

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

SEPTEMBER 2015

[IDENTITY]

EPHESIANS 1:3-14



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

SEPTEMBER 2015
VOL. 53 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.
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SUBSCRIPTION CHANGES AND INFORMATION

3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Plymouth, MN 55441.
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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

\$19 a year, Group, 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.

ENCOURAGING WORD

GOD HEARS YOUR PRAYER

BY DORIS STENSLAND

*God bends His ear to the earth every day,
listening for His children to pray.
He says, "To take time for Me, that is your
choice,
but I long each day just to hear your
voice.
I delight to have this visit with you.
I want to hear if my blessings got
through."
Think about what a privilege we're given
... to come into God's very Presence in
heaven.
We're invited, no traffic problems getting
there;
always a green light when we come in
prayer.*

Jesus, by His death, made it possible for us to come to our Heavenly Father as freely and easily as we pick up the phone and call our earthly parents. We are invited to "Come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

God wants to hear our voices in prayer, but there was one occasion when God heard a *voice-less* prayer. It happened back in Old Testament times. There was a woman named Hannah. She was an unhappy woman. She was childless, and her husband's other wife would provoke her

until she wept. One year when the family went to Shiloh to worship, she was overcome with bitterness of soul. Eli, the priest, watched her as she was weeping and praying. He observed that her lips were moving, but her voice could not be heard, and he supposed that she was drunk. "No," she said, "I have been praying here out of my anguish and grief." In her praying she made a vow to God, that if the Lord would give her a son, she would give the son back to the Lord. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving, but her voice could not be heard.

God remembered Hannah and her voice-less prayer, and He answered her prayer. God soon gave her a son. Now her life was filled with joy. She named the baby Samuel, saying, "because I asked the Lord for him." Hannah kept her vow and gave her little boy back to the Lord, and then sang a song of praise and thanksgiving.

God hears our *voices* when we pray. He also hears our *voice-less* prayers and our *whispered* prayers. He even hears our prayers when they are still only *thoughts*. "Before they call I will answer them and while they are still speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24).

May our prayers bring joy to the heart of God today.

"In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice. In the morning I lay my requests before You, and wait in expectation" (Psalm 5:3).

Stensland is a charter member of Redeemer Free Lutheran, Canton, S.D.

Eternal life is the most fundamental, foundational, the most important inheritance that we have received, are receiving, and will receive—because we haven't received it in full quite yet.

—Pastor Matthew Ballmann, Sioux Falls, S.D.

In a thematic way, we have heard again and again and again that our identity is not something that we have to find ... It's not something we create. Identity is something that is conveyed. It is given to us.

—Pastor Nathan Hoff, San Pedro, Calif.

There is a hero who can pass through the flaming sword of God's justice, and Jesus is that hero.

—Pastor Mark Molstre, Lake Stevens, Wash.

I don't know you. I don't know your story. But I do know you have one, and I know who the Author is.

—Jen Erickson, Minneapolis, Minn.

God spoke to me in many ways this week. The first is that my identity is in Him. Second, that I can't expect to have an ordered life if I live out of order. So I need to make time daily to be in God's Word in order to see any change in my life. Ultimately I learned to give God my pencil and let God write my story.

—Kellie Anderson, Dalton, Minn.

God determines value. He's saying you are valuable!

—Pastor Tim Johnson, Pipestone, Minn.



[IDENTITY]

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

BY RUTH GUNDERSON

The room was quiet, save for a few murmurs. One chair squeaked as a teenager uncrossed his legs. And then there was the soft swoosh 37 pens make as they glide across skin. “Loved.” “Forgiven.” “Beloved.” “Blameless.” “Saved.” The words spread across the four fingers and one thumb belonging to a young girl. Her words echoed in scribbles across fingers and thumbs throughout the room.

Sometimes the words were supplemented with “cherished,” or “blessed,” or “holy,” or “chosen.” Friends bent over hands, inspecting the work. The soft murmurs grew to the low roar of chatter as the elective leader guided the teenagers into a discussion on finding their identity in Christ.

Across the campus of the YMCA of the Rockies, in meeting rooms large and small, similar scenes were taking place as myriad elective leaders expanded on the camp theme for FLY 2015: Identity, taken from Ephesians 1:3-14.

Beginning on Monday afternoon, June 29, more than 2,000 campers began arriving on the sprawling campus tucked into the eastern edge of Rocky Mountain National Park. After moving into their dorms, reconnecting with friends or making new ones, and grabbing supper, students began to dig into God’s Word during the opening service and message on Ephesians 1:3-4 taught

by Pastor Scott Stroud. Stroud set the foundation for the week of study on identity by describing three sources where identity is forged: through others, through self, and by God. Who we are, said Stroud, is the big question in life. If we are “in Christ,” as Ephesians 1:3 enjoins us, then we are blessed because Christ was cursed, we are chosen to be His, and we are holy and blameless because of Christ’s work on the cross. Stroud closed his message by giving students an opportunity to respond to the invitation to be “in Christ.”

NightLYF also kicked off on Monday evening, with Caesar Flickerman (played by Stephen Quanbeck) and Effie Trinket (played by Hannah Johnson) of Panam hosting the FLY Games, a spoof on *The Hunger Games*. They invited campers to walk with them on the Road of Transformation during the week as they hosted a series of games and challenges. Each evening,



Walk” video to a spoof on “Duck Dynasty,” the videos captured what was happening with students throughout the week.

The morning schedule was overhauled for FLY 2015, with several large group workshops replacing one elective hour each day. The workshops—on issues such as Identity and Faith (taught by Pastor Micah Hjermstad), Identity and Culture (taught by Pastor Jim Johnson), and Identity and Sexuality (taught by Pastor Eric and Wendy Westlake)—were meant to address key aspects on the theme of identity. Also offered was an adult and youth ministry track, which included two sessions by Dr. Walt Mueller, founder of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding, and two sessions by Dr. Jeff Berryhill on mental health issues.

Students were then given a total of more than 50 elective options to choose from during the 10 a.m. hour throughout the week. Subjects covered during this hour included vocation, gaming, relationships, prayer, adoption, confirmation, bullying, the Holy Spirit, money, girls-only talk and guys-only talk, race, and social media. The daily sessions, scattered around the campus, expanded on the theme of identity in more detail.

The 11 a.m. hour each day was dedicated to a Bible study called “Encounters with Christ,” focusing on Bible characters who found their identity in Christ. Meeting in two groups, Pastor Nathan Olson taught the junior high group in Reusch Auditorium while Pastor Paul Kneeland led his study for the senior high in the Longhouse.

