

The Lutheran AMBASSADOR

November 24, 1998

Humility:

without it
thanksgiving
is meaningless.

John the Baptist:
his message
for our times.

Longing for His Return!

**Why use
the Advent
Wreath?**

AFLC news:
Travel into the
country with
the Abels.

**Campus Days
at AFLBS.**

PLUS ...



*Through
Christ
then, let us
continually
offer up a
sacrifice of
praise to
God
that is,
the fruit of
lips that
give thanks
to His name.*

— Hebrews 13:15

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

November 24, 1998
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AN ENCOURAGING WORD

Praise and thanksgiving to the Creator

"Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him" (Romans 1:20-21a).

I like to start each morning with a walk. I'm truly amazed at the beauty and complexity of the universe that God has created. I notice the variation in the plants. The difference in each animal, from the tiny insect to the birds and mammals, is amazing. To think that God created all of this in six days is even more amazing.

When we ponder creation, it causes us to ask some questions and notice God's plan for creation. The trees bear fruit. For whom? The lights are created to mark out days, seasons and years. But for whom? On the sixth day, the Creator's activity comes to a sudden time-out. A divine discussion is held. God's creative work is climaxed by the creation of a being distinct from all others, a creature made in the image of God and therefore able to rule as His vice regent over the lower creation.

Mankind, male and female is the peak of God's creation. All that went before was designed with man as the climax. Genesis 1:1 said it simply: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Genesis 1:2-2:3 speaks of how God, out of desolation, emptiness and chaos, creates order and beauty and makes a habitation fit for a king — His royal creation and representative, mankind. When we consider all of creation as a gracious gift from God's hand, can we do anything

less than praise and thank Him?

David put it into words perfectly when he penned Psalm 8, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

Pondering God's creation has given new meaning to my morning walks. They become a time of praising God. These thoughts make me anxious to see the One who not only created all of this but redeemed me from my sin so that I can spend eternity with Him. Thank you, God, for your goodness!



— Pastor Del Pamer
Faith Lutheran
Shakopee, Minnesota

sound bites

As we think of the glorious hope of the second coming, our hearts are filled with joy;

1 our souls are consumed with a breathless impatience; our eyes attempt to pierce the dark clouds which veil the future, hoping that the glorious descent of the Son of man may burst upon the view.

— William Hendriksen

Jesus leaves us, not with secret signs that only the spiritual giants can discern. No, He leaves simple and easy-to-understand instructions to

4 his beloved children. ... He gives us words of simplicity that force us to rely on Him. ... Jesus leaves us with a future hope that, by faith, transforms our present reality with Him.

— Michael Card

6

For the ability to be of service to a fellow creature, we ought to give thanks, not demand it.

— W. J. Cameron

2 He who has nothing to live should be aided. If he deceives us, what then? He must be aided again.

— Martin Luther

3 He (Jesus) may come any time. He's sure to come some time. Let's be ready when He does come.

— Andrew W. Blackwood

Focusing on the greatness of God, ... enlarges the soul. ... it makes you a greater person by making you a smaller person.

... I've always tried to present truth so that it will humble the sinner and exalt the Savior.

— J. I. Packer

5

*Enter into His gates with thanksgiving
be thankful unto him*



Those adventurers arriving on the Mayflower were thankful in a special way because of the hardships they had endured. Over forty of their comrades had died the first winter and fifty-five remained to give thanks to God after their first harvest. With a life experience as they had, there was a humbling before the Lord. The pilgrims responded with thankfulness and celebrated with feasting and prayer on that October day in 1621 that Governor William Bradford had set aside.

Humility: *then* Thanksgiving

*and into His courts with praise;
and bless His name.*

— *Psaltn 100:4*



They followed the example of Jesus who was also humble and thankful. He said, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39b). Jesus' desire was to accomplish His Father's will. He humbled Himself because He knew the Father. He said, "I thank You Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes" (Matthew 11:15). God reveals things to those who are like babes before Him. To become as a babe is humbling. Jesus knew the Father and gave all glory to Him for He had given all into Jesus' hands.

We have nothing on our own. It is right to humbly acknowledge the Lord and then thank Him for all His blessings.

Expressing thankfulness can sometimes sound so meaningless. God knows what is meant. He knows whether the heart is humble and sincerely longing to give thanks. It is easy to have the attitude Jesus spoke against: "Because you say, 'I am rich, have

become wealthy, and have need of nothing — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked ..."
(Revelation 3:17).

Humble acknowledgement that all has come from the Lord is crucial. Without it any expression of thanksgiving is meaningless, perhaps even condemning.

May we open our understanding and be taught of the Lord to be humble before Him. Then true thanksgiving will overflow. "All of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.' Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (I Peter 4:5b-7).



— *Pastor LeRoy Flickinger*
Westaker and Bethania Lutheran Parish
Newfolden, Minnesota

Keeping on Keeping on

— Gola Dynneson
Triumph Lutheran
Nogales, Arizona

A thankful heart breeds encouragement to endure the trials of life day by day.

I graduated from high school in 1933. Drought and depression were prevalent. We were nine children and had no money for college. We were thankful for one another and for health and strength to carry on. Dad and Mother taught us to fear, love, and trust in God above all else. Many lost their farms and went on welfare. I helped Dad in the fields. We didn't get allowances, but we were clothed and fed and were able to stay off welfare.

I wondered, "why?" Worldly things and entertainment didn't take our money. Ephesians 5:20 says, "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs making melody in your hearts to the Lord." Our family loved to sing, so much of our entertainment was to gather around the piano and sing. Hymns of praise nurtured a thankful spirit that helped to endure the depression and wait patiently on the Lord.

It was a good preparation for what was to come in my life. Thank you, Lord. Over 51 years ago, as a newly married couple, we struck out for the Mexican border and Nogales, Arizona. Bible school had ignited a mission spirit within us to be co-laborers, working for our living with border wages and starting a Sunday school and church to follow. We were thankful the Lord was with us and saw us through the trying times as well as the glorious times.

After eight years of this, the Lord moved my husband to obey a call to further study at college and seminary. We had four little girls and little money. Thankfulness again welled up in our hearts as we saw the Lord unfolding things before our eyes. After seminary we were sent to Mississippi to three congregations. The blessings of being in the

Bible Belt and a school with good discipline and devotions for our girls, was great. It fortified us for our return to Nogales, a predominantly Catholic community, to spread the gospel.

Now in our 85th and 83rd years, thankful hearts again well up in remembrance of His guidance and encourages us to keep on. David's Psalms are good to dwell on and give us ways to praise and thank God. Romans 8:37 says, "We are more than conquerors through Him who loves us." Doubts give way to the right spirit of thankfulness.

Recently, our car was stolen from our carport. While waiting for the police, my husband remarked, "We lost our car, but many today lost their homes and all due to Hurricane George. We have our home and food and shelter."

This attitude of thanks encouraged me to trust the Lord and not panic. Within a week, the insurance agent arranged a settlement so we could get another car — even a newer one.

Don't worry. Leave things in the hands of the Lord and let Him work it all out His way. Give Him the glory as He gives us the strength to trust Him more.

Our great God loves sinners, and forgives and cleanses through Jesus Christ. Thank Him and continue to pray for yourself and for others. Praise the Lord.



