

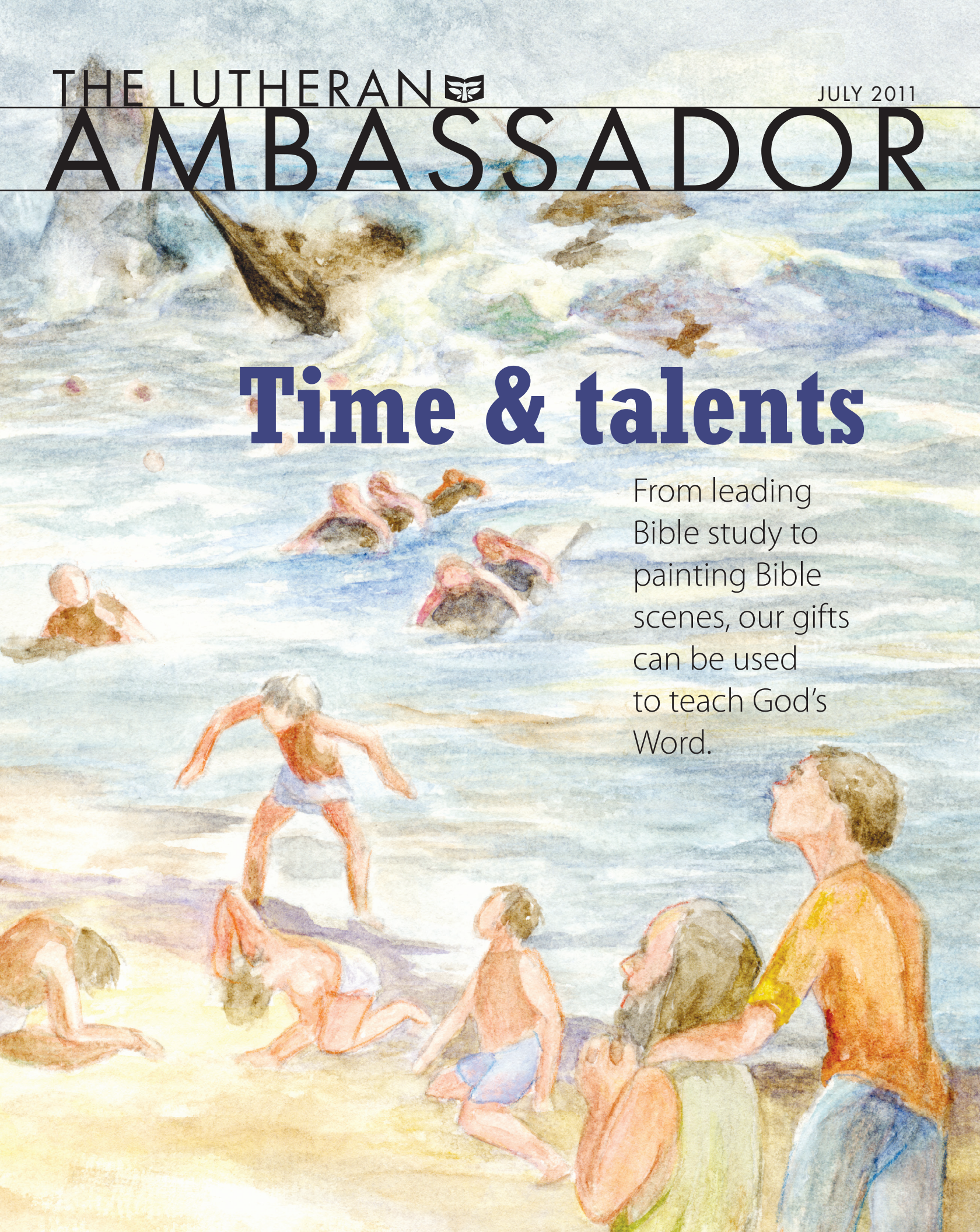
THE LUTHERAN 

JULY 2011

# AMBASSADOR

## Time & talents

From leading Bible study to painting Bible scenes, our gifts can be used to teach God's Word.



# Living in

BY KAYLA PAIGE

**L**ast summer I decided to abandon cleanliness and embrace dirt. When another team from the Association Free Lutheran Bible School crossed paths with mine, we created our own adventure in small-town North Dakota. All we required was a field with standing water and voilà—globbs of mud started flying through the air in an endless barrage of slinging, squelching, and splashing. Finally we called a truce, mud clinging to our clothes and smeared against our skin. Those pools of sludge suddenly looked refreshing, so we waded in to scrub ourselves clean, emerging with traces of dirt mostly erased.

Or so we thought. We walked back to my host home to hose off. When I stepped into the shower, I was horrified as I stood and watched the water wash over me. I realized that my “clean” body was leaving piles of dirt. It was equally shocking to watch filthy streams run down the drain as I rinsed out my clothes. Even after showering, I discovered a remnant of mud hiding in my ear!

Since then, I’ve experienced a similar horror about filth of a different sort. Pharisee-like, I used to feel grateful that I was not a whitewashed tomb like other people (Matthew 23:27-28). I was forgiven; I was living for Jesus. Outwardly righteous, I didn’t realize that within resided lawlessness, defiling the corners of my heart with “evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (Matthew 15:19).

As I’ve grown more and more to love the Lord, to know His ways, and to see through His eyes, the mud of sin has become



# the mud

glaringly apparent. Isaiah 64:6 laments that even “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” This realization can easily lead to despair. Sin seems endless, defeat inevitable. Indeed, sin is deep, for “nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh” (Romans 7:18).

But we have a greater Savior, a Savior who invites us to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrew 10:22). Living in the mire of the sinful nature, we think such purity sounds impossibly beautiful. Yet it is ours in Christ. How can we be so confident, knowing our tendency to revel in filth? Our boldness is based in Him alone, because “we know that He who promised is faithful” as Hebrews 10:23 declares. True, we will continue to find mud lurking in our hearts. Even still, Jesus washes us white as snow so that He may present us “to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Ephesians 5:27). He plans to accomplish this “by the washing of water with the Word” as we live in the cleansing waters of our baptism, drowning our old selves in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Instead of bathing in the muddied waters of our own righteousness, let us wash in the blood of Jesus and cry, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

*Paige is an AFLC Home Missions parish builder serving Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Madison, S.D.*

July 2011 >>

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR vol. 49, no. 7

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

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

**Subscription rates:**

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

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

I find by conversing on natural philosophy, that I gain knowledge abundantly faster, and see the reasons of things much more clearly, than in private study: wherefore, earnestly to seek at all times for religious conversation; for those with whom I can at all times, with profit and delight, and with freedom, so converse.

