

THE LUTHERAN 

JANUARY 2012

AMBASSADOR

1962

THE AFLC
CELEBRATES

50 years

"I REMEMBER"



A blessed

BY CHRISTINA OSTHUS



life

My life hasn't been all that *difficult*, but it is rarely *easy*, either. The best way to describe my time so far would be somewhere in between those two adjectives—let's try *blessed*. What is blessing, or what does it mean to be "blessed"? The longer I live, the more my definition of that concept changes. Go ahead and chuckle if you need to—I know I haven't lived that long. But I have lived long enough to marvel at God's faithfulness.

It's not just a cliché when pastors tell you the most peaceful place is in the eye of the storm. I know this—His presence is typically the most palpable when I begin to think that my worst fears are coming true. The last two places where God has led me have been both breathtakingly beautiful and shockingly painful by turns. Since I started teaching teenagers, I have been dreading the day when one of my students goes to jail to do hard time. And I have been praying fervently against any of them committing suicide. Both of those fears have reared their heads within the last semester, though the alleged suicide attempt was not successful.

But guess what I found out? When those moments come, God will still be there, and He will not allow me to be shaken. As I sat on the floor of the cafeteria cradling my student's head and stroking his hair while we waited for the paramedics, there was room for nothing in my heart but peace. And while my heart did sink when I heard what one of my graduates had gotten into, His peace again enveloped me and left no room for despair.

Lines from a few songs are overtaking me as I think of how

good my God is. The first is, "How He Loves," by John Mark McMillan, and the line that steals my breath away explains how I can, through God's help, entirely transcend my fears: "All of a sudden, I am unaware of these afflictions eclipsed by Glory." We may rightly worry about those who deny their problems,

but if we can't tear our eyes away from His face, it is only to be expected that our troubles would blur until they scarcely seem to exist.

When I consider what I have learned, I also think of the chorus from a beautiful song by Laura Story that is appropriately entitled, "Blessings": "What if your blessings come through raindrops, what if your healing comes through tears? What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know You're near? And what if trials of this life are Your mercy in disguise?" God brings pain and sorrow into our lives to drive us to Him and to make us hunger for Heaven. Later in the song the writer adds, "What if my greatest disappointments, or the aching of this life, is the revealing of a greater thirst a world can't satisfy?"

I know now that I will never ask God for an easy or painless life, because that would be empty and meaningless. At the beginning of this coming year, I will ask Him for a rich year, full of all the tears, laughter, beauty, and pain that He wants to bestow on me.

Osthus is from Eagle Butte, S.D., and serves on the 2013 Free Lutheran Youth Committee.

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Is it really wrong, then, when the days are evil and the night is approaching, to lift up our eyes and mind from the confused and dwarfed present, and to turn to the true, real picture of the congregation which the New Testament gives us?

—Georg Sverdrup

Let us ever remember that while free congregations are our heritage, it is of no eternal value unless we are living congregations as well.

—Robert Knutson

[We believe in living congregations, where the Spirit of God does His gracious work of creating saving faith in the hearts of repentant sinners, and calling them to use their gifts for Christ. We believe in free congregations, congregations that are free to serve their Lord as they are guided by the Spirit through the Word of God. The Word and Spirit are the only authority over them.]

—John P. Strand

There are two things that we cannot do alone: one is to be married and the other is to be a Christian.

—Paul Tournier

The church has often been more concerned to prove itself right than to present the message which by its transforming effect is its own proof.

—Myron S. Augsburger

PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL

1962



By Dr. Francis Monseth

It will be 50 years in October since the first conference of what was to become the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations was held in Thief River Falls, Minn. Bringing together hundreds of people from several states, this “organizing conference” gathered under the theme, “Press On Toward the Goal,” taken from Philippians 3:14. And what a fitting theme it was for this fledgling fellowship of churches.

Identifying with the Apostle Paul’s desire to forget the past with its struggles and trials and to focus instead on the future with its prospects and promises, the conference-goers made preliminary plans for the ongoing mission of its earliest constituency. Drawn mainly from the former Lutheran Free Church, these congregations, many of them small and rural, wanted to continue as independent Lutheran congregations committed to the Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God and to unite together with like-minded congregations for ministry they believed they could accomplish more effectively in concert with others.

The people gathered at that first conference in 1962 were concerned to “press on toward the goal,” finding that theme at once inspirational and instructional. What is “the goal” for believers gathered in congregations that are seeking to follow the Lord together as well as in their personal lives? The immediate goal—and for us the most direct application—is to “press on” in the calling God has entrusted to us. That calling is expressed clearly in Philippians 3:14 as “the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” The “prize” is Christ! Everything else pales in comparison to this prize. The apostle expresses the inestimable value of knowing



Pictured on page 4 are Pastor Julius and Marit Hermunsle.

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14, NIV).

Christ (Philippians 3:8) and then makes it his earnest prayer to "know Him and the power of His resurrection" (Philippians 3:10). But the goal isn't simply to "know Him." It is also to make Him known. The calling entails proclaiming the good news of the gospel message to those nearest and dearest to us (Mark 5:19: "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how he had mercy on you"), as well as to everyone for whom our Lord shed His precious blood (Mark 16:15: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation").

Has the goal of reaching the world for Christ been reached as we mark the 50th anniversary year of the AFLC? Have we cause to rest on our laurels as a church fellowship? Has the task been completed? Obviously, we've only just begun as we think of the untold millions who remain untold. The fields of the world are still "white for harvest" (John 4:35).

Even as we acknowledge together the vast harvest fields yet untouched, we thank God for the gracious work of our Lord in our midst this past half century—so often in spite of

ourselves. Yes, we thank God for the measure of spiritual life and growth that is evident in many congregations because of the faithful preaching and teaching of law and gospel and the right administration of the Word and sacraments. And we rejoice in the advance of world and home missions in North and South America, Africa and Asia through the prayerful and consecrated efforts of so many among us. It is cause for praise to God as we consider, also, the hundreds of students who have studied at our Bible school and seminary in Minneapolis and have taken their places as spiritual leaders and workers in our congregations. Let us not forget the Christ-centered Lutheran materials that have been published and are exerting powerful effect in our congregations as well as in an increasing number of other church groups. And how we join in thanking God together for the emergence of more and more "free and living congregations" where the Word of God and the Spirit of God are graciously and powerfully at work in bringing lost sinners to Christ and establishing them in sound biblical teaching. Indeed, we have so many reasons to

rejoice as we consider God's faithfulness in honoring His Word among us.

