

# As if they never left

BY ANDREW KNEELAND

he cost was high, but the amount of mercy was even higher.

In the closing days of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln was asked what he would do with the southern states as they re-entered the Union. The North and the South had been at war for four years, and the costs were enormous: billions of dollars had been spent, millions of acres of crop land had been destroyed, and 3 percent of the nation's population had been killed.

It was a painful separation, and many despised the people they thought responsible for such devastation. How would Lincoln deal with those

Confederates who had been their enemy for so long?

"I'll treat them as if they never left."

The 16th president was assassinated a few days later, and Congress took upon itself a more vengeful plan of southern reconstruction. But Lincoln's policy of forgiveness and mercy was a testament to his character. Even considering the costly conflict, he was still willing to forgive.

Our sin costs even more. The separation between us and our Father was even more painful than civil war. But still, knowing our sin and our failures, Jesus welcomes His children back.

The story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 captures the impact of this mercy and forgiveness.

Before the story even begins, the youngest son is at home with his father. All his needs are provided for, he's surrounded by the comforts of home, and the ring on his finger guarantees his inheritance and status as a son of the father.

But sin came into the world. And it made the picture a whole



lot messier.

Life was great for this son, but worldly attractions wedged a huge chasm between father and son. He was a lost son, drawn to the world. And the world burned him, just like it burns us.

Fortunately, God doesn't want to leave us in our misery. Even though we turn our back on Him, abandon our place in His home, and try to do things on our own, our Father wants us back.

Like the prodigal son, we can experience the never-failing love of our Father. We can know that He is watching the road from a long way off, waiting for His chil-

dren to return.

In Jewish culture, a father would typically wait to be formally addressed by his son before speaking to him. Not our Father. He's watching from a long distance, eagerly waiting for a chance to run down the road to embrace us and lavish us with His gifts.

And what are these gifts? The prodigal son got a ring—to remind him who he is, an heir—and a robe to replace the muddy rags he had been wearing. When we're forgiven our sins, we get a ring assuring us eternal life, and we get a robe of imputed righteousness to hide our filthy sins.

Jesus provides both of these gifts. Because of His work on the cross for us—dying so that we don't have to be punished for our sins—we are able to be called children of God.

The war is over, Jesus has won. And He's willing to treat you "just as if you never left."

Kneeland, a 2013 graduate of AFLBS, is a member of Atonement Free Lutheran, Arlington, Wash.

(Cover photos) Top: Brazil mission work by Seth Skogerboe. Bottom: Haiti mission work by Alex Maldonado.

### September 2014 >> THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR vol. 52, no. 9

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The Lutheran Ambassador (USPS 588-620 ISSN 0746-3413) is published monthly by the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. AFLC headquarters and publications office is at 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441. Phone (763) 545-5631; fax 763-545-0079.

For subscription changes and information: The Lutheran Ambassador, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441. 763-545-5631 or e-mail at luthamb@aflc.org. Subscription rates:

\$19 a year, Group Rate, U.S. \$20 a year, Individual, U.S. \$22 a year, International Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, MN, and additional mailing office.

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

How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because someday in your life you will have been all of these.

—George Washington Carver

George Macdonald said, "If you knew what God knows about death you would clap your listless hands", but instead I find old people in North America just buying this whole youth obsession. I think growing older is a wonderful privilege. I want to learn to glorify God in every stage of my life.

—Elisabeth Elliot

Our teen interview transcripts reveal clearly that the language that dominates U.S. adolescent interests and thinking about life—including religious and spiritual life—is primarily about personally feeling good and being happy.

—Christian Smith

I have met so many young people who do not see the church as relevant and do not consider the Bible a real book of history that can be trusted.

—Ken Ham



# UNITY IN THE CORNERSTONE

■ BY PASTOR MICAH HJERMSTAD

THE NEW TESTAMENT picture of Christ as the cornerstone is one with which most are familiar. Oftentimes, this picture is associated with the truth that the Word of God—and particularly the Word made flesh—is the foundation upon which the Christian's life rests. While that is indeed true, Christ as the cornerstone means so much more.

The tendency for many today is to separate God's sanctifying work from His redeeming work of justification. In other words, we think that Christ's work on the cross was great and wonderful and foundational, but now we need to "move past" the cross and climb the ladder of holiness to demonstrate our great faith.

However, the picture of the cornerstone tells us something different. A cornerstone is the essential foundational piece of a building: it determines how straight and true the walls will be as they are being built. The cornerstone directly impacts the entire building, from the foundation, to the building's walls, to the capstone, which is the crowning stone of the entire building. For the Christian, that means that Christ, the cross, and the empty tomb are everything. His redeeming work is the truth on which our faith rests, and the sanctifying fruits that come from faith are the result of being grafted into Christ the True Vine.

The theme of this year's FLY Beyond week was "Built," taken from Ephesians 2:19-22, which teaches that Christians are members of God's household "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord."

Last year, the FLY Convention theme was "Broken." Christ was broken on our behalf, crushed for our iniquities, and it is by His wounds that we are healed. I Samuel 2:6 says it another way, "The Lord kills and brings to life." It is through Christ's atoning death and victorious resurrection that we are given new life, and it is that same truth that builds us up in Him as well. God breaks us, He kills us, He brings us to life, and then He builds us as Paul writes, "into a holy temple in the Lord."

Much of the week with our youth was spent exploring different aspects of being built up into Christ. Christians are reconciled, brought near, adopted into God's household, and we are built on Christ into a holy temple in which He dwells.

One of the absolutely fascinating truths found in Ephesians 2 and throughout the entire book is the unity that this truth brings. This unity shines through all of Scripture. In the picture of Christ as the cornerstone, the same truth that saves us also sanctifies us. That's unity. In Ephesians 4:4-6, Paul hammers home the unity found in Christ: "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." The "oneness" of this passage speaks for itself, but the fact that God is "over all and through all and in all" points us even further to the unity found in God.

If that wasn't enough, in these verses Paul gives us a remarkable picture of the unity of the Trinity and what that means for believers, the Church. There is one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father of all. The Triune God is three persons in one being. That is a unity that our simple minds cannot fully comprehend. What is amazing here is that this teaching comes in the context of a discussion on the unity of the Church. The Church is one being, consisting of multiple persons, and as Paul says at the end of Ephesians 2, we are joined together, built together into a dwelling place, a holy temple in the Lord.

It was a distinct privilege to attend FLY Beyond this year and to witness the unity of the body of Christ in our youth. I am so thankful for them and their testimonies. And I'm so thankful that God chose before the foundation of the world to put all things in subjection under His feet, including His own Son, "so that God may be all in all" (I Corinthians 15:27-28). God's plan all along was to redeem His people, make us His own, and make us one. That theme is evident in the very nature of the Trinity, it's clear in God's work of salvation and sanctification, and it's seen in His building up of the body. We are left simply to proclaim with Paul in Ephesians 3:20-21, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever."

