

THE LUTHERAN 

JULY 2010

AMBASSADOR

TRUTH



Faith



network

BY MARCUS DAHL

There are moments in life when the Lord takes my breath away. He answers prayers in such a noticeable way that I am compelled to pray harder for more things, and for more people. The Bible instructs us to pray continually without ceasing, asking the Lord to respond to our needs even though the Lord knows about them before we ask. What do I pray for most? Salvation for the lost.

Have you ever been asked if a family member is a Christian and responded, "I hope so." Me, too. I want to encourage you with an event that blessed me.

I pray daily for my family members, that the Lord would open their ears to hear, open their eyes to see, and soften their hearts that they may receive Him. I pray, "Lord, please bring Christians into their lives so that they may hear the gospel and turn to Jesus."

I pray day after day, and weeks turn into months, which turn into years.

One day recently a relative called me. She was in Palm Springs on vacation when a man walked up to her in a parking lot and handed her a penciled drawing, meant especially for her. The drawing was of a figure of a person kneeling down with hands raised in a surrender position, looking up into heaven. In the clouds was heaven, the gates opened and raining down blessings upon the surrendered figure.

She asked me what I thought this picture meant. I told her it

was a picture of someone surrendering his life to Christ.

Reflecting on this occurrence, I believe it was an answer to my prayer. I don't know the man in the parking lot in Palm Springs. Yet his

step of courage was a movement of faith.

Imagine a network of Christians around the world. As you are praying for your loved ones, perhaps I will be the one to meet them at the little league baseball field or grocery store. As I share my faith in Christ with them, the Lord may answer your prayer.

I can't reach people whom you can reach, nor can you reach those whom I can reach. But can you imagine the fun we can have by stepping out of our comfort zones and praying that the Lord helps us to notice those small opportunities we can take throughout our day to tell someone about Jesus Christ? The Lord delights in allowing us to participate in sharing about His Son and the eternal life He brings.

You already know enough to share. Will you please pray about joining this faith network? When we finally die and go to heaven, we will never again be in the presence of an unbeliever who needs to hear the gospel. I pray the Lord gives you the courage to practice your faith in this way. Amen.

Dahl, a member of Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, is a student at the Association Free Lutheran Seminary, Plymouth, Minn.

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It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.

—Frederick Douglass

The goal of theological education must not be to clutter the minds of students with citations, glosses, interpretations, or hairsplitting distinctions. Rather, it must be to lead them to a greater understanding of Jesus Christ, the heart and center of God's Word.

—James S. Hamre

"Georg Sverdrup and the Augsburg Plan of Education"

For in Jesus all the mysteries of wisdom are hidden. Without Him we have nothing. In Him we have all that we need here below. It takes time and labor to enter into Scripture, and it takes testing and experience to find the treasure that is hidden in Jesus.

—Georg Sverdrup

"Is Augsburg's Work Done?"

It is hard to find words in the language of men to explain the deep things of God.

—John Wesley

doctrine

REVEALING THE TRUTHS OF GOD

By Pastor Dana Coyle

Several years ago, Andree Seu of *World Magazine* summed up the theological bent of the modern church era in this way: “Spirituality is good; religion is bad. Seeking is good; finding is bad. Meditation is good; prayer is bad. Feeling is good; doctrine is bad.”

Indeed, in today’s emergent, seeker-sensitive, relativistic, touchy-feely, postmodern-and-trending-toward-post-Christian church culture, the word “doctrine” is viewed with increasing disdain. At best, doctrine is considered to be dry, archaic, boring, and irrelevant. At worst, it is considered to be divisive, intolerant, graceless, and inflammatory. Perhaps you’ve heard this little gem, which has been growing in popularity of late—“Jesus unites, doctrine divides.” This statement suggests that Jesus and doctrine make incompatible bedfellows and that if a church wants to hold tightly to Jesus, that church needs to be willing to let doctrine go.

This is an unfortunate and ignorant perception. For one thing, Jesus Himself indicated that the truth about Him would bring a kind of division (Matthew 10:34-36). For another, it is impossible to hold tightly to Jesus without holding tightly to doctrine, because it is only through the doctrines revealed in Scripture that we can know about Him and believe in Him (II Timothy 3:15-17). Indeed, salvation and sanctification are impossible apart from doctrine. As Joshua Harris observed, “We cannot have an experience of Jesus Christ apart from what He’s revealed about Himself.” Furthermore, the preaching and teaching of doctrine lies at the heart of the calling that Christ Himself has placed upon His Church—a call that could not be spoken more plainly (I Timothy 4:13, Titus 2:1, etc). And so rather than shunning doctrine, the Church should regard upholding and teaching it to be a glorious and joyful privilege!

The word “doctrine” in the Scriptures refers both to the act of teaching and to the substance and content of what is taught. Therefore, all teaching in the church is doctrinal. But what kind of doctrine is being taught?

The Scriptures refer to two overall categories of doctrine. First, there is “sound doctrine” (Titus 1:9, I Timothy 1:10). Sound doctrine is doctrine that is healthy, correct, and accurate. It is objective truth, revealed by God in His Word. Furthermore, sound doctrine is “the doctrine of God our Savior” (Titus 2:10), and that which is “according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God.” (I Timothy 1:11). In other words, sound doctrine is emphatically gospel-centric, focused on the perfect person and atoning work

of Jesus Christ, the Savior. It is the divinely glorious truth of the cross and the empty tomb—the substitutionary death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—and all of the truths about God and sinful man that are encompassed within it. It is inerrant, infallible, and timelessly relevant truth, and it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. Put simply, sound doctrine comes from heaven, and when rightly taught and believed, that is where it will lead (I Timothy 4:16).

Second, there is “false doctrine” (I Timothy 1:3). False doctrine is the opposite of sound doctrine, though it effectively employs tactics of deception to appear otherwise. It is referred to as the doctrines of men (Colossians 2:22) and as the doctrines of demons (I Timothy 4:1)—a phrase which reveals its ultimate source. False doctrine warps the pure truths of Scripture into teaching that is incorrect and inaccurate, even though it speaks much about God. It is doctrine that corrupts the pure truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the errors of distortion, exaggeration, addition, or omission (and as the demon Screwtape smugly observed in C.S. Lewis’ *The Screwtape Letters*, the errors modulate every 30 years or so, in order to switch disguises and ensnare a new generation). False doctrine is devilish lies masquerading as truth, darkness masquerading as light. It comes from the furnace of hell, and when proclaimed and believed, that is where it will lead.

Doctrine matters! And it is only the continual, systematic proclamation of the pure biblical gospel of Jesus Christ—the teaching of the “sound doctrines” of God’s holy Word to all ages—that will firmly implant the saints in the truth and thereby safeguard them against the foul and deceptive winds of false doctrine that will blow with increasing furor until Christ returns. We must proclaim the biblical gospel in its fullness, including the beautiful doctrines of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper—doctrines which are inseparable from the gospel. The stakes are far too high to be cavalier about this. Our divine mandate is to be devoted to doctrine!

All teaching in the church is doctrinal. And so in truth, churches that are seeking to minimize doctrine—the “Jesus unites, doctrine divides” crowd—aren’t leaving doctrine behind at all. They are simply stepping away from sound doctrine. And because there is only one other kind, this trend must slowly but surely bring disaster. May the Lord protect our AFLC from this slippery slope, empowering us to stand firm, unto eternity, in sound doctrine.

