THE SEPTEMBER 2018 LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR





A LIFE WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL

BY CHRISTINA OSTHUS



life serving God wholeheartedly will be difficult at times. Hebrews 11:33-38 talks about servants of God in the past who "through faith conquered kingdoms, [...] were made strong

out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight." The text goes on to list the persecutions these people endured, and then says they were those "of whom the world was not worthy" (v. 38). I wonder about all the implications of that phrase. It implies that those mentioned in this chapter do not belong on earth, that its fallen condition is not good enough for them.

Psalm 107 talks about four groups of people. The first group, mentioned in verses 4-9, consists of those who "wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in ..." This passage parallels Hebrews 11:13-16, which speaks of those who "acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth," making it clear that they were "seeking a homeland," like Abraham, "a city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God" (v. 10). To remember that we are in a kind of exile from Heaven is crucial, as is remembering how short life is on this earth. This has to do with being "in the world and not of it," which comes from Jesus' last words to His followers before His crucifixion in John 15-17. To reiterate, if Christians are living life tied to the things, places, and even the people of this world (Luke 14:26), they are not true disciples.

Jesus talked a lot about the sacrifices incumbent on those who follow Him, and more than once He sounded as though He actually attempted to dissuade His followers (Luke 18:22, John 6:67, Mark 9:34). Paul wrote in Romans 12:1 that we are to sacrifice not only everything we have, but ourselves.

Before we get discouraged and guilt-ridden over all that we are not doing for God, He reminds us of our inborn weakness and His lavish grace. God reminds us that He has not forgotten our physical and moral weaknesses (Psalm 103:14), and He tells us what He requires of us. Requirements for salvation are utterly unattainable because of our sin nature, but His expectations of us as children are simple: to act justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8), to live a quiet life, to mind our own business, and to work with our hands (I Thessalonians 4:11-12).

So, are Christian those who are leading a pell-mell life sharing the gospel around the world and living in their cars, or are they living a quiet life at home in the suburbs raising children to fear God? Part of the answer is related to seasons of life, part of it to calling. However, even more paramount to the Christian life than the sacrifices and the mandates that have been shared is what Jesus affirms as the greatest commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" (Luke 10:27). Keeping this command foremost in our hearts will lead us to live a life worthy of being disciples until we reach our true home, as God promises us in Psalm 107: "He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in." That city, Heaven, is our inheritance granted to us by a loving Father.

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sound bites

Only about 20 percent of youth 18 years old and younger attend church today in our country. This tells us that there is a vast mission field among youth. —Pastor Joel Rolf, 1993

Remember to write a note of thanks—maybe this month—to the youth advisors, youth pastors, youth workers in your congregation.

—Pastor James L. Johnson, 1994

What we need are people who will face the issues with our youth, and in love teach them biblical skills they can use in their lives. They need people to show interest and to point them to Jesus!

—Pastor Dennis Gray, 1995

Join me in prayer that every young person in the AFLC would have a youth group to nurture their faith. Join me in making an intentional effort to reach out to our youth.

—Pastor Kevin Olson, 1996

We have an incredible message to share with the students of America: Jesus can rescue them from hell, and by His grace, provide them forgiveness, new life, and the promise of Heaven. We serve an amazing Savior!

—Pastor Jason Holt, 2005



he Sunday evening after a weekend youth retreat can be a time for hearing what is really going on in the lives of teenagers.

They are relaxed and open to conversation. The stress of the world can become more distant, so the comments can flow freely. This approach has aided me for many years of youth ministry until about five years ago when the sounds around the room changed. It was quiet, actually.

Allow me to explain. For many years, our congregation has joined in the Association Retreat Center winter retreats in Wisconsin. The getaway setting allows for middle school and high school students to hear from God's Word and to enjoy snow activities. As it turns out, the weekend has regularly fallen on the national American holiday known as the NFL Super Bowl. Having attended this retreat multiple times, the teens

have relished the opportunity to make the most of the weekend by watching the game together. It was a great way to cap off the weekend before heading into a new week.

In previous years, this environment was buzzing with voices. It was the place for jokes that only they would get, memories from the retreat, and comments on the commercials. But this particular time, none of those elements were present.

What happened instead? Silence.

Silence ... and staring at their cell phones. It was the first time I noticed this shift in today's teens. Their phones were their first focus, and any potential conversations took a backseat.

WHO IS IGEN?

Commonly referred to as iGen (as in iPhone) or GenZ (as in Generation Z), they are today's

BY JASON HOLT

WHAT MAKES THEM IGEN?

Within the discussion, three trends immediately stood out to me in reading Twenge's text and in working with teens through the generational shift.

First, they are in no hurry to grow up. Many factors indicate that this generation of adolescents are passive about passing into adulthood. For maturity benchmarks like driver's licenses, iGen is content to wait. Either childhood is too attractive or the world of "adulting" looks too risky.

Second, time spent on the internet. This one hardly can be surprising to us. With CNN reporting at the end of last year that the median age for a child to receive a smartphone (11) now falls significantly before children becoming teenagers (13), screen time has become their most popular pastime.

Third, in person interaction no longer. This characteristic may make us think twice. For decades the teen years have been synonymous with "hanging out" with friends. Do today's teens still value time with their friends? Yes, but a string of texts from a distance may be favored over getting together in person.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The gospel of Jesus Christ never changes. We can rejoice in the fact that our Savior King is the same yesterday, today, and forever. At the same time, we do well to be watchful of the cultural landscape, which is consistently shifting in our

media-driven world.

In Acts 17:16-31, Paul's interaction with the Athenians speaks to healthy ministry in these settings. The passage highlights how Paul examined the culture in Athens and then shared Iesus with its inhabitants. Paul noted their idols (v. 16), their religious nature (v. 22), and their specific idol dedicated to "an unknown god" (v. 23). This apostle of Christ identified the context in order to introduce the content of the gospel.