Hjermstad, who serves Hope Free Evangelical Lutheran, Ishpeming, Mich., led a Bible study on Ephesians 2:19-20 at FLY Beyond, held July 21-25 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis.



### **FLY**

# WHAT WE

### BY JENNIFER ALBRIGHT



Albright attends Calvary Free Lutheran, Fosston, Minn.

hat is the difference between an infinite and personal god? Was Jesus just a good teacher or another prophet? What is the evidence of Jesus's resurrection? How many ancient manuscripts of the New Testament can be found? How do you defend your faith?

Pastor Jason Gudim really hit a home run in answering these questions and others during the apologetics session at Fly Beyond this summer. A person can't communicate with infinite, impersonal gods as they seem almost over-powering or distant. When gods are just personal and finite, they are not always there and seem to have more problems than we do.

There are only three religions that have a god that is both infinite and personal. They are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Out of these three, Christianity is the only religion in which God's son, Jesus Christ, became a human. How cool is it that our God loves us so much that He sent His son to die on the cross for our sins?

We learned that there is more historical evidence that Jesus Christ existed than Julius Caesar. No one would doubt the existence of Julius Caesar; but when it comes to the existence of Jesus Christ, many people have a hard time believing. When Jesus was on earth, He fulfilled many prophecies from the Old Testament. He demonstrated authority over nature, demonic spirits, illness, sin, and death. All the prophets throughout the Bible point their power back to God, but Jesus doesn't, because Jesus is God. If Jesus was just a good person, He wouldn't be able to receive worship. But He does because He is God.

Then Pastor Gudim talked about the evidence of Jesus's resurrection. Jesus said He would die and three days later rise again. Three days after Jesus died, His tomb was found empty. After Jesus had risen He appeared to several people who were all eyewitnesses to His death and resurrection. If they hadn't believed what they had witnessed, the Christian Church wouldn't have started and spread so quickly. Furthermore, out of the 12 disciples, 10 were martyred. Nobody would die for something they didn't believe.

Why does Jesus's death on the cross matter to us? "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). If Jesus hadn't died on the cross for our sins we would all be slaves to sin. Because of our sin God turns His back on us, but Jesus stepped into our place and God turned His back on Jesus instead.

I learned a lot in the apologetics sessions that I will be able to use to defend my faith and present evidence for why I believe what I believe.



# BELIEVE

### **APOLOGETICS**

BY CALEB HOLT

s there really a God? This is a question that is probably asked in human minds around the world every day. At FLY Beyond, we had one session Tuesday through Friday on apologetics, led by Pastor Jason Gudim. In this class, we heard a ton of evidence on why God is real, and that Jesus really did walk this earth, die for our sins, and rise again on the third day. The majority of this evidence was from two sources: first, the Bible, and then also Faith Search International.

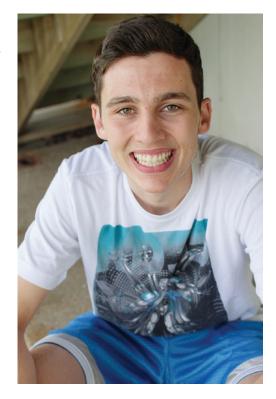
One of the really cool pieces of evidence we learned was that there are more than 24,000 ancient manuscripts of the New Testament. That is more manuscripts then there are for the writings of Plato, Caesar, and Homer altogether. Such an awesome fact! There were so many other amazing things in this class, but there are specifically a few that I would like to touch on.

First, one of the things I really enjoyed a lot was talking about some of the qualities needed in a god. Although we got some of the not as important answers like having a beard and being a Minnesota Twins fan, we did hit on a few major things needed for a god to exist and to really be the true God. The two real main ones are that our true and only God is infinite and personal. Our God is eternal and close to us personally at the same time.

Second, we learned that there are three approaches that people seem to take in general when talking to a non-believer about Jesus: an argument, a debate, or a conversation. We learned that you should never be looking to start an argument, which does not show Christ's love. Generally, you should not be looking to debate with someone. What you should always be focused on is having a conversation. You are trying to talk to someone about Jesus with gentleness and respect (I Peter 3:15).

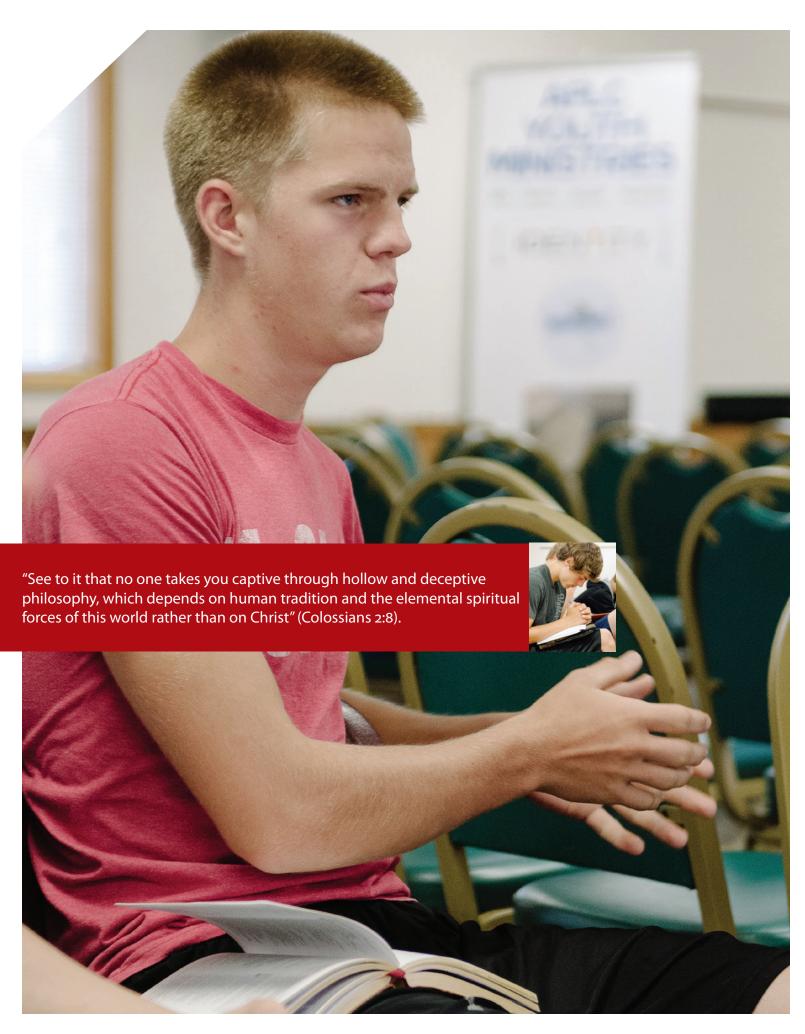
Last, we learned that in the Gospels, Jesus shows God's authority over the universe in many ways. He demonstrated authority over nature, demonic spirits, illness and physical ailments, death, and finally, sin. He has the authority of the one and only true God.

