

THE LUTHERAN 

JANUARY 2011

# AMBASSADOR



## *Pious Life*

A spiritual life  
movement

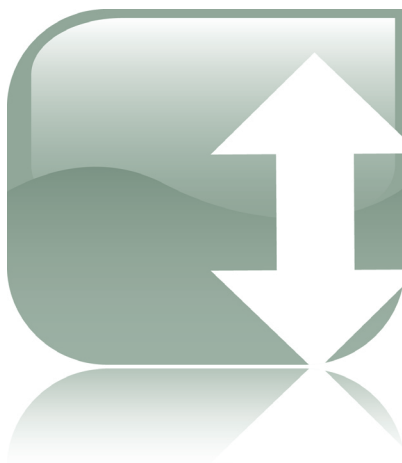
# Put off,

BY PATRICIA BALLMANN

**A**h, it's that time of year again. Time to stop putting off those projects, time to put off some pounds, time to put on a new you. Have you noticed how many put ons and put offs there are in the Bible? The list can be quite daunting when you begin to study it. At times, I just about give up on ever becoming like my beautiful Lord and Savior. However, Jesus Christ offers me the key of hope and promise when I am tempted to become discouraged or overwhelmed with the put off/put on list. Let's briefly examine what that list entails.

Those who are believers are called to put off the old man according to Ephesians 4:22 and Colossians 3:9. What is inherent in this old man? These two chapters give us quite the picture: anger, malice, blasphemy, corrupt communication, deception, all manner of lusts and immorality, bitterness, pride ... the list goes on and on. These are the attributes we inherited through our sinful nature and that are imbedded in our hearts and lives from conception. These are also the very things we are instructed to put off by the power of Jesus Christ.

We are then commanded in these same chapters to replace our old nature by putting on the new man, which is a new creation in Christ Jesus and patterned after Him. The characteristics of the new man include mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forgiveness, faith, truth, and love, along with many others.



# put on

These qualities are attributes of Christ, and they should be the distinguishing characteristics of everyone professing to be a Christian. Just looking at one aspect of the armor of God, which we are also commanded to put on, is staggering. Take faith, for example. You could strive for a lifetime and still not exhibit perfect faith in God.

Starting to feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the task? Don't panic—God has the solution. We are instructed to put on one more thing: Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 13:14). As I was recently reminded in a sermon, when I put on Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, I have taken on His attributes, like love, humility, and so on. When I put on Jesus Christ, I put off my sins, such as pride, anger, etc. Darkness must flee from the light. When I put on Christ, my sin cannot stay in the presence of God's awesome holiness.

So how does this work out in my life? My focus is no longer on increasing my faith, for example; instead, I focus on Christ, and my faith is directly strengthened as I look to Him. Jesus Christ—the source of love, purity, grace, righteousness, and truth—brings with Him all the merit I could never muster up on my own. We don't have to sort through the lengthy list of put offs and put ons. Just look to Jesus and put Him on!

*Ballmann is a member of Word of Truth Lutheran, Glen Rose, Texas.*

January 2011 >>

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR vol. 49, no. 1

Editor Pastor Craig Johnson  
craigj@teleport.com

Managing Editor Ruth Gunderson  
ruthg@aflc.org

Editorial Board Oryen Benrud  
Pastor Jerry Moan  
Pastor James L. Johnson

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

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

**Subscription rates:**

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

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

Thought should be given to a more extensive use of the Word of God among us. . . . The more at home the Word of God is among us, the more we shall bring about faith and its fruits.

—Philip Jacob Spener  
*Pia Desideria*

Those that profess themselves to be Christ's are known not only by what they say but also by what they practice.

—Ignatius

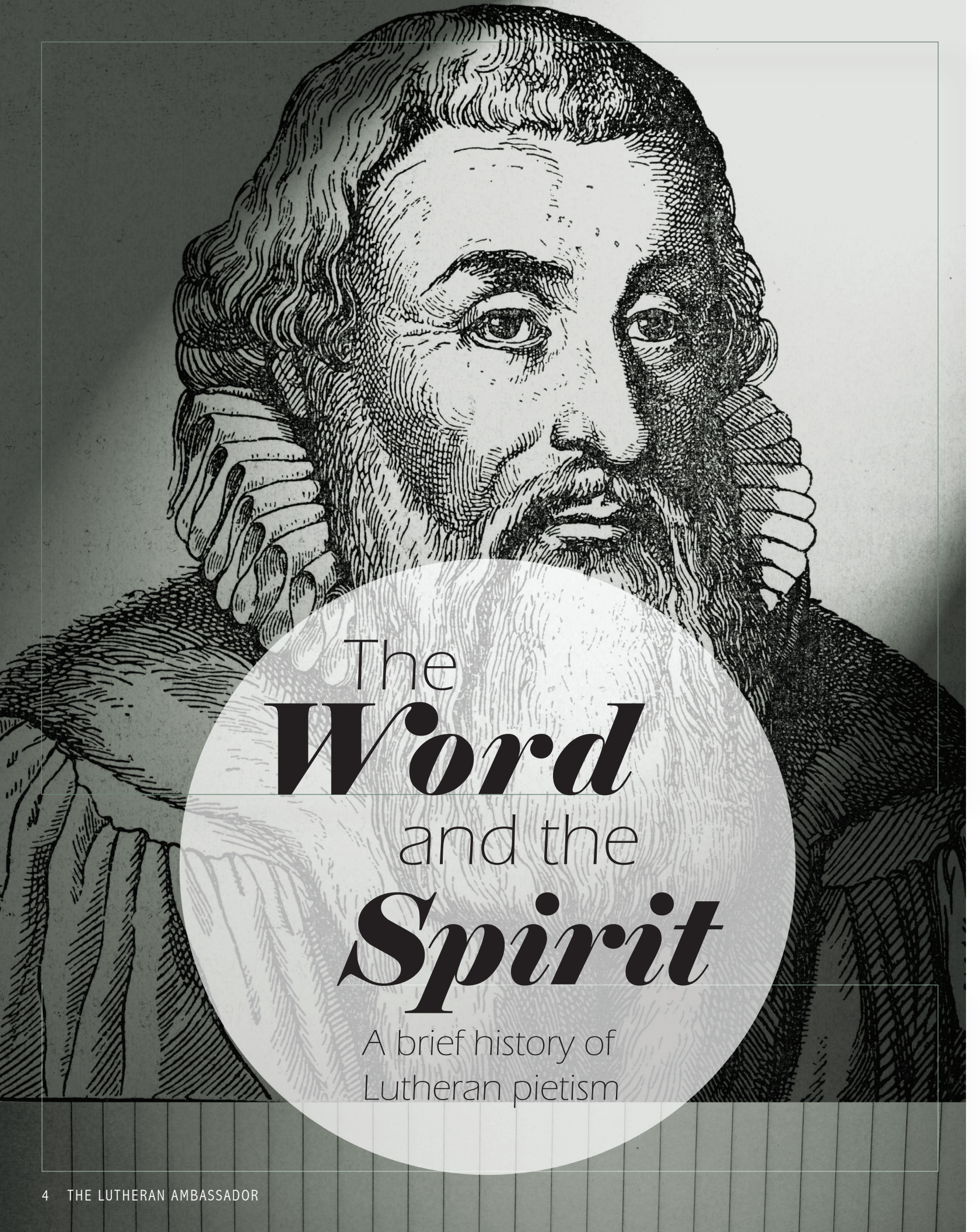
I am resolved never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.