But the call of God in the theme of the 1962 conference remains before us. Press on toward the goal! God would impress upon us in this milestone year, even as we remember His faithfulness throughout our short history, to focus on the future, to keep the goal—God's goal for us—ever in view. As a runner in a race does not let up until he crosses the finish line, so we are to keep our eyes on the goal and press on. The Apostle Paul knew that he had not reached the goal set before him, and therefore with a sense of urgency declared, "I press on toward the goal." We need that

sober recognition and serious resolve as we reflect on the past and face the future together. We have need of perseverance if we are to move progressively toward the goal. We need perseverance in the calling God has entrusted to us as free congregations: to "grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:18) and to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Let us together press on toward the goal.

Monseth, dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary (AFLTS), is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.





50 jubilee

By Pastor Brent Olson



ubilee" is a very good word for times like these, as the economy wrestles recession and one feels perhaps ever more poignantly a slave to the grind. First of all, it's a happy word, one quite difficult to say without coming close to smiling. Secondly, "jubilee" can be traced back to incredibly hopeful origins.

It comes from the Hebrew word יוֹבֵל (*yo-veil*) which originally signified a ram's horn but, by the LORD's command, came to signify a special year of release which was ushered in with the blast of this ancient instrument.¹

The Year of Jubilee, as commanded by the LORD, meant a release from all debts and a return of one's original family property. For the heavy-hitting real estate brokers on their "Wall Street," perhaps it wasn't the best news. But for the regular guy who'd had his family farm foreclosed on and confiscated by those who had lent him money for seed and cattle, it was a new day, a fresh start, a second chance. The relief of release would be all the more glorious for those whose fortunes had fallen so far as to require their selling themselves into slavery as a payment for debt. This Year of Jubilee was commanded to occur every 50 years, and so, as noted scholar Craig Blomberg writes, "[o]n average, each person or family had at least a once-in-a-lifetime chance to start afresh, no matter how irresponsibly they had handled their finances or how far into debt they had fallen."²

Significantly, the LORD chose to begin the Jubilee Year on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. It was the most important time of forgiveness each year, the one day when the high priest of Israel could enter the holiest place in the Tabernacle or Temple to offer up an unblemished bull's and an unblemished goat's blood to atone for the sins of all Israel. In essence, Yom Kippur was an annual reminder for Israel that they were deeply indebted to the LORD who had made them, called them, redeemed them from slavery in Egypt, and leased them freely every single allotment of the Promised Land. "[F]or the land is mine," He said (Leviticus 25:23). More than that, Yom Kippur was an annual declaration that, in marvelous, wonderful grace, the LORD had forgiven all their debts. Thus, on the *Yom Kippur* which ushered in the Jubilee Year, those of even the most insensitive conscience could not easily escape the compulsion of grace. Whispering through the chambers of their hearts had to be this grace-filled—or, for some, grating—thought: "We should forgive our debtors as He has forgiven us our debts."

Sadly, though, the history of Israel from Moses to Jesus Christ gives little indication that the Jubilee commands were ever kept. Instead, it appears, anointed king after anointed king failed to lead the LORD's people to obey the Sabbath or Jubilee laws.³

Thankfully, the Year of Jubilee, for all its wonderfulness, was a mere preview of coming attractions.⁴ One day, 1,476 years (or so) after the LORD commanded the Jubilee Year through Moses, a new and better Moses, a new and better King David, anointed with the Holy Spirit without measure, went back to his hometown. As he

customarily did whenever he went to the worship service, he got up to read the Scripture lesson. When the scroll of Isaiah was handed to him, he unrolled it to chapter 61, the very heart of the last section of the book, and read:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty (release)
to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty (to release) those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ...

And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:18-19, 21, my parentheses above).

Here we see Jesus of Nazareth announcing the Jubilee to which all other Jubilees pointed, proclaiming the good news of ultimate release. He had come to usher in not a single year, but the everlasting year of the LORD's favor, beautifully previewed in His releasing others from spiritual slavery and sin's accompanying physical bondage of handicaps and disease. Most wonderful, however, was how He inaugurated this ultimate Jubilee, not with the haunting bellow of a ram's horn but with the gentle voice of a lamb crying out midst distress, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). It was there on the cross, that ultimate Day of Atonement, when Jesus, poverty-stricken and oppressed by the powers that be, initiated the new and better Jubilee, buying our release with His own blood (Isaiah 53).

This especially is why Jubilee is such a good word for times like these. Whatever horrors the economy may have in store this new year, whatever challenges may come to our families or our churches, we can rest cozily in the knowledge of our release. We are living in the year of the LORD's favor, the Year of Jubilee. Because we know He cares for us, we don't have to worry about anything now (Matthew 6:31-2). Better, connected to Jesus Christ by faith, we have "a living hope ... of an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for [us] ..." (1 Peter 1:3-4). For this kind of news, simply smiling doesn't quite do it. Loud shouting maybe. Maybe dancing.

Olson, who was recently called as an Old Testament instructor at the AFLC Schools in Plymouth, Minn., is a member of Emmaus Free Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn.

(Endnotes)

1. It is highly probable that the Latin root of the English word "jubilant" can be traced back to this Hebrew word, though, unfortunately, many dictionaries obscure this origin.
2. Blomberg, Craig. *Neither Poverty Nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999. Quoted in Keller, Timothy. *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just*. New York: Penguin, 2010, p. 28.
3. In II Chronicles 36:20-21, the LORD explains the length of the Babylonian captivity, 70 years, as compensation for the 70 yearly Sabbaths (a Sabbath for the land every seventh year, cf. Lev. 25:1-7) missed by Israel over 490 years from King Saul (c.1050) to King Jehoiachin (c.586). King Hezekiah and King Josiah, the only kings after David given the LORD's seal of approval, may have kept the Sabbath laws, though the Scriptures do not explicitly mention it.
4. A phrase used frequently by Dr. Paul Raabe of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, to explain typology.



1962



2012

I REMEMBER...

TO MARK THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE AFLC, THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR
ASKED SEVERAL PEOPLE WHO WERE AT
THE ORGANIZING CONFERENCE IN 1962
TO SHARE THEIR MEMORIES.
HERE ARE THEIR THOUGHTS.

By Mildred Strand

Little did I imagine 50 years ago that I would someday be asked to write my memories of what was truly an historic conference. Lutheran Free Church members who were opposed to the impending church merger had gathered at Thief River Falls, Minn., Oct. 25-28, 1962, to organize as the Lutheran Free Church, not merged.

The purpose was not to form a new church body, but to continue what had worked well for the previous 65 years.

Nor could I even imagine how the Lord would bless so that from our very small beginnings we would become the fourth largest Lutheran church body in the United States. To God be the glory, great things He has done!