With so much focus on the term *identity*, Pastor Jason Holt noted that as the week progressed, more and more teachers, speakers, and presenters began using a qualifying term for the theme, saying, “true identity.” Holt, who is the director of AFLC Youth Ministries, said, “It captured a sense of ownership, of all that Christ has done for us. ... They saw that God’s Word was reemphasizing what our true identity is.”

Pastor Tom Johnson affirmed the theme in his Tuesday evening message from Ephesians 1:5-6, focusing on the value Christ places on His adopted sons and daughters. “We have value because of who our Father is and what He has done,” said Johnson, who used the testimony of a young woman who was adopted to illustrate what it means to be chosen—predestined—by God. “God predetermined that anyone who is in Christ would be a part of His family,” said Johnson, who

“tributes” from various states competed in several challenges, including a pudding drop game, an epic game of rock, paper, scissors, and the human twister. In a music challenge, a group of girls competed against a group of boys to think of a song with a specific word in it. And each evening, the hosts often reminded everyone of their identity, which was found in their sense of style and engaging personalities: Effie, “a beauty a step ahead of her time,” and “the terrific” Caesar Flickerman. But as the week progressed, Effie began to question her true identity.

Correspondents Jeremy Langness and Joel Mattson hosted a series of videos throughout the week as they interviewed tributes for NightLYF. From asking students about their special talents—beat boxing, hacky sack, basketball, pole vaulting—to giving hashtags on their favorite part of FLY 2015, and from a takeoff on the viral “Neature



Videos from the FLY Convention can be found on the FLY website//

flyconvention.org

Content includes:

- Six evening sessions
- Five highlight videos
- Eleven NightLYF videos



FLY 2015 attendance

- Teens: 1,166
- Staff: 407
(Including 271 dorm room leaders)
- Children: 94
- Adults: 375
- Day/Evening pass: 16

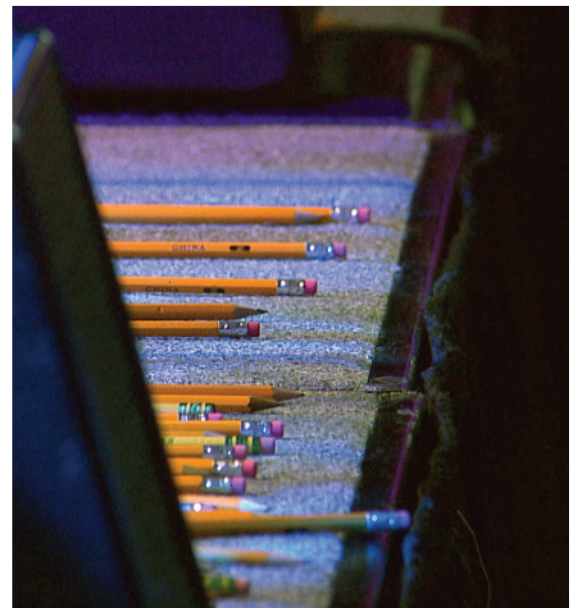
Total: 2,008



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ABOVE: A student takes notes during an evening service at FLY 2015.

TOP: Pastor Nathan Hoff uses a pencil in his message on the Holy Spirit. (Photo by Seth Skogerboe)
ABOVE: Pencils line the front of the stage as students chose to allow the Holy Spirit to author their lives.

challenged students to not cheapen that which Christ has given value. Students were given the opportunity to receive Jesus as their Savior.

The Skit Guys, Tommy Woodard and Eddie James, returned to FLY as special guests Tuesday evening. Using comedy and vivid storytelling, they drew on the theme of identity in Christ, wrapping up the night with a compelling challenge to give over every aspect of our lives to Christ.

Artist and speaker Eric Samuel Timm was also a special guest at FLY 2015 and was featured during Wednesday evening's NightLYF. A multimedia artist, Timm used humor and storytelling as he painted two pictures depicting the sacrifice that Christ made for all of mankind, and the love He offers to all who would choose to identify in Him. After Timm ended his session, he jumped off the stage and spent time talking to students.

Earlier during the evening, the men and women met in separate services as two different speakers delved into Ephesians 1:7-10. Jen Erickson began her message by sharing her life story of being a widow at 30 with three young sons. "These past three years I have learned anew what it means to be a daughter of the King and what it means to be beloved," said Erickson. Though she admitted to not knowing their stories, she told the girls that she does know the Author of their stories, and that He meant their stories to be ones of redemption. Her message focused on the means of identity in Christ—the blood of Christ—which makes possible forgiveness of sins as well as a full life in Christ.

Over in the Longhouse, Pastor Mark Molstre spoke to the men about the powerful love of Christ, and walked the group through how "being in Christ" works. He used the spinning earth as an example, stating that we are all in it, yet don't contribute to its motion. "Men, we are a part of Christ," said Molstre. "We are a part of something far bigger than ourselves ... we're beyond fitting into the world because we fit in Christ." Molstre talked about the powerful love of Christ, which makes that possible: a love that would take on the redemption of our lives by paying the ransom through His death on the cross. "There is a hero who can pass through the flaming sword of God's justice and Jesus is that hero," said Molstre.

Each afternoon campers were given many options to fill their time, from basketball, volleyball, and ultimate Frisbee competitions to a talent show, Minute to Win It games, service projects, and scavenger hunts. ARTiculate, a laid back, student-led forum offered art-related activities like poetry writing, chalk art, and photography. Students were also given several opportunities to participate in evangelistic outreach events, including a trip into Estes Park to talk with locals and tourists about Christ.

On Thursday, the afternoon schedule was cleared so that youth groups could plan events together. Some hiked in Rocky Mountain National Park, others participated in youth group games. In each instance, it was an important time for teens and counselors to touch base on the work God was doing in their lives. "There were a number of youth groups working on deep issues within their group," said Pastor Kevin Olson, who was a member of the Altar Call team. "The theme of identity hit deeply into the lives of students."

Pastor Matthew Ballmann dug into verses 11-12 of Ephesians 1 during the Thursday evening service. In his message, he touched on three areas of inheritance for those who are in Christ: eternal life, eternal worth, and eternal satisfaction. "We are given the most valuable, worthy thing of all, Jesus. That which I find in Christ Jesus breaks the chain and releases me ... now I can find my satisfaction in Him," said Ballmann. His message concluded with an invitation to become inheritors of all that Christ offers.

After a day of large-group workshops, electives, and Bible study, the final service was held on Friday evening. As campers entered the Longhouse, each one was given a pencil.

