Consider the moment you first came to know Jesus. I suspect that for many of us it was when we were just a few weeks old and our parents brought us to the Lord in baptism, at which point our souls were

redeemed and we were immediately indwelt by the Holy Spirit. While it is certainly true that this is not the only way God chooses to save His people, it is a vivid picture of the truth that is prevalent through Scripture and clearly summarized in Martin Luther's explanation of the third article of the Apostle's Creed:

"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith ..."

The Holy Spirit makes the living, life-changing, and historical Christ a personally experienced reality for us. Jesus has redeemed us from sin, the wrath of God, death, and the devil, and He has earned for us righteousness, forgiveness of sins, peace, and eternal life. The individual receives Christ's redemption through faith, and this faith comes as a gift (Ephesians 2:8-9) through the work of the Holy Spirit who calls us, illumines us, works repentance in us, converts us, regenerates us, and sanctifies us. It is through the means of grace—the Word and the sacraments—that the Holy Spirit performs these works of conviction, conversion, and sanctification.

The Call to Change

The Holy Spirit's gracious work of sanctification is bit of a mysterious one where He day by day renews us after the image of God. As He does this we take on the purpose of glorifying God and fulfilling God's plan while He empowers us to evangelize the world and edify the Church. Through the process of sanctification the Holy Spirit reveals to us the things in our lives that have a tendency to enslave us. He patiently does this with the loving heart of a Father, gently but firmly teaching His children right from wrong so that we can experience the joy and freedom for which we have been created.

This may seem like a simple description, but the process of sanctification is just

as complex as the incomprehensible God who established it. He has created each of us with our own unique strengths, weaknesses, gifts, and shortcomings; therefore, no two journeys of sanctification will look the same. The temptations that fight for the throne of my heart may be different than those that fight for yours, and the sin that distracts you today may be different than that which you battle tomorrow. However, through it all, the Holy Spirit is lovingly revealing these things to us by convicting us of sin, empowering us to put to death the deeds of the body, drawing us closer to Jesus, and providing hope through the message of the gospel.

Imagine for a second that your best friend just came up to you and said that he recently had an encounter with an all-powerful, good, and gracious being, the creator of the entire universe, who was now living in him and influencing his thoughts, words, and actions. Would you expect your friend to be the same as he always was? Of course not! It would be impossible for him to encounter something that powerful and walk away unchanged.

The same is true for believers. Do you believe that your body really is a temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19) and that the Creator of heaven and earth dwells within you? Do you trust that He really loves you and has your best interests in mind through the difficult and often painful sanctification process? I encourage you today to take some time to invite the Holy Spirit to continue His work in you, reminding you of what Jesus has done for you and opening your eyes to how you can better reflect Him. He always keeps His promises, and we can rest assured that "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). What a marvelous promise to cling to!

Nelson, who lives in San Antonio, Texas, is a former Home Missions parish worker.

BY RYAN JONES

I am very privileged to share with you the miracle that God has done in my life. I normally am fearful when it comes to sharing my testimony, but God has given me a wonderful story. I didn't grow up in a Christian home or anything like that. I barely knew anything about the Bible and honestly I didn't even believe most of it. I never planned on becoming a Christian. However, I am very fortunate that the Lord had different plans for my life, and here is how it all started.

When I was about 14 years old, I was walking through a store with my mom and felt a strange connection to a book called *23 Minutes In Hell*. It's Bill Wiese's recounting of a vision of hell. I was curious more than anything, but for some reason I really wanted that book. So I asked my mom to buy it for me. I can't remember why, but we never ended up buying it. Fortunately for me, God heard me and answered that request. About five years later I heard that man's testimony and it changed my life forever.

Let me backtrack a little bit. I grew up living for sprint car racing. There were primarily three things I thought about constantly: girls, money, and racing. I looked for sponsors for my race team because I knew money would get me to the racetrack, and I would meet plenty of girls there. So all three of my carnal heart's desires would be fulfilled with money. I kept thinking, "If I could just get some more money, maybe then I could be satisfied." The Bible says, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money" (Ecclesiastes 5:10). That's how I felt; I was never satisfied.

I had life all planned out. I thought I was going to make it to NASCAR, have more money, fame, and success than anyone could ever dream of. I am very grateful that God had a different plan for me because I was probably going to end up miserable.

Since my priorities were wrong, I wasn't a good person. I always believed in God but I was an idolater. I knew nothing about Him. I only prayed when I needed something, and I was only praying for things that would make me more sinful.

Before every race, I prayed for four things: that I wouldn't wreck my car, that I would do well, that I would be safe, and finally, I would ask for forgiveness of my sins because I didn't want to go to hell if I crashed and died.

I was missing the most important part—I didn't know Jesus Christ. Holding my life up to the light of the Bible, I was disgusting. I broke every law of God, and because of that, I deserved the opposite of salvation. I was a liar, a fornicator, a thief, an adulterer, and by the standard of God's law, a murderer as well. But that's where the truth of God's grace really hit me—He was merciful when I definitely didn't deserve it.

