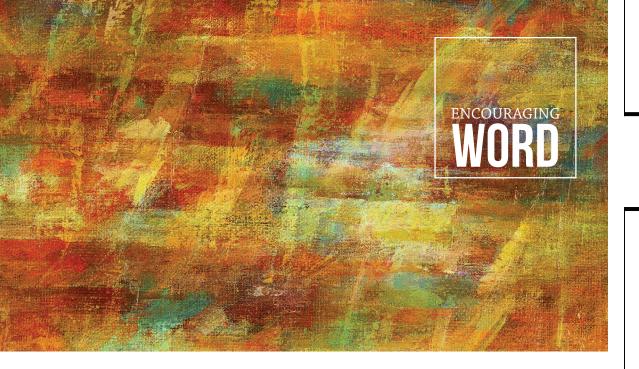
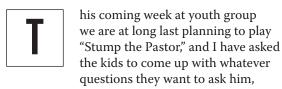
THE STANDARD NOVEMBER 2018 LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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WE ALL HAVE QUESTIONS

BY CHRISTINA OSTHUS



writing them down ahead of time or just asking them out loud. My youth have a lot of questions, and so do I. I think the first thing we will do is talk about questions in categories: theological questions, philosophical questions, and personal questions, maybe.

A big theological topic for me is gaining more of an understanding of the Trinity, both for myself and for my kids. It's something I have struggled with, and it didn't get easier when I watched the Lutheran Satire video, "St. Patrick's Bad Analogies" (lutheransatire.org/media/st-patricksbad-analogies). Analogies can really help us to better understand complex ideas, though they all break down at a point. However, this video tears apart every single analogy I have ever heard about the Trinity, and leaves viewers with the knowledge that there is a mystical union of three in one which was briefly torn asunder when Jesus was on the cross. I would like to gain a better understanding of this truth, and my daughter was actually flabbergasted to realize just recently what the Trinity really implies about the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

A philosophical question might dig into the problem of evil. The way this question is phrased is really important to me. For example, as a Christian I don't ask, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" I believe in original sin and total depravity, so the concept of a "good person" isn't

biblical. In fact, I am tempted to turn away from discussions of this question with one reply: "The fall." However, I know the Bible has much more to say than just that, and I know the brokenness all around me cannot be easily explained away. I also know that the question, "How can a good God allow suffering?" should at least be validated with an exhaustive response.

A personal question would probably stem from either a theological or philosophical one, but would be more individualized, such as, "Why do I lie to my parents all the time?" or, "Why did my grandma get cancer?" These are obviously the ones most delicate to answer, if not the most difficult. Again, my simple answer might be, "Original sin," or, "The fall," but I know my students are looking for more than that. Another common question from teenagers I know that fits all three of these categories is, "Why was I born into a Christian family in a country where the Bible is legal and available, while others were born in remote tribes that have never heard the gospel, and how can we be held to the same standard and offered the same salvation?"

There is no easy answer to any of these questions, but I think that as we try to "stump" our pastor we will have a fruitful discussion and come to a deeper understanding of some spiritual truths as we have our eyes turned, not toward man's logic, but toward God's holy Word.

Osthus, a 2006 graduate of AFLBS, works in youth and family ministry on the Cheyenne River Reservation, Eagle Butte, S.D.



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sound bites

"Count your blessings" is such a common expression that it has become a catchphrase. Yet it contains powerful truth and meaning: Be grateful for what you have—and for what you don't have.

—Robert W. Bly

May God keep us from the terrible vice of ingratitude and the forgetfulness of His blessings.

—Martin Luther

It's one thing to celebrate Thanksgiving Day every year. It's another to live on Gratitude Street all the time. People who intentionally count their blessings, express their thanks, and cultivate the quality of finding thanksgiving items in every circumstance—those are the people who live on Gratitude Street.

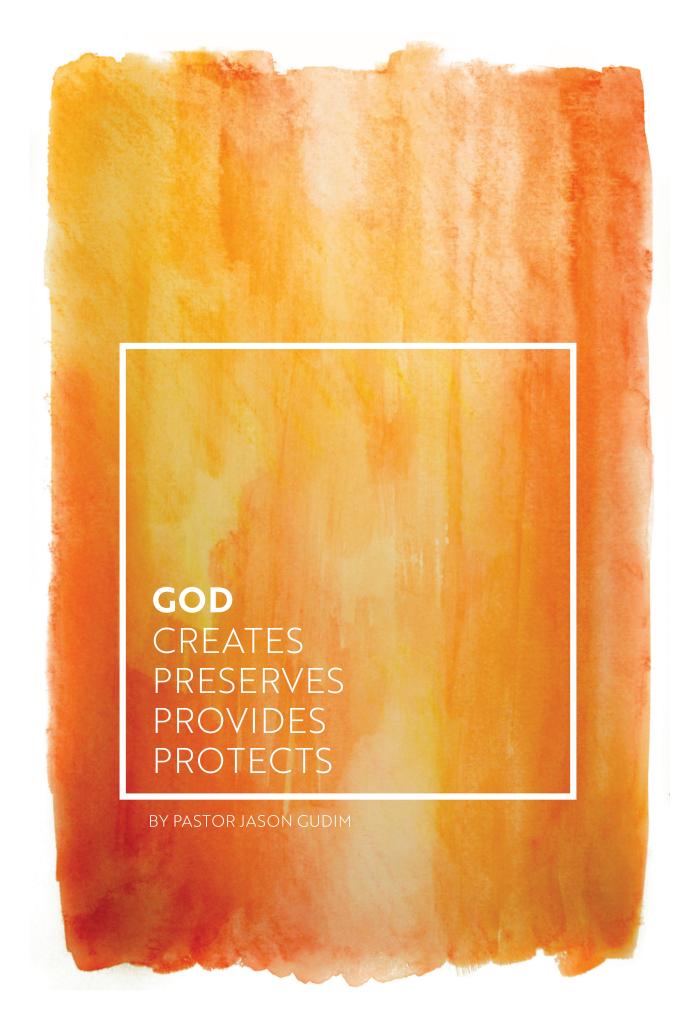
—David Jeremiah

He who enjoys anything without thanksgiving is as though he robbed God.

—John Chrysostom

I have found that the more thankful I am, the more peaceful I am. Gratitude helps me focus on what I have instead of what I don't have, allowing me to stay focused on my blessings instead of worrying.

—Joyce Meyer



I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth (First Article of Creation).

or many people living in the 21st century, God is either an abstract idea or a distant figure that went into retirement after finishing his work of creation, leaving us to fend for ourselves. In his explanation to the first article of the Apostles' Creed in the Small Catechism, Martin Luther contradicts these notions by explaining how God is active in each of our lives and enumerating the many gifts He has given us.

