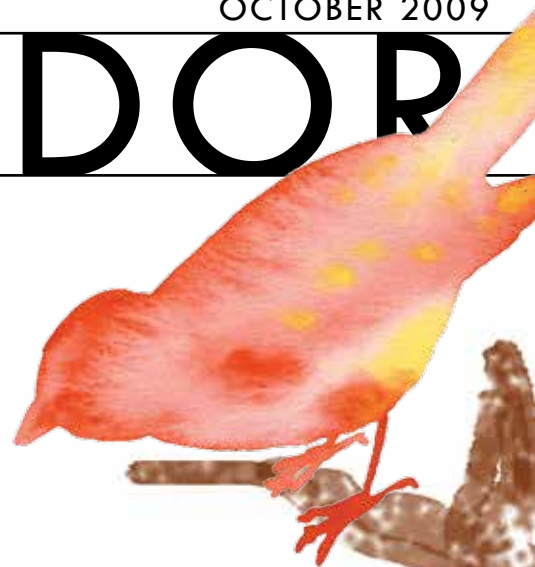


THE LUTHERAN 

OCTOBER 2009

AMBASSADOR

between
us



Common

BY SUSAN WHITEHEAD



sense

When I was a young mother of three children, a mole removed from my back was given a preliminary diagnosis of melanoma, a particularly dangerous form of cancer. While waiting four days for the lab results, I fought to think rationally, but common sense became my enemy, repeatedly reminding me that my mother was dying of cancer, as had many of her siblings. I gave up pretending to be strong, and cried out to God, long and hard.

God's answer came to me in the depths with a velocity I will never forget. His powerful message consisted of two words: "Trust Me." He didn't say I would be delivered from that cancer, but I knew that my family and I would be all right. I didn't know what it all meant, but I didn't need to know anything beyond Him.

Despite that experience, I still instinctively reach for common sense. While it is an important natural gift from God, if I don't lay it at His feet, along with all gifts, both natural and spiritual, I risk placing it on the throne.

Oswald Chambers wrote in *My Utmost For His Highest*, "Certainty is the mark of the commonsense life—gracious uncertainty is the mark of the spiritual life. To be certain of God means that we are uncertain in all our ways, not knowing what tomorrow may bring." Later in his book, Chambers pushes it further: "Faith and common sense are as different as the natural life and the spiritual. Can you trust Jesus Christ where your common sense cannot trust Him?"

Peter could. In that glorious instant on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus gave him a snapshot of heaven (Matthew 14:29-30). Could the opposite of common sense be abandonment to God?

Common sense is simply judgment based on observation and experience, and without God, it is as empty and limited as we are.

I think of a lake. Standing ankle deep in shallow water, we can see what lies just before us. Our natural common sense guides our steps, telling us to not walk on the sharp stones. As we go deeper, however, we cannot see the way to go, and our common sense comes to the

end of its usefulness. Crying out to the Lord in the midst of deep waters is spiritual common sense. Chambers calls submitting common sense to God's will, "revelation sense."

Jesus' life was the antithesis of common sense living. Nothing He did or said made sense at the time, yet for those who followed and listened, Jesus awakened that longing placed deep within that seems to be a sense of eternity. His followers trailed after Him in a constant state of bewilderment, and yet in those three years, they were all fed and clothed. Jesus was completely practical in unearthly ways.

When the Lord finally got my attention that memorable day, I happened to be in my car in a parking lot. After my laughter and tears subsided enough to drive, I didn't want to move. Life might poke its finger and pop the shiny bubble of this glorious, bathed-in-joy moment. But it wasn't fragile. It was more real than common sense could ever be. Just ask Peter.

I wrestle to find that ground that is firm, but not too firm; to be faithful in the everyday, but not let it define me: to face reality through the prism of eternity.

Look out, Peter! Here I come!

Susan Whitehead is a member of Vision of Glory Lutheran Church in Plymouth, Minn.

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You can make more friends in a month by being interested in them than in ten years by trying to get them interested in you.

—Charles Allen

[We need a safe place for weary pilgrims. It's time to put political campaigns and ego-driven agendas and building programs and church activities and inspiring services on the back burner. We need to dive into the unmanageable, messy world of relationships, to admit our failure, to identify our tensions, to explore our shortcomings.]

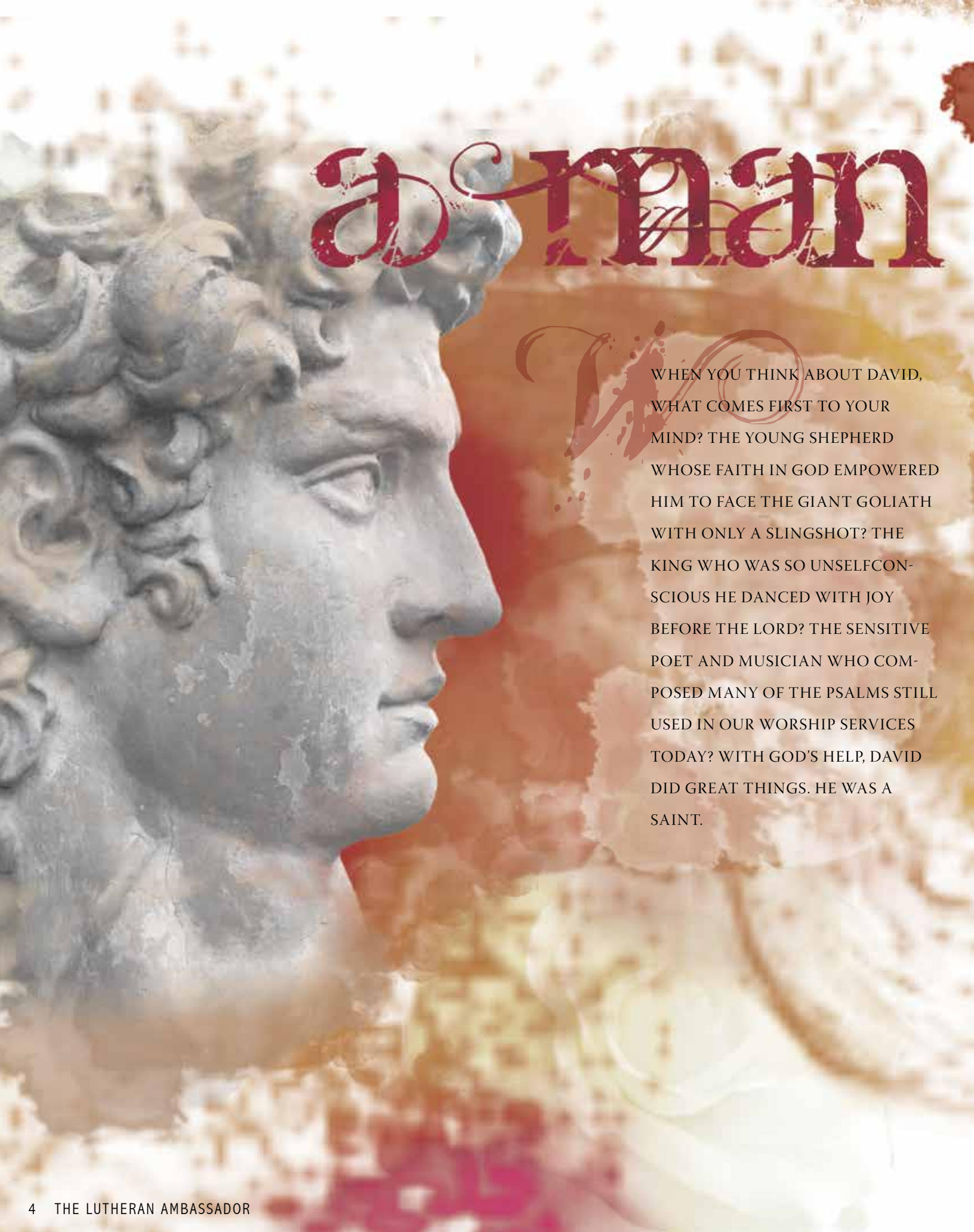
—Larry Crabb

It is the duty of every Christian to be Christ to his neighbor.