—Jonathan Edwards

It is not enough to know God's Word; one must also practice it in a living, active manner.

—Johan Arndt  
*True Christianity*





The  
***Word***  
and the  
***Spirit***

A brief history of  
Lutheran pietism





By Pastor Robert L. Lee

Almost 30 years ago I was privileged to attend the Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions in Fort Wayne, Ind., where an essay on pietism was presented by Dr. Trygve R. Skarsten. He reminded us of the legacy of this important spiritual life movement: small group Bible studies, the use of devotional literature in our homes, social welfare

institutions such as hospitals and care centers for the aged, concern for the spiritual formation in our seminaries, confirmation instruction, an emphasis on pastoral visitation, and the modern world mission movement.

"We have all tasted of Pietism and found it to be good," he declared, "even though we are reluctant to admit it at times" (*Trinity Seminary Review*, Fall 1981).

It is helpful to consider the background of this movement in the events of the time. The Thirty Years War ended in 1648, leaving Germany in a pitiable and pathetic condition. Some estimate that the population was reduced by one-third through disease, military casualties, and immigration; in one province of southern Germany the population dropped during a 20-year period from 330,000 to 60,000. Farms and villages were pillaged, and there was ample evidence of moral and spiritual decline.

There are differing opinions concerning the birth of pietism. Some point to the influence of a devotional classic entitled, *On True Christianity*, whose author, a German Lutheran pastor named Johan Arndt (1555-1621), has been called the grandfather of the movement. Yet he was one of many voices during the century raised in strong protest against the cold and lifeless conditions in church life. Dr. Carl F. Wisløff, author of *Do the Work of an Evangelist*, tells of one of these voices, Pastor Heinrich Mueller, who decried the four churchly idols: the pulpit, the altar, the baptismal font, and the confessional.

"People do not truly repent of their sins and confess them, yet they go to church and receive the sacrament," said Mueller. "Such an attitude is only an outward, official churchliness. There is no real life in it at all, only an imitation of life."

The father of pietism was Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705), who introduced the devotional fellowships while he served as pastor in Frankfurt, Germany. Born in Alsace and reared by godly parents of aristocratic ancestry, he received an excellent education in noted institutions of learning, earning a doctorate in theology. This respected pastor was grieved by the deadness in so much of Protestant Christendom. Christianity is more than the memorization of catechisms, he taught; Christianity is life, and it must be lived.

The author of *Innermission Church History* (p. 207) dates the beginning of the awakening in Spener's parish as July 18, 1669, after he preached on the Pharisee and the publican from Luke 18. Many were converted, and a powerful season of refreshing began.

The word "pietist" began as an uncomplimentary nickname for believers who gathered in *collegia pietatis*, small group fellowships founded by Spener that met for the cultivation of spiritual life through Bible study and prayer. This revolutionary practice, a rediscovery of the Reformation teaching on the priesthood of all believers, spread to other parishes, and ignited what the American Puritan pastor Cotton Mather called "the fire of God which ... flames in the heart of Germany."

Five years after beginning this experiment Spener was asked to write an introduction to a collection of sermons by Johan Arndt. This caused such a stir that it would soon become a separate book, *Pia Desideria* (Pious Wishes). In it Spener not only pointed to the problems but also outlined a program for church reform, including improved training of pastors in regards to their personal spiritual life, the promotion of preaching that produced holy living, more extensive use of the Scriptures than the Sunday sermon, conducting all controversies in a spirit of prayer and gentleness, encouragement for lay involvement (priesthood of all believers), and an emphasis of the practice of love and good works.

The second phase in the history of pietism is associated with the name of August Francke (1663-1727) and the University of Halle in Germany. Mentored by Spener and his successor in the leadership of the movement, Francke was convinced that hearers of the Word should also be doers, and he was responsible for putting thousands of students and others to work in the institutions that he established: schools, an orphanage, a home for widows, a bookstore and print shop, a library, a laundry, a farm, a bakery, a brewery, a hospital, and an organization that would in the coming decades distribute millions of Bibles and Scripture portions. Francke's encouragement for evangelistic outreach resulted in Halle becoming an early center for the rise of the Protestant world missions.

Pietism has an inspiring history, but there are many who seek to disown any connection to the movement, labeling it legalistic or even heretical. No one would deny that some later developments may have been marked by unbalanced theology and practices, yet this should not cancel out our appreciation for and indebtedness to what the Spirit of God accomplished through it.

Some may recall the closing comments of Dr. Carl Wisløff when he lectured for the AFLC Seminary's Summer Institute of Theology in 1987: "A pietist is not a very nice name to have, in the opinion of most people. ... A pietist is accused of being a narrow-minded person, bearing gloom and darkness to all that is beautiful. Once after I had spoken on these things I was asked if I considered myself a pietist. I answered, 'I am afraid that I do not have the right to such a high claim.' But the man responded, 'No, you are a pietist all right.' I replied, 'Thank you very much indeed'" (*Do the Work of an Evangelist*, p. 92).

*Lee, a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., is a member of the faculty of the AFLC Schools, Plymouth, Minn.*

I

was having lunch at a Bible conference in Europe a few years back with a Bible teacher from Germany named Heinz, and we found out we had much in common.

We both were in our 40s and working with college-age believers. He loved the Bible and cared about reaching souls for Christ. Heinz used the word “revival” freely and admired Luther, like I do. Disarmingly open, he impressed me with his kindness, warmth, and humble humor. He didn’t know it all, and that was fine with me. I don’t either. But I’m eager to learn and grow.

With that in mind, I felt free to ask Heinz more personal questions. I assumed he was a German Lutheran, but I didn’t know much more than that.

“What are you?” I asked, looking for him to describe his theological camp, view on the Bible and spiritual life. “How would you describe yourself, theologically?”

“I’m a pietist,” he said.