GOD CREATES

God has created the entire universe and all that is in it (including you and me) out of nothing. He didn't make use of material that was already there. He made the material out of which He made everything else. He didn't start the process and then walk away. He brought the creation to maturity so that everything He saw was "good."

There is real value to this knowledge in our every day lives. Knowing that God creates out of nothing helps us to realize that He has created our new lives in Christ out of nothing. We do not contribute anything. We do not meet Him part way. Since we are dead in our trespasses and sins, God has created our faith through the work of the Holy Spirit carrying the message of the gospel to our sin-stained corpses.

Knowing that God brings His creation to maturity gives us comfort to realize that He hasn't left us to muddle through things. "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

Creation is a gift, and there is no gift greater than the creation of our faith, which receives God's gift of salvation.

GOD PRESERVES

God has given and preserved for us everything we have: our lives, our bodies, and our health; the food, clothing and shelter that sustains us; our families, and everything else in our lives.

Often times, these good and gracious gifts wear out in a world battered and broken by sin. Our bodies and lives fail because of illness and injury. Our food, clothing, and homes run out and break down. Our families break apart. Loved ones die.

But in the midst of our suffering, God sustains our faith. He preserves us by his Holy Spirit until we die and enter eternity or Christ returns. And as we suffer, we are comforted by a God who knows what it's like to suffer and who is always with us during our struggles. We look not for God's purpose in our suffering, but His presence with us. God's steady hand of comfort and presence in our lives

is a gift to us each and every day and sustains our faith during times of trial and tribulation.

GOD PROVIDES

God provides for all the needs of our lives, and He does so abundantly. This means we receive more than the bare minimum of what we need to survive. We receive more than we could ever ask for or imagine.

Sometimes our needs cause us stress, anxiety, and fear. We worry that we won't have enough to purchase what we need before our next paycheck hits our bank account. We stress over our children's education, well-being, and futures. We are afraid of disaster, unexpected change, and sudden medical complications.

The Bible teaches us that God will never fail to provide for us because He has already given us everything we need for life and salvation in Jesus Christ. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). Even if we should suffer lack of some material provision in our lives, our eternities are taken care of and wrapped up in the finished work of Christ.

Jesus Christ is the gift from God that demonstrates that He will never stop caring for us.

GOD PROTECTS

God protects us from all danger and guards and keeps us from all evil. He is always watching out for us, always defending us, always keeping us safe.

Occasionally it feels as if God has turned His back on us. We worry that our sins have offended and angered Him to the point that He has abandoned us. Because our sin clings so closely, we all too easily forget that our sins have been nailed with Christ to the cross and are no longer counted against us. At the cross, sin was overcome, death was destroyed, and Satan was defeated.

Thanks be to God for the great gift of Jesus' victory over our enemies of sin, death, and the devil.

God is constantly and consistently active in our lives. We might not always be able to see it, and sometimes we might not even be aware of it. But He's always there, creating, preserving, providing, and protecting.

And the wonder of it all is that He delights to do it. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus Christ has reconciled us to the Father. It is now the good pleasure of our heavenly Father to care for us as His dear children.

Gudim serves Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis, Minn.

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).

hat two words did your mother aspire to teach you from your earliest days? The number of times we were prompted to say "thank you" would likely be uncountable. God must have inspired parents to recognize the importance of this small phrase.

The Scripture from I Thessalonians 5:16-18 is a familiar one to most of us, and it also includes that "say thanks" command. But how much have you meditated on these "final instructions," as the heading in my Bible titles these verses? How different we may view them compared to the Thessalonian believers receiving these words written by the Apostle Paul during times of persecution. But being joyful, continually seeking God, and thanking Him can sound like a tall order, even in our rather comfortable modern-day living.

On the other hand, how can we not? Our human reaction is thinking about the who, why, how, and when of an instruction. In truth, it comes down to my perspective—defined as my attitude, my way of regarding things, my view—and the foundation of that perspective. God's Word, used by the Holy Spirit, should be the only true authority over my perspective. "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in Your law," writes the psalmist (Psalm 119:18).

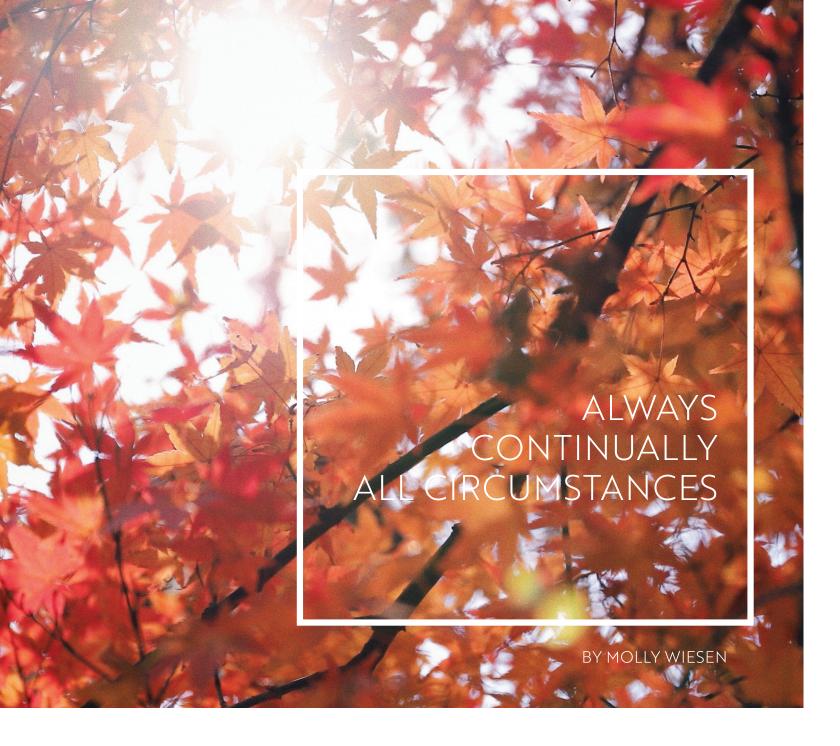
Psalm 100:1 tells us, "Shout for joy to the Lord ..." Why? "Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are His" (vs. 2). The object of our praise, prayer, and thanks is the Creator God. Isaiah 45:5 dispels any doubt about the identity of the Almighty: "I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God."

Even though we have no right to need a why, He gave us the most precious answer before there was anyone to even ask the question. "But God demonstrated His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He loves us beyond understanding and has brought us back to Himself through faith in the gift of Christ's death and resurrection.



The reasons to be filled with joy, thanks, and a desire to seek the Lord through prayer would make a never-ending list. So what obstacles lie in wait, breaking out as despair, unbelief, and ingratitude? That list could also be very long, but Proverbs 11:2 gives the core reason: "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." Our old nature wants the control, the credit, our time, and attention.

