

The Lutheran AMBASSADOR

November 5, 1996

What you believe,
does it matter?

Seeking and thirsting
for nothing but grace

A lesson in
courage



Learning from Luther

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

November 5, 1996
Volume 34, Number 14



The magazine of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, 3110 East Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441. (612) 545-5631

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The Lutheran Ambassador

(USPS 588-620 ISSN 0746-3413)

is published every three weeks except monthly in June and July (16 issues per year) by the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations.

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For subscription changes and information:

The Lutheran Ambassador, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441. (612) 545-5631.

Subscriptions rates:

\$15.00 a year, Group Rate, U. S.

\$16.00 a year, Individual, U. S.

\$18.00 a year, International

Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, MN and additional mailing office.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *The Lutheran Ambassador*, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55441.

Faith or doubt

And He said, "Come." And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid: and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, "Lord, save me." And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him and said unto him, "O Thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

— Matthew 14:29-31

As we again remember the Reformation, the central theme comes to mind. It is the doctrine of faith as set forth in God's Word. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 1:8,9). Faith, as defined by Webster, is "belief and trust in and loyalty to God, complete confidence, something believed especially with strong conviction." It is to believe; to trust. The antonym of believing is doubt.

The earliest trick of the devil was to cast doubt. To Eve he questioned, "Yea, hath God said, 'Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1b). Eve replies with the command God gave and the old serpent comes back with a half truth, "Ye shall not surely die."

The Apostle Paul, harking back to this cunning of the serpent (the devil), feared for the Christians at Corinth. He wrote, "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in (purity that is toward) Christ" (II Corinthians 11:3).

Peter, who had faith enough to obey Christ's command to "come," climbed out of the boat during a

terrible storm and began to walk on the water toward Jesus. But Peter, being so human and finite, "when he saw the wind, boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, 'Lord, save me.'" Just those few moments when he took his eyes off Jesus and on the storm allowed doubt and its consequences to enter.

But good for Peter, he knew where to flee in his trouble — the One who is our refuge and strength. Peter's plea was simple, *Lord, save me*. Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. Jesus then said to Peter as He does to us, "How little you trust Me. Why do you doubt Me?"

How often we begin to doubt Jesus' ability to keep us, to doubt His commands, to doubt His Word, and to doubt His saving and keeping grace. Our eyes see the winds, the storms of life and we begin to sink in worry, despair, depression and fear. And the devil keeps on whispering, "yes, has God said ...?"

Yes, friends, faith versus doubt is a constant battle. It's relentless because the enemy of our soul is relentless. But God is faithful. Christ is able to save us and keep us. We do not dare take our eyes off of Him for a moment. Faith must be exercised and nourished. Take that step of faith that God wants you to take. Nourish it by getting into God's Word. Romans 10:17 says, "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word."

May our experience be as David confessed in Psalm 141:8, "Mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord: in thee is my trust."

— Pastor Alvin Grothe
Astoria, Oregon

SOUND BITES

Luther said he would be glad for all his works to perish except *On the Bondage of the Will*, which emphasizes people's inability to save themselves, and his *Small Catechism*, which explains the faith to children.

1

"What good does salt do if it does not bite? What good does the edge of the sword do if it does not cut?"

—Martin Luther

"It is impossible to keep peace between man and woman in family life if they do not condone and overlook each other's faults but watch everything to the smallest point. For who does not at times offend?"

—Martin Luther

Martin Luther has been called "one of the greatest preachers of all time," yet he became deeply discouraged with his congregation. Despite his admonitions and instruction, Luther felt, his people remained godless. "It annoys me to keep preaching to you," he said, and in 1530, he actually went on strike and refused to preach for a time.

4

"Whether you wish to comfort the sad, to subdue frivolity, to encourage the despairing, to humble the proud, to calm the passionate, or to appease those full of hate ... what more effective means than music could you find?"

—Martin Luther

6

"Some marriages were motivated by mere lust, but mere lust is felt even by fleas and lice. Love begins when we wish to serve others."

—Martin Luther

It matters what you believe!

Luther's
view
of the
importance
of right
doctrine.

Martin Luther's life of service to God grew out of a traumatic experience. Having nearly been struck by lightning, he made a vow to St. Anne that he would give himself to a life of monasticism if his life were spared. It was and he did.

Luther dedicated his life to serving God as he understood Him. He had a faulty understanding of God, however. He did not have the Scriptures at his disposal, helpful Christian literature or guidance from spiritual leaders. But after becoming a monk he avidly studied the Bible as well as the writings of the church fathers.

Little by little God revealed Himself to the devout German monk. The Holy Spirit laid upon his heart a hunger for the truth. This propelled him in search of right doctrine and he was promoted and became a professor at the University of Wittenburg.

While teaching the book of Romans, Dr. Luther came to understand the mystery of justification by faith. It revolutionized his life. He said, "Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise."

This was revolutionary thinking in Luther's day. Most lived in spiritual bondage to the law. God put a fervency in Luther's soul to study the Scripture and

to teach it without compromise so the masses of people who were enshrouded in spiritual darkness might come to know liberty in Jesus Christ through faith.

Tradition was not sacred.

Tradition was an overwhelmingly strong force that kept the wheels of the Roman Catholic Church turning. Unfortunately those wheels weren't turning in the direction God wanted.

The teaching from the clergy was that salvation depended upon man's doing. Luther taught from the Scriptures that "By grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works" (Ephesians 2:8,9). This went against the church authorities, but Luther was committed to teaching biblical doctrine, and fortunately for Christendom, it was not optional in his thinking. Any teaching that did not find full support in God's Word eventually was discarded as a teaching of man.