Coyle serves Helmar Lutheran, Newark, Ill.

Handwritten text in a script, likely Devanagari, covering the upper portion of the image. The text is arranged in approximately 10 lines, though it is heavily blurred and difficult to decipher. It appears to be a form or a list of entries.



WHAT MAKES A

GOOD TEACHER

By Loiell Dyrud



With Sunday school beginning shortly, there is undoubtedly a good deal of apprehension among teachers getting ready for that first day in the classroom—especially first-time teachers. “A teacher affects eternity,” said the famous 19th century American writer Henry Adams. No doubt Adams made this statement in reference to the public school teachers of his day, but how much more true is this comment when applied to Sunday school teachers today who are entrusted with nurturing the spiritual lives of their pupils each Sunday?

Martin Luther referred to teaching as a virtue: “Count it one of the highest virtues upon earth to educate faithfully the children of others.” Though teaching is certainly a virtue, it seems to me, it is also more an art than a science. It can’t help but be when one considers the setting—an adult placed in a room filled with 25 uniquely different children, no two alike. Whether in public, parochial, home, or Sunday school—it is a universal truism that the single most important factor in the miracle of learning is the teacher. It is equally true that no one wants to be a bad teacher.

But what makes a good teacher? Or as some would say, what makes an effective teacher?

Having taught in the public schools for almost 40 years, I thought I could tell who would be the good teachers, but that was during my first 20 years of teaching. At the beginning of each school year, I thought I could predict from among the new teachers who would be successful and who would be failures. But having been wrong so many times, I gave it up. There are just too many variables. Sometimes the people I thought would be utter failures came alive wonderfully in the classroom and became exceptional teachers.

So you who are about to start your first year in the classroom, worried sick about your perceived inadequacies and potential failures, take heart; God may have wonderful things in store for you. And though there is absolutely no way to guarantee what will make a good teacher, the following points may help along the journey.

The first and most important key to becoming a good teacher is preparation and love of subject matter. Nothing is more important. By preparation I mean first of all prayer for each one of your students as well as for guidance in your study. How successful you will be in the classroom is directly proportionate to how much time you spend in prayer and preparation in God’s Word for class each week. Today’s Ambassador Series is an inspiring curriculum

filled with exercises, art work, and study guides, but the lesson must be thoroughly studied and absorbed by the teacher ahead of time. Shortchange your preparation time, and you shortchange your students as well as yourself. Nothing was more disgusting than to hear some of my fellow teachers say they had to “wing it” in a class because something had come up. Disgraceful as it may be in the public sector, how much more so in a spiritual setting? One good way to gauge how well prepared you are is if you are so excited about teaching the lesson you can hardly wait to get into the classroom and share it with your students!

But all the excitement in the world can never overcome a lack of discipline in the classroom. To be a good teacher, one must master the relationship between discipline and love. The reason preparation is placed ahead of discipline is that without adequate preparation there will unlikely be adequate discipline. One can’t just occupy the time with inconsequential small-talk about what’s going on in students’ lives and get by. Though one may get by the first few class meetings, sooner or later discipline goes out the window without adequate preparation. And no matter how much love a teacher may have for his or her students, it is never enough to compensate for idle hands and unfocused minds.

Another point to consider—in public schools, students know they must be in school or there will be consequences. Sunday school is neither mandatory nor are there consequences for skipping (at least none they can readily see). As a result, Sunday school teachers often feel they must cater to every whim of the disruptive student to make sure the seat is not empty next Sunday. But even as adults know, so do children: it is hard to respect someone you can walk over. Firm classroom guidelines must be established and consistently carried out. And the important word here is “consistent.” It does little good to set up rules and ignore them. But love and respect for the teacher follows when pupils see a consistently prepared, loving adult in control of the classroom.

There are few experiences more rewarding than the reciprocal bond of love and respect forged between teacher and pupil over a year’s time. But it must begin with prayerful preparation and continue with consistent discipline. Also remember, successful teachers are not born overnight. The process takes years. And though the results of one’s efforts are often disheartening, take heart in what Luther says: “A pastor and schoolteacher plant and raise young trees and saplings in the garden. Oh, they have a precious office and work and are the finest jewels of the church.”

Dyrud is a member of Our Saviour’s Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn.

HOLY
BIBLE



DESIRING GOD'S WORD

By Pastor Seth Forness

In Psalm 119:97 the psalmist says that he loves God's law and he meditates on it. That is, he thinks about it constantly and keeps it as the basis for all that he does. Can we say that this is how we feel about God's Word?

How can we move from knowing we should read God's Word to a place where we love reading it? What plan of action will help move someone who is young in the faith into a deeper trust and love for God's Word? I am not one who is much for a "how to" plan, so instead let me share with you my journey of how I came to love reading and studying God's Word.

I remember that as a child I wondered why I had to read my Bible, since I already had a basic belief in Jesus as my Savior. I knew that the Bible contained many of the stories that I loved like David and Goliath, Joshua and the walls of Jericho, and Daniel and the lions' den, but I could read those accounts in other story books. What did the Bible have to offer me that I couldn't get anywhere else?

I received my answer when I started hearing the Word of God explained to me. From a young age I had heard pastors and others talk about what the Bible says, but not until my time in confirmation did I have it explained to me. I vividly remember my teacher, Pastor Richard Larson, walking us through how the Ten Commandments were not just ten dusty old rules, but that they still applied to us. I had never really thought about how the teachings found in the Bible could have direct application to my life.

I soon began to wonder, "If the Ten Commandments have application for my life, could the rest of Bible apply as well?" As I grew in faith and watched those around me, I began to see others living out the teachings of the Bible. I saw both of my grandmothers constantly praying for their families, and I have seen many of the results of those prayers. I saw my parents keeping our home safe by minimizing worldly influences and the impact those decisions made in my life. I saw my dad reading his Bible and I have watched him become stronger in his faith. I saw my mom apologize to me and my sisters when she had used harsh words when disciplining us for disobedience, showing her love for us.

As I saw these examples all around me I realized that the

Bible contains more than stories and rules, it contains truths and promises for those who put their trust in God. As I watched others live out their Christian faith, I began to hunger for what the Bible might have for me. Would I experience the same blessings my parents had if I read my Bible? I knew the only way that I could know for certain was to begin reading for myself.

I began a devotional plan that I found in the front of the *NIV Student Bible* I had received from my aunt. I read through the daily Scripture passages and expected to be amazed at God's hand doing miraculous things all day long every day. However, this was not the case. In fact, soon the glitter wore off my excitement and I began to wonder if I had missed something. I was reading God's Word, so where were the instant amazing life experiences?

During this time of questioning I came upon II Peter 3:9, which told me that not every act of God happens when or as we expect it. After reading this passage I gained a new perspective; I realized that I may not see God's hand moving every day, but it is. As I lived in this perspective I began to see small things happen as I prayed. I began to find strength to resist temptations, and I saw the hand of God protect me when I gave in. I began to experience the moving of the Holy Spirit as He guided my life. I moved beyond a basic belief in Jesus to a full assurance of salvation.