Time passes swiftly but memories fade. However, I

do remember driving across the state from Tioga, N.D., where my husband, Pastor John Strand, was serving as pastor of the Tioga Lutheran Parish. I asked John who might be elected president of this continuation of the LFC. He responded that he had not heard. I do not believe that he attended any of the pre-convention meetings because of the distance and heavy parish responsibilities.

I do remember that the

attendance was unexpectedly large and the sessions were moved from Our Saviour's Lutheran Church to an elementary school in the city. I also remember that the women present met in the church basement to organize a Women's Missionary Federation. Mrs. Alma Ose was elected our first president.

I remember few specifics of the business sessions and did not take notes. However, the lay people were very involved and this has continued to this day. Without their strong support financially and otherwise, there would be no AFLC today.

John had been asked to speak and he titled his message, "The Church We Seek." Later, when elections were held, he was elected our first president. This was a total surprise to me, and I actually shed tears, not of joy but at the prospect of having to leave Tioga and the people I had grown to love. (John

continued to serve in Tioga for a couple more years so I became prepared for the move.)

I do not recall John asking for my input, but he knew that I always supported his decisions. A young man who was in attendance at the time told me many years later that there was a time of apprehensive waiting until John responded positively.

Since that day other Lutheran groups have attempted organization with minimal success. How is it that the Lord has so richly blessed us? I stand in awe and pray that we might continue to be that salt and light in this world that He wants us to be.

Strand is a member of Ebenezer Lutheran, Northwood, N.D. Her husband, Pastor John Strand, served as the first president of the AFLC, from 1962 to 1978.

I REMEMBER...

MEMORIES FROM JUDITH WOLD, ADELINE MOE,
ROGER PETERSON, IRVIN SCHMITKE, & CLARK DYRUD

By Loiell Dyrud

For those members of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Thief River Falls, Minn., who attended the "Special Conference of Lutheran Free Church Congregations" in October 1962, memories have obviously faded over the last 50 years. But for many, certain details still remain.

Elementary teacher Judith Wold was unable to attend because the conference was scheduled for the same time as the Minnesota Education Association (MEA) convention in the Twin Cities. As a result, she, FloAnn Bredeson, and Thora Skomedal—all members of Our Saviour's—were out of town, but their hearts were in Thief River. When they returned, they rejoiced to hear about the successful conference.

Judith offered an interesting insight as to why the organizing conference was held in Thief River. In the 1961 merger referendum (the third and final vote that allowed the Lutheran Free Church to merge with The American Lutheran Church), 11 congregations from the Thief River Falls District of the Lutheran Free Church had voted "no," resulting in a large concentration of LFC congregations refusing to join. Since Our Saviour's was one of the largest congregations and Thief River

Falls had adequate hotel accommodations, it was the logical host for the conference.

Two leaders of the anti-merger forces were also from the area. Pastor Richard Snipstead, who became the first secretary and later president of the AFLC, was pastor in the Greenbush Parish. Pastor Raynard Huglen, who had written the definitive position papers, "Declaration of Faith" and "A Statement on the Historical Situation," and who later became the first editor of *The Lutheran Ambassador*, had grown up in Newfolden, Minn., though at the time he was serving in northeastern South Dakota. But the area also had a strong, independent laity. Our Saviour's, as well as many congregations in northwest Minnesota, valued the congregationalism of the LFC and were not ready to bow to the authority of a synod. Our Saviour's particularly had a history of opposition to the merger and had voted "no" on each of the three LFC referenda by wide margins, including the time one of its pastors had strongly promoted the merger. In all three merger votes, only one "yes" vote had ever been recorded.

Many of Our Saviour's women—including Millie Peterson, Lenore Wold, and Jan Schmitke—have limited memories of the event since they were

heavily involved in preparing meals and lunches, but their enthusiasm for what was taking place was evident. Adeline Moe has a slightly different perspective. She remembers how important it was for her mother, Martha Nabben, to attend even though she was in her late 80s. Mrs. Nabben and her husband had settled in the Thief River area in 1904 and had had a long history with the LFC. She was hoping that tradition would continue in a new organization.

Roger Peterson, a high school senior, does not have many specific memories of the sessions, but he remembers with fondness the time he spent with Robert Lee and Gary Skramstad, both college students at the time who are now AFLC pastors.

Irvin Schmitke worked at the local airport and was unable to attend all the daytime sessions, but he remembers how local planners had expected representation from perhaps 10 area congregations. How surprised everyone was when representatives from nearly 80 LFC congregations and hundreds of people descended on Thief River Falls for the meetings.

Clark Dyrud, a junior in the local high school, recalls the shock he experienced when he looked out at the crowded sanctuary on Thursday's opening night. He thought he knew

most of the people around the district, but this audience was packed with strangers.

Fortunately, schools were closed because of the MEA break. By Friday noon the attendance had outgrown Our Saviour's sanctuary, and the conference moved a block and a half to Knox Elementary School. Sitting on a folding chair in the crowded gym, Clark remembers hearing speaker after speaker saying, "This is an historic event," and telling himself, "I must remember this. I am witnessing an historic event."

And, indeed, it was an historic event, for the unexpected numbers and enthusiasm convinced the leaders that God was behind their efforts to continue the principles of the LFC in a new church body. This was the conference that gave birth to what would later become known as the AFLC.

Since that historic event in 1962, Our Saviour's Lutheran Church has hosted four annual conferences: 1966, 1974, 1987, and 1997 as well as the AFLC's 40th anniversary celebration in the fall of 2002.

Dyrud, a member of Our Saviour's Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn., is also on the AFLC Schools Board of Trustees



50

YEARS

Pictured (from top left) are Pastor Wayne Hjermstad, Judith Wold, Pastor Trygve Dahle and Alma Ose; Dorothy Presteng, Esther Farrier, Sylvia Molstre and Mrs. Martin Konsterlie; the 1963 Ambassadors singing group (Dave Johnson, Roger Strom, Terry Simonson, Al Hendrickson and Francis Monseth); Pastor Lars Stalsbrotten, Solveig Hjermstad, a young girl, and Pastor Phil Hagen.

By Phyllis Nikunen

When I first talked with Meredith Bursheim about sharing her memories of the first conference following a Sunday morning service at Dovre Free Lutheran in Winger, Minn., for which she, at 93 years, still is the organizer, she smiled and said she had been thinking quite a bit about those very special memories recently.

A couple weeks later we sat down together at her kitchen table in her lovely assisted living apartment in Erskine, Minn. We first talked briefly about her church, Dovre Free Lutheran, of which she had been a member all her life, as were her parents

before her. Organized in 1895, Dovre had been a member of the former Lutheran Free Church until becoming one of the founding congregations of the AFLC.