The battle against humanism.

Another prominent force at work during the early 1500s was the humanism of the Renaissance. The recent Dark Ages seemed to have brought little progress in the arts and intellect. But now there was interest in developing the intellect and one was encouraged to become proficient in various academic disciplines. The Renaissance produced some commendable things, but it had a major fault — the attitude that the proper interest of mankind was man himself. As would be expected, this idea found its way into the church. The quest for learning seemed to be innocent enough, even healthy, but any quest for theological truth not centered in God's Word was destined to end up in relativity. Luther recognized this and resisted any doctrine which was not based on the **Word alone**. Hence one of "sola" tenets of the Reformation.

The humanists studied the languages of the Bible as one of their disciplines, therefore it seemed at times the Renaissance and the Reformation went hand in hand. Rather than remain in ruts of tradition, this new emphasis had the potential of bringing new thought patterns into Christendom. When Luther opposed the church's position, the Renaissance man



— Pastor Larry Haagensohn
Lutheran Church of Hope
Loveland, Colorado

generally agreed, however, it was for a different reason. Their “age of enlightenment” thinking rightly judged the Church as oppressive. Their style of reform, however, was not what God wanted. Luther recognized that if it wasn’t rooted in the law and the gospel, no teaching could bring a person to the completed salvation of Jesus on the cross. Luther did not claim them as allies. They would only undermine, by human reason, the very thing which he sought.

Erasmus, the humanist’s champion, and Luther appeared to be pursuing the same goals. In fact at one time Erasmus praised Luther as being “the emancipator from rosaries, psalteries, pilgrimages, holy water, confession, food and fast laws, the misuse of the ban, and the pomp of indulgences.”

But Luther was motivated by more than a paranoid desire for change. He was stimulated by more than an inner craving for more socially acceptable theology. Something greater than a moral sensitivity spurred him onward. The objective statements of the Bible had created a simple child-like trust that could not be usurped by either the wisdom of man or a desire for change at any cost. Luther viewed right doctrine to be more important than outward reformation which would amount to nothing more than a new “form of godliness” without any power in it. He was motivated by a desire to restore in the Church the place that Jesus Christ rightfully had as Lord.

Contending for the Truth.

Erasmus was enlisted by Luther’s opponents to “slay” Luther with his superior intellect. One of his assignments was to prove the freedom of the will. If it could be proved that man had a free will, then of course he would be able to do enough good works to set him on the road to eternity. But Luther’s theology of the bondage of the will was too deeply rooted in the Scripture to overcome. It wasn’t a mere theological weed that could be pulled out by even the best of man’s attempts. Whoever would try to refute it must ultimately deal with what God says.

Luther wrote a number of lengthy “articles” (treatises) to clarify or defend the biblical teaching on the Sacraments. His “Babylonian Captivity of the Church” was

... any quest for theological truth
not centered in
God’s Word was destined
to end up in relativity.



devoted specifically to exposing the false teaching of the day. The document is aimed at the sacramental system which contributed to binding people in spiritual captivity. Luther initially rejected four of the seven so-called sacraments of the Roman Church and later narrowed it to two.

That Luther was not just in favor of change to get rid of the stagnant system is revealed further in his preaching against those who were going too far in their reformation. He held tightly to the Scriptures against those reformers who taught and believed the body and blood of Christ were not really present in the Sacrament of the Altar. Without realizing it, these reformers were just adopting the Renaissance spirit — relying on man’s mind and not the plain statements of the Bible (i.e., “This is My body, This is My blood,” which Luther refuted by teaching the Scripture.)

The entrenched church played heavily on the *emotions* of people and thereby kept them in their influence. The right wing reformers appealed to the *intellect* of the people. Luther’s view of correct doctrine was that it must be based solely on the written Word. He appealed to nothing in man to gain a following, nor to compile a theology. If a church was to have God-given life, it would not happen at the expense of doctrine. God produces faith through the Word of God which is the chief means of grace. The Christian life is by “grace alone” and must be based on the “Word alone.”

Luther was a true warrior. In his thinking no spiritual life and no assurance of salvation could exist without right doctrine. Without correct teaching, the soul is left to tread in the sea of uncertainty, only to become weary and to die for all of eternity.

Who will set us free? Thanks be to God who continually preserves right teaching and powerful, effective preaching of the law of God and the message of the cross of Jesus Christ.





SINGING THE TRUTH

what Luther teaches
us about music

Luther, the great reformer, was interested in music. I was interested in learning what some of my friends knew of Luther and the music of our church so I made a few phone calls and received informative answers.

"Luther stressed congregational singing. He translated and wrote many hymns."

"He brought singing into the worship service."

"He stressed mind over emotions and the gospel was made meaningful as music went hand in hand with theology."

"He used music to spread the doctrine of the 'just shall live by faith.'"

Every conversation included the hymn Luther wrote, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."

But Luther lived in the 1500s so can his hymns be meaningful for us today? To answer, give it the test for good music. All music that comes to us through many generations passes the test of greatness. We may not enjoy the music of the past, but if it is being sung today it has its merits.

Consider the musical legacy from Martin Luther. As the Reformer, he was also the father of evangelical hymnody. He revived the lost art of congregational singing.

As a child he had a solo voice and his favorite instruments were the flute and the lute. He accompanied himself on the strings of the lute. He expressed joy and thanks to God for the power of song given to the nightingale and birds of the air. He wrote, "I give music the highest and most

honorable place: and every one knows how David and all the saints put their divine thought into verse, rhyme, and song."