*Be anxious for nothing,
but in everything by
prayer and supplication
with thanksgiving
let your requests
be made known to God.*

Thanksgiving leads to Peace and Hope

Thanksgiving is vacation, turkey, football, family and friends. But for the Christian it is more than that. Thanksgiving comes from saying "thank you" to someone who has helped us in some way or given us something. Who has given us more than God Himself when he gave to us His Son, Jesus Christ? He died for our sins to give us hope and peace.

Hope means trust and reliance. It means to wait and to expect something, even when its coming true seems quite unlikely. That hope is exactly what God has given us. It's so special that we can do nothing else but trust Him and give thanks.

Peace results from thanksgiving. We are so thankful for God's loving kindness to us. He gives us peace of mind — a peace that passes all understanding! That peace does not need to know what will happen next.

Two members of St. John's Lutheran at Schwer share why they are counting their blessings this Thanksgiving.

Viola Lucht's husband died suddenly in 1973. "A peace overcame me knowing he was safely in God's hands. I'm also thankful he did not have to suffer." She added that if God sees that it is in our best interest not to recover from illness,

we can still have hope and peace. "My husband entered 'into His presence with thanksgiving and into His everlasting courts with praise' (Psalm 100:4)."

If, however, with God's help and the knowledge He has given to doctors, we do recover, it is with grateful hearts filled with peace and hope. Viola has experienced that as well. "I had cancer surgery in 1985 followed by chemo and the tamoxifen for seven years. During all those years I was able to keep teaching Sunday school and attended most of my grandchildren's ball games. It was not fear but always peace and hope in the Lord Jesus."

Adversities strangely add to our thanksgiving. The Pilgrims' painful first months in their new land led to our first Thanksgiving Day. Many respond to adversity like Jonah who rebelled, complained and was bitter toward God. Only while Jonah was in the belly of the fish did he give thanks. It often takes adversity to make us more thankful, although we don't grasp this truth until later.

Lynn Hasselbring's adversity has led to greater thanksgiving this year. "My pregnancy with twins led me to, 'Trust in the Lord with all Thine heart and lean not on your own understanding' Proverbs 3:5. Before the birth, I went to a Sunday communion service. While at the altar, Pastor placed his hand on my shoulder and prayed.

"That night I started having contractions. After the unplanned c-section, we came home with healthy twin girls. But complications came up and I was re-admitted to the hospital. Through this adversity I know that God was with me and I am thankful for the closeness I experienced. I wish I could feel that connection all the time. When I face future adversities or doubt, I can look back and know that peace and hope that God gives. I have two reminders to look at everyday — Samantha and Taylor."

May our past, present or future hardships draw us closer to our God of peace and hope. May we, like Paul in prison, respond with thanksgiving in all circumstances!

— *Pastor Mel Meyer
with Viola Lucht and
Lynn Hasselbring
St. John's Lutheran at Schwer,
Milford, Illinois*

*And the peace of God,
which passes all
all comprehension,
shall guard your hearts
and your minds
in Christ Jesus.*

— Philippians 4:6-7 (NASV)



— Pastor
Gary Jorgenson
Faith Lutheran
Ottawa, Illinois

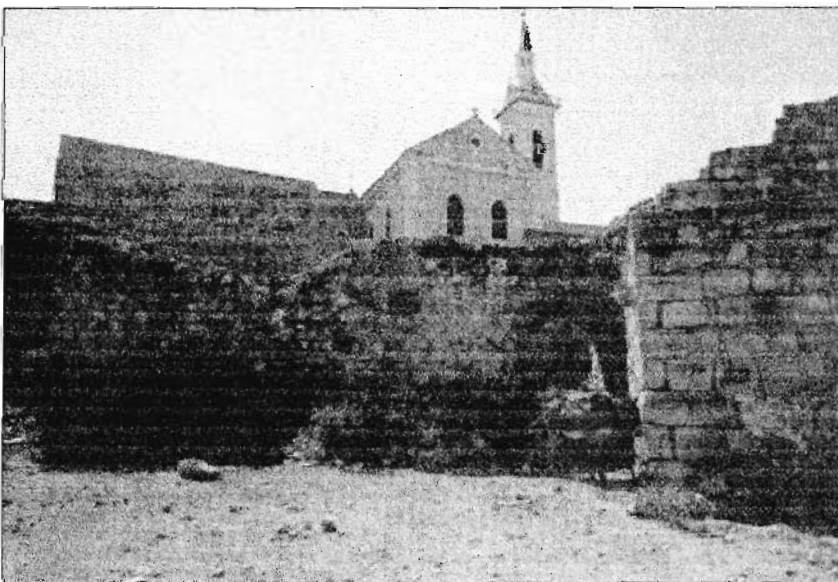
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We live in a society which promotes individuality and individual freedoms. We are urged to be our own person and do our own thing. Yet, many who want to be recognized for their individuality, devote much energy conforming to others. Wanting to be

John the Baptist

a
man for
his
times

a
message
for
ours!



Ain Karim, Judah, St. John's Church and the site of John the Baptist's birthplace (Luke 1:39-57).

unique, they become like everybody else!

John the Baptist was not one of those people. If ever there was a "rugged individual," it was John the Baptist. From his physical appearance and his lifestyle to his mission in life, John the Baptist was unique.

He didn't live in a city or on a farm. He didn't dwell with nomadic shepherds. He lived alone in the stark desert wilderness around the Jordan River. He didn't dress in the latest fashions. John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. He didn't feast on fine cuisine or good home cooking. His diet was locusts and honey. He didn't waste much time talking about the weather, the latest sports scores or the stock market. He went to and fro in the wilderness crying at the top of his voice, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him." He called whoever heard him to a baptism of repentance as the proper response to his message.

Imagine the reports about John that first began to make their way back to civilized society. "There's some guy walking around out in the desert — John something-or-other. He goes around all day long shouting 'Repent! Repent!' He looks like some kind of freak. I guess he fancies himself some sort of prophet, but I think he may have been out in the sun too long! It doesn't matter who listens to him young or old, rich or poor, clergy or laity — He calls each of them to submit to a baptism of water which he says is for the forgiveness of sins and is necessary for all who would be ready to meet the Savior when He comes. Can you believe it? Oh, and you ought to hear how he talks to the Pharisees and Sadducees. He calls them a brood of vipers!"

When John talked (or more likely shouted) people did listen. Only a few at first, but the crowds grew. And while he may have been approached as a source of entertainment at first, he was soon impacting Jewish society to such a degree that even the religious leaders came out to see him. His message confused and troubled them. But it sounded forth with the clear and unmistakable ring of truth.

He called Jewish citizens, of all people, to repentance. His teaching demanded that they recognize that neither Jewish blood flowing through their veins nor the practical observance of the Jewish theology in any way qualified them as citizens of the kingdom of God. They needed to be converted.

He called them to repentance in a water baptism for the forgiveness of sins and to a personal faith in the Christ whose appearance was at hand.

He was asked to identify himself. Was he the long-awaited Messiah? No. John insisted that he was not even worthy to untie the sandals of the Messiah. Was he a reincarnated Elijah or Moses? No. He was a prophet, but not one of the prophets of old come back from the grave.