The answer surprised me. I had not heard many people from my generation use the label so freely, but Heinz employed the term like it was second nature—much like I would use the term *evangelical*. So I played it coy: “What do you mean by that?”

“You know,” he said, “that movement among Lutherans that emphasizes the personal experience of salvation, Bible study, prayer, revival, missions.”

“I like it,” I told him. “Sounds like me.”

For Heinz, piety was a happy adjective, defining what Luther was describing in his *Preface to Romans*: “a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith.”

I have thought about that conversation many times since then. With Heinz as my inspiration, I began to study the pietism movement more closely. I had heard my seminary teachers use the term, steering my classmates and me to explore the pursuits my adopted theological hero, Georg Sverdrup, espoused. I liked his favorite description, “living Christianity.” But the word *pietism* seemed foreign—a word for another generation.

You might be cautious to use the term yourself. I understand. It’s not a word I just slip into a casual conversation at my daughter’s soccer practice or with my younger pastor friends. I sometimes use the phrase when my Evangelical Free or Calvary Chapel brothers ask me, “What kind of Lutheran are you?” But I don’t even use it when I pray: “Dear Lord, let me be a better pietist.” Not quite.

But the more I studied pietism, the more I liked it. I began to read about Heinz’s spiritual ancestors, Johan Arndt, Philipp Jakob Spener, and Spener’s godson, Count von Zinzendorf, another hero to me. John Wesley identified himself as a pietist after he spent three months of 1738 with von Zinzendorf’s Moravian fellowship at Herrnhut. I learned the movement sprouted in Europe around 1675, when Spener published his book, *Pia Desideria* (Pious Desires). That classic work divided the

*Continued on page 16*



By Pastor James L. Johnson

# *Positively Pious*

The secret to non-petty  
pietism and a robust  
faith in Jesus







# *Walk* by the *Spirit*

Are your actions a  
stumbling block?



# H

By Sarah Langness

ave you ever heard the phrase, “Do I say, not as I do”? We’d prefer for people to do what we *tell* them to do rather than following our example because often we don’t live in the way we urge others. Unfortunately, as believers, it is all too easy

to proclaim the truths of Scripture, to exhort others how to walk according to the Spirit, and to challenge our brothers and sisters to share the gospel with others but not actually do so ourselves. Talk is easy. It’s easy to recant, to apologize for our words, or to promise never to say such things again. Doing, on the other hand, is more difficult. Doing is when we put feet to our faith, when we actually walk in the way we exhort others to do. And it is in our doing that we are most carefully watched.

We are watched not only by our omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent God, but also by the people around us, both believers and unbelievers. They may be observing how your relationship with Jesus affects your daily life, or trying to distinguish what makes you, a Christian, different than the rest of the world. Whatever the case may be, it’s intimidating to consider the eyes that are all around us. As Christians, we are Christ’s ambassadors (II Corinthians 5:20), bearing His wonderful message of salvation to a lost and hurting world. As such, it is critical for us to examine ourselves.

In the early Church, the apostle Paul encouraged believers to examine themselves to see if they were in the faith (II Corinthians 13:5), to ensure their actions would not pose a stumbling block to others. One of the issues that caused stumbling and is addressed in the book of I Corinthians was the eating of food sacrificed to idols. Paul says that believers know “there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and there is no God but one” (8:4), but this wasn’t known to all people. For the sake of those with a weak conscience, Paul urged the Corinthian church to stay away from such things.

“For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol’s temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ” (8:10-12).

In essence, Paul said that it was better for the Corinthian believers to sacrifice their personal desires for the sake of the lost, that they may come to know Christ.

Today we don’t necessarily struggle with eating food sacrificed to idols, yet stumbling blocks of a differing nature are present in abundance. Maybe it is the drinking of wine with a meal or the watching of certain movies or television shows. Our instinctual inclination is to feed our own passions and desires rather than looking to the concerns of others. But Jesus commands us to place our love for the Lord and our neighbors above ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). We aren’t to live in accordance with the desires of our flesh, but by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-18), that very same Spirit who “desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (I Timothy 2:4).

How do we determine if our actions will pose a stumbling block for those around us? Maybe it’s as simple as remembering the phrase, “What would Jesus do?” We may also benefit from asking ourselves the following questions: Is this activity pleasing to my Savior or am I participating in it for my own selfish desires? Am I walking in a manner worthy of the calling I have

*“Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jew or to Greek or to the church of God.”*

*— I Corinthians 10:31-32*

received? Is this going to draw me closer to Jesus, or pull me farther from Him? If I partake in this activity, will others be encouraged in the Lord, will the lost seek Him and the saved know Him better?

Ultimately, our goal should be pointing people, both saved and lost, to Jesus Christ. It is my prayer that each and every one of us would have such a passion to see souls come to Jesus that we would give up the earthly, physical things that seem so dear to us. May we confidently proclaim along with Paul that “we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ” (I Corinthians 9:12).

*Langness is a member of Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah, N.D.*

# W

e live in a world with many options. So much is at our fingertips and within our grasp. We can jump on a plane and fly around the world or delve into a video game that stretches the imagination and takes

us into new worlds. We can eat Pad Thai or drink Ethiopian coffee. If we're feeling adventurous, we can go skydiving or bungee jumping, and swim with the dolphins on the way home. We can surf the internet for fascinating facts and pursue anything we desire. We don't even have to leave our room anymore to have a social life or go to college.

With so much available to you, you may not think that your choices matter much in the big scheme of things. What does it matter if I just spend one more afternoon playing video games? What's another \$50? Who's it going to hurt if I just click this link with my tiny little mouse?

With so many options, how do we choose? What should we do with our lives? How should we spend our time? What should we spend our money on? What should we look at on the internet?

Ultimately, we are called to be pious (reverent or godly) in how we live our lives. The choices we make as Christians should be guided by God's Word.

Things can get pretty chaotic and time can fly by quickly. Choices that seemed small and unimportant at one time can suddenly become very large and sometimes devastating later on. Jesus said in Matthew 5 that "everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment ... and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." He goes on to say that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Did you realize that not only your outward actions but even every little thought that you have is important? God not only sees your actions, but He knows your mind and heart!

This idea is frightful to anyone who has examined his or her heart or mind. We are all guilty before this all-knowing, all-powerful and perfect God! Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." We cannot and will not be able to please Him or make up for what we've done wrong by trying very hard or by doing good works. Isaiah 64:6 says that "all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment." But the good news (the gospel) is that He has provided a way for us.

Ephesians 2 says, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ... but God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Each one of us may receive this grace by faith. Believe it! Through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross we are offered freedom from our bondage to sin. Freedom to live for Him. Freedom from addictions to pornography, drugs, cutting, drunkenness, and sex outside of marriage. Freedom to love our Savior and our spouse. Freedom from depression and despair. Freedom to love God and love our brothers and sisters as ourselves.