Luther added this emphatic statement: "If any man despises music, as all fanatics do, for him I have no liking; for music is a gift and grace of God, not an invention of men. Thus it drives out the impurity, sycophancy, and other vices."

The first Protestant hymnal of eight hymns was published in 1534. Four of them were Luther's. These little hymn books exasperated Luther's enemies because through his hymns, his teachings were being sung into the hearts of the people. And thus began our Lutheran hymnody.

"A Mighty Fortress is Our God" is most familiar to us. It was the Battle Hymn of the Reformation and came to be regarded as the true national hymn of Germany. Based on Psalm 46, this hymn, according to one writer, "has such force that at times it has been against the law to sing it."

Eight of the 37 hymns credited to Luther are found in our *Ambassador Hymnal*. Three familiar tunes include:

"From Heaven Above," "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage" and "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word."

Surely Luther's doctrine was woven into his hymns. May it be ours.

*God's word is our great heritage,
And shall be ours forever;
To spread its light from age to age
Shall be our chief endeavor;
Through life it guides our way,
In death it is our stay;
Lord, grant, while worlds endure,
We keep its teachings pure,
Throughout all generations.*



— Mrs. Oryen Benrud
Our Saviour's Lutheran
Zumbrota, Minnesota



There was a time in the life of Martin Luther when God was seen as nothing but an angry judge. In fact, in his earlier years, Luther was consumed by the thought of an angry God judging his sin and one day honestly remarked, "Love God? Sometimes I hate Him." Eventually, graciously, through the study of the Scriptures and the prompting of the Spirit, Luther found his gracious God through Christ. What follows is some of Luther's writings on the gift of grace as he learned and grew in the knowledge of His Lord Jesus Christ.

What is grace?

To Martin Luther, grace is the focal principle of theology. In a sermon on October 6, 1537, Luther shared this belief by suggesting that grace is the chorus of the many verses of theology.

A good song may well be sung often, grace consists in this, that God is merciful to us, shows Himself gracious for the sake of the Lord Christ, forgives all sins, and will not impute them unto us for eternal death. This is grace; the forgiveness of sins for the sake of the Lord Christ, the covering up of all sins.

Earlier, in 1521, Luther defined grace as God's greatest gift. In his commentary of the Gospel of Luke, he explained the difference between receiving good gifts and receiving the greatest gift — grace.

For God indeed gives to some men good things and richly adorns them, as He did Lucifer in heaven. He scatters His gifts abroad among the multitude; but He does not therefore regard them. His good things are merely gifts, which last for a season but His grace and regard are the inheritance which lasts forever ... In giving us the gifts, He gives only what is His, but in His grace and in His regard of us He gives His very Self. In the gifts we touch Him; but in His gracious regard we receive His heart, spirit, mind, and will.

No grace apart from Christ

If grace was the greatest gift from God, Luther was adamant that the grace of God can only be received through faith in Jesus Christ. Without faith in Jesus Christ, there is no gift of grace. On the text, Matthew 11:2-10, Luther delivered a

Learning from Luther the meaning of grace

sermon in 1522 that declared this.

These promises of grace are all based on Christ from the beginning of the world, so that God promises this grace to no one in any other way than in Christ and through Christ. Christ is the messenger of God's promise to the entire world. This is also the reason why He came and let the promise go out through the Gospel into all the world; but before that time He always proclaimed ... Therefore it is vain for anyone to expect the divine promise apart from Christ. Everything centers and terminates in Christ. The man who does not hear Him hears no promise of God. For just as He recognizes no law except Moses' Law and the writing of the prophets, so he gives no promise except through Christ alone.

The feeling of grace may go, but not grace itself

Martin Luther understood that his security rested in his faith in Christ and in the changeless grace that it produced. However, in a lecture on Genesis 15:1, Luther does not ignore the human feelings of uncertainty concerning God's grace.

It is no small comfort to know that grace has not been taken away but is truly constant and unchangeable. Nevertheless, our feeling and awareness of grace are removed for a while, and fear and trembling set in dejecting and disturbing the soul. The effect is that a man turns impatient and imagines that the wrath of God is unbearable and so turns God into a devil.

When "fear and trembling set in," Luther suggests one sure way to overcome those fickle feelings concerning the grace of God. In his comments on Galatians 3:3, Luther wrote:

If you want to attain grace, be engaged in intently hearing and carefully taking to heart the Word of God. The Word, I say, and the Word alone, is the conveyer of the grace of God.

(continued on next page)



— Pastor
Mark Molstre
Zion Lutheran
Tioga,
North Dakota

Martin Luther

A LESSON IN COURAGE

The absolute authority of the Scriptures in all things began to become clear to young Martin Luther during his studies for his Master of Arts degree. While in the library, Luther became aware of the Bible as it laid chained to its stand.

His father gave him a set of expensive law books as a graduation gift, yet Luther remarked, "I wish it would have been a Bible." The enlightenment of God's Word became the very essence of Luther's life of faith and courage.

As the truth was revealed to him, he discovered the compassion of Christ, the confidence of the Father and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The Word was his sole counsel in dispelling the darkness of falsehood.

Luther knew the opportunities he was

— Mike Anenson
Emmaus Lutheran
Bloomington, Minnesota

forsaking. His parents had sacrificed to see him complete school and become a great lawyer. To his friends and teachers, it seemed impossible that a man with such a brilliant future would give it all up for the life of a monk. But Luther's courage and conviction was constantly being fed by the Word. A "fool for Christ" cannot be understood by those seeking to direct their own lives.