He was a man, raised by God for this unique time, and for a unique purpose. He was the voice of one crying in the wilderness — a desert wilderness, yes. However, with greater significance, his voice cries in a vast spiritual wilderness with alarming urgency. "Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand. It's here! The time has come! All mankind will see God's salvation!"

While John's message was filled with urgency for his time, his message is equally urgent for our day.

It is soon Christmas. Millions will observe the holiday, but relatively few will truly celebrate it. Why?

Because only those who in repentance and faith have received Christ as their Savior can truly celebrate the event in all its significance. Will you be celebrating Christmas or merely observing the holiday?

Furthermore, the Bible teaches that this same Jesus Who came once to this world as a helpless baby in Bethlehem and went to the cross at Calvary bearing your sins and mine in order to redeem us to God, will come again as the King of kings to judge every person who has ever lived on this planet. Only those who have been truly converted will pass that judgement. Nearly 2,000 years have passed since John announced that first coming. How much longer will it be before He comes again? Are you ready?

John the Baptist isn't here to shout that message in our day. Just as, by God's design, Elijah and Moses couldn't pronounce it in John's day, John can't proclaim it in ours. We who know Jesus personally have been called to do so, and the time to fulfill that task is short. John was a man for his time, but his message is for all time. Proclaim that message boldly. Proclaim it urgently. Proclaim it faithfully. The time is at hand!



Inexpressible and Glorious Joy



Jesus is coming again!

It was torture! We hadn't seen them in a long time. We never enjoyed life more than when we could spend time with our cousins. And now they were expected that evening to celebrate Christmas Eve with us. They had moved to New Mexico and we remained in Minnesota in the Twin Cities area. It seemed forever since we had last seen them.

My brothers and sister and I had emerged from our beds early that morning having slept fitfully in anticipation of their arrival. Though it was more than twelve hours away, we had a whole day to fill with activities that we hoped would make the time pass quickly. But Dad and Mom had different ideas! They thought the house should be cleaned to the hilt with company coming. Their adult eyes saw a lot more



— **Pastor Jon Wellumson**
Emmanuel Lutheran
Williston, North Dakota

cleaning that needed doing than we did. So we were kept busy helping and staying out of their way. Nothing could make a day drag on longer. And nothing could increase our hunger for their arrival more.

Such is the time in which we live as Christians. We look back to when Jesus visited this world with love and compassion. We were blind and lost. We were filthy, wretched and miserable. We were helpless and hopeless. We were all that one who is pure and holy would want to avoid; yes, would want to remove from Himself as far as possible. But instead He came close; very close. He found us and healed us. He cleansed us and lifted us up. Nothing else in history is remotely like His visit. Life could not be said to have any joy or purpose before He came.

After His death and resurrection, He journeyed far away. He said He is returning, but oh, how long it seems since that promise was given. And while what He did in His first visit has made us God's children through faith, we are left to fight a battle while we wait for His return. How slow the time seems to go sometimes as we contend with the world and the devil. But most painful and difficult of all, and what causes our longing for His return to burn within us the most, is our desire to be done with our own flesh. It clings to us and threatens our

well being. And yes, our very lives. We live with joy and suffering at the same time while we long for His return.

When He comes again, the battle is done! When He comes, the flesh is gone and the devil and his kingdom are removed. What can we long for more than His return? What could possibly bring greater joy?

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power *until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time*. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor *when Jesus Christ is revealed*. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (I Peter 1:3-9).



*Amen.
Come,
Lord Jesus!*

— Revelation 22:20

The tradition of Advent wreaths

As I was growing up, bringing down the Christmas decorations from the attic was always an exciting time. On the day after Thanksgiving, my mother, my brother and I would unpack the ornaments, the lights, and the Advent wreath. Our wreath was a small red circle made of wood with a garland of silk holly leaves, and we placed it on a crocheted doily in the center of our dining room table. Mom always had trouble getting its small white candles to stand straight in their holders. She would drip melted wax in the cups to anchor the candles, but they were always a little crooked. Despite the wreath's simplicity, it reminded us of the meaning of Advent, a time of joyous anticipation that leads us to the celebration of Christ's birth.

According to an article by Debbie Tafton O'Neal, the official season of Advent was established by the Council of Tours in 567 A.D. It was to be a time of fasting prior to Christmas Day. At first, this Advent season lasted from three to seven weeks, but now it is usually observed for four weeks. The history of the wreath is uncertain, but some believe that its use originated in Germany or France. In his article, "Light Your Way to Christmas," Mark Boyer writes that the tradition of Advent wreaths was started a few hundred years ago by Lutherans in Eastern Germany. Four candles were hung from a chandelier to represent the four Sundays in the season of Advent.

Although Advent wreaths today can range from pewter to ceramic, traditional wreaths are usually made with evergreen boughs. Evergreen trees remain green throughout the winter months, and this reminds us of the eternal life that is given to us through the Savior: "Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24).

The circular shape of the wreath symbolizes the never-ending love of God; a love so limitless that it gave us Jesus. Psalm 136:1 reminds us to "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting." In the same way that a circle is continuous, God's love for us will never end.

When we light the Advent wreath's candles, we think of the light that was sent to

us at Christmas. We read in John 8:12 that "Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.'" Just as a candle can illumine the darkness around it, Christ came to illumine a world dark with sin.

Advent wreaths may vary widely, but their purpose remains the same. They serve to enrich Advent by reminding us of what this season of anticipation means: we prepare to celebrate Christmas and the eternal life, the never-ending love, and the light that was given to us on that day.

May each of our homes and churches be warmed with His light and love as we burn our first candle this November 29.



— Maren Dyrud
Maranatha Free Lutheran
Glyndon, Minnesota





Pictured is an AFLC-Brazil Bible school student making a hospital visitation.



Students also help with vacation Bible school preparations and children's camps.

Sudan: suffering in silence

(Excerpts taken from reflections of Clive Calver, President, World Relief Corporation)

The church in Sudan may be the fastest growing church in the world, but its people are dying.

In the past several months, I have traveled to southern Sudan to assess the extent of the famine there and what can be done about it. Each time I witnessed unspeakable suffering. I saw people, who hadn't had a decent meal in months, transformed into walking skeletons. I now know what the American servicemen may have felt when they liberated Auschwitz.

Indeed the sight of starvation left an indelible impression. But it was the sound of starvation that troubled me even more. I'd seen hungry children in Cambodia, Nicaragua and Rwanda as World Relief's president and I know, from raising four children of my own, that children cry when they're hungry. But the children I saw in southern Sudan were far beyond hunger — months of insufficient food had rendered them lifeless and still. Standing in an emergency feeding center, surrounded by hundreds of gaunt, hollow-eyed women cradling

their infants, I witnessed the terrible silence of starvation.

Through the cruelty of a 16-year civil war, religious persecution and three consecutive years of crop failure, the people of southern Sudan have lost everything and have no way to feed themselves or their children. They have no choice but to leave their villages and set off walking across the vast flat plains of Sudan in search of something to eat. Some, mostly children and the elderly, die along the way. Others collapse within sight of their goal. And some die in spite of reaching it.

Indeed, times are very hard in southern Sudan, and the people need our compassion and prayers, but I discovered something in this land that made me very, very envious: The Church is exploding with new converts! One leader told me he used to have 12 churches to look after; now he has hundreds of church groups.