Pastor Nathan Hoff's message on Ephesians 1:13-14 brought a conclusion to the study on identity by describing the work of the Holy Spirit, who marks with a seal those who are in Christ. Hoff first gave a broad overview of the Holy Spirit's work throughout the Scriptures, beginning with the Spirit "hovering over the waters" at creation, through the giving of the Ten Commandments, to Passover and into the New Testament and Luke's many references to the Spirit in his Gospel, and finally, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Hoff then delved into Ephesians and what it meant to be sealed with the Holy Spirit. "Sealing means ownership," said Hoff. "Ownership means protection. ... I have been claimed. I have an owner. I am His."

Ownership, said Hoff, conveys authorship and the ability to write the story of the lives of those who are in Christ. "This story that God is telling is not just a private story. It's a cosmic story," said Hoff. "It is before the beginning and after the end."

During the final NightLYF, Effie Trinket revealed her decision to find her identity in Christ. Her new motto? "The girl on fire, for Christ!" Despite her decision, Caesar Flickerman was not ready for such a step, choosing instead the pomp, flare, excitement, and popularity that he was used to. "I just don't know anything else," said Caesar, but he did promise to talk to Effie about the many questions he had about a life in Christ.

Effie's decision came after the closing of Hoff's message. In a poignant moment, he invited campers to allow the Holy Spirit to be the author

#

FLY 2017

- July 3-7
- Contract signed for nearly 200 more rooms.
- Room for an additional 400-700 attendees.



In this issue

Don't miss the AFLC Youth Ministries column (pg. 18). Pastor Jason Holt writes about FLY 2015 guest speaker Dr. Walt Mueller, who was featured in the adult and youth ministry track. Mueller is the founder of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding.

of their life stories. To symbolize the decision, he invited them to come forward and lay their pencils on stage.

With more than 2,000 people raising their voices in praise and worship of the Author, new sounds filled the Longhouse—the sounds of shuffling feet and pencils dropping. By the close of the service, the front of the stage was yellowed with pencils piled up on top of each other as student after student chose to find their identity in Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to author their life stories.

Gunderson, a member of Vision of Glory Free Lutheran, Plymouth, Minn., is the managing editor.

BY PASTOR JIM JOHNSON



What makes you into you?

That's what we were discussing at the

"Identity and Culture" workshop at the Free Lutheran Youth Convention. Over four days, we walked through the four chapters of II Timothy—and we discussed current youth culture princess Ariana Grande, a 22-year-old actor and singer who is switching things up.

Grande, who recently spent 34 continuous weeks in the top ten of the Billboard Hot 100, has earned approximately \$58 million in 2015. She grew up in Boca Raton, Fla., devoted to her church and identifying herself as a follower of Jesus Christ. But then the changes came. The new culture altered her identity. Her brother Frankie, 32, revealed he was a homosexual, and her church leaders criticized her favorite cartoon characters. That's when she knew she had to change.

"It was a rare moment for me," Grande told writer Lucy Mapstone. "I needed something else to believe in."

And with that, Grande started attending a Kabbalah worship center. The culture impacting the former child star is causing Grande to re-think her belief system. "Since then, my life has unfolded in a really beautiful way, and I think that it has a lot to do with the tools I've learned through Kabbalah ... You have the power to change your reality," said Grande, whose hit song, "My Everything,"

marked her evolution into a sensuous starlet.

"You have to numb your reactive state."

Usually, I have found, you have to get numb before you change your identity, morality, godly lifestyle, and biblical belief system. That's how it works. It's exactly what the Apostle Paul said would happen in II Timothy 4:3-4, "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."

Money, fame, and acclaim are alluring addictions, and once you get a strong taste for them, you tend to veer from your God and His unchanging ways. Ever since Grande's brother, Frankie, announced he was a homosexual, she has pulled away from her church family. She recently reacted to her church's biblical response toward her brother's sin. "He (the Pope) said SpongeBob SquarePants is gay and he's a sinner and should burn in hell, and Harry Potter was a sinner," Grande told the *Daily Mail*. "And I was, like, enough! First the gays and then SpongeBob and now Harry Potter. Get out of my house." In the last days, the Apostle Paul said in II Timothy 3:4, people will be "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." And so it goes with Ariana Grande.

As it was, Grande's former church leader, Pope Benedict at the time, did not second guess her favorite cartoon character. It was Dr. James Dobson who had his doubts about SpongeBob, not the pontiff. And to be fair, Pope Benedict did not say homosexuals will burn in hell. He does stand fast on the biblical principle that God's Word upholds the truth, and if the Bible says marriage is a life-long union between a man and a woman before God, then no cultural change or Supreme Court decision can change that.

But that doesn't change God's Word and His will. Still Grande isn't buying it. She wants a new identity, a new driving force, a new church, a new god. She let culture dictate her worldview, instead of allowing the Lord to be the Lord. Just like us sometimes.

Second Timothy 3:1-2 says, "But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy" (ESV).

The culture around us wants to make us

bend. God says, no, you don't have to live that way. Salvation brings stability. With Jesus you get a new identity. You receive the Holy Spirit and He changes you from timidity and conformity. You start to stand strong because Jesus is your rock and fortress. Second Timothy 1:1-2 says, "for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (ESV).

Martin Luther said that if your identity is not in Jesus Christ, you will likely find it to be molded by three powerful influences: the world, yourself, or the devil. During the youth convention, we opened up II Timothy and discussed those influences. What makes you into you? What significantly shapes the way you see yourself?





[IDENTITY] & CULTURE

Ariana Grande's ever-changing world is her biggest influence. In *Les Misérables*, Jean Valjean's influence was a battle between God, himself, and Inspector Javert, the rival who could not relate to the gospel but loved the law. For Riley, the Minnesota girl in Pixar's recently released animated film, *Inside Out*, it's the five primary human emotions that fight for control of her personality—joy, fear, anger, disgust, and sadness. Steve Rogers' identity was forever changed by technology: a Super-Soldier Serum and Vita-Ray treatment. Rogers became someone new: Captain America, the leader of the Avengers.

But God wants to remake you according to His power and wisdom, by His Son, Jesus Christ.

Would you let Him remake you? He will grant you a new name, a new righteousness, a new purpose, and a new future when you place your faith in Him. For that reason, Paul writes in II Timothy 2, you are God's "child," (vs. 1) you are "a good soldier," (vs. 3), you will "reign with Christ" (vs. 12), you are "approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed," (vs. 15), and you are "noble" (vs. 20). The Lord "knows who are His," says II Timothy 2:19, and therefore, you don't have to wonder if you matter, who you are, where you are going, or to whom you belong.