Why was the apologetics class so important to me and all of the other teens at FLY Beyond? There really is not a better explanation then how Pastor Gudim ended our last session on Friday: Apologetics puts you at the feet of Jesus on the cross, and it is there where you are forgiven.



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







# THE BATTLE FOR TRUTH

### BY LAY PASTOR PAUL KNEELAND

THERE IS A VERY SERIOUS BATTLE going on in our world between truth and lies.

Our culture is filled with lies. There are lies about who we are and who God is. We are bombarded with lies in media, art, law, politics, economics, philosophy, ethics, science, history, etc.

As the foundation of truth gets watered down, twisted, suppressed, distorted, rejected, and ignored, our house begins to crumble. When the rains, floods, and winds come, great will be the fall. On the other hand, Jesus said, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on a rock." Jesus is that rock. The truth is that rock.

John 14:6 says, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life ..."

John 17:17 says, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." I Timothy 2:3-4 says, "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth."

Do you think truth might be important?

It is so important that the devil's primary line of attack is to deceive us regarding the truth. Remember, "He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). He lied to Eve in the garden. He lied to Jesus in the desert. He lies to us through some of our biggest influences: song lyrics, movies, television shows, magazines, advertisements, and the internet. His deceptions are everywhere.

Little by little, drip by drip, these influences can pull us toward world views that we don't even recognize as lies. Think of that television show that seems so captivating. Sure there are things that would not fit God's design for society, or for the family, or for spirituality. But it's such a well-written show. So clever. So funny. Everyone is watching it. And so it continues drip, by drip, by drip, by drip.

It doesn't happen overnight. Like a stalactite that forms in caves (stalactite means "to drip") after a long period of time, the lies of the devil can become so imbedded in our hearts that they form the pillars of false beliefs.

An extremely frustrating aspect of all of this is that Christians often give willing endorsement to the lies of Satan. In fact, we often encourage them. Does this not concern you?

Jesus never said it was going to be easy following the truth. In fact, He said it would be hard: "Enter by the narrow gate. For the

gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:13-14).

You are not alone if you're afraid, or if you're struggling in knowing how to live by faith in the truth of God's Word. Even the disciples took a while to get it. In Matthew 14:31, we see Peter asking Jesus to help him walk on water, then sinking. Jesus asked him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Also in that chapter, the disciples were on hand when Jesus miraculously fed the 5,000. Then in chapter 15, when they again had very little food to feed another multitude (4,000), the disciples asked in v. 33, "Where can we get enough food in this remote place to feed such a crowd?"

Guys, didn't we just go over this?

Shortly after that episode, in Mark 8, the disciples had forgotten to take bread along for themselves, and Jesus said to them:

"Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

"Twelve," they replied.

"And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

They answered, "Seven."

He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

And remember when the disciples couldn't heal the boy with a demon in Matthew 17? Jesus said to them, "How long shall I put up with you?"

When asked why they couldn't do it, Jesus said, "Because you have so little faith."

See? You are not alone. Jesus is trying over and over again to get us to understand that when we come to Him, we have begun a relationship with the Son of God Himself. Actually, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The God of the universe! The One who spoke this world into existence. Truth in person. How amazing is that?

The power behind our faith, the power to reject lies, does not come from us or from our own faith. It comes from the object of our faith-God. Do you trust Him?

Kneeland, interim pastor at Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn., led a session on Living By Faith at 2014 FLY Beyond.



# ONE FAITH, ONE LORD

A group of 21 students and three adult leaders traveled to Brazil July 15-August 2, where they visited AFLC World Missions projects in Curitiba and Campo Mourão. They worked alongside AFLC missionaries Pastor Paul and Becky Abel, Jonni Sliver, and Matthew Abel, as well as Brazilian national workers. Along the way, they learned about missions and the Body of Christ.

In their own words they share about some of the lessons they learned and how they saw God at work in their own lives as well as the lives of those they met.

(Photos by Seth Skogerboe)



Back row, from left: Jon Nelson, Zach Ricke, Ben Carlson, Samuel Ricke, Gunner St. John, Cody Halverson, Alex Monseth, Adam Erickson, Ryan Jones, Levi Berntson, Seth Skogerboe, James Newman, Josiah Nelson, Ben Nelson and Connie Ricke. Front row, from left: Amanda Flechsig, Katie Berge, Rebekah Jordan, Rachel Dryburgh, Adreana Marschner, Erin Dahl, Jordan Fevig, Jessica Smith, and Abby Dahl. (Photo by Ruth Gunderson)

### BY ERIN DAHL

THE NIGHT WAS COOL and the stars were bright as we sat in a big circle on the South American soil. We could hear the cheers of a soccer game being played opposite the fence and dogs barking off in the distance. Almost everyone had shared in our debriefing circle. I felt so unspiritual because I hadn't shared anything yet. I wanted to share about a moment on the trip I had felt God change my entire world. I gathered my thoughts and failed to come up with something radical and impressive, so I simply shared the truth.

"I know God has changed me over our time here, it just hasn't been in the way I was hoping, and I was expecting to be used in a bigger way."

That night I prayed passionately for God to reveal to me the works of His hands.

Earlier on our trip, I went to find a place to be completely alone with God. I had been in the Word every day, I was seeking Jesus every day in prayer, but I felt like

He wasn't there, although I know He was. He was being silent and I couldn't figure out why. How can God provide for everything and prepare the way for me to come to Brazil to share about Him, but then, when I get there, He suddenly becomes silent? I was confused. I was working, serving with my paint brush and with little tasks. But my devotional life felt dry. I wasn't questioning my salvation or my faith, I just couldn't understand why God was silent. So I held to the promises of His Word and I prayed.

During lunch one day at the Bible school, I poured the juice for everyone who went through the line. The act was small, but God used it to change my whole attitude and perspective on serving. He spoke to me through the little Dixie cups of orange juice, "I am with you and alive in you when you find Me in the smallest actions."

All along I had been doing small things, we all had been. These small things seemed so insignificant. But God wanted us to do

them. God poured the blessings as we did the tasks. So with each weed being pulled, each tree being planted, each plate being washed, I knew it was for Jesus. Each task was no longer insignificant.