Now at the age of 30, 16 years after I was confirmed, I think I am beginning to understand what the psalmist meant when he said that he loves God's law and he meditates on it all the day. As a youth and young adult pastor I hope to help the young people in the congregation I serve gain this mindset. No program exists that will teach them to have a love for God's Word. I can, however, live a lifestyle that shows young people the difference God's Word can have in their lives.

As pastors, youth workers, parents, siblings, and lay people, we have the obligation and privilege to live as examples, letting others see the blessings and changes in our lives that come from reading God's Word. Hopefully, they will desire to read and study God's Word so they can know and experience the blessings for themselves.

Forness is a pastor of youth and young adults at Maranatha Free Lutheran, Glyndon, Minn.

the next g

By Kevin Holman

A few weeks ago, I was working with some young men, as I do most every week. As I helped them prepare to teach Sunday school, we discussed what topic they would like to teach. For half an hour one of the students answered, “Jesus,” every single time a question was asked. It was a very long 30 minutes! He was obviously trying to be funny, but unfortunately he was only succeeding at trying my patience. Helping youth to become leaders can be frustrating. But it also can be, and usually is, rewarding.

The point of youth ministry is to influence and impact youth for Christ. Author John C. Maxwell claims that leadership is measured by one’s amount of influence. If so, then the question quickly becomes: by whom are we most influenced? Often times, we are more influenced by our peers than anybody else, especially when we are talking about teens. Because of this influence, it is extremely important to raise up youths to be leaders. Not only so that they are confident in their own faith, but also so that they can more effectively influence their peers.

I have been blessed through my connection with two young men this year. Sam and Joel are both high school sophomores. At the beginning of this past school year, I was looking for two young men who showed leadership qualities. My plan was to build into them leadership skills as Jesus did with Peter, James, and John.

I won’t ever be as successful as Jesus, but I did see these two young men impact a lot of other people around them. Each week these two students led our Sunday school class. Each week the three of us met to study together, pray together and hold one another accountable. Not only did these two high school students lead the class themselves, but they also, at the end of the Sunday school year, began teaching other students how to lead Sunday school.

These young men started the school year planning to be ordinary sophomores. God had different plans for them. They are now leaving their sophomore year as strong Christian influencers and leaders.

I focused more of my time working with Sam and Joel this year than I have in any other part of a demanding and difficult ministry. This could probably be easily misunderstood as favoritism, and maybe it is to an extent. But as we answer critics and, much more importantly, look at the method that Jesus used, we soon discover this is a legitimate way to do ministry. Jesus intentionally spent quality time with Peter, James and John. I would dare anyone to have a conversation with Jesus about playing favorites.

A key to successful ministry is understanding that we will not always be around to lead others. We need to choose a few potential leaders and train them to take our place and continue the work that we are doing.

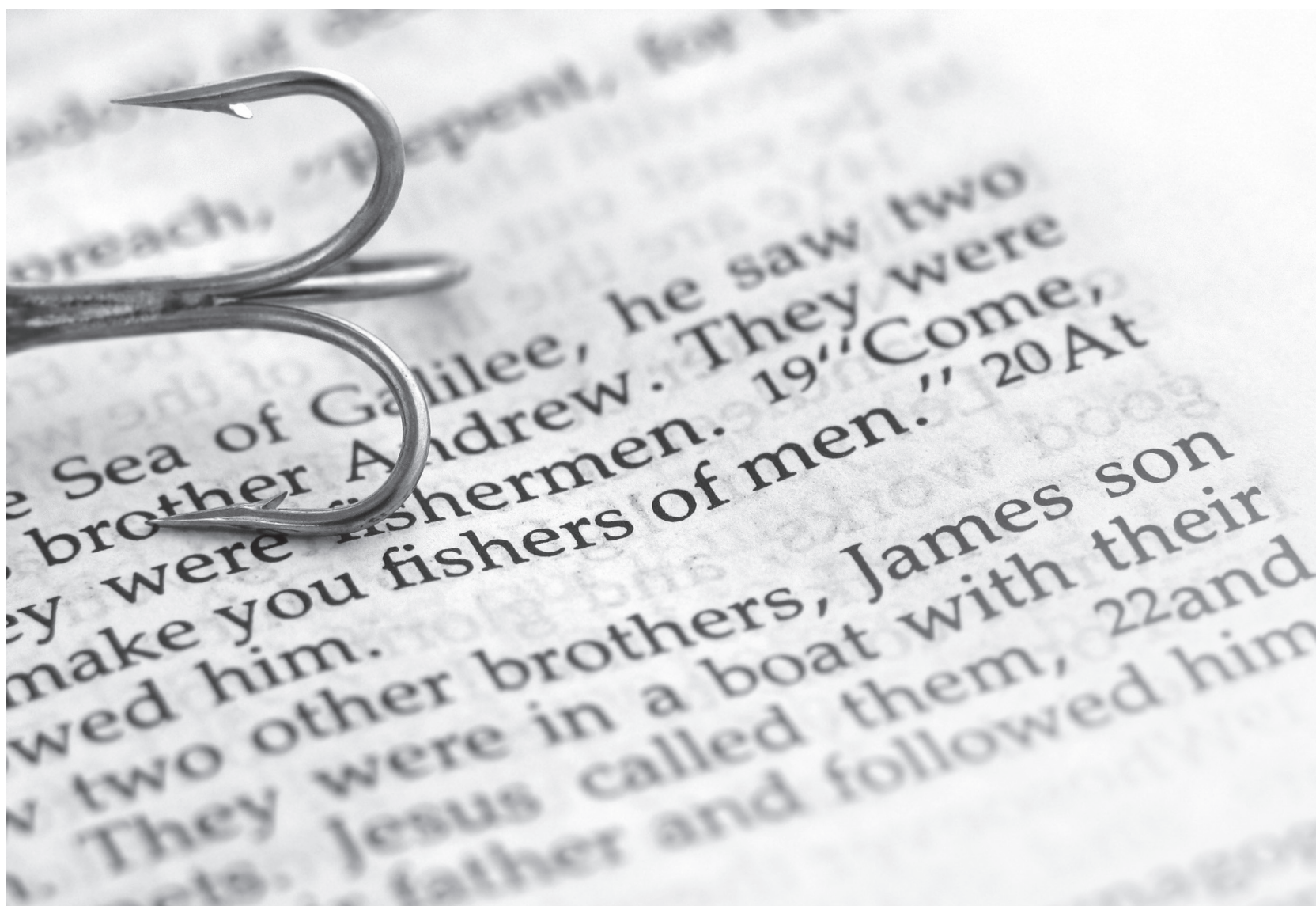
I have learned many lessons this year. One of the most valuable lessons has come in the form of micro-management. Especially as it relates to youths, we like to have our say. We are constantly looking over their shoulders and holding their hands while they are doing something. I think this is wrong. The point is not to stop them from failing, but to allow them to step out there and do something. Allow them to experience the joys and the sorrows of leadership. In some cases, this involves failure. And when they fail, we need to come alongside of them and help them learn from the experience.

Truthfully, I have learned more from my failures and my flaws than I have from any success. And isn’t that the joy of the Christian life any way, that Jesus loves us, as imperfect and as helpless as we are, and that He promises to walk alongside of us? He promises to teach us and to guide us. I can’t think of a greater joy than to come alongside someone else and help them come alongside Jesus.

Holman works with the youth at Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, Minn.