Luther had the courage to stand in the gap alone. In the midst of a crisis, Luther was determined not to see himself glorified, but to be the bridge that would bring honor to the Lord, no matter the cost. Upon his declaration against the selling of indulgences, Luther was removed from the order of Augustinian monks. In his debate with Dr. John Eck, Luther was accused of sharing the same opinion as that of John Huss, a professor and university president who later was burned at the stake due to publicly speaking out against the selling of indulgences. Luther was not intimidated, knowing that it was the blood of the martyrs that became the seed of the Church. Courage is not being afraid of aligning beliefs with the truth of Scripture (Matthew 5:11,12).

Luther now faced excommunication. Also his life was in danger from the zealots of the church. In spite of this he continued to exhibit the confidence of a man walking in God's timeline rather than man's (Romans 8:18).

Pope Leo's timeline gave Luther 60 days to recant. But with a passion to share the truth, Luther moved the

GRACE

This resting in the **Word Alone**, propels the Christian onward and in a surprising way. Luther remarks about this in his sermon on Matthew 2:1-12 which speaks about the Magi in their journey to Bethlehem and how they were propelled by the Word alone.

The light of nature and the light of grace cannot be friends. Human nature wants to feel and to be certain before it believes. Faith wants to believe before it feels. This is the reason why human nature goes no farther than it can see by its light. But grace steps out cheerfully into the darkness, follows the bare Word and Scripture, no matter what matters

appear to be like; whether human nature thinks them to be right or wrong, grace clings to the Word.

To Martin Luther, the doctrine of grace was indeed the chorus in the many verses of theology. He once said, "I am seeking and thirsting for nothing less than a gracious God." Luther finally found that gracious God. He found it through faith in Jesus Christ. Luther came to understand "it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

Let us, as Luther, seek and thirst for nothing less than this gracious God.





The Wartburg Castle and the room where Luther translated the New Testament into German.

*The body
they may kill,
God's Truth
abideth still.*

Scriptures from the church only, into the home by translating the New Testament from Greek to German in eleven short weeks. It was God's Word that provided an intimacy with the author which underscored the principle of His constant presence. According to the historian Roland Bainton, it was in God's promise of "I will never leave you or forsake you," that Luther found "healing for life's hurts and the balm of eternal blessedness."

Luther had many opportunities to pack it up, give in to Rome and simply be a mouthpiece for a dry and empty religious life. But Luther reminded himself and others: "do your best ... Crawling is something, even if one is unable to walk. Do not try to imitate other people. Look solely to His honor and not to applause." He knew God does not need a master of ceremonies to conduct the ways of man, rather He seeks for men and women of "obedience rather than sacrifice."

Luther served mightily in spite of his friends undermining his convictions, relatives not understanding his passion for the Word, and having those you respect and revere charge you with heresy. Luther knew that his life was not his own (Galatians 2:20).

Aware of the many enemies of God sowing seeds of discord in an attempt to

keep Luther at home and quiet, he simply responded, "I shall go, though there were as many devils there as tiles on the roof." With his lute under his arm he headed out to appear before the Diet of Worms. "God will be with me," he firmly stated — as with young David squaring off before Goliath, small in stature, but great in God. He arrived at Worms and in the presence of the knights and nobles, peasants and priests, he was challenged to recant his words against the church, its hierarchy and the selling of indulgences. With an uncompromising spirit he spoke: "I cannot and will not recant anything, for it is neither safe nor right to act against one's own conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen."

The power of the Holy Spirit and the conviction of the cross in the personal life of Luther provided a framework for Scripture's principle of "justification by faith alone." Luther's life had been changed since becoming so well acquainted with God's Word, and now it was truly the integrity of the Word that was being tested.

My friends, gird yourself daily with Paul's words to the believers in Corinth: "Be on guard, stand firm in the faith, be men of courage, be strong. Do everything in love" (I Corinthians 16:13).



**A "fool for Christ" cannot be understood
by those seeking to direct their own lives.**

The hardest part of praying for missionaries is to believe that it is important enough to do it.

Missionaries are so far away and they are super Christians, aren't they? Surely they are insulated from temptations ordinary people like you and I must deal with! Besides, one may reason, they chose that life.

Prayer for missionaries is not a matter of choice. It is an act of obedience because it was Jesus who commissioned us to go to even the ends of the earth so that others might know Him. Our missionaries go for us to do just that.

It's a mystery why God, who knows our hearts and all our needs, should include us in His work at all. But James 5:16 says, "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." Because God's Word confirms that, then I ought to come to prayer in thanksgiving and joy and pray in a way that is "effective."

Paul was the first missionary. He requested, "Pray on my behalf." He sent Tychicus and Onesimus to the congregation at Colossae to inform the people about the situation. Missionaries today send newsletters telling us about their situation. To pray effectively, we can use those newsletters to note requests and to be encouraged.

I was excited to move into a new culture when my husband accepted a call to teach children of missionaries in Madagascar. The excitement wore off some when I tried to communicate in a language that had 52 words to describe rice but not one for the word "interesting." I experienced the frustration a new missionary feels when trying to move from the level of vocabulary needed to shop to that which described the needs, fears, hopes and feelings of the people.

A friend said of his life as a missionary: "The highs are higher and the lows are lower." Training

Pray for us

nationals to be Christian leaders is a tremendous privilege. But sometimes, couched in cultural differences and a language that is not altogether clear or because of a shallow faith, potential leaders desert. The resulting pain is deep and real. Paul knew about that too. We sense his pain in II Timothy 4:10-16 as he names some who left the faith.

