

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

September 26, 2000

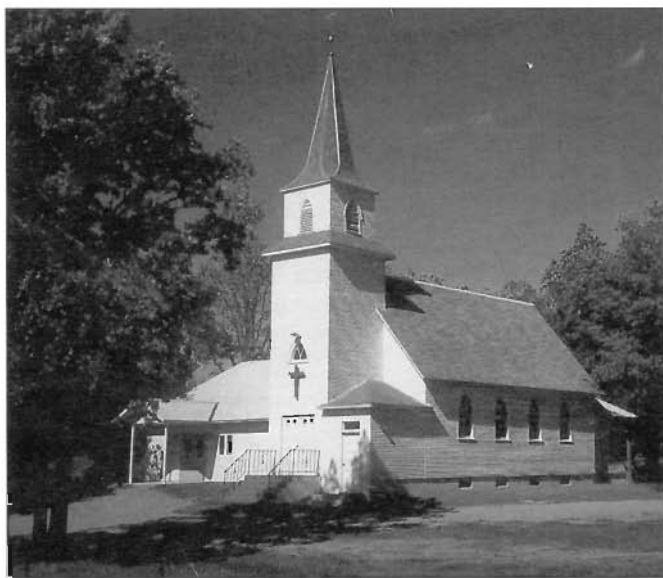


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September 26, 2000
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AN ENCOURAGING WORD

To grow or not to grow — that is the question

We are told in II Peter 3:18 to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." The verb "grow" in the original Greek means to continually grow. This means that Christians should continually grow in their dependence upon God's grace. Apart from Christ we can do nothing pleasing in the sight of God. We cannot even be a Christian apart from grace. The Scriptures are very clear on these matters.

But Christians are also to continually grow in their knowledge of Christ. This is why a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is vital to the Christian walk. As you spend time reading and studying about Jesus in the Bible and considering who He is, what He's done and what that means for you, you begin to know more about Him. This is a tremendous thing to do. But you dare not stop there, for your knowledge would be merely objective and, hence, limited.

Consider the old farmer who frequently described his Christian experience by saying, "Well, I'm not making much progress, but I'm established!" One spring when he was hauling logs, his wagon wheels sank down to the axles in mud. No matter how hard he tried he couldn't get the wagon out. Defeated, he sat atop the logs, viewing his dismal situation.

Soon a neighbor came along who was uncomfortable with the farmer's worn-out testimony. "Well, brother Jones," said the neighbor, "I see you're not making much progress, but you must be content because you're well-established!"

Certainly Jesus wants you to know Him objectively, but He

wants you to know Him subjectively as well. This means that you talk with Him and step out in His name, even if you're stepping into the unknown or out of your "safe zone." Growing in the knowledge of Christ means trusting Him to faithfully strengthen you for whatever task you have been given. This is how you will actually experience Christ working in and through you. This is where you will get to know Him personally.

A man, after 25 years with one company, was still doing the same old job and drawing the same salary. Finally he went to his boss and told him he felt he had been neglected. "After all," he said, "I've had a quarter of a century of experience."

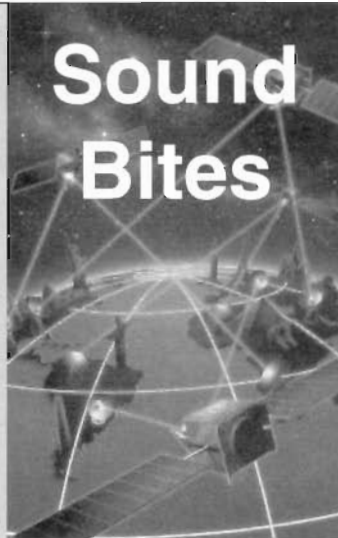
"My dear fellow," sighed the boss, "you haven't had a quarter of a century of experience, you've had one experience for a quarter of a century."

Dear reader, don't be stuck in the mud in regard to your relationship with Jesus. Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior. Every day should be a new and growing experience with Christ! Who He is, what He's done, what He's doing and what He can do through you is limitless. So step out in the name of Christ and you will find, as the hymn says:

*I have a Friend so patient, kind,
forbearing,
Of all my friends this Friend
doth love me best,
Though I am weak and sinful,
yet, when sharing
His love and mercy, I am ever blest.*

— **Pastor Tim Johnson**
Resurrection Free Lutheran
Beltrami, Minnesota

Sound Bites



1 Viewed from a materialistic standpoint, the organization of the Lutheran Free Church (AFLC) is weak. It has no strong constitution and no strong central government. There is a wide opportunity for congregations and individuals to misuse their liberty and to shirk their duties The Lutheran Free Church (AFLC) is strong only in so far as it gives room for the Word and Spirit of the Lord to do their work in the hearts of its members.

—*Andreas Helland*

4 This, then, is freedom, that each man and each woman who loves the Lord may have the permission and opportunity to serve him in the congregation. Thereby the congregation will become truly God's people and the handmaid of the Lord. Thus, the free congregation is not an obstacle for Christianity; it is rather the proper and correct form for the outward appearance of Christianity in the world.

—*Georg Sverdrup*

6 I am convinced that God can accomplish more through a few living congregations than through all the church machinery in the world.

—*John Stensvaag*

2 So what preserves us as a free church? *The Holy Spirit and the Word*. Without the Spirit and the Word the AFLC is powerless.

—*Loiell Dyrud*
The Quest for Freedom

The important thing is to bring as many as possible to salvation in Christ through sincere repentance and living faith. ... The intention is not to turn the congregation into a mission field, but rather to make it an evangelizing force in the world, both at home and abroad.

—*Georg Sverdrup*

5 Through the preaching of the Gospel, a congregation becomes living. Laws and rules cannot create freedom and life, but can only take it away. God alone, through the Gospel, can create life. As the Gospel is preached, people in freedom will come to the Christian congregation and to Christ.

—*First AFLC President John Strand*



An association

The AFLC is an association. Well, of course! It's part of our name, right? The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. In my opinion, the word "association" is a better word for a denominational fellowship than "church," since it

stresses the scriptural truth that the congregation is the church. Yet some still do not understand what this word really signifies.

Our Fundamental Principles state it clearly: "A free congregation gladly accepts the mutual assistance which congregations can give to one another in the work for the advancement of the Kingdom of God" (#7). In other words, the autonomy of the local congregation is not compromised in the least by the fact that we are associated together to accomplish what cannot be best achieved alone. Things of this nature are the training of pastors, distribution of Bibles and other Christian literature, missions and other works of mercy (#9).

I have remarked at some informational meetings that an independent congregation may be a contradiction in terms. This means that it is part of the very nature of a Christian congregation, as it is for an individual Christian, to be interdependent, to depend on one another. God's Word declares: "From which the whole body (i.e., the church),

being fitted held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Ephesians 3:16).

An association is not a synod. Congregations are

called to freely work together and to assist one another in Kingdom endeavors, not to narrow partisanship and church political machines that exclude those who are not members of their organization or do not fit into their agenda. The "synod spirit" trusts in human machinery and structure, as a majority of congregations rule over one another and coerce cooperation; an "association spirit" creates cooperation together in freedom and brotherly love, convinced that less structure is the best structure of all and that our trust must rest solely in the Word and the Spirit of God.

Georg Sverdrup, in a commentary on the Fundamental Principles, refers to the "stiff, sharp, pointed fences" which are constructed to exclude even brothers and sisters who share the same faith. It is difficult and time consuming to build an association of free congregations, he suggests, and this struggle may be avoided when cooperation is forced — or where cooperation is neglected. We struggle against hierarchy on the one side and individualism on the other.