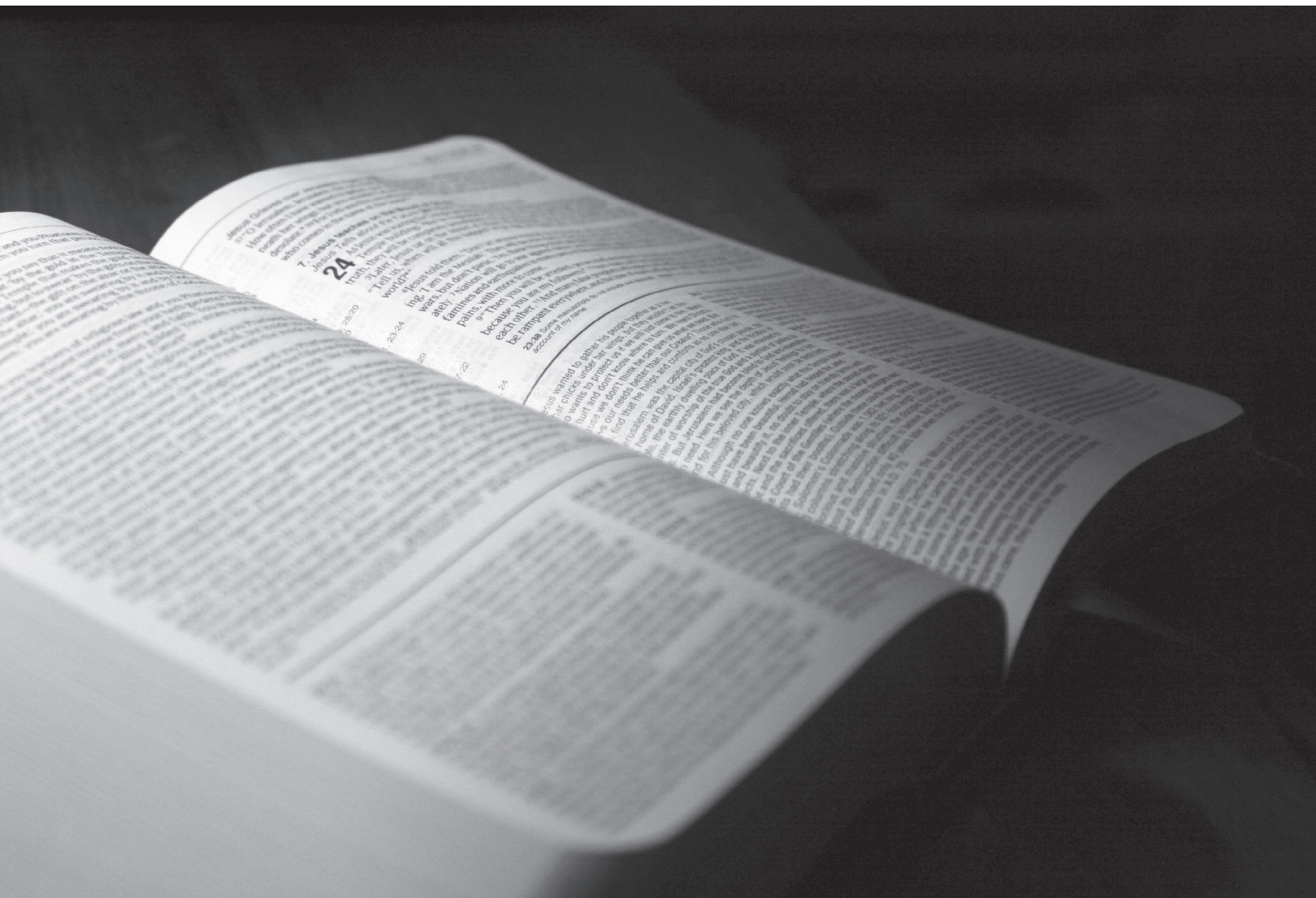
generation

RAISING FUTURE LEADERS



do you know h

By Pastor Robert Giles



now to ...?

PRAYER AND READING YOUR BIBLE

There are certain things Christians often mistakenly take for granted in dealing with other people. First, we sometimes assume that everyone knows how to pray. Second, we assume that everyone knows how to read the Bible. But my own personal experience during many years of ministry shows me that such assumptions are erroneous.

I recall one instance from my earlier years of serving as a pastor in a small city in Montana. The doorbell at the parsonage rang one afternoon and as I answered it I met two young people: a girl of about 14 years of age and her brother, who was about 12. They were not members of my congregation. As I invited them in, their question was, "Pastor, how do you pray? Will you teach us to pray?"

I could sense that they were both troubled about something. As we sat there for a few minutes talking, they told me the source of their immediate concern. Their father, who drove a truck for one of the refineries, had just come in from a run and had left his truck at the refinery to be serviced. He and his wife had gotten into an argument, then he had started drinking. In the midst of the heated argument the telephone rang. It was the refinery calling to tell him his truck was loaded and ready for his next run. He left home very angry, with several drinks in him, to drive his truck loaded with 10,000 gallons of high test aviation fuel over 4,000 miles of mountain roads. This was a hazardous situation, to say the least; an accident just waiting to happen.

No wonder his children were worried. They knew they should pray, but they had no idea how to go about it. As we sat in my living room I explained to them that praying is very much like talking things over with a good friend whom they trusted, much like they had done when they came to me and explained their worries.

Together we knelt down and I prayed for them and for their father. And they each poured out their troubles to the Lord in the name of Jesus, asking for their father's safety on his journey. They went away that afternoon much relieved.

At about 7:30 the next morning I received a phone call from the two young people, who shared with me their joy and said thanks. They'd had a telephone call from their daddy. He'd arrived at his destination safely. The Lord had definitely answered their prayers.

In a similar way, I've often had someone ask me, "How do you read the Bible?" They have perhaps started to read the Bible, but had gotten hung up on all those "begatitudes" in some of the chap-

ters of the Old Testament. They had gotten discouraged and quit reading or they tried to cover too much at one sitting.

I always tell them that the Bible is really a very exciting book if they would approach it with the right attitude. If their faith is not yet strong, I recommend that they begin by reading one of the four Gospel accounts. I tell them to use a Bible with a cross-reference tool and look up Old Testament references whenever the Gospel account says that a prophecy has been fulfilled. I suggest reading all four Gospels, becoming familiar with the different viewpoints of the four writers.

I always invite these people to come back and ask me questions about any passage they do not fully understand. After all, I've been studying the Bible for more than 50 years and most of the questions they might bring have already been brought to me by someone else. Besides, I have many reference books and commentaries, Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, as well as Bible studies on most every book and on many subjects. Certainly I should share such resources with others in need. I consider it quite a privilege to be able to do so.

As people grow in their Christian faith and want to know how they can better serve the Lord in living a Christian life, I recommend the New Testament Epistles, each of which are written to show us ways to live more closely with Christ.

I had my own Bible for about 12 years before I surrendered my heart to Christ in a conversion experience. In those years I had read very little of my Bible consistently. When I came to know Jesus personally, however, there arose in my heart a definite hunger for His Word and I read my Bible with a great appetite.

But I needed something more. Fortunately, my pastor and his wife invited me to attend evening classes at a local Lutheran Bible Institute. There my hunger for God's Word was satisfied as good teachers further explained the Bible. It was through these experiences that I received God's call to the ministry.