This summary speaks volumes to working with teenagers. We can be aware of their culture and benefit from Paul's attitude. The man who met the risen Savior King on the way to persecute Christians likely remembered where he had come from and where the Lord had brought him. As a result, he stuck with the Athenians. No matter how he felt about their trends, Paul strode into the Areopagus. Sharing Christ with them was worth it. Do we look at today's youth culture as an obstacle or an opportunity?

When we realize that iGen has some unique characteristics, then we are better prepared for building bridges for connection and delivering the gospel message for content. With grace for their tendency to not be "in a hurry to grow up," with mercy for their screen devotion, and with compassion for their preference of personal interaction, let us enter into the lives of iGen.

Holt, Living Hope Church, Rogers, Minn., is the director of AFLC Youth Ministries.

young people born between the late 1990s and approximately 2010. If you have not noticed, they are a markedly different breed than their predecessors.

Jean Twenge, the San Diego State University professor and researcher who coined the term "iGen," notes in her book by the same name that today's teenagers have at least 10 distinguishing marks from Millennials (also known as GenY). Dr. Twenge's investigation indicates a tangible cultural shift since then, and she points to the cell phone as the catalyst that began the change.

GROWING BANKS

BY ALEX MONSETH

remember the day clearly. The early morning nerves. The stern lady analyzing my every move.

The nearly disastrous parallel parking attempt. The flash of the camera. And finally, the pure bliss of freedom as I drove my dad's old car alone for the first time. Getting my driver's license was a day to remember. But for the new generation of youth, it seems to be less of a right of passage and more of something you eventually get around to.

A 2014 study by the University of Michigan showed that only half as many 16 year olds are getting a driver's license compared to youth in 1983 (Philly). This trend is just one of the numerous characteristics of iGen which point to a slower transition into adulthood than previous generations.

Like any generation, there are positives and negative attributes to iGen youth. It's easy to criticize their infatuation with technology or differing types of social interactions. However, casting common conversational buzzwords aside, it's important to focus rather on how we can reach youth in this generation with the gospel

of Jesus Christ. So what are the opportunities to show Jesus to these young people living in today's culture?

Youth today are much more risk averse and fear making mistakes. With an individualized culture and the intense academic pressures on young people today, it's understandable that they would feel such a pressure to succeed and validate the large amount of money and time poured into their future from an early age.

The gospel give us the opportunity to speak truth into their lives. God's Word shows them that because of His grace we can stand fully confident as children of God every morning, as His love for us remains constant despite our failures. Lamentations 3:22-23 says, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning, great is your faithfulness." This is the type of true unconditional love that only Jesus can provide. We need to remind iGen youth that they don't need to be perfect, and that failure shows us our need for Christ, where we find His righteousness for us complete.



Because iGen youth are slow to take full responsibility for things like driving, work, and school, they can also have a tendency to keep faith in their parent's hands. In I Thessalonians, Paul is thankful for the church's faith in Thessalonica because they accepted it not as the word of man, but as the Word of God. Because iGen youth typically feel the need to check all the boxes to meet perceived expectations, many of them attend church and youth group at the request of their parents, but their faith stops there. While this is nothing new from past generations, the need to challenge youth in issues of faith has grown increasingly important.

Christian rapper Andy

Mineo recently released an EP titled *I: The Arrow*. In the song "Clarity," he describes a season of doubt in his faith. A line of a verse says, "The opposite of faith ain't doubt," as he tries to show that through his season of doubt he grew closer to God as he wrestled with tough questions. While times of doubt are difficult, they often bring us closer to Jesus as we draw near to Him when we realize we don't have everything figured out. In church and youth groups, we can address current hot topic issues such as homosexuality, immigration, or politics, diving into what God's Word says about these things which can be huge spiritually for students.

Youth will undoubtedly and eventually wrestle with spiritual and social questions in their schools and colleges, where God's Word will likely be absent from the presented solution to this fallen world. It may be difficult to bring up issues such as these, but they need to be talked about in a place where the Word will be present. Searching through the Bible in Christian community, rather than just blindly believing what parents say, can help young people to make faith their own as they

learn to trust God in His Word.

We have the chance walk alongside iGen youth, showing them God's Word as they understand for themselves what God has done for them. And we can show them that God's grace through Jesus is greater than any of their failures or lofty future expectations. "This is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe" (I Timothy 4:10).

Monseth, a 2016 graduate of AFLBS, serves as youth director at Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Camarillo, Calif.

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ime flies when you're having fun!" "The older I get, the faster time flies!" "Where did the time go?" These are just a few phrases people use regarding the passing of time. Though accurate in the context in which they're used, they no longer adequately describe what we're seeing in today's fast-paced society. These days, time doesn't just fly by when we're having fun or as we grow older. It just simply flies! And if we don't make a conscious effort to manage it (and train our youth how to manage it), life itself can begin to feel frantic, for all ages.

When I was a youth back in the 1980s, I remember listening to the song, *Praise the Lord*, *He Never Changes*. Part of it went like this: "Life is moving faster than it ever has before. What tomorrow brings isn't certain anymore. So many paths from which to choose, don't know which way to run, 'cause every road leads to nowhere, every road except for one. Praise the Lord, He never changes, I come to Him, He's always there ... He's never any other way. And He'll be the same tomorrow as He was and is today."

Those lyrics were true back then—before every household had home computers and cellular devices—and they're still true today in this generation of the internet, social media, and hectic lifestyles. It's no wonder so many of today's youths struggle with making life decisions, taking risks, and transitioning into adulthood. Modern technology and the busyness of daily life have placed them at a disadvantage for developing healthy independence and confidence to face life as adults.