The beauty of it is, these are not "rice Christians;" there's nothing to gain from becoming a Christian in Sudan except possibly more hostility. People are looking for someone outside of themselves who will give them hope for the future and they're finding that in Jesus.

Campo Mourão, Brazil —

Twelve of the over 40 students at the Brazil Bible school and seminary live on campus. Many need to find ways to pay room and board. They come from families who are not able to financially help. The Student Work Fund is a type of scholarship offered to help these young people as they work on or off campus. This little-known fund is supported by people and congregations in the AFLC. If any church or individual would like to help students come to the Brazil Bible school or seminary, please contact AFLC World Missions Director, Eugene Enderlein at (612) 545-5631.



Jon Warren/World Relief Photo

Curitiba, Brazil

Fernando and Monse Herrera of Mexico and their two-year-old son have arrived in Brazil to serve their internship. They are fruits of the missionary outreach in Aguascalientes, Mexico, and feel called to be missionaries themselves. They will spend part of their time in Campo Mourão, Brazil where the AFLC Bible School and Seminary is located as well as spending some time here in Curitiba.

Recently Paul and I traveled into a rural area about 40 kilometers away. Paul usually takes this trip about once a month.

People live scattered out among

the hills down narrow, winding trails in the middle of "nowhere." The scenery is beautiful but living in these places is no easy task.

The first house (a little shack made of old boards nailed together, about nine-foot square) was home to a young couple with two children and the wife's senile father. The baby was undressed on the bed, lying in filth. Evidently no one had diapered her that morning. The mother proceeded to haphazardly wipe her off with a dry rag and dress her somewhat. Of course these houses have no water or lights. The couple and the two children sleep

together on an old single mattress (no sheets, just an old blanket stretched over the piece of foam). The young couple prayed to receive the Lord last Tuesday and we wanted to help them out and visit and pray with them again.

As we arrived at another home, we saw a flurry of children running. They would peek their dirty little faces out of the door frame one by one. The 36-year-old mother has 12 children. Her oldest daughter (19), already has four children of her own and they all live together. The men make charcoal for a living, burning logs in hot kilns to receive a pittance. Most of the people depend on day labor, or field work when they can find it. They are paid \$3 per day.

We had a refreshing visit in the home of an old Christian couple who were so pleased to have someone arrive to read the Bible and pray with them. The nearest church is 17 kilometers away so they have a hard time getting there regularly. When people saw our car approaching they would put down whatever they were doing and run to their homes, hoping the pastor would come and visit their house. Some had waited all afternoon in hopes that we would stop for a visit. In each place we distributed clothing, food, and medicines and took time to visit, read the Bible and pray. It is just a little glimmer of hope in a world of hopelessness.

I can't do justice to explaining the day's experience, but perhaps this will help you remember to be grateful for all you have and be willing to share with those who don't have much of anything. It seems like we're just applying "band-aids" to big wounds. But we hope the little that we do in Christ's name will be a means of helping some to trust in Jesus to provide for all their needs. Money for food and especially medicine is a real need.

We appreciate your prayers for us as we hold forth the light of the gospel in this place.

— *Missionaries Paul and Becky Abel*

Miriam Infant Home Campo Mourão, Brazil

Pictured with some of the children, is Irani Lenz, a housemother at the Miriam Infant Home. Irani is a Brazilian of German descent. She writes in her testimony:

"As a teen I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, and He continued to give me a yearning for mission work. I started Bible school and there God spoke seriously to me. It was a great internal battle for me. I didn't want to follow or obey. But when I began to resign my life to Him, paths opened to do His work.

"Now it has been four years that I have been in Campo Mourão. As part of the team of workers, I need wisdom to be an example for the children to show them the ways of Christ. The greatest responsibility is to influence and impact their lives through the Word in order to develop a healthy and balanced self-image in the hearts of the little ones. Parents have abandoned and mistreated these children, but God will never in any way abandon them."

Irani now has added responsibilities to care for the 18 children as Missionary Sonja Dahl is home to renew her visa. Heidi Hinderaker, Radcliffe, Iowa, and Sarah Nystrom, Cokato, Minnesota, are helping Irani as short-term missionaries. "Please pray for another worker. That is our most urgent need," said Sonja.

Sonja is available to share at congregations starting in December. She can be reached at her parents' home in Felton, Minnesota: 218-494-3608 or e-mail at sonjaheide@juno.com



Report from Missionaries Tim and Renata Hinrichs

A new missionary will soon join our family! We're expecting our first child at the end of November. The Lord graciously protected Renata over the last few months of travels, even though the overseas flight/layover was plenty exhausting. We are counting the days now and thank you for your prayers.

Bible school starts

Our dream of seeing a Bible school start here in Silesia has finally come true. Just a week after we arrived here after our summer furlough in the United States, we were already attending the grand opening service in Dziegielów, Poland where we met the 12 students who are attending the school this year. They range in age from 18 to over 60, both married and single students coming from as far away as Krakow and Katowice to right here in Cieszyn. It has been such a great experience to get to know these students and we give praise to the Lord that he called these 12 (does that number sound familiar?) to study his Word. In the short time we've had to get to know them, we've discovered that they are very open to God's Word and His will for their lives.

New missionary on the field

Every Wednesday and Friday morning we make the half-hour commute across the border to teach at the school. Of course, I don't speak Polish very well (hardly at all) and so Renata is by my side as my translator. So far this has been working very well.

The building that we anticipate will be a more permanent site for the school is still not ready for use but hopefully will be opened at the end of the winter. But the Lord provides. We've been meeting in a chapel building on the second floor where there is a nice classroom just large enough for the entire class. As far as accommodations for the students, people in the community have really pitched in and found housing in their homes for every student. Praise the Lord!

The trimester at the school will continue until the end of November when the students go on a two-week mission outreach somewhere in Poland.

Please pray for the school. The grace of the Lord is definitely resting on it right now — in response to prayers!

Moving

We're in the process of packing, painting, repairing and preparing to move into a house that dropped into our laps from the Lord. Two weeks before we left for the States we decided to have our landlord over for dinner to thank them for the three years they allowed us to rent from them. Soon their daughter would need the apartment so we knew we would be moving out, but didn't know where.

Over dinner, we found out that Mrs. Srubar's father had just passed away two weeks before and left an empty house in town. By the end of the evening, they gave us a tour of the house and promised that we could rent it for the price of paying the utility and phone bills. Sometimes God gives you more than you can ever imagine possible!

Our new address, phone number and e-mail is: Tim and Renata Hinrichs, U Lavky 3, 73701 Cesky Tesin, Czech Republic. Phone: 420-659-55003, e-mail: thinrichs@iol.cz

Partners in Mission Outreach has received a \$1,000 grant from Aid Association For Lutherans to be used toward the purchase of a newer bus. The grant was made available through the 1998 General Agency Grant/Public Relations Program, and was approved through the Grand Forks, North Dakota agency.

About \$30,000 is needed to replace the current bus with a newer one. The transmission on the current bus was just repaired and is ready for another mission trip.

The Partners in Mission Outreach is planning a trip to Obregon, Mexico, January 8 for a two-week trip. Cost is \$575. Call Al Brazier at 218-782-2456 for more information. All ages are welcome.