Bible teaching has always been one of the major parts of my pastoral ministry. But that hunger for God's Word has never left me. I seek to read my Bible through at least once each year in my personal devotions. I try to read every translation so as to become familiar with them. No matter how many times I read my Bible, I always find something new and exciting. I can truly say with the prophet Jeremiah, "His compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Giles, a former AFLC pastor and the father of AFLC Pastor Dan Giles, passed away in November 2009.



By Pastor Arlin Olson

MY FATHER

My dad was very dear to me. We enjoyed working together on the farm, taking care of livestock, fieldwork and harvesting. In the winter we spent time in the workshop rebuilding machinery or vehicles. We worked as father and son. Dad didn't give many orders—he didn't need to. We understood each other and had the same goals, so we simply worked together. We could talk about almost anything, personal and spiritual. It was a special relationship that I will always treasure.

Though it was a happy relationship, I realize it was not perfect. I was not a perfect son and Dad was not perfect, either. But he knew something of the love and forgiveness of the Heavenly Father and modeled that to his children.

The perfect models for a father/child relationship are Jesus and His Father.

We hear the love of the Father for His Son in the thundering voice at Jesus' baptism, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

And again on the mountain, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him" (Matthew 17:5).

On Jesus' part we see confidence of the Father's love and delight in doing the Father's will. Jesus said in John 5:19-20: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. ..."

The earthly life of Jesus rang with phrases like, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34). Or, "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38). These are echoes of Psalm 40:8, "I delight to do thy will O my God."

The relationship between the Father and Son is marked by oneness, and love for and delight in each other. It is a relationship

in which the Father reveals His desires to the Son and the Son obeys the Father out of sheer love. He works as a Son, not as a servant!

What does that mean for you and me? It means a lot if we consider it in the light of Romans 8:15-17: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."

When we come to faith in Jesus we receive the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of sonship. The Holy Spirit assures us that we are God's children and enables us to cry to God from the depths of our hearts, "Abba, Father!" In today's English that would be like saying, "Daddy," an intimate term used for a father we love. In other words, we are brought into a relationship with the Heavenly Father that has a likeness to Jesus' relationship with Him. If we doubt that, verse 17 goes on to say, "We have become heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ." We become inheritors by grace of the glory that belongs to Jesus by right.

We can enjoy a relationship with a perfect Father just like Jesus does. The Father's delight in Jesus has become His delight in us! There is no need for doubt, no need to strive to earn a place in His heart—it is already given by grace through Jesus and assured by His Spirit.

How about you? Do you know God as a taskmaster, or do you know Him as your Father?

Olson is a former lay pastor with the AFLC-Canada.

Fostering spiritual learning

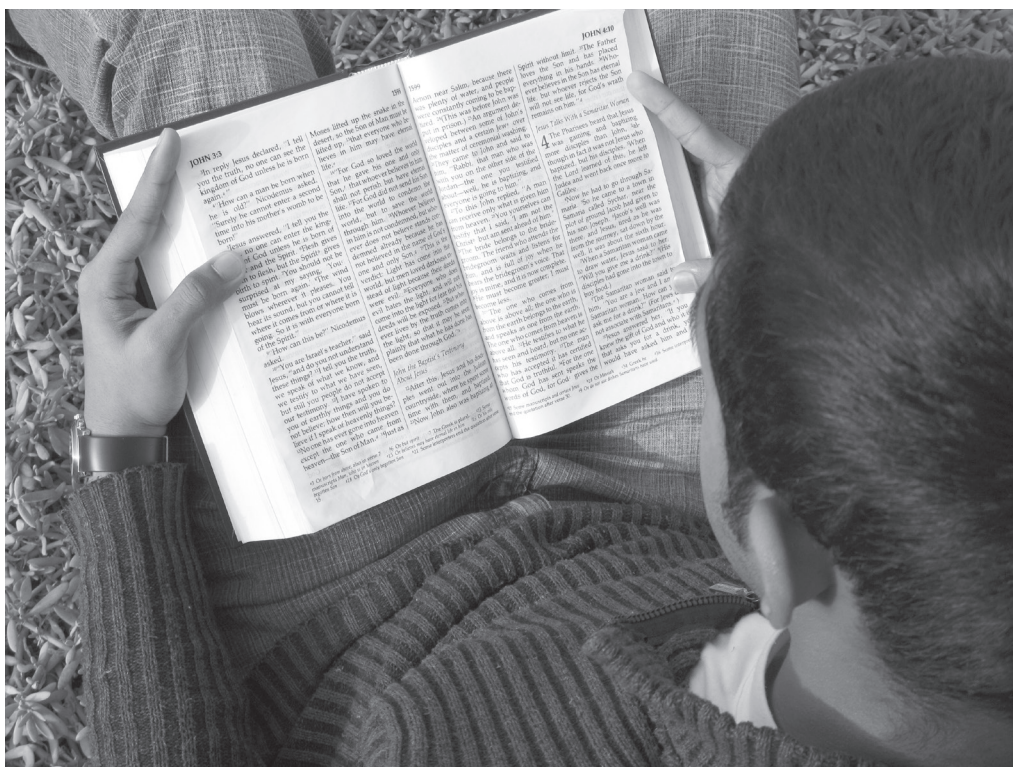
BY LORILEE MUNDFROM

Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it." We are told here that when our children are taught the truth from God's Word, it will grow and bear fruit in their lives. The Bible does not promise them a life without troubles, but that if we are faithful in training and teaching children, God will bring it to their minds as they grow and mature. Isaiah 55:11 says, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Surely God's purpose is to bring people to faith in Jesus. And just as surely, God is faithful to His promises.

The Women's Missionary Federation (WMF) encourages women of the AFLC to foster Christian education among the children of their congregations in a variety of ways, such as the cradle roll packet presented to new parents. These packets provide Christian literature for spiritual teaching and training in the life of a new addition to a home. You may order the cradle roll packets from our executive secretary, Dawn Johnson, for use in your own churches or as an outreach tool to other new parents.

One of the current projects of the WMF involves the ministry of Parish Education. Your 2010 contributions will be used, first of all, to complete the fifth grade teacher's manual, *Journey Through the Old Testament*. Upon its completion any remaining funds will go toward publishing the new sixth grade Sunday school curriculum, *Journey Through the New Testament*.

Ambassador Publications, the publishing arm of our AFLC, has many resources available to parents and families for teaching children the Word of God, including children's Bibles and study Bibles; Christian music materials (music books, illustrated songbooks and CDs); Bible story books, devotional books for children, and mission story books. Have you checked out the new Scripture



memory program, *God's Word by Heart*? Go to www.aflc.org/publications/catalog to view these and other resources available through the department of Publications and Parish Education.

Another vitally important part of early childhood Christian education involves attending Sunday school and worship services with your children. Parents, you are the example these little ones will follow, so commit yourselves to teaching them the Word of God every Sunday. Ambassador Publications also provides biblically solid, Lutheran Sunday school materials that can also be viewed at the Web site listed above.

The WMF strongly encourages you to give generously in prayer, time and monetary resources to AFLC Parish Education. Our children are the future of our church!

Mundfrom is the president of the national WMF and lives in Eugene, Ore.