—Martin Luther

People need people. God's people need God's people in order to know God. Life in Christ is a corporate affair.

—Tim Stafford



a man

WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT DAVID, WHAT COMES FIRST TO YOUR MIND? THE YOUNG SHEPHERD WHOSE FAITH IN GOD EMPOWERED HIM TO FACE THE GIANT GOLIATH WITH ONLY A SLINGSHOT? THE KING WHO WAS SO UNSELFCONSCIOUS HE DANCED WITH JOY BEFORE THE LORD? THE SENSITIVE POET AND MUSICIAN WHO COMPOSED MANY OF THE PSALMS STILL USED IN OUR WORSHIP SERVICES TODAY? WITH GOD'S HELP, DAVID DID GREAT THINGS. HE WAS A SAINT.

Of good

BY JOAN CULLER

But David also had a dark side. He lusted after another man's wife and took her in adultery. When she became pregnant, he tried to trick her husband into believing the child was his own. After it became apparent that his deceit wasn't going to work, David had him killed. God punished David by taking the life of the son who resulted from his adulterous liaison. David did some terrible things. He was a sinner.

David seemed to do everything in a big way. He was a fierce soldier—"Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands" (I Samuel 18:7)—and a charismatic king who united the Jewish kingdom, brought the ark to Jerusalem and built a palace there. His magnetic personality attracted both men and women. Brought to King Saul's service as a young man, David quickly became a favorite who could calm the King's terrible moods with his music. Saul's son Jonathan loved David with a friendship that was "more wonderful than that of women" (II Samuel 1:26), and Saul's daughter, Michal, also loved David and became his wife. In all, David had at least eight wives and 14 children, but his family life was far from successful. The jealousies that arose between these children of different mothers resulted in such dysfunction that one brother raped his half sister, was then killed by another brother who subsequently led a rebellion against his father, David, and was killed himself.

How did this man, a liar, fornicator and murderer, a man who could control armies but not his own children, come to be considered by God "a man after my heart, who will do my will" (Acts 15:22)? Why was his family chosen to be the human branch of Christ's family tree? David's story reminds me of a nursery rhyme I learned when I was small about the little girl with the curl down the

middle of her forehead: when she was good, she was very, very, good, but when she was bad she was horrid. Some of David's sins were truly horrid. So why does God hold him up as an example we should follow?

The reason is simple: God does not keep score. The most saintly among us are still sinners and we still need a savior. David's good works did not earn him special credit with God and his sins did not preclude him from being God's man. That slate was wiped clean by Christ's sacrifice. It wasn't anything David *did* that made God call him "a man after my own heart." It must have been something else. I think the something else was his steadfast and life-long relationship with God.

Like everything else about David, his love for God was *big*. It became the central and defining relationship of his life from the moment Samuel anointed him and "the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David" (I Samuel 16:13). After that, God's will became part of his decision-making process. The Bible records many times when David "inquired of the Lord" before taking action. When things looked bleak, David turned to God and "strengthened himself in the Lord." When he succeeded, he humbly gave credit to God, saying, "who am I God, and what is my house that you have brought me this far?" (II Samuel 7:18). When rebuked by Nathan, God's prophet, he quickly admits, "I have sinned against the Lord" (12:13). He begs God to spare the life of his child, but when the child dies, he accepts God's authority without bitterness. In fact, he immediately "went into the house of the Lord and worshipped" (12:20).

As a dying man, David's last thoughts are about the house he wanted to build for God. He assembles his officials, seasoned warriors and army commanders, stewards

and sons and commends the building of this temple to his son, Solomon. He tells the people to "observe and seek out all the commandments of the Lord your God, that you may possess this good land and leave it as an inheritance to your children after you forever." He advises Solomon to "know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and a willing mind, for the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought" (I Chronicles 28:9). The best advice he could impart to those he was leaving was to know, obey and serve God.

David's history depicts a man who walked and talked with God throughout his life. To David, God was not a distant authority to be appeased or obeyed out of fear. God was his rock, his deliverer, the satisfier of his soul. Read through the Psalms to get an idea of David's enduring and personal attachment to God. More than 70 psalms indicate in their superscription that David wrote them. Many mention specific occasions in his life: for example, "when he fled from Absalom," or, "when the Philistines seized him in Gaza." Others were written as a cry for mercy, or guidance; they expressed joy and despair. They recall his days as a shepherd and as a king.

David's relationship with God was not perfect because David was not perfect; but he had the saving faith "the ancients were commended for" in Hebrews 11. With confidence in God's grace he could say, "The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27) Like Abraham before him, David "believed the Lord and (God) counted it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

Culler is a member of St. Paul's Lutheran, Leitersburg, Md.



I'M NOT A GREAT FRIEND. MY FRIENDS CAN TELL YOU THAT. BUT I AM BLESSED WITH WONDERFUL FRIENDS FROM WHOM I AM DAILY LEARNING WHAT MAKES A TRUE FRIEND.

A true friend genuinely cares about you. As far as I know, Suzy, Ellen, and the Beckys have never openly conspired to carry me through life. In fact, between all of them, only the Beckys have ever met. Yet they have all, at different points, met my need for wisdom and compassion. They've been there for me when I needed to cry, when I needed to hear that everything was going to be okay, when I needed to know what a Christian wife and mother looked like. They've loved me enough to ask the tough questions, and when necessary give the tough answers. They have been mentors to me, as Paul was to Timothy. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 16:10, "If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am." Paul shared his wisdom and guidance, protection and reproof, even from a distance, with a young man who, while different in upbringing, served the same Lord. Life would be very hard without friends who walk slightly ahead of

us on the journey.

A true friend helps, encourages, and is patient with you. Julie, Angie, and Tanya know me well enough to be my friend despite my shortcomings. They know that I probably won't respond to their phone calls or e-mails within a reasonable amount of time, but they haven't given up on me yet. Their patience is exemplary! They have walked with me through personal, parenting, and home-schooling dilemmas, laughed with me through the same, and directed me back to the Lord through it all. Barnabas, whose name means "son of encouragement," was just that sort of friend to Paul. He was the first to come alongside Paul after his conversion and present him to the apostles as not only a non-threat, but as a true believer. Barnabas and Paul traveled together, taught together, and suffered together. Interestingly, they didn't always agree—Acts 15 tells us this much—but they did reconcile. Life would be very lonely without friends who walk beside us.