God didn't call me to pray for salvation with a big group of Brazilians. He didn't call me to evangelize a prostitute on the street. He didn't call me to be a hero. God's plans for me on this trip were not mine at all. He wanted me to do the small things and pour forth the most joy from doing them. God was no longer silent when I realized this. I found a deeper, richer love in serving Him, and I was able to pour out that love because I was filled with the joy of Jesus.

God is not always loud and doesn't always appear to be working. But His silence is not deadening, it creates a deepening.

Dahl, who will attend AFLBS this fall, is a member of Maranatha Free Lutheran, Glyndon, Minn.



### BY REBECCA JORDAN

THIS TRIP HAS BEEN AWESOME. I got to meet so many people. Getting to know the Brazilians was amazing even though we did not speak the same language I was still able to really connect with them and share my faith with them. While being on this trip I've grown closer to God in many different ways, and going to the church services and getting to know the way that they worship God in Brazil really got me thinking that even with different languages we are still

sending praises to God. I have also learned that all of us can be missionaries everywhere, whether it is in a different country or in your own home town. You can tell people about Jesus everywhere, and even though the mission trip is over my mission is not. I can still share God with others.

Jordan is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Valley City, N.D.

#### BY SETH SKOGERBOE

I WAS STRUCK by the massive beauty of God's creation. Prior to this trip, in the woods of Minnesota, I had several times stopped to look up at the stars and tried to fit them into my brain. Then, on the first night (when we arrived in Curitiba), one of the guys on the team noted that we were looking at the other half of space—south of the equator. Not only did God allow us a glance at another country, on another continent, but here He showed us a second half of the sky, full of other stars. In the words of short term assistant missionary/fire-juggler/ translator Mafù Abel, "Wow."

And underneath the sky is the country of Brazil, and within that a state, and within that the Bible school, and the Miriam Infant Home, and the kids there. We got to know them for just two days and one morning. Even for so short a time it hurt to go away. You wouldn't think that you could get to know someone through soccer, learning broken Portuguese, and singing along to Frozen, but we did. Wow, again! How small are people, when you are looking at the sky. But when you look at the people—they are so complex, so alive. The hugeness of heaven, and the tininess of infants. We are incredibly, and disproportionately, blessed. Praise Jesus!

Skogerboe is a member of St. Olaf Free Lutheran, Montgomery, Ill.

### STUDENT MISSIONS

### BRAZIL

### BY ALEX MONSETH

PRAYER IS THE WAY WE CAN TALK to God, the Almighty Creator. We can actually talk to Him. That has always amazed me. However, I don't think I ever felt His full presence in prayer until a few weeks ago while in Brazil.

Pastor Marcus had just delivered a convicting sermon, which God was clearly using to stir the hearts of the many youth at the ARCA camp. At the end of the message, an altar call was issued to any who felt the need to give their lives over to Christ or to recommit to their Savior.

I watched from my seat in the second row as the first of a couple songs began. I remembered many messages in the past when we had been given an invitation to come forward. There had been times when I had brushed the offer aside, too proud or too scared to step to the front, but other times when I came forward, urged by God's tug on my heart. I remembered that feeling of being seated, unsure of whether to stand and go for prayer. What would the people think of me? Am I sure that I need to go up? So many questions. That night, God distinctly told me that I needed to pray for those who were struggling. So I did.

The music continued and kids started to slowly file to the front. Soon the whole space between the chairs and the stage was filled with repentant hearts. What an answer to prayer! A sense of peace came over me like a cool breeze on a hot summer day. I had never prayed for others so vigorously before. I felt that wonderful kind of exhaustion you feel after a long run, when something was accomplished.

Many other prayers were answered over the course of our time there, but that night stuck out to me. Every person on the team had a purpose for the trip, and although I know God allowed me to be used in many ways while we were in Brazil, praying for those kids to make that courageous commitment was the pinnacle of God's work through me.

Mark 11:24, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

Monseth, who plans to attend AFLBS this fall, is a member of Living Hope, St. Michael, Minn..



#### BY RACHEL DRYBURGH

JOURNAL ENTRY: Thursday, July 24, 2014 Tonight we said goodbye to many of

our Brazilian friends at the ARCA. I feel like I'm being torn because I have to leave behind all the dear friends I made in the last weeks. How can I be so sad, considering I've only known many of those people for a week? Because of the language barrier, I could hardly communicate with them unless someone translated or we were feeling up for playing a form of charades with them. We shared smiles, hugs, and laughter, but very few words. How could I become so attached so quickly to people who are from a completely different world than I am from?

Christ's love. He filled each and every member of our team completely with it. The mutual faith and love in Christ we shared with the Brazilians set in place a bond that usually takes many years to build. Even though we were all from different backgrounds, different cultures, and different

ends of the world, the love of brothers and sisters in Jesus was so strong, it unified us in ways we never could have imagined. Playing sports together, praying with and for each other, and worshiping God at the top of our lungs caused the differences between us to become less noticeable. The love of Christ was the foundation of every interaction with the Brazilians. I would try talking to some of my Brazilian friends, and even though I could hardly speak a word of Portuguese, I would leave the conversation feeling like I just had a deep conversation with them. It was amazing to see how deeply His love flowed through us as both of our worlds collided together. Even though my heart hurts now that we have to leave, the knowledge that our hearts will remain close to brothers and sisters in Christ helps ease the pain of goodbye.

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

### BY RYAN JONES

WHEN I THINK OF MIRACLES, I usually think of Jesus walking on the water, or God parting the Red Sea through Moses, but the miracles we saw down in South America were a little different. What I foolishly didn't expect God could do was to break through the language barrier. I thought that I'd have trouble connecting with the local youths down in Curitiba, but the language difference was a real conversation starter. As soon as we gringos started to make an effort to relate, we developed relationships with the locals. So I made a conscious effort, and I was dumbfounded at how God used me in one Brazilian teenager's life.

My friend's name is John Paul. John Paul's background with the church is a bit inconsistent. He has family who attend, but he walked away from the church. I didn't know any of this before I met him on the first day of camp and we started playing foosball and Ping-Pong. We were friends from then on. Every day we sat together at lunch and he bought me and a few other guys Cokes from the snack shack. We played fútbol, basketball, and Frisbee together.

On Saturday morning, Jesus took hold of John Paul's heart and he surrendered himself to the Lord. Later that weekend, he also came up front and made a public covenant with Jesus. God definitely was at work at the ARCA.

Saying goodbye was extremely difficult.

John Paul gave me a hug, told me he loved me in English, and then left. Earlier in the day, I had received a note from John Paul. Obviously I couldn't read it, but Becky Abel told me that John Paul thought of me as his best friend. Wow. I was so humbled it hurt. My weakness allowed God to show His strength.