That's who I was until one day when I came home early from work. While searching the Internet, I remembered the book that had intrigued me. I found a video of Wiese's testimony. He began to explain his experience and I was terrified. I said the sinner's prayer at the end of it, but I never saw a change in my life.

At this point I began to research more about the cross and

what actually happened there. In a nutshell the conclusion I came to was that Jesus took the punishment for my sin, and He gave me His righteousness (II Corinthians 5:21). To receive His righteousness, I had to trust in Him and repent, otherwise I was going to go to hell.

I put my faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But I felt helpless. I began to ask God to give me the power to turn away from sin. I remember that I woke up one morning with the phrase "born again" echoing through my mind. Somehow I knew it was Jesus who was telling me this. I didn't know what it meant to be born again at the time but I knew that the Holy Spirit of God was dwelling inside me and my life would never be the same again.

I instantly became full of zeal and indescribable joy at the realization that I had been set free from the bondage of sin. Instead of a fear of hell, I began to love God and desired fellowship with Him. I began to read the Bible and pray for things I have never prayed about before. I sang constantly, and I also at times began to fast.

Contrary to my previous passions, I quit chasing girls. I was about ready to sell out of my race team because I didn't know if that was God's will for me. I began to have a hatred for money versus a love for money. All I could think about was Jesus, and I had a sincere desire for Him to be honored and glorified. I looked around at this world that I had previously worked so hard to be a part of, and I began to see it as if my life was just a vapor, nothing else mattered but Jesus. I belonged to Him, and I did not need anything else.

For months I've been trying to describe this experience, but the only way I can put it into words is by comparing it to the transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly. While the caterpillar is in a cocoon, a beautiful work is being done—a totally new creation. The Bible says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come" (II Corinthians 5:17). It's clear to me now that my transformation isn't temporary. It's not just a New Year's resolution. It is a miracle of God that changed my life forever, and He continues to change it today as I grow in faith.

I'm a 20-year-old kid. I could be chasing after the world in hot pursuit of all its desires, but I realized that if I kept living each day as if it were my last, one day it would be. That's when I got a taste of who God is. I gave it all up for Him. Everything I've lived for before I was converted means nothing. I'm saving up my money and going to Bible school, away from my family and friends. I'm giving my life to Jesus Christ because He's the one who found me when I was at my worst. He gave me life when I was clearly dead. I know my life is safe in His hands. How could I ever trust in my own merit after all the mistakes I've made? That's the reason for the hope that is in me—it's His grace. I've finally found something satisfying and it's not girls, money, or racing. It's Jesus. I'm not trading Him for anything.

Jones is a member of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.



THANKFUL
FOR SALVATION

BY KARYN WILSON

I'll never forget the details of the moment when my firstborn child immersed into the world. Her wet body was raised in front of me and placed in my anxious, trembling arms. I hugged her to my chest, kissed her soft face and cried along with her first cries. Such an instantaneous and intense love, I never could've fathomed. It was in *that* moment, at 8:14 p.m. on August 12, my life was forever changed.

Those first few nights, baby Kathryn didn't want to sleep. As I sat in the rocking chair, holding my beautiful new daughter, stroking her delicate body, and staring into wide, alert eyes, sleep didn't seem to matter.

I'm only beginning on this motherhood journey, but already since Kathryn's birth, my eyes have beheld a whole new facet of God's character. It's as though I've taken my sleeve to a foggy window, rubbed a small circle, and am now gazing into a world I've never seen.

The love and joy of new motherhood has opened my eyes to the true magnitude of the Father's love for me. To a greater degree I'm realizing that as much as we might try to grasp the depth of the Father's love, it is infinitely deeper than we can comprehend. His love was completely selfless and life-giving. A particular verse I've been mulling over is: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10b).

Motherhood has afforded me a new perspective on this verse. Rightly understanding Christ's mission on earth unveils the most basic mission of a mother—to give life. Christ's "giving life" took on three basic forms: acts, teaching, and sacrifice.

- 1) Through His *acts*, He gave physical healing and, in some instances, even raised people from the dead.
- 2) Through His *teachings*, He revealed how man could live a more abundant life.
- 3) And, most importantly, through His *sacrifice*, He gave grace and forgiveness, and the ultimate gift of eternal life

Similarly, a mother's calling could be described in three primary ways.

First, a mother quite literally gives life as she carries and then births her child into this world. The first woman created by God was named Eve, which means "the mother of all living." In a culture where life in the womb is not cherished, this most basic mission of

a mother cannot be underestimated. Her first responsibility is to fiercely guard, protect, and nurture the life of the child entrusted to her care by God.

Second, through her example and life-long instruction, a mother preaches the gospel, teaches wisdom, and trains her children in the way of life. A mother's role in this is particularly unique—and weighty—in that she often spends more time with her children than anyone else in their lives. Proverbs tells children that the instruction of a wise mother will "lead you; when you lie down ... watch over you ... talk with you. For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life" (Proverbs 6:20-22).