You see, we are not free to live as we please, or free from slavery so that we can be lazy or cruel. Rather, we are free to live and to love.

"What good is it, my brothers if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warm and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead" (James 2: 14-17).

According to God's Word, if a tree is truly alive, will it not bear fruit? If it does not bear fruit, is it not as good as dead? Since God has brought you from death to life, should you not live?

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Remembering who deserves the credit and who accomplishes the work in all of our lives, may also help us in how we deal with others. It is not our job to deal with the sin of others, but to love our brothers and sisters enough to tell them of Jesus' loving sacrifice!

Piety is impossible for an unbeliever. It was only possible for Christ. Yet Christ has offered us not only His sinlessness, but His righteousness (piety). We are also told to love, not because it will earn us anything in God's eyes, but out of thankfulness for the love that we have received from Christ. This is an act of worship to our God and Savior. Therefore, good works spring forth from a changed heart and life, and ultimately from God and His grace through Jesus Christ, and not through any work of man.

*Nelson is a youth worker at Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Cokato, Minn.*





By Matthew Nelson

# *Your Choice*

Freedom in Christ  
gives us the opportunity  
to live rightly





# *Uphold Unity*

Freedom in Christ does  
not have to come at the  
cost of relationships



T

By Pastor Elden Nelson

he apostle Paul admonishes the church at Ephesus with these words, "Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long suffering, bearing with one another in love, *endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Ephesians 4:1, my emphasis).

It is true that we strive for and appreciate the peace that comes when there is unity. However, that unity and peace is often lost in relationships and thus missing in the cooperative efforts of members of the local congregation while they carry on with Kingdom work. That loss quickly hinders and impedes the work to which we have been called.

In Psalm 133:1 King David wrote, "Behold, how good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity." David goes on to say in verse three, "It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing—Life evermore." How, then, do we achieve and maintain that unity of the Spirit?

Is it not true that even as believers we have differing opinions, preferences and understandings of how the Christian life is lived and Christian work is carried out? It is not uncommon among us as believers to declare our liberty in Christ and attempt to justify our actions by holding onto that freedom at the cost of destroying unity among the brethren. It is at such times that the Holy Spirit reminds us of our stubborn selfish nature, and it is at that point that we make a choice. Do we allow the old nature to rule and thus plow through with our way? Or do we yield to the work and will of His Word and His Spirit?

Jesus gave us a wonderful example of yielding to the Father's will as He knelt in the garden and prayed, "... not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). His Word gives us further direction as to how we should meet the challenge of dealing with those who hold to an opinion different than ours. In I Corinthians 8:9 the apostle Paul says, "Beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak." Again in Mark 9:42

Jesus says, "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea."

Pride and self will are from our old nature. When they are permitted to take charge of our lives, relationships with Christian brothers and sisters are put in jeopardy and the Lord's work is hindered. Paul reminds us in Romans 12:3, "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." He gives further advice in verse 10, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another."

The verses from Ephesians chapter four are solid, sound direction for us. "Walk in *lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering*, bearing with one another in *love*, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Often times the issues that divide God's people are those things upon which pride insists. It is easy to forget that His people, in every congregation, are at differing levels of maturity. And so Satan takes those issues and uses them as wedges to cause hurt, to stir up anger, and to set brother against brother, sister against sister. But thanks be to Him from whom there is forgiveness. Thanks be to Him who can restore and renew those relationships that have been frayed by stubborn self will and pride.

We are not able to orchestrate, develop or legislate unity within the congregation. Only the Holy Spirit is able to unify, and He does that for His people as He builds character. It is a process. Sometimes we label it as sanctification, and sometimes we refer to it as growing in Christ. It is as His people become more like Christ that unity and peace are the result. And so as we walk that walk to which He has called us, let us seek Him, being patient, understanding, respectful and loving toward our brothers and sisters in Christ.

*Nelson, a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., is the president of the AFLC.*



By Scott Stroud

Alcoholic beverages have been in existence from the time of Noah's private wine-tasting party until the present day. I write this not to defend or attack the biblical legality of drinking. My purpose instead is to take a brief look at drunkenness. We know that the book of Proverbs was written to young men to lead them along a path

of wisdom and understanding concerning the practical aspects of godly living. If we approached the subject of alcohol from the angle of wisdom instead of legality, I think most Christians would choose to leave it alone.

The apostle Paul states in Romans 6:17 that "...you were once slaves of sin, [but] you have become obedient with all your heart to the standard of teaching in which you were instructed and to which you were committed."

In my early 20s I was a slave to alcohol and saw firsthand the negative consequences of being a drunkard. The book of Proverbs warns of four aspects of drunkenness, which lead us away from this standard of godly instruction.

*The drunkard is a mocker*

"Thine eyes shall behold strange things, and thy heart shall utter perverse things" (Proverbs 23:33, ASV).

The old Adam is always at war within us, fighting against the new man that is in Christ. The Bible admonishes us to put to death that old man through daily crucifixion (Colossians 3:5). It becomes impossible to do this when we become drunk because alcohol causes us to lose our inhibitions and lower our guard. As we cease resisting the flesh, we blurt out things that we later regret after we've sobered up. When our untamed tongues are set free by strong drink, a river of mockery and sin flows from our unrestrained sinful nature.

*The drunkard is a brawler*

"... strong drink a riotous brawler; and whoever errs or reels because of it is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1).

Anyone who has been around drunken people as I have knows that they love to fight. The sin that flows out of the old man unhindered comes barreling out toward other people through harsh words, spoiled tantrums and flying fists. The most disturbing thing is that people don't even realize how foolish and illogical they are being as they dredge up old quarrels and resurrect past pain. Scripture tells us that we are to take these wounds to the Lord for healing. But the drunkard stores them in his heart. Out of the overflow of his heart he speaks while under the influence. The next day the drunkard is beaten to a pulp like Proverbs 23:35 describes, or he is in jail waiting for a buddy to come bail him out.

*The drunkard lacks sound judgment*

"Lest they drink and forget the law and what it decrees, and pervert the justice due any of the afflicted" (Proverbs 31:5).

Solomon warned his sons that drunkenness would cause them to make bad decisions as they tried to govern Israel. Alcohol does this by nature, which is why many casinos give free drinks to those who are gambling. The gambler's judgment becomes hindered and he spends way more money than he would normally. Even though we may not be ruling over a country like Solomon's sons were, Titus 1:8 sets forth qualifications for those who would be leaders in the Church. One of those is sober mindedness. When our minds are clear the Holy Spirit can lead us in our decisions. But when wine invades that place in which the Spirit dwells, we are led astray by our own foolish thinking. Alcohol pushes the presence of the Lord out of our lives.