Meredith recalled how, in the months following this first meeting in Thief River Falls, several other area meetings were held in various communities in Minnesota and North Dakota. One of these meetings was scheduled to be at Dovre, but when the time came, the turnout was so large they could not all fit into the church. So the meeting was moved to the Winger Community Building.

The Bursheims had two young sons who fully understood why so many were becoming increasingly concerned about the direction the LFC was going, as did many other young people in various congregations.

When asked what she remembered most about the Thief River Falls meeting, Meredith responded that it was the good spirit and the feeling of unity among all who were present. She said it was obvious that a great deal of prayer had preceded the meeting. She fondly remembered three young men who were so enthusiastic with a vision for what the church should and could be. Today, these three men are Dr. Francis Monseth, Pastor Robert L. Lee and Pastor Gary Skramstad, all of whom have filled important roles in the history of the AFLC.

Meredith also mentioned some of the older pastors who, with their wisdom and depth of their own personal spiritual experience, encouraged and led this little group of faithful people: Pastor Julius Hermunsle, Pastor Trygve Dahle, and Pastor

Fritjof Monseth.

One younger pastor, who was not really well known by her at the time, but who was a main speaker, Pastor John Strand, a humble man who spoke with authority, impressed her the most. When he spoke she felt that he, with his gift of discernment, was a born leader "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). Others she talked with later came away with the same feeling.

Both Meredith and her husband, Robert, came away from the conference in Thief River Falls with a renewed sense of hope for the future of the church.

Nikunen is a member of Dovre Free Lutheran and Union Lake Lutheran, Winger, Minn., where her husband, Pastor Jerome Nikunen, currently serves.

PEOPLE



Meredith Bursheim reminisces about the organizational conference of the AFLC at her home in Erskine, Minn.



Pictured left (top to bottom) are Laurie Nash, Chris Jacobsen and Carol Dietsche. Below are Pastor Mike Brandt and Robert Dietsche.



I REMEMBER...

By Laurie Nash

In 1960 my parents, Bob and Carol Dietsche, accepted Jesus as their personal Savior when a traveling evangelist visited their home in Wisconsin. As young Christians they found themselves thrust into the controversy of their Lutheran Free Church becoming a part of a more liberal Lutheran synod. On Oct. 24, 1962, during a difficult and emotionally charged congregational meeting, my parents believe they lost their church to liberalism. The next morning three discouraged men—my dad, Eldor Sorkness and Harvey Hendrickson—left for Thief River Falls to attend the organizational conference.

How did you know about this meeting?

We had attended some early rallies in Minneapolis where we heard about this meeting. We also attended some meetings of the Hauge Innermission and Federation that kept us informed.

What was your reaction as you stepped into that first service that evening?

I was apprehensive and nervous but ... here was hope! Here were people who had the same convictions as we did.

What do you remember about those services?

I remember the great hymn singing, a powerful message by Pastor John Strand and times of prayer. There was a sense of unity and purpose that was a great encouragement to our group.

I guess I wasn't the only nervous person there that evening because I remember people kept dropping the offering plates during that first service.

Who do you remember?

I remember the godly determination of men like Pastor Fritjof Monseth, Pastor Julius Hermunslie, Pastor John Strand, Pastor Trygve Dahle, etc., who believed in the Free Church polity and piety. Here were conservative, godly men who taught and

walked according to the Scriptures and who were not going to compromise.

I met laymen and pastors who have become family—fellow brothers in the Lord and lifetime friends.

We left Thief River greatly encouraged! We were grateful for men who were willing to stand on God's Word and grateful to the Lord who was leading and guiding.

Now 50 years later, I am so very grateful for my AFLC church family. I stand in awe of what God has done on our behalf and of what He will continue to do.

"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Nash is a member of Solid Rock Lutheran, Anoka, Minn. The Dietsches are members of Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis.

AN INTERVIEW WITH PASTOR ALVIN GROTHE



By Pastor Craig Johnson

What were you doing in 1962?

In 1962 I was doing carpentry in the Badger, Minn., area. I also had a small farm and was on the council at church.

What were the thoughts and feelings in the congregation about the upcoming merger?

The merger was a big topic of conversation. Our pastor, Pastor Richard Snipstead, had kept the congregation informed about what was going on. We got a letter from the new church, the ALC, telling us we were automatically in the new group, so we had to deal with how to respond. The congregation was pretty close to unanimous against the merger, but we were concerned we might lose our church building.

What were some of your thoughts and feelings leading up to the 1962 conference in Thief River Falls?

I had some mixed emotions. I was happy we had voted out of being part of the merger and I was glad nothing had been said about our building being taken away. I was a little anxious, though. I was wondering how many would show up in Thief River and what the general attitude would be. There was some anxiety about what would take place and what the new group would be like. We had lost Augsburg, the seminary, the bookstore, the high school in Fargo, the camps.

What are your memories of the conference?

The Holy Spirit was there. There was unity. We had the same convictions and a



united commitment. There was a hunger for the leadership of God that He would lead and provide. We had a drive to go ahead and build a church where congregations would be free, guided by the Word of God and not dictated to by headquarters.

What were your thoughts as you headed home after the conference?

I felt a big relief when I went home. The merger issue was over and now we had our own organized church that was standing on the Word of God. We knew the confer-

ence had been bathed in prayer and we were expecting God to lead. That anxiety I had felt was lifted during the conference. It was a relief to know the congregation I had been raised in was going to continue to be free to function as a congregation and God had worked it all out. After the conference God kept providing and had His way.

Johnson, former editor of The Lutheran Ambassador, serves Bethany Lutheran in Astoria, Ore., where Pastor Alvin and Loretta Grothe (pictured above) are members.

I REMEMBER...



AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT KNUTSON AND KENT QUANBECK

By Keith Quanbeck

Fifty years ago this coming October you attended the founding conference of the AFLC. What were your thoughts and expectations going into the conference?

Kent: I was very optimistic. I felt it was an opportunity to start over as a Free Church body. I was at the final annual conference of the LFC just a few months earlier, before it merged into The ALC and in some ways it was like a death. I had attended Oak Grove High School and Augsburg College and loved them both, now they were in the new merged church. But even so I was confident we could start new.

Robert: I remember hoping we would have enough people to start a new church but didn't really know. We had heard of different pastors and churches that were against the merger but we didn't know who would actually show up for this conference.

What do you remember about the conference itself?

Kent: That first day reminded me of a family reunion. Many of those who were

there were the same ones who had been against the merger and with whom we had meetings the previous few years.