Missionary notes:

Missionaries Darwin and MaryAnn Jackson, Puebla, Mexico, are now using Mail Boxes Etc for their mail service. They can receive up to magazine-size envelopes within five days, sent with U.S. postage.

Their address is:
Suite 48-383
9051-C Siempre Viva Rd.
San Diego, CA 92173-3628

Missionaries Dick and Clara Gunderson, Puebla, Mexico, are in the U.S. for three months. In January they will be available to speak to your congregation. Contact them through the World Mission Prayer League office at 612-871-6843. Both the Jacksons and Gundersons are AFLC missionaries on loan to WMPL

Arlington, South Dakota

— Members from Calvary Lutheran are making plans for a January 7-16, 1999 mission trip to Weslaco, Texas. The group will stop at Good Shepherd Lutheran in Ponca City, Oklahoma before traveling on to work with Faith Lutheran and "End-of-the-Road Ministries" in Weslaco. They expect to minister to Spanish-speaking churches on both sides of the border.

Missionaries David and Sarah Nelson, Campo Mourao, Brazil, await the completion of the adoption papers for Rachel. Their scheduled return to the United States has been postponed until next June when they will begin their year's furlough.

Adventures with the ultimate tour guide

Q "Quick, turn on the air conditioner!" one of the team members would cry out as we climbed into the van. Many times as we were sweating our way down the southern highways our van's thermometer read 120 degrees Fahrenheit. I thought, "If Jesus walked in heat like this, I can make it riding."

Being on the Southern Barnabas team last summer was definitely an adventure that only Jesus, my Tour Guide, could take me on. Several aspects of the trip made it an adventure: the call, the kids, the kind adults, the unique experiences, and the way I saw the Holy Spirit work in my life and in those around me.

When my Tour Guide called, it

— *Stephanie Johansen*
Calvary Lutheran
Bismark, North Dakota

took Him a long time to make it clear to me where He exactly wanted me to go. I had been thinking of options and could not decide. Finally it was very clear, and the peace that settled in my heart was real. I knew that traveling south with Him was what He wanted me to do for the summer. It was a good thing He made it that clear, too, because five minutes later one of my best friends offered me a tempting invitation to go to Hawaii with her.

The experiences I enjoyed this summer being on tour were by no means dull, in fact, many never even crossed my mind before I embarked. I had the chance to go sailing on the Gulf of Mexico and water ski in the Texas Panhandle. I ate seafood, drove a combine, rode in a semi-truck that was full of wheat when a tire blew out, rode to the top of a grain elevator and ate a lot of homemade ice cream. I found out great tans are hard to come by in the heat of the South because if I went outside, it was either before the sun was up or after the sun went down. I sang, shared biblical concepts through puppet shows, cleaned out an overgrown yard where chiggers were abundant and saw some of the most beautiful scenery in the United States.

The people the Tour Guide introduced me to were as different as the snowflakes that fall from heaven. I met several very successful, if not famous people that showed me what Christ-like humility is about. I watched numerous parents whose life goal is to raise godly children that will impact the next generation. I met a restaurant owner who was searching for God and wanted to talk about it. I also met pastors who are hours and hours from another Free Lutheran pastor but who faithfully serve their very small congregations. The Tour Guide's timing was perfect in every

instance. One week God let me receive the blessing of seeing one woman's unflinching faith in her Father as she received numerous attacks from Satan. I will never forget her very visible joy even through these trials and testing.

The opportunity to teach the kids this summer was a great joy. Some were pastor's children or grandchildren. Others had siblings from many different fathers and did not even know the first thing about God. Most of them came because someone in their lives cared enough to bring them. By the end of the summer however, about seventy-five percent of all the children contacted received Christ for the first time. Being a part of the Tour Guide's plans in this area was the biggest joy of the whole summer for me. The fields were and still are white unto harvest.

My Tour Guide changed me. He challenged me to be available to do anything at any time, to look through other tour members' eyes and to enjoy just being in the Tour Guide's company. There are many spots that are left on the tour. The Guide has planned something special for each traveler. He has scheduled in an intimate time with each traveler. Give Him a call today. Don't delay!



(The Southern Barnabas team canvassed and taught vacation Bible school, worked with youth groups, led worship services, and whatever else was needed in home mission churches in Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Alabama and Wisconsin for nine weeks last summer. The team consisted of Claire Gettis, Andrea Nelson, Stephanie Johansen and Jeremy Nelson. The AFLC Home Mission Department sends out two Barnabas teams each summer along with ministry teams from the Bible school and youth department. Each January applications are received and teams are selected. It's not too early to pray for this ministry outreach.)

Norway, Illinois — The 1998 Illinois District Fall Youth Rally was held at the Pine Ridge Christian Center on October 10. The theme for the day was, "We Won't Bow Down to Your Idols!"

AFLC Youth Winter Retreat

"Side by Side"

February 5-7, 1999

at the ARC

Osceola, Wisconsin

1-800-294-2877 (ARC)

Youth Director Sought

Elim Lutheran of Lake

Stevens, Washington is seeking a full-time youth director to work in partnership with the Seattle area Youth for Christ organization. The position requires an applicant with proven potential for effective youth ministry, and strong organizational/leadership skills.

If you have been feeling the Lord's direction into full-time youth work, contact Elim Lutheran for more information: phone 425-334-1911, or write: Box 318, Lake Stevens, WA 98258.

— Peggy McGranahan
Christian Free Lutheran
Wheatland, Iowa

“Thus far has the Lord helped us”

I had been at a home school convention in Des Moines, Iowa. I was less than 20 miles from home that Saturday night of June 13. My thoughts were busy planning how to get my two sleeping girls and our luggage into the house while remembering everything I wanted to tell my husband, Jerry, about our trip.

Suddenly the approaching headlights swerved into my lane. A drunk driver hit us head-on!

The next hour was filled with screams from my daughter, Lauren, sirens, firemen, the Jaws of Life, and the ambulances.

The past four months have been filled with a hospital stay, casts, doctors' appointments, physical therapy, a wheelchair and a lot of pain — both physical and emotional. My injuries were not as severe as Lauren's. Baby Taylor was completely unhurt but her older sister was not so fortunate.

So can I be thankful?

Obviously, I am thankful we are all alive. Jerry could have lost all the women in his family that night, (we also have two boys). God was present and protected us from more serious harm. Psalm 121 often comes to mind: “The Lord will watch over your coming and going, both now and forevermore.”

I have never felt the presence of the Lord like I did that night. I longed to see His face. It wasn't God's time for me to see Him, but I saw His love in the faces of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We are part of a church that loves us and prays for us. But they also put their love into action and we are grateful. Day after day in the hospital people came to visit us. When we returned home they brought meals, hung out laundry, washed dishes and anything else to help.

The cards and letters that came were encouraging, especially to Lauren who waited daily to see if the mail man brought something

for her. I have told the chairman of our congregation they did everything right, though he finds that hard to believe.

I am also thankful for the tears shed for us. I was in shock (denial maybe) for weeks afterwards. If someone who visited us looked teary-eyed, I would correct them. “Stop that. I'm not going to cry and neither are you. We're OK!”

Well, we obviously weren't OK. And the tears shed by our pastor, friends and family showed they cared and hurt along with us. Now I treasure the memory of them as evidence of the compassion people felt.