God makes you, saves you, and gives you an identity. He has the power to "change your reality." So no, child of God, you don't need something

else to believe in. You need to believe in the One who is something else. When sin and cultures clash with your world, your values, your family, and personal identity, don't ask God to get out of your house; ask Jesus to move in and rebuild your house.

He will not make you into you. He will make you into one of His.

Johnson serves Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Camarillo, Calif.



[IDENTITY]

& FAITH

BY ERIK NELSON



When I woke up on the morning of Monday, June 29, I thought I had my whole identity figured out. I was Erik Nelson, homecoming king, salutatorian, and yearbook editor. I was Erik

Nelson, scholars bowl captain, citizenship award winner and graduate of St. Francis Community High School. I was going to be Erik Nelson, Kansas State Wildcat and architecture student. I was vain and self-righteous. I considered my many scholarships to be the reward for being a good person. I believed I had achieved all these things on my own power. I went to church on Sunday and youth group on Wednesday, and I tried to be a nice person, but my faith didn't influence any other part of my life.

I knew that if I just survived through FLY, I would be off to Manhattan, Kan., in a month and a half. I would be free to follow my own impulses and do my own thing. I was already in contact with a couple of campus ministries, and I'd gone to one of their services while I was in the Little Apple to enroll for classes. I couldn't wait to escape from the boring, old-fashioned church that I had grown up in and join a "fun" church that would cater to me and my wishes.

But the faith that I had placed in myself and my own plans would be radically shaken during that week in Estes Park. The evening services challenged my views and made me rethink my plans. Friends and family members whom I ran

into all week asked me about my plans for the fall and some challenged me to reconsider my priorities. These little things—comments from my peers, short sentences I heard in the services, phrases from songs—all came together one night while I was eating alone in the cafeteria.

I couldn't find my friends and my phone was dead, so I couldn't text them or call them. I ended up sitting at a table alone in a corner of the cafeteria. Being alone with my thoughts, I was forced to be serious and consider all that I had heard. I asked myself, "What is the real reason you're going to K-State this fall? What happened to make you change your plans? You always planned to go to Bible school. When did that change?" I realized then that all my plans were completely based on me and what I wanted. I realized that I didn't want to give up my scholarships. I didn't want to put my full faith in Christ and go out beyond my comfort zone.

I remembered Pastor Scott Stroud took time out of his sermon to emphasize one sentence. He said, "The devil will use any means possible to kill you." I wondered, were my scholarships designed to destroy me? Was I putting my faith in money? I had a realization that I was on a path to destruction. It wasn't about where I went to college. I had no authentic faith in Christ, and this terrified me. That night I sought out Abbie Carlson, a good friend and great mentor, and I shared my struggles with her. I knew that I had to trust God's plan for me. I realized nothing in this world is worth



the infinite value of a relationship with Christ. I decided to put my whole life and future in God's hands and picked up an application to the Association Free Lutheran Bible School.

When I woke up on Saturday, July 4, 2015, Independence Day, I knew I had true freedom in Christ. I believe this is the path God wants me to take and I can't wait to see where He leads me.

Nelson is a member of Peace Lutheran, St. Francis, Kan.

[IDENTITY +] & RELATIONSHIPS

BY BROOKLYN KNUTSON



ell me a little bit about yourself. I dread this request. Where should I even begin? What do I consider my defining qualities? In all honesty, my mind draws a blank and that is why I dread

it. I could tell you my name or talk about what I do, or tell you where I was born, who my parents are or tell you all the good things about myself or all the bad ... but what is it that really defines my identity and who I am?

The phrase “put your best foot forward” illustrates the attempt of many when it comes to first impressions. No one starts out with the details of their tendency to lie or their struggles with vanity. We save the ugly and the rough edges for later on in the relationship. I try to hide my own faults until after a friendship has been established. Is this lying about my true identity?

My own insecurity tells me that I wouldn't have any friends if others knew my sinfulness. But in reality, we are all sinners and all of our relationships are affected by our sin—we are separated from God because of it. Thankfully, through the blood of Christ we are given a new identity (II Corinthians 5:17) and are brought back into fel-

lowship with Him. Our sin no longer defines us or separates us from Him (Romans 8:39).

Our sinfulness should also not separate us from fellowship with one another. We need to seek godly examples and encouragement in our walks of faith. One of Satan's greatest attacks is to isolate us. It's much easier to tear people down if they believe they are alone in their failure. But Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, “Two are better than one. They can help each other in everything they do. Suppose someone falls down. Then his friend can lift him up. But suppose the man who falls down doesn't have anyone to help him up. Then feel sorry for him!”

At the Free Lutheran Youth Convention, we focused on the theme of “Identity” and I learned that my sinfulness does not define me. Rather, I can take on the identity of Christ. Once we have confidence that we are adopted as children of God, we can commune with our brothers and sisters in Christ with no shame.

FLY opened my eyes to what my identity truly is. Throughout the week we had the opportunity to choose two sessions on various topics each morning. One particular session, presented by Owen Parsley, focused on having fun as a



Christian. What stood out to me was the emphasis he had on fellowship with others. Christians and non-Christians, people are called to be in fellowship with one another. That is where we find encouragement. Building on the overall theme of our identity being found in Christ, Owen talked about our individual traits and God's design for our unique personalities. God had a specific plan even for our friendships, said Owen, and what traits will complement those around us. How amazing it is that God even designed my personality to be used for His glory.



Within the Church we share a core belief in Christ, but God also pours out more blessing when He created us to bond over a shared sense of humor or an interest in similar activities. When I see like-minded people worshiping together, I see God caring for His children in a personal way. He provides for us in every way, and He knows that we, as humans, desire relationships.

We share a common identity with those within the Church, but what about those outside of it? How can we connect with them? I believe that is why God created us all with unique personalities. During high school I was involved in basketball and volleyball. While playing I found many chances to get to know players from other teams, and sharing a passion led to growing friendships. Having one thing in common opens the door to conversation, and it gives opportunity for the gospel to be shared. Having common

interests makes fellowship easy, but I admit there will be some people with whom I have nothing in common. This does not shut the door to ministry, but I see it as an opportunity for prayer. God created my personality for a reason, and I believe He can use it as He desires.

Even though we don't share the identity of Christ with unbelievers, that title still has power. The difference Christ makes in the lives of believers should be evident to those who need to know Him. At the FLY Convention I found myself overjoyed early in the week, thinking of myself as a daughter of the King. Doesn't that sound prestigious? It is. And it is great to have assurance of this title. But what struck me later on in the week was the effect that identity could have on those who are unsure of where they are with God—how intimidating that could be. If only everyone knew that through Christ this is available to all!