The "when" of this passage often brings discouragement.



How can I always praise Him, pray, and give thanks? What if I lose my job? What about that illness that just appeared in a family member? What if my child is addicted to drugs? The effects of this world's evil and trials can put us in a tailspin. This is where the Holy Spirit's work takes over. The Spirit uses time in God's Word, fellowship with other believers, and the preaching of His Word to fill us with that incomprehensible desire to praise and thank Him, no matter what our circumstances.

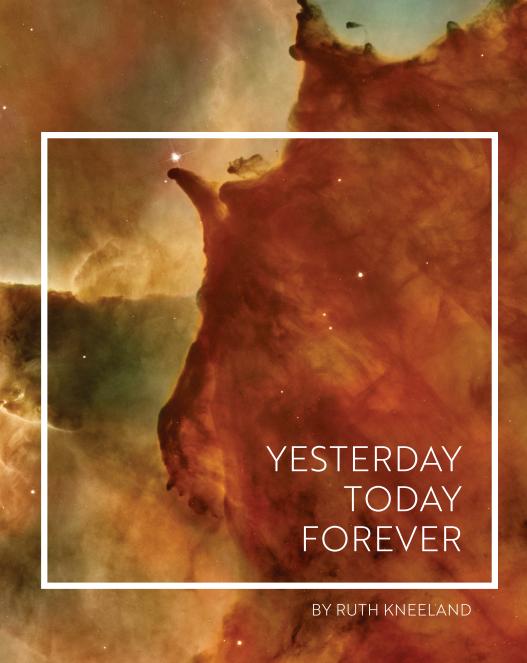
I am thankful for a Bible study I was in several years ago. One of the take home suggestions was to keep our eyes and mind always open to situations that come up in our day when we could say, "Thank you, Lord." It's amazing how that practice has brought a multitude of

thankfulness out of my mouth during day-to-day life happenings. Everything from healings, to escape from accidents, to the smell of coffee brewing in the morning, to the joy of having a pink bike to ride—all are wonderful gifts of His blessing, protection, and love.

The most wonderful thing that we can praise and thank Him for is that our current situation is only temporary. His great promise to us remains: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (II Corinthians 4:16-18).

This is the will of God in Christ Jesus for us: Be joyful, pray, and give thanks.

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



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

or all time Jesus has been, is, and always will be the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). We establish our faith on this foundation. We rest in the fact that Jesus continues to call the lost, comfort the hurting, and strengthen the weak. His complete work on the cross needs no updates or added features. This truth from Hebrews 13:8 assures us that Jesus is always enough. We won't find a revised, new, or improved version of Him. Jesus is unchanging.

In His eternal perfection, Jesus knows the tendency of our hearts. He knows that our hearts wander, get carried away, and are easily distracted by all kinds of clutter. Our waywardness and discontentment reveal our ever-changing sinful hearts. Hebrews 13:5 has a warning and a wonderful promise for us: "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

We see examples in Scripture of the results the love of money can have on one's life. We need look no further than Achan (Joshua 7), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), and Gehazi, Elisha's servant (II Kings 5) to find powerful illustrations of lives destroyed because of the love of money. No doubt, we can each add stories of people we know whose lives have been negatively impacted as a result of the love of money.

I'm certain my heavenly Father desires me to be more mindful of the attitude of my heart. Discontentment comes naturally to my flesh. Just as a child wants what he doesn't have, so our hearts are easily drawn into comparing and ledger-keeping with those around us. Theodore Roosevelt said, "Comparison is the thief of joy." The thrill and satisfaction of finally attaining what we desire doesn't last long because we quickly move on to wanting the next new thing. When our days are spent yearning for what we don't have, we lack the joy that God desires for us. John 15 tells us that the true source of joy is being in relationship with Jesus, just as a branch and a vine

are connected. Jesus says in John 15:11, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." The final words of Hebrews 13:5, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you," perfects this joy, knowing that when we have Jesus, we have all we need—and for this we should be thankful.

How much did Iesus desire this relationship with us? Enough to suffer, die on the cross, and rise again to make it possible. Verse 12 of Hebrews 13 tells us, "And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood." Christ shed his blood so we no longer have to follow the regulations of the law (Hebrews 13:9-14). There is no need to depend on the blood of animals because they cannot remove guilt, cannot cleanse our hearts, do not have power over sin, and cannot save. Instead we rest completely in the finished work of Christ on the cross, which does remove our guilt, does cleanse our hearts, does have power over sin, and does save us. "So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?' ... Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name" (Hebrews 13:6, 15).

Will you join me in thankfulness and pray that we can daily acknowledge that our unchanging Jesus is enough? May our sacrifice of praise include a grateful heart instead of a heart that complains or compares, a generous heart instead of a heart that clings to possessions, a satisfied heart instead of one that continually desires more for itself, and a confident heart instead of a heart that regularly wanders.

While it is appropriate to count our many blessings, and name them one by one, may we always recognize the true source of these blessings—our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the unchanging reason for thanksgiving.

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

Because a thankful heart is a happy heart. I am glad for what I have; that's an easy way to start ... (Veggie Tales).

his tiny tidbit of song has stuck with me for 20 years. It pops into my mind when I am tempted to wish a little too greedily for what I don't have, or when my belongings start to seem a little shabby.

I'm frustrated because another piece of our ancient house needs repair.

"I am glad for what I have."

Someone else's life seems to flow so easily, while I seem to bring chaos to everything I touch.

"A thankful heart is a happy heart, Amy."

It's no deep theological concept. It's just an old song from Veggie Tales, so simple a tiny child can grasp it—say thank you to God for the things you have. We've tried to teach our children that sort of simple gratitude in the hope that they will remember to be thankful in all circumstances. Yet true gratitude encompasses so much more than just saying "thank you" for the good things God provides.

There is a dark hopelessness in this world that drags at our hearts. The world around us seems to revel in its sinfulness. People disappoint. Our own hearts betray us, and our feeble attempts to live godly lives can seem a mockery in the face of our own sinfulness. We grow weary. Our burdens feel heavy. God seems silent.

But He is not silent, friends. Through the Word, God speaks to us. He pours out grace to His children. He grants us faith to believe what we cannot see. He gives us Christ. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

God has always been this way—generous with His love and pursuing us with His grace—but the Church has not always understood it. Before the Reformation, the Church leadership was corrupt. Parish priests often lacked a clear understanding of Scripture. The laity understood even less than the priesthood as the whole divine service was conducted in Latin, which nobody spoke.

