

THE LUTHERAN 

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AMBASSADOR

21ST CENTURY

• PASTORS •

PILGRIMS IN PROGRESS



What are we waiting for?

BY ANDREW KNEELAND

"For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness" (Galatians 5:5).

Fiddler on the Roof is one of the most beloved plays of all time. Written in 1964, the play focuses on a fictional Jewish village in Imperial Russia at the beginning of the 20th century. The Jews in this village faced constant persecution and abuse from their Russian neighbors, and were eventually evicted from their homes.

Near the end of the play one of the villagers asks the local rabbi, "We've been waiting for the Messiah all our lives. Wouldn't this be a good time for Him to come?"

The rabbi responds: "We'll have to wait for Him somewhere else."

For their entire history, the Jewish people have been waiting for a Savior to come save them. They're waiting for Jesus, but as Christians we know that He already came. Jesus came as our Suffering Servant and defeated our sin as a Conquering King. And praise God for that! We're no longer waiting for what the Jews are waiting for, but we are still waiting for something.

So what are we waiting for?

As believers in Jesus, who trust that the guilt and punishment of our sins has been atoned for at the cross by our Savior, we are waiting for Him to come back for us. We eagerly await the sound of the trumpet to call us home, where Jesus has prepared rooms for us.

As Paul wrote in Galatians, we Christians are "waiting for the hope of righteousness," for that final verdict of "not guilty" to be finally declared to us in God's heavenly throne room. This hope is



assured to us now because of our baptism, and by the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, but we wait with believing hearts for the day we all get to heaven.

But there's another difference between what we're waiting for and what the Jewish people wait for. We aren't waiting for something we *hope* to happen someday; we wait for something we know *will* happen one day. Our "hope" isn't so much hope as it is a confident expectation.

When we usually use the word "hope," we're hoping that the rain will stay away tomorrow, or that our package arrives on time. The objects of those hopes—the

weather and the mailman—aren't exactly reliable. There's nothing unreliable or uncertain about the "hope of eternal life" that Jesus has given to us!

Our God doesn't lie, so we can trust His promises. The hope of righteousness given to us is assured because of what Jesus has accomplished. By dying in our place on the cross, Jesus turned our hope into confidence.

So, in the meantime, we don't need to live our lives in uncertainty, hoping and praying and waiting for someone to victoriously ride in, defeat persecutors, topple oppressors, and save us. Jesus already has. Instead, we wait—not with baited breath or anxious worries, but confidently—for Christ to return and take us home with Him. We wait for the suffering and persecution of this present darkness to end, and for glorious joy and peace to take its place.

What are you waiting for?

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No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself, and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true.

—Nathaniel Hawthorne

What are Christian preachers? Paul asks. They are just “servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each”—that is, agents through whom God has worked to elicit your faith. This being the case, the glory is not due to the agent through whom the work is done, but to the Lord who does the work by His own power.

—John R.W. Stott

Obedience and humility are God’s twin guardians against the plague of vain ambition resident within the heart of the leader who wants to be a star.

—Denny Gunderson

First, and most importantly, every pastor must be pastored by Jesus Himself. He is, after all, the Pastor of pastors.

—John W. Frye

Therefore is he best trained for the ministry whose heart is most thoroughly permeated by the love of God and whose spirit is most completely illuminated by the light of the Spirit of God.

—Georg Sverdrup

A photograph of a wooden column with a cross on its shaft and a tiered base, standing on a green floor. The column is positioned on the right side of the frame. The text 'THE CALL' is overlaid on the left side of the image, with a vertical line and an arrow pointing downwards next to it.

THE
CALL

TO
PREPARE

BY PASTOR PHIL HAUGEN

The call to prepare is not a call given to unbelievers. It is assumed in this article that we are speaking of men who through Word and sacraments are trusting Jesus for forgiveness and righteousness in the sight of God.

God works with different people in different ways. God is always consistent with Himself; He is always faithful and always uses His Word and sacraments to work among us, but the circumstances of that work vary from person to person.

There is no textbook call that follows an exact pattern, no “Ten Steps to Knowing Your Call.” For example, as a church body we acknowledge and delight in the fact that God through the congregation has called some to be lay pastors. These are men trained in the school of experience, whose gifts are recognized by the congregation and who are called and appointed by God through the congregation to serve.

The call to prepare, however, is the call that comes to some to enter into training (usually including college training and formal seminary training) for the purpose of serving as a minister called and ordained by the congregation in the office of Word and sacrament. The call of God to serve, in whatever capacity, is always a gracious call. The call of God to prepare for ministry is also a gracious and beautiful work of the Holy Spirit through His Word.

Usually, the call to prepare for ministry is not a sudden or dramatic call. Often the call comes quietly, in the form of a conviction that begins to grow over a period of

time as the Spirit of God calls and works through His Word and sacraments. This call is the call to prepare (sometimes referred to as the inner call), and it is not necessarily a formal call to public ministry (the outer call,

The inner call is a lasting conviction shaped by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Basically, the inner call is not a temporary emotional high or idea caused by some spectacular event.

which comes through the congregation). The inner call is a lasting conviction shaped by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Basically, the inner call is not a temporary emotional high or idea caused by some spectacular event. The inner call could begin this way, as it did for Luther when he was caught in a dangerous thunderstorm, but usually not. Instead, it is a settled conviction, a persistent thought, that indeed God would have you begin to prepare for the possibility of public ministry. Through days and weeks and months and years spent in the Word, the Holy Spirit shapes you and calls you. He shapes your desires, your will, your thinking and your planning. He leads you as you live in the Word.

Sometimes the inner call will be stimulated or confirmed by people around you, people whom God has placed in your life.

It might be a family member; it might be a pastor or a Sunday school teacher; it might be a youth leader or elder in the congregation. As they see certain gifts or inclinations the Lord may have given you, they can sometimes serve as instruments in the hand of God to encourage you and to confirm the call to prepare. Sometimes the call to prepare will be stimulated or confirmed by opportunities the Lord gives you, opportunities to do lay preaching or to teach Sunday school or to lead a Bible study or a youth group. Over a period of time, a conviction and desire comes that indeed you should think about preparing for ministry, that indeed this may be God's intent for you.

My encouragement to you who are wondering about a call to prepare is “fear not.” Sometimes we are afraid. We are afraid to begin because we are afraid of making a mistake. Fear not. This call and work is not up to you, it is up to God. Finally, it is not your decision that determines this, but it is God's call on your life. It is not your wisdom; it is not your sensitivity to the Spirit's leading; it is not your ability to properly dis-

cern the call and will of God. It is His call, His wisdom, His leading, His ministry, and His Church. God does a good job of leading you and leading His Church.