"The love of Christ compels us," Sverdrup writes, and is the principle behind true Christian cooperation. God loved, so He sent His Son into the world to be our Savior. God's Son loved, so He came into the world to seek and save those who were lost, giving His life as a ransom for many. God's Spirit is love, poured out in the hearts of believers so that they have the mind of Christ Himself. We love because we are born of God and have His life in our hearts.

Association flows from the love of Christ. There is a world lost in sin, and we are called to bring the gospel to those who need salvation. It's an impossible mission for a single Christian or a single congregation, but together we may accomplish much more than can be done alone.

An association of free congregations. Associated for Christ and His kingdom.



— **Pastor Robert L. Lee**
AFLC President



We are free

Of the four words in the name Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, the word “free” might be the one that people ask the most questions about. Free from what? Free to do what? What do you mean by free?

Free to be under and in the Word

Georg Sverdrup, the father of the Lutheran Free Church movement, saw that the local congregation had the need and privilege of being in the Word. A hierarchical authority was not required. The local congregation could go to the Word itself.

Sverdrup wrote the Fundamental Principles which the AFLC still looks to today. Principle 5 states, “The congregation directs its own affairs, subject to the authority of the Word and Spirit of God, and acknowledges no other ecclesiastical authority or government above itself.” The congregation is under the Word, not under some other additional authority. The congregation is free to go to the Word for direction and wisdom.

A result of this freedom is a responsibility on the part of the congregation to be in the Scriptures. They are not to simply wait for others to study the Bible and give them an interpretation. The local congregation diligently studies the Word itself, expecting God will speak through the Word.

It is what God has said in His Word that determines the congregation’s purpose and plans, more so than dictates from some human authority. It respects what is said by others, but it respects the Bible the most.

A model of congregational behavior is presented in Acts 17:11. It says, “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”

The congregation is free to, and expected to, examine the Scriptures themselves on a regular basis to see what is true. The first president of the AFLC, Pastor John Strand,

in his report to the 1965 AFLC Annual Conference said:

“The only authority above the congregation is the Word and Spirit of God. If they do not recognize the authority of the Word and Spirit of God, they are not a congregation. Here, too, they are free to interpret the Scriptures, interpreting Scripture with Scripture, not being bound by the interpretations of others.”

This freedom of the local congregation to go directly to the Word of God itself may be seen by some as frightening. It may be felt safer if a central authority does all the interpreting of the Word, and all the local congregations follow without questioning. The reply to that type of fear is not to seek more centralized authority. The need is to place greater confidence in God’s Word and Spirit.

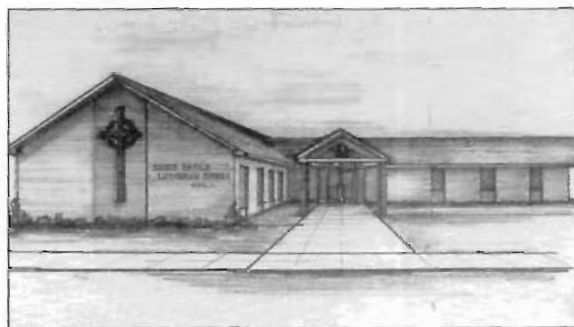
The Apostle Paul was used by God to plant numerous congregations. He kept in touch with the congregations, encouraging them, giving them instruction, but the congregations were free. They had received the Word and Spirit of God. That was sufficient. They did not need him.

Congregations should be encouraged to exercise their freedom, to go to the Word to find guidance, to depend on the Word for strength.

Free to be respected in their uniqueness

We look at our congregations through grace-tinted glasses. We view them in light of what God has done. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27, NIV).

Seeing the congregation in this way should lead us to respect her. This involves respecting the decisions she makes. A local congregation may do something different than what an individual or another congregation feels is best. Other con-



Why do we call

There is at least one way we have not followed the advice of Martin Luther. We call ourselves “Lutheran.” Luther appealed, “I ask that men make no reference to my name and call themselves, not Lutherans but Christians. What is Luther? After all, the doctrine is not mine, nor have I been crucified for anyone. ... Christ alone is our Master.”

Luther was rightly concerned that people would not follow him as a person. Why have we not given heed to Luther’s concern? Why do we unashamedly describe ourselves as Lutheran Christians?

In the aftermath of the Reformation, those who had protested the false teachings of the Roman Church differed on certain matters. Soon there were those who were dubbed “Zwinglian” or “Calvinist” or “Lutheran.” The designations served to distinguish how the Reformers interpreted certain doctrines. And as denominations have proliferated over the centuries, names have

served to distinguish how a certain group understands the Scripture.

What marks us as Lutherans? Let us remind ourselves of what distinguishes our AFLC as “Lutheran” and why we need that identity in our mission together.

As we review our biblical convictions, we would not claim that all of them are held exclusively by Lutherans. We rejoice in the measure of doctrinal unity that we share with evangelical Christians of other denominations. Furthermore, we would acknowledge with sadness that not all who call themselves Lutheran have remained true to their doctrinal heritage. But some important doctrinal distinctives and emphases of Reformation Lutheranism do exist.

The Way of Salvation

The most important question that anyone can ask is “What must I do to be saved?” There is only one correct answer to this question. The Apostle Paul stated it simply, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou

FREE



—*Pastor Craig Johnson*
Editor,
The Lutheran Ambassador
Astoria, Oregon

gregations can advise and offer counsel on the basis of experience, but they should be hesitant to condemn the other congregation’s actions, unless clear Scriptural teaching exists. As Fundamental Principle 10 states: “Free congregations have no right to demand that other congregations shall submit to their opinion, will, judgment, or decision; therefore, domination by a majority of congregations over a minority is to be rejected.”

Congregations are free to pursue God’s unique calling for them. Each congregation is part of the body of Christ. “Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ... God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ... God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other” (I Corinthians 12:14, 18-20, 24-25, NIV).

A belief in the freedom of congregations carries with it the understanding that not

every congregation will look the same way and operate in the same exact manner.

According to the biographer James Hamre, Sverdrup “argued that the division of the church into various bodies was justified on the basis of different tasks and callings.”

Some congregations are called to minister in urban areas, others in rural settings. Some serve largely retired people, others young families. Some are particularly gifted in the area of music. Hospitality may be what another congregation excels in. One congregation may be called to reach those who prefer a somewhat more formal and traditional worship style. The mission field another congregation may be led to serve prefers a more informal style.

Each congregation has the privilege, the freedom and the responsibility to seek out their unique calling from God. They can and must go to the Word and Spirit of God and ask what is the reason for their being and the goal God desires for them to strive after, and then rejoice in the freedom they have to pursue it.



ourselves Lutheran?

shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). This answer contains in short form all the elements of the way of salvation: the Lord Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of sinful mankind, and the receiving of His redemptive work on the cross by faith.

As Lutherans, we believe that because of the sinful depravity of the entire human race, every person, young and old, needs to be saved (Romans 3:23; John 3:6; Ephesians 2:3; I John 1:8; John 3:3-6). The Lord Jesus Christ is the gracious provision for salvation. God became man in the person of Jesus Christ to die in our place, making full atonement for the sins of every person (John 1:14; II Corinthians 5:19).

But Jesus Christ is also true God (John 3:16; Romans 8:32; I John 5:20). He is a divine-human Savior, a Savior who is God and man *in one person*; He alone was able to provide salvation for sinners — and He has!