We witnessed miracles. The language barrier didn't negatively affect our team. God miraculously tore down that wall and replaced it with lasting friendships.

Jones is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.



ALL WHO WERE ATTENDING the youth winter retreat at the ARCA gathered in the chapel to begin the worship service for the evening. We began to sing songs that were familiar to our group of Americans. As we all began to raise our voices and sing songs of praise to our Lord, I closed my eyes and heard not two languages being sung but one. Yes, half were singing in Portuguese and the other half were singing in English. Yet, I imagined Christ listening to His children singing to Him with hearts being surrendered and filled with love.

During the course of the weeks we spent in Brazil we continued to experience times when this concept of being a part of the same Kingdom was so evident. There was no doubt that we were different than our Brazilian brothers and sisters. It was obvious when we opened our mouths to speak the little Portuguese we knew or tried to measure up to the soccer skills of our new friends. We knew we were the gringos and they knew it, too. However, we share citizenship in the Kingdom of God for eternity, whether we are citizens of Brazil or the United States.

"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands ..." (Revelations 7:9). Thank you, Jesus, that we are one in the body of Christ.

Flechsig is a member of Good Shepherd Lutheran, Pleasanton, Texas.



### STUDENT MISSIONS

### **BRAZIL**

### BY JESSICA SMITH

BEFORE THIS TRIP, I have to admit I was worried and almost a little afraid. I had never gone on such a long trip with so many strangers. Even going to the training before the actual trip made me a little nervous. It was definitely a step outside of my comfort zone. But I went. This was something I needed to do, and quite honestly, it was a trip I needed to go on. It showed me that no matter where you are and what you do, God is always there by your side. I didn't have to worry about not knowing too many people because within a few days, I had started to make friends. God was there for me, too, when I did feel like I was alone. This trip helped me grow closer to my God and my Creator. By going to places like Iguazu Falls, I could see the might, power, creativity, and beauty of that same Creator.

Smith, who plans to attend AFLBS this fall, is a member of Singsaas Free Lutheran, rural Hendricks, Minn.

#### BY CODY HALVERSON

ON THE PLANE RIDE HOME I sat next to a Brazilian man who spoke fluent English. As we started visiting, he asked why I was in Brazil. I told him about our mission trip and he was amazed that teenagers would take the time to work for the Lord. He shared his testimony with me. He was a successful business man who had lost it all. He went to church one day and heard the story of God's love for him, and he accepted Jesus as his Savior. Today, God has blessed him and he gives all the glory to God.

In preparing for this mission trip, there were many things that had to be in place in order to go: passports, visas, and luggage. I was hopeful that my passport would be stamped and my ticket would go through. In many ways, it is very similar to our walk with the Lord. Except, He paid it all. He got my passport, visa, and ticket when He took my sins to the cross. If we accept His free gift to us, He will be our pilot on a first-class flight to an eternity with Him. Yes, there will be turbulence along the way, but the promise of Heaven is the sweet destination that will never grow old.

Halverson is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Valley City, N.D.



### BY ABBY DAHL

LOOKING BACK AT THE TWO and onehalf weeks I spent in Brazil, I am so grateful for the experience. I learned so much. One thing I understand more clearly is what it means to be a part of the body of Christ. While we were at the ARCA for a weekend camp, the campers weren't afraid to express themselves in worshiping God: jumping up and down, running around the room, raising their hands, whatever they could do to best worship God. Since all of the songs were in Portuguese, it was harder for us to follow along, but many times they would be singing familiar songs, so we would sing in English and they would sing in Portuguese. Two languages, two cultures colliding into one body, worshiping the same God.

Even though we had barriers, we grew closer with the Brazilians because we had such a deep common bond in Jesus.

Our team bonded and was united in Jesus, as well. It was encouraging to know

that if you needed someone to talk to or some one to pray with, they were there and wanted to help with anything they could.

Spending time with the kids at the Miriam Infant Home was very joyous. You couldn't leave the house without a smile on your face. Whether you were playing soccer, watching *Frozen* in Portuguese, or having tickle fights, there was always laughter and wide-eyed smiles.

During the time spent at the Bible school, I learned more about the importance of doing whatever we are asked with a joyful attitude and a servant's heart. Whether it's washing dishes, pulling weeds, washing chairs, playing with children, or painting walls, God called us to do every task in joy and love. That is sometimes the biggest testimony you can have.

Dahl is a member of Maranatha Free Lutheran, Glyndon, Minn.



#### BY KATIE BERGE

THERE ARE COUNTLESS MOMENTS on this trip when God touched my heart. He opened my eyes in many ways, but especially at the Miriam Infant Home. If I'm being honest, I really struggled during that ministry. When we got there, I had a blast with the kids—playing with them, getting to know them, holding them, loving them. Then the realization came that inevitably I was going to have to leave, just like almost everyone else in their lives. My heart was heavy; I dreaded the day I had to say goodbye to these precious kids. Too quickly that day came. I questioned why God would send me there. I came to lift their spirits, not crush them. Why come and build friendships with these kids when I just have to leave right away? Is coming here for only a few days and creating such strong attachments really God's will?

I went to the home to say goodbye. I planned to make it as quick and casual, but I was there for two hours before Becky Abel finally pulled me away from the kids. After many sobs and sad good-byes with the children. I had a lot of time to think on the long bus ride.

I had two main goals that I prayed for on this trip: For God to break my heart for what breaks His and that He would give me more of a world mission mind-set. He did just that.

I thought about how much the kids needed those hugs. I could have gone there and not said a word. I wouldn't even have had to play with them. All they really wanted was a hug. So I squeezed them and they squeezed me back. As I thought about what their home lives were like, I squeezed them even tighter and wished that I never

had to let go because at that very moment maybe the pain from their past was gone.

Even though it's so hard to understand, I know that God had a reason for me to meet those kids. I hope that I showed them that they are loved, valued, and held by Christ. I pray that they will know Jesus so that one day they will never have to feel such heartache and abandonment again.

As terribly sad as it is, these aren't the only kids in the world experiencing hard situations. There are places like this in the U.S., even in my home state of North Dakota. Yet, I have never gone there to love, hug, and play with the children. I don't have to go to Brazil to have an impact for Christ.

Berge, who plans to attend AFLBS this fall, is a member of Living Faith Free Lutheran, Larimore, N.D.



"No one who believes in him will be put to shame" (Romans 10:11).

he words "no one" really stand out in this passage.

It is usually so among men that only a few can rise to the top in human society. If all were to succeed, it would be no success; if all were rich, it would be no riches at all. Among us it is so that only as some rise above the rest in any way are they outstanding. Now Paul says that no one who believes in Christ shall be put to shame; we can all rise to the top, for we are found in Christ Jesus.