Last, although an incomplete and imperfect comparison to Christ's sacrifice, a mother yields her own personal comfort, pleasures, and priorities to the needs of her beloved child. A mother makes sacrifices without pause because of her great love. Although she cannot grant her little ones eternal life through personal suffering, she can, and must, point them to the One who is able. The continual sacrifice of a mother should reflect the servant-attitude of Christ, thereby declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in a tangible way. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Only *life* has eternal significance. Nothing in this world is more worthy than investing in a human soul—not sleep, a tidy home, a new car, a big house, a career, or traveling. While none of these are innately vain pursuits, they must serve only as means to investing in life. They must be tools used in our pursuit of steering our children's eternal souls to Jesus. While on earth, Christ was a perfect example of this eternal vision.

As mothers, our love should drive us to model Christ in giving life through our acts, teaching, and sacrifice—that we might point to Jesus Christ, who gave the ultimate gift of life. Let us not forget, we can only love because He first loved us. All our earthly efforts to love pale in comparison to the love of the Father. He surrendered the life of His one and only Son to suffer on a cross, that we might have life eternal. What mother could make such a sacrifice? Such love is unfathomable. And yet, *that* is how deeply we are loved.

Wilson, Dallas, Texas, is originally from Word of Truth Lutheran, Kopperl, Texas.

THANKFUL
FOR NEW LIFE



BY LYNN JOHANSON

A request to write about “Gratitude in Grief” came on what would have been the 49th anniversary of my marriage to Wes, a day I had spent concentrating on praising God. The timing told me this was God working.

Pastor John Wesley Johanson’s memorial service was held on July 20, what would have been his 74th birthday. The pastor leading the service wondered if there were birthday cakes in heaven. We laughed, and have been laughing through tears these months as we experience the home-going of husband and father. John’s journey began in April with a heart valve surgery that failed, as did the repeat surgery in June. An open heart surgery and four weeks of intensive care weren’t enough to give his weakened body strength. God could have intervened, but in His mercy and love, chose not. Wes’ last journal entry read, “I have reached a new level of trust.”

After the first surgery and another hospitalization, I asked, “What are you praying about?” He answered, “Healing, patience, and to glorify God.”

Although he could not speak for weeks due to throat tubes, he was able to bring glory to God by his attitude, thumbs up, and smiles. The medical staff repeatedly commented on his pleasant spirit. I was able to use words to testify to the reason for his attitude, gently adjusting comments like a doctor’s urge to “keep our fingers crossed,” to “We’d rather pray.”

But to give thanks? I’ve wondered about the praise of Corrie ten Boom in *The Hiding Place*, when she thanked God for the insects in her concentration camp barracks. Give thanks in all things, Lord?

Do I thank you, God, that my husband enjoyed his jail and recovery ministries, but was not allowed to continue? Do I thank you, Father, that he endured five surgeries before You took him home? Yes! Whatever You and he were discussing or deciding in those quiet weeks, we trust they were needed for him to finish the course.

Do we grieve? Yes! Our son, Peter, stood at his dad’s bedside table and wiped away tears for his weakened father. Our sons David and Jonathan flew to Salt Lake City to share their love and cried for their father. Our son, Mark, collapsed into my arms and sobbed at the changes in his dad. I held him as my daughter-in-law, Tracie, held me, and we witnessed Wes’ last breath. We cried. And Jesus cried, too.

But our tears were not as those who have no hope. Our sons and their families remained at the bedside with their father’s body. Dad was home. Peter asked, “What do you think Dad is doing now?”

God provided many reasons for thankfulness during those weeks. God provided safety during the 12-hour round trips to Salt Lake City, even when a boat and trailer broke free and headed for the family van. A hotel gave us a room and allowed the changing of occupants as family visited. The hotel bill was paid by Wes’ Sunday school class and the recovery group he mentored. Their prayer support and that of the entire body of Christ far exceeded their donations.

Gratitude overflowed from our hearts during the week of Wes’ memorial service. Food was more than we could ever use. Many Bibles were donated to the Gideon jail ministry. Multiple hugs and gentle words of encouragement have continued to this day.

Personally, I praise God for His comfort and the support of our sons. They awed us with the depth of their financial, practical, emotional, and spiritual support. Wes laughed, “Did we ever imagine they’d clean up so well?” Their spiritual maturity gave us great joy.

By God’s grace I was able to leave my husband’s shrunken body, an action I never thought possible. As our family rose to leave the hospital room, God placed a thought in my mind that Wes had often used at funerals where children are present. He used two gloves: the worn and dirty one was the old body, the immaculate glove with his hand inside was the resurrected body—strong, sin-free, and worship ready.

Do we miss him? Yes! I want to share experiences: picking blackberries in Oregon, the blue sky over the Pacific, and the tiny granddaughter he’d never hold. We have learned to remind ourselves, what do you think Dad is seeing, hearing, doing right now? What beauty and berries are there in heaven? What understanding of truth? Can he experience knowledge of God’s hand in our lives and throughout history? I want that, too, Father. I want to know. And I want to know Wes again, as well as those other dear ones who have gone on ahead.

I am deeply grateful—even in grief—that we have hope. Amen.

