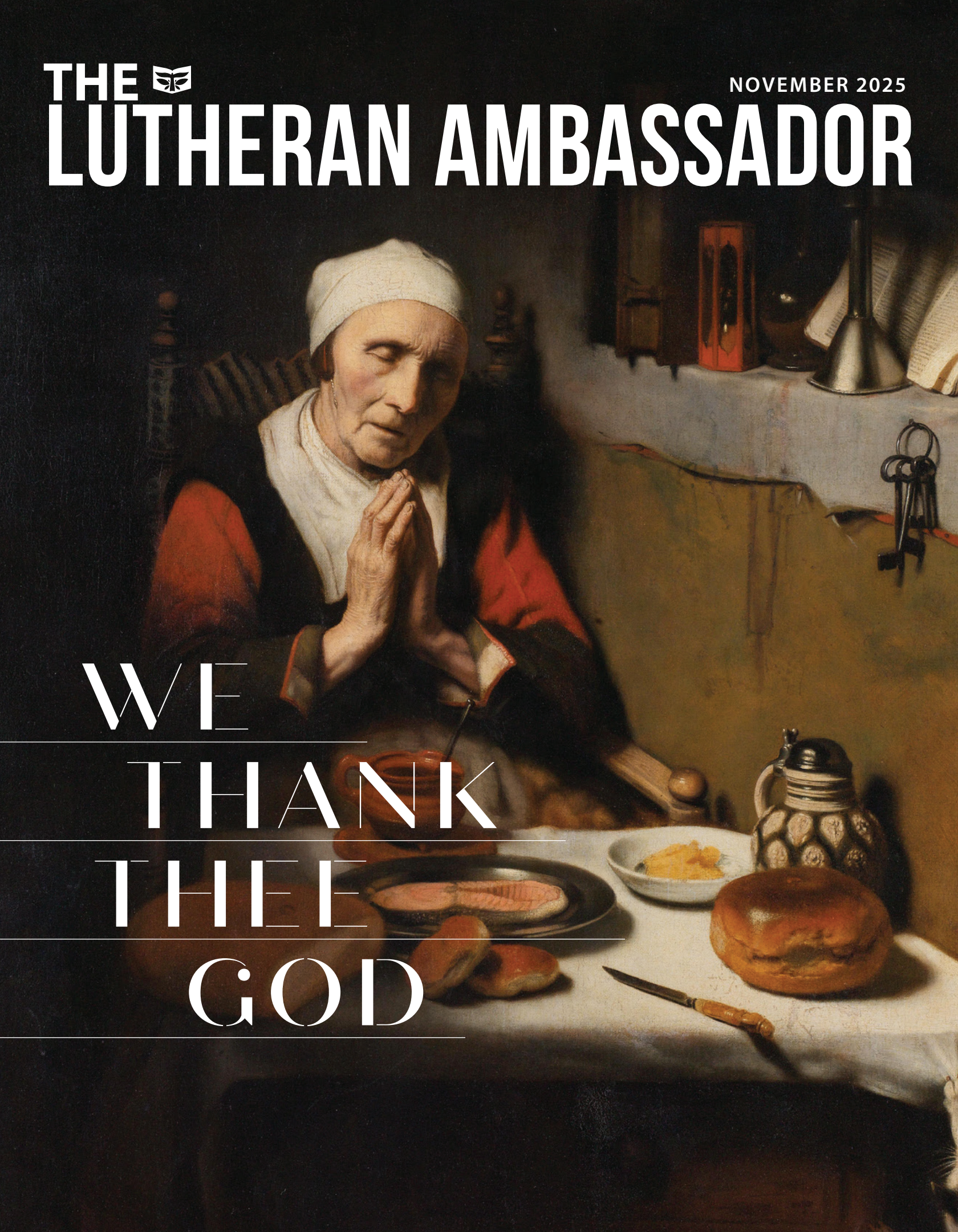


THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

NOVEMBER 2025

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Guided and guarded.

I've been diving into the writings of the early Church fathers lately—those ancient voices shaping Christian thought. Okay, I'm not kidding anyone. On most days you'll catch me knee-deep in the works of long-dead pastors and theologians. But the "Church father" I was reading today is actually a woman—Perpetua, the 22-year-old martyr whose prison diary from A.D. 203 gives us one of the earliest firsthand accounts of Christian persecution in the ancient city of Carthage.