—Jonathan Edwards

[ In Lutheran congregations the Gospel, these truly precious tidings, must be preached, and the entire congregation must be pervaded by the Gospel spirit. If that is the case, the people are not continually put in terror by the Law, but are made glad by the Gospel. ]

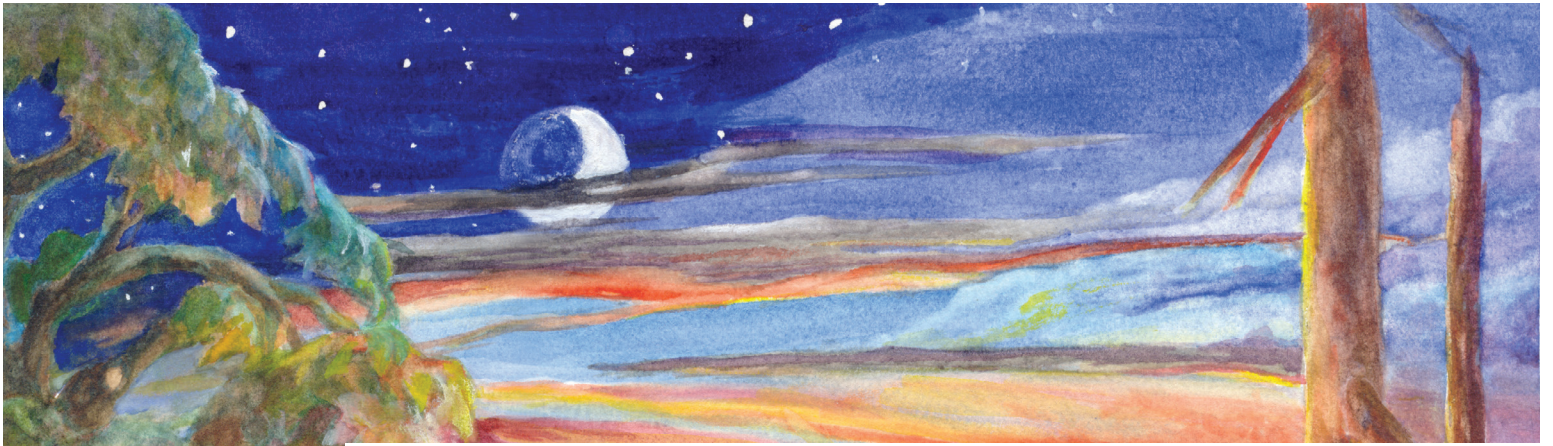
—C. F. W. Walther  
Law and Gospel ]

Nothing can be rightly known, if God be not known; nor is any study well managed, nor to any great purpose, if God is not studied. We know little of the creature, till we know it as it stands related to the Creator ...

—Richard Baxter

Defend the Bible? I would as soon defend a lion!  
Unchain it and it will defend itself.

—C. H. Spurgeon



# Artist to the church



I

can't remember a time when I wasn't trying to draw a picture. My mother used to say I came from a distant planet because no one else in our family's history ever showed any interest in creating artwork. But I know it was because of her Bible. My mother's Bible was beautiful. It had a soft black cover with fancy gold lettering and pages so thin they were almost transparent. It also had wonderful illustrations in full color, which filled my 3-year-old brain with awe. I spent many hours sitting on Mama's lap while she told me the stories of the pictures. My favorite, right at the beginning of Matthew, was of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus in the manger.

I didn't try to draw that picture—I just knew I would make a mess of it. But I started to copy pictures from calendars and magazines, whatever had pretty colors. By the time I was 4, I was able to

Arlington, Wash., artist donates her skills to illustrate AFLC's Sunday school materials

BY JOYCE NICHOLS

18-year-old ladies did not leave the safety of the family and live in an apartment alone. And that was that.

draw figures that actually looked like people, not sticks.

I took every art-related class that my high school offered and in my senior year, I edited the school annual and my drawings were selected to adorn the first page of each section. I was offered a job in the art department of a large publishing company in Los Angeles, but was unable to take it because my family had decided to return to the Seattle area. In those days,



However, 20-year-old ladies did get married and raise families. I married a career U.S. Air Force man. We raised two children, several pets and moved many times, but I never stopped drawing and painting. Sometimes it was for my own enjoyment, but often I did illustrations and design work for my husband's military units to help with our meager income.

I kept trying to improve my technique, studying the works of Rembrandt and Michelangelo at every opportunity, often ending in tears of frustration at my inability to figure out how they worked. I finally did learn how to draw a reasonably accurate human figure, and to render it in both watercolor and oil. Painting was done after the children were in bed, and my patient husband supported my efforts.

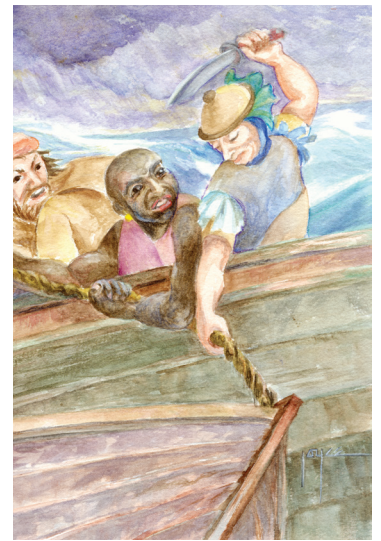
I have always known that whatever talent I have comes from God. His Book inspires me, and He never lets me down when I need encouragement. The only way I can show my gratitude is to always be available if His Church is in need of an artist, whether it is to paint a mural or just paint a wall. As long as it requires a brush and a

can of paint, I volunteer.

One year I designed bulletin covers for my church in Anacortes, Wash., to help with a dwindling budget. I wasn't sure that I was knowledgeable enough to do the job so I prayed for guidance. Each week I read the Scripture lessons. Then, using at least two versions of the Bible, as well as study guides and Bible study booklets, I read all the information at hand. I asked God in my bedtime prayer to guide my hand. Invariably, when I picked up my pencil to begin sketching, the drawing just did itself. To enhance the viewer's understanding, I typed a description to be included in the bulletin as a separate sheet. If the illustrations drew themselves, the explanations typed themselves as well. I never had much of an idea in mind when I sat down at the typewriter, but somehow the explanations became clear as I typed.

The wife of my pastor was also an artist. The two of us, with another oil painter, started a community outreach program in the basement of the church, inviting anyone in the community who would like to try their hand at drawing and painting to

The Ambassador Sunday School Series is produced with the assistance of many volunteers who write lessons, construct learning activities, create illustrations, design teacher lesson plans, and much more. Joyce Nichols, who is 80 years old, is one of many volunteers using her creative gifts to serve in this way. This article gives a glimpse of an artist's life and serves as a tribute to all the volunteers who have given of their time and talents to help produce quality curriculum to teach the Word of God.