Johanson, Nampa, Idaho, is the widow of AFLC Pastor John Wesley Johanson, who died July 15.

THANKFUL AMIDST GRIEF





THANKFUL FOR EACH DAY

BY PASTOR DALE FINSTROM

Over the past two years, numerous people have asked me how I am doing. I often reply: “Today is a good day,” or, “God is good, but life is uncertain.” If you want a good medical answer ask Cris, my wife and nurse. She takes very good care of me. Maybe you’re wondering what is wrong with me. I have cirrhosis of the liver caused by fatty liver disease. Only 2 to 4 percent of those with fatty liver disease get cirrhosis—I just happen to be one of those.

Scripture tells us, “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-17). Sometimes it is hard to be joyful all the time—I have some bad days. Yet we are admonished, “Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). These were the words of the prophet Ezra, who spoke to the weeping Israelites after finding the Book of the Law and reading it to them.

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. Daily joy comes from Jesus and God’s Word. But praying continually—try to do that without grumbling or complaining! When I can’t sleep I am usually praying—it helps. We are also admonished to “give thanks in all circumstances.” This sounds so simple, but it’s not. I don’t give thanks for the cirrhosis, but for the situation I’m in and how I might glorify God in the midst of it. I also don’t understand God’s will in all of this. Yet I know that He is sovereign in all that He does and that His will is perfect. “As for God, His ways are perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in Him” (Psalm 18:30). It’s easier to give thanks in the midst of the circumstance when you know God’s ways are perfect and He can be trusted.

Back in March of 2011 my doctor told me the diagnoses. He said, “Dale, it is time to get your house in order ... be prepared.” These were hard words to hear, especially for someone who has preached the good news of Jesus for 28 years. I have counseled

many on how to get their spiritual lives in order and to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. I have known and walked with Jesus from the time I was a small child. However, putting your physical house in order is a different subject. It requires self-examination and dealing with the “here and now.” Cris and I have spent a considerable amount of time in this area, including a family meeting with our children, buying grave plots, and even purchasing our headstone. I am ready. It is important that all of us have our spiritual and physical houses in order. We know that Jesus can come to take us at any moment—we must be ready.

To live a daily life of thankfulness can be difficult. On June 30, I resigned as pastor at Resurrection Free Lutheran Church in Beltrami, Minn. It was a time of mixed emotions and some uncertainty about the future. At the same time, I realized that I was not capable of taking care of all of my duties. Many of us find our identity and self worth in our work. Yes, there have been times of depression and frustration, but I’m reminded that God is my refuge and strength, an ever-present help in time of trouble (Psalm 46:1). Corrie ten Boom once said, “There is no pit so deep, that God’s love is not deeper still.” I don’t know what people who don’t know Jesus as their Savior and the anchor of their soul do, but I am so thankful that I know Him and can trust Him, casting all of my cares on Him.

Every day I’m thankful for my wife and family who lovingly care and pray for me. I’m thankful for loving congregations who are deeply concerned for me and the welfare of our family, constantly praying for us. I am extremely thankful for my colleagues and our AFLC family who have encouraged me and prayed for me. Every day my goal is whether by life or by death, that Christ would be glorified in and through me.

Finstrom is an AFLC pastor, who most recently served Resurrection Free Lutheran, Beltrami, Minn.

Meet the WMF board members

Deb Benson—Treasurer

Several months ago I was contacted by my sister-in-law, who was a member of the nominating committee for the national WMF. She asked if I would be willing to have my name on the ballot for the position of national WMF treasurer. My first instinct was to say no. Many excuses came to mind: I already have two part-time jobs and am treasurer of my local WMF. But I told her I would pray about it and let her know in a few days. I have often prayed that God would use me to honor and serve Him. As I thought about my prayer I realized that God can't use me if I am not willing.

I reviewed the job description and responsibilities (which was three pages long and seemed quite involved) and answered the questions she sent me. After time spent in prayer I agreed to have my name on the ballot.

I was elected and began my position in September. Even though I am filled with apprehension and wonder if I am qualified for this job I am excited to serve alongside the other WMF board members. I am challenged by Colossians 3:23, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men."

Lynn Wellumson—President

Our children and grandchildren are a continual source of pleasure. Serving alongside my pastor husband in the oil boom area of Western North Dakota is a continual source of challenges. Psalm 90:12 says, "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."

Esther Hylden—First Vice President

"The Joy of the Lord is my strength." Nehemiah 8:10.

I was raised as a preacher's kid in the 1960s, and determined to never marry a pastor or a farmer. Then I fell in love with Mark Hylden, who was considering becoming a pastor, then felt called into farming. I had plans for my life, but God had different plans.

Lori Willard—Second Vice President

Currently, I am resting in Him. His direction to me has been to pay attention to getting enough sleep, rest from doing ministry, work at home, and really focus on Him in daily devotions. He can do more in my resting than me helping Him. Psalm 37:7a says, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him ..."