*The drunkard ends in poverty*

"For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty" (Proverbs 23:21).

All the previous aspects of drunkenness lead to a life of poverty. The drunkard mocks people, and so inevitably says things that are detrimental to his livelihood and friendships—the very things he is dependant upon for survival. He fights and brawls and ends up in court for legal issues, or maybe ends up destroying property that he is responsible to replace. The drunkard lacks good judgment and therefore makes bad business decisions or gambles away his earnings. The sensation of pleasure and self satisfaction (gluttony) have become so dominant in his life that he spends all he has to maintain this state of spiritual oblivion. In essence he is running from God.

*Legally speaking ...*

Even if you believe that the Bible does not prohibit drinking alcohol, for the sake of brothers like me, don't you think the loving thing to do is to leave it alone? Solomon told his sons it was not for kings to drink wine and strong drink. As heirs and adopted children of the King of kings I believe this applies to you and me.

*Stroud, a member of Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, Minn., is a senior at AFLTS.*



# Proverbs

## *wise Counsel*

Proverbs gives  
understanding in areas  
of practical living



objective, doctrine-focused and nominal Lutherans from the experiential, mission-minded Christians with which I spend my time. I studied the sparse translated writings of Georg Sverdrup, the Norwegian American professor who founded the Free Lutheran fellowship in 1897. He wasn't afraid of the term.

I realized I shouldn't be, either. After all, I want to be that kind of believer, a genuine Christian—positively pious and not a petty, divisive judge. I want the kind of living, active, busy faith that Paul describes in Philippians 1:21: “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” I want to be a constant learner, a lover of the Word, a seeker of souls. I want to “do the work of an evangelist.”

I will also own up to the problems associated with pietism. Historically, pietism hasn't been all roses since 1675. Hypocrisy and pride springs eternal after any Spirit-led awakening. Outward conformity degenerates into “a form of godliness that denies the power thereof” (II Timothy 3:5). Pietists like me can grow anti-intellectual. We can become overly subjective and elevate experience over truth. We can become isolated and reactive and harsh.

But that's not the pietism that Spener or Luther or Heinz promoted.

When I study what Pastor Spener proposed when he published his ground-breaking book in 1675, it's hard not to say, “I love this brand.” Spener's recommendations included small private Bible studies in the church, the wide use of spiritual gifts, and not just preaching the gospel, but practicing it and sharing it—“the indispensable sign” of a believer, said Spener. He also espoused warm and engaging relationships with people who don't yet believe.

He encouraged Christians to appeal to theological opponents “with sympathetic and kindly treatment,” and not brewing cold arguments or making bitter attacks. He also encouraged a new style of preaching, urging preachers to use “pleasing rhetoric” with a focus of “implanting” faith in the inner man, and calling for changed lives.

Who can argue with that?

That day when I was chatting with Heinz over lunch, we were dining in the very monastery where Luther, before his conversion, was a monk. We were seated perhaps 300 feet from the cell where Luther frequently slept on the floor. We were on the campus of Luther's spiritual training ground, among 50 teachers who openly promoted Luther's approach to spiritual life and view of the Bible. It is my sense that, were Luther sitting there that day with us, he would have been warmly encouraged with Heinz the pietist and his love for revival, Bible reading, repentance, and mission.

I think the Apostle Paul would have felt the same. When he writes to the new believers in Philippi, he speaks in terms of affection and offers a challenge. “I have you in my heart,” he says

in Philippians 1:7-8. And yet, Paul tells them, to “work out” their faith—to take it up a notch and start pursuing a higher level of growth. “I pray that your love may abound still more.”

Writing to believers short on love, long on divisiveness, and weak in genuine Christian living, Paul preaches a robust, healthy, vibrant faith—pietism—urging them to “conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel” (1:27) and to “suffer for his sake” (1:29), to work hard at keeping “united” with true believers (2:2), and to “work out your salvation in fear in trembling” (2:12).

And yet, Paul sought at least three Spirit-led attitudes that helped cultivate a healthy positive pious faith—and helped him avoid the petty pietism that turns disciples into Pharisees. I see the following three attitudes in Philippians 3 meant to enhance a robust pietism:

*I'm not there yet.*

Paul recognized that his major life changes weren't complete. “Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect,” he says in Philippians 3:12. He had a long way to go, so much to learn.

*Forget the past.*

Some of the worst abuses of pietism stems from a yearning for yesterday. Ignoring the possibilities for the future, and the spiritual opportunities for the present, we pine for the past. Not Paul. “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet,” Paul writes in verses 13 and 14, “but one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Isn't that what you want?

*God is changing me.*

Paul lived in anticipation of continual personal transformation. Though he was not “perfect,” he was being made perfect. “Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude,” writes Paul in verses 15 and 16. God is making me new. “And if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however; let us keep living by that same standard.”

I want that kind of faith. Humble, forward-looking, and wanting to grow.

California Christians sometimes will ask me about being a Lutheran. They have heard of the modern bent of the majority of Lutherans who describe themselves as such. They have read about “Lutheran” views on same-gender marriage and the ordination of homosexual clergy. “Are you that kind of Lutheran?” they ask.

Not that kind, I say. I'm a pietist. Positively pious. Like Heinz.

*Johnson serves Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Camarillo, Calif.*





# Let your light so shine

BY PASTOR PAUL ABEL

*“For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory” (1 Thessalonians 2:11).*

**T**he Apostle Paul stepped into Thessalonica seeking to live a pious life as he preached the Word of God. His holy, righteous and blameless living (1 Thessalonians 2:10) gave him the right to be heard as he encouraged the new Christians to live lives worthy of God.

As modern-day missionaries, my wife, Becky, and I also have an awesome responsibility to model the pious life before unbelievers as we go into the world to preach the gospel to people whose lives have been ruined by sin. What a blessing to announce forgiveness and the promise of new life to all who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus! Those who believe are promised the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who enables them to live pious lives, lives worthy of God, as they learn to obey the principles in God’s Word.

The Bible teaches us that God has always had a perfect plan for His people—a plan to bless them and to bring glory to Himself. God separated His people, the Israelites, from the world to be a “showcase” for God, that others, too, might turn to the one living God. The Christian Church today is to be that “showcase” for God. This implies that we be decidedly different from the ungodly culture that surrounds us. This should include a marked difference in the way we act and dress, the movies we watch, the music we listen to, the habits we form, the way we spend our money, and the attitudes we demonstrate. Our values should be distinctly different. Our piety, our desire to honor God in all the aspects of our life, is a testimony to a dying world.