Continued on page 17

# You want me to do what?

## Seven steps to leading a Bible study for the Average Joe

BY JOSH SKOGERBOE



I was 16 years old. It was the summer of 1988, and about a half dozen of us were in a crowded van, en route back home to Minnesota from a youth conference in Colorado. Somehow, in a moment of weakness, I had been unwittingly duped into leading a Bible study in the afternoon as North Dakota rolled endlessly past the windows.

This was a brand new thing for me. Our youth group leader was a former Marine and was under the impression that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. So this rock in the pit of my stomach ... and these sweaty palms ... my dry mouth ... it was for my good, apparently. Captain Steve the youth group commander was stretching my comfort zone into a new shape.

I decided to talk about love. God is love, right? How could I go wrong with love? I had no idea what I was doing. At 16 I was certainly no Bible scholar, but I did love Jesus, and I believed that His Word was holy. So I stumbled into that holy place with a prayer for help. I may have started with John 3:16, "For God so loved the world ..." Or it might have been John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." I don't remember exactly. But I do remember using those tiny cross-reference notes in the center column of each page of my Bible to jump from one passage about God's love to another. Reading. Learning. And I remember the light bulbs going on in my brain. And I remember being *amazed*.

I was nervous. But I was excited at the same time. God had spoken to me while I had prepared, and I wanted my friends to see how life-changing the love of God really is. Captain Steve's dreaded assignment to lead a Bible study became a great blessing. What started out to be a short devotional turned into a long, deep, honest discussion in the back of that van about faith and

forgiveness and God's love among teenagers; and it carried us across the windswept plains and back home to Minnesota.

You never know what God might do when you open His Word together. I bet many of you believe this already. You know His Word is truth, and it is alive and swelling with Spirit-fueled, life-changing power for those who hear it. Many of you, I'm sure, have had profound moments of worship in a small group setting, together with friends in a Bible study. And yet the thought of *leading* in a setting like this might make you a little bit queasy. It's OK. We understand. We've been there before.

I want to encourage you today, if you have the opportunity to take the lead in a Bible study, to *go for it*. I know, easier said than done. I understand that you might feel in over your head. That's a good place to start, because feeling inadequate leads us to prayer. After all, we want God to be the communicator here. We want His message to be clear.

So how do we begin? Once you've committed to leading, knowing where to start is sometimes the biggest hurdle. With that in mind, here are seven steps to leading a Bible study for the Average Joe:

### (1) PRAY.

Your Father is eager to encourage you. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." That's good news! When I start my prep



for a Bible study, I certainly feel lacking in wisdom. But God is generous. He will help you. He always keeps His promises.

## **(2) IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET.**

Is your Bible study setting a group of mature believers? New Christians? Could there be curious non-Christians in the mix? Keeping in mind *who* you are leading as you prepare will help you write questions that get to the heart of the group.

## **(3) READ IT.**

And then read it. And then read it again. When I'm getting ready to teach, it seems God reveals new insights the longer I stay with the text. Be sure to read the surrounding passages, too, and think about the context in which this passage was written. Who was it written to? Who is the human author? What was going on at the time?

## **(4) FIGURE OUT THE BIG IDEA OF THE TEXT.**

In other words, try to identify the main key thought God is communicating in the passage. If you can write out the big idea in one sentence, it will help you understand

the whole passage in context. This also makes a great discussion question, "What do you think is the *big idea* of this passage?" And if you are choosing the passage as the group leader, keep it short enough and focused enough to apply this question. If you choose 37 verses, you'll most likely have too much material to cover with any depth. Better to cover less ground and ponder it more deeply than to sprint across the page and just skim the surface.

## **(5) APPLY IT TO YOURSELF FIRST.**

God wants to speak right to you. He wrote the Bible for you. Listen to His voice, and hear what He is saying to you first. There's no better way to prepare than to allow God full access to your heart. Then, after you have been changed, you are ready to talk about it. That is Bible study done right.

## **(6) SAY WHAT THE TEXT SAYS.**

In other words be sure as you prepare that you are pointing people to God's Word, and His ideas, rather than your own. It is easy to bring our own preconceived hypoth-

eses to the Bible and look for support for our ideas. True Bible study looks into the text to understand what *God* is saying.

## **(7) LOOK FOR JESUS.**

The whole Bible, cover to cover, points to Jesus. We were created in God's image to enjoy relationship with Him. Our sin separates us from Him. Jesus' blood, shed on our behalf, is our only hope of reconnection with God and the joy of eternal life. In every passage, look for evidence of these truths, and bring them out. We can never hear this good news enough. It is the hope for the lost and the strength of the redeemed. Always, always, always look for Jesus.

Is God nudging you today? Do you have the opportunity to lead a Bible study? If you follow these steps, and recognize that anything of eternal significance will be God's doing in the first place, His Church will be encouraged. Don't miss out. He is eager to encourage you. *Go for it.*

*Skogerboe, who just finished his first year at AFLTS, is the worship leader at Living Hope Church, St. Michael, Minn.*



# Walking with another

Mentors offer wise counsel and caring words as they pour themselves into others.

BY NAOMI ANDREWS

**O**ver the past ten years I have come to understand the powerful impact and blessing mentor relationships have had in my life. As I look back today I see many godly women and men who have informally served as mentors whom I look up to as a young Christian woman. They may not realize the informal role of a mentor they have played in my life, but they have given their wise counsel and caring words in ways that have helped me grow in my relationship with Christ.

As a student at AFLBS, I was offered the opportunity to meet with a mentor, but I turned it down. I now see turning down a mentor as a lost opportunity for spiritual growth in my faith. I have come to regret that decision, which would have led to a beneficial mentor relationship with godly women older and wiser than I.

I believe a mentor relationship is a natural part of the Christian walk we all in our

own unique way are called to. A mentor relationship modeled in the Bible that stands out to me is Jesus' relationship with His disciples.

Jesus began his mentoring relationship with His disciples with the words, "Follow Me." In Matthew 4 He said to Peter and Andrew, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." From the beginning we see Jesus' intention for His disciples to repeat the discipleship process. Mentor relationships are an integral part of our Christian walk. These relationships begin, like the disciples, with a call in each of our lives from Jesus to follow Him. Jesus' final words to His disciples before ascending into Heaven were, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

As we follow Him, and grow in Him, we desire to become more like Him, to bring others to Him, and to admon-

ish one another in the faith. We, too, like the disciples, are given this second step of going and making disciples. In between Jesus' call to His disciples to follow Him and His admonition to make disciples, a key element stands out. He lived His life with His disciples. He didn't just show up weekly at the synagogue and preach to them. He consistently taught them every day as they broke bread together, traveled between towns, faced stormy weather in a boat, and sat on mountains. He simply lived His life with them: pouring Himself into them and teaching them so that they could in turn pour His teaching into others.