For you who are wondering about God's call to prepare, His invitation to you continues to be Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” These verses are invitation and promise; they are gospel and not law. God is not threatening you and is not putting a burden upon you, but He is inviting you: trust Him, and He will direct your path.

Haugen, a member of Faith Lutheran, Minneapolis, is a full-time faculty member at the AFLC Schools, Plymouth, Minn.

In 2011, our association published volume three of the AFLC Heritage Series, *They Lived in the Power of God: Lutheran Revival Leaders in Northern Europe*. The author of that volume was Uuras Saarnivaara. He, too, was a man who lived in the power of God.

Some of you may remember that Uuras Saarnivaara was called by the AFLC in 1964 to teach and form a faculty at their brand new seminary, the Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary. Saarnivaara was there at the beginning, and even though his stay was brief (1964-65), his impact is still felt within our association 50 years later. Perhaps you are wondering who this man was.

Uuras Saarnivaara was born February 17, 1908 (d. May 5, 1998), to Emil and Olga Saarnivaara in Nurmijärvi, Finland. The name “Uuras” means “hard-working, industrious, diligent.”¹ Aila Foltz, Saarnivaara’s only child, said in a tribute to him, “His father said that he gave his firstborn the name Uuras hoping that, even if he did not turn out to be gifted, at least he would manage in life if he worked hard.”² He certainly was a gifted and hard worker, earning two doctorates in his lifetime: a PhD from the University of Chicago Divinity School in 1945, and a ThD from the University of Helsinki in 1948. His hands also stayed busy as he wrote more than 60 books and 500 articles in Finnish and English. His most well-known books are *Luther Discovers the Gospel* and *Scriptural Baptism*.

The love Saarnivaara had for writing came from his love for God’s Word and His people. He faithfully defended the Word during the onslaught of liberalism here in America and in Finland. He fought battles that were not always popular at the time, but defending God’s Word is not always popular.

When AFLTS called Saarnivaara in 1964, he was right at home teaching at a seminary, which was part of a church body that believed the Word of God is inerrant, infallible, and inspired. Saarnivaara and the seminary stood in contrast to the liberalism and neo-orthodoxy that had swept over most of the Lutheran seminaries in the United States by that time.

Saarnivaara’s stand on the Word of God was shaped by his parents as well as several pastors and revival leaders. As a boy, the sermons by Olavi Heliövaara, a parish pastor, and K.A. Passio of the Finnish Missionary Society affected him in a profound way. Passio’s sermons pricked Saarnivaara’s heart in a unique way be-

BY PASTOR PATRICK LOHSE

Our seminary’s jubilee anniversary is a testament of God’s grace and power. Grace manifested in calling men like Uuras Saarnivaara to faithfully teach the living and active Word of God (Hebrews 4:12) to seminarians.

cause they stressed personal conversion. Saarnivaara was also drawn to study the life of Lars Levi Laestadius. Within Laestadius’ writings he saw an emphasis on personal conversion.

Saarnivaara came to America in September of 1939. He was called to teach systematic and exegetical theology at Suomi Theological Seminary in Hancock, Mich. Though the contract was supposed to be for only three years, his work lasted for 15 years. During that time the seminary experienced growth due to their well-respected and popular professor. Of course not all of this growth can be attributed to only him, Saarnivaara’s wife, Sirkka, played an important role by providing spiritual support. She had a servant heart that was ready to help others. Aila Foltz, in her 2008 tribute to her father, illustrates her mother’s servanthood, “As my father’s birthday approached, Mother whispered to some seminarian that their professor’s special day was coming. The seminarians showed up outside my parent’s bedroom window and serenaded Father, at which he opened the window and invited them all for birthday cake later in the day. Mother, of course, had a large layer cake in the works. Those cream-filled cakes are still spoken of by former students.”³

Our seminary’s jubilee anniversary is a testament of God’s grace and power.

Grace manifested in calling men like Uuras Saarnivaara to faithfully teach the living and active Word of God (Hebrews 4:12) to seminarians. His desire was that all pastors could bear witness to the power of God upon both their teaching and life. I end this brief sketch of Uuras Saarnivaara with one of his prayer requests: “That God would turn our church theologian’s, pastor’s, church worker’s and teacher’s hearts and minds to believe the Bible is God’s Word, and to know Christ as their own redeemer and Lord as well as proclaim God’s Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁴

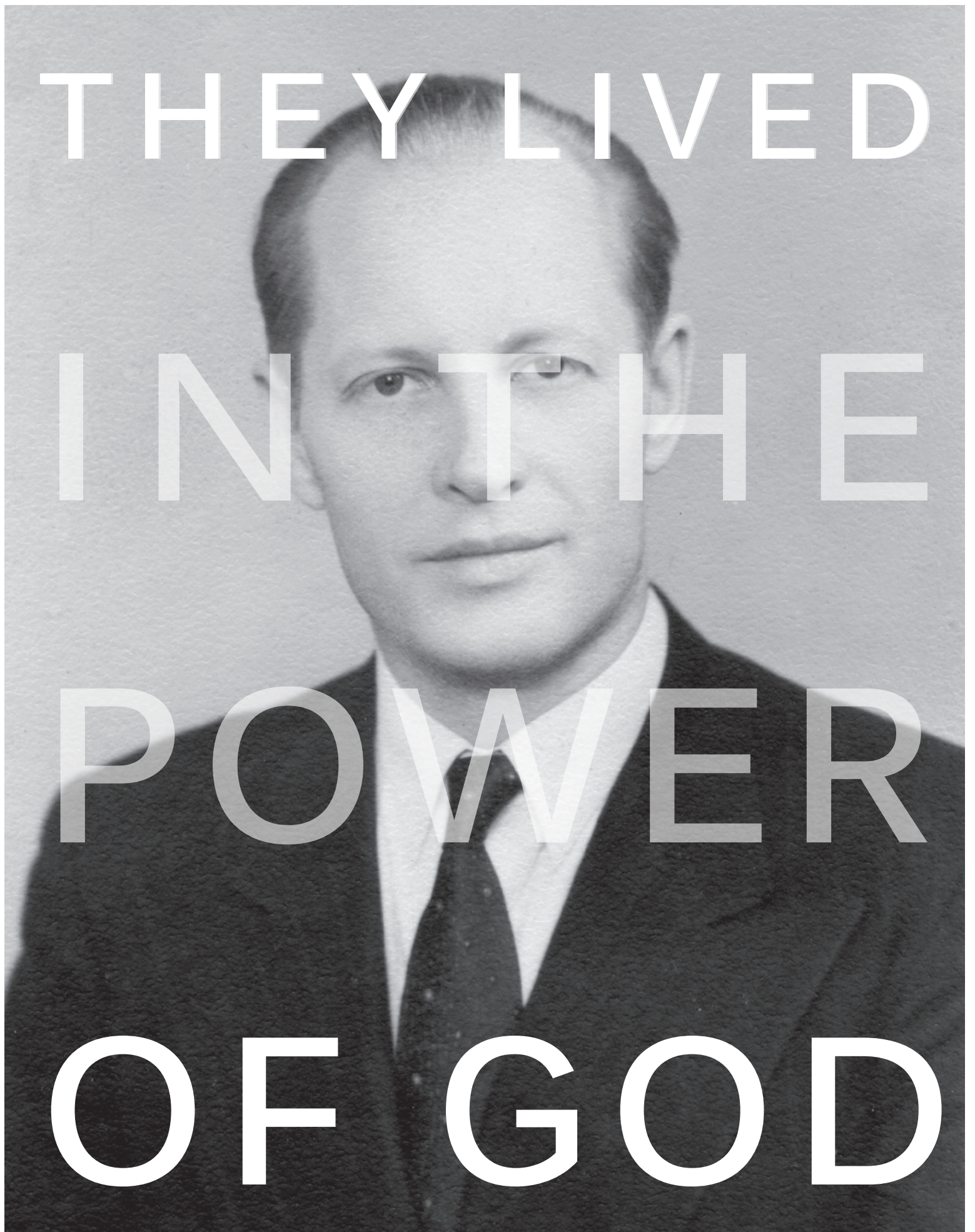
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¹ *Suomi-englanti-suomi sanakirja*. Helsinki: Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö. 2005