The adversary prowls to bring fears to the new missionary and discouragement to the more seasoned. Paul understood that. He asked the Ephesians to pray that "utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador ... that I may speak boldly as I ought to speak." That's a prayer request for all missionaries!

We were a young family when we arrived in Madagascar. Our sons thrived on mountain climbing and swimming in the Indian Ocean. They made close friends with those separated by an ocean from the "fast-moving world." Ten years later when we left "to come home" to America, I realized our sons had left their home in Madagascar. Their roots were deep. Missionary kids of all ages, who grew up in any other culture share a longing that the rest of us don't understand. But it's real. Please be gentle on those who are

adjusting to "home" when they have left their home and maybe even their parents. Pray that God will fill their gap of loneliness. Remember, too, the parents whose children have come to America and are making major decisions without them.

Paul thanked Onesiphorous for often refreshing him. If our prayer time is limited because of other demands, perhaps it would be most effective to pray for one missionary — and then be responsive to the Holy Spirit's leading to send notes or possibly gifts. I remember reading a missionary's account of receiving a box, mailed three months before, on the very day it became an answer to the prayer of a young girl for a hot water bottle and a doll for a friend who was ill. Paul admonished Timothy to be diligent. Paul also said his needs were amply supplied when the Philippians sent a gift. Their gift was to him "a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice," and he added, "well pleasing to God."

Before Jesus could feed the multitude he had them sit down. He would, I believe, have us sit down. Pray. Write. Support our missionaries in an effective way.

I find it helpful to use Paul's prayer requests in II Timothy 4:17, Colossians 4:2-4 or II Thessalonians 3:1-2 and insert the missionary's name where appropriate. Writing out those prayers may clarify them.

To Archippau, Paul said, and I pass it on as a plea to myself, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it" (Colossians 4:17).



— Mrs. Dee Berkas
Fosston, Minnesota

No man should be alone when he opposes Satan. The church and the ministry of the Word were instituted for this purpose, that hands may be joined together and one may help another. If the prayer of one doesn't help, the prayer of another will.

— Martin Luther



AFLBS's new resident heads, seminarian Jason Hold and Allison Mellgren. They work with 107 Bible school students registered for this fall quarter. On December 2, winter quarter begins. Parents' Day is scheduled for December 7. The annual Christmas concert will be December 8 at 4 p.m.

Bruce, South Dakota — Grace Lutheran Church has red and purple pulpit clothes to give to a church. For more information contact Bev Jurgens at (605) 627-5569 or Pastor Hurley at (605) 627-5445.

Pastor Ken Thoreson, Janesville, Wisconsin, has resigned as pastor of Bethany Lutheran of rural Brodhead, where he has served since 1979. He also served as the pastor of Trinity Lutheran in Janesville from 1988-94. Pastor Thoreson accepted the call to Alma and Our Savior's Lutheran parish of Argyle, Minnesota, and expects to begin his new ministry December 1, 1996.

Pastor Tom Baker, Evergreen Park, Illinois, has resigned as pastor of Ebenezer Lutheran where he has served since 1995. His future plans are indefinite.

The greatest problem

What is the greatest problem facing your congregation? What is the greatest problem of the AFLC?

These questions came to mind recently when several of our boards and committees were asked to list the main obstacles to their ministries. A variety of concerns were expressed, but high among them was the problem of finances — specifically the lack thereof. If only we had more money! If only people would dig deeper! If only there was a greater commitment to this area of ministry!

It may sound quite radical, but let me say plainly that the need for more money is not the greatest problem faced by Christian ministries. A renowned missionary statesman once declared that "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply." We serve a Master who owns the cattle on a thousand hills.

Our greatest problems are spiritual ones. Pride. Prayerlessness. Unbelief. Lukewarmness. Worldliness. Disobedience. These are the sort of problems that hinder our ministries, and any financial shortfalls are only the symptoms of a far more serious crisis. No healing will come until our eyes are open to see beyond the surface to the depth of our distress.

I would like to suggest this well-worn pathway toward a solution to our problems. First, let there be the realization that we are not worthy of God's provision. Only Jesus is worthy. It is all of grace. Second, let us humble our hearts before Him in repentance and faith. We have sinned in thought, word and deed. Broken vessels are the ones that the Master will most abundantly bless, so He receives all the glory.

One of the definitions for the word "revive" in the Old Testament describes the one in desperate need of renewal as "half-stunned and ready to faint." I wonder if many of our AFLC ministries would fit this description? And what about our congregations? We are tempted to believe that a simple solution to every problem must exist — a book to study, a seminar to attend. Perhaps the spirit of the words in Revelation chapter three might be more accurate: "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." Yet this is the description of the lukewarm Laodicean church! The ones that are whole have no need of a physician.

The solution to financial problems is to get organized and plead with people to give more generously. The solution to spiritual problems is to get down on our knees and plead with God for mercy.

May the Lord lead all of our boards and committees, as well as each congregation, along the path of brokenness to the place of blessing.

— Pastor Robert L. Lee

Massapequa, New York — Unity Lutheran recently sold its building and property. The congregation has been without a full-time pastor since 1994. Massapequa is on Long Island.

Lakeville, Minnesota — Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran held their Missions Sunday on October 27. Pastor Paul Nash preached at both the 8:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. morning services.

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Partners in Mission Outreach trip into Central Mexico

After nearly three years of planning, last August the AFLC Partners In Mission Outreach (PIMO) bus with twenty-five workers traveled to Aguascalientes. It was the first time the PIMO bus took a mission team that far into Mexico.