I learned a concept at a youth worker's retreat several years ago that has stuck with me: our need to be both poured into and poured out into others. Like an overflowing vessel, I need to be both filled up and poured out. Both are vital in our walk with the Lord. We are never too young or too old to take on both the role of a mentor and that of the mentored.

Nearing the end of the 2007 spring semester at AFLBS, a junior Bible school student asked if I would go out to coffee with her. Sitting outside of Starbucks on a beautiful spring evening, she poured out her heart to me. As our conversation neared its end, she asked me to be her mentor for the following year. Why God laid me on her heart I don't know, but it turned out to be a relationship that I look back on as God-ordained. What

started as a mentorship grew into a friendship, leaving me mutually blessed and edified in my faith. Since then I've seen her go on to work with and mentor youth herself. Through this mentor relationship I came to learn, understand, and see what the concept of disciple making means.

As mentors we go beyond just teaching someone under us. We go beyond just seeing them grow in their relationship with the Lord. Yes, mentors are teachers, but also friends and pupils themselves. I like the phrase "mentor relationship" because the word relationship depicts a two-way street. As Christians we are called to live life together. As mentors we bring others into our lives. We walk through life together. This relationship transforms the lives of both the mentored and the mentor. It may happen while sipping a Mocha Frappuccino at Starbucks, while on a hike on a muggy day at Hiawatha Falls, over homemade scrambled eggs and French toast at your kitchen table, while attending a retreat together, or as you kneel in prayer before a mighty God shaping your faith. The important thing is that we answer Christ's call to follow and to go.

*Andrews, a 2003 graduate of AFLBS, lives in Palmdale, Calif.*

# Meaningful connections

## Small groups can foster interdependent relationships focused on serving God

BY JERRY NELSON



When I ask the question “How are you?” people usually respond with a brief “fine” or “pretty good.” Many of our conversations at church are like that. Brief and

even superficial statements come out of our mouths because we don’t feel comfortable being totally transparent and honest with people we don’t know very well.

Studies have shown that people who come in through the front door of the church will soon leave through the back door if they don’t make some meaningful connections with people during their first several visits. We may organize some large evangelical outreach programs to bring people into the church, but if we don’t give them opportunities to develop relationships and opportunities to study the Word of God with other believers, they won’t stay connected.

Small group ministries are more and more important in our highly mobile culture where most of our relational ties are weak. It’s rare for anyone with grown children to have all of them living within a 25-mile radius. It’s also rare to have cousins and distant relatives living nearby. Few have true lifelong friends and acquaintances. Small groups can bring a needed sense of belonging and caring relationships.

It’s unfortunate but true that we can’t be a close friend to everyone we meet. There aren’t enough hours in our days,

Jesus himself took time to be alone, and He often went away from the crowds of people; but He made time for 12 friends (disciples) whom He was especially close to, and three of those relationships were closer yet (John, James and Peter). The small groups that last the longest are the ones in which friendships are the deepest. That’s why it’s best to choose a group according to who is in it rather than where or when it meets. Consider the commonalities you share with others. Then, rather than dividing an existing group that is thriving, it is better to have one strong leader from the existing group begin a brand new group. Some groups stay together for decades and they don’t grow stale. They haven’t become a clique. Their members have grown older and wiser together with a dignity and beauty reminiscent of a time when communities had stability and people had roots.

In a society where financial independence is valued, many of us seek higher education and higher paying jobs so that we aren’t dependent on anyone. We can do life alone and pay for whatever services are needed. Certainly financial independence and education are good, but if we aren’t careful we may create our own lonely existence outside of God’s plan. Acts 2 presents a different focus, a beautiful picture of the church family functioning as a community of believers loving each other and helping each other. It says that they met together frequently, worshiping together, breaking bread together, sharing things in common,

and the result was that “they added to their number daily.”

A church of 80 to 100 people will naturally have small group fellowship, but when the church grows to a larger size there needs to be a plan. Jesus Himself spoke to large crowds of people that gathered to hear His message. But after His death and resurrection the churches were small. They weren’t mega-churches. They were a persecuted church, a tight-knit fellowship intent on living their lives for Christ. Our small groups, similar to the New Testament church, can consistently connect us to two valuable things: significant relationships and the Bible.

In small groups, my wife, Terri, and I have seen wonderful seasons of spiritual growth and many answers to prayer. We have experienced God’s healing touch, His provision of new jobs, and His peace and protection. We have seen quiet people open up about their needs and talkative people learning to listen.

A year ago we made a decision to raise support to serve in ministry at a small church plant in Camarillo, Calif. Our involvement in small groups has helped us enjoy the process of getting acclimated to California. Our friends care and pray for us and eagerly search the Scriptures with us for answers to life’s difficult questions. I praise God that the new small groups we’re in at Good Shepherd are giving us new meaningful connections and precious friendships.

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

*Nelson, a Home Missions parish builder, serves Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Camarillo, Calif., as a ministry assistant.*





And you, R I will  
ve you unto mysel  
m, there ye may be also.  
4 And whither I go ye know, and  
the way ye know.  
5 R Thomas saith unto him, Lord,  
we know not whither thou goest, and  
how can we know the way?  
6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the  
way, the truth, and the life: no  
man cometh unto the Father, but by  
me, ye should  
and f

# Teaching the truth

“But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (II Timothy 3:13-17).

BY PASTOR JOEL BAKER

**D**eception has permeated our culture and has invaded the church. The apostle Paul takes on this problem as he writes to his student Timothy, warning him of evil men and impostors who deceive others and also have been deceived themselves. In his letter, Paul warns Timothy that this deception will increase. That is certainly a description of the times in which we live.

Paul goes on, in verse 14, to warn believers in Jesus, that we are to be in a continual state of learning, needing to know and understand the truth of God's Word. You should be learning these biblical truths from parents, pastors, Sunday school teachers, youth leaders and others. This verse says to continue on and implies that there is always more to the Christian life as we become more mature in our faith. We are to be grounded and rooted in the Word of God so that we will not be led astray and deceived. Many of the epistles contain warnings to expose and correct false teaching.

From verse 15, we learn that from childhood Timothy had known the sacred writings (the Scriptures), which were able to give him the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. The same applies to us. The earlier we learn the truth of Scripture, the better it is. Faith comes by

hearing the Word of God as the Holy Spirit quickens it to our hearts.