Robert: One of my first thoughts was that most of these pastors here were pretty old; then again I was only 26 at the time. However, these "older" pastors had a lot of wisdom and fire in them.

But Pastor John Strand set the tone of the conference when he said; "We pray God's blessing on those who go a different direction." We [were] going to look forward and not dwell on the past.

Kent: The discussion was on starting over. We wanted to have a Free Lutheran church with the same *Fundamental Principles* of the Lutheran Free Church. We also discussed the need for our own publication, which became *The Lutheran Ambassador*.

Robert: The second day brought me more confidence. There were a lot of questions to address concerning missions and schools. We were talking about pastors, and the sentiment was if we are going to have our own church body we [would] have to train our own pastors. So at that first conference we determined the need for a seminary.

Kent: What was important for me, and I believe everyone there, was that as a church body we were committed to the inerrancy of Scripture.

What were your thoughts as you left the conference?

Robert: On the Sunday after the conference I gave a report to my home congregation concerning the conference. I told them how pleased I was with the turnout and with the number of congregations represented. I said we can do this.

What are your thoughts about how the AFLC has gone?

Kent: I am thankful that we have been faithful to the Word of God. We have stood firm and God has blessed us.

Robert: Fifty years later I appreciate even more the *Fundamental Principles* we and the Lutheran Free Church were founded on. We are free and living congregations.

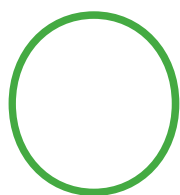
Keith Quanbeck, who now lives in Eden Prairie, Minn., grew up in the New Luther Valley Lutheran Church, McVile, N.D., where both Robert Knutson and Kent Quanbeck are members. Both served on several AFLC boards and committees over the last 50 years.

WATERS IN THE WILDERNESS

JANUARY 16



“Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but be thou a partaker of the affliction of the gospel according to the power of God” (II Timothy 1:8).



ur testimony is part of God’s communication to others. For each one who treasures the Lord in his heart it is both a joy and honor to bear witness to knowledge and personal experience of God’s Word.

But it is a difficult task to penetrate man’s hardness; his pride and ignorance is the devil’s sharpest sword. It takes power to proclaim divine truth and to be humble in doing so. Loving boldness is required to speak the language of Jesus.

To the Lord belongs all power. Only through total submission can we learn obedience, Let us be truly dedicated to Him. Let Him be our constant companion. Let Him break all bondage to worldly

desire and passion. Because of His obedience and suffering we can be strengthened through affliction to seek His calling; in faith we need not be afraid to suffer for His sake. Only by following His example can we be true witnesses. In humble surrender to His will can we overcome iniquity. To do this is to suffer; but let us regard our suffering as nothing to His grace. Let each opportunity in our Christian walk be an occasion to bear fruit unto salvation. Let His light shine through our suffering to bring relief to others. As Christ was on the cross, may we remain strong in our affliction and not be ashamed.

By Clara Korkola, Carlton, Minn.

Waters in the Wilderness is a daily devotional published by the AFLC Board of Parish Education in 1971 with Dr. Iver Olson, editor. All 365 meditations were contributed by AFLC members from many walks of life. “Here, they offer each a glass of cool and refreshing water each day to thirsting souls,” wrote Olson in the preface. Reprinted by permission. The volume is out of print.

To God be the glory

BY PASTOR RICH RAMSBACHER

It's December, 2010, and the phone rings. I visit with Pastor Paul Nash about preaching a couple of Sundays in Springfield, Mo. We pray about it and discuss it as a family. Katy, our daughter, has spring break in March, and we can celebrate an anniversary of sorts. Twenty years earlier we met my parents in the Springfield area to introduce them to their new 2-month-old granddaughter.

We were able to fly to Springfield in March and share God's Word with the people of Immanuel Lutheran. We also enjoyed seeing that the little cabin on Table Rock Lake where we stayed 20 years ago was still there. As the week progressed, my wife, Kay, and I looked at each other and I said I sensed that God was calling us to Missouri. She felt the same way.

We have been in Springfield for about four months and it is amazing to see how God works. The members of Immanuel Lutheran have a wonderful tract of land to be used to build the kingdom of God. As I look out over the church property and see the leaves falling to the ground, the images of children playing outside on a sand volleyball court, Frisbee golf course, or a soccer field seem so real. With a visit from Jonathan and Tamba Abel, AFLC missionaries to Brazil, the vision of hosting missionaries on furlough and pastors on sabbatical comes to mind—a southern retreat center. After hearing that the Summer Institute of Theology transmitted classes via video in Texas last summer, I know the technology is available for a Bible school satellite, which would allow students to study from Springfield.

These are the visions for the property that are the easiest to see. But the true vision is for the lost here in Springfield. In the short time I have been here I have met a large number of young people who aren't attending any church. The conversation always starts the same: "I was raised ..." (fill in the blank with the denomination of choice). As the conversation goes on, the next statement is often, "I don't go to church because ..." The bottom line is that young people are not hearing the truth preached or seeing it lived out in the congregations they previously attended. They are not seeing any difference between the world and the Church. It is important that we be a congregation that is different in our community, the one which preaches the gospel and walks in the light.

As members of Immanuel Lutheran prepare themselves for new members, we are studying what could be called Christianity 101—getting back to the basics. We want to be ready to disciple new members and love the lost. We want to clear our vision so we see the hurting and lost and can truly become a hospital for their care. Springfield has many people searching for a home congregation, a place to feel safe and to find comfort in the gospel and fellowship of other believers.

Twenty years ago Kay and I thought Springfield would be a good place to retire, but God has a different plan. To God be the glory!

Ramsbacher serves the AFLC Home Missions congregation of Immanuel Lutheran, Springfield, Mo.



Will you miss me tomorrow?

BY LAUREL JOHNSON

On Thanksgiving Day, 1994, our family gathered awaiting our dinner. I took note of the elderly moms visiting together on the sofa. The torch had been passed to me (a bit younger) to make gravy without lumps.

It was special to have the younger gals busy with the trimmings and our 8-year-old granddaughter helping, too. As I mentally checked off the list of things yet to do, a 4-year-old niece came to me, looked up and asked, “Will you miss me tomorrow?” My heart jumped as those words penetrated.

The families returned to their homes, and I was left pondering that special, heart-warming question: “Will you miss me tomorrow?”

My thoughts focused on the women who have ministered in congregations at home and abroad. Volumes could be written of their faithfulness, dedication, sacrifice and tremendous service. They have given a godly heritage of values, programs and plans that are blessings beyond description. Thanks be to God for His faithfulness and for faithful servants of all ages.