All who have heard the gospel have an opportunity to be saved. We have heard it since we were children. The Holy Spirit has worked in our hearts in such a way that we have come to faith in our Savior. Of this we ought not to be ashamed. It is a sign of weakness in us if we ever are ashamed of Christ. He was never ashamed

of us; He has said that if we are ready to confess Him before men, He will confess us before the Father in heaven.

What have we to be ashamed of? Certainly not that we are Christians. It is generally agreed, even among unconverted people, that when all things are taken into consideration, Christians are the best people in the world, and the Christian life is the best life. So why should we be ashamed?

Paul here assures us that none who believes on Christ shall be put to shame. That means both here and hereafter. Then why should we be afraid?

Eloise Johnson, Burtrum, 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.

women's missionary federation



### Rejoice and weep with them

"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15).

n the early autumn days of 2013, my friends Carol Hensrud and Maxine Larson were both diagnosed with cancer, and faced a long winter filled with chemotherapy. As fellow members of Bethel Free Lutheran in Grafton, N.D., our congregation and members of the WMF watched as their faces grew pale, their hair thinned, and fatigue became the way that they started every day. We sent cards, called with words of encouragement, and offered rides. But we felt helpless as we watched our dear friends struggle with yet another round of

"How many weeks left?" we asked. The countdown was slow but steady. Eleven more weeks, nine more weeks ... finally, one more week! At last they were done, and we rejoiced! We wanted them to know just how much we loved them and how happy we were that their chemo was completed. We decided to shower them with love at our May WMF meeting and hosted a Done with Chemo Party.

The Fellowship Room was decorated with flowers and balloons. We brought cards and presents and then waited for them to walk through the door.

"Surprise!" we yelled as they entered.

"What is going on here," they gasped as they looked around. When we told them we were celebrating the end of their chemotherapy sessions, the room was filled with laughter as they looked around in disbelief. We opened that evening with a rousing chorus of, "Count your Blessings," looking at each other as we sang. Each member is a blessing, and our friendships are a gift. As we studied God's Word that night, each verse, each comment was precious.



Carol Hensrud shared Isaiah 43:2 with us, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."

"Ladies," she said, "notice that it says, 'when you pass through the waters, not, 'if.' We have all been through hard times, be it chemo, the loss of a loved one, a job, trouble at home. But God is here with us, even in the hard times."

We nodded our heads in agreement. We have all been through hard times, and God has been with us. We closed with Romans 15:13, a benediction and prayer: "May the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him."

Hylden, a member of Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D., is the first vice president of the WMF.

### **Group from Living Hope Church travels to Haiti**

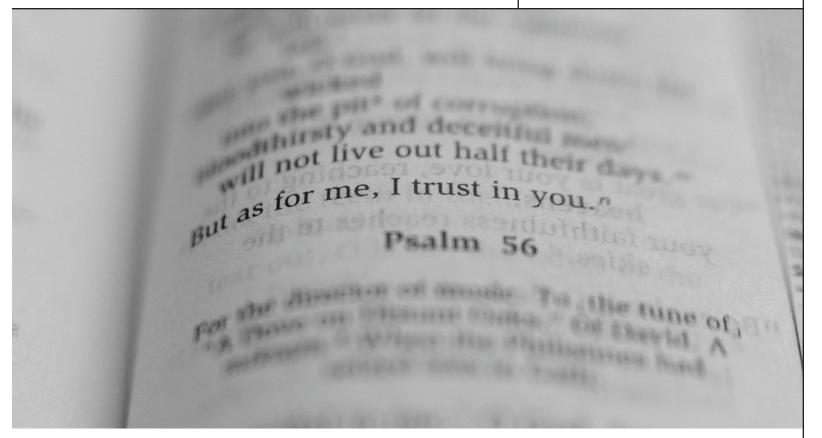








A team of 14 from Living Hope Church (St. Michael, Minn.) spent a week in Haiti partnering with Praying Pelican Missions. The team assisted with building a foundation for a future bakery in the mornings, provided afternoon kid's ministry to community children, and led a Bible study for community leaders in the evenings. TOP: Pastor Jason Holt, Joey Halvorson and Caleb Holt help dig a foundation. MIDDLE LEFT: Katy Dahl spends time with children. BELOW LEFT: Naomi Halvorson and Ralph Grambusch work on the bakery foundation. ABOVE: Drew Grambusch holds a child during the children's ministry. (Photos courtesy of Alex Maldonado.)



### When the future isn't clear

BY PASTOR ANDY AND MONICA COYLE

he back-to-school season has arrived again. In Ukraine as well as in the United States, students and teachers are beginning a new year of education. As we look to the year ahead at the International Bible School—Petrodolina (IBS), the anticipation leads us in a new sense of dependency on the Lord for His provision and direction in this work.

In the school's first two years, the uncertainties and unknowns looked a bit different than they do now. Yet unknowns and uncertainties are realities that drive us to the Lord, who knows all things.

Throughout the past year, the political and economic crisis in Ukraine has brought very difficult times for the Ukrainian people. The conflict has strained and broken many relationships on a variety of levels throughout the region, including the international partnerships of our Bible school.

Biblical education and training is a crucial need not only in Ukraine, but in the surrounding regions of Eastern Europe and Russia. IBS began with the goal of providing solid, biblical education and practical ministry training for young leaders. One foundational part of the vision of IBS was to be an international school, meeting the needs of neighboring Russian-speaking countries. With the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, students outside of Ukraine most likely will not be coming to Ukraine. This is a

big challenge for IBS, as the Ukrainian Church itself is very small. The school board, faculty, and church are presently in discussions about potential changes to the program in order to attract more students from within Ukraine.

Recently we were meeting with a ministry advisor and school board member regarding potential future plans for this ministry as a response to the current challenges. Comparing "what could be" and "what is" can be discouraging when we consider our own limitations and our fleshly nature. The plan vs. the reality is often very different. Yet as our friend pointed out, it is a good reminder of how God deals with us. The apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4-5). God takes broken things and makes them whole, redeeming everything according to His perfect plan.

We don't know the future. But we do know that He is in control. We know that He does all things well, and that He makes broken things beautiful. And we know that He is faithful. "Faithful is He who called you, and He will also bring it to pass" (I Thessalonians 5:24).

The Coyles are AFLC Missionaries on loan to East European Missions Network, serving near Odessa, Ukraine.