They are electronically plugged in (nearly) 24/7. They have the world at their feet, and this world can be a big, scary, fickle, unforgiving place. Furthermore, life keeps them so busy with school and activities that they miss out on learning how to work through challenges, disappointments, fears, and failures. There's either no time or there's another distraction. So instead of learning to deal with everyday issues, they learn to navigate around them or avoid them completely.

So how can we as parents, youth leaders, and congregations help guide them toward adulthood?

First, disciple them. Show them what it means to truly live within the security of a personal relationship with Christ (Romans 8:28-39). This involves more than just teaching Bible stories in Sunday school or providing youth camps/retreats and other Christian activities. Those are important and certainly beneficial in encouraging spiritual growth, but in a world that is becoming more and more

impersonal, adult leaders need to make a concentrated effort to be personal.

I've been privileged to organize and direct various youth activities in our church and I confess I've done it two ways. First, organize, provide the physical necessities, and then oversee as it basically runs itself. Second, organize, provide the physical necessities, and then get involved on a personal level. The second, though requiring more effort, is better. It's better because it bridges the gap between youths and adults. When we make the effort to be personal with them—showing interest in their lives, concern for their situations, joy in their victories—it trains them to be personal with others. And when we take time to pray with them simply and sincerely, it teaches them to be personal with Jesus, to see Him as their champion and as the one who bridged the gap between all of us and God the Father.

Next, be responsible shepherds (Acts 20:28). Strive to model healthy behavior regarding social media, cell phones, and time management. Adults often complain about how today's youths are so addicted to technology, how they're too busy and always plugged in to social media. It's true! Yet adults fall into those same tendencies-monitoring social media from personal devices, playing games on cell phones, texting anytime or anywhere, and being so busy that there's no time left to really connect with people. If we want to help our youths become competent, confident adults, we must humble ourselves, meet them where they're at (like Jesus does), and grow together.

There are no shortcuts, no secret formulas, just good old-fashioned time and effort. Unplug from technology and talk face to face. Encourage them to step out of their comfort zones and trust God for His best. Be actively supportive as they take those leaps of faith. Likewise, let us be willing to step out of our own comfort zones. Let them support us as we work through issues and put our trust in Jesus. Ask them to pray for us and with us. Keep it personal. Keep it real.

It seems that modern technology and the distractions of this world are here to stay. In light of that, now more than ever, let us encourage our youth—and remind ourselves—to focus on the only One who never changes, the only One who has it all under control. Let us place our confidence in Him, for in Him is where our true purpose lies (Philippians 1:6).

Haglin, a volunteer youth worker, is a member of Zoar Lutheran, Hampden, N.D.

REAL OR VIRTUAL

ext to no one is surprised to hear that my generation is rapidly changing, and still continues to evolve as we embrace technology's influence in our lives. Technology has shaped the way we think, learn, and communicate. What sets us apart from previous generations is our tendency to connect almost exclusively through virtual means. We are relying less and less on in-person interactions and more on electronic forms of communication. How, then, are we supposed to continue spreading the love of Jesus to our peers within the aptly named iGen?

As we continue to build relationships virtually, our impact for Christ is still evident in how we conduct ourselves and interact with our friends. Virtually or otherwise, we must remain equipped to spread Jesus' message of salvation to all of those we meet. I Peter 3:15 tells us to "be prepared" to answer those who ask for "the reason for the hope that you have." Therefore, as Christ's love for us translates into our love for others, do not be afraid to let the light of Jesus shine through you to your peers, no matter what form it may take.

In this day and age, many of our relationships are born and bred online. We are able to keep in contact with those we may have met only a handful of times, or maybe not at all. Especially as a missionary kid, I have grown so thankful for the ability to maintain communication with friends regardless of distance and time zones. It is exciting to see how God moves in their lives

as well as mine. I can credit loads of continued growth and spiritual encouragement within my friendships to electronic contact. The odds are that most of that growth never would have happened without those virtual means.

Face-to-face interaction has many benefits as well, to be sure. Generally, communication in-person is less filtered, less calculated, more real, and rawer—some pieces that I missed when having to stay in touch purely through text or video chats. However, my generation has learned to appreciate the benefits of virtual relationships, as well. Often times there is less pressure involved with a virtual interaction, resulting in unprecedented openness within a conversation. Regardless of whether a friendship is grown inperson or electronically, the building blocks of a solid relationship remain the same: Honesty, authenticity, shared interest, and care for one another. If the love of Christ is present in your in-



person interactions, then it should be present in your virtual communications, as well. Ephesians 5 says that we should be "imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love." The key is to be true to who we are, and ultimately who we are in Christ, because that is what is going to shine through regardless of how we form a connection.

Beyond our interactions with close friends, technology has opened the floodgates of communication to include even those we don't know personally. To go along with our improved methods of staying in touch, our spheres of influence are also expanding. Fortunately, it could not have come at a better time. Our peers are facing hugely increased rates of depression and suicide. We are the largest generation in the world, and most of us still find ourselves feeling hopelessly alone. People are hurting. Our friends are hurting. What better time to have the greatest ability to reach them? Our generation needs to

know that we are there for them just like Jesus is there for them and for us. More than that, He proved it 2,000 years ago on the cross so that we may "walk in the newness of life" (Romans 6:4) and become "children of the promise" (Galatians 4:28). In a generation of lost and hurting people, God's provided means of reaching them is quite literally at our fingertips. Somehow, even when face-to-face encouragement is not an option, God works through something as simple as a text message to help spread Christ's love and let someone know that they are not alone.