It was illegal to be a Christian in the first few centuries following Jesus' ascension. The Roman authorities tried their best to stamp out this new faith, but the Church kept growing. Physical persecution wasn't always their first priority—sometimes they felt Christianity would die off on its own—but Emperor Septimius Severus decided to take matters into his own hands. Reigning at the end of the second century, Severus inaugurated a brief stretch of violent persecution against Christians, especially in his home province of Africa.

Several young Christian students were arrested in the affluent city of Carthage. Among them was Perpetua, a 22-year-old citizen of high standing in the community. She was newly married and nursing an infant son. Perpetua was also joined by her household servant Felicity, who was expecting a child very soon.

Likely because of their social status, these prisoners were given every opportunity to renounce their faith and escape their cruel fate. Perpetua's diary records a visit from her father, who tearfully begs her to save herself. She says, "Father, do you see this water pot? Can we call it by any other name?" Her father replies, "No." And in famous words that forge unyielding devotion in countless others, Perpetua says, "So also I cannot call myself by any other name than what I am—I am a Christian."

Felicity gave birth to a daughter while imprisoned, and the two infants were given to others to raise. Perpetua, Felicity, and the other Christians were brought to a colosseum and were killed by wild animals.

Did our editor get his months mixed up? No, I tell this story in our Thanksgiving issue because Perpetua, like so many others, rejoiced in her suffering. What was Perpetua thankful for? The chance to share in the passion of our Lord. And we are thankful for her story.

Severus was not the last emperor to violently oppose Christianity. Other, more severe stretches of persecution followed, but none were successful in darkening the Church's flame.

Tertullian was a theologian in Carthage at the time of Perpetua's execution and famously wrote to the Roman world, "The more often we are killed by you, the more in numbers we grow; the blood of Christians is seed."

We can be thankful for Christ's death and resurrection, which guarantee us that in the end, everything will be okay. Even through painful times, Jesus guided and guarded his church, and we can be certain he will continue to guide and guard us today.

James tells us to "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds." And a few verses later reminds us: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

The pages in this issue are filled with stories and testimonies of God's good provision and blessing. God has blessed us! This month, spend time reflecting on how God has worked in and through your life to bless both you and others.

—Pastor Andrew Kneeland



TESTI- MONIES

SAYING YES TO GOD

I said yes to God. And with the backing of members of the Green Lake Free Lutheran Church council, I reached out to FLBCS Seminarian Michael Rokenbrodt to help us produce one of his original two-act plays, *The Word in the Stone*. Quickly, we secured the dates and the venue—a local community center.

“Now it’s time to recruit,” explained Michael, who would be coming to direct the drama. To my delight, five of our council members expressed interest in acting. I was on my way rejoicing; Michael said that we only needed nine actors (doubling parts) to make the play work. With my connections in the community, this should be easy to accomplish, right? Wrong.

In the following months I reached out to anyone I thought might be interested. Most were, but the timing wasn’t right. Or an illness hit. Or the play was too “deep.” I mentioned the struggle to find actors to our goddaughter, an actress in New York. She is also a mighty prayer warrior who understands the spiritual battle that will ensue when tackling something like this.

The Word in the Stone depicts life in ancient Israel prior to and during King Josiah’s reforms—not a pretty time in history. In fact, the themes of this drama look strangely similar to the culture we live in today: idolatry, apostasy, prostitution, and child sacrifice. We prayed. My friends and family prayed. Our church prayed. And little by little, God showed me who to add to our cast. Some were family members. Some were from other churches. Some were surprises, people I had overlooked in my original search. Most were first-time actors. I had long been convinced that one of the main purposes of this endeavor was to bring the right people into the cast community that God was creating.

But I was getting nervous. Two weeks out and we were still short a few actors. No one was interested in doubling parts, so I needed nearly 20 people altogether.

More prayer rose up—prayers of thanksgiving that God was going to complete what he had promised when he put it

on my heart to produce this play.

Two weeks before rehearsals started, I consented to take the part of the Priestess of Asherah, also known as the “bad lady.” I re-asked another fellow who had originally declined months ago. He said yes! And finally, the husband of our leading lady agreed to play her husband in the play.

The cast was complete—or was it? I couldn’t shake the feeling that someone else was supposed to be here. On the first night of rehearsal, Michael inquired who would be helping run the PowerPoint for scenes and sounds. Oh right, I forgot. But one of our cast members had a middle school-aged son who might be persuaded. He said yes! I found out that only a few days prior he had tried to take his own life. The missing one had been found! Praise God!