The Application of Salvation

What is necessary if a person is to be saved? It is simply and exclusively faith in Jesus Christ and nothing more (John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Romans 4:5). Christ has done it all! This is the chief message of the Bible. This is the chief message of Luther and the Reformers. This is our chief message if we would be authentic Lutherans.

It was God's grace and mercy that moved Him to redeem fallen mankind through the merits and death of his Son, and it is His grace that moves Him to offer and convey this salvation to the individual sinner (Ephesians 2:8,9). How are the benefits of the cross brought to us? The means through which God conveys this gracious salvation are called "the means of grace," the Word and the sacraments.

The Word of God is the chief, and in one

sense, the only means of grace. Without the true and powerful Word of God, baptism and the Lord's Supper have no validity. As Luther writes in the Small Catechism, "For without the Word of God, it is simply water and no baptism." And in regard to the Lord's Supper, he explains the benefits: "The eating and drinking, indeed, do not produce them, but the word: 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins' ... these words are the chief thing in the sacrament."

Because of the dynamic Word of God connected with the sacraments, Lutherans believe that they are much more than symbols. They are saving and sanctifying. Since every person is born in sin and stands in need of God's grace from the moment of birth (John 3:6; Ephesians 2:3; Psalm 51:5), we bring our little ones also to the Lord in baptism.

Because baptism is connected with the powerful gospel, we believe that God gives the gift of faith. The regenerative work of the Holy Spirit through the Word in baptism is affirmed by Lutheran Christians on the basis of the clear testimony of the Scriptures (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26-27; John 3:3-5).

The Lutheran Church teaches that the true body and blood of Christ are actually present in the Lord's Supper. Our Lord said as He instituted the Lord's Supper: "This is My body, which is given for you, ... This is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you." We accept these statements in their natural, literal meaning. In the words of Luther: "It (the Lord's Supper) is the *true* body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine" Lutherans believe that "life and salvation are given unto us in the sacrament." We do so on the basis of Christ's promise as He instituted the Lord's



— Dr. Francis
Monseth
Free Lutheran
Seminary Dean
Minneapolis,
Minnesota



"Because of the dynamic Word of God connected with the sacraments, Lutherans believe that they are much more than symbols. They are saving and sanctifying."



Supper, "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). The Lord's Supper gives renewed assurance of the forgiveness of sins as one partakes in faith.

The Lutheran Church teaches that the Word and the sacraments are the only means by which the Holy Spirit performs His work in the hearts of people. Through these ordained means, He calls them to Christ, converts them, sanctifies them, and keeps them in the faith (Romans 10:17; Romans 1:16; I Corinthians 12:13). Consistent with this understanding is a sense of urgency in proclaiming the gospel to every creature. Yes, "How will they believe in him whom they have not heard" (Romans 10:14)? Based on its conviction that the means of grace are indispensable for life and salvation, true Lutheranism has been and remains evangelistic and mission-minded.

Why then should we call ourselves "Lutheran?" It is to testify to how we understand the Word of God. We are not ashamed to be Lutherans. We share a unique and precious heritage

in the great re-discovery of the gospel in the sixteenth century. Luther grappled with the question of his own salvation until he

was at last set free by the good news that "the just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:16). Justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone based on the Word alone became the passionate and powerful message of his life. Millions more have been brought to peace and joy in Christ through his rediscovery. Yet, untold millions remain untold. The task before us is great! As heirs of the Reformation, let us not only keep the faith but share it with our needy generation.



The

What is the congregation? Why is it important to the Fundamental Principles of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations? These are questions seldom asked, and yet they are crucial to the understanding of who we are as an AFLC. For when we have either forgotten or through neglect set aside the importance and the necessity of the congregation, the Kingdom of God on earth is hurt and hindered from being what God has intended it to be.

Even though the answer as to what is the congregation may seem obvious, understanding it often becomes difficult. According to the second principle of our Fundamental Principles, "The congregation consists of believers who, by using the means of grace (the Word of God and sacraments) and the spiritual gifts as directed by the Word of God, seek salvation and eternal blessedness for themselves and for their fellow men." As we see in Acts at the birth of the New Testament congregation, it is an assembly of believing people, born of the Spirit of God, growing in faith, and carrying out the work of winning souls for Christ. The congregation is a gathering of believers who meet for "instruction in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

According to the Word of God, Paul prayed, preached, taught, and labored for the sake of the congregations at Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, and Colosse (Colossians 1:24-2:5). In Corinth, Paul worked to bring unity of mind and spirit so that the name of Christ would be honored, thus bringing all souls to Him. Paul considered the congregation at Rome as the Body of Christ (Romans 12:5). John considered the seven congregations in Revelation as the seven golden candlesticks (Revelation 1:20).

To Christ the congregation was consid-

congregation

ered central and necessary even though they were often weak and sometimes almost dead. To Christ the congregation was considered precious so much so that He gave His life for her, and then sent the Holy Spirit to bring her life through the conviction of sin and comfort through the pure gospel of grace. It is there that the Word and Spirit of God not only creates new spiritual life but also sustains it through the forgiveness of sins. Simply put, the congregation is the local gathering of Christians and seekers for the purpose of worship and edification as directed by the Word and the Spirit.

Sverdrup defined a Christian congregation as "an assembly of volunteer men and women, brought together and united by the Spirit of God through the Word of the Lord and the sacraments, one body with the Lord, who lives in them and where they live, the household of God and dwelling place of the Spirit. This assembly of believers should all be workers in the vineyard of the Lord; they should all show forth the excellencies of Him who called them out of darkness into His own marvelous light; they should all be priests of God, and there should be no 'gracious sir' among them, nor should any even be referred to as such," so wrote Clarence J. Carlson in *The Years of Our Church*.

Why is the congregation important?

What makes the congregation so necessary to God's Kingdom work? The first Fundamental Principle states: "According to the Word of God,

the congregation is the right form of the Kingdom of God on earth." In answering the question we shall consider a statement by Georg Sverdrup: "The relationship between congregation and God's Kingdom is the central life stream in God's Kingdom on earth." (From the writing of Georg Sverdrup, translated by John Horn.)

The importance of the congregation can often be lost. Much concern and effort gets directed to good causes which are a part of the congregation's work and mission, but the building up of the congregation is forgotten. At times the clergy, congregational leaders, or church bodies can become the powerful and dominant force, and supporting them becomes more important than strengthening the congregation. This is contrary to the principles of the AFLC.

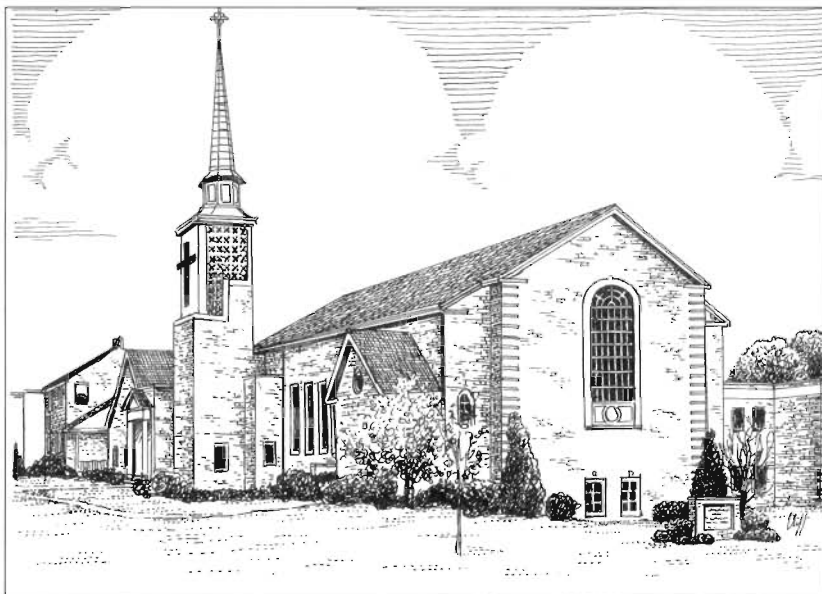
We believe the only authority above the congregation is the Word and Spirit of God. The Kingdom of God is hindered in its mission when anything else supersedes the importance of the congregation. Sverdrup stated it clearly when he said: "It is therefore a principle in the Free Church which bows itself only to God's Word and no other, that the congregation is the sufficient form for God's Kingdom, and that no other form is demanded for the outpouring of God's Spirit until Christ's return." (*Folkebladet*, December, 1898; January and February, 1899).