As relationships continue to slant more heavily toward the virtual side of things, it is important to remember that our identity in Christ does not change based on how we choose to connect. Sometimes there is no replacement for face-to-face conversation and growth, but encouragement, building-up, and reassurance are all possible regardless of our means of interaction. With that being said, forget about choosing *how* to be there for someone, just choose to be there. Finally, "over all these virtues put on love" (Colossians 3:14). Above all else, the light of Christ in our lives is evident through our genuine care for one another. I John 4:16 says, "Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." When we first shape our friendships around Christ-like love for our peers, our relationships will continue to grow, no matter what way we work to grow them.

Bierle, Plymouth, Minn., is a senior at AFLBS.



elonging is something that each one of us should be able to relate to on a personal

level. I assume that most people reading this article have already gone through the sometimes-gruesome process of navigating school complete with constantly fluctuating social groups, taboos, and expectations, changing responsibilities and relationships within the home, keeping up with the latest trends, and the onset of a changing

body size and smell thanks to puberty. Just typing that list reminds me of the exhausting reality that this particular stage of life holds for our students. Even with all of these issues, larger yet are the concerns and worries related to the idea of belonging.

In the psychology world, Abraham Maslow is credited with the construction of an idea called the hierarchy of needs. Basically, the idea is that human behavior is driven by certain needs met in a particular order. For example, the foundational categories are known as "basic needs" and include

two areas of physiological needs, such as food, rest, shelter, and water, as well as "safety needs" which build off of the previous foundation to include a safe environment, law, order, and so on. After these two basic needs, Maslow moved on to the psychological needs, the first of which was to belong and be loved. Now, I am not trying to encourage nor discourage the merits of Maslow's theory by giving this brief little psychology lesson, but merely wanted to use this information to communicate that the concept of belonging is something that even the secular world finds extremely important.

What is interesting to note, however, is that not only is the feeling of belonging a significant priority in the eyes of the secular world, it is also something that we are created to experience. We have been created with the purpose of belonging, and God has given us several institutions to which we are invited to belong.

The earliest institution to which we belong happens even before we enter this world on the day of our birth—the family. According to God's



ELCIO BELCIG

BY JORDAN LANGNESS

intended design, each person was made to start off life's journey by belonging to a permanent group of people. The interests may vary, but no matter the difference in age, gender, size, hobbies, or careers, the family is a unit to which you will always belong. There will be times of trials, disagreements, and even tragedies, but in the end, your family is meant to be a group to which each member belongs.

While this design of God's is great, we live in a broken world where His designs are not always met in reality. A wide range of possibilities may result with an orphaned or abandoned child; yet, even though these situations are tragic, God uses them for His glory by giving us the reality of adoption. Through this process, someone who was outside of the family is brought into the family as a full member, resulting in the restoration or creation of a permanent place of belonging. This picture of adoption has been given by God to illustrate the next and most significant aspect of belonging—the call to belong to Christ.

Ephesians 1:3-8a says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us."

As adopted children of God, we discover that we not only belong to Christ, but that we also belong to His body the Church, to His Kingdom, and to His work on this earth. In these things we find our true identity as God's children, our purpose in God's body, our hope in His Kingdom, and our mission in God's work.

In contrast, modern society has moved in a direction that has resulted in isolation and a

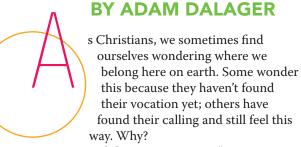
lack of meaningful personal connections. Thanks to technology, we have never been more connected, but at the same time alone and lonely. It is tough to truly belong when the extent of belonging is limited to text messages or social media connections. Today's youth are hungering for authentic reallife, face-to-face relationships, and the Church is poised to not just offer them belonging in an interpersonal relationship, but to extend to them the invitation to also belong to Christ.

Langness, who serves as treasurer on the AFLC Youth Ministries Board, is the youth pastor at Hope Free Evangelical Lutheran, Ishpeming, Mich.



FLY BEYOND

AFLC Youth Ministries hosted FLY Beyond July 16-20, an equipping and training camp for high school students. The theme this year aimed to show students why and how they "Belong" to Christ's Kingdom, His Church, and His work in this world.



Philippians 3:20 says, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a

Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." We feel out of place because we are. Our real home is in heaven. But even though this isn't where we ultimately belong, we still have a purpose here.

Jesus came to earth to call sinners to repentance, to seek and save the lost, and to do the Father's will. Are we supposed to do what Jesus did?

Our job here on earth is highlighted in the words of Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all

that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Imagine, the almighty God who created the

heavens and the earth, is inviting us to be part of His work. But what we need to remember is that we are called to be part of His work, not to do it ourselves. I Corinthians 3:7 says, "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."

How, then, do we carry out the Great Commission from Matthew's Gospel? We live our lives giving glory to God, helping and caring for others, and loving others because God first loved us. And as we are doing these things, the Holy Spirit works through us. The work we do here will change nothing in God's eyes. We are still sinners deserving eternal punishment. This is why God sent His Son to be our salvation and to teach us how to live rightly.

There must be a way we can repay God for this beautiful gift, right? No, there is absolutely nothing we can do by our works that will increase our favor with God. Which brings us back to Jesus, our Savior. Jesus came and died for us, not because we deserved it or could repay it. He died for us because He loves us.

We are part of God's plan of salvation. The place we belong is in heaven, but we aren't there yet. We go as the Great Commission tells us to, and the Holy Spirit works through us, influencing us and reaching out through us, saving others.

Dalager is a member of Westaker Free Lutheran, Newfolden, Minn.



BY KORTNEY VITERA

his was my second year attending FLY Beyond at the ARC. When I was first learned about the new ministry training fair introduced this year, I really didn't know what to expect of it. Though I was extremely excited about having something new at FLY Beyond, I had loads of questions, a few being, "What is it?" "What will I learn?" and, "In what ways is this going to impact me and my walk with Christ?"