Verse 16 is the well-known verse that stresses the importance of Scripture. The whole purpose of God's Word is to teach us, reprove us, correct us, and train us in righteousness. It does all of this so that the man (or woman or child) of God may be prepared and equipped for every good work, which includes discerning and correcting false teaching (verse 17). This is a very strong and active Word.

In our world today, as in Timothy's world, we believers are exhorted to live a righteous life for the Lord—a life that pleases and honors Christ. What are some ways congregations can teach believers to stand firm in God's truth, so they aren't deceived and led astray?

An article by Bradley Hughes, (“Christianity and the Culture War,” *The Schwarz Report*, May 2011) gives some suggestions on different ways to ground people in the truth.

1) Teach the biblical worldview that the Bible is totally accurate in all it says and that it is absolutely true. People need to know that everything they see, read, do, and hear in society should be filtered through the lens of Scripture.

2) A congregation needs preaching from God's Word (exegetical preaching) that considers the context when the Word was written and the very definite applica-

tion for today's world.

3) Teach apologetics so one can articulate one's faith and explain Christian convictions to others.

4) Hold Sunday school classes, Bible studies, and discipleship training that includes issues in the culture and talk about a godly response to engage the culture. Some DVD teaching examples are the Truth Project and TrueU for young adults. A couple of examples of topics to teach deal with secular humanism and radical Islam, as they are pervasive in our society and in world events. There are good Bible study resources available from the AFLC's Ambassador Publications and also from the Women's Missionary Federation.

5) Become actively involved with helpful parachurch organizations that are involved in worldview education. Examples are Summit Ministries for people in the last half of high school and in the early years of college, World View Weekend sessions, and Faith Search Ministries (Don Bierle). Establish scholarships for young people to enable them to attend Christian worldview training.

6) Be intentional to engage with people around you. Ask the Lord to help you be friendly and helpful to others and be aware of their needs. Individually and corporately, find ways to demonstrate your faith in action.

7) Pray for your congregation. Establish prayer groups that specialize in Christian worldview. Prayer is essential to undergird all that the church does. Ask for the Lord's guidance and discernment as far as how to proceed.

I pray that Christians will be continually seeking to learn and be shaped by God's Word throughout their lives, as it is a life-long pursuit. As Satan is always fighting to ensnare us and lead us astray, believers need the discernment, strength, and direction we receive from being in the Word, and we need to engage the world around us.

*Baker is an AFLC pastor on loan to Plymouth Apostolic Lutheran, Plymouth, Minn., where he serves as associate pastor.*

# Challenging evolution

AFLC pastor's book takes on the evolution debate, answering your big questions

BY PASTOR AL PINNO



Most books dealing with the creation/evolution controversy focus

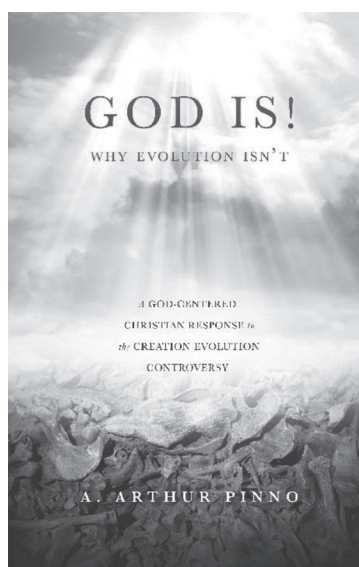
mainly on the scientific aspects of the issue. I recently wrote a book to show how the nature and character of God, revealed through Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Word, is the death knell to the evolutionary mythology—as it is to all human mythologies. *God is! Why Evolution Isn't* shows how the eternal, holy, almighty, omniscient, perfect, loving and truthful nature of God is completely contrary to the cruel and error-prone mythological evolutionary process.

There is a lot of confusion among Christians and the general public in the area of creation and evolution and the controversy's implications for life. This book seeks to bring some biblical clarity to a lot of the questions that many people have in this area. Questions like: Does the universe testify to the glory of God? Is God's signature

found in every cell? Are humans mutated apes? How does dinosaur blood reveal a young earth? How does the relativity of time impact the age of the universe? Is theistic evolution a bridge between Christianity and science? What are the basic assumptions of evolution? What are the fruits of the evolutionary tree? Were Adam and Eve real people? What did Jesus believe about creation and the flood? Could a God of love create hell?

For many people evolution is a “fact” of science and something that they really haven't thought through in terms of its implications for life and for our Christian faith. God has given us His Word and an incredible mind with which to reason. It is important to seek out the truth regarding the evolutionary theory and its implications related to God and human life. God's revelation of His infinite nature and character through Christ, His Spirit and His Word are completely contrary to the imperfect, materialistic, and chance processes of the evolutionary myth.

Evolution flunks logic, math



and science. It isn't based on science at all but on a purely philosophical belief in materialism. Scientists aren't God, and science is no savior. It is important for believing Christians to understand the proper place of science for our life in this world and when it goes beyond its sphere in an attempt to replace God. God is truth and He does not lie. To reject the clear biblical teaching on creation and the flood in His Word is to be inconsistent with our faith and trust in Christ.

Since God is love, theistic evolution is completely impossible as it would require that God would be the creator of disease, violence, and of hundreds of millions of years of pain, suffering and death. My book looks at

arguments made against God's love based on His tolerance of evil in our world, and the reality of hell, and why these arguments fail.

The fruits of evolutionary teaching continue to be widespread and tragic in all churches and nations that succumb to the evolutionary mythology and its attack on God and the sanctity of all human life. As a result, many are turning away from God. But at the same time, many others, when faced with the testimony of creation and of God's Word, are turning their hearts back to God.

This book is written for youth and adults and is useful in strengthening the faith of believers and challenging unbelievers and those who have strayed from faith in God as Creator, to turn their thoughts and hearts back to God and to Christ. *God Is! Why Evolution Isn't* has been self-published by Xulon Press, Longwood, Fla.

*Pinno is the president of AFLC Canada and the director of Ends of the Earth Courier for Christ, a ministry dedicated to sharing the grace and truth of Christ in word and deed in Canada, Russia, India, Burundi and other ends of the earth where God leads. He and his wife, Dorothy, live in Vernon, British Columbia.*

IN THE BEGINNING...

# A life of humble service

BY PASTOR JONATHAN ABEL

**A**s I was getting things ready for our largest camp of the year, I missed Senhor Antônio. He was nowhere to be found on the campgrounds. Antônio is a farmer who has worked for us since 1968. Our camp, Fazenda Retiro, started as a farm back in the 1960s. The missionaries at that time needed a farmer to come and help with the crops and the animals and take care of the campgrounds. The man who applied for the job was Senhor Antônio.