## Grafton church hosts retreat in Kalispell

Thirty-six members and friends of Bethel Free Lutheran Church, Grafton, N.D., traveled to Kalispell, Mont., near Glacier National Park for a three-day revival conference in the mountains. The purpose of this trip was to get away from the daily distractions at home and to focus on seeking God in prayer, Bible study, and worship. Three pastors spoke to the group on revival: its definition, history, the role of prayer in revival, and our need for spiritual revival in our daily lives. The mornings were spent in Bible study, the afternoons were free to enjoy the beauty of Montana, and the evenings featured a lively worship service in a tent. Those who attended deepened their fel-

lowship with one another and enjoyed getting to know members of the two churches who hosted the event, Faith Free Lutheran



in Kalispell and Stillwater Free Lutheran in rural Kalispell. Most importantly, all who attended grew closer to Jesus Christ.

### Seminary hosts the 2014 Summer Institute of Theology



A group of students convened Aug. 4-8 on the campus of the Association Free Lutheran Congregation Schools, Plymouth, Minn., to attend the Free Lutheran Seminary's Summer Institute of Theology. Courses offered included "Studies in Ephesians," by Pastor Jerry Moan, "The Doctrine of God," by Pastor Steve Mundfrom, "Highlights in American Lutheran History," by Pastor Craig Jennings, "Ministerial Acts," by Pastor Robert Lee, and "Creation and Science," by Dr. Robert Kohl.

# Identity is indispensable

BY PASTOR ERIC RASMUSSEN

had the privilege of hearing Dr. Chap Clark speak for about six hours recently at youth worker continuing education seminar. Dr. Clark is an author and expert on youth culture and youth ministry. He is most famous recently for co-authoring a book called Sticky Faith with Kara Powell.

During the seminar Dr. Clark spoke on the need for autonomy, identity, and belonging as children transition through adolescence to adulthood.

Autonomy means independence and when applied to formational experiences, it deals with how people use power and talents. Autonomy asks, "Do I matter?"

Identity applies to the unique and distinctive aspects of individuals. Identity asks, "Who am I?"

The third aspect, belonging, deals with how individuals are cared for and received. It asks, "Who needs me?"

Perhaps those of you involved directly in the lives of teens have seen them process through these questions as they mature.

As the 2015 FLY Committee prayed and thought about potential themes, "Identity" quickly came to front. It didn't seem like a particularly strong word to me at first, but we were convinced that it was relevant. In the weeks and months after we centered on this theme, the Holy Spirit has used several instances—similar to having heard what Dr. Clark taught—to confirm the importance and validity of "Identity" as our theme for FLY 2015.

What identifies you? Is it your profession? A pastime or hobby? An accomplishment? A relationship? Teens are searching for their own identity. Some find their identity in academic achievement, others in athletics, music, or other extra-curricular activities. Some build their status on relationships or in something like being a class clown. Still worse, some find their identity in sinfulness: trouble-making, stealing, vandalism, or sexual activity.

Whatever they land on, what happens when they can't live up to their self-made identity? What happens when they get low grades, are injured, or get dumped? What happens if they are expelled from school, arrested, or become pregnant? Their iden-



tity is ruined. Their structure crumbles. Most of them eventually adapt; some give up.

Our society encourages teens to think of identity as something in the future—"I want to be ..." Culturally this is normal and a part of becoming an adult. Biblically, though, our identity is already accomplished. It is not a future event. It will not crumble or fail. It has been declared in the Word of God.

God's Word declares that we are created in God's image, that we are known by Him, and that we are loved by Him. Despite our status as sinful, former enemies of God, we have been saved, bought, redeemed, reborn, justified, and reconciled. We are chosen to be a part of God's family through adoption and are His own possession. We have a relationship by faith with the almighty God who guarantees our inheritance of eternal life in the work of Jesus Christ and by the seal of the Holy Spirit. That's the identity of every Christian from baptism through childhood, and through the often-painful teen years to adulthood.

It is the goal of the 2015 FLY Convention to teach these truths to our teens. God will work in the lives of those who attend. Will you send your teens and support your youth as they desire to join us in Colorado? Will you help them find their identity in Christ?

Rasmussen, who serves Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn., is the president of the 2015 FLY Committee.

### **AFLC memorials: July**

#### **AFLBS**

Roger Peterson
Donna Jacobson (4)
Randy Strand
Ruth Claus
Ingrid Wasser (4)
John R. Nelson
Wanda Milton Biesheuvel
David Carr
Juanita Nolz
Grace Claus

#### **AFLTS**

Richard Rolsma Howard Hefta Kenneth Simmons Walter and Myrtle Stutrud Pastor John Mundfrom Ruth Njaa

### **Ambassador Institute**Donna Jacobson

#### **Evangelism**

John Nelson Loran Johnson

### **General Fund**

Pastor John Strand

#### **Home Missions**

Donna Jacobson Kenneth Nash

#### **Parish Education**

Donna Jacobson Pastor John Mundfrom

#### **World Missions**

Donna Jacobson (2) Betty Johnson

... in honor of

#### **AFLBS**

Josiah Nelson

### Men's hunting, fishing retreat

AFLC President Lyndon Korhonen will host a men's retreat Sept. 25-29 at Wilderness Bible Camp located near Lake Park, Minn. Enjoy bow hunting and fishing on the 78-acre property. There is excellent fishing on Middle Cormorant Lake and others. Nine dorm rooms are available, and meals will be prepared in the kitchen facilities either individually or corporately. Pastor Korhonen will have portable stands up and ready for those who arrive on Friday night. Come for a day or the whole time. The camp (12220 County Road 5, Lake Park, MN) is about 11 miles south of Lake Park on the West side of County Road 5. To participate or for more information, call Korhonen at (763) 233-1473. Camper hookups are also available.

### **Memorial service for Johanson**

Pastor John Wesley Johanson died July 15. Born July 20, 1940, in Passaic, N.J., he grew up near New York City. After graduating from college, he married Lynn Noble.

He was called to the ministry while serving in the U.S. Army. He graduated from the Lutheran Brethren seminary and served AFLC churches in Winger, Minn., and Pukwana, S.D. After retiring, he volunteered with Gideon's International at Canyon County Detention Center, Nampa, Idaho. He was also a volunteer chaplain at West Valley Medical Center, Caldwell, Idaho, and volunteered at Celebrate Recovery ministry at First Church of the Nazarene, Nampa.

Surviving are his wife, four sons, David (Sheree) Johanson, Peter (Tracie) Johanson, Mark (Brandi) Johanson, and Jonathan (Kelly) Johanson; and five grandchildren

A memorial service was held on July 20 at First Church of the Nazarene, Nampa, Idaho. Memorials may be given to the Gideons and/or Celebrate Recovery.



Promotional packets for FLY 2015 were assembled and mailed out to AFLC congregations. Look for your packet and plan to attend June 29-July 3, 2015.

### **People and places**

**Josh and Ruthie Wagner**, AFLC missionaries on loan to Lutheran Bible Translators, have been evacuated from Sierra Leone in the midst of an outbreak of the Ebola virus in West Africa. The Wagners will continue to work with the Themne translation team as they wait for the epidemic to subside.