During a good portion of the 26-hour drive to Wisconsin, my head continued to fill with questions not only about the ministry training fair, but about myself in general. "Who really am I?" "What am I supposed to be doing?" "What has the Lord really called me to be?" And the questions continued. Little did I know, soon all my questions were going to be answered.

The ministry training fair consisted of 12 discussion team trainings, which involved equipment and an exercise. There were two discussions each night (Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday). In total, everyone attended six discussion team trainings by the end of the week.

The trainings I specifically attended with my discussion group (in order) were: "Belonging to the local congregation," taught by Aaron Arneson, "Discovering spiritual gifts," taught by Pastor Jason Holt, "Framing a three-minute youth worship service devotional," by Adam McCarlson, "Extending spiritual leadership through discipleship," taught by Molly Barsness,

"Identifying when it is okay to say no," by Danny Wilhelm, and "Developing a 15-minute youth group Bible study," by Aaron Ocker.

Each and every one of the trainings spoke to me in many and various ways, and each and every one of them were very much unlike, though they all possessed one similar quality that

personally was my key takeaway—leadership. In one way or another, leading and leadership repeatedly stood out as a key aspect of ministry to which God is calling me. I had no concept of why until after camp when I was able to really pray and meditate on it all. God fully revealed to me that He has given me my own special gifts which should be used in leading, all for His glory and by His grace. I am a leader who is led by the



great leader of all. I thank God for the ways He has worked in me personally through the ministry training fair this year.

Vitera is a member of Faith Lutheran, El Campo, Texas.





Members of the team include (front from left) Jon, Heidi and Jeremiah Nelson, Eliza, Hannah, Bethany and Jon Lee; second row: Tammy Vukonich, Becky Kjeseth, Hannah Bottolfson, Janice Sigman, Brea Tallman, Luke Erickson, Carmen Mohl, Zoe Kraft, Sylvia Zeiszler, and Dalton Zeiszler. Third row: Lois Van Someren, Brittany Stewart, and Molly Stewart. Back row: Roger Van Someren, Nick Stewart, Josh Stewart, Marvin Sigman, Alex Woodworth and John Mohl.



Journey Missions team supports Brazil field

BY HEIDI NELSON

ebrief. It's one of my favorite words in our English language because it gives an excuse to hear and share from a deep place in our hearts. Every single day that God fills our lungs with breath, He also fills us with different experiences—some highs, some lows, and many just routine.

We don't often take the time to process the impact these experiences have on us, but often the processing is the most important part of the experience. A mentor once reminded me, "It doesn't matter how it happened, what matters is what you are going to do about it now. How are you going to respond?" Sometimes, God gives us opportunities to be interrupted from our regular routines in order to capture our hearts or redirect us. Then we process the pause.

On June 20, about 25 members of a Journey Missions team from North Dakota, Wisconsin, and Minnesota were given an interruption in their schedule, which they used to participate and process what it means to follow Jesus in another context. Our team was able to experience a large majority of the AFLC ministry throughout Brazil.

As I think through the highlights of this experience for our team, I'm reminded of our debrief time. As a team, we learned that God uses any and every age to serve in His kingdom. We realized the need to be more intentional about praying for our missionaries as we saw and experienced some daily challenges they face. God helped us overcome fears and challenged us to

return home with new vision for some areas of our lives. We learned how the love of Jesus transcends language and cultural barriers. As we were challenged by testimonies of new Brazilian friends along the way, our hearts were forced to pause and process changes God was calling us to make in our own lives.

We are so thankful for the opportunity to go on trips like this. We are thankful for all who made it possible through their prayers and support along the way. We are thankful for the divine appointments God set for us. We are thankful for the ways He opened our eyes and used our experiences to give us fresh vision back home. We are thankful for an interruption from our routines to pause. We are thankful for the deep things in our hearts that we are still processing. We are thankful that this opportunity was not just a onetime experience, but part of our ongoing journey. We are thankful for Jesus, for His relentless love and plan for each of us. We are thankful for the hope He has given to us that we can share with others.

We look forward to one day when we are in our eternal home and we are reunited with brothers and sisters, for we have left with them pieces of our hearts. We eagerly wait for that day when we see Jesus face to face. Until that day, we continue to process. We continue to journey.

Nelson is a member of Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis.



INTRODUCING TWO NEW WMF OFFICERS

wo women will take on new roles with the Women's Missionary Federation beginning this month. Lavonne

West, Columbia Falls, Mont., was voted into the president's position. And Deanna Larson, Ortonville, Minn., will take over as communication secretary.

The WMF thanks Lynn Wellumson, who served as president, and Barb Strand. who served as communication secretary, for these past six years of dedication in serving the national WMF. We are grateful and blessed by your willingness to serve.

Lavonne West, a member of Stillwater Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont., is the youngest of five children and grew up on a dairy farm near Wanamingo, Minn. At a Bible camp where

Dr. Francis Monseth was the evening speaker, West realized her need for a Savior at the age of 12. She returned to that camp while attending AFLBS and college and served as a counselor. In 1985 she began teaching the senior high Sunday school class at Stillwater Free



Lutheran. West is married to Ken and they have two grown sons. They recently took a cruise to Alaska to celebrate 30 years of marriage. West, a former teacher, is a caregiver by trade and is currently "taking care of America's heroes" at the Montana Veterans Home. For 56 years, music has been the joy in her spiritual journey. Her favorite verse is Psalm 143:8, "Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning for in thee do I trust. Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk for I lift up my soul unto thee."