² Foltz, Aila. *Tribute by Aila Foltz for the Uuras Saarnivaara Seminar on Feb. 16-17, 2008*. (A translation from Iustitia 24: Uuras Saarnivaara- heratysteologi:)

³ Foltz

⁴ Saarnivaara, Uuras; *Sinun Sanasi on Totuus (Your Word is Truth)*; Tohtori Uuras Saarnivaaralle Hänen Täyttäessään 75 Vuotta. Helsinki: Uusi Tie. p. 31 (translation mine).



A TEAM EFFORT

BY PASTOR TIM CARLSON

“It was He who gave some to be ... pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service; so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13).

What are the roles of pastors and lay people, according to these verses? As a first-time pastor in a mission church, I had much to learn about this topic. I soon found myself becoming overly involved in every aspect of the ministry of the church because it was more convenient to do something myself than take the time to equip and train members of the church to use their God-given gifts.

However, as usual, God gave grace to that church and to its pastor. As that congregation grew and matured, we learned much together about the purposes mentioned in Ephesians 4, “to prepare God’s people for works of service ... until we all become mature.” The Lord worked through His powerful Word so that over the years many lay leaders were trained to perform acts of ministry in the congregation, such as praying for and visiting the sick and serving communion alongside me. It was especially rewarding to see many men of the church become willing to be trained to preach and thus sustain one of the traditions of the

AFLC, having lay preachers bring the Word of God to thirsty souls.

What a contrast when I took my next call to a long-established congregation, where it immediately became evident that ministries were taking place that had been the vision of not only the pastor but of the laity, who had taken full ownership of those ministries. I was impressed to see their commitment to the vibrant music ministry, Sunday school and vacation Bible school outreaches, strong youth program, and even the ministry of caring for the building and grounds, just to name a few. Only when I saw the example of this congregation’s members working together did I begin to more fully understand how God intends a mature congregation to build each other up, to be unified in purpose, and to work for spiritual maturity and knowledge among all the members of the church.

Yet, as this pioneering congregation began to experience growth, the challenge of absorbing and training new members also became evident. Sometimes a church has trouble allowing new members to take on leadership roles. People have a natural

distrust of new people, wondering, “Will they be faithful to the doctrines of the church? Will they do a good job in this ministry? Will they do some things differently from our traditional ways?” A common problem with church growth is that the long-term members who have invested so much are being challenged to trust the Lord to teach and lead new members, just as He led the older ones as they took on ministry roles. Without trust, eventually the strong ministries in a church will wind down and pass away if others are not trained to join the leaders.

A congregation and a pastor are being short-sighted if they do not realize the eternal impact of allowing lay persons to discover their spiritual gifts as they take on ministry responsibilities in the Body of Christ. As I have watched the years of ministry pile up and the numbers of funerals I have officiated increase, God has impressed upon my heart the importance of involving all members in the daily life of the congregation in light of each one’s eternal destination. I now realize that getting new people involved in the life of the congregation is



more than just a good policy—it is part of the broader mission of a congregation not only to evangelize but also to strengthen and preserve its members.

Church leaders can become so busy thinking about the nuts and bolts of running a busy church that they lose sight of its broader mission: the purpose of a congregation is to glorify God, not just to build a great church. Keeping this mission foremost in our thoughts is a key to transferring ownership of our ministry from us to the Lord. Strong involvement and discipleship in the lives of members of a congregation can help to safeguard them from the many dangers that can separate believers from their Lord: sickness, temptation, loss of a loved one, infighting within a church, and—worst of all—false teaching regarding Christ.

Often people see ministry as the role and duty of only the pastor, but then the outreach and spiritual work of the congregation is limited to only what one man can do. The pastor's job, as it says in Ephesians 4, is to "prepare God's people for works of service." He begins this task by instructing new members about the doctrines of the church as well as the opportunities for service. He leads by example, and he relinquishes control of many ministry details to his congregation and ultimately to the Lord. These instructions in Ephesians 4 are a call to action that can best be completed when each believer within a congregation is willing, equipped, and enabled to serve.

The daily life of the congregation is not separate from the work of evangelism and discipleship; rather, it is an integral part of

teaching and strengthening the individual members. It is not insignificant, therefore, when a lay person practices hospitality, begins an intercessory prayer ministry, or brings a meal to a person fighting a serious illness. These are just a few examples of a thousand ways laity can use their gifts and "give themselves fully to the work of the Lord" (I Corinthians 15:58).

Truly, the goal of a congregation is that all may grow toward "attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." As we look to eternity, may we be given the wisdom and the grace to allow the Lord's wise purposes to unfold in the life of every believer.

Carlson serves Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D.



FINISH
WELL

BY PASTOR RICHARD GUNDERSON

A purposeful beginning, middle, and end of each season of life are promised to us by the same immutable God who promised Isaiah, “Even to your old age, I shall be the same. And even to your graying years I shall bear you! I have done it and I shall carry you; and I shall bear you, and I shall deliver you” (Isaiah 46:4).

I suppose it is because I am in the last month of serving in this office as assistant to the president of the AFLC that I have been asked to write this article with the above title. As many have asked me, “What are you going to do when you retire?” My answer has been, “I did that back in 2000.” It’s that I haven’t quit. But now it is time to move on to another season of my life. As the name plaque is removed at the office door, I want to finish well.