*Everything I needed
to know about
friendship I learned
from my friends*

BY JENNIFER HOLT



true friends

A true friend shares enthusiasm for life. Teresa and Jamie are sisters to me in the truest sense. They make me laugh, they make me food, and they make me think. Their love for the Lord is contagious, and their giving, sacrificial hearts inspire me. I picture Timothy similarly: with an eager heart, an infectious hope, and an unquenchable drive to serve the Lord. My friends' enthusiasm for life and their faith is contagious, and I'm honored to serve Jesus with them. Life would be very dull without friends to brighten it.

So, what can we do to grow in our friendships? The most important step, and typically most difficult, is that of reaching out. As cheesy as the saying "A stranger is just a friend you haven't met yet" is, there is truth in it. Two dear friends of mine, Betty and Sylvia, are ones who I've met because they work at places I frequent—the library and the grocery store. Is there someone at your church or in your neighborhood who you don't know well? Someone who appears

to be lonely or alone? Maybe someone you see frequently, whether at work or while doing errands? Take the time to get to know them; show a genuine interest in them.

Dale Carnegie's classic, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, while not a Christian book, can be very useful in learning how to connect with others, the main point being to ask questions and truly care about the answers. Everyone has a story, everyone has struggles, and no one should have to go through them alone. And whenever possible, ask how you can pray for that person. It is a priceless gift you can give to lift them up to our heavenly Father in prayer. It shows them you care, and to the nonbeliever it is a witness of Who true friendship comes from.

You can ask yourself what characteristics you value most in your friends, and then challenge yourself to develop those in your relationships with others. I have been blessed with friends who are compassionate, patient, sacrificing, and encouraging, and from them I have learned the value

of compassion, patience, sacrifice, and encouragement in relationships, and have been challenged to become more like Jesus in these areas.

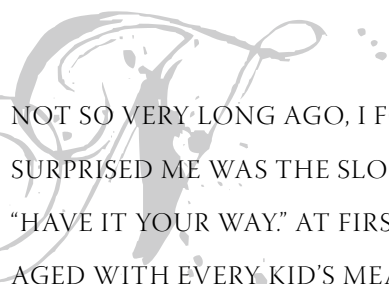
Finally, so often we use I Corinthians 13 as a wedding and marriage Scripture, which is great, but forget that it is God's Word to us regarding who He is, how He loves, and how He wants us to love *everyone*. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." Seeing these verses as a challenge to love everyone God's way has changed how I see friendship. It can be daunting to grow in friendships that show that kind of love, but we have a very, very big God who can make us able!

*Holt is a member of Living Hope,
St. Michael, Minn.*

friend of god

BY ANDREW OLSON





NOT SO VERY LONG AGO, I FOUND MYSELF ORDERING LUNCH OFF THE MENU IN A NEARBY BURGER KING. WHAT SURPRISED ME WAS THE SLOGAN THIS AMERICAN BURGER JOINT HAS SO READILY ADOPTED IN ALL ITS STORES; “HAVE IT YOUR WAY.” AT FIRST GLANCE, THIS TRADEMARK PHRASE SEEMS JUST AS INNOCENT AS THE TOYS PACKAGED WITH EVERY KID’S MEAL—AFTER ALL, WHO WOULDN’T WANT THEIR FOOD, MADE THEIR WAY? BUT WHY STOP WITH BURGERS AND FRIES?

How often do we try to customize our friendships, as well? Unfortunately this paradigm has reached much further than the walls of the food industry and has extended into the depths of American social life. *My friends done my way*—a world where “What’s in it for me?” has become a question of chief importance and contributing selflessly to a friendship is a notion of the distant past. Far too often we choose to surround ourselves with people who will meet our needs or benefit us in some way. The ideal has become a model of utilitarian friendship, where we seek out others who will provide something of importance to us and any contributions to the friendship are expected to be mutual. Bottom line—our friendships with the people around us are based on their performance, which is unfortunately doomed to fail eventually.

The problems resulting of this human paradigm are many. People who don’t fit into our criteria for friendship are left alone and contact with them minimized, favoritism is shown to those with our best interest in mind and “clicks” result from our strong common bonds with the few. Our hidden self interest within our friendships is eating away at the Christian church today, for how can we truly minister to everyone if we are so heavily focused on select individuals? I wonder what Christ thinks about this.

Jesus managed His social life in a radically different way than most people of His time. A quick glance at the people He associated with reveals that He was quite countercultural in this regard. Who else would *choose* to visit the land of the enemy, frequently spend time with sinners and

eat lunch with tax collectors? These social rejects were typically disassociated from, but He loved them! Jesus was intentional about His ministry and dedicated time and effort to seeking the lost, even to the point of exhaustion.

Although our Lord focused greatly on ministry, He also chose to cultivate an inner circle of disciples. However, even in this respect Jesus broke the mould. Notice how He chose those who considered themselves to be less in God’s sight, rather than the Pharisees who considered themselves “spiritual peers” or greater than Christ himself! In addition, the love Jesus shared with His disciples was unlike any other seen before. His acts of love included mentorship, ministering, foot washing and death. What did He have to gain from any of this? He showed the love of a true servant, *totally selfless* and completely untainted with the self-seeking motives of the sinful flesh.

Finally, take a look at how Jesus interacted with the fellowship of believers. He dedicated Himself to the teaching and the instruction of God’s Word in the synagogue, sharing spiritual insight with those around Him at even an early age. To those who considered themselves “at Christ’s level,” he instructed and rebuked in love. Here once again, rather than forming clicks, Jesus took the counter-cultural approach. To say the least, the love He showed the Pharisees was far from charismatic—in fact it involved rebuke and condemnation—but He chastised them *because He loved them*, and although they were evil and empty in God’s sight, He died for them just the same.

Before He left this earth, Jesus gave

us the challenge of a lifetime: to show His servant love to others. John 13:34 says, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” This is Christ’s love we’re talking about here! Impossible? Yes, there will always be those people who seem unlovable and it certainly doesn’t get easier as you realize you may never get anything in return. In order to offer this sacrificial love, we’re going to need the Lord’s help.

Breaking out of this paradigm isn’t going to be easy. It could involve spending less time with those you feel comfortable around, reaching out to coworkers and classmates or maybe showing servant love to those who may seem like a bad investment of your time and efforts. You can’t do it alone—He’s our only hope. Jesus offers His encouragement in Matthew 11:29, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

This radical love isn’t easy to share, but has the potential to alter the world as we know it. Think of the last time someone shared a gift of selfless love with you. Did you arrive at a remarkable moment in your life? What a difference we could make if we simply chose to love! Are you up to the challenge of sharing a Jesus-like love? Make Him your motivation; after all, He loved you first. So until you pass by the next Burger King: Are you willing to *have it God’s way*?

Olson, a member of Faith Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn., is a junior at AFLBS.