It is a privilege to be involved in ministry. What a blessing to “sit at the feet” of our white-haired ladies and learn from them. What a joy to watch our younger women as they become involved in ministry, like petals of roses unfolding.

How is it with our congregations’ ladies groups? Perhaps the younger ones are saying: “Yes, we will miss you tomorrow when it is difficult for you to serve or when you have gone into the glorious presence of Jesus.” Perhaps the older ones are saying: “WMF

is tomorrow and it is our hearts’ desire that more of the younger women could be alongside of us today.”

As we blend together—always sensitive to one another’s changing needs, capabilities and schedules—we will experience joy in seeing our sisters in Christ grow in His grace and knowledge. The focus of our group’s ministry will always be on the ministry of Jesus. The vision of ministry, once established, will continue. New ideas will enhance our outreach. Our words and actions will demonstrate that we understand the importance of building up one another in the Lord.

As our women’s ministry continues to meet each opportunity and challenge, may our lives and prayers include entrusting, encouraging, encircling and enfolding one another to the end that God may be glorified. Others will observe our conduct and will testify that Philippians 2:2 is evident: “Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”

My heart was so touched and torn by that little girl’s question that I realized I needed to do something to fulfill the longings in the heart and life of that little 4-year-old. In our homes and congregations, torches are being passed. Someday it will be my turn to sit on the sofa. But for today, I want to play a part in God’s answer to the question: “Will you miss me tomorrow?”

Johnson, the wife of Pastor Wendell Johnson, is a member of True Vine Lutheran, Mora, Minn., and former president of the National WMF. This article originally appeared in the Feb. 7, 1995, issue of The Lutheran Ambassador.

Taking our mountain

BY JONNI SLIVER

Caleb from the Old Testament has always been a hero of mine; he had strength of character and two motivating gifts—faith and faithfulness. Because of these two gifts, he received the inheritance God had for him. In the same way, the Free Lutheran Church of Brazil is extending God's Kingdom and receiving the abundant blessing of the Lord. Though I have only been here for less than a year, I can tell you that I have seen a "Caleb spirit" in this place. The church memberships are seeking God for the inheritance He has for us, not passively, but with hungry hearts.

Caleb believed God and in His power moving in people acting under His authority. "Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it'" (Numbers 13:30). God recognized Caleb's faith and made him a promise—a land of his own. "But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it" (Numbers 14:24). But Caleb didn't expect to be given the land. He had fought for his brothers and he was willing to fight for his mountain, in the strength of the Lord. In the same way, members of the AFLC Brazil know we have an inheritance and we are rising up to take it.

Part of our inheritance is our cities. The AFLC Brazil has ministered God's blessing in many cities, and strong churches are providing hope and grace in a dry, thirsty land—but there is more to be done. There are areas that have been forgotten, and some of the poorest regions seem to have been abandoned—but not by God and His children.

New initiatives are taking place all over southern Brazil.

One small example is in the city of Campo Mourão. Three strong churches have blessed their neighborhoods, but in the past a fourth Free Lutheran church ministered to the neediest area of the city. Sadly, the church closed years ago, and the building remained as a broken memory. In the last several months the three churches of Campo Mourão have joined hands to take back their inheritance. Key members from each church are evangelizing, reaching out to children and visiting homes near the church. In effect, they are taking back *Jardim Esperança* (fittingly, the Garden of Hope).

Another part of our inheritance is this generation. As I have visited church after church I have seen concerted efforts to reach the smallest, most vulnerable members of the community and congregation with the love and grace of the Father. But not all children are in situations where the local church can easily reach them. Thousands of children inhabit the streets of every large city in Brazil, and even in smaller cities children are abandoned, abused, and isolated. During the last 21 years the Miriam Home has seen many broken young lives receive shelter and hope. In the last few months the AFLC Brazil family has embraced the Miriam Home in a new way, realizing the truth of Deuteronomy 15:10-11, that when we open our arms to the needy and poor, God pours out His blessing.

Praise the Lord for the inheritance He has for each one of us. By His grace we will take our mountains.

Sliver, from Emmaus Free Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn., is an AFLC missionary serving at the Miriam Home in Campo Mourão, Brazil.

Annual conference housing options

Hosts of the 2012 Annual Conference have compiled a list of motels and campgrounds available in Thief River Falls, Minn., for those attending the 50th anniversary conference June 12-15.

Blocks of rooms have been reserved under "AFLC Annual Conference" with varying types and special prices. Please make your reservations as soon as possible as there is a limited amount of space available.

- Americas Best Value Inn & Suites
1915 Hwy. 59 SE
Phone: (218) 681-6205;
Reservations: 1-888-890-9568
www.americasbestvalueinn.com
- AmericInn of Thief River Falls
1920 Hwy. 59 SE
Phone: (218) 681-4411
www.americinn.com
- Best Western Inn
1060 Hwy. 32 S
Phone: (218) 681-7555
or 1-800-569-8123
www.bestwestern.com
- C'mon Inn
1586 Hwy. 59 SE
Phone: (218) 681-3000
or 1-800-950-8111
www.cmoninn.com
- Cedar Lodge
1009 Main Ave. N.
Phone: (218) 681-6800
or (218) 689-5185
www.cedarlodgetrf.com
- T-59 Motel
1510 Hwy. 59 SE
Phone: (218) 681-2720
(Reservations taken after Jan. 9)
www.t59moteltrf.com

Camping in Thief River Falls:

- Petro Pumper
Hwy 59 & Hwy. 1
Phone: (218) 681-3546
- Thief River Falls Tourist Park
Hwy. 32 S & Oakland Park Rd.
Phone: (218) 681-2519
www.citytrf.net/tourist.htm

Surrounding communities also offer housing options.

News from King of Glory, Shakopee, MN



New members were received Oct. 30, 2011, at King of Glory Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn. Pictured are (from left) Pastor Les Galland, Janeen Gimberg, Mary Johnson, Karen Raatz, Curly Johnson, David Raatz, Pastor Walter Johnson, Tammy Johnson, Ralph Draheim, Allen Johnson, Jeannie Schubert and Randy Schubert. Not pictured are Virgil and Carol Mears, Tyler Johnson and Tiffany Johnson.



Members of King of Glory Lutheran celebrated a dedication service Oct. 9, 2011, as the congregation moved into a newly purchased building in Shakopee, Minn., from their former home in Eden Prairie, Minn. Pastor Elden Nelson, president of the AFLC, brought a message based on Genesis 28:10-22 titled, "The House of God—The Gate of Heaven." Pastor Jason Gudim, who serves Faith Lutheran in Minneapolis, read the Scriptures for the service. Pastor Les Galland serves King of Glory Lutheran.