What can the Church do faced with the sad reality of Christians who make wrong choices, Christians who do not live pious lives? In Brazil, church discipline is exercised so as to free people from the bonds of sin and help restore them to a healthy relationship with God and others. Throughout our ministry we have walked alongside several people from our congregations who were lured away from the pious life by sinful practices. They were being tormented because of their sinful choices. They certainly were not a great testimony for the cause of Christ. In the midst of these discouraging realities, church leaders came alongside them with discipline, forgiveness, discipleship and love to help them rebuild their lives according to God’s plan. After coming to repentance, these people were assured of the support of the family of God as they were reconciled to God and returned to pious living. As a church we cannot condone unholy living. On the contrary, we preach the truth of God’s Word and discipline those who insist on violating God’s commands. Like the Apostle Paul, we embrace our people as a father would, encouraging, comforting and urging them to *live lives worthy of God*.

Friendship with the world is enmity toward God. The Church needs to set a standard through the pious living of its members so that the world might be amazed at the blessings of God being poured out upon those who walk in the light to the glory of His name. May the Word of God be at work in you as you seek to live a pious life, a holy, righteous, and blameless life, a life worthy of God. Remember the words of Jesus, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify the Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

*Abel has been an AFLC missionary to Brazil for 26 years. He and his wife, Becky, returned to Brazil in late December.*





# As we gather

BY SUE WALZ

*“For where two or more are gathered in My name,  
I am there with them.” Matthew 18:20*

**A**s one of the newest AFLC Home Mission churches, we start our service each Sunday morning with this verse, celebrating God’s presence in our midst. Simply named “The Gathering,” we come together at the Senior Center in Hastings, Minn., to joyfully worship together and prayerfully consider how God would use us, a small group of 25 or so, to reach out to the people there and the surrounding communities and share the love of Jesus Christ.

The Gathering was started when a group of fellow believers first joined together for a weekly Bible study at the home of Brad and Wendy Kupser after a Home Missions informational meeting in April 2009. We were blessed to have one of the summer VBS teams from AFLBS join us that summer, and had a wonderful response of nearly 30 children that week. We continued with a weekly Bible study for the next several months, enjoying a time of prayer, study and fellowship each week with our new friends. As we continued through the months, we switched to an informal Sunday evening service.

In early 2010, we were introduced to Luke Emerson, a seminarian, and his wife, Kelly, and their family. Through a cooperative effort between the Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary and the Home Mission department, the Emersons came to us as Parish Builders to help us spread the word throughout Hastings of the AFLC and the church body that was growing in the area. Luke and other volunteers put in many hours trekking

through the streets of Hastings, distributing fliers and visiting with people. The Emerson family quickly became a part of the new fellowship, and we are so thankful for their work, their energy and enthusiasm, and their willingness to serve the Lord.

On Sept. 12, The Gathering launched a traditional Sunday morning service, complete with Sunday school for children and adults alike. Luke now shares the message with us many Sunday mornings, in addition to keeping up with his studies at the seminary.

Through the months, we’ve gathered to pray and to fellowship. We’ve gathered to build a pyramid and palm trees on a trailer for the River Days parade, and we’ve gathered to give thanks to God for His grace and mercy. We gather now to study God’s Word, to sing His praises, and to be strengthened for the work that lies ahead. We pray that God will speak to the hearts of the people of Hastings who need to hear His message and need to know the love of our Lord.

We are so thankful for all those who support us in our efforts. We are excited as we look forward to the future of The Gathering, and we ask for you to join us in prayer as we prepare ourselves for that time when God reveals His plan for our work in the community of Hastings.

*Walz is a member of The Gathering, an AFLC Home Missions congregation in Hastings, Minn.*



# What should we do?

BY LORILEE MUNDFROM

**W**hat should we do? This is a common question that comes across my desk regarding women's ministries. Sometimes women are concerned about whether or not they need to have a WMF meeting where they discuss missions, share in offering for the WMF projects, and have Bible study. Sometimes members of a women's group are thinking of disbanding because of lack of attendance. Sometimes women who are part of a new congregation want to start a WMF/women's ministries program and they want to know how to get started.

Whatever the situation, first and foremost our WMF board recommends praying faithfully about the situation. God will lead you as you are committed to Him.

Some churches have disbanded their WMF group because there are not many who attend. Many women work outside the home and have other family activities that take up their time. I want to encourage the women in our AFLC to stay committed to studying the Word of God, which is the spiritual nourishment of any Christian. Please don't forsake this important aspect of your life because you have "too much to do." What ought to be the priority for a Christian women's group? First it must be the study of God's Word, then fellowship with other Christian women, then outreach to your community. Will you make that commitment?

When we were contacted by one women's group, we suggested perhaps meeting together for the monthly WMF Bible study and then having a special program quarterly or semi-annually for fellowship and promotion of AFLC missions or an outreach program in your community. Fun activities are encouraged, too. Check out the WMF resource pages sent to you in November for ideas. Again, the most important thing to do is study the Word together.

In another situation, we suggested that during the Bible study a short snippet of information on a missionary could be shared



in about five minutes. An offering could be taken for the monthly project if they so chose, and the fellowship time could be held afterward.

Women's ministries should be just that: An opportunity for women to minister to one another through Bible study, prayer, and fellowship.

While we in the WMF desire to have women from every AFLC church involved in some way in WMF, we desire even more that you find a way to fellowship and study God's Word together that works for you. Remember, Bible study is the most important thing that should take place at any WMF meeting.

God bless you as you pray about how you would reach out to the women in your congregation. We all have women "on the fringes" looking in; we need to ask them to come inside, fellowship, and study the Word of God with us.

*Mundfrom is the president of the AFLC's Women's Missionary Federation.*





Ministry Training Institute students, pictured above, participate in a discussion during a fall semester class. Pictured above are (from left) Bryan Bohl, Josiah Rolf, Kathryn Norris and Jeremiah Jones. At left, Bryan Bohl talks about an assignment with Pastor Connelly Dyrud, MTI director. MTI students spend the fall semester on the campus of the AFLC Schools in Plymouth, Minn., and the spring semester on internship assignment.

## MTI students begin internships

Four students enrolled in the Ministry Training Institute this school year will begin their spring semester internships this month.

Bryan Bohl, from Everett, Wash., Kathryn Norris, from Arlington, Wash., and Jeremiah Jones, from Wyndmere, N.D., are all in the cross-cultural track at MTI. They will spend spring semester in Brazil, working with and supporting AFLC missionaries.

Josiah Rolf, from Plymouth, Minn., is taking the aviation track at MTI. He will spend the spring semester in Naknek, Alaska, supporting Pastor Jeff and Jane Swanson, Pastor Jeremy and Lacy Crowell and Pastor Bob and Margaret Lee.