The congregation should never become secondary to any authority or movement. The congregation will always be God's vehicle to reach this world for Christ. "For if the congregation is the expression of God's love it is especially that which seeks the lost in order to save them." (Sverdrup's writings — translated by John Horn).

May the Holy Spirit always keep our vision clear as to the importance of the congregation and may He give us a love for the congregation, "as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25).



— Pastor
Terry Olson
Member of AFLC
Coordinating
Committee
Thief River Falls,
Minnesota



Fundamental Principles of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations

Guiding Principles of the Lutheran Free Church and Association of Free Lutheran Congregations since 1897

1. According to the Word of God, the congregation is the right form of the Kingdom of God on earth.

2. The congregation consists of believers who, by using the means of grace and the spiritual gifts as directed by the Word of God, seek salvation and eternal blessedness for themselves and for their fellow men.

3. According to the New Testament, the congregation needs an external organization with membership roll, election of officers, stated times and places for its gatherings, and other similar provisions.

4. Members of the organized congregation are not, in every instance, believers, and such members often derive false hope from their external connection with the congregation. It is therefore the sacred obligation of the congregation to purify itself by the quickening preaching of the Word of God, by earnest admonition and exhortation, and by expelling the openly sinful and perverse.

5. The congregation directs its own affairs, subject to the authority of the Word and Spirit of God, and acknowledges no other ecclesiastical authority or government above itself.

6. A free congregation esteems and cherishes all the spiritual gifts which the Lord gives for its edification, and seeks to stimulate and encourage their use.

7. A free congregation gladly accepts the mutual assistance which congregations can give one another in the work for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

8. Such assistance consists partly in the mutual sharing of spiritual gifts among the congrega-

tions through conferences, exchange visits, lay activities, etc., whereby congregations are mutually edified, and partly in the voluntary and Spirit-prompted cooperation of congregations for the accomplishing of such tasks as exceed the ability of the individual congregation.

9. Among such tasks may be mentioned specifically the training of pastors, distribution of Bibles and other Christian literature, home missions, Jewish missions, deaconess homes, children's homes and other work of mercy.

10. Free congregations have no right to demand that other congregations shall submit to their opinion, will, judgment, or decision; therefore, domination by a majority of congregations over a minority is to be rejected.

11. Agencies found desirable for conducting the joint activities of congregations, such as conferences, committees, officers, etc., cannot in a Lutheran free church impose any obligations or restrictions, exert any compulsions, or lay any burden upon the individual congregation, but have the right only to make recommendations to, and requests of, congregations and individuals.

12. Every free congregation, as well as every individual believer, is constrained by the Spirit of God and by the privileges of Christian love to do good and to work for the salvation of souls and the quickening of the spiritual life, as far as its abilities and power permit. Such free spiritual activity is limited neither by parish nor by synodical boundaries.

A look

The AFLC was formed in October, 1962, by people and congregations which were members of the Lutheran Free Church.

They did not wish to take part in a merger of the LFC with the recently formed American Lutheran Church which was to take place on February 1, 1963.

The LFC, which began in 1897, remained outside of a merger in 1917 which brought together the three largest Lutheran bodies of Norwegian background: the Hauge's Synod, the Norwegian Synod and the United Church. They comprised the new Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, which later became the Evangelical Lutheran Church. It was that church which, together with the old American Lutheran Church (German), and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (Danish), joined to form the new ALC on January 1, 1961.

The Lutheran Free Church at various times over the years had some pastors and people who looked favorably on a merger with the larger Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. But any attempts were always squashed by a larger opposition. As the 1950s came, however, a rising sentiment for merger was evident. During merger discussions, there were always those who sought to resist the effort in debates on the floor of annual conferences, through



The new Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Thief River Falls, Minnesota. The congregation hosted the organizational conference in 1962.

at the beginning

— excerpt from
“A Brief History”
in Growth and New Challenges,
the AFLC at 30
by Rev. Raynard Huglen

the pages of *The Lutheran Messenger*, the organ of the LFC, and in local, district and churchwide forums. As defeat became apparent for those hoping to stay out of the merger, congregations and individuals who still opposed the union drew closer together.

The reasons for maintaining an identity apart from the ALC, then one of the three largest Lutheran groups in the United States, seemed to sift down to five areas. A pamphlet, “A Statement of the Historical Situation,” discussed those areas and was read at the Thief River Falls, Minnesota conference in 1962, at which the AFLC was organized. Perhaps not everyone who helped form the AFLC felt equally strong about each of the five points, but in their totality they made a formidable argument against the merger.

In brief, they were as follows: 1) The ALC held membership in the World Council of Churches. There was concern that there was a looseness in the theological foundation of the WCC, a definite liberal leaning on the part of many of its members. Also it was thought that the WCC might lead to one world church, with an inadequate theological base. 2) The theology of the new church would not reflect a conservative stand on Scripture. As a part of the theological dimension, it was mentioned, too, that there was no desire to be a part of any “back to Rome” movement. 3) As to church polity, there was strong belief that the freedom of the local congregation should be safeguarded in every way possible. 4) There was the desire to uphold the low-churchly emphasis among Lutherans. 5) It was felt that the ALC didn’t represent the pietism needed in our day.

A general invitation was sent out for a conference in Thief River Falls, October 25-28, 1962, for the purpose of seeing what could be done to preserve a “Lutheran Free Church.” People came from 76 congregations, seven states, two Cana-



A 1972 photograph of pastors John Strand, AFLC president from 1962-1978; Ed Mathison; Gene Sundby, current president of the AFLC-Canada; and Rodney Stueland.

dian provinces, and from a number of Lutheran church bodies. Rev. John P. Strand was elected president along with other officers and committees which were set up to begin planning joint work for the 50-some congregations which were covenanting to labor together as free Lutheran churches.

While the AFLC was started by people of the LFC, they were soon joined by pastors and people from other Lutheran bodies. The largest first significant group to enter the life of the AFLC came from the former Suomi Synod. This church of Finnish national background had merged with three other bodies to form the Lutheran Church in America on January 1, 1962.

In 1988 the most recent Lutheran merger took place. It united the ALC, the LCA and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, thus creating a new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, with over five million members. In and around 1988, a number of congregations, largely of the ALC, and largely in Illinois, affiliated with the AFLC, bringing a rich legacy of evangelical and pietistic Lutheranism. Other congregations were formed by concerned groups of Lutheran people in various states. It is safe to say, as to individuals and pastors, that the AFLC has people with backgrounds in nearly all of the Lutheran church

bodies which existed in 1959.