New study on the Apostles' Creed

Second part in 'Worship' series

Can you recite the Apostles' Creed from memory?
"I believe in God the Father Almighty . . ."

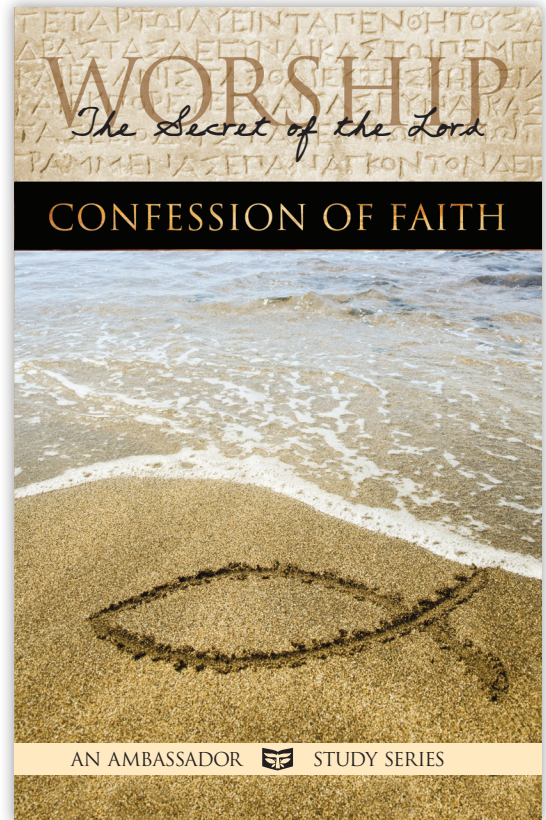
If so, is it because your parents taught you the Creed as a young child? Or perhaps you learned it from the Catechism during confirmation instruction. Or maybe you have repeated it so often during worship services that the words are etched in your mind.

What do you really mean when you speak the words of the Apostles' Creed? Does the Creed still have value today? The author of this study suggests, "This is such a common confession of faith, used so frequently, that we may easily forget that it is an extremely lofty statement."

"Confession of Faith" is a practical and stimulating study of the Apostles' Creed and reveals a rich and meaningful expression of the foundational truths upon which our eternal hope is built. As a result of this study, its familiar words will take on fresh meaning.

This eight-lesson study is the second in a two-part series called *Worship: The Secret of the Lord*. Part one, "Confession of Sin," was published in October 2009. Both studies are appropriate for personal or group study.

"Confession of Faith"
Worship: The Secret of the Lord
 Ambassador Publications, 2010
 \$5/each



LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM



Republished Catechism booklet

Luther's *Small Catechism* is a timeless tool for teaching the basic truths of the Christian faith in a way that is both doctrinal and devotional. Sometimes referred to as the "Bible of the laity," it is intended to help parents guide their children to the Word and to faith. This newly published 32-page booklet includes the text of the catechism, full-color visual posters, prayers for various occasions, and a brief biography of Martin Luther. It is recommended for students using the Ambassador Sunday School Series and as a compact reference for youth and adults.

Luther's Small Catechism
 Ambassador Publications, 2010

For more information on these and other resources, contact
 Ambassador Publications at (763) 545-5631 or parished@aflc.org.
 Information is also available on the Web at www.aflc.org/parished.

Intentional mission

BY CHRISTIE BALLMANN

I don't think I had ever spent an Easter morning with sand between my toes before. But there I was on Magu Beach with a gathering of early morning worshipers exchanging eager refrains of "He is Risen!" For a few days I was an ambassador for Home Missions to Good Shepherd Free Lutheran in Camarillo, Calif.

Then again, neither had I envisioned spending Valentine's Day with retirees in Mesa, Ariz., or Memorial Day on Medicine Lake in Plymouth, Minn., swatting mosquitoes with 30 AFLBS students, getting ready to launch 11 weeks of summer team ministry.

It's been an incredible year and one-half since my move from Texas to Minnesota to work as administrative assistant in the AFLC Home Missions office. Talk about living in the "vortex of passion and drama." This is it! It's like having a front row seat, watching God perform miracle after miracle through His Word and His people.

Trying to capture lessons from the past year in Home Missions is a bit like chasing fireflies in the summer sky. You may catch a few, but there are dozens more in the twilight. I'll readily share three lessons that show up most frequently, lessons that are shaping who I am becoming.

Presence

The ministry of presence means being there. It means rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep. It means bearing each other's burdens. Jesus set the example. He wept as Mary and Martha wept at Lazarus' tomb. He took laughing children in His arms. He showed up to celebrate the wedding in Cana. Even on the cross, He made sure His mother had someone to hold her as she watched her Son suffer.

"You have never talked to a mere mortal," C.S. Lewis wrote. Presence is living with the awareness that every person we come in contact with is an immortal soul, loved infinitely by God. We are entrusted with the great privilege of being a channel of that love.

The ministry of presence is not complicated. It's an encouraging smile, jotting a card, attending a funeral, or sitting in the hospital waiting room with an anxious family. It's amazing what happens when individuals and congregations grasp the ministry of presence—the wounded are brought to wholeness in Jesus' name and new life bursts forth.

Hospitality

When I think of hospitality, I think of spending Easter Sunday with Pastor Jim Johnson and his family in California, where they fed and hosted a dozen young adults who were all away from family. I think of the Westroms, a retired couple in Mesa, who graciously opened their home and bussed me all over town when I flew down for chalk drawings.

Matthew 25:35-40 describes hospitality this way, "For I was hungry, and you gave me meat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in." Why is hospitality a rare commodity in today's society? Maybe because it puts my pocketbook, time, and pride to the test of surrender. Yet it has tsunami-like force to open the door for Kingdom impact. Hospitality is one of the beautiful hallmarks of a growing congregation.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a lifestyle and journey, not a program or event. I love the multi-generational aspect of ministry in Home Missions. It's parish builders working alongside experienced pastors. It's the mature believer inviting newer believers on ministry trips and having faith for the person they will become. It's a "come join us" mentality of meeting people where they are at and investing for the long term.

Intentional Christianity

Isn't it amazing that God allows us to partner with Him in reaching the world, using simple channels of presence, hospitality, and mentoring? We don't engage in this strategic role by default. We have to be intentional about engaging the "immortals" in our sphere of influence. This is the heart of Home Missions.

These lessons aren't meant for the exclusive few in mission congregations—no, intentionally caring and living out the Word is for every believer. Lord, grant me grace to be one of your passionate and intentional disciples, and begin in my own home!

Ballmann is administrative assistant for AFLC Home Missions and Evangelism. She is also an active gospel chalk artist. She attends Grace Free Lutheran in Maple Grove, Minn.

Aren't you excited?

BY PASTOR JONATHAN ABEL

Four years ago I was stuck in traffic in Maringa, a medium-sized town in the southern part of Brazil. Beside me was a Volkswagen Beetle, its driver was banging on the horn. In front of me was a Ford pickup truck full of teenagers yelling, screaming and—as crazy as it may seem—dancing.

We were in a traffic jam caused by a group of people in the middle of the road who seemed to be going crazy. They had contracted a disease that comes in waves from all over the world and always affects Brazilians. It's called World Cup fever, and once again Brazil is a contender to win the World Cup Soccer Championship this year in South Africa. Brazilians are going crazy!