National WMF seeks photos for 50th anniversary event

As the National WMF prepares for the ladies retreat in March and for WMF Day in June, we are asking for your help in providing to us pictures of any WMF events—such as rallies and WMF Day—so that we can make photo boards. If you have any that you can share with us, please send them to: Phyllis Peterson, 420 Ash Road, Portland, ND 58274 or you may email photos to aimforlife@polarcomm.com.

Home Missions hosts retreat

The AFLC Home Missions department will be hosting a leadership retreat Jan. 16-18 at the Association Retreat Center (ARC) in Osceola, Wis.

The theme for the retreat is "Stand Firm," taken from II Thessalonians 2:1-5, and Pastor Eric Barger from Take A Stand Ministries will be the keynote speaker for the event. For more information, visit the Home Missions Web site at www.aflchome-missions.org.

Writings of former editor Raynard Huglen still available

The Race Before Us: Collected Writings of Raynard Huglen

We can be thankful that Pastor Huglen (first editor of *The Lutheran Ambassador*) has compiled a book of his writings that is now available for those who do not have access to back issues.

Some common threads are evident in his work: the necessity of a personal relationship with Christ, faithfulness to our Lutheran roots, and a firm belief in the biblical correctness of Georg Sverdrup and Sven Oftedal's blueprint for "free and living congregations." Of more than 1,300 editorials, Huglen has chosen 45 for this volume, and what a fine collection of opinions they represent.

The book also includes

- wonderful gems found in a section called "Life on the Edge of Town."
- articles about his 1967 trip to

Norway and the island of Huglo where his father was born.

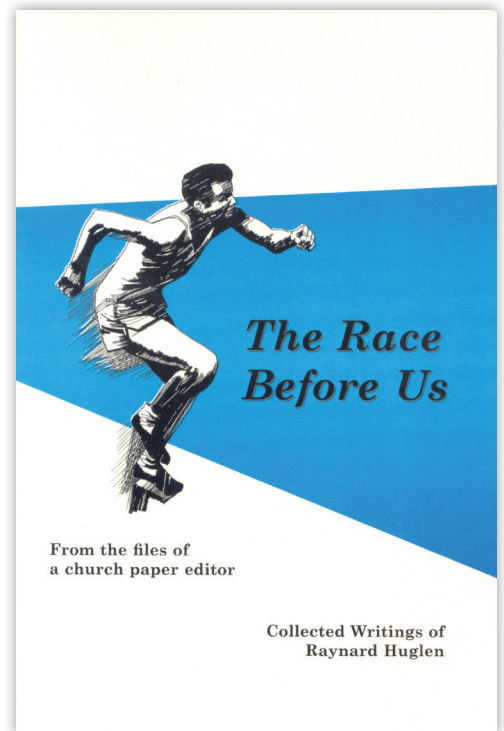
- tributes to Professor George Soberg, Pastor Fritjof Monseth, Pastor Julius Hermunsleie, Dr. Iver Olson, and Pastor John Strand.

- Christmas and Easter sermons and several devotionals.

By Loiell Dyrud, Thief River Falls, Minn.

The Race Before Us: Collected Writings of Raynard Huglen is 259 pages, paperback. The book is available for \$5 each plus shipping and handling.

For shipping costs and ordering, please contact Ambassador Publications, 3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard, Minneapolis, MN 55441, phone: 763-545-5631, email: parished@aflc.org.



AFLC Schools campus hosts Christmas concerts



The AFLC Schools hosted a weekend of Christmas concerts Dec. 9-11. TOP: Olivia Johnson (front) and Bethany Papillon play their flutes. ABOVE: Ryan Tonneson and Brent Raan sing in the Seminary Chorus. RIGHT: Audience members joined the choirs in the "Hallelujah Chorus."



AFLC memorials: November

AFLBS

Keith Nash, Arnie Anderson
Vera Olsen, David
VanHoveln, Ruth Claus

AFLT

Irene Helling

Evangelism

Walter Grenz, Dianne
Iverson, Howard
Wellumson

World Missions

Arnie Anderson
Margaret Kittelson
Barbara Wentzel

Home Missions

Anders Flaa, Keith Nash,
Selmer Storseth, Howard
Wellumson, Velma
LaRocque

Parish Education

Glenn Evans

... in honor of

World Missions

Vernon Russum, and
Anne Presteng

AFLBS

Vernon Russum

FLY Beyond camp planned for July

AFLC Youth Ministries is gearing up for FLY Beyond on July 16-20 at the Association Retreat Center (ARC), Osceola, Wis. Formerly called FLY Boot Camp, this week of leadership training has been a highlight for many teens from across the country with its focus on maturity as a disciple of Jesus. Registration is available at (763) 545-5631 and at youth.aflc.org.

ARC plans 2012 schedule

The Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis., will host a number of AFLC-wide camps and retreats in 2012.

- **SIDExSIDE** (grades 7 through 12)

Dates: February 3-5; Cost: \$90

- **Sno Daze** (grades 4 through 7)

Dates: February 3-5; Cost: \$90

- **Couple's Retreat**

Dates: February 17-18 (19)*; Cost: \$130

- **Women's Retreat**

Dates: March 23-25

- **Men's Retreat**

Dates: April 20-21 (22)*; Cost: \$65

- **Fire Up Youth Camp** (grades 4 through 7)

Dates: June 24-29; Cost: \$190

- **Kids' Camp** (grades 1 through 3)

Dates: June 29-July 1; Cost: \$75

- **Family Camp**

Dates: July 29-Aug. 4; Cost: Family rates apply

- **Classics' Retreat** (55+)

Dates: Sept. 14-16

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

- **Prayer Retreat**

Dates: Nov. 30-Dec. 1 (2)*; Cost: \$65

* Denotes the option of an extra night stay. For more information, contact the ARC by e-mail at arcregistra-tion@centurytel.net or call 800-294-2877.

People and Places

Living Faith Lutheran, Boyertown, Pa., was accepted as a Home Missions congregation by members of the Home Missions Committee. Pastor Eugene Enderlein is serving the congregation on an interim basis.

Pastor Dennis Gray, Newfolden, Minn., is offering an online discipleship course. Lessons will be offered via email and discussions can be held via Skype. For more information, contact Gray at norwegianalso@msn.com.

Margaret Kittelson, 91, went home to be with the Lord on Nov. 6, 2011. A lifelong member of Helmar Lutheran Church, Newark, Ill., she served as a missionary in Bolivia together with her husband Odell for more than 25 years. Blessed be her memory.