I left FLY with the realization that I need to proclaim my identity. I can't keep this hidden as a feel-good status for myself. I need to share my new identity so that others can have this assurance. If I ever get the chance to tell you a little bit about myself, it will include that I am saved by grace and kept by faith, a child of the King. And you can be, too.

Knutson is a senior at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, Plymouth, Minn.



[IDENTITY] & SEXUALITY

BY NATHAN HAUGEN

Imagine with me the Garden of Eden before the forbidden fruit was eaten and sin came into the world. Place yourself in the garden with Adam and Eve, naked and walking with God. Adam and Eve were totally known by God and felt no shame. Their identity was placed completely in their oneness with God. Their self-worth was an overflow of

being known by the Father. As such, all aspects of their lives, including sexuality, became a reflection of their relationship with God.

Western culture has tainted our understanding of biblical identity, especially when it comes to God's design regarding sexuality. The water has been muddied. As the Bride of Christ, we must filter out the lies and cling to the truth that brings life. That truth is that God has created us in His image—gender included.

Looking at gender from a biblical perspective can give us clarity. Gender, essentially, is the cumulative characteristics that make up who we are created to be, male and female, and how we act in relationship with our Creator.

Here is where mankind has confused one for the other. And it all started with the fall. Once

Adam and Eve had eaten from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, their eyes were opened and they saw their nakedness. Their first instinct was to cover up, their second was to hide from God. When God asked Adam what he was doing, Adam responded: "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself" (Genesis 3:10).

Immediately after the fall, Adam and Eve were disconnected from Love and, therefore, from their identity source. They started trying to fill the void by controlling means and broken ways of relating.

Even though it has been thousands of years since the fall, we, too, are trying to find what was lost in the Garden of Eden: our identity. One of the first to try was Jacob, who stole his brother



“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked and felt no shame” (Genesis 2:24-25).

that in changing his sex, he is complete. But he is aching, both by gender and sexuality, to be informed correctly.

If you want to be established on a firm foundation, you must have a biblical understanding of identity. Each of us has a spirit, soul, and body, as Paul pointed out in his blessing to the Thessalonian Church in his first letter to them. “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:23). This verse also emphasizes God’s desire to have perfect union with us.

Because of the world’s deceptive and confusing messages about gender, it is easy to see why people struggle with their identity. If we have no union with our Creator, then our gender and sexuality will not be informed correctly, and our passions will not be fully enabled. This will change and affect the way we think; and our emotions will be rooted in fear, pain, anxiety, isolation, etc. Our choices will reflect our inner turmoil, and the result is that our outward behavior will mirror that struggle.

But if we look through the biblical lens of identity, we can see that it is God who first informs us at the core of who we are, our spirit. From there, our true identity flows to our human bodies, including our sexuality. When we find our identity in the Lord, He informs our gender and calls it good. It is easy, then, to know without a shadow of a doubt that our sexuality is good in the sight of the Lord.

Let’s go back to the Garden of Eden once again. Imagine perfect union with the Father without sin. Jesus Christ came to break every chain of sin, and sexual confusion is just part of that chain. Christ can and will transform one’s identity and sexuality if that person is willing to

call sin, sin. If you are willing, allow the Lord to tear down the walls that you have built to protect yourself. He will heal the wounds of your heart. When the walls come down, Jesus will speak into the core of who you are. When you hear His words of truth, everything will change. The Lord desires to make each of us into a good gift, not only to our families, spouses, and children, but also to the lost, to testify that He can and will make all things new.

Identity must be understood by the beginning of the story, the Garden, and by the forever after, eternity with Him. We are created to live forever and to be known without shame. What a glorious day to look forward to, when the Father presents “the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27). Our Heavenly Father will present us to our Savior, Jesus Christ, as His bride to be fully one at last, the completion of the story He began in the Garden.

Haugen, a 2007 graduate of AFLBS, works with Outpost Ministries. He lives in Minneapolis, Minn.

Esau’s birthright and fooled his father in order to get a blessing (Genesis 25). Many people searching for their identity are not all that different from Jacob. They are willing to steal what is not theirs rather than looking to the Father for their true identity and being restored back to what was intended in the Garden of Eden before sin.

We have seen many famous people find their identity in their sexuality, but they have it backwards. They are building their life on sand. Men and women are not listening to the voice of the Lord, and in their brokenness have fallen to deception. Sadly, some have been duped into believing that their physical bodies define who they are—certainly not as God intended. Bruce Jenner, who now identifies as Caitlyn, is an example of one who is deceived by the world. Jenner believes





TOP CENTER: Pastor Mark Molstre taught on the FLY 2015 theme of Identity, taken from Ephesians 1. FAR LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM: Students met in the Longhouse each night for the evening service. Erik Samuel Timm (left) met with students following his presentation. The Skit Guys Tommy Woodard and Eddie James were also special guests this year. CENTER, CLOCKWISE: Students from Beltrami, Minn., wait for the large group picture. Students react to the comedy of the Skit Guys. Students participate in a pickup game of basketball. Effie and Caesar hosted the FLY Games. The volleyball tournament was held on Friday. ABOVE: Female students worship during the Wednesday service. The Ultimate Frisbee competition.



C

ulture is catechizing today's youth 24-7.

This statement was made by Walt

Mueller during an elective for parents, youth leaders, and pastors at the FLY Convention. Dr. Mueller is the president for the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding (CPYU). He has spent the better part of three decades watching youth culture morph and assisting the Body of Christ to discern biblical responses to these changes.

His statement was both a reminder and instruction for me. It was a reminder because we are called to catechize our youth. We seek in AFLC Youth Ministries to win youth to Jesus, to build them in God's Word, and by God's love, to equip them to live and to share their faith, and ultimately, to multiply maturing teen disciples of Jesus. But the question that arises is this one—whose catechism are we using?

The world presents its view. It baptizes our teens visually to what our lost world thinks are priorities. We present our view. It is our common effort to equip youth with truth, but it always comes through our limited understanding. It must continue to be the Word of God, the

WHOSE CATECHISM?

BY PASTOR JASON HOLT

primary means of grace, which provides the catechesis. We cannot take even our own explanations over the authority of the Holy Bible.

Scripture directs us to pass on the faith to the next generation. The Bible is full of passages like Psalm 78, which expresses the concern for those who follow after us to follow the Lord.