The more I think about it, the more it seems either pretty cool or crazy. Why do people get so fanatical about ball games and sports teams? I do not condemn them because I think it is great to be involved in certain things and to participate with your heart.

But when I look at my fellow Christians, those who are part of the family of God, those who belong to the team that has already defeated Satan and continues to defeat him each day, I wonder why we do not have the same enthusiasm as those who cheer for their team at a ball game. After all, the Bible says in Revelation 15:2, "And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire. And those who had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God." It also says that the angels rejoice over a sinner who repents (Luke 15:10), and that we who belong to Christ are part of the winning team (I Corinthians 15:57; I John 5:4).

Being part of a winning team is a great thing, but being a player on the team and not a bench warmer is even better. The joy of the game is being in it. Even though it seems at times like a lot of work, in the end it is all worth it.

Isn't it exciting to see our young people, like Amanda Aldrich and Bethany Marschner, take time out of their lives to serve in Brazil at the Miriam Infant Home, blessing a set of malnourished



Amanda Aldrich and Bethany Marschner, both AFLBS graduates, are serving as short-term missionary assistants at the Miriam Infant Home in Campo Mourão, Brazil.

twin babies so that they might survive or helping a teenager named Daisy from going into a life of prostitution.

Isn't it exciting to see young men such as Nathan Olson and Jonathan Nelson sharing the things they have learned at AFLBS and in their home churches with young men on the foreign field?

Isn't it exciting when young people such as Mariana and Paulo start their spiritual walk at our Bible camp and then walk together in marriage to give God the glory and call Pastor Jonathan Unverzagt to come and do their wedding in Brazil?

Isn't it exciting to see people like Rui, a truck driver who had a life full of problems, come to know the Lord? Now his life is full of hope! Isn't it exciting?

So why aren't we excited? The apostle Paul says that we are crazy, and the things of God are foolishness to the common man. But most people looking at us would not see that difference. Is this the way God wants us to be? The Christian life is only fun when you are sold out for Jesus. "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). With Christ we are winners! Let's show it! Hip, hip, hurray!

Abel is an AFLC missionary serving in Maringa, Brazil.

The 2010 AFLBS summer teams

Eight teams of students from the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, Plymouth, Minn., are spending the summer ministering in AFLC congregations, camps and vacation Bible school programs.



Ambassadors

Jessica McCarlson, Erin Olson, Paul Berge, Andrew Olson and Michael Osthus.



Timothy

Audrey Nash, Caleb Fugleberg, Ben Dahl and Erin Harris.



Cornerstone

Shane Remington, Laura Westlake, Lydia Berger and Josiah Rolf.



Joshua

Bethany Rice, Philip Nash, Ashley Hurner and Andrew Hoffman.



Foundation

Stephen Quanbeck, Anna Benbo, Kayla Paige and Tim Larson.



North Barnabas

Matthew Quanbeck, Julia Prichard, Janna Fugleberg and Josiah Nelson.



South Barnabas

Nick Almanza, Hannah Johnson, Steph Nelson and Hans Tanner.



Majesty

David Olson, Kathryn Norris, Adam Voth, Laura Meline, and Andrew Jore.

Youth Ministries releases free Electronic Toolbox

AFLC Youth Ministries released an Electronic Toolbox (or E-Toolbox) at the 2010 annual conference in June.

“As our Youth Board prayerfully considered a way to get key youth ministry tools into the hands of the local congregation, we were energized by the thought of a jump drive,” said Pastor Jason Holt, director of Youth Ministries.

The free one-gigabyte jump drive includes 23 tools, from games and training to samples from Cadre Ministries and the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding. Also included is the AFLC Commission on Evangelism’s *Discipleship Manual* and information about youth events like FLY 2011. The jump drive is contained in a blue wristband designed for youth leaders and pastors to utilize this summer.

“Our immediate feedback on the E-Toolbox has been very strong,” continued Pastor Holt, “so we are hopeful that it will be significant for churches ministering to and with teenagers.”

For more information on the E-Toolbox, contact AFLC Youth Ministries at (763) 545-5631 or e-mail youthmin@aflc.org. A free E-Toolbox is available for each AFLC congregation.



The E-Toolbox, a one-gigabyte jump drive in the form of a wrist band, contains tools and information for youth ministers.



New members were received May 16 at Maranatha Free Lutheran, Spring Lake Park, Minn. They include, from left, Ed Hoeykens, Colleen McGinnity and Lois Holmes. Pastor Tonnes Pollestad is pictured at right. We praise God for bringing these new members into our fellowship.



Summer team/parish builder training

Members of the 2010 summer teams from the Association Free Lutheran Bible School and parish builders from Home Missions gathered on the Plymouth, Minn., campus June 1-4 for a training week.

AFLBS Golf Scramble fundraiser set for August 16

The AFLBS Golf Scramble will be held Aug. 16 at the Links at Northfork, Ramsey, Minn. The annual fundraiser for the Association Free Lutheran Bible School in Plymouth, Minn., raises scholarship funding for students. Last year the tournament brought in more than \$9,000 toward scholarships.

The cost for each four-person team is \$400. The fees for the modified shotgun scramble includes 18 holes of golf, cart use, unlimited use of practice facilities and a cookout meal following the tournament. A list of registration and sponsorship options is available on the AFLBS Web site at www.aflbs.org.

AFLC memorials: May

AFLBS

Rosemary Peterson,
Borghild Haven, Henrietta
Skyberg, Florence Myhre,
Frank Peters, David Van
Hoveln

AFLT

Albin Haugen, Hannah
Quanbeck, Harlan Estrem,
Blanche and Oliver Moen

Evangelism

Lois Johnson, Ted Bouchard

General Fund

Borghild Haven,
Ted Bouchard

FLAPS

Harvey Hoops

Home Missions

Thelma Berg, Virginia
Carkuff, Eugene Hoeft,
Harvey Hoops

Parish Education

Dr. Mary Lindquist,
Gladys Swenson

World Missions

Odean Pederson, Ethel
Sterling, Edna Eversvik

... in honor of

World Missions

Glenn and Alice Moe

People and Places

Micah Hjermstad, a 2010 graduate of AFLTS, has accepted a call to serve Hope Evangelical Free Lutheran, Ishpeming, Mich. He was ordained during the annual conference in June, which was held on the campus of the AFLC, Plymouth, Minn.

Pastor Todd Erickson, Roseau, Minn., has accepted a call to serve as president of Heritage Christian Academy, Maple Grove, Minn. Erickson, who currently serves the congregations of Rose Free Lutheran and Spruce Free Lutheran in Roseau, taught at the academy while he attended the Association Free Lutheran Seminary.

Pastor Stephen Odegaard has resigned as pastor of Calvary Free Lutheran Everett, Wash., due to health issues. He plans to retire once the congregation is able to find a replacement.

The ladies of **Ebenezer Free Lutheran**, Humboldt, Tenn., recently sponsored a quilt show in conjunction with the West Tennessee Strawberry Festival. Quilts were submitted from around the area. A total of nearly 70 quilts were displayed. The organizers were Ruth Busse, Mary Ann Ramaker and Anna Waehler. Plans are under way for the next year's event.