If I had lived before the Reformation, how would I have known that I could approach the throne of grace with confidence? No priest would have allowed it. No scholar or church leader would have put Scripture into my hands and urged me to search it for God's truth on my own, even if I was educated enough to read the Latin texts. I would have gone to the divine service not understanding exactly what was going on there. Even my priest would have had a clearer grasp of the traditions of the Church and the edicts of the pope than he had on the Word of God.

It would have been difficult to see Christ in the Church during that time before the Reformation—just obligation, penance, and a desperate hope that my obedience here would assuage an angry God enough to keep my time in purgatory relatively short.

But now, as a Reformation Christian, the Scripture is placed in my hands, and a wealth of relief pours out of it. Certainly, in God's Word I see my sin. In places, God's law batters my heart and I see God's wrath for sinners and my own hopelessly sinful heart. But I also see, as Luther saw so many years ago, sweet words of redemption and hope, not tied to obedience and obligation, but dependent only on God's powerful work and His unfailing love.

Grace alone! Not my church attendance, not my adherence to tradition or specific forms and styles of worship, not my perfect obedience or excellent behavior. God declares that I am justified.

Faith alone! Not my opinion or my feelings, but God's promise of spiritual comfort in my earthly pain, and eternal life with Him.

Christ alone! Not my feeble, fault-riddled effort at a form of goodness that always misses the mark, but Christ's perfect obedience and righteousness draped over my sinsick self.

Scripture alone! I have one sure, dependable source for knowing God. In His Word, I see my sin and my need, and I see Him, powerful, mighty to save, and desiring to save me. I need not—and dare not—search any further for salvation than the truth I find in His word.

To God's glory alone! I do not need to clamor for credit or insist that attention must be paid when I do something good. I am free to give generously without acknowledgement and work without public acclaim, knowing that God works in me for His own glory.

We who are Reformation Christians can rejoice. We are rescued. God has lifted us from our sin and works in us obedience and faith. He saves us from our hopelessness and teaches us to trust the promises in His Word. He declares that we are righteous.

We need not strive, for all the work has already been done by Him. We can rest. Thank you, God.

Dalager, Argyle, Minn., is a member of Westaker Free Lutheran, Newfolden, Minn.



"I would have despaired," cried David, "unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of God in the land of the living" (Psalm 27:13).

hat caused David such agony of spirit? Was it a cry after a brush with death? Was it after his wife, Michal, said she despised him? Or, was it because his son, Absalom, betrayed him? Perhaps it was while in the depths of guilt, seeking forgiveness from his God after the adulterous act with Bathsheba. That act alone brought consequences almost too severe to bear—the death of his child.

What was David seeking in his pain and affliction? Healing, reconciliation, understanding, forgiveness, succor?

Although I read the psalms regularly, I know little of the depths of despair in the heart of the writers. And I don't know the depths of your pain, reader. I have not gone through the death of a child; I have not yet had a debilitating illness; I have not experienced spousal abuse or unfaithfulness; nor have I gone through the loss of work, resulting in financial stress.

Yet even in my daily living I find myself crying out to the Lord for His blessing, His grace, His goodness in mercy. One word from David's cry stands out: believe.

"Only the eyes of faith can see God working," I recently heard someone say. I saw the truth of this recently in talking with an old friend over dinner. Carol and John had suffered a severe financial setback. Now she was caring for John, who is in the throes of Alzheimer's disease. As we said farewell, embracing, I asked her how she was dealing with all of this.

"The Lord hasn't changed," she said. "He hasn't let go of His hold on us—not even for a moment."

I felt the need to thank her for her tender care of John, for her loyalty to him.

"It's God's grace," she said. "He's given me of His own lovingkindness so I can do the same for John."

I saw in her receiving of God's grace to care for her husband the working out of Psalm 84:6: "Passing through the Valley of Bacca, they make it a spring." Victory through grace.

Anticipating a positive response, I recently asked a friend who had sustained a nasty injury, "Where is the goodness of God here?" She didn't hesitate a second as she told me of her husband and daughter taking over the household chores, cooking, clean-up, laundry, etc. Her college-age son had texted her expressing his love. She saw God's goodness as His children helped one another.



This was true for our daughter and her husband when they sustained extreme loss through a hurricane. They recognized and received God's goodness through an outpouring of prayer and help from friends and strangers. The secret, it seems, is to recognize God's goodness in the form He sends it.

At the pastors' retreat in September we were reminded about the promises of God. The emphasis this year was on stress in the pastor's life. (Yes, I mean my pastor and yours.) The topic was dealt with from several angles: what it is, how to deal with it, etc. Our teachers opened their own hearts and told us of their own experiences. After sharing a portion of Scripture that had ministered to him, a speaker asked the rest of us to share Scripture that has been special for us in dealing with stress, affliction and pain. There was



an overflow crowd, husbands and wives, maybe 100 of us or more. The verses were called out, one after another, never a repeat. God's Word is living and active, a help in the time of trouble.

Do you believe it?

My closest friend may not know the depth of my pain, but Jesus does. He calls, "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).

Recognizing that we live in a hostile world where pain and adversity daily raise their ugly heads, Jesus both warns and encourages us in John 16:33: "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

Job's world was a bitter one, wasn't it? Physical, mental, financial, emotional, and

spiritual despair afflicted him beyond my understanding. Where was God's goodness? His wife surely didn't see it. Nor did his friends who arrived to commiserate with him. How did he get through it without blaming God or without sinning against Him? In chapter 42 Job finally admits, "I have heard of Thee by hearing of the ear; But now my eyes see Thee ..." He recognized God's sovereignty.

I have a special psalm which has ministered to me. I love it because the writer, David, admits his own weakness, his inability to understand all that's going on. Psalm 133:2 reads: "Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child rests against his mother; my soul is like a weaned child within me." This isn't a picture of a frantic baby clamoring for his mother's breast, but a calm babe in his mother's arms, trusting that she has his best welfare at heart.

Gunderson is a member of Spencer Creek Free Lutheran, Eugene, Ore.

May the peoples praise You, God; may all the peoples praise You. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for You rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth.

Psalm 67:3-4

hankfulness is the best word I can think of to describe our Journey Missions trip to Jinja, Uganda, this summer.

We are so thankful for the opportunity we had to bring a team under Journey Missions to Uganda. Each member on the team of ten was a special blessing to the ministry there and also to the other team members. It is a joy to see how God always seems to bring such specific personalities together for such specific circumstances. One member, Pastor Marshall Nessa, showed such care for our missionaries and members of the Ambassador Institute Board through prayer and encouragement. We serve an amazing God. We are thankful for opportunities to see the Great Designer at work.