When I think of finishing well, I need to go back to the beginning, when God called, prepared, and sent me. A very important part of that process involves my wife, Clara, as we have together served the Lord through 59 years of marriage. Right from the beginning of our lives together we knew that God had laid His hand on the both of us for service; we could never have imagined what special privileges were in store for us in serving the Lord of life.

It was God’s work that gave me a concern for seeing people come to Him as their Lord and Savior. It has been an unbelievable privilege to be involved over the years both in Latin America and here in the States in the development of leadership. The longer I serve Jesus it becomes ever more important for me to see the Spirit of God at work in

my life, in the lives of others, and in the life of congregations. In that call and commitment I want to finish well.

We had the privilege recently of traveling to Scandinavia and France. I was deeply saddened to see so many churches turned into museums. Without a spiritual movement in people’s lives there will be spiritual poverty and spiritually empty people, translating into empty buildings that people only enter as a novelty. I like what Jon Carlson writes as he paraphrases Shakespeare in the forward of a book written by his grandfather, Pastor William E. Berg: “There is just enough urgency in the gospel to make retirement obsolete, but assurance enough to make saints blessed ...” (*A Strange Thing Happened To Me On The Way To Retirement—I Never Arrived*). Finishing well includes the urgency of the gospel. As I move to the next phase of my life, the urgency for the need for spiritual awakening continues as my heart’s desire. Reaching the world for Christ is still God’s call to all of us. We need to look to the Lord to see where He will lead us.

Finishing well means letting go and not hanging on. Finishing well also means running well and being steadfast to the end. Dr. Wilton Bergstrand is quoted by Berg,

“Life has other dimensions besides length. There is breadth, there is depth, and there is height. Life can be broad in interests and concerns, deep in faith, high in aims. We measure not only breaths taken out but also breaths not taken—when we have been breathless in wonder. We should measure life not so much by its duration as by its donation.” It is impossible to finish well if you have not run well. It is important to be right where God wants you to be. Finishing well means having a healthy run, ending with a healthy conclusion.

Joshua finished well. We can read his famous exhortation and testimony declared toward the end of his life, “If you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God which He commanded you, if you serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land He has given you. ... as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 23:16, 24:15). And Caleb, who at 85 years of age declared when he laid claim to the hill country in the Wilderness of Zin, “I am still as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent me; as my strength was then, so my strength is now, for war and for going out and coming in.” He did go out in his 85th year, taking possession of the land given to him. He finished strong!

A purposeful beginning, middle, and end of each season of life are promised to us by the same immutable God who promised Isaiah, “Even to your old age, I shall be the same. And even to your graying years I shall bear you! I have done it and I shall carry you; and I shall bear you, and I shall deliver you” (Isaiah 46:4). So, we say, “Ebenezer – thus far the Lord has helped us” (I Samuel 7:12). In the Lord we will finish well.

Gunderson has served as the assistant to the president of the AFLC for nine years. He is a member of Sunnyside Free Lutheran, Stacy, Minn.



TODAY'S TOOLS

It is 6:45 a.m. on Sunday. I carefully close the clasp on a simple gold chain around my neck. Anchored at the bottom is a gold cross which rests against my chest. Besides my wedding band, this is the only piece of jewelry you will find me wearing. This necklace is very important to me and my family; it was given to my grandfather, Alfred Knutson, upon graduating from Augsburg Seminary in 1928. He served congregations in Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and North Dakota, and traveled as an evangelist for the Lutheran Free Church. Each week as I feel the cold weight

of the cross against my neck, I am reminded of his years of faithfulness in proclaiming the gospel, and I'm reminded of the same charge given to me.

Although I never met him, I have a deep respect for the legacy my grandfather left, and find myself wondering what he would think of me. Not as a man, preacher, or pastor, but of the era I minister in. In the last 86 years our world has seen many changes. Some are negative, others have overcomplicated life, but many have proven to be both useful and helpful for the 21st century pastor.

The endless array of changing technology seems overwhelming, intimidating, and unnecessary to some. My grandfather (and thousands like him) had decades of fruitful ministry without any of our modern gadgets. Nevertheless, the Lord has placed us in a time when what seemed beyond imagining is now routine, even for grade school children. Many of these devices and technologies can be effective tools and instruments for the pastor to use, expanding his reach, maximizing his time, and boosting his productivity. As I think about a typical day, let alone a week, I see how my ministry



BY LAY PASTOR ERIC CHRISTIANSEN

My grandfather (and thousands like him) had decades of fruitful ministry without any of our modern gadgets. Nevertheless, the Lord has placed us in a time when what seemed beyond imagining is now routine, even for grade school children.

contact with people regardless of where I am. Daily I use my phone to make calls, and to send text, email, Facebook, and even Twitter messages. By checking and interacting with my Facebook and Twitter news feeds, I am able to stay connected with people's lives, and am often reminded of important activities. This provides a point of connection, a place from which to start our next visit. Thanks to the internet, all my messages and connections are waiting for me on my laptop and tablet.

These tools make collaboration easy. Since 2010, our church leadership has been using Google Spreadsheets (a free online service) to plan and organize our worship services. Each person who has a part in the service (myself, secretary, worship team members, accompanists, A/V techs) can see the document and share in putting the elements together. Two websites, Trello.com and Quip.com, provide powerful document to-do lists and file-sharing options, which I use with others when planning special events, activities, or trips. All of these applications work across different devices, can be accessed on any internet-connected computer, and alert me when a change is made, question is asked, or task is due.

Quizlet, a free online flashcard program, allows me to create flash cards for my confirmation class. These can be printed, studied online, or even downloaded to phones and tablets. Alongside collaboration, I frequently use my devices to collect and organize important data. Thanks to cloud computing, all of my contacts, calendar appointments, and email messages are seamlessly kept up to date on all my devices. This allows me instant access to phone numbers, emails, and GPS directions while out of the office. I can always see my schedule and share it with my wife so our

calendars are in harmony.

Evernote is the application I use the most. It allows me to store and create nearly anything: notes, documents, webpages, voice memos, photos, and much more—enabling me to take notes while visiting, jot down sermon ideas, record mileage, and archive receipts all while on the go. I have complete access to and can edit all the notes from my laptop, phone, tablet, or any computer connected to the internet. Contact Journal records my pastoral care connections and reminds me when to follow up. Dropbox allows me to save files I need access to while away from my computer, and is a quick and easy way to share information with others.

Finally, Logos is my primary Bible software and study tool. It is a quick and powerful way to collect study material, search my library, and engage with a passage or biblical topic. With it installed on my devices, I have access to my complete library of resources, highlights, and notes anywhere. I can begin my study in the morning on my iPad while still in bed; pick it up on my MacBook in my office, and even squeeze in a few moments of study on my iPhone in a hospital waiting room. Logos, coupled with Evernote and my word processing program, have maximized and streamlined my sermon and Bible study process.