"He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God" (Psalm 78:5-7a).

This God-given activity is to be owned by the family of God (Jacob/Israel) and by the family (fathers). The pursuit is to have young people know the living God and set their hope in Him.

Dr. Mueller's comment was also instructional for me. We are called to be conversant with the culture of the next generation. Do we need

For more information and resources from the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding, visit cpyu.org.

to watch endless YouTube clips? No. Do we benefit from observing what is happening in the culture? Definitely.

Scripture speaks to this engaging approach. First Chronicles 12:32 explains that the men of Issachar had both an understanding of the times

and a response to God's truth, which led them "to know what Israel ought to do." The instruction here encourages us as Bible-believing Lutherans to engage the culture.

Everyone has a catechism. It may be their family heritage. It may be some favorite pastor's convictions. It too often is seen in the authority of one's own opinions. Which one will we listen to? May we listen to the inspired, inerrant Word of God and disciple the next generation to know Jesus and follow Him by His grace.

Holt, a member of Living Hope Church, St. Michael, Minn., is the director of AFLC Youth Ministries.

WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION



ELECTED LEADERS

Lynn Wellumson, Williston, N.D., was re-elected WMF president at the Annual Conference at Warm Beach, Wash. Her nomination questionnaire contained the following information:

“My parents brought me to Christ in baptism. They were faithful to nurture me in God’s Word at home and in our local congregation. I don’t recall a time when I wasn’t trusting in Jesus as my Savior and Lord.

“I have been a member of the AFLC since its inception in 1962. My home church had been a Lutheran Free Church and became a charter member of the AFLC.

“In my daily life as I face struggles at work and at home, God is helping me to learn to not trust in myself or to assert my will, but to look to Him for

strength and to truly pray, “Thy will be done.”

“I have served on the local WMF level as vice president and secretary. I was the national WMF treasurer from 2003 to 2008, District President of the Western ND/Eastern MT district from 2008 to 2012, and have served the last three years with fear and trembling as national president.

“The last three years have renewed my interest in and love for AFLC ministries. The board members and I strive to produce articles and Bible studies that are biblically solid. We work toward informing women about AFLC ministries so they can be excited about supporting them.”

During the conference, Barbara Strand, Abercrombie, N.D., was re-elected to the role of communication secretary.

Barbara accepted Jesus as her Savior as a high school student while attending Lake Geneva Bible Camp in Alexandria, Minn., and reaffirmed her commitment while attending AFLBS.

She has been a member of an AFLC church since age 9. She was confirmed and married at Zion Lutheran Church in Tioga, N.D. As a married couple, she and her husband had been members of St. Paul’s Free Lutheran Church, Fargo, N.D., until their move to Abercrombie, N.D., where they are members of Bethany Free

Lutheran Church. Barb is currently the secretary of her congregation and the church pianist. She has been involved in the Sunday school ministry at various levels throughout the years, and currently introduces the Sunday school students to the missionary family the church supports every month. Barb is currently secretary of her local WMF, and served at the district level years ago. She has served on the resolutions committee for the national WMF conference. She organizes quilting projects for her local WMF and works with women of all ages in their WMF projects.

Other board members include Esther Hylden, Park River, N.D., first vice president; Lori Willard, Everett, Wash., second vice president; JoyAnn Dahl, Plummer, Minn., recording secretary; and Deb Benson, Armour, S.D., treasurer. Dawn Johnson, Wilson, Wis., continues to serve as executive secretary.

We, as a board, are dependent on the local WMFs for your helpful insights and suggestions for ministry. While the board continues to make plans for future events, we humbly seek God’s plan first and foremost.

Pictured (from left) are Lynn Wellumson, Lori Willard, Esther Hylden and JoyAnn Dahl.



Landslides, mud, and pulling vehicles out of the mud have a way of building friendships among men like few other things. The Ecuadorian church that we work with here recognizes the fact that men are drawn to an adventure, and when Polivio plans the yearly church men's retreat, all the men know it will be an unforgettable adventure in a very remote location.

Like many churches, the Paz de Dios congregation struggles with maturing and keeping young men. It would be an estimate, but we see that more than 50 percent of the boys who grow up in the congregation are not actively involved by the time they graduate from college. It's very concerning and one of the reasons the Lord has called us to serve in this congregation.

With this background in mind, the men's retreat this year was focused on crossing the generational gap between the older and younger men. Fathers with sons 12 years and older were encouraged to bring their sons, and anyone who didn't have a son that age was encouraged to adopt a young man for the weekend.

This year's weekend retreat was planned on the edge of the Amazon jungle. All the rivers in Cuenca flow into the Amazon River. Unfortunately, there has been a lot of rain lately

THE CALL TO ACTION

BY JUSTO PILLMAN

and this has caused many landslides on the road to the jungle. We had to stop various times to assess the landslide situation and then we used the 4x4 vehicles to pull out/through the ones that had gotten stuck. When we finally made it to the jungle, everyone was muddy and sweaty but in high spirits and enjoying the fellowship.

Not surprisingly, the accommodations for the 40 men and sons were extremely rustic, but there was plenty of food to go around. During the two-day retreat we had hikes in the mud and rain, times to swim in the rivers and waterfalls, and also times of rich teaching.

In Ecuador religion has historically been something more for women. Women and children attend church and the men take little responsibility for raising the children and much less for spiritual things. The term that would often be used is that the man of the house is *en la calle* (in the street). We continue to see this tendency to more or less degrees in the Lutheran/Evangelical church today.

In Scripture we see many, many examples of men of action and men with a purpose in life. Paul challenged his young disciple, Timothy, to "fight the good fight of faith" (I Timothy 6:12) and also to "endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (II Timothy 2:3). The focus of the teaching of these men's retreats is for men (and specifically



young men) to respond to the call of Christ. To fight the good fight of faith. To be men of action. To be men with a purpose in life to proclaim the gospel and glorify the Lord. The call of Christ isn't simply one of sitting in the pew every Sunday. The call of Christ is one of action, one of adventure, one of taking up our cross and following Him. We hope and work and pray that the next generation of men will be equipped and challenged to join the greatest adventure of all, walking by faith with Jesus Christ throughout their lives.

Pillman is an AFLC missionary serving in Cuenca, Ecuador.