He was perfect for the job. As a member of one of our churches in a small town near Campo Mourão called Iretama, Antônio was a very poor farmer trying to raise four small children on a little plot of land that was very steep and hard to grow anything on. So my father, Pastor John Abel, who was serving as a missionary, asked him if he would be interested in coming to work at the camp. He jumped at the opportunity, and moved to the Fazenda in Campo Mourão.

I was so thankful for Antônio when he came to work at the farm and take care of the camp. He was very good at all areas of farming, and loved the camp ministry. For years the missionaries came and went, and the ministry of the camp ran smoothly.

Antônio has done his job with love. Over the years we have had horses, cows, sheep, chickens, geese, ducks, bees and other different creatures. We have raised wheat, corn, soybeans, cotton, coffee and vegetables of all types. We have an orchard with some 15 different types of fruit trees.

The camp has been a real labor of love, and many kids have come to Christ through the ministry. Most of our national leaders got their training at this camp where they worked as counselors and staff. Antônio was always there, keeping things up and sharing his faith with people who came to camp.

Antônio and his wife, Vita, have devotions at the breakfast table. This was a routine of theirs for many years. Vita passed away late last year, even though she was 11 years his junior. Vita was a great woman of faith, and a companion to her husband for more than 50 years. After she passed away, all of us felt her loss. I was amazed to see Antônio keep on with his desire to serve the Lord at the farm. He still climbed the trees to take down fruit for campers, or cleaned the pool, or raked the grounds.



Pictured (from left) Pastor Silvio Paes, Pastor Jonathan Abel, Senior Antônio, Pastor John Abel and Pastor Paul Abel.

Lately, Antônio started to complain a little about his health. So when I came to camp and didn't see him around I got concerned. I went to his house, and his daughter said he was sleeping. He had had some pains in his chest, and wasn't feeling well. When I visited him again, he was better and we thanked the Lord. At the same time, I realized that this old servant of God won't be around forever. When he goes, we will be hard-pressed to find someone to fill his place. His church will lose their best deacon and tither.

Antônio is 82 years old, and has served the Lord valiantly as a farmer all his adult life. He reminds me of what the Apostle Paul says in Romans 12:3-6: "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think. But set your mind to be right-minded, even as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith. For even as we have many members in one body, and all members do not have the same function, so we the many are one body in Christ, and each one members of one another."

Antônio is a humble man who has given his gift as a farmer to further the Kingdom of God in his own God-given way. When God promotes him to glory, he will certainly be missed.

*Abel and his family are AFLC missionaries serving in Brazil.*

meet with us once a week. We had a good group of regulars and our times together were sometimes inspiring, sometimes disastrous, but always good fellowship.

Eventually my husband and I moved to Lake Havasu City, Ariz., as a medical necessity. He had lived with Parkinson's disease for 17 years, and the cold northwest weather was increasingly uncomfortable for him. We built a home and settled down for the next 10 years. With the help of the nurses and aides from home healthcare, I was able to keep him at home until the last two years. I finally placed him in a nursing home, and for the first time in five years I slept a full eight hours.

During these years, my art was my refuge. Our church attendance was fairly regular, but life was not illuminating, so I painted. I painted every wall in our house, some with faux painting techniques but most with murals. I could no longer afford painting supplies so I used acrylic house paint and bottles of craft paint to create block walls and extensive Italian landscapes. I even painted the guest bathroom to resemble an Egyptian ruin.

A friend who was active in the local art world found places for me to paint. I painted faux finishes on bedrooms, living rooms, and kitchens—anyplace that anyone wanted to look special. I did need the money, but I needed the outlet much more because when I painted, time passed without pain.

My husband lost his 27-year battle with Parkinson's in March 2006—we had been married 57 years. It took me a year to find a buyer for our house, but in July 2007, my children returned to Arizona for

the last time to pack my belongings into a super-sized U-Haul and move me back to Washington, the state of my birth.

One of the first things I did upon moving into my daughter's house was to paint my room orange with a blue and white cloud ceiling. I was freezing and needed something that at least looked warm. Then I



started painting floor-to-ceiling murals on a local restaurant in return for meals. That was a two-year project. I found Atonement Free Lutheran and my mind began painting murals on the walls. With the approval of the church board and Pastor Richard Long, I spent the next year, one day a week, creating children and adults going to church at Atonement on all the walls in the Sunday school area

I finally had to give up my tall ladders

and now confine my reach to 8-foot ceilings, using a two-step ladder. When that gets to be too much, I'll just paint the lower half of the wall, but I will still paint.

Working for Ambassador Publications is just so perfect for me, and I find such joy not only in the painting itself, but in the research it takes to make sure that the children who will learn from the text will also learn from the illustrations. There is so much false and misleading information in our world today that it is my goal to make sure that every illustration I submit contains information that is correct—whether it is the clothing worn, the landscape that would have existed or the modes of transportation that would have been used. Whoever looks at my pictures will be able to take with them an image that reveals the world as the Apostles would have seen it.

My mother went to be with God in 1988, but she left me a treasured gift of God's love. The Bible that she and I studied so many years ago has a place of honor devoted to the Lord on a table in my bedroom. It is the first thing I see in the morning and the last thing I see at night. The beautiful black cover is tattered and the gold lettering is faint, but the picture of Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus in the manger is still as beautiful as it was the first time I saw it.

*Nichols is a member of Atonement Free Lutheran, Arlington, Wash. Her art depicting Paul's shipwreck from Acts 27, is featured on the cover.*

# A desire for God's Word

BY PASTOR STEPHEN MUNDFROM

**T**here are no accidents when you walk with Christ. The events of life fulfill a divine purpose often beyond our comprehension. It was not my intention or aspiration to ever be involved in the AFLC's Home Missions work, however, God used His church to make it happen. At the annual conference in 1995 I was elected to serve on the Home Missions Committee, eventually becoming its chairman. Maybe I thought that I would put in my time serving on the board and then that would be it. But I had said yes not just to a position, but to the Lord of the Harvest.

It was Pastor Henry Mohagen who used to say regularly, "You could parachute from a plane into any community in America and start a new church." As a member of the Home Missions Committee, he understood the great spiritual need in our country for Bible-preaching churches that would lead people to Jesus. During the years that I served we witnessed churches planted in places we expected and in places that surprised us. Throughout it all I saw with clearer eyes how significant the work of church planting was—not just for those who participated in the new churches, but also for those who worked to see it happen.