“FACEBOOK HELPS YOU CONNECT AND SHARE WITH THE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE.” SO IT SAYS. AND SO IT DOES, IN A CERTAIN SENSE. MIDWEEK AT THE FREE LUTHERAN YOUTH CONVENTION IN ESTES PARK, COLO., I CELEBRATED MY 33RD BIRTHDAY. AWAY FROM HOME AND APART FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY, MY FACEBOOK ACCOUNT LIT UP WITH POSTINGS FROM WELL-WISHERS AWARE OF MY SPECIAL DAY. HOW DID THEY KNOW THE DAY WAS MINE? FACEBOOK TOLD THEM, AND WAS THE MEANS BY WHICH THEY WERE ABLE TO WISH ME A HAPPY DAY.

I’ve heard stories of happily married couples who met on Facebook. I have friends who have received condolences through Facebook after a difficult breakup or the death of a loved one. And of course there are the long-lost classmates who have reconnected through the world’s premiere social-networking Web site.

Facebook is one of man’s most recent (and among the most dazzling) communications technologies—designed solely for the purpose of making communication between people easier, more efficient. But like any communications technology, it does something largely invisible while we use it for our visible means. And it is this invisible thing that we must understand well if we are to use it without falling victim to its invisible effects.

To demonstrate this invisible thing, consider the effects of the oldest communications technology still in use today: the alphabet. Before the alphabet, society was dependent upon oral tradition for the preservation of knowledge. Important information would be lost without it being told and retold. And this telling and retelling required physical presence with other people. So society was communal, relational. Proximity mattered.

After the invention of the alphabet, knowledge could be preserved independent of face-to-face interaction. So long as a man could read, he could know what he needed to know apart from community. And his stories would be remembered so long as he could write. Physical presence was no longer necessary for the preservation of knowledge, and previously essential relationships were now mediated through things: stone, scrolls, books, etc. The alphabet as a communications technology actually created distance between people.

Scholars, philosophers, and theologians agree: every communications technology

since has followed suit. Facebook is no exception.

One way of observing this is to notice the absence of nonverbal communication in the virtual world. There are no unintentional facial expressions or vocal inflections here. We are able to reveal only as much of ourselves as we wish to reveal. As we micro-manage our image, the interplay between ourselves and the rest of the world is filtered, edited to our liking. This is one reason why technology-mediated communication is so appealing: we are more able to be to the world who we’d like to be.

As a result, we are a people often preferring communication through technology (Facebook, texting, e-mail) to a more human—and therefore more risky—face-to-face interaction. But in the process, says Pastor Eugene Peterson, “We have permitted a technology-saturated way of life to disengage us from what is essential to our humanity.”

Cultural critic Howard Rheingold says it this way: “People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, *but we leave our bodies behind.*”

But God has given us bodies. And He said it was good. Our bodies are an essential part of our humanity—awkward non-verbals and all. And we were made in His image, meant for relationship with Him and with other humans. It was not good for man to be alone.

The Christian doctrines of the Trinity, creation, and the Incarnation affirm that physical relationships matters. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we, in a certain sense, are to follow after Him. So relationships divorced from bodily, face-to-face interaction lack a vital element of what it means to be truly human, made in the image of the triune God.

So we must not forget how to attend to those in our midst—to fully exist in the

place where we find our bodies to be. This is where God gives gifts. His presents are in the Present.

Technology by nature fragments our existence. An example: as I write this I see two men out the café window sitting at a table—both of them talking on cell phones to people not at the table. They are virtually blind to each other. This is the invisible influence of technology of which we must be aware and diligently seek to subvert when we can. We must work against the isolating effects of technology even while we use it to maintain the connections that matter to us.

How do we do that?

A suggestion: dial your use of technology back a notch when you can. Facebook? How about a phone call? E-mail? How about a hand-written letter? Strive to remove as many degrees of separation as you can between yourself and the person you are communicating with at the time.

And two practices for proficiency in the art of presence:

Eat meals with other people (and don’t multi-task while you eat). There’s nothing quite so intimate as meeting our body’s most physical needs in the presence of other people, so let’s not ruin it by trying to do something else at the same time. Put the gadgets (and newspapers) away, turn off the television, and attend to the people in your midst.

And keep the Sabbath, especially in regards to technology. One day a week, turn off the cell phone, the computer, the television, the Xbox; no texting, no e-mailing, no Facebooking. Seek to exist fully where you find your body to be, with the people in front of and around you. Attend to the people in your midst.

Erickson is a member of Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn.

face to face

BY JEREMY ERICKSON





grand parents



BY DIANE PETERSON

GRANDPARENTING IS A PRIVILEGE AND A RESPONSIBILITY. (IT IS ALSO NOT A VERB, BUT IT IS A RELATIONSHIP THAT INVOLVES ACTION.) GOD HAS BLESSED MY HUSBAND AND I WITH TWO SETS OF GRANDCHILDREN, TOTALING EIGHT. HOWEVER, BEING A GRANDPARENT ISN'T LIMITED TO THE CHILDREN OF OUR CHILDREN. WHATEVER YOUR FAMILY SITUATION, YOU CAN BE A GRANDPARENT.

There are children in your church, and perhaps your neighborhood, who could use a “bonus grandparent.” This is especially important if a child’s actual grandparents are no longer living or are some distance away. Children will be blessed by having someone with whom to attend recitals, ball games, and grandparents’ day at school, by someone who sends a birthday card and engages them in conversation when they see them. And you will be blessed by making children a part of your life.

Whether the relationships are with your real grandchildren, bonus grandchildren, or both, there are some things I feel are important to keep in mind.

Consider the parents. Following their guidelines in what is acceptable in such things as behavior, activities, food, and gifts makes for a better relationship with them and a consistency that is helpful to the children. That may mean limiting the size and/or number of toys given at birthday and Christmas. Harder for me is denying the dessert (that I may have made because it is his favorite) if Isaac chooses giving up dessert over having three bites of his main dish. For Grandpa the difficulty is often maintaining nap and bedtime schedules. Another issue might be amount of television screen time allowed and what is appropriate during that time.

Take advantage of your grandchildren’s willingness to interact. Marjorie, 13, expects me to e-mail her every day. Sometimes it’s a bother, but I am blessed that she wants that contact. Micah, 1, expects me to pick him up when he sees me. Lydia, 2, grabs a

book almost every time I walk in the door. Josiah’s amazing knowledge of U.S. history means he beats me when we play Hail to the Chief, but what fun to play a board game with the kids. It’s also another opportunity to observe their personalities and development.

Take a preteen to lunch. Somehow this is a setting that lends itself to conversations that you might not have elsewhere. It’s an opportunity to share about dreams, values, and, yes, a relationship with the Lord. Find other settings that fit other ages. The significant factors are your undivided attention and encouragement to talk about what really matters.

Keep those cards and letters coming, even if you don’t get a response. College students don’t always have the time or motivation to write, but they appreciate hearing from you. We have one young friend whose grandfather wrote to him once a week from the time he was young until the grandfather’s death. What an amazing relationship they had!