Another blessing was the Scripture I had memorized over the past five years. I was never too serious about Scripture memorization until I started home schooling. Then it became part of the curriculum. That night in the emergency room, I searched my brain for something to hold onto for comfort. I couldn't name one book of the Bible or even one person in Scripture. But Psalm

23 clearly came and I repeated it over and over again. The “valley of the shadow of death” held new meaning for me, and I did not fear evil for He was with me! I have always had a difficult time getting Psalm 23 “word perfect,” but not that night.

Today we are thankful that healing has occurred. I am strong again and it feels so good to do my own work — hang out the laundry, scrub the kitchen floor, and all the other glorious jobs of the high calling of motherhood.

It feels even better to not be so focused on ourselves and our hurts and needs. When others are in need, I can now help them.

Our thankful hearts are described in I Samuel 7:12, “Then Samuel took a stone and set it up ... He named it Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far has the Lord helped us.’” God has blessed us. And this is my Ebenezer, a testimony of God's goodness to our family.



Eunice Will, Springfield, Missouri, attended the 16th National Convention of Lutherans for Life during October 30 - November 1, in Dallas, Texas. Lutherans for Life is a pan-Lutheran, educational organization to witness to the sanctity of human life through education based on the Word of God. The organization has 14 state federations, 181 local chapters, and 741 life ministry coordinators. They are promoting “God Loves Life” for Sunday, January 24, 1999. They have produced bulletin inserts, a video and an audiocassette, sermons and worship services to help congregations proclaim the message on Sanctity of Human Life Sunday (the anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision of 1973 legalizing abortion in all nine months of pregnancy). For more information call 1-888-364-LIFE.

El Cajon, California — Rancho San Diego Lutheran women have started a walking and devotional group. Their first walk was on November 7. After walking, the ladies gathered for a time of Bible study.

Kalispell, Montana — Dottie Stephens came to Stillwater Free Lutheran on October 18, for the first time in years. Since her stroke, she was not able to get into the building. But on October 11, the congregation had an open house to celebrate their new church addition and handicap lift.

Missionaries Connely and Carolyn Dyrud, Campo Mourão, Brazil, will be in the states to prepare for their daughter's wedding on December 5. Christina is their first child to be married. Shannon, their oldest, is teaching in South Korea, and will be home for the wedding and Christmas.

What makes a great church?

AFLC Evangelist Jim Rasmussen and I attended John Maxwell's "Lay Ministry Equipping Seminar" recently. What we heard reinforces the strategy we are developing for the AFLC Commission of Evangelism.

Dr. Maxwell believes the three signs of a great church are: people are coming to Christ as Savior; the laity are getting involved in ministry; and individuals are being called into full-time Christian service. He stated that the average church does not need more members, it needs more ministers.

The analogy of a football game was used to describe the way some Christians think and participate as a church. A football team would not be successful if the coach tried to run out to the field alone to play the

game. Other members of the team must get in the game.

It wouldn't work for the players to run to the field and stay in the huddle. Dr. Maxwell believes too many are infected with a disease called "spectatorism." They know more about church policy than evangelism and are better acquainted with parliamentary procedure than with discipleship.

He encouraged teamwork. A team arguing among themselves goes nowhere.

The team also needs equipping. With that in mind the commission of evangelism wants to be used to help pastors throughout the AFLC equip their saints for ministry. We want to

serve the congregations as they develop a process of evangelism, followup and discipleship suited to their unique fellowship.

Pastor Rasmussen has been serving as the AFLC Director of Evangelism since August and has made many contacts. We continue to establish procedures and survey materials and strategies for evangelism in the local congregation. We are looking for opportunities to share what we know and have experienced with as many congregations as time allows.

— **Gene Quist, Chairman**
Commission on Evangelism
Bloomington, Minnesota

Church Extension Grant given to the AFLC

Thirty-six AFLC congregations shared a \$40,000 grant from the Lutheran Brotherhood Foundation's Church Extension program. The program is designed to develop new congregations and assist established congregations to undertake special evangelism programs.

WMF in memoriams

Esther Rutkowski, Valley City, ND
Esther Kemble, Crookston, MN
Hazel Langness, Ishpeming, MI
Phyllis Olson, Willmar, MN
Louella Meyer, Paxton, IL
Margaret Kiser, Valley City, ND
Vera Eldevik, Bagley, MN
William Bubs, Webster, SD
Lester Haase, Watertown, SD
Norman Johnson, McVile, ND
Mary Moen, Wallace, SD
Bruce Skramstad, Valley City, ND
Mrs. Carl Flaten, Ray, ND
Helen Aasand, Warren, MN
Rollie Durkee, Morris, IL
Alice Smith, Shevlin, MN

A ministry of mercy

Ministry of mercy. These three words more than anything, describe the work of "Mercy and Truth Publishers."

Pastor Gerald Mundfrom felt a calling to write even as a child, and in later years God opened a door by inspiring him to establish this ministry. Over the years he has written several studies and booklets that have been distributed to many AFLC and non-AFLC churches alike.

This ministry of mercy is as much a ministry of the present as a ministry of the past! It has a special love and compassion for those struggling with depression, and as a result Mundfrom wrote *Purged*, a book dealing with how God saw him through his own struggle with depression. Another book he wrote is entitled, *The Depressed Christian*. He has written about the spread of false teaching in *Modern False Teaching in the Church* and about *Baptism, A Covenant*. All of these books plus a variety of booklets are available to the public by writing: Mercy and Truth Publishers, 312

235th St., Osceola, WI 54020.

The name "Mercy and Truth" comes from Psalm 25:10 which says, "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and testimonies." As long as this verse is lived out in the life of this ministry, it has a promising future.

Mercy and Truth Publishers recently adopted a constitution and has a board consisting of Pastors Howard Kjos, Wayne Hjermstad, Lynn Wilson and Mr. Larry Johnson. There is an advisory board as well.

God has blessed this ministry and it is the prayer of those who have been blessed by it that it will continue to prosper. Pastor Mundfrom and his wife and secretary, Margaret, have done much for this ministry; but the real credit belongs to God. Were it not for His Son, dying for us on the cross and rising victorious three days later, this ministry would not exist. But because He did, we do.

— **Pastor Lynn J. Wilson**
Roslyn, South Dakota

Campus Days at AFLBS —

High school students totaling 103 registered for the fall Campus Days, October 23-25. AFLBS Dean James L. Johnson said, "It seems we get older students in the fall who are serious about the Lord and Bible school. Our traditional spring Campus Days draws more students of a wider age range." Senior AFLBS student Matt Bruce, Fosston, Minnesota coordinated this fall's event along with senior Dan Keinanen, Cloquet, Minnesota.

Pastor Johnson sensed a special kind of Class of 2000 and 2001 student at this fall's promotional weekend. He said, "I'm glad to see the caliber of Christian kids who are looking forward to coming to Bible school."

Students may register early (before December 15, 1998) for the fall quarter of 1999 and save the \$20 registration fee. This last summer, ninety per cent of the student body was registered by mid-June.

The Culbertson/Brockton, Montana, Campus Days students arrived for the Friday evening service after a long day's drive.



Nathan Skramstad, Zumbrota, Minnesota.