At the post-production debrief, the number one highlight from the actors was “being a part of this community.” Our “yes” was fulfilled in God’s “yes!”

—Susan Kraemer is a member of Green Lake Free Lutheran, Spicer, Minn. Artwork: “Crickhowell, Breconshire,” artist unknown, c. 1800, Yale Center for British Art. Cover: “Old Woman Saying Grace,” by Nicolaes Maes, 1656, Rijksmuseum.



TESTI- MONIES OF TRUST

TRUSTING HIS HAND

One particularly sunny March day this year, I went with my nanny kids to hike at a small nature park. As we began walking, the little girl declared she would hold my hand so that we wouldn't get lost. At first I thought it was silly. How could we get lost? I had walked that path a dozen times before. However, I did not begrudge her company and went with it, thinking her amusing antics wouldn't last long. As we kept on, she did not relent her hold on my hand. But when we came to a point where a second path appeared to the side, she ran ahead of me and turned down into a little alcove. Being taller, I could see that it led to a dead end. It wasn't long before she came running back to me and reclaimed my hand, asking me if I knew where we should go. I smiled and led her down the right path leading toward home.

I was hit only minutes later with what I like to refer to as a "Holy Spirit mic-drop moment." The lightbulb went off in my brain as his quiet revelation hit me. I was the little girl walking on the path of life with my Heavenly Abba, holding his hand as we walked through forest and valley. I didn't force my nanny girl to stay with me; rather, she chose to hold my hand. She kept talking about getting lost or which way to turn. Somehow, though she did not know my

experience nor my qualifications as a navigator, she trusted that as long as she stuck with me, it would all be okay. She didn't want to be alone in the unknown.

But is this not the very thing God desires from me? Consider the road of life—how daunting, unknown, and danger-filled. Does he not want me to take his open hand, to trust that he already knows the paths we walk and has no fear of getting lost? He who has no limited vision or height by which to be hindered? I

love how the third stanza of the hymn "Come Thou Fount," by Robert Robinson, captures this truth when it declares, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love, Here's my heart, oh take and seal it, Seal it for Thy courts above." The Lord never wanders.

I always stray, thinking I know exactly where I am going, drawn off the path by some worldly wonder. And often he lets me go. He watches as I try to manage on my own strength, knowledge, and wisdom. Oh, how quickly I forget that I will not make it far on my own delusion of strength! Rather, I must hold his hand on the road of life, trusting that he knows exactly what he's doing. All he asks of me is to simply stay close to him.

—Kylee Green is a women's dorm assistant at the Free Lutheran Bible College. Artwork: "Les," by Ludovít Čordák, 1907, Slovak National Gallery.



TRUSTING HIS PLAN

For three years, I immersed myself in God's Word at the Free Lutheran Seminary. I memorized chronologies, traced genealogies, and studied God's unfolding plan of salvation. The seminary gave me a rich education in Christian faith, but I also learned that some lessons can only be lived.

When I entered seminary, I had a meticulous three-year plan. Housing, tuition, Naomi's schooling, and Nikki's work—all fit neatly into place. Life in Plymouth, Minn., was demanding but predictable. Then came internship. We packed, wondering when a rental would be found and where Nikki would work, and with no idea about schooling. Each day, my sense of control slipped away, and my plans felt like a house of cards. The words of Proverbs 19:21—"Many are the plans in the mind of man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand"—moved from theory to reality.

We arrived in Williston, N.D., hours late after battling strong headwinds across North Dakota. The moving truck's needle maxed out at 40 MPH. Our help had mostly left, and exhaustion set in. Then God sent Justin, a stranger to all, who brought Sprite and carried our heaviest furniture with joy. Without him, we may not have finished. God's provision came when our plans failed.

Naomi's schooling was another test. We hoped for a Christian school, but roadblocks forced us into public school. I feared for her faith, but God surrounded her with Christian friends, teachers, and mentors. She not only stood firm but also encouraged others. What I saw as defeat became God's greater plan.

Nikki's work followed a similar pattern. She began as a substitute teacher but was quickly thrust into full-time teaching amid staff turnover. Overwhelmed, she nearly resigned—until the school offered her an administrative role, one perfectly suited to her gifts. God's timing turned trial into opportunity.

Like Ruth declaring to Naomi, "Where you go, I will go" (Ruth 1:16), we stepped into an unknown life and found a church family at Emmanuel Free Lutheran who embraced us as their own. Through Justin's kindness, Naomi's community, and Nikki's new role, God proved that his purposes prevail.