We are thankful for the legacy our AFLC missionaries are creating in Uganda. What a blessing to be in the homes of Brent and Emily Raan, Micah and Famke Berger and coworker Michael Rokenbradt, and Nate and Rhoda Jore (who were on furlough), visit with them, and experience a little taste of their daily lives. We are challenged by their obedience and faithfulness to follow Jesus through great ups and downs in life and ministry. God has given them a special and very needed niche of ministry, empowering and discipling church leaders. We saw Brent lead a Bible study for those who have gone through the Ambassador Institute curriculum. Through this study, God is at work in creating a fellowship of believers who passionately dig into His Word for daily sustenance. We are so thankful for their great examples of perseverance and love for Jesus and for people. We are thankful for the ways God has provided for and directed their families.

The missionary community we experienced in Jinga is a beautiful picture of the body of Christ. There are so many different families that come from all kinds of backgrounds and serve in very different ways, yet they are united on the

core gospel truths. Through their house church fellowship, they love each other deeply, enough to have honest conversations and to support one another through the many joys and challenges of life and ministry. I was personally so challenged and encouraged by this amazing community of ordinary people, who are faithfully following Jesus and genuinely caring for their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Someday when we see Jesus in heaven, we will also see people worshiping Him from every tribe, language, people, and nation. It will be amazing. For now, we sometimes get a little taste of that time while we get to worship and interact together with believers from another nation. It was a joy for our team to meet many Ugandan believers through Sunday worship, Ambassador Institute classes, and opportunities to serve them in medical ministry. Through these experiences, we worshiped with them, heard their stories, prayed together and encouraged one another. God is so amazing that He can understand all our different languages and heart cries all at the same time. We are thankful for the Ugandan believers, for opportunities to worship Jesus together, and for their great witness of God's love.

We are thankful for people and for unique opportunities. We are thankful for encouraging and challenging moments. We are thankful for the One who ordains the timing of all these circumstances. We are thankful for the Master Designer, the Great Shepherd of all His sheep, the One whose name is to be praised in every language forever and ever. We are thankful for His love and mercy and for the hope He brings to people of every nation. We are thankful for the promise of seeing Him face to face someday. We are thankful for Jesus.

Nelson is a member of Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, Minn.









Bible school students meet for class in Ulan Bator. Battogtokh Sukhmyagmar and his mother and sister. Children sing praise songs during a church service in Ulan Bator. Pastor Lyndon Korhonen meets with Pastor Puje.

Stories from Mongolia

BY PASTOR CRAIG JOHNSON

he story of Christianity in Mongolia isn't a long one. For 70 years Mongolia was dominated by the Soviet Union and communist, atheistic ideology. In 1991 the Soviets left Mongolia and democracy spread. Christian missionaries soon came and the stories of God changing lives soon began.

AFLC President Lyndon Korhonen and I visited Mongolia this past September in response to an invitation from the Mongolian Evangelical Lutheran Church (MELC) to visit and consider ways their church and the AFLC could have closer fellowship. MELC began in 1995, three years after the Norwegian Lutheran Mission sent their

AFLC president and World Missions chairman visit MELC

first missionaries to Mongolia. MELC now has 22 congregations, a Bible school, four pastors, and a number of church workers located throughout Mongolia. The church is

also home to a number of stories of lives God has transformed.

During his teenage years Puje was a "good atheist" who believed in the teachings of the Communist party. Then he was invited by a friend to hear a missionary speak. At that meeting Puje, who was then in his early 20s, received a copy of the Bible for the first time. He read it and God worked through His Word and brought Puje to salvation. He is now a pastor and leader of the church in Mongolia. He is also father-in-law of Ganzorig Enkhjargal, a student from Mongolia who is studying at the Free Lutheran Seminary.

Another Mongolian pastor we met struggled for years with alcohol abuse which was destroying his life and his family relationships. Somebody shared the good news of Jesus with him and he came to faith in Christ. He now shares that good news with others as he pastors four congregations and leads a ministry to bring freedom to ones enslaved by alcohol addiction like he was.

Battogtokh Sukhmyagmar came to know Jesus as his Savior in the youth ministry of one of the congregations. Now he joyfully serves a congregation on the outskirts of the capital city of Ulan Bator. He also, once a month, rides a bus 13 hours one way to help plant a new congregation in a community in Mongolia that currently has no Christian congregation. We visited the congregation in the city of Darkhan. That congregation worships in a building which used to provide housing and offices for Soviet soldiers. Now the good news of Jesus is being proclaimed there.

Most of our time was spent in Ulan Bator, Mongolia's largest city. On the Sunday we were in Mongolia we worshiped with the congregation there and Pastor Korhonen preached. MELC has a Bible school in Ulan Bator where students meet four times a year for two weeks at a time. People of a variety of ages come there for training in the Bible and serving in local congregations. One of the areas in which the AFLC may be able to assist MELC is in providing occasional teachers for some of the Bible school sessions.

The Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) was instrumental in the beginning of MELC and still works closely with the church. While in Mongolia we visited with David Olson, who is a member of the AFLC and a former student at AFLBS. David is now a missionary and current director of NLM's work in Mongolia.

The door for sharing the good news of Jesus in Mongolia has not been open long, but today it is wide open and hearts are also open and receptive. The people of the MELC believe now is a key day of great opportunity. They want to be faithful to God's calling and go forward with a sense of urgency and hopefulness. Pray for God to continue working in Mongolia, bringing about many more stories of changed lives for Jesus.

Johnson, chairman of the World Missions Committee, serves Bethany Free Lutheran, Astoria, Ore.

THE 2019 BIBLE STUDY

"I see the Lord always before my face; He is at my right hand, that I shall not be moved. Therefore, my heart rejoices, my tongue is glad, and my flesh also shall rest in hope" (Acts 2:25-26).



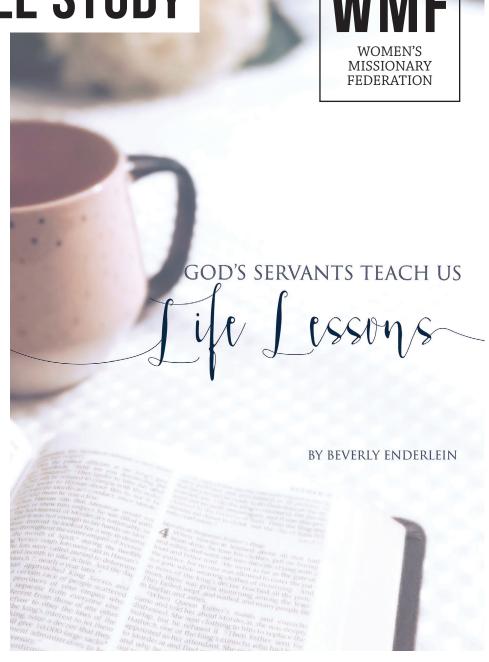
e invite you to walk through the Bible together as we study "God's Servants Teach Us Life Lessons," the 2019 WMF Bible study written by Beverly Enderlein. At first glance,

a study of the old favorites might be too familiar to be captivating. However, powerful lessons can be drawn from the real-life events of God's people through the ages. As we enjoy reading and discussing each one, we want to seek richer applications for ourselves. God's Word is living and powerful, it is always current, and its lessons are given for our admonition and instruction.