The AFLBS Worship Team led the Friday evening service for Campus Days. Pictured are: Mia Erickson, Roseau, Minnesota; Kristen Antal, Leeds, North Dakota; Luke Johnson, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Andrea Valdez, Maple Grove, Minnesota; and Nate Jore, Brasilia, Brazil. The pianist is Linnae Nelson of Kandiyohi, Minnesota. This team leads the Monday morning student chapel sessions throughout the school year.



Cambria Hoops, Deshler, Nebraska.



Pastor Michael Brandt, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, spoke at the Saturday evening service.

Pastor Jerome Nikunen, Chillicothe, Illinois, has resigned as pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran where he has served since 1993, and has accepted a call from Abiding Word Lutheran Church in Deshler, Nebraska. He begins his new ministry in November. Abiding Word is in the process of building their first worship facility.

Buckley, Washington — Pastor Joseph Schultz was installed as pastor of Grace Lutheran Church on September 27. Pastor Ken Moland of nearby Kirkland, officiated and preached at the afternoon service. Pastor Schultz is the first full-time pastor at Grace in about four years. The congregation joined the AFLC last spring.

Omaha, Nebraska — Community of Grace Evangelical Lutheran church celebrated its recent affiliation with the AFLC at a special worship service on October 11, with President Robert Lee as the guest preacher. Organized in 1995 as an independent congregation, they purchased another church facility located in the western suburb of Millard. They are served by Pastor Brad Hoefs and Karen Reynolds who works with the youth, music and Sunday school.

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations

3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

AFLC Benevolences (10 months) — January 1 - October 31, 1998

FUND	TOTAL Subsidy	REC'D IN OCTOBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$224,870.00	\$19,177.04	203,298.98	90
Seminary	112,558.00	11,438.99	81,035.71	72
Bible School	180,678.00	14,023.93	117,525.79	65
Home Missions	260,263.00	20,387.96	184,275.28	71
World Missions	420,686.00	38,188.02	306,684.29	73
Capital Investment	16,276.00	659.07	11,753.18	72
Parish Education	50,335.00	5,216.93	49,822.58	99
Church Extension	18,092.00	56.80	17,725.50	1.35
TOTALS	\$1,278,758.00	109,148.74	972,121.31	76
TOTALS 1997	1,223,905.00	102,586.57	827,195.53	68
Goal 83%				

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma — The AFLC Southern District's Annual Pastor's Conference was held October 5-7, at the Grandison Bed and Breakfast. Their gracious hosts were Bob and Claudia Wright of First Lutheran Church and Pastor Jerry Peterson. The special sessions featured the theme, "Seasons of the Pastor." Home Missions Director Paul Nash participated along with district pastors: Vince Will, Roy Johnson, Randy Nelson, Tim Hurley and Brian Davidson.

Park River, North Dakota — Pastor Ted Berkas is the interim pastor at the Victory and Grace Lutheran Parish. His address is Box 599, Park River, ND 58270. Phone 701-284-6886.

Pukwana, South Dakota — Pastor Walt Beaman was installed on August 23, 1998 as pastor of St. Olaf Lutheran in rural Chamberlain and Pukwana Lutheran in Pukwana. AFLC President Robert Lee conducted the service.

FLS receives Lutheran Brotherhood funds — The third quarter Member Matching Gift program recently provided \$2,300 to the Free Lutheran Seminary. The latest payment matches 24 gifts from Lutheran Brotherhood members made during the third quarter of 1998. This program matches members' gifts of \$25 to \$100 per year to Lutheran seminaries nationwide.



Bruce, South Dakota — Grace Lutheran has completed an addition to their parsonage. The 20 x 26 foot addition was done with volunteer labor led by Robert Schwartz. Pictured are: (standing), Keith Tofte, David Ulvestad, David Chapin, Robert Schwartz; (kneeling), Dean Goodfellow, Ken Loomis, Ken Schaller and Darrol Ford. One of the rooms in the addition is used as an office for the assistant to the editor of *The Lutheran Ambassador*.



Pastor Albert Hautamaki, 77, of Maple Grove, Minnesota, has gone home to be with the Lord, having faithfully served Him and His church for 42 years. He was born on May 4, 1921 in Eben Junction, Michigan. After serving in the U.S. Army from 1943-45, he attended Suomi College and Northern Michigan University. He received his Graduate of Theology degree from Suomi Seminary in 1952. He served churches in Ishpeming, Michigan and Everett, Washington, before serving the AFLC as the business administrator from 1971-77. He served in vacancy pastorates and retired in 1983. He is survived by his wife Merva; children, Lois Hautamaki, Charles (Bonnie) Hautamaki, Diann Michels, Rachel Hautamaki, Deborah (Randy) Stroman, and Kevin Hautamaki; six grandchildren; brothers, Arvo, Ray and Arnie Hautamaki; sister, Irene Swajanen, Vivian Riddle and Florence Maki.

Funeral services were held at Medicine Lake Lutheran Church on October 13. Interment was at Fort Snelling National Cemetery in Minneapolis.

Blessed be his memory.

Oceanside, California — Community Lutheran Church hosted a Sunday evening Reformation Barbecue on November 1. Area AFLC congregations participated. The guest speaker was Pastor Jim Ritter from Bloomington, Minnesota.

El Campo, Texas — Faith Lutheran hosted special meetings October 16-18. Pastor Vince Will, Springfield, Missouri spoke on the theme, "The Christian Walk." He also led a session on missions and the search for Noah's ark.

The congregation has since been part of the volunteers aiding flood victims stranded in El Campo while their homes are being cleaned. One older couple from Faith Lutheran became stranded in their home as

the flood waters rose. The church organized a work day to assist in the cleanup of their home. Lutheran Brotherhood has set up a flood relief fund for the victims in southeast Texas.

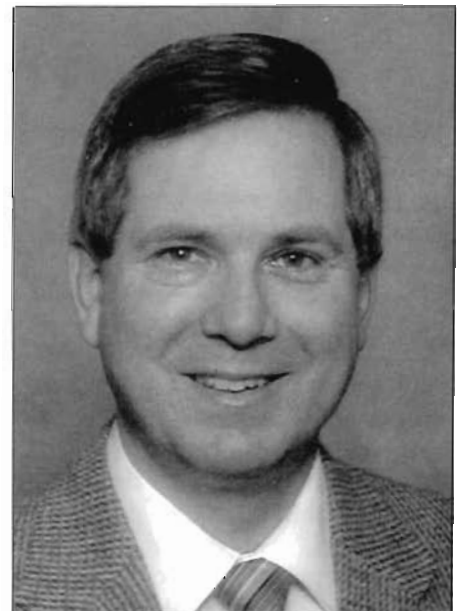
Faith Lutheran is joining with two other churches in preparation for the Christmas musical, "King of Kings" to be held the first weekend of December. It is designed as an outreach to share the real message of Christmas with the community.



Word of Truth Lutheran, Burleson, Texas.

Burleson, Texas — Word of Truth Lutheran, a congregation who recently joined the AFLC, celebrated their first anniversary last August. On November 1, five students were in the church's first confirmation service. Located 20 miles south of Fort Worth, the congregation is seeking property for a future building.