Members of the executive board of the WMF include, from left, JoyAnn Dahl, Dawn Johnson, Lori Willard, Lynn Wellumson, Esther Hylden, Barbara Strand, and Deb Benson.

JoyAnn Dahl—Recording Secretary

I am learning how to be a mother-in-law for the first time, learning how to work with the WMF board, learning how to watch my third daughter become a high school senior this year, and lots more. There is never a time in life that is not filled with some type of learning and growing. Thankfully I don't have to do all this by myself, but realize that Christ is running this race with me.

Barbara Strand—Correspondence Secretary

I cherish the time I am able to spend with the women on the national WMF Board and to be a part of the decision-making process for the work of the WMF. As we meet, we are in earnest prayer that the Spirit would lead us and that good decisions will be made on behalf of the women of the AFLC. I am thankful for the opportunity to share the work of the WMF.

Dawn Johnson—Executive Secretary

In Psalm 100, the writer tells us that it is God who made us. As God's child I love being a wife, mother and grandmother (as well as other relationships), and I enjoy serving the women of the AFLC. I desire to "serve the Lord with gladness" (vs. 2).

New Grade 4 curriculum on The Apostles' Creed

Ambassador Publications volunteers, board members, and staff have been working hard the past two years to prepare new Grade 4 curriculum on The Apostles' Creed in the Ambassador Sunday School Series. The first quarter student books have been published and are being used by many of our congregations this fall.

This curriculum presents what the Scriptures teach about the Trinity—that God is Three in One. Each of the three quarters focuses on one Person of the Trinity as students study the three articles of The Apostles' Creed. The first quarter teaches about God the Father, the Creator of all things. The second quarter student books will be published in November and the third quarter in the spring. You can preview sample student lessons on our website. Teacher resources are also available there to download free this year at www.ambassadorpublications.org/apcurriculum/grade4.

Thanks to the WMF for supporting this project. Funds are still needed to print the second and third quarter student books. If anyone would like to make a donation towards the new curriculum, gifts can be sent to Ambassador Publications designated for "Grade 4."



First quarter now available



"Here in the Creed you have the entire essence of God, his will, and his work exquisitely depicted in very short but rich words. In them consists all our wisdom, which surpasses all the wisdom, understanding, and reason of men. Although the whole world has sought painstakingly to learn what God is and what he thinks and does, yet it has never succeeded in the least. But here you have everything in richest measure."
—from Luther's Large Catechism

Pictured above are three illustrations from the Catechism Posters and Study Guide, published by Ambassador Publication. The illustrations are also included in each quarter of the Grade 4 curriculum, matching the three articles of The Apostle's Creed:

- The Father: Creator
- The Son: Redeemer
- The Holy Spirit: Sanctifier

The first quarter of Grade 4 is now available from Ambassador Publications. For more information or to order these resources, contact Ambassador Publications by phone: (763) 545-5631, by e-mail: parished@aflc.org, or visit their online store at ambassadorpublications.org.

Rooted in the gospel

BY PASTOR NATE JORE

Work to be pleasing to God.” These were words I saw written on a roadside sign marking the location of a “Christian” church about 15 miles from our home in Jinja, Uganda. You might expect such a message on the sign of a holy building of another religion, where people are taught that their destiny depends on their goodness. Many Christian churches have fallen into the same trap of teaching moralism that is void of the power of the gospel. Uganda has seen much of this teaching in which the law is portrayed as a means to holiness instead of as an arrow pointing to Christ and His redemptive work on the cross.

Our major focus in Uganda has been making disciples by training them in God’s Word. In addition to the two-year Ambassador Institute Bible storying training, we recently added a new course: a year-long study through the Book of Romans. Seven students met the requirement of completing the two-year program and then teaching the same course to their own class. We are currently through chapter 8 of Romans, and the study has been extremely rich, rooting us firmly in the gospel.

One of our Ambassador Institute students testified of how the law was laid heavily on the members of her church, along with the pressure to give financially in order to receive blessing. She was earnest in her desire to follow Christ, and yet felt like she was always falling short. She did not have the financial means to give as the pastor was telling her she should. She felt as if she would be condemned because of her failure to keep the law. How liberating it was when she heard the true gospel from her teacher, one of the Romans students, and was relieved of her heavy burden of trying to become righteous by her deeds. “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known ... This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe” (Romans 3:21-22). Today she walks in the freedom and joy of knowing that Christ’s work on the cross was enough.

One of our Romans students has been teaching a class in a neighboring district about a six-hour journey from his home. I recently heard one of his students sharing his testimony. In summary he was saying, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). God’s grace toward us in Christ had been a new teaching to him, though he had been a churchgoer for many years. He had clearly heard the gospel from his teacher and had received the good news. He and some of his



Photo by Andrew Abel

fellow students are planning to start another class in yet another district that neighbors theirs. And so the gospel continues to spread in a land where there is much religion yet little understanding of salvation that is purchased by God and received by grace.