From a small fellowship of congregations which had no assets held in common at the beginning, apart from some contributions and offerings taken at the Thief River conference, the AFLC has developed a well-rounded program. The AFLC headquarters is located on a 25-acre property overlooking Medicine Lake in Plymouth, a suburb of Minneapolis. The AFLC schools’ campus shares the property. From 50 or so congregations the Association has grown to over 240 congregations in 23 states and in three provinces of Canada.

Perhaps this brief history can be concluded in no better way than by quoting three sentences from Dr. Bernhard Christensen’s description long ago of the Lutheran Free Church. They describe what was and is the purpose of the organization of another group of Lutheran congregations which has hoped to continue in that tradition, the AFLC:

— It is an attempt to build an effective and orderly Christian fellowship with a minimum of human organization.

— It is an experiment in extreme ecclesiastical democracy and decentralization.

— It is a searching test of faith in the power and Spirit of God (from “What is the Lutheran Free Church?”).



A family of ministries



Triumph Lutheran, Nogales, Arizona, built in 1966, was an early mission outreach for the AFLC.

Home Missions

"The Lord ... sent them two and two ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come ... saying to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few, therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'" (Luke 10:1-2)

The mission statement of AFLC Home Missions is:

1. Out of a desire to honor the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

2. Under the authority of His inerrant Word,

3. In dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

Our mission is to help establish and bring to maturity free and living Lutheran congregations and Christians, so that home mission pastors and lay people may be equipped to become partners in spreading the gospel and in building the Kingdom of God.

The founders of the AFLC saw the need to establish free and living Lutheran congregations throughout the United States. AFLC Home Missions exists to spread the gospel, working alongside our other departments. Under guidelines set by the annual conference, we bring the message, send workers, and encourage those already in place.

To do this, we need two things: first we need our AFLC family to pray God to send a revival so that our lives will be totally committed to Him; second, we need laborers. We are looking for early retired men and women to come alongside of us, sharing their talents. There isn't anyone we cannot use in some capacity to bring the good news to our nation.

We have much work to do. The harvest fields are indeed still white. One of our home missions committee members once said that his vision was to see an AFLC congregation in every county in the United States. That's our mission and our goal. Please pray with us.

— **Pastor Paul M. Nash**
Home Missions Director

World Missions

Our AFLC World Missions is an obedient response to the mission mandate given by the risen Christ to be the vessels through whom His message of love, forgiveness and restoration is shared with all the peoples of the world.

Today our AFLC World Missions is involved in: evangelism; church planting; Bible distribution; theological training with a seminary, Bible school and by extension; children's homes and school; widow's home; Jesus film ministry; medical and dental help; and relief work in times of disaster.

Currently our world missions ministry exists in four countries. Our oldest mission field, Brazil, has work in the states of Parana, Espirito Santos and Mato Grosso do Sul. This work is carried on in partnership with the AFLC-Brazil.

In Mexico we encourage and assist the Central Mexican Lutheran Church with congregations and national pastors working in the state of Guanajuato. American missionaries have begun work in the state of Aguascalientes. A national pastor works in the state of Sonora, and in Puebla we have a missionary on loan to the World Mission Prayer League.

India's state of Andhra Pradesh is where thirty-some national workers proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ among the Hindus and Moslems. In Europe, Portugal is our newest work. Later this year we anticipate the arrival of the first American missionary to that country. Our AFLC also has a missionary on loan to the East European Missions Network who serves in the Czech Republic and Poland.

We praise God for AFLC members serving God in foreign lands with independent, faith-mission agencies, such as the Wycliffe Bible Translators.

We continue to receive from various corners of the world the "Macedonian call: Come over and help us!"

— **Pastor Eugene Enderlein**
World Missions Director



The world mission committee in 1992.

Seminary

The first report of the "Seminary Board" to the AFLC Annual Conference in 1964 outlined two main reasons for establishing a seminary. The first was the need "for a theological seminary among Lutherans in our land with an orientation to the Bible and to our historic confessions that is uncompromisingly faithful and sound."

From the beginning of our seminary thirty-six years ago until the present, the conviction has remained firm that "the Bible is the divinely inspired, revealed, inerrant and authoritative Word of God and as such is trustworthy in all its parts and the supreme and only rule of faith and practice." A childlike trust in and commitment to the inspired Scriptures is fundamental in the entire life of the seminary.

There is full subscription to the historic Lutheran confessions because they are faithful and correct statements of Bible truths. The seminary rejoices in its Lutheran heritage and desires to stand with those who would call the Lutheran Church back to the Bible and back to the Confessions in order to faithfully and effectively minister to the needs of this generation.

The second reason given in that early seminary report for establishing a theological school was in order "to preserve and to promote the goal we have together, that of free and living congregations." To do that, there is need for "free and living" spiritual leaders. That is why the seminary's statement of policy continues to emphasize, "A pastor is to be, above all, a man of God. ... Only people living close to the Lord can reveal Him." We would emulate the goal of the Lutheran seminary of the nineteenth century: "Our seminary does not want to send out a single minister who is not in personal and experiential relationship with Christ Jesus. We need and want an orthodox Pietism ... a ministry aflame with the love of Christ and of souls." This is our earnest prayer as we work together for free and living congregations.

— **Dr. Francis Monseth, Free Lutheran Seminary Dean**

Bible School

The Association Free Lutheran Bible School was established in 1966. The school was opened to meet the need for a conservative Lutheran Bible school where youth, irrespective of race and color, could be given a firm foundation in the faith. The first class was enrolled in September 1966 with thirteen students.

The Bible school has a fourfold purpose:

- To bring students into and establish them in the assurance of personal salvation in Christ Jesus through the study of God's Word.

- To prepare students to face a secular society in school and community by grounding them in the Word of God.

- To help students embrace the truth as found in the Bible, and to reject the theological errors so prevalent today.

- To challenge students to seek God's will in all personal vocational choices.

— **Pastor James L. Johnson, AFLBS Dean**



Pastor Todd Schierkolk received his degree in 1992 from the Free Lutheran Seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Parish Education

AFLC Parish Education serves the local congregation by providing biblical Lutheran educational and devotional resources for teaching the Word of God to all ages. The goal of parish education is to help develop living congregations through the teaching of the Word, which begins in nourishing the spiritual life of children.

In an article entitled, "The Living Congregation," Georg Sverdrup notes that "the work of a living congregation has its starting point in infant baptism." He reminds us that as our children receive spiritual life in baptism, then clearly the congregation has a "holy obligation" to nourish that life by the Word of life. This obligation requires the participation of the entire congregation, both men and women. Sverdrup continues, "If little ones shall not be starved to death spiritually, nor be torn away from Christ's body by force and power or by Satan's cunning ways, ... so must all the congregation both know their responsibility and be on guard and accomplish the work in the right time and in the right way." The members of the congregation are called to the essential work of nourishing and strengthening the faith of the children with the Word so they will not die spiritually. This principle is the foundation for parish education in the congregation.

The need for and benefits of the regular teaching ministry of the congregation are not limited to children, but extend to all ages. All members need to be taught the Word of God, both law and gospel. All members need to be directed to the cross of Christ for salvation and Christian living. As the Word is faithfully taught, members can be assured that the Holy Spirit is at work within the congregation calling sinners to repentance and strengthening believers in their faith. The parish education department supports congregations in this work and produces materials such as, Sunday school curriculum; Bible studies; confirmation materials; teaching visuals and resources; historical, doctrinal, and devotional books.