Reader says Truth Project curriculum is worth studying

I attended a Truth Project Bible study group a few years ago at our church. I had been a Christian for just more than a year and I was anxious to be a part of a group that met for 12 weeks.

The Truth Project was exactly what I needed as a new Christian. It helped my wife grow in her faith, too; she had been a Christian for nearly ten years by then. The 12-part DVD series, led by Del Tacket, teaches a biblical perspective of a wide variety of topics: science, politics, theology, sociology and much more.

I appreciated that the Truth Project tackled so many topics, yet did it in a way that was easy to understand and easily applicable to my life. I spent the first 35 years of my life as a non-believer. When I came to know Jesus, I wanted to follow God's Word and knew that there were certain things that were right and wrong. But I didn't completely understand the Christian perspective. The Truth Project helped me understand why, as a Christian, I believe

what I believe.

My wife and I continue to use what we learned from the Truth Project in our day-to-day lives. As we teach our children, we are reminded of the lessons on history and science. As we go to work each day we are reminded of the lesson on labor and work. We feel better prepared to share our faith with family and friends as we remember the lesson on theology. When we listen to the news or hear other worldviews we are confident in our faith and in what we believe and are able to discern right from wrong and truth from lies.

The Truth Project helped me grow closer to God in many ways and cemented my faith in God. I am so thankful for this great opportunity for me, my wife and so many others.

Pat Quittem, Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.

ARC hosts upcoming retreats

A look at upcoming retreats and camps at the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis.

♦ Family Camp

Dates: July 25-31

Cost: Vary according to family size, accommodations

♦ Classics Retreat

Dates: Sept. 17-19

Ages: 55 and older

Leaders: Pastor Elden and Faith Nelson

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

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

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-May 31, 2010

FUND	REC'D IN MAY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$27,461	\$133,011	134,366
Evangelism	5,148	62,810	35,938
Youth Ministries	7,163	67,987	26,676
Parish Education	6,127	47,307	49,786
Seminary	14,309	86,964	77,347
Bible School	31,196	198,838	136,003
Home Missions	31,470	208,105	120,055
World Missions	19,110	121,526	101,076
Personal Support	22,934	126,212	164,605
TOTALS	\$164,916	\$1,052,759	\$845,853

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

Longing for assurance

I recently had the chance to travel to Rome, Italy. While there I visited the Holy Stairs. It is believed that these stairs were originally in Jerusalem at the palace of Pontius Pilate and that Jesus walked these stairs when He was on trial before Pilate. The legend is that Helena, the mother of Constantine, brought the stairs from Jerusalem to Rome around the year 326. The stairs consist of 28 marble steps that are now encased by wooden steps. They are located in a



Pastor Craig Johnson

building across the street from the Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano.

A lot of things shut down in Rome in the early afternoon. I got to the building that houses the

Holy Stairs a little after 3 p.m. and waited until the building opened again at 3:30 p.m. As the time got close a crowd gathered at the doors. When the doors opened they poured in and headed straight for the stairs. I got in after the first wave and watched people climb the stairs on their knees.

Directions are given as to what to pray on each step. Indulgences are offered to those who make the climb. Indulgences are basically the Catholic Church claiming punishment for sin will be less if certain acts—such as climbing the stairs—are performed. One of the signs posted said an individual could receive an indulgence for himself or for a loved one.

I watched the people climb the stairs on their knees, stopping at each one to pray. I wondered what was going on in their hearts and minds. They appeared to be very sincere. Some were probably torn up by guilt and desperately looking for something to soothe their conscience. Some were maybe hoping this climb would get a loved one out of purgatory and into heaven. Along with hurting knees, those stairs were also probably full of hurting hearts that were longing for peace.

Martin Luther made a pilgrimage to Rome in 1510 and climbed those same stairs. At the time he was still a monk in the Catholic Church and he was searching for assurance that his sins were forgiven and he was in a right relationship with God. He thought a trip to Rome and climbing the stairs would help. He was also hoping to get his dead grandfather released from purgatory. He climbed the stairs. He said the prayers. He kissed the steps. But when he got to the top he had to admit: “Who knows whether it is so?”

The biographer Roland Bainton writes, “But if crawling up the very stairs on which Christ stood and repeating all the prescribed prayers would be of no avail, then another of the great grounds of hope had proved to be illusory.”

Luther didn’t find peace from climbing the stairs. He just got frustrated and discouraged. He found peace, instead,

through his study of Scripture. The assurance he longed for came from the truth of Romans 1:17: “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”

Five hundred years have passed since Luther’s visit to Rome, but some things

Luther didn’t find peace from climbing the stairs. He just got frustrated and discouraged. He found peace, instead, through his study of Scripture.

haven’t changed. People are still visiting relics and performing rituals thinking those things will get them right with God. It won’t. We have a right standing with God not through our works, but by God’s grace. Our faith is not in how well we do following the rules. Our faith is in Jesus, crucified for our sins and risen again.

It is believed that some of Jesus’ blood fell on those stairs. Whether it did or not is not the most important issue. What matters most is that Jesus did satisfy the demands of the law and shed His blood for our sins. We find peace in the promise that “the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

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

Periodicals

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association retreat center

BY MIKE FISK

More than a cup of water

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in" (Matthew 25:35).

Every once in a while we hear unbelievable tales of people who are starving to death, injured or being attacked while crowds of people look on, seemingly oblivious to the pain and/or destruction of another human being. We watch these scenes aghast at the apathy of our society, but once in awhile we must ask the haunting question, "Is what I do any different?"

Most of us will be fortunate enough to never see people physically beaten, but every day we rub shoulders with people who are emotionally and spiritually shattered. In our defense, these people are hard to see. Bruises of the heart and soul go unseen and at times expose themselves in opposite actions such as anger, rage or addictive behaviors.

These people are the spiritually starved and emotionally naked. They are the ones who cut us off on the interstate or treat us rudely in the checkout line. They are the ones who speak condemningly about God, religion and the church. The negative and hateful things they do are an attempt to dull the pain of their own existence.

Virtually every week of the year we see pilgrims on the journey of life congregate at the ARC. We provide the physical needs through good food, comfortable buildings and a quiet, safe environment so that they can focus on healing the wounds they have encountered in life. We are not content to stand by and watch as the needy come through our gates.

The weary come from every walk of life. Some are from other cultures whose needs are foreign to us. Others come from other denominations or religious beliefs that we don't understand, and in some cases don't agree with! Some come with no intent whatsoever to seek spiritual food. All of them are given a cup of water. All of them have their physical needs met in the name of Jesus.

While we meet physical needs, the Holy Spirit is working through the study of His Word and the speaking of gifted, godly men and women to bring spiritual and emotional renewal to those in need. New decisions for Christ are added almost every week. There were more than 500 decisions for Christ in 2009. Families have been restored, addictions have been conquered and physical healings have occurred on these holy grounds!

We are so thankful for those who have partnered with us in this ministry of bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to the world around us. Our Father has "loved us with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3) and we, in turn, aspire to show that love to all who enter our gates. The ARC has become a mission field in reverse. While others go out and make disciples of all nations, God brings people here to experience His word of love, hope and forgiveness. Thank you for your support of the ministry of the ARC. The ARC staff stops for prayer every day at 11:45 a.m. We invite you to join us as we ask God's Holy Spirit to continue to move mightily in our midst.

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