Remember that being a grandparent is not a competition. This is especially an issue at gift time. We do not have to match in number or size of gift what other grandparents give. This isn’t always an issue of income, but can be a matter of family policy. Young children may not appreciate, or even be aware of, contributions to their college fund, but that can be combined with a carefully chosen small gift for a more lasting impact than a pile of gifts.

One of my friends revealed that his grandparents always gave identical

Christmas gifts to him and his younger brother. Easier, yes, but I feel it is important to select gifts that fit the age and interests of the individual. It is very satisfying to find the perfect gift. Marjorie’s passion is fashion and she likes to bake. For her birthday she will get cookie cutters in the shape of clothing items, accompanied by various items for decorating cookies. I recently had the opportunity to accompany Jesse while he shopped with his own money at a toy store. I listened to what interested him, asked some questions about what he had and didn’t have, and even made some notes. This spring I attended a homeschooling conference with my son and daughter-in-law and found some books and games not readily available in ordinary stores. Then, noticing Isaac’s current interest in garbage trucks, I saved the books I had bought for him there for another time and gave him the kit to build a garbage truck that I had found earlier at a teacher store.

Time spent with the grandchildren or for them, a sincere interest in them and what interests them, and carefully chosen gifts are all a part of grandparenting. Yet, the greatest responsibility is prayer. We have individual pictures of all our grandchildren on the refrigerator at eye level. Every morning I consider each one and ask the Lord to keep them safe from the evils of the world, but most of all that they live their lives in relationship with Him—knowing, loving, and serving Him.

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



In the Word

At the Summer Institute of Theology

Ten years have passed since attending my first Summer Institute of Theology (SIT). Every time I'm asked whether it's worth the time and effort to attend my answer is always a resounding yes, absolutely it is! I'm convinced that this Christ-focused, passion-infused, Word-driven, Spirit-filled week is literally one of the best kept secrets in the AFLC. SIT is designed for pastors, laymen, elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers, and youth workers—basically anyone wanting to dig deep into the Word of God.

Every year I cannot help but feel refreshed by the respect and authority the attendees and faculty hold concerning the Word of God. The Word is not seen as words on a page to be interpreted purely grammatically and historically, but they are viewed as words with a divine power. The grammar and historical background are like a fancy racing car, while the divine power is the engine that provides the thrust for the car. Passages such as I Thessalonians 1:4-5, which speaks of the Word coming “in power and in the Holy Spirit,” are taken literally. The Word is irrefutably clear concerning its ability to transform and fortify believers in their faith (II Timothy 3:16). Every subject we discuss is thoroughly saturated with the Word of God.

The second characteristic making SIT

so unique is the diversity of believers who gather from every walk of life. The professors by far rank among the humblest men I have ever met—men who strive to faithfully expound the Word of God to the highest degree of accuracy. In similar manner, I liken those attending to the Bereans who searched the Word daily for truth. Looking around the classroom of some 80 men and women, I was struck by the reality that they were soldiers equipping and fitting themselves for battle on the front lines. We all left with our two-edged swords sharpened and shields of faith reinforced, ready for engagement!

Morning devotions, corporate prayer, teaching, and the open and honest discussion of all those present were inspiring. The fullness of “conviction” that only comes from the Holy Spirit resonated throughout the week. Each person left energized, encouraged, and challenged in his or her walk with God. SIT has been one of the most formative annual experiences of my life and ministry. Next August I pray that there will be a record number of Bereans present who are searching and growing by the power of the Word and the full conviction of its truth.

Matthew Ballmann, a student at Dallas Theological Seminary, is from Glen Rose, Texas.

Building Up the Body of Christ” was the theme of the AFLC’s Summer Institute of Theology. It should also be the theme of every believer in Jesus Christ. I Thessalonians 5:11 reminds us, “Therefore encourage one another, and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” SIT was developed primarily for lay pastors to receive biblical instruction and encouragement as well as a way for them to maintain their academic credentials. But SIT is not limited to those individuals.

As an ordained pastor of the AFLC, I have been refreshed in every way at the SIT gatherings. For a length of time I have attended SIT classes every other year. I signed up for classes, first, that I did not take while I attended AFLTS (three years of classroom training and one year of internship). But even when I have taken similar courses at SIT, I have gained new and refreshed insights from the inspired and inerrant Word of God.

As I get older, I have come to appreciate not only the Bible all the more, but also the instructors at SIT who train us in the Word of God.

SIT has also become a place to make new friends and become reacquainted with long-time friends. Not only are classroom times of benefit, but the fellowship moments with like-minded believers is priceless. SIT is an opportunity for pastors (lay or ordained) and laity to grow together, and to be further equipped to “build up the body of Christ.” At SIT you will be blessed so that you will be a blessing to others.

Pastor Todd Klemme serves Minnewaska Lutheran, Starbuck, Minn.



Left to right: Dr. Francis Monseth leads a class on Doctrine of the Church. Fern Bohling, Golden Valley, Minn., takes notes. Wayne Lehmann, Watseka, Ill., listens intently in class. Pastor Henry Mohagen, Reva, S.D., and Irvin Schmitke, Thief River Falls, Minn., talk outside of class. Pastor Robert Lee listens as a student asks a question during a class on Church Leadership and Administration.

I look forward to the week of SIT, the Summer Institute of Theology, at the Bible school. Sure, there are the 50 hours of class and a number of papers to do for the homework, but I look forward to the fellowship, renewing old friendships, seeing everyone at the Bible school, and just spending a week dwelling on and searching the Scriptures. It can be a challenging and rejuvenating week.

SIT bolsters my faith and challenges me to look at what we do as Christians and as a church to see if there are areas where we are just "going through the motions." I want to know why we hold the traditions we do and what they mean. According to our AFLC principles, the congregation is the right form of the Kingdom of God on earth. It always makes me wonder why God chose us

as individuals and us as churches to be His vehicle of the Holy Spirit to be salt and light in the world. I seem so fallible, weak, and unconvincing. God is holy, mighty, and the definition of truth. When you realize how and why He wants to use us, it is a great responsibility, not just to do the right thing, but to know our God and His Word.

The Word is law and gospel, and even though the Ten Commandments may seem old fashioned and outdated, the conviction of the Spirit is strong as I look at the commandments and how God wanted to preserve us for Him. It is amazing how, in our secular society, the commandments are still used and depended on.

The traditions and heritage of the AFLC is strong and provides me with a sense of identity. I know that this church body isn't

based on methods of worship and policies of what is right and wrong, but on the Word alone, which governs every part of our lives and the life of our church. It has spurred me to look at some of our neighboring AFLC churches and their members, to hear the stories of the beginning of the AFLC in 1962 and their experiences at that time.

I want to thank Pastor Jerry Moan, Dr. Francis Monseth, Pastor Robert Lee, and Col. John Eidsmoe for this great week of instruction and self evaluation. As the old saying goes, the more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know. God blessed this week and may He continue to guide us with His Spirit and His Word.

Don Edlund is the youth director at Resurrection Free Lutheran, Beltrami, Minn.