More recently, it has been in the mothering of new congregations that I have seen the great value of saying yes to the Lord. First in Madison, S.D., and now in Jamestown, N.D., I have served established churches that provided resources and encouragement for new church plants. What is perhaps most memorable is the hunger for God's Word in the new church. For many, the pure and



complete Word of God had not been provided to them in a long time. With joy and eagerness they received that Word, bringing revival and with it a new devotion to God's kingdom. That devotion was severely tested as ordinary people accepted the work and challenge of a new beginning, many doing work that they had never done before. A major benefit of planting a new church is that it provides the need and opportunity for God's people to become personally involved in His work.

A little more than a year ago I first met with a group of interested Christians in Jamestown. They were determined to be a part of a Bible-based Lutheran congregation. The right approach seemed to be in relating to them what was valuable to me in the AFLC. Christian outreach has been described as one poor beggar telling another poor beggar where to find food. I found this to be the case in Home Missions work. It's not about us or our grandiose schemes. It is always

about Christ and His Word. No salesmanship is needed; the product sells itself because God's Spirit goes before us to prepare the way. Jesus said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32). Every Christian can and should do this, in word and deed. Home Missions has given me a great opportunity to do it and see the wonderful results.

*Mundfrom serves Grace Free Lutheran Church in Valley City, N.D., which is offering support to New Hope Free Lutheran, a new AFLC Home Missions congregation in Jamestown, N.D.*



Members of the 2011 Barnabas teams include Kyle Smith, Courtney Jacobsen, Hannah Johnson, Josiah Nelson, Janna Fugleberg, Anna Long, Shane Remington and Isaac Paige.

# A ministry of service

BY AMY ANDREASON

**S**alt and pepper. Adam and Eve. Word associations are common for many people. Let me try one with you. Summer and ... What comes to mind? Personally, I think of vacations, ball games, BLTs, and summer teams. Our family has had the privilege of hosting many teams from the Association Free Lutheran Bible School over the years. What a blessing the Home Missions Barnabas teams have been to us. Each summer brings four new young people from AFLBS who love the Lord and are ready to lead vacation Bible school. They are equipped with lessons, songs, and lives that tell of the greatness of God and how He saves us through Jesus from our sin.

God presents His life-giving message of salvation through His people. He uses the Barnabas teams and the communities they visit to get the message out. The Lord takes humble and willing hearts, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, works His will, impacting families, neighborhoods, towns, and the world. He knows the impact one person can have on the world when they submit to Him. God tells us the fields are ripe for harvest. Students on the Barnabas teams travel the country proclaiming the gospel. And what a joy it is for a congregation to receive these visitors into their homes and lives.

As church members house, feed and work with the team members, new friendships are struck and relationships develop. Some of these relationships continue to grow throughout the

year as teens and teams are reunited. The reunion may be at the Free Lutheran Youth Convention in Estes Park, Colo., at the Association Retreat Center in Osceola, Wis., during youth retreats, or at a local spot such as our very own Pickerel Lake Bible Camp in South Dakota.

Home Missions parish builders have come from summer teams. Missionaries have gone out around the world from summer teams. What an opportunity God affords us through our new friends. There are times I find myself praying for certain individuals who have visited our community through the Barnabas teams. It might be the young man who plans a career in filmmaking. I pray for him as he studies and is led by the Lord to direct Christian or wholesome films for the thousands of lives that may be touched by his ministry. It might be the Christian life insurance agent, nurse, or social studies teacher who will be remembered in prayer.

No, we don't forget the young people from Barnabas summer teams. I Thessalonians 1:2-3 says, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work and faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." Thank you, summer teams. Open your hearts, congregations, and be blessed.

*Andreason is a member of Good Shepherd Free Lutheran in Madison, S.D.*



## AFLC Schools host graduation weekend events



TOP: Members of the AFLBS Concert Choir perform one last time during the graduation service held May 21.

ABOVE: Pastor Joel Rolf, dean of AFLBS, hands Torie Hemingsen her certificate.

RIGHT: Andrew Jore (left) snaps a shot of graduates Julia Prichard, Jordan Nelson, Josh Chandler, Tyler Lindell, and Hannah Johnson.





TOP LEFT: Seminary graduate David Franz stands with his fellow graduates in the reception line after the graduation service.

TOP: Chad Friestad, AFLBS dean of students, prays with graduates before walking to the chapel.

ABOVE MIDDLE: Dr. Francis Monseth, AFLTS dean, addresses three seminary graduates during the graduation ceremony.

ABOVE: The reception line following the service extended from the chapel to the doors of Heritage Hall.

LEFT: William Kireri, a seminary student from Uganda, welcomed his brother who joined him for his graduation.

## AFLC memorials: May

### AFLBS

Jack O'Neil (2), Marvin Jones, Ruth Claus

### AFLTS

Harvey Smette (2), Duane Knutsvig, Matt Malm, Carolina Osland, Beverly Wavra, Bert Jensen, Donald Olson (2), Helen Berg

### Evangelism

Mark Hoops, Lowell Formo

### General Fund

Beverly Wavra

### Home Missions

Darlene Bjornson, Marvin Schaper, Bernie Teske

### Parish Education

Dr. Mary Lindquist

### World Missions

Angeline Aus



Micah Berger (left) and Hans Tanner are serving as short term mission assistants in Jinja, Uganda, with missionaries Pastor Nate and Rhoda Jore. Tanner is a 2011 AFLBS graduate from Living Word Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D. Berger finished his junior year at AFLBS and is a member of Zion Free Lutheran, Wadena, Minn.

## ARC to host summer camp

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

### • Family Camp

Dates: July 24-30

Evening speaker: Pastor Peter Franz

Cost: Family rates apply

### • Classics' Retreat

Dates: Sept. 9-11

Ages 55 +

\*Discounts are available for families having more than one child attending camps: two children, 10 percent; three or more, 15 percent. An additional fee of \$20 applies if registration is submitted fewer than 10 days prior to the beginning of the camp.

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

## People and Places

Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee removed **Salem Lutheran Church of Oxford**, North Branch, Minn., from the AFLC congregational roster at their request.

**Pastor Tom Brock**, Minneapolis, Minn., has resigned from the AFLC clergy roster.

**Pastor Kent Sperry** has accepted a call to serve Ebenezer Lutheran, Northwood, N.D. He most recently served Grace Lutheran, DeKalb, Ill.

**Pastor Peter Ward** has resigned from serving Faith Lutheran, Ottawa, Ill. He currently serves as chaplain at Pleasant View Home, Ottawa.

**Justo and Tricia Pillman**, Christ the King Lutheran, Wilson, Wis., have accepted a call to be missionaries with AFLC World Missions. They were commissioned at the mission festival service June 15 during the AFLC annual conference in Sioux Falls, S.D. The Pillmans will work in Ecuador, where Justo previously worked as a short term mission assistant with the national church.