Consider these examples:

- Allow the poor widow in I Kings 17 to propel you to put faith in God into lively action, even when times are hard.
- Be challenged to prayerfully consider how we can relieve the terrible persecution of believers in our modern world as we look at the times in which Naomi and Ruth lived.
- · Resisting Satan's deceptions and temptations by personal obedience to God will be very apparent in the study of Joseph.
- As we study the grief and hope of the little family of Bethany, we will focus on Christ's Lordship over death, the power of His resurrection, and the joy of looking forward to His return.

Let's trust God to teach us as we journey together with God's servants throughout 2019. This study is an updated version to the one that was presented by the WMF in 1972.



2019 WMF Bible Study • God's Servants Teach Us Life Lessons

Please use this form to order the 2019 WMF Bible Study. The cost per copy is \$12, which includes shipping.

Name:		
Address:		
City:	Zip:	
Church name:		
City:	Zip:	
Number of copies:		

Make checks payable to "WMF of AFLC" and mail to: WMF Executive Secretary, Dawn Johnson, 2991 30th Ave., Wilson, WI 54027.









Former Charles property homes demolished

since the 1950s, the Charles family has lived on the property adjoining the administration and campus of the AFLC in Plymouth, Minn. After the AFLC purchased the former Hauge Lutheran Innermission Federation property at 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd. in 1964, the two neighbors have enjoyed an amiable relationship. When the Charles Family Trust decided to sell their property, they knew who they wanted to sell it to: "The church," said Deanna (Charles) McCormick, trustee.

The AFLC purchased the property in August 2017 for \$650,000. For a time,

renters were allowed to live in the large residential home and two duplex properties while the AFLC pursued potential renovation projects. But the expense of such work on an aging home with multiple structural and system issues was out of the AFLC's budget. The decision was made to demolish the home, garage and duplex buildings. That work was completed the week of Oct. 8-12.

For now, the property will be seeded as a green space for use by AFLC employees and guests, as well as students and staff at the AFLC Schools. A total of \$222,000 remains on the existing mortgage.



A large residential home, garage, and two duplex apartments were demolished October 8-10. A crew worked to remove the building material and level the land before seeding the dirt with grass seed. The property will remain a green space until needed for future use.



A PLACE TO REST

BY PASTOR NATE JORE

we had much to process: discouragement, stress in our marriage, expectations, uncertainty, and a move/transition. Our daily schedule at Alongside included two morning sessions on topics such as loss and grief, stress and burnout, depression, conflict resolution, community, and Sabbath—to name a few—followed by an hour of group counseling, a lunch break, and then individual counseling for an hour each afternoon. There was an excellent program, as well, for the kids and the youth, and they covered the same topics in their classes as the adults.

Our kids loved every minute of it, and Rhoda and I were able to see how healthy it was for them to have a place where they could understand and voice some things they weren't able to before. We also had ample time to play together as a family and to process together what we were learning. We gained valuable tools and language to help us in our efforts to be healthier individuals and to be more fit to serve and to persevere through difficulties. We left refreshed and grateful. I am so thankful for Pastor Del Palmer and the WMC for supporting us in attending this retreat, as well as for their attentiveness to the well-being of the

missionaries of the AFLC.

As I write this, I find my heart going out to pastors here in the U.S. Many of them are struggling with burnout and discouragement. Are we taking care of our pastors? Is your pastor struggling? It struck me that while Alongside is designed for both pastors and missionaries, there were no pastors in our group. Somehow, it doesn't seem out of place for a missionary on furlough to take three weeks to focus on their emotional and spiritual well-being, but what about for a pastor? This is a worthy investment for our pastors. There are a growing number of ministries like Alongside that provide excellent counseling and help for people in ministry. We hope you will consider supporting your pastor attending such a retreat, or if you are a pastor, to consider if this is something that would be beneficial for you. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jore and his wife, Rhoda, and their children are AFLC missionaries serving in Uganda.

September this year found

us again at a counseling retreat,

Springs, Colo. We were on our first furlough after having spent three years in Uganda where our third child, Hannah, had recently been born. We

were there at the request of the World Missions Committee.

Another AFLC missionary

family had recently taken part

in the course, and they highly

a list of issues which we were

hoping to process and gain

failure, fear, betrayal, and

loss of family and our home

invaluable to our family, and

opportunity for us to attend.

After having worked through

from our first term, we were

joy and with fresh eyes.

able to return to Uganda with

recommended it. We went with

insight into, a few being unmet

expectations, disappointment,

culture. That week at MTI was

we thank God for providing the

much of our pain and heartache

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Brad Novacek, Kasson, Minn., has been deployed to the Middle East for a year. Pastor Richard Erickson is serving Mt. Sion Lutheran in Kasson and Zion Lutheran Church in Dexter, Minn., in his absence.

Pastor Joel Rolf has accepted a call to serve Minnewaska Lutheran, Starbuck, Minn., and began there on Oct. 17. Rolf resigned as the dean of AFLBS after serving 12 years.

Journey Mission Short Term Assistant (STA) **Emily Olson** will be transitioning in December from serving in Uganda with Pastor Brent and Emily Raan to serving in Celeya, Mexico, with Pastor Milton Flores. STA **Seth Skogerboe** arrived in Cuenca, Ecuador, in October where he will serve for 6 to 9 months.

Seminarian **Ryan Patenaude**, who will complete his studies in December, has accepted a call to serve West Prairie Free Lutheran, Kindred, N.D. Patenaude is serving an internship at St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D., under the mentorship of Pastor Micah Hjermstad.

Chad Friestad, Crystal, Minn., was ordained Oct. 21 at Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating.

Pastor Wayne Hjermstad is serving as interim pastor at Word of Life Lutheran, Mankato, Minn.

Members of **Good Shepherd Lutheran**, Brainerd, Minn., voted to come off of Home Missions status on Sept. 23. Home Missions celebrates with this growing congregation and prays God's blessing on them in the future.

Kristin Barka will replace **Julia Prichard** as the administrative assistant to the Home Missions director. Prichard will step down at the end of the year.

Pastor S. Jerome Elness, Duluth, Minn., has moved to Livonia, Mich., to live with his daughter, Elenn, and her husband Dr. Stephen Parrish. Elness, whose wife Elaine died last year, is a former LFC/TALC missionary in China and served the AFLC congregation in Superior, Wis., for several years.