My internship taught me what no classroom could—that true faith means surrendering control. As I now serve in Beresford and Centerville, S.D., I plan with purpose but hold those plans loosely, trusting God to direct my steps. May we all rest in Jesus, knowing that while our plans may falter, the Lord's purpose always stands.

—Pastor Troy Hanson serves Skreftsrud Lutheran, Beresford, S.D., and Immanuel Free Lutheran, Centerville, S.D.





A SACRIFICE OF PRAISE



BY ADAM ERICKSON

I thought Jesus sacrificed himself for me so that I wouldn't have to sacrifice, but then I read Hebrews 13:15—"Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." What does that mean? And why should I do it? The author of Hebrews seems to cheerfully encourage us, saying, "Let's sacrifice!" but the reality is my heart worries this is just another thing I have to do, rather than what I get to do.

The seminarian in me thought looking at the verse in Greek would help, but the only nuance I found was that the phrase translated "continually" is literally "through all." I realized that I'm not just being called to keep sacrificing through all time, but through all circumstances, regardless of whether it is a season of suffering or rejoicing. Plus, the Hebrews who originally received this letter were all too familiar with persecution, and by now the sinner in me felt even worse.

However, those Hebrews would have remembered their Torah (Old Testament) well, and through my study of Bible footnotes I found that those thanksgiving offerings are connected to—but not at all the same as—the sin and guilt offerings in the Levitical system. A sacrifice of praise has nothing to do with our salvation nor our standing before the Lord; it's simply a response to what God has already done.

Psalms 116 shows us the heart behind a sacrifice of praise: "I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy" (v. 1). More specifically, "For you have delivered my soul from death ..." (v. 8). If forgiveness and deliverance have been secured, what else is there to do? "What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me?" (v. 12). The saved sinner continues, "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD" (v. 13). And he willingly proclaims, "I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD" (v. 17).

Friends, the first step has already been taken; before you were ever born, the Lord heard your cries and delivered you. It was on the cross that Jesus offered the ultimate sacrifice for your sin, guilt, and shame, and he secured your salvation once and for all. What's more, he rose to life again. He continually acts as your ultimate High Priest and intercedes for you "through all." That's why Hebrews 13:15 emphasizes, "Through *him* the ..." It's only through Jesus that we can

offer praise and thanksgiving through all circumstances, because our High Priest knows personally every weakness and burden that our sin-sick world brings, yet remained sinless so that we could confidently receive mercy and grace (Hebrews 3:14–16).

Although all we bring to our salvation is our need, God graciously gives us new hearts and an avenue to express our gratitude through a sacrifice of praise. We know God doesn't need anything more from us, but our Heavenly Father will never stop his children from expressing their love for him; it seems as though he delights in it. But we don't need animal sacrifices anymore, even if your turkey this year accidentally becomes an object lesson on burnt offerings.

Verse 15 explains best what a sacrifice of praise is for believers: "that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." The word "acknowledge" here is the same word for confession, for speaking the same word in agreement with someone else. We don't need to reinvent the wheel. All we're invited to do is to know and confess that Jesus is who he reveals himself to be in the Word.

But how does the Son of God reveal himself? What does it mean to call on the name of Jesus? And why did he choose that name when he came to dwell with us? Jesus, or Yeshua, means "Yahweh saves." There is nothing that the Lord likes more than for you to know he's the savior-God who died to deliver you from the sin you've done and the sin that's been done to you. He wants you to call upon him.

There are endless ways our lips can bear that fruit. One way could simply be praying Psalm 116 to God in private or with others. Reading Hebrews for devotions is a fantastic way to know the depth of Christ's salvation. This season may bring opportunities for you to share about the Savior with family or friends that don't know him, since he died for them, too. Or sometimes we gather as congregations for a special service to thank and praise him during this season. However the Spirit leads us, may our hearts and mouths always sing, "Christ, our Lord, to You we raise, This our sacrifice of praise."

Erickson is serving his Free Lutheran Seminary internship at Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D. Artwork: "View of the Ulten Valley," by Louis Eysen, 1889, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main.



A HOPE & A FUTURE

ast Thanksgiving, I was surrounded by family, friends, football, and food. A perfect holiday setting by all accounts. But it was one of the worst Thanksgivings in my life. Even though I was surrounded by many blessings and reasons to be thankful, I was in a deep season of depression.

A few months before that Thanksgiving, I experienced the most crushing and heartbreaking situation I have ever faced; I was still dealing with the repercussions. All I could think about that Thanksgiving was, “How can I give thanks even in the midst of this hardship?”