Thy neighbor, thyself

*Who is your neighbor?
We may want to limit
who we let on our list
of acceptable people,
but Jesus tells us to love
in a different way.*

The lawyer to whom Jesus spoke the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) asked two very appropriate questions. His first question has been and still is perhaps the most appropriate and needed question ever asked: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” That question needs to pass through the heart and over the lips of every person living on this earth. It needs to be directed to the right person, and that person is Jesus, the Son of God.

The second question asked by the lawyer was so very appropriate for him and it is one that you and I need to intentionally

ask of ourselves: “Who is my neighbor?” We are surrounded by people in many places and situations, but not always do we recognize more than a handful of the masses as our real neighbors.



Pastor Elden Nelson

In our society we are very easily persuaded that our neighbors are those persons who, first of all, look and act as we do. Second, they must share a common or similar work experience with us. Third, they should have a similar socioeconomic status as myself. Fourth, they

must share my ancestry. Next, they need to hold the same moral and ethical values that I hold. And last, they need to believe as I do in such matters as politics and religion.

In our selfish way we often think that neighbors are a choice—our choice. We are led to believe that it is OK for us to make the choice to exclude from our list of neighbors people of another race, people with less education, or those who do not believe as I do. But Jesus proceeded to teach the man that love is the essence of being a neighbor. Showing mercy to those whose needs are different than mine is the character of a Christian neighbor. And with such a backdrop for identifying our neighbor we realize there are no exclusions to “our list” but that we are under obligation, as the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 13:8, to “owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.”

In the wake of decisions made by other Lutheran church bodies in recent weeks it is easy for us to make some very poor, unwise and unchristian choices in regard to being neighborly. It is so easy to be cynical, critical and judgmental of the beliefs and ways of another. Perhaps, just perhaps, we are more inclined to label those of another stripe as our enemies. Praying for and with them, befriending them and showing mercy does not mean we compromise our beliefs and convictions, or knuckle under to liberal thinking or practice, but it does mean that we have learned or are learning that part of the lesson the Teacher proclaims in this parable—“Love thy neighbor as thyself.”

Love, according to God

The heart of missions is relationships

BY DAWN JOHNSON



In John 13:35, Jesus connects the concept of love and mission: “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Because AFLC Home Missions congregations are involved in “mission,” the relationships that exist in the church are very important. These congregations are generally smaller in number and those involved in their church may have to carry a bigger load as they begin to grow.

The most important relationship in a Home Missions congregation or in any and all relationships is our personal relationship with our Lord and Savior. We must be reading, studying, meditating on and living out God’s Word in our lives. Our commitment to God is reflected in our lives—how we choose to live, act and respond to people and situations we face. God’s Word tells us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind (Deuteronomy 6:5).

God loves us so much and He wants us to love others. He tells us: “Love your

neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). He does not tell us that we have to like our neighbor or what he does. But the Word says *love* your neighbor. This type of love can only be found in Christ and a proper relationship with Him.

God’s Word also tells us that we are to love as Christ loves us (John 13:34). That is no small command. It is nothing that we can do in and of ourselves. There will be people who we are in contact with who will disappoint us. God says love them. There will be people who come into our lives who do or say things that we don’t agree with. God says love them. It isn’t our job to change people, God’s Word will do that. Our job is to love them as Christ loves them. How can you reach out to someone if you are shunning them or ignoring them

for things they have said or done?

There are many who don’t know the real truth of God’s Word. The world and Satan have influenced their thinking. False teaching, or “half-truths,” have

been taught and must be overcome in order to get the truth of God’s Word into their hearts and minds (John 8:32, 36). Only through the preaching and teaching of the Word, sharing in fellowship in God’s Word and being living examples of God’s Word does that happen. Only God can do all that. We as His servants must surrender to Him and allow Him to work through us.

The key is to be constantly in prayer, seeking God’s will for us (Matthew 6:33). That means putting our own agenda aside and doing God’s work. This can be a struggle because our selfish nature likes to have its way. But it is God’s work and we are God’s people.

Johnson, Wilson, Wis., is the executive secretary of the AFLC’s Women’s Missionary Federation.

*Memories of a
former missionary
remind us of
our need*



The Lord is needed

BY PASTOR DEL PALMER

Fall brings back memories of AFLC missionary Carolyn Dyrud and the day we traveled to the cemetery to lay her body there. One of my favorite memories of Carolyn is hearing her sing, "People Need the Lord," accompanied by her little boom box. Her words still ring in my ear.

Every day they pass me by,
I can see it in their eyes,
Empty people filled with care,
Headed who knows where?

People need the Lord

Yesterday I attended a funeral of another believer. I looked into the casket and saw the shell of a man who had been up, alive and walking a few days earlier. Because of his faith in Christ, I knew where he was spending eternity. Funerals bring us face to face with our mortality. One day it will be me lying in a casket. Death is a reality and it reminds us of the fact that sin has left a fatal stain on all of us.

The statement is personal:

I need the Lord

I start each morning with lofty goals, committing my life to the Lord. By the end of the day my sinful nature has been exposed. My sins are not major. I haven't robbed a bank or murdered someone. But any sin is major in God's eyes. Far too often I fall to gluttony, anger, coveting the things God has not given me and putting my interests above God's, which is idolatry.

Not only do other people need the Lord, but I need the Lord. I need His forgiveness, His mercy and His power to live honorably for Him.

The statement is universal:

We're all in the same boat

There are masses of people in many of the places where I go, whether it's the Mall of America, the Minnesota State Fair, or the cities of Brazil, Mexico or India. When I look over a mass of people I wonder, where are they spiritually? Every individual

has rebelled against God, but how many are trusting in Christ? Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The question is always there, where will they observe the day of their funeral?

Whenever we observe a mass of people we ask, what can I do? You know you can't reach them all. But you can make a difference in the lives of some of them. Thank God that someone made a difference in your life and shared Jesus with you. You needed the Lord, and He made a great difference in your life. Show Him that you value what He's done for you by having a life mission to reach others for Christ.

We are called to take His light,
To a world where wrong seems right
What could be too great a cost
For sharing life with one who's lost?

Palmer, the director of AFLC World Missions, lives in Shakopee, Minn.

A place for everyone

Home Missions offers service opportunities

BY ADELA HEIN

The phone rang, “We’re flying to Sioux Falls in a few hours to visit a Home Missions family in need. Do you want to come?” “How about helping out with an outdoor vacation Bible school we’re putting on in the park with a mission church?” “Interested in canvassing for a new Bible study we’re starting in Hastings?” The cozy Home Missions office, complete with a giant bowl of mints garnishing the table and a kid-sized chalk easel in the corner, started feeling like home. Each unique ministry experience has stretched me outside my comfort zone, but the opportunities and blessings that resulted have been nothing short of amazing!

Last October, at an AFLC regional retreat in Texas, I learned about Home Missions for the first time. Pastor Paul Nash issued the challenge: “Are you living your life for a purpose that matters in eternity? ... Is your number one goal bringing glory to God in all that you do?” That day began a journey with so many adventures, leaps of excitement, and tests of faith that it would take pages and pages to share them all. As a 19-year-old nursing student, waiting and searching for God’s direction post-graduation, the way seemed to suddenly become clear. Desiring ministry to be the focus of my profession and my life, I seized the opportunity to spend two years studying God’s Word at the Association



Pastor Paul Nash, director of AFLC Home Missions, and his copilot, Adela Hein, fly to a Home Missions event.