Deanna Larson, Ortonville, Minn., grew up in Cottonwood, Minn. After graduating from high school, she attended Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minn., where she met Richard

Larson. They have been married for 43 years and have five adult children (three are married) and two grandchildren. Larson states that the Lord began a work of faith in her heart at her baptism. She prayed in third grade during a Gideon Bible distribution for assurance of salvation. Her



Deanna Larson

husband is currently the pastor at Abiding Faith Free Lutheran, Ortonville, and Elim Lutheran, Clinton, Minn.

She says, "God is my light, life, and salvation. He is still sustaining us in our current ministry calling, blessing us and our Christian families here and throughout the world. God is guiding us through the season of adult children, grandchildren, staying connected with extended family. He is faithful, wise, with us, enlightening us. And still loving us."

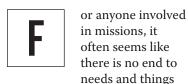


Teens train in leadership at FLY Beyond



Seventy-six teens were joined by staff and youth workers for FLY Beyond July 16-20 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis. The theme of the week-long training focused on helping students understand how they "Belong" to Christ's kingdom, His church, and His work in the world. Leading the morning Bible study was Pastor Brett Boe, Shakopee, Minn. An apologetics study was taught by Tim Barnett from Stand To Reason, and evening services were led by Dr. Nathan Olson, Preston and Mindi Nash, and Jordan Langness.





to do. Will your ministry ever be complete? Can measurable goals be laid out—and completed—in your ministry? As we look at the apostle Paul's example, we see he did have goals that he completed.

In Acts 14:23, 26 we read: "So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed ... From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed."

The context of these verses is that of Paul and his mission team returning from their first journey together. Earlier in the chapter we see that during their ministry abroad, they had made many disciples and "strengthened the souls of the disciples" (v. 22). They took great care that these new disciples were left in the care and too part in a local congregation directed by elders they had appointed. Last, these new congregations were commended to the Lord, and then Paul and his team traveled back to their sending church which had commended them to the grace of God.

As we enjoyed fellowship with our home congregation of Christ the King Lutheran (Wilson, Wis.) recently, we felt like we could relate in so many ways to Paul and his



COMPLETING THE WORK

BY JUSTO PILLMAN

returning to Antioch after completing his work. The past year in Ecuador has been one of great encouragement to us. The young men and women we discipled over the past nine years have grown up. Many of them have graduated from university, are married, and have families of their own. Most importantly, they have caught the vision of discipleship. They are having weekly discipleship times with the next generation of youth. They are actively beginning to disciple their own children, as well.

Quite a number of them are beginning to take on leadership roles in the church. For example, Diego is church treasurer and runs the church projector each Sunday. Andres will lead church services, youth group, and preach. Kevin is currently in seminary and oversees the church music ministry. Maria maintains and updates the church website. Michael helps with the graphic design needs in the church and will lead services. We can in no way take credit for the spiritual maturity in these dynamic young adults. We were just a part of the planting and watering, and God gave the growth.

As these talented and dedicated young adults began assuming many of the roles we had done in the past, we began to consider and evaluate our original goals for serving in Ecuador. We are thrilled that the local congregation has the



resources and maturity to continue growing. We also realized that, like Paul, we completed the goals for which we had been sent. We could move on with joy knowing that by the Lord's grace we had completed the work we had been commissioned to do. We want to say thank you to the AFLC congregations for faithfully supporting the work in Ecuador. We do not know what the future may hold, but after a time of rest and reconnecting with family, maybe the Lord will call us, like He did with Paul, on a second missionary journey.

Pillman and his family recently returned to the U.S. after serving six years in Cuenca, Ecuador.

Lutheran bloggers establish Little Library book exchange

By Joan Culler

In 2016 a couple of ladies from St. Paul's Free Lutheran in Leitersburg, Md., decided to start a blog: The Lutheran Ladies Connection (lutheranladiesconnectionwordpress.wordpress.com). About a year into their blogging adventure, they became book reviewers for B&H Publishing, a company which focuses on providing Bible-centered content. In return for posting unbiased reviews on their blog, the B&H website, and Amazon, the group received free Christian books. As the pile of books grew larger, one of the ladies asked, "What should we do with all of them?"

Starting a Little Free Library seemed to be the obvious answer. Little Free Library is a nonprofit organization that builds community and encourages reading by creating neighborhood book exchanges around the world. Through Little Free Libraries, millions of books are exchanged each year, increasing access to books for readers of all ages and backgrounds. At a Little Free Library you may take a book, trade a book, or donate a book. The libraries are sponsored by organizations or individuals.

The grand opening of the Little Free Library of Leitersburg was celebrated by members of St. Paul's Free Lutheran on July 28 with an ice cream social and drawing to win a variety of books donated by the Lutheran Ladies. Members of the church and community attended to see the library unveiled.

Pictured at right is the new library, built by Rob Waltz. Members of the Lutheran Ladies Connection from St. Paul's include Beth Ann Deardorff, Joan Culler, and Michele Edgel.

To learn more about the libraries, visit its website (littlefreelibrary.org).



Pastor James Lindgren was installed July 29 at Good Shepherd Lutheran, Madison, S.D., with Pastor Paul Nash, director of AFLC Home Missions, officiating. Pictured are (from left) Mike Klopf, Selmer Hagen, Virgil Johnson, Judy and Pastor Jim Lindgren, Pastor Paul Nash, Dean Feistner, and Morgan Rohde.



Fergus Falls congregation to mark 50 years of ministry

Members of Calvary Free Lutheran Church, Fergus Falls, Minn., will celebrate the congregation's 50th anniversary Oct. 27-28. Visitors are welcome to join the church for a weekend of events.

An evening of fellowship will be held from 4 to 8 p.m. on Oct. 27, and will include a meal, open mic time, a slide show of events through the years, and the opportunity to visit with the former pastors who served the congregation.