I left northern Minnesota and picked up team members along the way. Our first night was spent at the AFLBS dorms in Minneapolis. When we arrived that Saturday evening at Good Shepherd Lutheran in Pleasanton, Texas, we were treated like royalty with a Texas barbecue. We were given the opportunity to share during the morning worship service the next morning. Before boarding the bus again, the congregation treated us to a wonderful dinner. What a blessing our hosts have been to the PIMO teams over the years!

Before reaching the border, we stayed at the Christian Retreat Center in McAllan, Texas. Mr. and Mrs. Neil Dorch operate this retreat center for groups such as ours.

On Monday morning we reached the border only to discover that the authorities wanted a different permit for the bus. After appealing to the chief border authority, we were granted permission to enter. But we had lost precious hours and chose not to begin the 10-11 hour drive to Aguascalientes. At the motel that night, we thanked God for answered prayer. We were becoming a family with a mission to accomplish. We grew in determination to fulfill the mission no matter what stood in our way. I truly feel God was strengthening us through this first part of our trip.

Finally we arrived at Springs of Living Waters Lutheran



Partners In Mission Outreach group surveying the construction at St. Andrew's Lutheran in Leon, Mexico.

Church and the Dan Giles and Todd Schierkolk families. We went to work the day we arrived. I feared we would run out of work, but everything turned out just right. That next Sunday was the big day. It was the congregation's first wedding in their church. We had the newly raised altar and the walls freshly painted for the occasion. Tears of joy were seen in the congregation as they saw what had been accomplished. What a reward! The troubles we had encountered seemed small.

A small group had the opportunity to travel farther south to Leon and visit with Pastors

Samuel and Milton Flores. They visited the construction site of a new church there. PIMO is planning a future trip to that area.

Our immediate plans are focused on this December 27 through January 10 when we would like to go to northern Mexico and the city of Obregon and Pastor Gabriel Mercado. Prayerfully consider joining us on this trip. For more information, contact: Al Brazier at RR2, Box 338, Greenbush, Minnesota 56726 or call (218) 782-2456.



— Al Brazier
Director, Partners In Mission

Bloomington, Illinois — On October 6, Bob Deitsche, Osceola, Wisconsin and Home Missions Director Paul Nash traveled to this central Illinois city for an informational meeting. They were joined by area pastors, Clyde Grier of Milford and Jerry Nikunen of Chillicothe. Pray for this fellowship group as they seek God's will.

Pastor Randy Moe, formerly of Sacred Heart, Minnesota, is the interim pastor at Our Saviour's Lutheran in Thief River Falls, Minnesota. His new address is 1003 Arnold Ave. N., Thief River Falls, MN 56701.

Weslaco, Texas — Faith Lutheran voted to purchase an Allen MDS 16 series MIDI Sequencer organ. At the push of a button, the programmed organ will provide preludes, hymn accompaniments, liturgical responses, anthem accompaniments, choir rehearsal accompaniments, offering music, postludes, and whatever else might be needed or added through computer disks.

Room dividers available — Used 5 X 5 room dividers (retail for \$160) are available to churches for \$10 or less for quantity. For more information call Maynard Paul at (612) 452-3447.

Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wisconsin — Pictured is the current renovation project underway at the ARC. Shunam, the first building to the left of the main entrance street, is scheduled for completion by July 1997. It will have two "motel-like" rooms. The rest of the space will have large rooms for approximately 12 people in each. This winterized facility is greatly needed, especially for youth retreats.



Spokane, Washington — New Vision Free Lutheran hosted a busy week last August. They were assisted by the 1996 AFLBS Majesty Team and the Oasis Youth Group from Good Shepherd Lutheran in Cokato, Minnesota.

The week began with an outdoor service during which two families were baptized. The week-day mornings were spent with a total of 74 children at VBS. Afternoon and evening ministries included street evangelism with music, drama and puppet shows at the Spokane Transit Authority Plaza, the Riverfront Park and at an inner-city mission. They had a pro-life rally at a local abortion clinic and packed the church for the mid-week service with a multi-media drama by the Oasis Youth Team. The week concluded with many members of the congregation and the teams going to Family Bible Camp in Montana with the Kalispell congregations.

New Vision has seen many doors of ministry open to it in this large city and is in need of people to minister. Special needs are for those who are talented in music. Is there someone or a group who would join with us for a year or for a time next summer? For more information call: (509) 534-2728.

Wichita Falls, Texas — Pastor Roy Johnson will be installed by AFLC Home Missions Director Paul Nash, as the pastor of Christ Lutheran on November 10.

Evangelism Commission seeks to call evangelist

The Commission on Evangelism is meeting regularly in preparation for the calling of a new AFLC evangelist as mandated by the 1996 Annual Conference. In our first meeting after conference, we started with an evening of prayer. Pastor Richard Anderson, Lakeville, Minnesota, helped us analyze where we have been, where we are and where we ought to go. Then the vision began to form and ignite! Our next step was to develop job descriptions for both the evangelist and the Commission on Evangelism.

The evangelist is to be a leader and a "banner bearer" who will champion evangelism as a high profile ministry in the AFLC. He is to be a trainer who helps congregations, pastors and students in our schools become effective witnesses and evangelistic preachers. He is to be an evangelistic preacher and guide to help congregations do an excellent job in conducting evangelistic meetings. He must multiply his efforts by developing a team of evangelistic preachers and trainers. He will lead in developing a resource center with cutting edge and classic evangelism materials to help the local congregation. Above all he is to live a balanced life putting God first, family second and ministry third. We are praying that some

day the AFLC will have several people working full time in evangelism. There is plenty to do — "the fields are white unto harvest."