As I head out the door, laptop in my bag, tablet in hand, and phone in my pocket, I realize something. This world and its devices may seem strange to my grandfather; but he would be pleased by the message and pastoral care for which they are used.

Christiansen serves Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis.

is heavily shaped by using these tools.

An Apple laptop, iPhone, and iPad, coupled with the internet and an ever-expanding list of programs and applications have become the Swiss army knives of my ministry. Thanks to advances in internet syncing, sharing, and cloud services (the nickname for internet data storage and delivery) nearly everything I need is close to my fingertips, unlocking a variety of tools which I use many times throughout my day to stay close to others and keep vital information near me.

These devices allow me to stay in close

BY ASHLEY MARSCHNER

Each week, the pastor puts a lot of effort into preparing a sermon for the congregation. But are we getting as much out of it as the pastor is putting into it?

Many of you may be in the same boat as me. I grew up in church, attending every Sunday. It seems, rather unfortunately, that after many years of regularly attending church, some things just become routine. One example of this is sitting in church and listening to the sermon each week. It can be difficult to maintain focus on the pastor and his message, and I sometimes find myself getting distracted by my own thoughts or following little rabbit trails. I try to pay attention, but I admit that I often fail.

Since marrying my husband Brandon, who is a seminary student at AFLTS, I have witnessed firsthand the sermon preparation process, and just how much time and study is actually involved. Each week, the pastor puts a lot of effort into preparing a sermon for the congregation. But are we getting as much out of it as the pastor is putting into it? It's easy to let the momentum of the previous week occupy our thoughts as we go into church. Sometimes we may even find ourselves sitting through the sermon, contemplating our plans for the afternoon. I am ashamed to admit that I have been guilty of this. The Bible speaks about how important it is to hear God's Word, and to listen to His voice. While He was teaching the crowds of people, Jesus said, "He who has ears to

hear, let him hear" (Mark 4:9). And again in Revelation, each of the seven churches is instructed, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29 and 3:6, 13, 22). God is calling us to use the ears that He has given to us to listen to His Word.

How can we be good listeners? This certainly can be a struggle, and no one listens perfectly all the time. But it seems that there are some things that can help us to be better listeners. We can start before its even time for the sermon. Take a few moments to prepare your heart and mind to receive God's Word. Spend some time praying, focusing your mind on Jesus, and asking for all those pesky extraneous thoughts to subside. Even having a time of family devotions in the car on the way to church can help to rid your mind of all the distractions and to place your focus on Jesus. When my brother was still pre-kindergarten age, my parents taught him the Lord's Prayer and the Apostle's Creed in the car on the drive to church so he could participate in the worship service even though he could not yet read.

We can also practice good listening skills during the sermon. One great way to stay on track is to take notes. Jot down the main points of the message or record some things that really stand out to you, for

later reference. Many pastors even include a sermon outline in the bulletin to help you get started. Filling in the blanks can be good motivation to listen attentively. If your church doesn't provide a place to take notes, get a small note pad to keep inside your Bible. Another thing I have noticed is that it is more difficult for me to pay attention to the sermon when I can't see the pastor. If you know this to be true for yourself, try to find a seat where you have a clear view. Keeping the pastor in your line of vision will help you to maintain focus on what the pastor is saying, and this will eliminate, or at least minimize, the rabbit-trailing.

It is also important to remember that





BECOMING A **LISTENER** IN CHURCH

the entire service is an act of worship. Worshiping God is not only a musical action, it is spiritual. It includes singing the songs, but it also means taking the words of those songs to heart and putting them into practice. Spiritual worship also includes prayer, communion, and hearing God's Word. In the Book of Romans, Paul says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (10:17). It is also helpful to realize that the entire service may be tied together around a common theme, which is usually taken from the sermon text. The chosen Scripture readings, the hymns, and the sermon itself all relate to the sermon text. Knowing this, you can look for

that common thread that weaves together each aspect of the worship service.

Being a good listener is also carried out after the sermon is over. I have found that I am able to best pay attention when my husband is preaching, because I know that afterward we will talk about the sermon. This sort of accountability helps to motivate me to listen well. But this can be true for anyone. Find someone to be your accountability partner and plan to discuss the sermon on the way home from church, over lunch, or at some other convenient time. When you both know that you'll be discussing it later, it can provide a great incentive for each of you to listen well and

to concentrate. Finally, it is important that we put into practice the things that we hear in the sermon. James says, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). If we take these lessons to heart, think back over them, pray about them, and by the grace of God, live them out, God will help us to be better listeners and we can be better prepared to serve Him.

Marschner, a 2010 graduate of AFLBS, is married to AFLTS student Brandon Marschner.



OCTOBER 22

WATERS IN THE WILDERNESS

“And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint”
(Luke 18:1).

We need to pray. We need to pray because God has commanded us to pray. There can be no greater reason than this for us to pray. God has also promised to hear us when we pray. This should encourage us.

God’s alternatives are very clear. If we do not pray, then we faint. We seek God’s face and forgiveness; or we turn aside from Him and are cast out.

The phrase, “always to pray,” does not mean that a man should be incessantly performing the act of prayer. It means that a man should constantly keep up the habit of prayer, and also to endeavor to live a life of prayer. Prayer is fellowship with God. The things of

earth will grow strangely dim to one who is much in prayer to God.

While there is great freedom with respect to how and when we should pray, it is good for us to have a set time when we go into the presence of God to talk with Him. It takes time and effort to pray properly—even when no one else hears us. It takes concentration and determination. We may have to give up an appointment we had made with ourselves to do something that was less arduous. Satan can think of dozens of things you should rather do than pray.

The greatest incentive is that God hears us when we pray.

Pastor Herbert Franz, Cloquet, Minn.

Waters in the Wilderness is a daily devotional published by the AFLC Board of Parish Education in 1971 with Dr. Iver Olson, editor. All 365 meditations were contributed by AFLC members from many walks of life. “Here, they offer each a glass of cool and refreshing water each day to thirsting souls,” wrote Olson in the preface. Reprinted by permission. The volume is out of print.

At work in the Alaska Mission

*Based on an interview
with Bonnie Timm
and Connie Koch*

BY DAWN JOHNSON

A group of six people from Wilson, Wis., traveled to Naknek, Alaska, June 26 to July 5 to finish a work project in the local Alaska Mission. Members of the group included Roger and Bonnie Timm, Greg and Connie Koch, Jim Keller, and Ray Blok. They were joined by Loren Tungseth and Paul Christiansen from Fergus Falls, Minn.

While in Naknek, the team worked many hours to finish outfitting an apartment in a large garage that is part of the Alaska Mission. The work included installing a new kitchen, two bathrooms, and flooring throughout, as well as painting the apartment.