Morning worship will be held at 10:30 a.m. on Oct. 28 with participation by former pastors David Rinden, Willmore Gundersen, Rodger Olson, Eric Christenson, and Jason Holt, and Pastor Brent Olson, son of the congregation, along with host pastors Jim Johnson and Eric Rasmussen.

A fellowship dinner will be served immediately following the worship service. Following the dinner will be a time of continued fellowship with coffee and cake.



IT'S THAT IMPORTANT

BY PASTOR AARON OLSON

faith? To my niece or nephew's faith? Yes, it is! If we want our young people to grow and mature in their faith, they need seasons of intentional growth

and study in their lives. We all need these seasons of renewal. I still remember how

crucial these seasons of renewal

teen. I came to faith when I was 15 years old. I remember vividly

that after I was saved, God put

in my heart a love and passion

for his Word and a desire to be

let's face it, high school is tough

and peer pressure is a real thing.

brought to faith, I was tired and weary. But God in His grace

around other Christians. But

About six months after I was

brought me to a church camp

was energized and encouraged

through camp. I returned home

equipped and motivated in my faith to grow and share it with

others. And this, of course, is

the whole purpose of FLY.

in Colorado that summer. I

were when I was a struggling

The FLY Convention exists to provide congregations with a tool to win the lost, build the believer, and encourage student discipleship in the local congregation. At FLY, our sons and daughters hear the Word, and many are saved through this hearing of the Word. At FLY, granddaughters and grandsons are encouraged in their faith. And at FLY, our young people go home invigorated and energized to share their faith and to make disciples.

I am so excited for the 2019 FLY Convention. I am one of those who starts looking forward to the next convention almost immediately after the prior one ends. The theme for 2019 is "I AM," from Isaiah 45:5-6, "I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other." It is going to be so exciting to hear and learn from this amazing passage of God's Word.

So now we return to our initial question. With all the activities our youth are doing, with the temptations they face, and with the technology they are surrounded by, yes, it is *that* important that we encourage our youth to attend the FLY Convention. Do you know a youth who wants to attend FLY next summer but cannot afford it? Is there a student in your congregation for whom we could begin praying or consider sponsoring next summer? What about the youth who do not attend your church? What if you sponsored them to attend?

Thank you for your continued prayers and support for our youth. God be praised for what He is going to do in their lives this coming summer.

Olson, who serves Calvary Free Lutheran, Arlington, S.D., is the first vice president of the 2019 FLY Board.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Members of Hosanna Free Lutheran, Cumberland, Wis., voted on July 22 to disband the congregation. All property has been turned over to the Home Missions department for future use. The status and future of the property is yet to be determined by members of the Home Missions Committee.

Pastor Oliver Olson, Spring Valley Calif., passed away on Aug. 7. The memorial service was held Aug. 27 at the Mount Miguel Covenant Village chapel, Spring Valley. A full obituary will be printed in the next issue.

The AFLC Schools will host a Revival Conference Sept. 23-24. Keith Ferrin, director of That You May Know Ministries, will speak on the theme "God's Word. Our Delight." The conference will open at 7 p.m. on Sept. 23 with a service focused on the Book of Ephesians. A morning worship on Sept. 24 will focus on the Book of Jonah, followed by a workshop at 10:10 a.m. and a Q&A at 11:10. A closing worship service at 7 p.m. will focus on the Book of Philippians.

The 2019 Annual Conference will be June 11-14 at Spruce Lake Retreat Center, Canadensis, Pa. Conference registration will be open in January on the AFLC website (aflc. org). Reservations for rooms and meals are now available directly through Spruce Lake Retreat Center (sprucelake.org).

JULY MEMORIALS

AFLBS

Wayne Deubner Larry Rudebusch LaVerne Simons Ruth Claus Pastor Allan Monson **Pastor Steve Papillon**

AFLTS

Tim Gerdeen Pastor Allan Monson Mark Amiot Mark Christian Wayne Deubner Pastor Steve **Papillon**

ARC

Bob Dietsche

World Missions

Nathan Stangeland

Pastor Allan Monson

Home Missions

Bob Dietsche Pastor Allan Monson Larry Farland Nathan Stangeland Tim Gerdeen

Parish Education

Pastor Joe Valtinson LaVerne Simons

Youth

Janice Riebeling

... in honor of

Home Missions Mabel Foster

World Missions Pastor John and

Ruby Abel Alfred Tenneson



Seminary hosts Summer Institute classes

With more than 50 students registered, the Free Lutheran Seminary hosted the Summer Institute of Theology Aug. 6-10 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. The theme of the weeklong continuing education courses focused on "Teaching and Teachers."

Providing school supplies

Members of St. Petrie Lutheran, Leland, Ill., hosted a school supply giveaway in July for families in the local community. A total of 40 bags were given locally and more were given to other needy communities both nearby and in two other states. Members of the congregation donated supplies and packed the bags, along with donations from the community and Thrivent. Pictured are (from left) Margret Abbott, Greg Abbott, Pam Whitcraft, Bob Jones, Jackie Jones, Pastor Gerald Steele, Carolyn Steele, and Jean Ohme.