Free Lutheran Bible School.

I moved into the Bible school dorms a few months early to get settled in and start work, and was immediately drawn into the comfortable, busy, and encouraging atmosphere of the Home Missions office. My spare time has been filled with helping out in various tasks, including stuffing envelopes, printing postage, and making prayer cards. The connections and opportunities only continue to grow. One of the most exciting has been helping with a church plant in Hastings by knocking on doors, handing out flyers, and through befriending people in the community and inviting them to attend church.

I came on campus not really knowing what Home Missions is, but I’ve been encouraged by working with people who

truly have a heart for God’s mission—sharing the gospel with the lost. They are people who live a life of faith every day, not knowing what might happen next, and at times being pushed out of their comfort zone as well, but always trusting that God will work and provide. It’s contagious! Home Missions isn’t just an office, it’s a lifestyle—an ever-adapting ministry of presence, encouragement, support, and prayer for new congregations of the AFLC. It is a constant testing of faith as the battle is waged against Satan’s plan of destruction for churches and families. Home Missions

is a place where the promises of God are not only known, but *lived out* every day. Lives are changed. I’m one of them.

The blessings of being a part of God’s work are incredible. I’m excited about starting Bible school and digging into God’s Word, but I’m equally excited about continuing to serve with Home Missions, wherever God can use me. Come winter, you’ll find this Texan trudging through the snowdrifts from the dorm to the Home Missions office to help out. There is room for everyone. Come join us!

Hein, from San Marcos, Texas, is a junior at AFLBS.



AFLC Schools welcome students to 2009-2010 academic year

Classes began in September for Bible school and the Free Lutheran Seminary

Students arrived on the campus of the AFLC Schools, Plymouth, Minn., on Sept. 6 as a new academic year began.

According to Sam Nash, director of student development at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, a total of 133 students had registered by the first of September. Included in that total were 55 returning students in the senior class (34 men and 21 women), 71 incoming juniors (33 men, 37 women and one part-time student), and seven students in the Ministry Training Institute (three men and four women).

The Free Lutheran Seminary has an incoming class of five full-time students in the junior level and five part-time students, as well as 11 returning students and six students on internship.

Students had two days of orientation at the Bible school before starting classes on Sept. 9. AFLTS began on Sept. 8.



ABOVE: Members of the Rolf family pitch in to paint the entrance sign in an effort to spruce up the campus during the summer, including (from left) AFLBS Dean Pastor Joel Rolf, Christina (Rolf) and Jacob Hill and Mary Ann Rolf. TOP: The campus, taken from a FLAPS plane (with thanks to pilot Lavon Bohling and photographer Ben Olson) at the beginning of September.

Ministries offer user-friendly e-mail list

This summer, AFLC ministries added a new way for you to stay connected with department news and prayer requests. It is now easy to keep updated with the latest from AFLBS, Evangelism, Home Missions, Parish Education, etc. Not only will this centralized e-mail service provide a professional look to our communication, but this transition allows us to cut rising postage costs. In addition, you can now directly manage your own newsletter account, which means if you need to change your e-mail address or want to stop receiving certain updates, you can make the change yourself, at the click of a button. It takes only five minutes to sign up.

Here's how:

- Go to www.aflc.org
- On the top right, click on the "Sign up" tab
- On this page you will find a list of all the department updates that are currently being offered by e-mail. Simply fill out your information and put a check mark beside all the updates you would like to receive. Hit "submit" and you're finished.

Our Association looks forward to serving you through new resources, information, and encouragement. Keep us in your prayers. Share your ideas. Let's make use of every tool as we advance the Kingdom of God.

AFLBS to host Vision banquet Oct. 30

AFLBS will host a Vision Banquet of Thanksgiving and Praise in order to thank and praise God for His wonderful provision of the Heritage Hall facility. The event will take place at 6:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 30 in Heritage Hall on the AFLC Schools campus in Plymouth, Minn.

It is our desire to show our appreciation to all who have partnered in prayer and resources, and to come together in a "last mile challenge" to complete the payments on this facility. A free-will offering will be received at the banquet, which will go entirely toward paying off this debt. We praise God for how He has provided. This \$3.3 million project has a remaining balance due of approximately \$100,000.

A common thread spoken by the students on campus in 2004, when this facility was opened, and today's students is the *unity* that is experienced with the opportunity of classes and fellowship in this one building.

We invite you to unite with us for a time of praise and thanksgiving as you join us for this banquet. The program will include special music and testimonies by AFLBS students and a message by Pastor Mark Johnson, former dean of students. Tickets will not be available for this event, however, we ask that if you want to attend, please RSVP to the AFLBS office by phone (763-544-9501) or by e-mail (aflbs@aflc.org) by October 23.

Vision is the development and expansion program of the AFLC Schools.

ARC hosts adoptive family conference

The ARC is hosting the Chosen Child Conference Nov. 6-8. This is a conference for adoptive families.

National speaker, Beth Thomas, once labeled the "Child of Rage" by HBO, will speak. Now a pediatric nurse, Thomas is no longer a child of rage. Beth knows what it is like to be an angry, defiant, destructive child. She once was one. Beth has unique insights into the mind of a challenging child with Attachment Disorder.

Other retreat speakers include: Pastor

Jerry and Kristi Nelson, who have six children (two are adopted) and were foster parents for 28 years with more than 70 children coming through their home.

Pastor Paul and Laurie Nash have been married for 35 years. Nash is Director of AFLC Home Missions. They have three children (all of whom are adopted) and five grandchildren.

More information is available on our Web site (www.arc-aflc.org) or call 715.294.2877

FLY Committee election results



President

Daniel Keinanen was re-elected as the president of FLY 2011. He is a youth worker at Christ is Lord Free Lutheran, Onalaska, Wis.



First Vice President

David Olson was elected as the first vice president of FLY 2011. From Winstead, Minn., Olson is a senior at AFLBS, Plymouth, Minn.



Second Vice President

Liz Lackey was elected as the second vice president of FLY 2011. She is currently a student at Moody Bible Institute, Chicago.



Secretary

Christina Osthus was elected as the secretary of FLY 2011. Originally from Eagan, Minn., Osthus is a 2006 graduate of AFLBS.



Devotional Life Secretary

Adam McCarlson was elected as the devotional life secretary of FLY 2011. Now living in Sioux Falls, S.D., he is a 2007 graduate of AFLBS.



Treasurer

Jacob Fedje was appointed by the committee as the treasurer of FLY 2011. Now living in Columbus, Ohio, Fedje is a 2004 graduate of AFLBS.