Before the trip, the team was encouraged to read through a Bible study called, *Before You Pack Your Bag, Prepare Your Heart*, written by Cindy Judge. This study encourages a willing attitude, a desire to be open to the Lord's leading, and showing respect and acceptance to the way of life of your hosts, an attitude that is reflected in I Thessalonians 5:11-15, "Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing" (vs. 11).

The trip involved much pre-planning, which included preparing food as well as the supplies and tools that they needed while in Alaska. Roger worked with Connie's brother to gather items that had been put on the plumbing supply list. Loren coordinated the cabinetry and flooring supplies. Those items were then forwarded to Seattle, where they were placed on a barge and shipped to Naknek on May 5. The dry goods and some tools were sent through the mail to Naknek.

Once the group arrived in Naknek, Connie and Bonnie cooked and baked (kind of like a logging camp) for the team and



then painted the apartment when they got to that point. The men worked longer than a normal sun up to sun down day because it never got dark. The work included plumbing, carpentry, electrical installation, sheet rocking, installing kitchen cabinets, painting and flooring. If a tool or machinery was needed, Pastor Jeff Swanson got the word out, and someone showed up with the tool.

Besides working, they toured a new cannery that opened this year, enjoyed a cook-out at the beach with church members, and watched Pastor Jeff and Pastor Jeremy Crowell pick fish. After the Sunday worship service, the men flew with them to the villages of Ekwok and South Naknek. Pastor Jeremy also took them up in the airplane for an air tour.

Before they left to come home, the team was able to participate in the dedication of the building, even while the paint was still drying. They felt very blessed to take part in the Alaska Mission and very thankful to the AFLC's missionaries serving there: Pastor Jeremy and Lacy Crowell, Pastor Bob and Margaret Lee, and Pastor Jeff and Jane Swanson.



TOP: Ray Blok and other volunteers work to install the kitchen in the new apartment at the Alaska Mission.

ABOVE: The work team from Wilson, Wis., paused at the end of their trip to take part in a dedication of the new apartment. The team included (from left) Roger Timm, Bonnie Timm, Greg Koch, Connie Koch, Jim Keller and Ray Blok.

Johnson, a member of Christ the King Lutheran, Wilson, Wis., is the executive secretary of the WMF.



A partnership with dividends



BY PASTOR WADE MOBLEY

There is nothing better to hone your kingdom focus than to do ministry away from everything you know and with people having only Jesus as a point of common interest.

My July 22 began at 4:58 a.m. I ran, edited some pictures, spent some time with Jesus, then milled around Xcamp to take in the atmosphere. Not much is more encouraging than finding some young person up early in the morning with his/her Bible and not another soul around. Xcamp is a youth camp in Trinec, Czech Republic, run by 22 local Lutheran congregations for the past 20 years or so. It is smaller than the FLY convention, our Free Lutheran Youth gathering, and all the students stay in tents. Volunteers from local villages prepare all the food, and every other year they bring in an American speaker to foster a rich relationship that has flourished through the years.

Additionally, one congregation does an English language VBS and sports camp the week before Xcamp. Dan Warner and Lisa Griebel, both of Living Word Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., assisted a team from Good Shepherd Free Lutheran of Camarillo, Calif. Pastor Jim Johnson, who serves Good Shepherd Lutheran, has done this camp with great success three times.

So how did all this get started? The story begins with Pastor Don Richman, who served Emmaus Lutheran in Bloomington, Minn., when the Iron Curtain fell in the late 1980s. What followed was an unprecedented opening of areas formerly closed to the gospel. I'm abbreviating the story, but Pastor Richman left Emmaus to start a network of ministries seeking to take advantage of these opportunities in 1992, and the East European Missions Network was born. You can read more at www.eemn.org.

Pastor Richman knew about Xcamp, and knew several of

its organizers well, including Stanislav Pietak, a personal hero of mine who served well and sacrificially through the Communist era. Richman also knew that an Emmaus kid had just started as the new dean of the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, so Pastor Johnson got an invitation to check out Xcamp.

Johnson was impressed. He found people with a similar heritage to the AFLC. He saw opportunity. He wanted people from the Czech Republic to come to AFLBS.

"Pastor Pietak, if we would find money to bring two Czech students to AFLBS, do you think you could identify them?" asked Johnson back in 1999.

Pastor Pietak turned around and called over soon-to-be-married Michal Klus and Sharka Hlavenkova. The next year they were married, moved to Minneapolis, and lived on the first floor of the women's dorm while they started Bible school. The following year, Michal was a classmate of mine in seminary. Three years later, Michal and Sharka returned home to Trinec, and they have been doing excellent ministry ever since. Several other students from the Czech Republic have attended our Bible school and seminary.

Soon, members from either Good Shepherd or Living Word will spend one week every year with the Trinec congregation, reaching souls for Christ while at the same time being renewed in their vision to do so back home.

And it's all because a pastor saw an opportunity, took a chance, left something he knew to enter something he didn't, then invited a friend to come and see God's work in a foreign land.

It was a pretty good return on investment.

Mobley, who serves Living Word Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., was elected as the next dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary.



Living in God's peace

BY PASTOR DEL PALMER

During a recent trip to Uganda, I attended a meeting for the teachers of the Ambassador Institute, the AFLC World Missions program designed to train pastors and leaders. A man stood up at the meeting and introduced himself as David. He told the group gathered that day how, as a student, the Ambassador Institute had changed his life. About halfway through his testimony he made a statement that made my heart jump. Through his words, I realized that David understands the gospel.

David remarked, "Through the simple instruction of our teacher, I came to realize that Cain's offering was rejected because of the attitude of his heart. He gave his gift out of compulsion and not willingly. I realized that I served God in the same way. I wanted to gain God's favor by the things I did. Back then I was struggling to serve God. I was struggling with the attainment of righteousness. I used to think I had to struggle to be righteous. Through the ministry of Ambassador Institute I came to know that righteousness is a gift we don't earn.

"These days I don't struggle to be righteous. If I become conscious that I have sinned, I go to the Scripture. In I John 1:9 it says, 'If we confess our sins He will be faithful and just to forgive us all our sins and cleans us from all unrighteousness.' That gives me peace all the time!

"Another thing I have to say: I have joy and peace. I know I'm a candidate for heaven. May God bless the founders of Ambassador Institute. There is no way we can bless you enough."

As World Missions Director, I am always concerned about our missions programs and ministries. My concern is that we don't want to just exchange one set of rules to follow for another. Instead, I hope that we bring the life-changing message that Jesus paid for our sins and we can have peace and heaven as a free gift. That is the only thing that will change people's hearts. That is the only thing that will allow us to serve God with joy rather than as an obligation.