— **Marian J. Christopherson, Parish Education Director**

Evangelism

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

In 1996 a mission statement was written by the AFLC Commission On Evangelism (COE). This statement says that our reason for existence is: "To develop and sustain an excitement for evangelism throughout the AFLC from congregation to the headquarters."

As the COE looks at its purpose, we feel that a number of key areas need to be addressed. We need to keep the banner of evangelism always before our AFLC. The AFLC exists to "make disciples."

One of our aims is to train church leadership teams on the importance of nine to twelve months of preparation for any evangelistic event. The main areas of such preparation involve prayer, counselor training, and discipleship training of all ages. It takes time.

We desire to get tools for evangelism out to all the lay people from youth on up. There is a vast tool box available. We want to find the tools that will be a good fit for your congregation, and help you to implement a lifestyle, not a program. A program does not last. When we have the opportunity to help you implement a



The 1999 Free Lutheran youth convention in Estes Park, Colorado. The 2001 convention is scheduled for July 16-21.

"lifestyle evangelism" effort, you and your congregation will continue to see the fruit of new souls, helping to ignite you to continue to live to glorify Jesus.

Another key area stressed by the COE is the need for integrity on the part of each one of us who carries the name of Jesus. People will take a good look at Jesus if we look and smell like Him.

Please remember, "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest?' I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe (white) for harvest" (John 4:35).

The commission on evangelism exists to encourage each congregation to be harvesters. Call us. We would love to help you get the training you desire.

— **Pastor Jim Rasmussen, Director of Evangelism**

Youth Ministries

Our ministry to AFLC youth is a behind-the-scenes ministry. We lift others up. We seek to serve.

We come alongside the 247 AFLC churches that need support: fifty-nine have no youth workers; 54 have pastor-led youth groups; 115 have volunteer youth workers; and only 19 have paid youth workers. Of those, only fifty percent meet on a regular basis. All of these churches need training, help, vision, encouragement and support.

District camps and youth rallies have a long history in the AFLC youth ministry, but sometimes the planning of those events can become overwhelming for busy pastors and volunteers. We offer everything from suggestions to hands-on assistance in the planning of and organization of these events.

We have two national youth events that are led by volunteer pastors and lay people with the desire to see quality youth ministry happening on the national level. The biennial FLY conventions and the leadership conferences continue to have lasting impact on the lives of students within our congregations. Both conventions have important roles in the greater youth ministry within the AFLC, and they require a great deal of work from our youth office.

AFLC youth ministry is not limited to the work that is done here in the United States. Mission trips unite our youth to the greater body of Christ. Many churches become mission-sending agencies as the youth from their congregations are bringing the message of Jesus to other parts of the world.

Support comes in many forms. Sometimes it is more tangible like the above examples, other times it is more subtle. "When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up — one on one side, one on the other — so that his hands remained steady till sunset" (Exodus 17:12).

We want to hold up your hands!

— **Pastor Kevin Olson, Youth Ministries Director**

Women's Missionary Federation

The WMF consists of women who desire to be used for the Lord. This is stated in our "Leader's Handbook" under the heading: Our Commission. The early leaders provided a good foundation on which to build today. They wrote that the WMF's purpose was "to awaken and deepen interest in and love for the Kingdom of God at home and abroad, thus sharing in the great missionary enterprise of the Christian Church."

We seek to do this through monthly Bible studies, information concerning the missions of the WMF, and through personal involvement and financial contributions to the AFLC.

In recent years the national WMF board has become increasingly aware of the urgent need there is to minister to the many needs of today's women. Therefore at the 2000 WMF Convention, a proposed change was presented which expands the purpose of the WMF. This change enables our WMFs to include women's ministries.

One of the first ways we are stepping out in faith in this ministry will be at our women's retreat next May when Sonlife Ministries will lead a seminar instructing us on how to minister to the women around us by focusing on the priorities of the Great Commission. We, as a national WMF board, pray that this will be just the beginning of the vision the Lord leads us in. Yes, our WMFs remain solid on the purpose with which they were begun. In the new millennium, we seek to enlarge that purpose.

— **Faith Nelson, WMF President**



FLAPS

The newest corporation in the AFLC structure, the Free Lutheran Association of Pilot Supporters, Inc. (FLAPS) is in its second year of existence.

The mission statement for FLAPS states that it is a non-profit corporation dedicated to reaching lost souls for the Lord Jesus Christ through providing aviation services such as air transport, training, technical support, and maintenance, for AFLC mission staff.

FLAPS operates under the missions department of the AFLC and in this capacity, responds to needs which are identified by home and world missions. FLAPS will provide air transportation services for AFLC staff and for the support of mission programs in the field. Aircraft will also be placed on loan to other evangelical church bodies to support their world missions work. The first of these was an aircraft placed into service in Alaska in late 1999.

Although the common denominator for FLAPS activities is aviation related, several other areas of involvement are under development. One is to "match resources with needs." Needs in the field will be identified for home and world missions. A "resource pool" of AFLC congregation members who are available to help fill those needs will be developed.

Another area of involvement envisioned for FLAPS is the development of a disaster response team. A motorized vehicle will be equipped with pertinent equipment and a team of volunteers trained to be on call as early responders to disasters, such as floods, tornadoes, fires, etc.

FLAPS is a total faith ministry and is committed to the Great Commission given by our Lord in Matthew 28:19-20. We continue to seek the Lord's guidance as the future of our young organization unfolds.

— **Lavon O. Bohling, Executive Director FLAPS**



The Association Retreat Center

"Come and rest awhile" (Mark 6:31), is the invitation given by the Association Retreat Center near Osceola, Wisconsin. The ARC provides spiritual and physical refreshment to every generation.

The former government radar base was purchased by the AFLC in 1979 and has been operating as a Christian retreat center and Bible camp since that time. The ARC is utilized by scholastic groups as well as a variety of Christian youth and adult groups.

Upcoming fall events include the "Classics Retreat" October 6-8 and the "Family Retreat" October 27-29. For more information and registration, contact Pam Olson at 1-888-748-3969; fax 1-952-496-0467; or e-mail arc@aflc.org.

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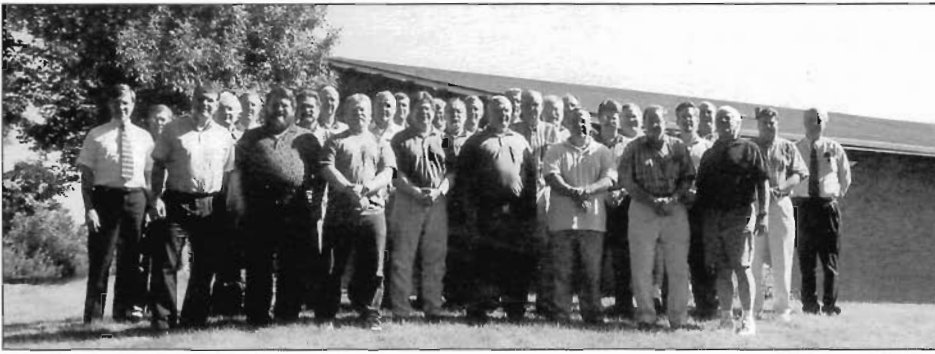
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Plymouth, Minnesota — Pictured are Pastor Peter J. Franz and Dr. Francis Monseth, FLS Dean, at the installation service for Pastor Franz at Medicine Lake Lutheran Church on July 23, 2000.