AFLC Youth Ministries will host its annual **Youth Worker Weekends** Jan. 18-20 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis. Guest trainer Duffy Robbins will speak on the theme, "Engaging Culture." Visit the Youth Ministries website for more information: aflc.org/youth.

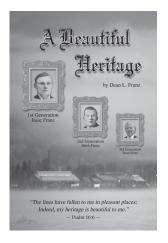
Franz family heritage book available

Pastor Dean Franz recently published a book titled, *A Beautiful Heritage*. It chronicles the spiritual heritage of the Franz family, beginning with his grandfather, Isaac Franz, who experienced a dramatic conversion in February 1904. It continues with Isaac's prayer for a son, a child of promise like Samuel, whom he promised he would give back to the Lord as a minister of the gospel. Dean's f

ister of the gospel. Dean's father, Pastor Herb Franz, was that child.

Pastor Herb was born in March 1917, but it would be a long and rugged road to the ultimate fulfillment of his father's vow. But even before he was saved, one could see that God was preparing Herb for ministry. A week after his unexpected, born-again experience in April 1947, he preached his first sermon. For more than 50 years he continued to preach, sharing the Word for a final time 13 days before God took him home in March 2000.

The first few pages of A Beautiful



Heritage tell Isaac Franz's story, while half of the 200-page volume is dedicated to Pastor Herb Franz's five-plus decades of pastoral and evangelistic ministry. The remainder of the book deals with the impact Isaac and Herb had on Pastor Dean's life, and the lives of countless others—including wife, Sylvia Franz; sons, Rick and Pastor Peter Franz; grandson Michael

Franz; and a dozen pastors, missionaries, and former members of Pastor Herb's churches.

Dean is offering his book free of charge to anyone interested in the Franz family story and/or to those whose lives may have been touched by Isaac, Herb, or Dean Franz. To receive a copy, send your mailing address by e-mail to dean-lfranz@gmail.com or mail to Dean L. Franz, 46679 Tucker St. NE, Cambridge, MN 55008. An addressed envelope will be included with the book for those wanting to make a donation toward printing and shipping costs.

FLY Board announces new pastor rate for convention

The 2019 FLY Board announced a new special registration rate for pastors attending the FLY Convention. Board members believe pastors have an important role in the lives of teenagers, and they value having them at the FLY Convention. But not all pastors are able serve on staff or as dorm room leaders. This week can be a time of refreshment and encouragement for pastors, and can help foster connections with youth in their congregations. Pastors are invited to check out the pastor's rate on the FLY Convention website and consider coming to the Rockies in July 2019. Visit flyconvention.org/registration for more information.

SEPTEMBER MEMORIALS -

AFLBS

Wayne Deubner Helen Breden (3) Ruth Claus Mabel Johnson Pastor Steve Papillon Lois Swanson

AFLTS

Pastor Steve Papillon

FLAPS

Harold Schmitke
Arnold Schmitke
Otto Schmitke
Martin Schmitke
Carl Schmitke, Jr
Carl & Alvina
Schmitke
Freda Varland
Agnes Ostrem
Betty Waterworth
Amy Gutterud
Phillip Lund

Home Missions

Jeri Graham Pastor Al Monson Joe Erickson

Lutheran Ambassador

Donald Melby

Vision

Wayne Deubner

WMF

Mabel Johnson

World Missions

Pastor Richard Dahlin (40)

... in honor of

Home Missions Kenn & Jeri Graham

World Missions



DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

BY PASTOR DANIEL HURNER

Philip comes across an Ethiopian who is reading from Isaiah 53 and asks him a single question: "Do you understand what you are reading?" This question leads to a conversation that ultimately results in the Ethiopian coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ. I enjoy this encounter so much because of the simplicity of the question. Recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit in this account, "Do you understand what you're reading?" becomes a question loaded with divine potential. By asking it, Philip is given the opportunity to explain to the Ethiopian that what Isaiah wrote about regarding the Suffering Servant was fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ.

encounter that is one of my personal favorites in the whole

Bible.

Now think of this question in the context of discipling

younger Christians. This question becomes a critical piece of what youth ministers seek to accomplish as we are driven and motivated by a desire for young families, college students, youths, and children to grow in their relationship with Jesus. This is especially true as we consider the incredible amount of influence that culture has on every single one of us. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism—a common religious belief among young people today—is appealing. It tells people to do good because it makes them feel good and God is available if/when they need Him. This belief replaces the true gospel message with Christianity lite—you can do whatever you like, believe whatever you want, and interpret the Bible in the way that best suits your lifestyle. This spiritual á la carte, paired with a constantly changing secular culture, can easily cause older generations of Christians to avoid navigating the confusing cultural fog to reach young adults.

Praise the Lord we have the promise from Jesus: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b). The confusion and noise of youth culture isn't an excuse for us to avoid this generation—it's an alarm that should drive us to view culture through the lens of Scripture so that we can come alongside younger Christians in a significant way. We can help them filter through what they see and hear so they can better hear the voice of their Heavenly Father. He has a message that is very different than what they've been bombarded with throughout the day.

If this topic has piqued your interest, would you consider at least one of two things? First, join us in January 2019 at the Association Retreat Center for Youth Worker Weekends, when Dr. Duffy Robbins will speak on this topic. Second, would you prayerfully support and encourage your congregation's youth leader/volunteer to attend?

Hurner is the associate pastor of the Dalton Parish, Dalton, Minn.

The 2019 schedule

Below is the 2019 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. Email us at ruthg@aflc.org or call (763) 545-5631.

ISSUE DATE	DEADLINE	ISSUE THEME
January	November 28	Faith issues
February	December 31	Christian Ed.
March	January 30	Lent/Easter
April	February 27	AFLC Schools
May	March 18	Evangelism
June	April 29	Open Doors
July	May 29	Missions
August	June 26	Conference
September	July 29	FLY 2019
October	August 28	Faith Journeys
November	September 30	Thanksgiving
December	October 30	Christmas

Please note, information regarding the Annual Conference, scheduled for June 11-14 in Canadensis, Pa., will be featured in the May issue, with a deadline of March 18. This issue will include the schedule, board and committee nominees, registration, and WMF Day schedule and registration. Other conference information will be printed as it is available, including youth and children's activities.

Have a feature story idea? Let us know

The editors of *The Lutheran Ambassador* are asking our readers for help in sourcing feature stories for the news section of our publication. These stories could include unique congregational ministries either within the church body or tied to the local or worldwide ministries. We would like to focus on personal stories of God at work within our churches.

We know that every congrega-

tion is filled with unique members who have stories of their own. If you have a testimony that you would like to share, let us know. Or if you know someone who does, we'd love to hear about it.