David learned from his Ambassador Institute teacher that Jesus' sacrifice gave him righteousness. He didn't learn it from the missionary sent to Uganda on behalf of the AFLC, but from the teacher. That means that those who have been taught by the missionary (Pastor Nate Jore) have been able to pass the message of grace on to the next group of leaders. They now live with God's peace. This reality makes my day.

Palmer is the director of AFLC World Missions.

Church fund-raiser meets needs of area children

BY PASTOR JOSH & AMY SKOGERBOE

Facing the fact that a new school year is pending is a bittersweet reality that hits both parents and students in the late weeks of summer. For the residents of two under-resourced housing communities near St. Olaf Church in Montgomery, Ill., the beginning of school poses a considerable financial challenge; every child needs a backpack and approximately \$50 worth of school supplies.

Following God's stirring to love our neighbors well and to develop deeper connections with them, a team representing our church went door to door, initially gathering the names and grade levels of 133 students needing help.

Responding to Facebook posts and requests from the pulpit, believers in the church and around the country were prompted to donate more than \$4,000 worth of gift cards, back packs and school supplies. The Back Pack team then shopped for, assembled, and eventually distributed more than 170 filled back packs, individually geared for each child.

This distribution initiative culminated with a Back Pack Bash event on Aug. 2 at St. Olaf, involving a grill-out and community party. The halls of Krug Elementary School, which borders the church property, and the middle schools and high schools nearby are now full of back packs which evidence God's heart and provision for these families. The body of Christ came together to love His kids, all for His glory!

The Skogerboes live in Montgomery, Ill., where Joshua serves St. Olaf Lutheran.



Class of 2004 reunion

Members of the 2004 class of the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, Plymouth, Minn., hosted a reunion for their classmates and families.

Pictured are (back row, from left): Theresa Boe, Caleb Davis, Gene Davis, Maeve Rogers, Shawn Rogers, Ken Flaten, Sam Willard, and Rachel Grammer. (Middle row, from left): Pastor Brett Boe, Bridia Boe, Wade Halvorsen, Lara Nash, and Steve Nash. (Front row, from left): Gideon Boe, Todd Waldie, Gabriella Waldie, Leah Waldie, and Nathaniel Waldie.

Do you have news from your local congregation? Contact the editors for submission requirements at luthamb@aflc.org.



To be a pastor

BY PASTOR GARY JORGENSON

Sometimes people will ask me, “How are things going at your church?” I often reply, “I think they are going well, but maybe you should ask my members that question.” My response usually draws a chuckle from the questioner. But the truth is, I am making that statement only half-jokingly. I can answer the question from my perspective, but not from someone else’s.

As I have been pondering what to write about the pastor, I have been thinking that this article might be written quite differently by a parishioner than a pastor. If the question is really, “How are you doing as a pastor?” I could give you my personal opinion. If, however, you are asking, “What do you do as a pastor and why?” I can give you a factual answer.

The word “pastor” comes from a Greek word which means “shepherd.” A shepherd has a very important ministry to his sheep—he feeds, guides, and protects them. He corrects them. He consoles them. He encourages them. He seeks them when they go astray. He does all of this and more. And that is also what a pastor is called to do for the people in his care.

In the days of the early Church, ministry to certain individuals was failing because those in leadership found themselves spread too thinly. They reasoned, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables” (Acts 6:2). They suggested the election of seven godly men to carry out this ministry. The Apostles would “give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). The advice of the Apostles seemed right and the first deacons were elected.

Was serving tables beneath the Apostles? Certainly not. Their point was that ministry of the church could be much more effec-

tively carried out if all members were actively involved in hands-on ministry to those with needs and if the Apostles could focus on the ministry of the Word and prayer.

What is the ministry of the Word and prayer? Does it mean that the pastor is to be cloistered away studying and meditating on the Word of God so that he can write sermons and Bible studies? That is part of the work of the pastor, but only part.

In Ephesians 4:12 Paul instructs leaders, including pastors, to “equip the saints for works of service for building up the body of Christ.” In other words, a pastor’s preaching and teaching should encourage and train others to better carry out the ministry which God has entrusted to them.

This is accomplished in part through the preaching of sermons and teaching of Bible studies. But a pastor carries out the ministry of the Word and prayer by sharing the Word of God on a more personal level with those who are sick, shut-in, grieving the death of loved ones, or facing their own mortality. They minister to people facing crises of numerous kinds, to those struggling to find answers to serious questions, and even to those celebrating great joys or significant blessings. He carries the Word to folks dealing with real doubts and moral failures, or to those who struggle with a sense of inadequacy for certain situations.

Some churches refer to their spiritual leaders as priests. I prefer the New Testament term “pastor” because one who serves in that capacity certainly serves as a shepherd to those in his care. It is a privilege to carry that title.

Jorgenson serves Good Shepherd Free Lutheran Church in Brainerd, Minn.

AFLC memorials: August

AFLBS

Ruth Claus
Margaret Holmquist (3)
Roger Peterson
Lloyd Walberg

... in honor of

AFLBS

The Ambassadors
Chad Friestad

FLAPS

Ricky Tenold

FLAPS

Janie Millett

World Missions

Keith Johnson

People and places

Pastor Terry Olson, Grafton, N.D., has accepted a call to serve as assistant to the president of the AFLC. Currently serving Trinity, Grand Forks, N.D., and Ny Stavanger, Buxton, N.D., he will assist President Lyndon Korhonen on a part-time basis beginning the first of the year. Ordained in 1973, Olson, married to Jean (Presteng), is the father of four children, and has served AFLC congregations in Iowa, North Dakota, and Washington.

Pastor Kris Nyman has accepted a call to serve Christ Community Church, Hagerstown, Md. He leaves Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah, N.D., which he has served for nearly 20 years.

AFLC Home Missions has commissioned several new Parish Builders for work in Home Missions congregations.

- Recent AFLBS graduates **Michelle Alverson**, from Osakis, Minn., and **Cassie Maier**, from Faith, S.D., are serving at Christ Community Church in Hagerstown, Md., with Pastor Kris Nyman.
- Recent AFLBS graduate **Erik Stoores**, Cascade, Mont., is serving at New Hope Free Lutheran, Jamestown, N.D., with Pastor Frank Cherney.

Twenty-nine members of **Living Word Free Lutheran**, Sioux Falls, S.D., traveled over Labor Day weekend via coach bus to the Creation Museum near Cincinnati, Ohio. The educational event was open to members of all generations.

Pastor Andy and Monica Coyle and their family have returned to Ukraine, where they are preparing for another year at of teaching at the International Bible School in Petrodolina. The school, which was established as an international endeavor, faces many challenges as the conflict continues in Ukraine.

Katy Dahl has accepted a part-time position on staff with AFLBS in admissions and recruitment. She will spend the majority of her time contacting prospects from the office and representing AFLBS on recruitment trips to schools, youth groups, youth retreats, and camps. Dahl is also a women's dorm assistant.