AFLC BENEVOLENCES July 1-31, 2018

	REC ['] D IN JULY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$23,892	\$254,525	\$249,930
Evangelism	9,835	62,109	82,344
Youth Ministries	14,911	87,464	63,539
Parish Education	12,409	125,141	86,294
Seminary	19,286	166,553	146,721
Bible School	49,117	348,335	355,466
Home Missions	27,899	234,484	252,623
World Missions	37,148	230,687	242,622
Personal Support	44,099	418,195	354,833
TOTALS	\$238,595	\$1,927,492	\$1,834,371

For additional financial information for each department, go to www.aflc.org/giving

DONE AND DOING

he youth of our fellowship certainly represent a core ministry concern, and for more than 10 years the biennial Free Lutheran Youth (FLY) conventions have been the largest gatherings by far in the life of the AFLC. These events, however, are only a fraction of the youth ministry within our church family ... in the local congregations with their Sunday school classes and youth groups, in the area Bible camps and retreats, through the outreach



Pastor Robert Lee

of AFLC-wide programs such as the Bible school and Journey Missions ... and so the list goes on. It seems clear, too, that there are abundant opportunities for doing. But you may have noticed that the "done" is listed first in our title, and that

is because it is the hardest for our nature to receive.

One of the greatest foundational gifts that our fellowship can offer our youth for a lifetime of faith is a clear grasp of done and doing. The doing is the least difficult for us to comprehend, because it seems like that's the way the world functions. We do, and we are rewarded; we don't do, and we are punished in some way. The old nature assumes that this should be the way that religion operates, too. A confirmation student used the phrase "earning our salvation." The instructor said that one of the most important things to remember from all of our studies is that salvation can't be earned. "Then why do we have to learn all of this stuff if we aren't earning our salvation?" the student responded. It's a question that makes sense, doesn't it?

More than 50 years have passed since I heard a speaker at a Sunday evening Reformation Day service in downtown Minneapolis, and yet his words still echo in my mind. "Remember," he said, "there are only two religions in the world. One says

'do,' and the other says 'done." This is what the Reformation was all about, to put it simply, and this is the heart of the gospel. We proclaim and claim a finished salvation, to which we can add nothing without detracting from it.

A man who was soul-troubled said to a pastor, "What can I do to be saved?"

The pastor replied, "It's too late!"

"What do you mean?" the shocked man exclaimed.

"It's already been done," the pastor said. "Jesus Christ, through His suffering, death and resurrection, has done everything that could be done for you to be saved."

His word from the cross, "It is finished"

(John 19:30), can refer both to His death and to what must be accomplished for our salvation. It is finished. Period. Praise His

It's the "done" of salvation that we want to be sure that our youth have received. Many of them struggle with assurance. They look to their own feelings; they look to what they have done or promise to do. But the peace that these things might provide is only very temporary, and soon they fall from their spiritual cloud nine with a sickening thud. True and lasting peace can be found only in Christ and what He has done.

But isn't "doing" a part of our Christian life, too? What does the Bible mean when it says that our salvation is not a result of works (Ephesians 2:9) but that faith without works is dead (James 2:17)? This is not a contradiction, and the believer can wholeheartedly agree with both statements, for the first speaks of "done" and the second of "doing."

The key is that the "done" must come first, for it is through faith in the finished work of our Savior that the Christian is set

free for the "doing," empowered to serve his Lord.

Luther wrote: "Yes, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith. Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn't stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing."

So, the doing becomes part of our lives, not to earn salvation and not even to keep it, but from hearts overflowing with gratitude to the One who did it all. The words of the old gospel song say it simply: "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe."

If we pass this foundational truth on

One of the greatest foundational gifts that our fellowship can offer our youth for a lifetime of faith is a clear grasp of done and doing.

> to the youth of our fellowship, then the future is in good hands. Oh, yes, they shall still struggle at times as we struggle, failing back into a guilt-motivated instead of a grace-motivated doing. But by faith we can share the confidence of the Apostle Paul, who wrote: "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

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Periodicals

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building the base

MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER

BY PASTOR RICHARD GUNDERSON



illie Stargell, first baseman for the 1979 World Series winning Pittsburgh Pirates, led his team in singing, "We are family," the team's theme

song. The team, besides having some Hall of Famers, was a group of ball players with moderate ability. Yet they were successful because they had a strong bond as teammates. As they cared for one another, they encouraged one another and helped each other. They had mojo because as a team they worked together.

The apostle Paul says in Romans 12:5, "So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually *members one of another*" (emphasis mine). Elsewhere in the 12th chapter of Romans Paul uses the following significant phrases: "present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice" (v. 1), "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (v. 2), "I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think" (v. 3), "we have many members in one body" (v. 4), "all the members do not have the same function" (v. 4), "we have gifts that differ ... each of us is to exercise

them accordingly: ... prophecy ... service ... teaching ... exhortation ... he who gives ... leads ... shows mercy" (vs. 6-8), and, "Let love be without hypocrisy" (v. 9).

Paul clearly illustrates what the family of God is and who they are within this body:

- The body has life. Ephesians 2:4-5 says, "But God ... even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."
 - The body grows and matures.
- The body is made up of many members with uniquely inter-related gifts complementing one another to carry out specific tasks.

I am of the opinion that Christ, who is still the head of the Church, the body of Christ, and who is at work in the members, is still gifting each member as a present-day work of the Holy Spirit. We have the false idea that biggest is best; if a church is big then it is a better church. The true family of God is not defined by its size. In fact, family membership has nothing to do with size. Healthy congregations, whatever the size, have Christ at their head, and are made up

of living believers standing on the infallible Word of God: members serving each other.

I have had the privilege of serving congregations of varying sizes. One experience stands out to me while serving a smaller congregation. There was a family in our midst going through a very difficult time. The father lost his job because his company closed, and his wife had to go out of state to find work in her profession. Christmas was coming, and the family was struggling. One of the church members made me aware of the needs of this family. We pooled together our efforts and some funds to get help for the father and his children. When mom arrived home for Christmas, there was a clean house and a Christmas tree with gifts under it. Many years later, one of the sons wrote to me expressing his appreciation for what was done for them. My answer to him was that we had only done what was our responsibility as members of one another.

Gunderson is serving as interim pastor at Spencer Creek Lutheran, Eugene, Ore.