The Commission on Evangelism wants to be a team with the new evangelist. We not only want him to be accountable to us but we want to be accountable to him. We want to help him excel in evangelistic work by our mutual leadership, encouragement and prayers. We hope to become a team that keeps evangelism on the front lines of the work in the AFLC. Please pray with us as we take a giant step in this effort when we call a man to be the "anointed" leader of AFLC evangelism. If you have any input for us talk to the Chairman of the Commission, Pastor Jim Rasmussen, Park River, North Dakota.

As of September 23, we are ready to begin interviewing candidates but we cannot call an evangelist until \$35,000 has been pledged to support him. The annual conference attendants pledged \$25,000! As soon as \$10,000 more is pledged the call will be sent. Write to the AFLC headquarters with your pledge today at 3110 East Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55441.

— Pastor Tom Olson
member, Commission on
Evangelism
Cumberland, Wisconsin

PEOPLE AND PLACES

In memoriam

Ida Walla, 80, Fergus Falls, Minnesota, passed away September 19, 1996, after a lingering illness. She was an active member of Calvary Lutheran until her health confined her. Ida Johnson married Melvin Walla in 1944. He was a lay pastor and they served congregations in McIntosh and Thief River Falls, Minnesota; Midland, South Dakota; Tioga and Fargo, North Dakota; and managed a nursing home in Erskine, Minnesota. They retired in Fergus Falls in 1975, and in 1987, Pastor Walla died. Ida was very involved in the early history of the AFLC's national WMF and served as president during those

formative years.

She is survived by two children: daughter Jude and Wayne Heringer, Washburn, ND; son Pernie and Brenda Walla, Arlington, WA and eight grandchildren and one great grandson.

Pastor Roy H. Mohagen, 80, Grafton, North Dakota, passed away on September 29, 1996, at Grand Forks, North Dakota. He was born September 30, 1915, in Grafton, to the late Robert H. and Nelsine (Strom) Mohagen. After high school, he worked on area farms as an employee in grain elevators in North and South Dakota. From 1941-45, he worked for Lockheed Aircraft Co. in Burbank, California. In 1941, he married Ethel Anderson. In 1947, they



Roy Mohagen

began farming south of Grafton where they have lived since.

Roy helped organize Bethel Free Lutheran Church in Grafton. He served on the Mission Board of the AFLC for a number of years. He conducted Norwegian worship services at various churches throughout the years. As a lay pastor, he served St. Matthew's Free Lutheran in Mountain Home, Arkansas, Aspelund Free Lutheran, Walhalla and Aadalen Free Lutheran in Fairdale, North Dakota. He was serving the latter until the last weeks of his life.

He is survived by his wife, Ethel; daughter, Delores Fast of Thompson, North Dakota; sons Donald of Mohall, North Dakota, and Henry of Towner, North Dakota; seven grandchildren and four great grandchildren; and one brother, Alfred and sisters Anna Duncan and Ella Flom.

Pastor Richard Anderson, Lakeville, Minnesota, is the interim pastor of King of Glory Lutheran in Eden Prairie, a nearby suburb of Minneapolis. He is also involved in working with congregations throughout the AFLC as part of the Home Missions' Vision 2100.

AFLC MEMORIAL GIFTS

August and September, 1996

Name	Given by	Department
Olgar Rokke	Ruby Holmaas	AFLBS
	Relatives/Friends	
Hans Upstad	Kenneth/Mary Nash	Home Missions
Alice Johnson	OnaBelle Tollefson	Miriam Home
	Ted/Lindy Brown	AFLT
Bill Dailey	Gerry/Karen Knudsvig	AFLBS
Nellie Bergh	Harlan/Carol Halvorson	World Missions
Luther Klug	Thomas/Marion Stockeland	General Fund
	Ivan/Marie Schlenk	AFLBS
	Loiell/MaryLynn Dyrud	
Henry Hoel	Pastor Amos/Ovidie Dyrud	AFLBS
	Pastor Robert/Gloria Lee	
	Loiell/MaryLynn Dyrud	
Annie Lilja	Kenneth/Luella Loomis	World Mission
	Bette/Darrel Ford	
Mabel Weidemann	John/Cindy Schlenk	General Fund
	Mitchell/Marilee Johnson	
Eldrid Welander	Kenneth/Mary Nash	Home Missions
	Harold/Bethel Erickson	General Fund
	Marlene Unverzagt	
	Pastor Robert/Gloria Lee	AFLBS
	Ernie/Darlene Miedema	AFLT
Melvin Junior Anderson	Arnold/Lydia McCarlson	AFLBS
Paul Hoplin	Gerry/Karen Knudsvig	
Adolph Ulvin	Gordon/Gladys Rugland	
Erma Kilzer	Ella Rekedal	AFLT
Mabel Aasen	Pastor Amos/Ovidie Dyrud	
Kenneth Kleven	Donald/Barbara Anderson	General Fund
Melba Thompson	M/M James Greene	AFLBS
	M/M Paul Spear	
	Pastor Bruce/Karen Dalager	
Albert Nelson	Russ/Ruth Matchinsky	
	Kathy Akerman	

1996 Annual Conference report available

Send \$7 to AFLC headquarters, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55441

Enough of the Niceness

People in the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC) are just about the nicest people I've ever met. Of course that belief is not based on any kind of scientific data or a statistical study. It is simply my opinion based on observation and experience and a lifetime spent as a part of this church body.

We have a lot of nice, kind people in our AFLC who do not want to hurt anyone. We may want to consider, however, if being nice in every sense of the word is always the appropriate behavior. Can an individual or group of individuals be a little too nice?