Contact us by email. Managing Editor Ruth Gunderson can be reached at ruthg@aflc.org. Pastor Robert Lee, editor, can be reached at rlee@aflc.org.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES October 1-31, 2018					
	REC'D IN OCTOBER				
General Fund	\$17,479	\$301,290	\$305,578		
Evangelism	4,409	85,589	103,081		
Youth Ministries	6,234	108,987	79,777		
Parish Education	7,286	138,198	137,948		
Seminary	16,938	204,670	206,386		
Bible School	20,317	411,931	424,106		
Home Missions	27,441	318,879	312,021		
World Missions	33,664	287,089	325,622		
Personal Support	38,624	496,604	449,702		
TOTALS	\$172,391	\$2,353,237	\$2,344,220		
For additional financial information for each department, go to www.aflc.org/giving					

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The Lutheran Ambassador

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Publication is required and will be printed in the November 2018 issue of The Lutheran Ambassador.

/s/ Ruth Gunderson, Managing Editor

LET'S COUNT OUR BLESSINGS

"Count your blessings, name them one by one; count your blessings, see what God hath done" (Johnson Oatman, Jr.).

he words of the old gospel song are probably familiar to our readers, and they can serve as an important reminder to us in this season of the year. Perhaps we may have remembered to count our personal blessings, which is surely important. But have we counted our blessings lately as a fellowship?



Pastor Robert Lee

A current project for your editor has been the preparation of an AFLC history, and it was striking to read an article written in 1961 by a pastor who said he was still opposed to the upcoming merger, but who saw no other

"Christian alternative" than to join the new church body. There was no Sverdrup on the scene, he wrote, and a handful of congregations that might choose to remain independent will need a school for training pastors, missions to support, a church paper with a good editor ... and so the list could grow, including all that was lacking to organize a viable new church body. No doubt there were those who shared our convictions yet were discouraged from standing with us. So much would be lost, it seemed, and a new beginning appeared to be quite impossible.

There are few of us still living who were there in 1962, and it is important for us to remember and remind our church family of the blessings that should be counted—not to celebrate what we have accomplished, but, as the songwriter says, to see what God has done.

When the 40th anniversary of the AFLC was observed, there was an encouragement in the president's message to the annual conference to think back to 1962 and to wonder if anyone could have ever dreamed ...

- · that we might grow from a handful of Midwestern congregations to a nationwide fellowship stretching from coast to coast and southward to the Rio Grande.
- that we would become a worldwide family, with missionary outreach to Brazil, Mexico, India, East Africa, and Eastern Europe,
- that we would become "a melting" pot of like-minded brothers and sisters from a mosaic of ethnic and synodical backgrounds, enriched by an evangelistic emphasis that continues to supply a steady stream of new believers with little or no church roots at all,"
- that the Lord might supply a spacious campus in suburban Minneapolis for a headquarters, seminary, and Bible school.
- that the Bible school would grow to be one of the largest of its kind in the world.
- that we would acquire an abandoned Air Force radar base in Wisconsin and convert it to a thriving year-round Bible camp, conference, and retreat center,
- that our national youth ministry would be the growing edge of the AFLC,
- that a full Sunday school curriculum, a new hymnal (impossible!), and a wide range of parish education, devotional, and historical materials would be published.

The ministry of our church magazine should be added to the list, serving our congregations and friends since 1963, adding, as well, the continuing emphasis on service and Word-centered fellowship by the Women's Missionary Federation, and the planting of new congregations by Home Missions.

Counting our blessings as a church family should also include thankfulness for that which has not changed: our commitment to building free and living Lutheran congregations and our confession

that we believe the Bible is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God. Anyone would have been deemed seriously mentally disturbed for suggesting in 1962 how far much of mainline Lutheranism might stray within 50 years. The concerns that are most shocking, of course, are social issues such as homosexual ordinations and weddings, approval of abortions, etc. But the foundational issue is the denial of the authority of God's Word, which has tragically been undermined in classrooms and from pulpits. We continue to stand where we stood in 1962, not due to a slavish worship of the past, but to an unalterable conviction that our world still needs to hear, "Thus says the Lord!"

The men and women who gathered 56 years ago in Thief River Falls, Minn., ... dared to dream and to trust God for the impossible.

> The previous editor of this magazine once referred to our AFLC pioneers as dreamers, and so we were. The men and women who gathered 56 years ago in Thief River Falls, Minn.—farmers, ranchers, teachers, homemakers, students, plus a few pastors (some of whom were already retired)—dared to dream and to trust God for the impossible. The story over the years has not been all pleasant, of course. Our church family has endured conflict and defeat, disappointment and failure. But God has been faithful, even when some of us were not, and He forgives.

Therefore, in this month of thanksgiving, this is a call to add our AFLC to the blessings that we count, thanking the Lord for what He has done.

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd. Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

building the base

UNITY OF THE BELIEVERS

BY PASTOR RICHARD GUNDERSON



he Protestant Reformation, begun more than 500 years ago, was not the first split of a group from the Roman Catholic Church.

In the centuries that followed, efforts were made to unite the Christian Church with very little success. Even within Lutheranism we have gone through a series of mergers throughout the 1900s, resulting each time with the formation of new Lutheran bodies—including the AFLC in 1962. In the wake of these mergers people were wounded, congregations divided, pastor friends turned against each other, and in general people displayed a total disrespect for one another. The world shakes it head and says it makes no sense. Through it all, God has been dishonored.

Unity is God's will and work. Our God is one as Jesus declared in Mark 12:29, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord ..." Jesus also declared, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). From Genesis to Revelation the oneness of the Godhead is

declared throughout God's Word. We hear the heartbeat of Jesus in John 17:11, 21-23 as He prayed that believers may be one even as He and the Father are one.

That same oneness is the commonality that we share in the family of God: all are one in Jesus Christ. Paul declared in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

There is a grammatical distinction between the words "unity" and "unify." Unity is the state of being one whereas to unify is to cause to be one or to unite. Unity is the work of Christ to make us one in Him. Instead of trying to unify the Church we need to heed the words of Paul to the Ephesian Christians, "... being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:3).

In our time serving the Lord in parish ministry and as missionaries, my wife and I have experienced the uplifting fellowship of believers from other denominational households. I have also experienced some negative incidents, but I have refused to turn inward and react by dishonoring those whom I felt offended me. Yes, there have been times when I failed and I have had to ask Jesus to forgive me and help me to respect and value all, within and without the family of God. In that I find freedom and would encourage you to do the same. That is one way we preserve the unity of the body of Christ.

I encourage you to look beyond the walls of your visible home congregation. *Luther's Small Catechism* speaks of the invisible Church, that is, the whole company of believers worldwide. When you declare in the Apostle's Creed together with others, that you believe in the Holy Christian Church and the communion of saints, be reminded that you are a part of the whole family of God .

Gunderson serves Spencer Creek Lutheran, Eugene, Ore.