Obituary: Delores Kjos

Delores Kjos, 81, of Roslyn, S.D., died Aug. 27, 2009, at Sioux Falls, S.D.
Born Feb. 8, 1928, in Sioux City, Iowa, she was the daughter of Ole and Anna (Bergstrom) Erickson. She married Howard Kjos Dec. 27, 1960, in Minneapolis.
She was baptized and confirmed at Augustana Lutheran Church, Sioux City, Iowa. She graduated from high school in 1946. She attended the Lutheran Bible

Institute in Minneapolis. She moved to Omaha, where she managed a children's home. She moved to Pulsbo, Wash., where she worked at a children's home. She received her teaching degree from the University of Minnesota.
After marriage, they moved to Hampden, N.D., in 1967, where she taught school and Pastor Kjos served three AFLC churches. They moved to Roslyn in 1972, when she took up a career in nursing, working as a certified nursing assistant at Strand Kjorsvig Community Rest Home,

retiring in 1989. They moved to Sacred Heart, Minn., where Pastor Kjos served a congregation. They returned to Roslyn in 1993. She moved into the Strand Kjorsvig Rest Home in 2006.
Surviving are her husband; one son, Danny (Roxie) Kjos, Roslyn; one daughter, Linnae (Paul) Spiering, Webster, S.D.; six granddaughters and four great-grandchildren.
The service was Aug. 31 at Roslyn Lutheran Church. Burial was in Fron Lutheran Cemetery, Roslyn.

AFLC memorials: August

AFLBS	Dorryce Brintnell
Noel Lofthus	Vision
Mavis Tenneboe	Red Mosser
AFLTS	Archie Christianson
Marjorie Knutson (2)	World Missions
Home Missions	Lois Hautamaki
Daniel Bengs	Gladys Larson
Mavis Tenneboe	Warren Aaberg

People and Places

Pastor Gary Jorgenson was installed Sept. 8 at Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Brainerd, Minn.
Pastor Kevin Olson, developer of the Ambassador Institute, is currently traveling in Uganda and India for one month in order to give final semester tests to students in the certificate level pastoral training program. Currently, there are 60 students in both India and Uganda.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1- Aug. 31, 2009				
FUND	TOTAL (subsidy)	REC'D IN AUGUST	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$434,087	\$16,073	\$202,9741	47
Evangelism	112,642	9,932	62,846	56
Youth Ministries	78,909	6,825	60,411	77
Parish Education	135,207	8,850	70,633	52
Seminary	244,110	11,672	117,651	48
Bible School	398,910	48,909	277,262	70
Home Missions	375,908	30,863	212,224	56
World Missions	327,017	11,441	148,626	45
Personal Support	435,500	34,734	264,806	61
TOTALS	\$2,542,290	\$179,298	\$1,417,432	56
TOTALS 2008	\$2,307,821	\$189,152	\$1,494,519	65
Goal 67%				
These are the Annual Conference-approved budgets but do not reflect all the financial needs of the departments. Contact the individual departments for further information.				

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/s/ Ruth Gunderson, Managing Editor
PS form 3526

Sincere and lasting

In 1944 Billy Graham asked George Beverly Shea to become the main musical performer on a weekly radio program he was doing. Shea agreed and is still singing for the Graham Association 65 years later.

In the summer of 1945 Graham was speaking in Asheville, N.C. He needed someone to fill in as a song leader. He asked Cliff Barrows. The next year Graham asked Barrows and his wife to serve as his

musical team on a tour of England. Regarding the trip Cliff said, "God really knit our hearts together in a special way." Barrows appeared to have a promising future as an evangelist on his

own, but after much prayer he accepted Billy's offer to be part of the team, promising, "As long as you want us to, I'll be content to be your song leader, carry your bag, go anywhere, do anything you want me to do." Billy's response was: "May we serve together until the Lord returns, or until one of us is called home to heaven."

In the Graham biography, *A Prophet with Honor*, author William Martin observes: "No characteristic of Billy Graham's organization stands out more clearly, or is accorded more importance by those who have viewed the ministry at close range, than the fact that nearly all of the men who started out with him in the 1940s were still by his side in 1990, and that most of the 'newcomers' had been with him for at least a quarter of a century. While in some Evangelical circles vaunting ambition,

fragile egos, and naked pride have created chronic tension and high turnover, BGEA (Billy Graham Evangelistic Association) is famous for its organizational stability and internal harmony."

John Stott said about the team, "They truly love each other. And they are extremely loyal to each other. They're like overgrown schoolboys. It's endearing."

Partnerships like that are endearing and appealing. That is the way it should be in the body of Christ. Bev Shea, Billy Graham and Cliff Barrows demonstrate that when there is a unity in the Lord, friendships can endure.

The relationships among the Graham team stand out. It was that way also in the early Church. They were devoted "to the fellowship. ... Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." That kind of closeness led to them "enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42, 46-47, NIV). Non-Christians noticed how the believers treated one another. They wanted to be a part of that kind of group.

After washing His disciples' feet and just hours before going to the cross, Jesus said: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will

know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).

It is not the beauty of our buildings or the songs that we sing or the way that we dress or the rules that we keep that identifies whether or not we belong to Christ. It is the way we treat one another. Our relationships with each other testify to the closeness of our relationship with Jesus. Close friendships among Christians can demonstrate how the Lord can change a life and transform the way we relate to one another. He can give us a love for one an-

Close friendships among Christians can demonstrate how the Lord can change a life and transform the way we relate to one another. He can give us a love for one another that is unlike any other kind of love.

other that is unlike any other kind of love. People are longing for relationships that are sincere and lasting. In the good news of Jesus we have the answer.

Our relationships are not something to treat lightly. They are treasures to hold tightly. Sacrifice your wants and wishes. On those minor issues be willing to have it not go your way. Don't worry about material gain. Instead cherish and nurture those relationships and friendships God blesses you with. In them true value is found.



Pastor Craig Johnson

association retreat center

BY BOB DIETSCH

The ultimate friend

Last summer we were sitting over the chasm that defines the boundary between Minnesota and Wisconsin, the St Croix River. We were being held up by two volatile elements, hydrogen and oxygen. No, we weren't flying. We were in a boat. The depth finder said 67 feet.

As the four of us contemplated the incredible scenery with a clear blue sky, perfect temperature and just enough wind to fill the sails on the boats, it seemed as if God was saying, "Look what I created for you." It was the *ultimate creation*.

I've thought about that scene quite a bit since that day. I'm not the first to notice, I'm sure, but the world is unique. I don't think there is another planet created like ours. Our atmosphere is just the right thickness, not so thin that we are evaporated by the heat of the sun, but thick enough so we are shielded from its radiation. The sun is at just the right distance from the earth, and our moon is at just the right distance to give us the proper tides to keep the ocean shores and beaches washed. Besides all this we have the heavens to declare His glory. Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God the skies proclaim the work of His hands." All was created for mankind to enjoy and maintain after we

were created in His image so that God could have someone with whom to fellowship.

But God, in His infinite knowledge, knew that sin would enter the picture. Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned."

I am personally very thankful for the remedy that He provided. His only Son. The *ultimate sacrifice*. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." Thank you, Lord, for making it possible for all of us to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

The *ultimate relationship* is knowing the living Jesus, walking with Him and having Him as friend. How can we help but serve and share the good news with others? That is the ministry of the Association Retreat Center, as stated in our mission statement. It can be found on the ARC's Web site (www.ar-aflc.com).

Dietsche, a member of Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis., is the former director and longtime supporter of the ARC.

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