Many of Martin Luther's contemporaries did not consider all of his actions to be extremely nice. The pope did not view it as a demonstration of great kindness when Luther called him the anti-Christ. Those in the church of that day who were getting rich by selling indulgences — something people could buy to supposedly cover over their sins — did not think Luther's words were well pleasing when he said, "Indulgences are positively harmful to the recipient because they impede salvation by diverting charity and inducing a false sense of security."

Few people in history have angered as many others as Luther did. But one who continues to upset more people than Luther ever did is Jesus.

After His first sermon "All the people in the synagogue were furious ... and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff" (Luke 4:28,29, NIV).

He attends a big festival and, instead of blending in and helping everybody to enjoy themselves, He speaks up and His words cause a great disturbance so that "Some wanted to seize him" (John 7:44, NIV).

While having dinner in the home of a respected member of society, He spoke more highly of a woman with a shameful past than He did of the host (Luke 7:36-50).

He calls the religious leaders of His day "blind fools ... hypocrites ... snakes ... brood of vipers" (Matthew 23:17,23,33, NIV).

In many instances, a lot of people probably would not have called Jesus "a nice guy."

It is easy to get mistaken as to our calling. Our

purpose on earth is not to get people to like us. Our mission is not to put a smile on everyone's face. The reason we are here is not to make all those around us comfortable.

We are called to be witnesses of the One who is so often offensive. We are to proclaim the message of the cross, a message which "is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (I Corinthians 1:18, NIV). We follow the One who said He "did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34, NIV).

We are commanded to be gentle and meek, putting the interests of others ahead of our own. We are to "make every effort to live in peace with all men" (Hebrews 12:14, NIV). But in doing this we must not let seeking to be nice supersede a commitment to the truth.

It may not be seen as nice to declare sin to be sin, but it must be done. Confronting with the truth, calling people to repent, saying "no, that's wrong" — those are often looked at as not very friendly things to do. Love for God and love for our neighbor, however, moves us to do these seemingly "unkind" things.

The Lord at times has to hurt us in a manner of speaking, in order to bring about full healing. "The Lord binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted" (Isaiah 30:26, NIV). It may not seem nice to inflict wounds, but God does it out of love and with a view of a greater and longer lasting good. God declares, "I have wounded and I will heal" (Deuteronomy 32:39, NIV). We endure the wounding because we know the need of and look ahead to the healing.

Paul knew he caused the people in Corinth sorrow by his letter, but he did not regret it. He knew the hurt was only for a little while and it caused sorrow that led to repentance that leads to salvation (II Corinthians 7:8-10).

We must strive to avoid being offensive in our actions and person, but we must not compromise the message which is often offensive. It is a message that offends, but also offers hope. It may hurt, but it also heals. It may wound us and others we share it with, but it can bring life like no other message can.

— Pastor Craig Johnson

**"Our mission
is not to put
a smile on
everyone's
face."**

Ministry to the visitor

I was a stranger, and you took me in. —Matthew 25:35

“Who is that person sitting at the back of the church this morning?” a parishioner asked the pastor.

A question like this can dishearten a pastor. Perhaps the appropriate response of the pastor is, “Go and introduce yourself and find out!”

How a congregation responds to visitors can make or break the ministry of that church. When an individual or family visits your congregation, do they feel welcome? Or does the visitor sense that you are thinking, “What are you doing here?” Congregations can effectively minister to the needs of visitors!

First, make the visitor feel welcome. Offer a hearty handshake and tell them they are welcome to your congregation. Ask them their name and where they are from. Avoid gawking at visitors, rather treat them as if they are part of your family. Don’t leave it up to the pastor to greet the visitor after the services.

Second, avoid making the visitors feel *over welcomed*. That may turn them away. I have discovered that it is best not to acknowledge visitors by

name unless you or the congregation knows the individual well. Also be careful of showering gifts upon the visitor too quickly. For example, it is best not to invite the newcomer to the local pizza shop for a Sunday dinner on their first visit. People, by nature tend to “beware of Greeks bearing gifts.” A visitor may think that you are setting them up to fill that youth advisor or custodian position that the congregation desperately needs.

Third, beware of becoming overly personal toward the guest, especially during the first visit. If a mother is there with her children, do not ask, “Where is your husband?” For numerous reasons, she may not be ready or comfortable to explain it to you. Especially for a man, it may be inappropriate to ask where he works. He may be out of a job and came to your church to find comfort and solace, only to be crushed by such a personal question. As visitors return, they may disclose their personal concerns.

Fourth, follow up on the visits. Make a broad statement during announcements that if someone is new or visiting they are encouraged to sign the guest book. A well-meaning usher should avoid making them sign it. I recall one visitor who did not sign our guest book. When I asked him for his name, he

AN ENCOURAGING WORD

answered as he hurried out the door, “A voice of one crying in the wilderness.” When an address or phone number is left, follow up with a pastoral-deacon visit. Use the opportunity to share your congregation’s love and concern for them. The visit may be an occasion to explain what your congregation is all about or it may be an open door to evangelize with an Evangelism Explosion type of approach. Whatever the situation is, let them know they are welcome and you are there to serve them.

We are called to love the visitors in Christ. God’s Word reminds us, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all ..., especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10, KJV).

Be assured that your pastor will be delighted to hear some one like you say to him next Sunday, “Pastor, I am going to introduce myself and welcome this visitor!”



—Pastor
Todd Klemme
Zion Free
Lutheran
Wadena,
Minnesota