## Fall women's retreat planned at Ebenezer Lutheran, Northwood, ND

Under the theme, "Fully Rely on God," members of Ebenezer Free Lutheran, Northwood, N.D., will host the fall women's retreat Sept. 16-17. Featured during this event is best-selling author and speaker Linda Evans Shepherd, from Longmont, Colo., who will teach on faith and trust in God, and how to pray when you don't know what to pray. Musical guest Into Zion will provide music for the event.

The retreat will begin on Friday evening, Sept. 16, and conclude the following afternoon. The cost for the retreat is \$50 for registrations received before Aug. 15, and \$60 after early deadline. Snacks will be provided Friday evening and breakfast and lunch on Saturday. Door prizes will be given away Saturday afternoon.

For more information about the retreat, contact Kimberly Miller at (701) 330-3329. Checks for registration can be made out to Ebenezer Free Lutheran and sent to 220 S. Doheny St., Northwood, ND 58267.

### AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-May 31, 2011

FUND	REC'D IN MAY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$20,713	\$117,605	\$133,011
Evangelism	7,555	44,238	62,810
Youth Ministries	6,006	58,704	67,987
Parish Education	11,445	51,547	47,307
Seminary	14,504	92,213	86,964
Bible School	49,054	201,433	198,838
Home Missions	50,876	190,663	221,044
World Missions	31,891	196,956	121,526
Personal Support	26,092	157,715	126,212
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$218,136</b>	<b>\$1,111,076</b>	<b>\$1,065,698</b>

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

# The gospel's predominance

I used to live in the country next to neighbors who had cows. Cows always want to sample the grass on the other side. Fences frequently have to be repaired and made stronger.

Sometimes people are like cows. They stray from where they ought to be. When that happens the temptation exists to build stronger fences. Lay down more rules. Give them a spiritual whipping with the law so that they'll be too scared to wander away again.

Putting up more fences is the way to keep cows in, but working with people is a different matter. We do declare the law, but



Pastor Craig Johnson

we also teach how good it is inside the fence. We share with people the gospel—the good news of what Christ has done. We trust the love of Christ, not just the fear of the law, will keep people

close to Jesus and walking in obedience to God's Word.

Christian education in our congregations needs to be more than just fence building. It is easy for our teaching to lapse into nothing more than: "Don't go there. Don't do that. Do this." We need to regularly check our teaching to be sure we are sharing good news.

On Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit filled the early Christians, they went out into the public square and the people listening said, "... we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" (Acts 2:11, NIV). That is the core of Christian education—declaring the wonders of God in an understandable manner. We miss the mark if we share warnings but

fail to proclaim the wonders, in particular the wonder of Christ's death and resurrection.

Some get a little nervous if they think there is too much proclamation of good news. They fear it will give people a false security while they are still in their sin. In the book, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, Dr. C.F.W. Walther wrote: "Do not follow your reason, which will tell you that by preaching the Gospel to them you will make your hearers secure. It is not so; on the contrary, when the grace and glory of the Gospel are truly held out to men, this rouses them, makes them joyful and therefore willing to do good works and, as it were, kindles a heavenly fire in their hearts. This effect is inevitable."

We might be tempted to think, if we tell people they are saved by Christ's work alone, they won't do any good works of their own. That is human reason and not biblical truth. When people see the love of Christ and fall in love with Him, then they do good works with an enduring and proper motivation. The best way of keeping people close to Jesus is not building a stronger fence but making clear to them the goodness of the gospel.

The author of *Surprised by Grace*, Tullian Tchividjian, writes: "The irony of gospel-based sanctification is that those who end up obeying more are those who

increasingly realize that their standing with God is not based on their obedience, but Christ's. The people who actually end up performing better are those who understand that their relationship with God doesn't depend on their performance for Jesus, but Jesus' performance for us."

Later in his book, Walther writes that "... the Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching." In the Christian education teaching and materials in your congre-

*We might be tempted to think, if we tell people they are saved by Christ's work alone, they won't do any good works of their own. That is human reason and not biblical truth.*

gation, does the gospel have a general predominance?

If we build strong fences, lay down a bunch of rules and tell them how bad it is on the other side, but don't tell them what Jesus has done, people are lost and without hope. It is the good news of Christ that saves. It is the good news that brings about spiritual growth and obedience. It is the good news that, without fear or reservation, we boldly proclaim.

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# A hunger to learn about Christ

BY PAT FLANDERS

**I**t is good to be a life-long student. I'll have to admit, though, for many years during and after college I didn't think so. Like many, the thought of just living life and moving forward in my personal and family life was plenty to fill my days.

After Christ came calling me in the 1990s there seemed to be a shift in my plans, and my new education as a Christ follower began. I read early on about the "narrow path to righteousness" in the book of Matthew. I had a new excitement about learning. Many of you can relate to the hunger for learning more about this Christ.

This narrow path also seems to be a winding path, with many little trails beckoning us to go searching further. I must admit my scholarly aptitude is still not as strong as others, but as I peek down these other trails I notice something quite interesting. Many people have differing opinions about what it's like to be a Christ follower. And many have very different, intriguing thoughts regarding some of the mysteries of Christendom.

God gave us curious minds. He gave us imaginations which allow us to conceive and formulate new ideas. However, not all of these ideas lead us down beneficial trails. As an example, recently I was gifted with a new book. The author of this book has received national press recently. From what I had heard of the author's beliefs, I wasn't really inspired to read it. But I did, and he certainly has some interesting, intriguing thoughts about heaven and hell. He even uses Scripture in an attempt to validate his position. But he doesn't and can't succeed. He, like many others, uses only Scripture that will benefit his position and thoughts. Any person could pick a position anywhere on a spectrum from true belief to non-belief and

find articles and books to support that position.

When you read or hear something that doesn't seem quite right, it's important to ask God for discernment and see what the Bible says. I am thankful for God's words that we can and should use as the plumb-line for all that we see, hear and read in this fallen world. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:16).

God is very alive and active, but so is Satan. The renaissance political philosopher Machiavelli wrote, "Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer." While used in his times as a political reference to monitor one's enemies, I think it can be reasonably used to remind us to keep our eyes and ears open to how and where Satan is working, even through so-called Christian books. If God leads, we may need to read some of those things that we really don't want to read.

We need good Christian studies and to ask questions. Proverbs 27:17 says, "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another." We need to seek the Holy Spirit and God's Word for wisdom and insight about the subtle deceptions facing even Christians. Psalm 119:105 says, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." We need to pray about how to continue learning and how to use this knowledge to stay on the narrow path.

*Flanders is the director of the Association Retreat Center, located in Osceola, Wis.*