Another of our Romans students was recently invited to be among the presenters at a conference. She began by giving the law from the stories of the Fall of Man (Genesis 3) and Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). She concluded by teaching that our righteousness comes only through Jesus as His righteousness becomes ours and our sins are forgiven through faith. Her teaching so confused the attendees that the next day they presented her with a list of questions based on what she had taught and threatened to give her a public beating as a false teacher if she failed to answer the questions with Scripture. The Holy Spirit guided her and she was able to answer their questions. After the ordeal, the host pastor asked her, “Why have I never been taught this truth (salvation by grace through faith) before?” A lady was present that day who had a “spirit of heaviness.” They had tried in the past to cast demons out of her to no avail. After hearing the gospel that day, the despair lifted as she believed the gospel and was liberated from the demands of the law, the demands being fully met in her by Christ (Romans 8:3-4).

Praise God for the peace we have with Him because we have been declared righteous in His sight through faith in His Son (Romans 5:1).

Jore is an AFLC missionary serving in Jinja, Uganda, with his wife, Rhoda, and five children.

Pastor Samuel Flores

Pastor Samuel Flores, who founded the Central Mexican Lutheran Church, died Sept. 3 at the age of 93.

Pastor Flores requested fellowship with the AFLC in 1977. The AFLC Annual Conference approved this fellowship as a new mission work in 1978. The CMLC was formed in 1980.

The outreach in Mexico began in the city of Leon and extended to Celaya in 1982 and Irapuato in 1983. The CMLC has been a big part of the work of AFLC World Missions in Mexico.

Flores pastored the church in Leon, and led the CMLC until his death. His funeral was held Sept. 4.

Applications sought for business manager

Members of the Coordinating Committee are seeking applications for the position of Director of Business Management. This is a full-time, salaried position with benefits. This individual will manage the accounting, payroll, and human resource functions for the AFLC and oversee the personnel and budget functions for informational technology and the reception area. Qualifications include a personal faith in Jesus Christ, a four-year degree, at least five years of experience managing an organization of comparable size and scope to that of the AFLC General Fund and its accounting department, mastery of accepted accounting principles and practices, experience in structuring an accounting system, and outstanding communication and strategic planning skills. The anticipated starting date is December 1.

Interested individuals may request a copy of the complete position description by contacting the AFLC offices at 3110 E. Medicine Lake Boulevard, Plymouth, MN 55441, by phone at 763-545-5631, or by e-mailing Karen Floan at kmfloan@afcl.org. Informal inquiries and questions may be addressed to the Coordinating Committee chairman, Dr. Daniel Mundfrom, by e-mail at daniel.mundfrom@eku.edu, or by calling 970-302-7997. To apply, a letter of application that addresses how you meet the qualifications of this position and a current résumé that documents your education and experience should be submitted electronically to: kmfloan@afcl.org.



Golgotha Lutheran members mark 100 years

Members of Golgotha Lutheran Church, Golden Valley, N.D., celebrated the congregation's 100th anniversary on Sept. 14. Special guests were Pastor Richard and Clara Gunderson. Pastor Gunderson brought the message from I Samuel 7:12, which says, "Samuel took a stone ... and named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us.'"

Lutheran Ambassador schedule for 2015

Below is the 2015 schedule for *The Lutheran Ambassador*. Please be in prayer for each issue. Note the deadlines and special emphasis of each issue. If you have an idea regarding a general article, a certain issue, or have an interest in writing, please contact the editors. E-mail us at ruthg@afcl.org or call (763) 545-5631.

ISSUE DATE	DEADLINE	ISSUE THEME
January	November 24	Pilgrimage
February	December 29	Christian Ed
March	January 26	Lent/Easter
April	February 23	Evangelism
May	March 30	AFLC Schools
June	April 27	Aging
July	May 25	Prosperity
August	June 22	Conference Review
September	July 27	FLY
October	August 31	Missions
November	September 28	Reform./Thanksgiving
December	October 26	Advent/Christmas

Please note, information regarding the Annual Conference, scheduled for June 16-19 at Warm Beach, Wash., will be featured in the May issue, with a deadline of March 30. The May issue will include the conference schedule, board and committee nominees, registration, and WMF convention schedule and registration information. The registration will also be printed in either the March or April issue. Housing information will be printed as soon as it is available.



Room for Thanksgiving

BY JORDAN LANGNESS

The invasions seem to happen earlier and earlier each year that passes by. I am not referring to plots of movies or the movements of national armies. What I am referring to is something I think we all are as equally familiar with, if not more so. We can observe these invasions happening right before our eyes at the local retail establishments we visit this time of year. You know what I am talking about—the invasion of tinsel, colorful lights, fake trees, ornaments, and all things that scream, “Christmas is coming!”

I remember a time when stores would advertise for the next season. Stores were transformed overnight from Halloween to cornucopias, pilgrims, and candy corn. Then Christmas, Valentine’s Day, St. Patty’s, Easter, and spring merchandise would appear at their appropriate times. These days it seems like Christmas keeps coming earlier and earlier. It isn’t uncommon to find Christmas decorations up before the end of October.