Pastor Brian Ricke has accepted a call to serve Living Hope Church, St. Michael, Minn. Ricke has served Calvary Free Lutheran, Arlington, S.D.

Pastor Adam Osier was installed Sept. 7 at Ruthfred Evangelical Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa., with AFLC President Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating.



Clothing drive benefits community

Members of St. Petrie Lutheran Church, of Rural Leland, Ill., hosted their second Loving Hearts Helping Hands Clothing Giveaway on Aug. 9. Chaired by Margaret Abbott and Jackie Jones, the event was a great success, with 44 people served through the project.

The congregation hosted a similar event in February of this year. The end-of-summer timing allowed the organizers to add new school supplies to the giveaway, which went over really well.

The congregation plans on hosting a similar event next August.



TOP: Joye Charlier prepares clothing for the giveaway.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-August 31, 2014

FUND	REC'D IN AUGUST	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$19,017	\$213,530	\$224,432
Evangelism	7,829	97,144	90,013
Youth Ministries	18,809	91,264	71,224
Parish Education	18,412	90,519	99,334
Seminary	13,171	192,347	187,937
Bible School	35,291	335,792	349,555
Home Missions	39,718	289,937	304,269
World Missions	24,180	316,888	255,469
Personal Support	36,043	288,696	289,950
TOTALS	\$212,471	\$1,916,117	\$1,872,184

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

A Perfect Pastor

A church officer was officiating at the installation on a new pastor. "I have bad news for you," he said to the congregation. "You have not called a perfect pastor."

Then he addressed the pastor with the same statement: "I have bad news for you. You have not accepted a call from a perfect congregation."

There should be no argument about either conclusion, correct? Every pastor is both a saint and a sinner, saved by grace alone through faith, yet still struggling with an old nature that will be with him until he goes



Pastor Robert Lee

home to glory. And every congregation has a collection of the same sort of saved sinners, knowing the same struggles with the flesh as their pastor.

Yes, we do believe that there is a real perfection possessed by faith by believers in the here and now, through the righteousness of our perfect Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and this is good news indeed. Yet one is reminded of the truth in the following little poem:

*O, to be one with the saints above!
That will be glory!
But to live below with the saints I
know,
Well, that's another story.*

Yet there is another aspect of truth that can also be taught and proclaimed: Pastor and congregation, we do have a perfect pastor, and His name is Jesus!

In I Peter chapter 5, a text that is often read at ordinations or installations, one must remember that the words "pastor" and "shepherd" are the same. There is a

command to "shepherd/pastor" (verse 2) that is addressed to the spiritual leaders of the congregation ... not a title but a working word ... and the only one who is called "Shepherd/Pastor" is the "Chief Shepherd," our Lord Jesus Christ, who will grant an unfading crown of glory (verse 4) to His faithful under-shepherds when He appears.

The tenth chapter of John's Gospel is a good place to turn to learn more about our Perfect Pastor. Jesus declares: "I am the good shepherd" (verses 11 and 14). This portion of Scripture and others make it plain that the sheep face dangers from without and even from within, for there are shepherds who are not good, and Jesus called them "hirelings" (verse 12). The old Norwegians labeled them *mat-prest* (food-pastor), one who is more concerned about his own comforts and provision than the care and protection of the flock.

Isn't it wonderful to know that our Perfect Pastor/Shepherd is not a hireling? He is the owner of the sheep, purchased by right of creation and the new creation. He laid down His life to bring us into His flock. He protects us against wolves and thieves who come only to "kill, steal, and destroy." He comes to give us abundant life, for now and forever. The enemy is strong, but our Pastor is stronger.

It is a source of great comfort to grasp the truth that our Perfect Pastor knows us and that we can know Him. Pastoral ministry takes place in the context of relationship. A new pastor strives to learn the names of the people in his congregation and visits them at home and in other settings so that he might get to know them ... and for them to get

to know him. Jesus knows His own, He knows us by name, and this was a special encouragement to me during a difficult time of doubt. I said to my soul, "He knows," and in this simple truth I found rest.

Our Perfect Pastor speaks of sheep which are not of this fold (10:16), and His shepherd heart longs to bring them, too ... that they would hear His voice and become

*It is a source of great comfort
to grasp the truth that our
perfect Pastor knows us and
that we can know Him.*

one flock with one shepherd. But how shall they hear? Paul answers this question with other questions in his Letter to the Romans: "How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent" (10:14-15)? He sends you and me, born again pastors and lay people, to a lost world with the good news that Jesus saves sinners.

Jesus Christ is our Perfect Pastor. Congregation, don't expect any pastor to be what only Jesus can be. Pastor, remember that you have a chief Pastor, too, under whose authority you serve. It is ultimately "the flock of God" (I Peter 5:2) that you shepherd, not yours. And remember that it is your Pastor who tenderly invites you to come to Him, when you are weary and heavy laden, and He will give you rest for your soul (Matthew 11:28-29).

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Periodicals

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association retreat center

The discipline of rest

BY PASTOR DAVID JOHNSON

I don't do downtime well. There, I've said it. I really struggle with the concept and discipline of time off. Vacation time goes unused, and days off have been a point of marital stress and nervous laughter for years. And to make matters worse, I don't really have a hobby, either. I just don't do downtime well.

Now don't get me wrong; it's not that I don't understand the importance of rest. I can preach from chapter and verse for weeks on end about God's Sabbath priorities and His principles concerning bodily and spiritual restoration. Oh, I know the biblical exhortations. But I still struggle with the practice of the thing.

And as a pastor, I find myself battling with the added complication of congregational needs, in addition to the needs of family, wife, and personal weariness. As my wife, Vicki, has often exhorted, "David, you have an over-grown sense of obligation." And she's right.

But in recent years I have found, at least for me, what seems to be the key to the practice of rest: the principle of removal. I simply have to get away, physically. My dad escaped to the cabin to fish. Similarly, that seems to be the only way that I can put the rest of the world on hold long enough to disengage. And I seem to be in good

company. God drew Moses away to the mountain to meet with him. The prophets often met God while apart from the busyness of life. And Jesus Himself often retreated to regroup and commune with the Father.

Matthew's gospel records one such occasion: "Now when Jesus heard [about John], He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself ..." (Matthew 14:13). And John recorded another time when Jesus went away by Himself, "So Jesus ... withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone" (6:15).

I'm still challenged in this area of life, but I am learning. I've found it helpful to research sanctuary options where we live, like our own Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis., which provides options for personal, couple or family retreat on a donation basis. What a blessing the ARC has been over the years to escape and meet with God away from the chaos of ministry demands. I pray that you, too, are able to grow in this critical discipline of life, as well.

Johnson serves Living Faith Lutheran, Boyertown, Pa., and Disciple Lutheran Fellowship, Reading, Pa.