Bloomington, Minnesota — Lutherans For Life will hold its Eighteenth National Convention during November 3-5, 2000 at the Thunderbird Hotel and Convention Center. This is the first time in 15 years that the convention has been held in the Minneapolis area. Join hundreds of Lutherans from around the country for this weekend filled with fellowship, encouragement, and enlightenment in the work of upholding the sanctity of all human life. For more information call Lutherans For Life at 1-888-364-LIFE, e-mail: info@lutheransforlife.org, or check out the LFL web site: www.lutheransforlife.org.



Seminary sponsors Summer Institute of Theology

During the last part of July, the Free Lutheran Seminary sponsored their annual Summer Institute of Theology. Thirty-six lay pastors, pastors and lay people attended the sessions taught by Dr. Francis Monseth, Pastor Robert Lee, Pastor Jerry Holmaas and the course on parish education led by Marian Christopherson and Pastor Martin Horn. Five students attended the six-week summer Greek course taught by Pastor Phil Haugen.

Pastor Roger David of Good

Shepherd Lutheran Church in Lincoln, Illinois has participated in the SIT for the past three years. He wrote, "Each year, these five days are proving to be among the most meaningful.

"Summer Institute courses relate to important areas of ministry. There's no denying, however, that days are long if you take all four courses offered. From 7:40 a.m. to about 9 p.m., the five days include about seven hours per day in well-planned and interesting classes. The

time passes quickly and is a well-spent investment with good dividends. As a result of the classes and follow-up assignments, coupled with discussions, prayer, devotions and fellowship among students, faculty and staff, I am becoming a better equipped pastor.

"The courses at the SIT relate to a congregation's purposes of preaching repentance and offering the free gift of salvation in Christ, helping Christian brothers and sisters grow in the Word and toward maturity in faith, and building up members of His Body for the work of ministry or service. The Summer Institute is benefiting the Lord's Church, and for that we offer Him our thanks and praise."

Pastor Tom Tuura, St. James, Minnesota has resigned as pastor of Hosanna Free Lutheran Church. He has served the congregation since 1995 and is taking a hiatus from the pastoral ministry. He has a burden for ministry primarily to the non-church-going population and has taken on a professional job in Lake Crystal, Minnesota. He also plans to do some studying and writing during this time, plus working toward his instrument commercial pilot certificate.

Pastor Dale Finstrom, Glyn-don, Minnesota spent three weeks last August preaching and teaching in the Czech Republic. His daughter, Laura, traveled with him. Pastor Finstrom serves Maranatha Free Lutheran in Glyndon.

Fifty years in the Lord's service

Pastor John Dennis has served Ruthfred Lutheran Church in Bethel Park, Pennsylvania since July of 1950, and has become both pastor and friend to the congregation and the whole community in the ensuing years.

A native of Marion, Ohio, he graduated from Capital University and the Evangelical Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio with A.B. and B.D. degrees. His first pastorate was to the small mission congregation of fifty people in the Pittsburgh suburb of Bethel Park.

Today that mission congregation numbers 1,400 and holds three Sunday services with an average attendance of 750. To honor their beloved pastor, the congregation packed all three services on his anniversary, July 23, 2000. The long-time organist, DeWayne Kanaghy composed special music for the occasion.

During his tenure, the Ruthfred congregation has built a large sanctuary, an education wing and now is



considering an expansion building program. Pastor Dennis encourages his parish in mission endeavors and they enjoy supporting various ministries. The church sponsors a large Sunday school, nursery school, youth program, organizations for service along with Bible studies for men, women, seniors, and an outreach Bible study to the community. A health ministry has been recently added. Ruthfred is noted for its fine choirs, including a bell choir. Pastor Dennis' interest in fine music and

liturgy has been the inspiration for the music program. His tenor voice lends beauty and dignity to the service and liturgy.

As a leader, an example, and a devout pastor, John Dennis has been a true servant of Jesus Christ in Bethel Park.

Pastor James Molstre joined Pastor Dennis in the Ruthfred ministry four years ago, and they continue as co-pastors in the church today.

Congregations celebrate 100 years

Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Evergreen Park, Illinois

On March 19, 1900, five families joined together to worship. A church was purchased in September of that year at 52nd and Wells Street in Chicago. Twelve years later the congregation built a new church at 71st and Aberdeen Street. It was affiliated with the Hauge Lutheran Church before the merger and joined the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the 1917 merger until the new ALC was formed on January 1, 1961. The current building has been the congregation's home since 1969 and is located at 9544 South St. Louis Avenue in the suburb of Evergreen Park.

The congregation has a long list of members who went on to be of full-time service to the Lord. They include: Deaconess Bernadina Solberg, medical missionary Eleanor J. Pierson, Pastors Thomas Gabrielsen, Wilfred Paul, Henry, Frank and James Ericksen, B. Gabrielsen, Oscar Jacobsen, Gabriel Gabrielsen, Jacob Andreasen, Harold Swensen, Harold Larsen, Thomas Williamsen, Sidney Swensen, Jordan Jacobsen, and Stanley Williamsen.

Ebenezer Lutheran is currently being served by visiting pastors and three laymen from Helmar Lutheran in Newark: Odell Kittelson, Sheldon Een and Don Davidson.

Pastor Jan Horne, Fairbury, Nebraska, who has served Faith Lutheran Church for the past four years, recently announced his retirement effective on October 1, 2000.

Pastor Jonathan Unverzagt, DeKalb, Illinois has resigned as pastor of Grace Lutheran where he has served since 1996 in order to accept the call to Christ the Lord Lutheran in Onalaska, Wisconsin. He began his new ministry on September 10, the 24th anniversary of Pastor Dick Gilmore's service to the congregation. *Pastor Unverzagt will serve as co-pastor with Pastor Gilmore. The new address for the Unverzagt family is 5729 Basswood Rd., Sparta, WI 54656, phone 608-272-3953.*

Sell Lake Free Lutheran Church, Shevlin, Minnesota

The northern Minnesota woods were just beginning to be settled in the late 1800s. A Pastor Opsata of Nymore heard of a Scandinavian settlement southwest of Bemidji and one day in 1897, he and a neighbor walked through the woods until they found a trail. They heard a rooster crow and arrived at the Thorwald Anderson home. He was welcomed and the first of several services was held for those early settlers.

On February 17, 1900, Hans Larson of Sell Lake passed away. There was no cemetery or church in the community so his son, Lars Hanson, donated land for a cemetery. The funeral service was conducted by Pastor Hans Bode who was called to serve the area by the Lutheran Free Church Mission Board. Later that same day, Sell Lake Free Lutheran Church was organized. Torval Anderson was the "klokker" who led the singing and opening prayers. Services were held in homes and schoolhouses.

In 1921 the congregation began building their first church. After several additions and improvements over the years, the congregation added a fellowship hall in 1998. They form a parish with Landstad and Trinity Lutheran and have been affiliated with the AFLC since 1963. Pastor William Goodman is currently serving them.

On May 29, 2000, over three

Pastor Paul Wigtil, West Union, Iowa, has accepted a call to serve Christ the King Free Lutheran Church, East Grand Forks, Minnesota. Approved for call in the AFLC by the coordinating committee, he is a graduate of Faith Seminary, Tacoma, Washington, and comes through colloquy from the AALC. *Until he begins his new ministry this fall, Christ the King congregation will continue to be served on an interim basis by Pastor Dick Gunderson, Cambridge, Minnesota.*

hundred guests joined in celebration of 100 years of God's grace and love. Quoting one of Sell Lake's anniversary booklets: "And so, today we pause to linger over the memories, and give thanks and praise to God who brought us through the dark hours and blessed us with some happy ones as well. May God give us the vision of the unfinished task before us and grace to labor while it is yet day — night cometh when no man can work."