I find it ironic that the day we set aside to celebrate being thankful is surrounded, and dare I say choked out, by so many messages encouraging us to think about ourselves. As an example, consider black Friday sales, which last year started off with some Thursday-only specials. In case you have forgotten, Thursday is Thanksgiving. We cannot even set aside one whole day to be thankful to God for what He has so extravagantly blessed us with before we start catching the materialistic bug called, “I want.”

In Deuteronomy, 6:10-15, God gives a warning to the nation of Israel that is worthy of our consideration today. The Lord informs His people that there will be a day when they are established in the Promised Land when He will bless them with good things they

won’t earn, and they will be satisfied (v. 10-11). That doesn’t sound too bad, does it? He follows this promise with these words, “Then watch yourself, that you do not forget the Lord who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall fear *only* the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name” (v. 12-13).

The warning of the Lord is revealed. God told the Israelites to be careful when they were full and satisfied, because it is in those moments that the temptation to forget the Lord is strongest.

History tells us the Israelites did forget the Lord and started incorporating other gods into their lives. We may be tempted to look back at the Israelites and scoff at their foolishness; after all, we do not forget God and follow idols today, do we? But on closer observation, their problem wasn’t so much that they abandoned God all together, but that they combined their worship of God with other gods. When it is put that way, I think we can all see where we have experienced this in our own lives. “Yes, we love you God and are grateful for all that you have given to us, but I really want that new iPhone so I am going to spend Thanksgiving evening camping out in a tent so I can get a great deal.” Or, “Sorry God, I can’t do Bible study today because the game is on.”

God’s Word is clear that He alone deserves our worship and our thanks. This season, let us commit to remembering Him and setting aside one entire day to truly give thanks to Him, even if it costs us that prime spot in line for that iPhone.

Langness, a youth worker serving Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah, N.D., is the vice chairman of the AFLC Youth Board.

AFLC memorials: September

AFLBS

Terry Grothe
Ruth Claus
Delores Scheel

Ambassador Institute

John Ludewig

Home Missions

Agnes Hviding

AFLT

Jeanette Schipper
Vera Bounds
Terry Grothe
Albin Dahlgren
Elsie Hovey
Dr. Francis Monseth

World Missions

Merle Vigness

People and places

Pastor Curt Emerson has resigned from Peace Free Lutheran, Canal Winchester, Ohio, and accepted a call to serve Zion Free Lutheran, Wadena, Minn.

Pastor David Skordahl is serving as interim associate pastor of the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish, Dalton, Minn. He resigned from his position as assistant pastor of Christ the King Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn.

Pastor Brian Ricke will be ordained Nov. 2 at Calvary Free Lutheran, Arlington, S.D., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating. Ricke has accepted a call to serve Living Hope Church, St. Michael, Minn., and will begin ministry there on Dec. 1.

Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee added **Maranatha Free Lutheran Church of Ulen**, Minn., onto the AFLC Congregational Roster. The congregation was started by members of Maranatha Free Lutheran, Glyndon, Minn. Both congregations are served by Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck.

Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee added **Our Saviour's Lutheran**, Patterson, Calif., onto the AFLC Congregational Roster. The congregation is served by Pastor Paul Johnson.

Statement of ownership

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Publication is required and will be printed in the November 2014 issue of The Lutheran Ambassador.

/s/ Ruth Gunderson, Managing Editor

ARC 2015 retreat schedule

- Side by Side
Grades 7-12, Jan. 30-Feb. 1
- Sno Daze
Grades 4-7, Jan. 30-Feb. 1
- Marriage Retreat
Feb. 13-15
- Women's Retreat
March 20-22
- Men's Retreat
April 24-26
- Family Weekend
May 15-17
- Fire Up Youth Camp
Grades 4-7, June 21-26
- Family Camp
Aug. 2-8
- Classics Retreat
Sept. 11-13
- Fall Family Weekend
Oct. 23-25
- Worship Retreat
Nov. 13-15
- Scandinavian Dinner
Nov. 23

For more information, visit www.arc-aflc.org, or call 715-294-2877.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-Sept. 30, 2014

FUND	REC'D IN SEPTEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$31,486	\$245,017	\$246,878
Evangelism	8,082	105,225	98,535
Youth Ministries	5,291	96,556	76,852
Parish Education	7,791	98,309	117,812
Seminary	12,605	204,952	199,633
Bible School	33,550	369,341	370,806
Home Missions	44,939	334,876	325,665
World Missions	27,737	344,624	274,380
Personal Support	32,544	321,240	333,890
TOTALS	\$204,023	\$2,120,140	\$2,044,452

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

Preparing for 2017

There is an important anniversary on the horizon, and it's not too early to begin planning. October 31, 1517, is the date when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, marking the birth of the Protestant Reformation. The year 2017 will mark the 500th anniversary of that momentous event. The next three years will quickly pass, and it's



Pastor Robert Lee

good to start some serious thinking about the witness of our congregations, and of us as individuals, during an observance that should not be ignored.

We bear the name "Lutheran,"

but what does this mean? Does it only reflect a historical connection, or does it reveal a present faith commitment? An anniversary may be a good time for the answers to these questions to be carefully considered and explored.