Directed by Pastor Connelly Dyrud, a former AFLC missionary to Brazil, the Ministry Training Institute is an optional third year program at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School in Plymouth, Minn. The program started in 2001, and has since graduated more than 50 students, many of whom are involved in full-time ministry today.



# Home Missions and AFLC Pastors' Retreat

The Home Missions Leadership Retreat and AFLC Pastors' Conference will be held this month at the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis.

The Home Missions retreat, held Jan. 17-18, is open to all Home Missions pastors and those on the leadership team of a Home Missions congregation.

The AFLC Pastors' Conference will be held Jan. 18-19, beginning 7 p.m. Tuesday with a praise and worship service and end-

ing after lunch on Thursday. The theme for the conference is "Building Bridges" and the theme verse is taken from Isaiah 54:2, "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare, lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes."

The registration deadline for the pastors' retreat is Jan. 13. Contact the ARC at (715) 294-2877 or (800) 294-2877.



Pastor Kevin Olson, Pastor Silvio Pais and Pastor Jonathan Abel look over the materials from the Ambassador Institute.

## AFLC Brazil partners with Ambassador Institute

Brazil has been an active mission field of the AFLC for 40 years. It has grown to 17 congregations, the ARCA camp, and the Bible school and seminary campus. AFLC Brazil has become self sufficient in many ways, even though the path to independence has been difficult. AFLC Brazil trained pastors for several years through the use of Brazilian teachers and missionaries.

Yet there is another need.

This past October, Pastor Kevin Olson was invited to Brazil to present the work of the Ambassador Institute at AFLC Brazil's Annual Conference. The attendees quickly accepted and adopted the oral training style as a component of their seminary curriculum, with the intent to train pastors who are far away from the school or cannot easily come to a daily traditional school

setting. This is the type of ministry that the Ambassador Institute is currently doing in Uganda and India.

Presently, Pastor Anilton Oliveria da Silva, dean of the Bible school, is working on advertising for the spring semester and preparing for students. Pray for Pastor Anilton as he begins this important challenge.

Pray also for Pastor Olson as he travels to Uganda for the first graduation of 20 Ambassador Institute students this January. He will continue to India with Pastor Jim Rasmussen, director of the AFLC Commission on Evangelism, and Pastor Al Pinno to lead courses for 40 students in "Evangelism," "1 Corinthians," and "Doctrine of the Holy Spirit."

## People and Places

**Matthew Rieniets**, a recent graduate of AFLBS and MTI, has accepted a position as youth pastor at Zion Lutheran, Tioga, N.D.

Members of the Coordinating Committee accepted resolutions of affiliation from **Singaas Evangelical Lutheran**, rural Hendricks, Minn., and **St. Peter Lutheran**, rural Amour, S.D.

**Pastor Peter Ward** has resigned from his position serving Faith Lutheran, Ottawa, Ill. He has accepted a call to serve as chaplain of Pleasant View Home, Ottawa.

**Pastor Brian Davidson** has accepted an interim call to serve Our Savior's Lutheran, Dickinson, N.D.

**Pastor Walter Beaman** has accepted an interim call to serve Ebenezer Lutheran, Northwood, N.D.

**Pastor Craig Johnson** is stepping down as editor of *The Lutheran Ambassador*. He has served in that position since 1993. Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee have begun the search for a replacement.

## Promotional DVD in the works for Brazil ministries

Andrew Abel, a 2008 graduate of AFLBS, has been accepted by the AFLC World Missions Board as a short-term missionary assistant to Brazil. Abel, a senior at Northwestern College in St. Paul, Minn., is currently working on a project that involves creating a promotional DVD for the mission work in Brazil.

Abel is the son of AFLC missionaries to Brazil Pastor Paul and Becky Abel. He is currently majoring in electronic media communications with an emphasis on video production. He traveled to Brazil over his Christmas break with the intention of capturing footage of the work and people in Brazil. That included interviewing AFLC missionaries and national leaders, and taking video of church services and events.

Abel hopes to produce a promotional DVD for use by AFLC World Missions, with focuses on the Bible school, seminary, camps, and national churches. He hopes to create similar DVDs for other AFLC mission fields in the future.

## Association Retreat Center hosts upcoming events

A look at the 2011 AFLC retreats and camps at the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis. The theme for 2011 is based on II Corinthians 1:20: The YES to all of God's promises is in Christ, and through CHRIST we say YES to the glory of God.

### • SIDExSIDE and Sno Daze

Dates: Feb. 4-6

SIDExSIDE is for Grades 7-12 and Sno Daze is for Grades 3-7.

Cost: \$90 if registered by Jan. 24. After Jan. 24 the cost is \$110. Discounts are available for families with more than one child attending these retreats—two-children discount of 10 percent each, three or more children discount of 15 percent each.

Speaker: Pastor Wade Mobley

### • Couples' Retreat

Dates: Feb. 18-19 (20)\*

Cost: \$130

### • Women's Retreat

Dates: March 18-20

Cost: \$85

### • Men's Retreat

Dates: April 15-16 (17)\*

Cost: \$65

### • Fire Up Youth Camp

Dates: June 19-24

Cost: \$190

Grades: 4-7

### • Kids' Camp

Dates: June 24-26

Cost: \$75

Grades: 1-3

### • Family Camp

Dates: June 24-30

Cost: Family rates apply

### • Classics' Retreat

Dates: Sept. 9-11

Cost: \$75/person, \$130/couple

### • Chosen Child Conference

Dates: Nov. 4-6

Cost: To be determined

### • Silent Prayer Retreat

Dates: Dec. 2-3 (4)\*

Cost: \$65

\*Optional extra night stay for an additional fee.

For more information on these retreats and future camps, contact the ARC by e-mail at [arcregistration@centurytel.net](mailto:arcregistration@centurytel.net) or call 800-294-2877. You can also visit the ARC Web site at [www.arc-aflc.org](http://www.arc-aflc.org) for more information.

## Home Missions to host two events to share vision for work in Arizona

Calvary Free Lutheran Church of Mesa, Ariz., along with AFLC Home Missions, invites all of our AFLC family and friends who are wintering in the Southwest to a gathering in the Valley of the Sun this January.

Two dates and locations are planned; if you can't make one, please join us at the other. The gathering on Jan. 22 will be held at noon at Calvary Free Lutheran in Mesa. The gathering on Jan. 29 will be held in the western section of the Valley of the Sun. Detailed plans are yet to be determined.

Join us to share great food and fellowship, as well as for an opportunity to meet old and new friends. Pastor Al Monson and the staff from Calvary Free Lutheran, along with Pastor Paul Nash, director of AFLC Home Missions, will be present to share a vision and dream for new works in Arizona.