Arlene Christensen, 85, wife of Pastor Martin Christensen, Frontier, Saskatchewan, died on Aug. 10, 2011. After raising their five children, Arlene and Martin left the farm near Frontier in 1987 to answer the call of God to prepare for further service. After a year of study at the AFLC seminary in Minneapolis, Martin served as lay pastor at Badger, Minn., and Elbow, Saskatchewan, before retirement and their return to the farm at Frontier. She is survived by her husband of 54 years; five children and 15 grandchildren. Blessed be her memory.

Dr. Francis Monseth, AFLC seminary dean, together with professors **Robert Lee** and **Jerry Moan**, attended the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) in San Francisco Nov. 16-18. The trip was made possible in part by a gift from the Women's Missionary Federation for faculty enrichment. "No Other Name" was the theme of the conference, which consisted of workshops representing all areas of theological study, and more than 2,100 people were in attendance.

Ashley Hurner, a 2011 AFLBS graduate from Glyndon, Minn., will begin work as a Home Missions parish builder at Calvary Free Lutheran, Mesa, Ariz., this month.

Hannah Johnson, a 2011 AFLBS graduate from Camarillo, Calif., was accepted as a Home Missions parish builder and is now working at her home congregation of Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Camarillo.

Pastor Frank Cherney was installed Oct. 16 at New Hope Free Lutheran, Jamestown, N.D., with Pastor Paul Nash, director of AFLC Home Missions, officiating.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-Nov. 30, 2011

FUND	REC'D IN NOVEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$35,558	\$292,129	\$300,991
Evangelism	10,938	113,654	115,281
Youth Ministries	6,845	107,690	118,392
Parish Education	7,914	118,294	100,585
Seminary	17,430	202,306	194,168
Bible School	27,105	404,603	390,299
Home Missions	36,695	405,582	404,683
World Missions	37,434	384,390	303,444
Personal Support	46,002	365,075	330,125
TOTALS	\$225,920	\$2,393,723	\$2,257,923

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

I remember, too

Fifty years will have passed next October since I and some college friends drove from Minneapolis to Thief River Falls, Minn., to attend the organizational conference of what would soon become the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. Major decisions had already taken place before we arrived on Friday afternoon, including the election of our first president, Pastor John Strand.

My home congregation had voted for the proposed merger, which would unite the Lutheran Free Church (LFC) with The American Lutheran Church on Feb. 1, 1963, and I felt like a bit of a church orphan, concerned about the future and

wondering if some had the courage of their convictions to continue a commitment to the heritage that had become so important to me.



Pastor Robert Lee

What a thrill it was to learn that the church

building could not hold the crowd of people who had come to the conference, and that the sessions had to be moved to a nearby school auditorium. How exciting to sense the optimism and to hear from guest pastors that others from outside the LFC were waiting to join us. The messages were encouraging, too, and friendships were established that have lasted for half a century.

I teach church history, which means that I spend a lot of time looking backward and reflecting on the past. It's a great privilege to celebrate what the Lord has done in our midst, but it's vital that we look forward to what He will do in the months and years to come, as the Lord tarries. The theme of the 1962 conference,



Twenty-five years ago, the AFLC hosted its annual conference in Thief River Falls, Minn., the site of the organizing conference in 1962. This summer the AFLC will again meet in Thief River Falls as its members celebrate the association's 50th anniversary.

"Press On Toward the Goal" (Philippians 3:1-16), directed our thoughts and goals beyond the confused present to the future, a needed perspective, too, for 21st century proponents of free and living Lutheran congregations.

Put it to rest

One of our Bible school students was introduced, and someone said to him that his last name didn't sound Norwegian. "No," he responded, "I guess I'm an outsider here."

Ouch.

Though people of Norwegian ancestry were undoubtedly a large majority of those who founded the AFLC 50 years ago, this has changed drastically. Our former editor reminded me recently of an informal survey that I took among a group of our pastors several years ago, and most were of mixed nationality, with a clear majority claiming some German descent.

One congregation that I visited several

years ago sponsored a heritage festival, with samples of all the ethnic foods and crafts represented within their membership. It was fascinating to witness the variety, while at the same time noting the oneness in Jesus Christ that was clearly proclaimed.

Let's mark our golden anniversary by facing reality and putting to rest any comments that suggest an ethnic uniformity among us—like "all of us Norwegians here," for example—and give thanks for the wonderful blend of national backgrounds with which we have been blessed. The writer of these words may be an unlikely one to address this issue, for I treasure my ancestry, and may be prone to be an offender. (I even like lutefisk, which is about as Norwegian-American as one can be!) But I'll work on my narrowness, and try to guard my comments, with the hope that you will, too.

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

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

association retreat center

Eternal resolutions

BY PASTOR ERIC WESTLAKE

What is really important? The answer is different depending on whom you ask. If you ask a person who does not believe in Christ, the response most likely is in temporal terms, such as home, family and health. These are all important but must always be kept in check compared to eternity.

If you ask the same question to a believer, the answer should be things that last forever, such as people believing in Christ and the Word of God. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." And Isaiah 40:8 says, "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." According to these two verses we find that believers and the Word of God will last forever. As we move into the New Year and have an opportunity to decide where our time, effort, and support will be used effectively, let's continually take the eternity test.

As believers we have choices to make with our time and resources. The first thing we need to do is pray for wisdom to partner with those organizations which are making the greatest impact on changing the eternal destination of individuals. I Timothy 2:3-4 says, "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." If it is God's desire for all to be saved, we need to realize that we are to do everything possible to that end.

I am personally thankful to the AFLC and the different ministries it supports. A local church in northern Michigan reached out and sent me to camp where I came to a saving faith in Christ Jesus under the preaching of Pastor Herb Franz. I am so thankful for the two years I spent at AFLBS where I had the opportunity to travel two summers on teams spreading the gospel through vacation Bible school and Bible camp. During my second summer as a counselor at the ARC I had the privilege to pray with four youths to accept the Lord. That evening, following the service, I had a strong call into the ministry.

I ask myself many times, what if we didn't have local congregations willing to reach out? What if we didn't have a Bible school that immerses our students in the Word of God? What if we didn't have the ARC, where hundreds accept the Lord every year? Praise the Lord that we do, and my hope is that we will do everything possible to support ministries like these in order that individuals like me will continue to have the opportunity to hear and accept the Lord.

We can make an eternal impact as we help support ministries that are founded and built upon the principles of winning souls for Christ. For more information about the ministry and needs of the ARC please go to www.arc-aflc.com or call 800-294-2877.

Westlake, who is the chairman of ARC Board, serves as lay pastor at Our Saviour's Free Lutheran, Zumbrota Minn.