It would be great if the 2017 AFLC Annual Conference had a Reformation theme, perhaps hosted on our schools' campus. Ambassador Publications could be encouraged to inform congregations of excellent resources for the celebration. Our seminary's Summer Institute of Theology (SIT) might also consider the anniversary in the courses offered. Perhaps the Bible school summer musical teams might include some arrangements of Luther's hymns, and our campus might host a Reformation Sunday rally, involving area congregations.

Local and area events may already be in the planning stages, and a mass choir is reportedly scheduled for the greater Fargo-Moorhead community. Congregations could invite their members and communities to attend discussion times on what

it means after 500 years to be a Lutheran Christian. The list of opportunities could be limitless.

How might we prepare? Here are some suggestions for individuals:

Read a book. There are Luther devotionals, such as *Through Faith Alone* and *Reading the Psalms with Luther* (both from Concordia Publishing). You might also find a copy on the internet of *Luther for the Busy Man*, translated by Dr. P.D. Pahl. *A Forty-Day Journey with Martin Luther* by Gracia Grindal, and *Jesus, Remember Me: Words of Assurance by Martin Luther*, edited by Barbara Owen, are highly recommended, and *Why I Am a Lutheran* by Daniel Preus combines a devotional and theological perspective in a fine way.

This is a good time to read a Luther biography. The classic is *Here I Stand* by Roland Bainton, but there are many other good ones. Ask your pastor for his recommendations.

Study the catechisms, both the small and large ones. You should still have a copy of the former from confirmation days, but you may have to order a copy of the latter. A good theological review will be good for all of us.

Watch a movie. There are at least two Luther films available. Both are good, but this writer prefers the older one.

Take a trip. We expect to hear of several tours to Germany that will be offered in 2016 and 2017, perhaps some by AFLC pastors, and it could be the experience of a lifetime to learn more about the Reformation in the land where it began.

Thrivent Financial is sponsoring the development of a television program on the impact of Luther's life and message, which promises to be very worthwhile. We can also expect media coverage of the

occasion; some will be informative, no doubt, but some of the more disappointing comments of Luther will probably be highlighted (such as his harsh words about the Jews), so a response may be necessary.

The 300th Reformation anniversary was in 1817 at a time when liberal theology and political events in Germany threatened the very core of the faith's distinctives. This challenge, plus new publications

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of old Lutheran works, led to a profound spiritual awakening by the Spirit of God in the hearts and minds of many Lutheran Christians and a new appreciation of their rich heritage.

The blessings of the past are worthy to be remembered and treasured. The command to remember, in fact, is found over and over again in the pages of Holy Scripture. "Remember the former things long past, for I am God and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me" (Isaiah 46:9). A generation that ignores history has no past and no future.

But nostalgia is not enough. "Manna kept is worms," wrote C.S. Lewis many years ago in an early work entitled *The Pilgrim's Regress*. Let it be our 2017 goal that a Reformation remembrance might recreate in each of us the living heart of Reformation Christianity ... grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, Christ alone ... all to the glory of God!

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Periodicals

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building the base

Personal maintenance

BY TIMOTHY LARSON

I thoroughly enjoy exploring old abandoned houses, imagining what they were like in their glory days. If these buildings are left too long, they become uninhabitable. Many times I notice that the foundations of these homes are crumbling or have completely collapsed. When these 100-year-old houses were new, the foundations were strong, unwavering, and not easily shaken. These once-sturdy and solid buildings are suffering from a lack of maintenance and preservation. This illustration often comes to mind when I consider the importance of having daily devotions and prayer times.

To quote a beloved old hymn, "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!" (*How Firm a Foundation*, John Keene). I Corinthians 3:11 says, "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." How amazing to know that there is no stronger foundation to put our faith in than Christ Himself and what He did for us by dying on the cross to save us from our sins.

One of the definitions of maintenance is, "to provide with necessities for life or existence." How appropriate when considering the spiritual sustenance with which we are supplied through God's Word.

Just because we may have been privileged to grow up in a Christian home and to attend church every week where we were taught the Word, doesn't mean we can neglect to live out our faith daily and maintain a personal relationship with Christ. Is it possible to cultivate or develop a relationship with someone if you

don't spend time with him or her? As followers of Christ, we need to maintain this firm foundation that we have in Christ by studying the Word and being fed daily.

We may ask ourselves how we can cultivate this relationship with Christ. We should certainly follow Christ's example when He went away to pray and spend time with His Father. Take time each day to do the same. It is also important to be involved with our congregations and encourage each other, sharing what God is teaching us and how He is leading us in our lives.

The last verse to the above-mentioned hymn should be an inspiration and encouragement to us:

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

Be encouraged, friends, to take the time each day to maintain and preserve the relationship you have with Christ through devotions. Use what He is teaching you to bring hope to those you come in contact with who are going through trials of their own. Though we will have many difficulties in this life, if we keep our eyes, hearts, and minds fixed on Christ Jesus, He will guide our steps. Keep on keeping on.

Larson, a 2009 graduate of AFLBS, lives in Osakis, Minn.