For more information, contact Calvary Free Lutheran at 480.981.3993 or AFLC Home Missions at 763.412.2018. You may also visit the Home Missions Web site at [www.aflchomemissions.org](http://www.aflchomemissions.org).

## AFLC memorials: November

### AFLBS

Boyd Haagenson  
Jeanne Ryan (2)  
Verna Berg  
Vivian Wall (7)

### AFLTS

Jeff Welliver  
Vivian Wall (7)

### Evangelism

Delmar Hobelmann  
Pastor Erwin Brandt

### FLAPS

Karen Rudningen

### General Fund

Esther Oien

### Home Missions

Lois Oscarson  
Lynn Emmett  
Glen Helm

### Parish Education

Dwight Lange  
Vivian Wall

### World Missions

Marilyn Pederson  
Dwight Lange  
Pastor Milo Gudim  
Lois Oscarson  
Selmer Storseth  
Vivian Wall

... in honor of

### Distance Education

Toby and Marg Larson

## AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-Nov. 30, 2010

FUND	REC'D IN NOVEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$37,754	\$300,991	\$276,820
Evangelism	8,582	115,281	87,761
Youth Ministries	7,637	118,392	78,839
Parish Education	11,160	100,585	87,185
Seminary	26,116	194,168	168,824
Bible School	30,498	390,099	331,726
Home Missions	28,836	351,793	303,541
World Missions	54,194	303,444	235,248
Personal Support	36,327	330,125	371,505
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$241,105</b>	<b>\$2,204,878</b>	<b>\$1,941,447</b>

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



# Strive to do what is best

**C**an I drink a glass of wine and still be a Christian? Will I get kicked out of the kingdom of God if I go to an R-rated movie? Will God let me stay in His family if I buy a lottery ticket?

I've been asked questions like that before and I've had to admit, the Bible doesn't say that if you drink a beer on Friday night or go to a casino on Saturday God will instantly erase your name from the book of life. But are those the kinds of questions we should be asking? Shouldn't we have higher goals for our behavior

than just trying to figure out what we can get away with and still be in the kingdom?

You would be wary of food that won't kill you but just make you a little sick. We should be wary of

behavior that, while not robbing us of eternal life, could bring sickness to our soul or the souls of others.

The Bible says, "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others" (I Corinthians 10:23-24, NIV).

When deciding what to do there are more things to consider than whether I can do something and still be a Christian. Some people, though, do certain things just because they can. Sometimes that kind of attitude is a reaction to a strict upbringing where people heard a lot of commands to "do this" and "don't do that," but didn't receive a lot of instruction on why. It might have frustrated and discouraged them.

They react to all the lists they were given by pushing the limits.

One of the unfortunate elements of our pietistic heritage is that at times it has been little more than just listing dos and don'ts. The lists have a certain attraction. They simplify life. You can just look at the list to determine if you can do this or can't do that. You don't have to think too much.

Some commands like "do not murder," "do not steal," and "do not commit adultery" are clearly forbidden in Scripture. Some other things, though, aren't so clear. The Bible doesn't name any video games and say which ones are okay for Christians to play and which ones aren't. On issues like that we need to take the truths of Scripture and the principles that are taught, wrestle with them and consider how they apply to the situations we face. Healthy pietism encourages that. It calls us to apply the truths of Scripture to how we live.

Figuring out how to apply Scripture isn't always easy. It can be hard to know whether something that we're permitted to do is beneficial and constructive. We pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us and trust that He will, when we're willing to follow.

One issue Christians have different opinions on is drinking alcohol in moderation. I personally have chosen not to drink alcohol at all. I've seen many families and lives that have been greatly harmed by it. I have seen many examples of how addictive and destructive it can be. I don't see how

it would be beneficial or constructive for anyone if I would drink.

Whatever conclusion you come to regarding this issue and similar issues, I hope you ask the right questions. Prayerfully consider what will most honor God and what will best serve the people God has brought into your life.

Growing up, whether it was school or sports or music or other things I was involved in, I was regularly encouraged by

*Figuring out how to apply Scripture isn't always easy. It can be hard to know whether something that we're permitted to do is beneficial and constructive. We pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us and trust that He will, when we're willing to follow.*

my parents to do my best. We should have that kind of goal when it comes to making choices about our behavior and how to use our time and resources. It's not just about doing the minimum required to avoid spiritual disaster. Let us seek what would most please God and help others the most in their spiritual life. Let us strive to do what is best.



Pastor Craig Johnson

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Periodicals

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

*association retreat center*

# God's tattoo

BY MIKE FISK

People get tattoos for a variety of reasons. Some get simple tattoos hidden away in discreet places. Others get tattoos that are easily seen by everyone they come in contact with.

Tattoos are usually some sort of statement by the person wearing the tattoo. It is a reminder to the person of a person, place or thing that has great meaning and significance. There are other times when tattoos mark a person for less than well-thought-out reasons. That's unfortunate because tattoos are painful to get and almost impossible to completely remove.

Why all this talk of tattoos? Because God has a tattoo! It's in a place where He will always remember it. It is a constant reminder of something that is extremely precious to Him. Right there on the palm of His hand is a tattoo with your name on it.

God says, through the prophet Isaiah, that He has engraved you in the palm of His hand. This is God's way of telling us that no matter what you are going through He sees you and knows the pain, frustration and bitterness you are feeling.

You may be going through things that are unbearable. You may feel totally forgotten by God. You may feel that you aren't good enough for God, that He doesn't love you or that He is angry with you. Nothing is further from the truth. Every time God looks at His hand, there is your name and a reminder to Him of all you mean to Him. Even though you may think you are a failure, to God you have great worth.

The tattoo in God's hand reminds us of three attributes of God's love for us. Tattoos are *painful*. It was God's extreme love for you that sent Him to the cross to suffer a painful death on your behalf.

Tattoos are *permanent*. They can never be fully removed. In the same way, nothing you can do will remove your name from God's hand. You are always and forever in His sight.

Lastly, God's tattoo is in the palm of His hand. The palm of God's hand symbolizes *protection*. It doesn't matter where you are along the journey of life or how you got there. God loves you so much He holds you in the palm of His hand to protect you from what

lies ahead.

Many who come to the ARC find themselves in places where they never thought they would be. In the midst of their struggles, the ARC offers a perfect place for them to reconnect with their Father and begin or restore their relationship with Him.

Please remember to pray for the more than 11,000 people who come to the ARC every year. Pray that they would, as our theme says, "come away and rest awhile," and that would go home with a new realization that they are a tattoo in the palm of the Father's hand.

*Fisk is the director of development for the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis.*

*"See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me." ~Isaiah 49:16*