Ordinations



Edwards

Rob Edwards was ordained Aug. 9 at Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating. Edwards, who graduated from AFLTS in May, has accepted a call to serve Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Cokato, Minn. (Photo by Wayne Peterson)



Olson

Nathan Olson was ordained July 26 at Ruthfred Evangelical Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating. Olson, who graduated from AFLTS in May, has accepted a call to serve Gloria Dei Free Lutheran, St. Louis, Mo. Olson has also started studying for his PhD in systematic theology from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Pictured (from left) are Pastor Korhonen, Pastor Kevin Olson, Pastor Nathan Olson, Pastor Steve Carlson, and Pastor Adam Osier. (Submitted photo)

Pickerel Lake Bible Camp celebrates 75 years

By Liz McCarlson

This summer Pickerel Lake Lutheran Bible Camp (PLLBC), Pickerel Lake, S.D., celebrated its 75th anniversary. The public was invited to an anniversary dinner and worship service held on the first night of each camp week put on the PLLBC Association. During the worship services, Pastor Mike McCarlson of Tabor Lutheran, Webster, S.D., and PLLBCA president, shared a brief history of the camp and plans for future building and remodeling projects. Speakers were the evening speakers for the subsequent week of camp.

Camp for senior high students was held June 21-26, with Pastor Rich Merkouris, King of Glory NALC, Sioux Falls, S.D., as evening speaker, and Pastor Brian Ricke, Living Hope Free Lutheran, St. Michael, Minn., as morning speaker. Camp for junior high students was held July 26-31, with Pastor Jason Holt, director of AFLC Youth Ministries, as evening speaker, and Pastor Jason Gudim, Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis, Minn., as morning speaker.



If you would like more information on the history or current running of PLLBC, contact Mike McCarlson at mike.mccarlson@gmail.com. If you would like information about sending students to or volunteering for a week at PLLBC in 2016, contact Liz McCarlson at elizabeth.mccarlson@gmail.com.

McCarlson is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis, Minn.



Fosston church celebrates 50 years

Members of Calvary Free Lutheran, Fosston, Minn., celebrated the congregation's 50th anniversary with a special service on July 16. Pastor Robert Lee, who served the congregation at its beginning, was the featured speaker for the event. Pictured are the charter members of the congregation who attended the service. From left, they are David Schmidt, Steve Schmidt, Sarah (Schmidt) Gunning, David Landsverk, Arlene Schmidt, Mark Landsverk, and Mark Schmidt.



Durant church honors law enforcement

On May 31, members of Faith Lutheran, Durant, Okla., honored their local law enforcement with a special presentation during their worship service. The Durant Police Department as well as the Bryan County Sheriff's Department were each presented a plaque thanking them for their service to the community. In addition, the congregation pledged to uphold these two organizations in prayer each Sunday as they serve and protect the citizens of their community.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Elected to serve on the **FLY 2017 Committee** are Pastor Eric Rasmussen, president; Pastor Adam Osier, first vice president; Pastor Dan Hurner, second vice president; Rachael Ballmann, secretary; and Heidi Nelson, devotional life secretary.

Pastor Tom Olson was installed Aug. 2 at Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran, Lakeville, Minn., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating.

Daniel Hurner was ordained Aug. 2 at Maranatha Free Lutheran, Glyndon, Minn., with Pastor Terry Olson, AFLC assistant to the president, officiating.

George Winston, who graduated from the Free Lutheran Seminary in May, has accepted a call to serve Grace Free Lutheran, Bruce, S.D.

Pastor Thomas Richard Marcis Sr., 83, died June 15. Richard served Abiding Savior Lutheran, North Royalton, Ohio. He attended Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, graduating in 1956. He was ordained Aug. 5, 1956, and served LCMS congregations in Jamestown, N.Y.; North Royalton; and Farmington Hills, Mich. He also served many churches as interim pastor including Abiding Savior Lutheran. The service was held June 18 at Royal Redeemer Lutheran Church, North Royalton.

AFLC Schools calls systematics professor

Members of the AFLC Schools Board of Trustees announced that Pastor Steve Mundfrom has accepted their call to serve as professor of systematics beginning Jan. 1, 2016. Board members extended this call after consideration at their July meeting, and Mundfrom informed his congregations at Grace Free Lutheran (Valley City, N.D.) and Zion Free Lutheran (Valley City, N.D.) of his decision on Aug. 2.

Dr. Mark Olson, chief academic officer of the Free Lutheran Schools, notes Mundfrom's heart for people and the local congregation. "Pastor Steve has been appreciated by many for his love for pastoral ministry. He loves Jesus. He loves the people God has called him to minister to. And he loves the opportunities given him to clearly articulate biblical truth and Lutheran distinctives."

Steve Jankord, chair of the Board of Trustees agrees. "We believe God has gifted and called Steve to this position at this time. He has a heart for the congregation and a mind to teach systematically. Systematics is foundational to everything we teach at our seminary and thus we are excited Steve has responded positively to this call."

Mundfrom will serve as the primary instructor for systematic theology in both the Bible school and seminary. Systematic theology includes dogmatics (teaching Scripture by category/topic),

ethics, and apologetics (reasons and answers concerning the Christian faith).

Mundfrom has served in Valley City for seven years with his wife Joanne, and children Rebecca (21), Philip (19), Heidi (17), and Alison (15). Previously, he served for eight years at Calvary Free Lutheran in Arlington, S.D.; and before that 10 years at Bethany Free Lutheran, rural Sebeka, Minn. Mundfrom graduated from the Association Free Lutheran Bible School (AFLBS) in 1982, and from Moorhead State University in 1986 with a bachelor's degree. He completed his Graduate in Theology from AFLTS in 1990, receiving his Master's of Divinity degree upon completion of his thesis in 2000.

Founded in 1964 by the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (aflc.org), the AFLC Schools include a two-year, post-secondary program (aflbs.org) and a four-year pastoral training program at the Masters of Divinity level (aflts.org). The Free Lutheran Schools Corporation is a candidate member of the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS, tracs.org).



Pastor Steve Mundfrom

JUNE & JULY MEMORIALS

AFLBS

Ruth Claus (2)
Becky Valdez (2)
Larry Ackerson
Adam Bauer
Esther Larson (7)
Judy Strand
Theoline Gunderson
Larry Olson

AFLTS

Bill Richardson
Miriam Wellumson
Norman Tout (2)
Alice Einerson
Theoline Gunderson
Esther Larson (5)
Harriett Erickson
Larry Olson

Ambassador Instit.