**Pastor Charles Knapp**, recently added to the AFLC Fellowship Roster, has accepted a call to serve Our Savior's Free Lutheran, Mason, Wis.

**Pastor Joshua Skogerboe** was installed Aug. 3 at St. Olaf Free Lutheran, Montgomery, Ill., with AFLC President Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating.

**Pastor Karnig Kazanjian** was installed Aug. 17 at Zion Lutheran, Silverhill, Ala., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating.

**Pastor Lee Kuhns** was ordained and installed Aug. 24 at Faith Lutheran, El Campo, Texas, with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating.

AFLC World Missions Director **Pastor Del and Karen Palmer**, World Missions Board member **Pastor Kent Sperry**, Northwood, N.D., videographer **Andrew Abel** and Journey Missions Department Head **Jon Nelson** traveled to visit AFLC World Missions work in Jinja, Uganda, Aug. 11-18. The group also traveled to visit mission work in India Aug. 18-27, and was joined by World Missions Board member **Glenn and Marjorie Espe**, Thief River Falls, Minn., and **Heidi Nelson**, Golden Valley, Minn.

### AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-July 31, 2014

FUND			
General Fund	\$27,834	\$194,513	\$200,395
Evangelism	9,578	89,315	80,741
Youth Ministries	6,402	72,455	61,675
Parish Education	10,567	72,106	71,174
Seminary	20,942	179,176	172,489
Bible School	58,829	300,501	317,159
Home Missions	30,150	250,219	261,313
World Missions	32,144	292,707	235,974
Personal Support	41,439	252,653	259,110
TOTALS	\$237,885	\$1,703,645	\$1,660,031

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

### How firm a foundation?

t sounds like good news to hear that probably most contemporary teenagers believe in a God who created and orders the world, and who watches over human life on earth. They believe in heaven, and also that God wants people to be good and fair to each other.

Before we get our hopes up and put too positive a spin on it, the same findings of the National Study of Youth and Religion show that youth believe the



Pastor Robert Lee

central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself, and, if you're good, you will go to heaven when you die. The god in whom they believe does not need to be particularly involved

in one's life except when needed to solve problems.

What is this strange religion? It is certainly not the faith of our fathers, is it? And it certainly is not a very firm foundation on which to build one's spiritual life. Some writers label it "moralistic therapeutic deism" (MTD), a term introduced in a book entitled Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers (2005). The authors believe that a significant part of Christianity in the United States, not limited to our youth, is actually only faintly Christian in any sense that is seriously connected to the actual historical Christian faith.

One might wonder, at first glance, if it is the instructional process in congregations that is basically at fault. Yes, this may well be a serious problem. But another writer, in a more recent book entitled Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church (Oxford University Press, 2010), puts an almost frightening twist on the topic by suggesting that congregations are doing a

great job teaching teens what we actually believe: "that Christianity is not a big deal, that God requires little, and the church is a helpful social institution filled with nice people ..."

One should hesitate to come to our own defense too quickly without pondering the charge carefully. No, we certainly do not mean to teach moralistic therapeutic deism, but it may be the message we are conveying—and perhaps, tragically, the life we are living.

Consider a few examples: A Bible story told to children in such a way that the point of the lesson seems to be that God is pleased when we are good boys and girls and do what is right; or a lesson to teens on discipleship that is only motivated by obedience; or a sermon that addresses the issues of Christian

living without ever really answering the question that every hearer needs to ask:

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ. pastors and lay people, we have been "entrusted with the gospel" (I Thessalonians 2:4), and this gospel is not a long list of things to do that will please God and make this world a better place. The gospel is the story of what God has done in Jesus Christ, what we could never do ourselves. God had mercy on us, dead in a state of sinfulness consisting of what we have done—and even worse, of what we really are. God loved us so much that He sent His only begotten Son to pay the price that we could not pay, the blood-ransom, through His atoning death on the cross. "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ

died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6).

Religion says, "Do!" The gospel says, "Done!"

What is the answer then to the "why" question that every Christian needs to ask, in a church world where we are in danger of sinking in a sea of moralistic lessons and legalistic commands? The answer is the gospel, the good news of what God has done in Christ for you and me. Lessons that seek to inspire good behavior, minus

... we have been "entrusted with the gospel," and this gospel is not a long list of things to do that will please God and make this world a better place.

> the cross of Christ, may be simple moralism. Discipleship instruction that takes Christ and the cross for granted may be religious legalism.

"For Christ's love compels us" (II Corinthians 5:14). The law shows us our sins and how God wants to be served. The gospel offers forgiveness to the sinner, both motivating and empowering a disciple of Jesus Christ to live for Him ... yet never merely a motivation to an end, but the end itself. This we seek to teach and live, hoping by God's grace to pass on this precious heritage to a new generation. The hymn writer said it well: "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word."

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

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

### something to share

### More of You, less of me

BY JULIE TWEDT

t could be that I'm just tired of finding piles of stuff every time I turn around, but it's more likely that the Lord has been softening my heart to love Him more than the material things of this world. Love material things more than Him? How did that sneak up on me?

It almost sounds ridiculous when I write it out, but when I look back at the different seasons of my life, not even very long ago, I was downright consumed by the search for the perfect *this* or *that* to make a collection or room in the house complete. The past two decades were like being caught up in a whirlwind. After getting married, starting a family, and turning our house into our home, I realize that way too much of my time and effort have been focused on things of no eternal value. When material things get so important, it's time to re-evaluate priorities.

John 3:30 says, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

It's as simple as that. There needs to be less of me. Less of my selfish desires and more serving others. More of a desire to see His kingdom come on earth and less of a desire to build my own kingdom here. This world would like us to try and keep up with all the new shades of green. But don't be fooled: following the trends of this world will lead to empty discontent season after season.

I can't say that I've achieved the status of minimalist yet, but

it sure sounds like a lovely goal. There's no doubt we would get by just fine with less. We would most likely get by better with less. Sometimes I wish I had been born in a different era, maybe back in my grandparent's generation, when people got by with less. Well, God didn't think so.

Acts 13:36 says, "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers, and underwent decay." God put me on the time line here and now. Each of us has been put on this earth at the time God chose for us. We were born into families, surrounded by people, and raised in a particular geographical location, on purpose. Being so caught up in looking for the next best thing this world has to offer only muddles our ability to focus on eternity.

Lord, please open my eyes to those who need more of You. I need Your wisdom to guide me every day and keep me focused on eternity instead of the temporary things of this world. Please give me the strength and courage to be Your hands and feet here and now, and show me who could actually use the stuff from my piles. More of You, less of me.

Twedt is a member of Valley Free Lutheran, Portland, N.D.