Their pastor is Ray Ballmann who also heads the Foundation for Family Development. He is a speaker and author. His books include: "The How and Why of Home Schooling" and "How Your Family Can Flourish" from Crossway Books in Wheaton, Illinois. His most recent book is from Alpha Omega Publishers in Phoenix, "Solid Rock Families in a Crumbling World."



Pastor Ray Ballmann

In touch with reality

M My senior year in high school we did not have good athletic teams, but we had some faithful cheerleaders. Some games it was a gazillion to nothing against us, little time remained on the clock, and yet the cheerleaders were still rooting, seemingly confident our team could somehow come back and pull it out. It was tempting to want to tell them, "We appreciate your spirit and dedication, but look at the scoreboard. Get in touch with reality."

Often the phrase "getting in touch with reality" is associated with negative things. We face realities such as: our team is doomed to defeat, our ability isn't as great as we thought, the treatment for the illness isn't working, that person we care about isn't coming back, our goals won't be reached, the disease is spreading. At times we have to face a reality we have tried to avoid.

The avoidance sometimes happens because it is thought that a make-believe world has more potential for joy. This misses the fact that seeing what is real does not always mean great sadness. The call to give thanks and rejoice is a call to see what is true.

God doesn't ask us to give thanks for things that are imaginary, but for things that are real. In giving thanks our eyes are opened to see more of the great things God has done and the goodness of life with Him. "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good" (Psalm 136:1, NIV) is a call to give thanks because of the fact of who He is and what He has done. Some of those facts are then listed in Psalm 136 as a statement of reality and an encouragement to give thanks: "God of gods ... does great wonders ... made the heavens ... divided the Red Sea asunder ... led his people through the desert ... remembered us in our low estate ... freed us from our enemies ... gives food to every creature."

Psalm 103:2 says, "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Praise comes from seeing the reality of the blessings God lavishes on His children: "He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases; ... he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west,

so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

Much of the reality of this life is painful. But the reality of who God is and what He has done is joyful and a reason for giving much thanks.

The Advent season is also a call to face reality. It is a call to face the fact that Jesus is going to return some day, maybe some day soon.

Things will not always remain the way they are. Scoffers say, as the Bible predicted, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation" (II Peter 3:4, NIV). Peter answers by stating once again the facts. The Lord is the Creator of all. He is "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9, NIV). Nevertheless, He will one day return and before Him all must stand. Change will come. That is reality.

At times we have to face a reality we have tried to avoid.

This is a reality of good news for those who are ready by faith in Jesus who died for us and rose again. It is a reality of warning and a call to prepare for those who are not ready. It is also a reality that should spur those of us who are ready to tell others, with urgency, to prepare. They don't have forever to get ready. We don't have forever to tell them the good news of how it is possible to look forward "to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (II Peter 3:13, NIV).

What is most real, what will bring the most joy, is not some imaginary world we create in our mind, but the life God has for us now and for all eternity when we are trusting in Jesus. Being in touch with reality means experiencing that life; seeing that real pain exists, but also real joy and blessings, better than anything imagined, can be ours in Christ.

Having a handle on reality also means knowing that "this world in its present form is passing away" (I Corinthians 7:31, NIV).

Jesus is coming again. That is not something made up by a writer of science fiction. It is really going to happen. And we really need to be ready. And we can be. We can have a sure hope for all eternity and a thankful spirit today. That's a reality to get in touch with and one in which we can find comfort, encouragement and joy.

— *Pastor Craig Johnson*

Free Lutheran Seminary Inter-Term 1999

"Creationism" – Harley Stover

"AFLC History and Aims" – Pastor Robert Lee

"Confirmation Ministry" – Pastor Tonnes Pollestad

For more information:

3120 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.

Minneapolis, MN 55441

612-544-9501 Fax 612-544-6404

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

– Martin Luther

BUILDING THE BASE

Created to be different

It is obvious, as we look at an aquarium, that there are many kinds of fish — 21,700 have been named and described. As we continue to view our world as God's "aquarium" and the humans in it as spiritual "fish," we also see that God has created us with unique spiritual characteristics.

Romans 12:6-8 tells us of seven basic spiritual types which God has created: "since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly." These are the "motivational gifts" of the Spirit, distributed to each of us at conception. They affect the way we each look at life and what we think is important. When we experience the new birth in Christ, these gifts are "harnessed, sanctified, and energized" and we are set free to become all that God intended.

A person with the gift of **prophecy** is like one of the electric fish who surround themselves with an electric field in order to find their way in dark waters where eyesight would be of little use. This field changes shape when they near an object and also senses the weak electricity generated by crabs and other prey. Likewise, the prophet has the capacity to feel what God feels and see what He sees. A prophet is deeply concerned about the reputation and will of God. He grieves over sin,

seeing right and wrong in black and white terms.

A **server** is more like the wrasse which helpfully removes parasites from the skin of larger fish. The very common gift of serving makes a person prone to care about the needs of others and go out of his way to meet them, especially in practical ways.

The **teaching** gift is like the silver hatchet fish which lives in deep, dark waters and has huge, bulging eyes to catch as much light as possible. Teachers comb the depths of God's Word to discover and confirm God's truth. They have the ability to make deep concepts simple and understandable to others in an orderly, systematic way.

Those with the gift of **exhortation** (encouragement) are like brightly-colored tropical fish. In the midst of the gloom in this sinful, dying world, encouragers bring pleasant color to their surroundings by stimulating others to faith, hope and obedience. They visualize specific goals for others and spur them on to great achievements for God.

I have been greatly blessed by the presence of **givers** in each congregation I've served. They are like precious oysters which are so generous in giving a home to a speck of dust and then making a valuable pearl out of it. A giver seems to have a talent for making something out of little. He can take an irritating need from another and make a rare trea-

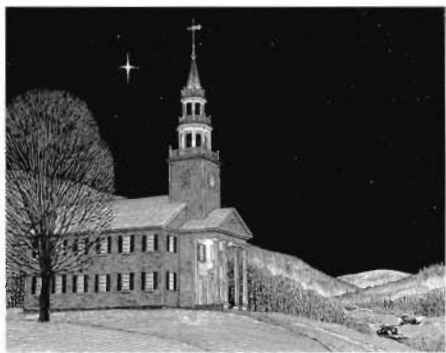
sure of God's grace out of it and give a generous pearl in return.

The gift of **leading** (ruling/administration) gives a person the capability of an octopus with its eight arms. A ruler is able to handle many responsibilities at the same time, by organizing tasks, delegating authority to others, and overseeing them until completion. His purpose and joy is to put feet on visions and accomplish the will of God in a given task.

The gift of **mercy**, demonstrates a quality often lacking in the world today — compassion. The mercy person is able to empathize with others in their distress or joy and impart God's love to them. In the frigid waters of the Arctic and Antarctic Oceans, there dwell ice fishes, which have antifreeze in their blood in the form of glycoproteins, preventing the growth of ice crystals. The mercy person also has a natural antifreeze in his being, to keep him from being frozen emotionally. With Jesus in his heart, he is able to impart the warmth of God's love to others.

With all of our different spiritual shapes and capabilities, we are all important! Have you discovered your wonderful gift through Jesus? Are you exercising it in faith and with thanksgiving?

– Pastor Craig Wentzel
Zoar and Living Word
Lutheran Parish
Edmore, North Dakota



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