Becky Valdez

General Fund

Pastor John Strand

Home Missions

Esther Larson

Parish Education

Esther Larson

WMF

Vernice Johnson
Alan Tvinnereim
Esther Larson (2)
Florence Pederson

World Missions

Esther Larson
Becky Valdez

Youth Ministries

Mike Smith

... in honor of

AFLBS

Barb Long
Katy Dahl

AFLTS

Pastor Wade Mobley

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-July 31, 2015

FUND	REC'D IN JULY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$36,685	\$208,981	\$194,513
Evangelism	13,804	86,564	89,315
Youth Ministries	12,836	67,537	72,455
Parish Education	9,202	71,688	72,106
Seminary	26,160	165,009	179,176
Bible School	44,146	295,185	300,501
Home Missions	34,243	249,750	250,219
World Missions	41,492	235,916	292,707
Personal Support	57,699	307,266	252,653
TOTALS	\$276,268	\$1,687,896	\$1,703,645

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

IDENTITY

The theme of the 2015 FLY (Free Lutheran Youth) Convention is a very relevant one in light of the rapid changes taking place in our world today. Who am I? What am I? To some of us, the answers to these simple questions may seem quite obvious, yet it would be a tragic mistake to ignore the identity challenges facing modern American youth. A popular talk-radio commentator spoke about this issue almost during the days of the convention, declaring that you need a clear identity



Pastor Robert Lee

to be a happy person. But the problem is that we live in a world where current trends seek to strip away identity ... religious, national, and even gender.

Tolerance is the watchword in religious matters, and this is certainly a commendable character quality for which all should strive. Yet today it seems to mean that genuine, solid religious convictions are bad, that there is no absolute truth. Many consider it to be intolerant and almost criminally judgmental to believe that any "people of faith" (or people of no faith) might be wrong, as long as they are sincere.

Patriotism also is under attack. In America, those of us who are older probably took for granted the pledge of allegiance in our classrooms, the singing of patriotic songs, and the proper respect shown to the national anthem. But today these symbols of loyalty to the nation are seriously challenged, even in the teaching of history. Our country was not and is not a perfect one, and national sins of the past, such as slavery and the treatment of Native Americans, should not be ignored. Yet surely with grateful hearts we can still sing, "God bless America, land that I love!" Can't we? Shouldn't we?

Several years ago a local politician campaigning for office was asked if there would be fair gender equity in his administration.

"Yes," he replied, "all thirteen genders will be represented." He wasn't elected, and many of us laughed at the bizarre notion that anyone might imagine that there are more than two genders. Yet today the media casually accepts a growing list of gender options (LGBTQQIAA), with some listings even putting a "+" on the end, which means that there might be more added later. Someone would probably have to be living on a desert island with no outside communication to have missed the recent news of a prominent male sports personality who decided to become a woman ... for, as one spokesperson of the so-called transgender movement declared, we are not born male or female; gender is assigned to us and can be changed.

Who am I? What am I? Thank God that He led the leadership of our AFLC youth ministry to address the issue of identity from a scriptural foundation. The FLY Convention continues to be the largest AFLC gathering, breaking records this year with more than 2,000 in attendance. A broad selection of workshops was offered. The Word of God was taught and preached, and our identity as broken sinners in need of salvation was made plain. Then the life-changing gospel good news was proclaimed, promising a new identity in Jesus Christ as God's forgiven and treasured children.

Many of us prayed for the convention and are thanking God for His answers. Now let us continue in prayer for those who were there, as well as for all youths, that their identity in Christ might equip them to face the challenges without and within that the devil, the world, and our own flesh will send.

ANNIVERSARIES

Late July the 50th anniversary of Calvary Free Lutheran Church, Fosston, Minn., was observed. The official organization took place during the summer of 1965, while I was there as a student pastor, and only a few of the original core are left, most of whom were children 50 years ago. Calvary is one of the congregations that emerged from the merger struggles during the early years of the AFLC, and it was not easy for a little flock in a small town with

Thank God that He led the leadership of our AFLC youth ministry to address the issue of identity from a scriptural foundation.

several churches to step out in faithfulness to their convictions. Family and friendships were strained, and even business relationships were sometimes hurt.

One of the impressions that I carried away from the celebration is that it may have been especially hard for the children. "Do you go to that underground church?" one of them said he was asked, as the congregation met in a basement for many years. But no regrets were expressed, either, and the faithfulness of the founders was honored with a recommitment to pass it on to new generations, confident in the lovingkindness and faithfulness of God (Psalm 100:5).

something to share

CALL AND RESPONSE

BY JOAN CULLER

Call and response is a preaching technique primarily associated with African-American and Pentecostal denominations. In this type of sermon, the pastor expects and receives words of agreement (“Amen”), and encouragement (“preach it brother”) as he speaks. A rhythm or cadence evolves as the sermon proceeds. It is an event in which the congregation not only receives God’s Word, they also participate in its proclamation.

Many of us Lutherans would be uncomfortable attending this type of worship service, finding it outside of our tradition and comfort zone. However, it occurred to me recently that we have our own version of call and response.

Here’s how my pastor-husband describes the Lutheran

service. We come into God’s presence with music and praise. Then we ask God to forgive us for our sins. God’s man announces that forgiveness and we give thanks. Then someone reads to us from God’s Holy Word, and when he or she is finished we give thanks. Then the man God has chosen to teach us says, “I will tell you more about God’s Word,” and we give thanks. Then we are invited to partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, and when we are finished, we give thanks. Finally, God’s man sends us back into the world strengthened to do God’s will and we say, “Amen” (let it be so)!

The word *liturgy* can be literally translated from Greek as “work of the people.” Work implies participation. The worship service, no less than everything else done in the parish, is not the sole responsibility of

the pastor. It is the work of the entire community. We are not meant to be passively entertained or instructed; we are to both receive and answer God’s Word and His call to us.

Too often we allow the liturgy to become rote, little more than a familiar habit. We enjoy singing hymns without thinking about the words, we fail to apply the words of Scripture to our own lives, and we zone out during the sermon, distracted by daily concerns. We allow worship to wash over us without sinking in. We don’t allow it in to change our thinking or motivate our lives.

Even if the call-and-response method is not our usual practice, thinking of worship this way may be a useful spiritual discipline. What if we entered each Sunday service with an expectation that God would be speaking to us, both

individually and corporately? What if we saw it as an opportunity to praise and thank God and listen for His instructions? What if we viewed the hymns, the readings, the sermon, and Holy Communion as an experience, chosen by God to shape us and others in our community? And what if we thought seriously about how we should respond to the merciful, loving Father who took such care to communicate with us?

Recently on vacation, we visited a Lutheran church which closed with this final bit of instruction: “The worship has ended, let the service begin.” This is truly call and response.

Culler is a member of St. Paul’s Evangelical Free Lutheran of Leitersburg, Md.