Alida Lutheran Church, Alida, Minnesota

On June 25, 2000 Alida Lutheran celebrated its 100th anniversary with thankful and humble hearts for the faith of their fathers, those Christian men and women who brought with them to the new world of opportunity, little more than their will to work and their inspiring faith in God. Nearly all the original members were Norwegians who migrated to this country to find a new life, to clear away the forests and to establish homes in the wilderness. Foremost in their hearts was a plan to build a church.

The present church was built in 1909 and is located eleven miles south of Shevlin. The congregation had joined the United Church in 1907 and later affiliated with the NLCA before becoming the ELC and then the ALC. In 1988 they joined the AFLC and were served by Pastor Lyle Twite as part of the Bagley parish. Currently they form a parish with Rice Free Lutheran and are served by Pastor Ron Pulscher. Pastor Twite continues to serve Grace Lutheran, the other congregation which made up the former three-point parish.

This summer's 100th anniversary celebration began with morning church services followed by dinner and an afternoon program. The afternoon service featured special musical numbers along with the honoring of several long-time members and a greeting from former pastor, Lyle Twite.

The members of the church wish to thank all those who participated in this truly great celebration.

Choosing the right picture

When putting together an issue of the magazine, we attempt to have a picture on the cover that illustrates the predominant theme of that issue. This time we had to think through what kind of picture would be most appropriate when the objective of the issue is to answer the question, what is the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations? How do we define this church body, this spiritual movement, with a photo?

Some natural choices for photos could be a nice shot of the headquarters building overlooking Medicine Lake outside of Minneapolis. Or we could go up the hill and take a picture of the seminary and the Bible school buildings. We could travel a little ways east and find some nice picture possibilities at the Association Retreat Center. Maybe a picture of all the AFLC executive officers or directors or members of committees would be good?

As you have probably already observed, we put on the cover pictures of some congregations that are celebrating their 100th year anniversaries this year. They represent what the AFLC is all about and what is the heart of the vision: congregations.

The Lutheran Free Church movement began because of a vision of what congregations could be and what God could do in and through free and living congregations. Georg Sverdrup is looked to as one of the founders of the movement. In describing him in the pamphlet, "Georg Sverdrup for Our Day," John Stensvaag wrote, "But as we now view him from a distance, we can see quite clearly that the one great cause for which he lived, labored and died was the Christian congregation: that the congregation as presented in the New Testament might become a reality on American soil."

A love for the local congregation and a belief in its great importance was a core reason behind the beginning of the AFLC in 1962. In his address to the 1965 annual conference, the first AFLC president, Pastor John Strand said: "It is easy to become so concerned with Christian doctrine, apart from the congregation, that we forget the congregation. I am a firm believer in a good emphasis on correct doctrine. This is so necessary in our day. But we must not forget the congregation. It was for the sake of the right concept of the congregation that the Association was formed. Let us never forget that. And people are generally more interested in the congregation, their congregation, than any other phase of the kingdom. When we help them build

the congregation we will have their support. If we get side-tracked much more than the Association will die. I believe that the one main task of our Association is to hold up the Scriptural pattern of the congregation. God grant that we be faithful. Not all evangelical Lutherans agree with us. Many simply do not understand our position. To be evangelistic is not always the same as being of free church mind and spirit."

Our uniqueness and reason for being an association of congregations comes not just from our doctrinal stand or our emphasis on evangelism or our concern for applying what we believe to how we live. The AFLC exists today to uphold that vision that "According to the Word of God, the congregation is the right form of the Kingdom of God on earth" (Fundamental Principle 1). Our purpose is to declare and demonstrate that when "The congregation directs its own affairs, subject to the authority of the Word and Spirit of God, and acknowledges no other ecclesiastical

authority or government above itself" (Fundamental Principle 5) the gospel is most effectively spread and believers are built up in Christ.

Having that vision results in our deep interest in building up the congregation. We care about what goes on at headquarters, the schools, the camps and other areas of the work, because what goes on there is to be done for the purpose of building up congregations. The departments exist to serve the congregations. Our goal and great longing is to see strong and healthy congregations.

Shortly after I began as editor of this magazine Pastor Strand reminded me that the magazine was "the voice of the congregations." We should be continually asking questions such as: how can we most effectively serve the congregations? Is this going to help build them up? What do the congregations need?

The heart of the AFLC is in some 250 different places, for that is how many congregations we have. It is in those places, those congregations, where the action is. Those are the front lines for serving the Lord. That is where things are truly interesting and the potential is greatest for seeing people brought to Jesus and lives transformed. The most significant work of the AFLC is going on in places like those featured on our cover — in local congregations.

The founders of this movement were enthralled by the vision God gave them from the Scriptures of the congregation. May that vision of free and living congregations continue to inspire us today and impact all that we do.

— Pastor Craig Johnson

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BUILDING THE BASE

Uniqueness of Christ

“All religions are the same. ... Jesus, Muhammad, Bhudda, and Krishna were all great religious teachers whose teaching were basically the same. ... Just because you don't believe in Jesus doesn't mean you aren't going to heaven. ... It doesn't matter which religion you practice as long as you practice one. ... All roads lead to heaven.” Surely these quotes represent the embracing of religious pluralism and the redefining of tolerance that penetrates our Western culture so thoroughly.

What is meant by religious pluralism is the view that there are a number of religious viewpoints available, all equally meaningful, relevant and true. Therefore, it is considered not only impossible but deeply arrogant for one particular view to be seen as dominant. Tolerance has been redefined in our culture to fit with this idea of religious pluralism.

These concepts are all undergirded by the postmodern view of truth which basically affirms that truth cannot be known, consequently truth becomes subjective rather than objective and the statement “true for you, but not for me” becomes the battle cry of the cul-

ture. One of my professors suggested “a person must find whatever makes life meaningful and happy for them, and that becomes the truth they should live by.” The fact is that while most people assume all religions to be fundamentally the same and superficially different, it is actually just the opposite. Religions are superficially the same and fundamentally different. One writer sarcastically put it, “All religions are the same. They only differ in matters of heaven and hell, life and death, sin and salvation.”

What is it that makes Jesus unique? The answer lies in the words of Jesus about Himself. He proclaimed Himself not simply to be a new religious teacher, or the new and latest prophet, or a wise sage. Jesus presented Himself as the complete fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. Had He claimed simply to be a teacher of truth as other religious teachers have done, than His uniqueness would be highly suspect.

Jesus, however, did not simply teach truth. He claimed to be Truth. He did not teach a way, He pronounced Himself as the Way. He did not suggest a manner of life, He stated He is Life.

For Jesus to make these claims is perfectly reasonable, but the

question becomes, was He telling the truth or not? Anyone could make the same claims as Jesus. However, can one substantiate those claims?

Jesus offered the following as His substantiation of His claims. “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” With those words Jesus promised to supply forthright and convincing proof that indeed He, and He alone, was worthy of His status. The proof would be His resurrection. Without the Resurrection, Jesus would have to be classified as a liar or insane, which would logically remove Him from being classified as “good.”

The apostle Paul made the Resurrection the very linchpin of his argument stating that “if Christ was not raised, we among all men are most to be pitied.” Without the Resurrection, Christianity is nothing more than a detestable lie providing a false hope of heaven for its pitiful adherents. The one fundamental question then becomes: Did Jesus rise from the dead? Is there adequate evidence to believe that such an event really did occur? I will take up this question in my next article.

— Rick Tollefson
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