Even in my season of depression and lack of joyful feelings, I can give thanks! Giving thanks isn’t based on my feelings or understanding; it solely rests in God. No matter what happens in this life or what situations we face, God doesn’t change, his love doesn’t change, his Word doesn’t change, and his promises don’t change. Because of the eternal hope we have, we can always give thanks.

We give thanks during the joyful moments of this life because of the blessings God gives to us. We give thanks during the difficult moments because of God’s provision and comfort in our hardships. We can also give thanks in disappointment because God works through it for his greater purpose.

As I reflect on this difficult past year of my life, I still have questions and face struggles, but I have already seen God use my hardship for his glory in so many extraordinary ways. God has strengthened my faith in him and given me a renewed perspective on suffering. “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2–4, ESV). Additionally, I was presented with many amazing opportunities to proclaim God’s glory that wouldn’t have been possible without going through this hardship.

Today, I give thanks that God will continue to use our hardships for his glory! “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11, ESV).

—Brett Erickson, a first-year student at the Free Lutheran Seminary,
is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.





TESTI- MONIES OF HOPE

HOPE IN HIS PROMISES

God asks me again and again, “Do you trust me even in this? Do you truly trust me even with the most precious parts of your life?” The following are examples of how God has taught me to trust him.

After losing one of my dearest friends and mentors, my 98-year-old grandma, God brought me tangible comfort in the long sleepless hours of the night. By my bedside I kept handy a flashlight and a variety of Bible verses that highlighted God’s character and promises. I repeated phrases, emphasizing different words each time to help me meditate on what he had for me instead of stewing over situations that could not be worked out in the middle of the night.

God led me to finish getting my master’s degree, which I had started 25 years earlier. I ended up over my head while balancing studies and the rest of life’s challenges. For the first time in my life, I dealt with anxiety. When alone, I would say out loud, “No!” to dwelling on doubts and fears. Instead, I replaced them with Scripture verses that shined God’s truth on the situation.

My goal in training my children was to have them rely on Jesus to lead them in every aspect of life and to glorify him in every way. I kept asking myself why it was so hard to let them go as they spent more time away from me pursuing their own interests. God showed me day by day

how my identity was not in my children but in who I am in Christ—loved, forgiven, redeemed, and precious in his sight. My husband and I started investing more time in our relationship.

Our church had congregational disagreements and went three years without a full-time pastor, during which time a majority of parishioners left. This was a sad, heart-searching time that led to a stronger congregational prayer life. God always provided someone to preach, and our spiritual roots grew deeper.

Multiple minor and serious health issues that took years to resolve also remind me to keep my eyes on Christ, the ultimate healer. I caught myself often putting more faith in doctors, medicine, or good health practices rather than in him first. Would I worry or choose to rest in his daily provision? Being athletic and active had been a significant part of my identity. When God allowed it to be stripped away, I was reminded again that he was completely sufficient and faithful.

“I will sing of the Lord’s great love forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations” (Psalm 105:8).

—Stephanie Kuhn is a member of Calvary Free Lutheran, Bismarck, N.D. Artwork: “Simplon Pass, by John Singer Sargent, 1911, National Gallery of Art.



FEAST AND REMEMBER

The large pat of butter glides across the freshly baked buns. Swirling steam coming off my mom's stuffing greets the table, promising that perfect medley of roasted apples, walnuts, breading, and everything to love about fall. Once all the family is gathered, the feast of Thanksgiving can commence. Gratitude and nostalgia fill the air just as much as the fragrance of apple. In between "Pass the turkey, please" and "I'll take some more mashed potatoes," there are always stories of "Remember when ..."

Feasts are natural vehicles for cultural memory. In Scripture, God gave Israel feasts of remembrance to be celebrated year after year: Passover, the Feast of First Fruits, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths. While each is worth studying—and I do challenge you this month to do just that: find Jesus in these festivals. It's abundant—we who are Gentile believers are most likely to be familiar with the feast of Passover, also described as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. God instructed his people to set aside this day to remember what he had done in redeeming Israel from slavery in Egypt: "And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever" (Exodus 12:17, ESV). God commands Israel to set aside time to remember using a meal and a day of rest.

This theme of remembrance flows throughout the biblical narrative. In Deuteronomy, Moses calls the people to "remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day" (Deuteronomy 8:18). He reminds them of God's provision in the wilderness and that every good thing comes from God's lovingkindness toward them (Deuteronomy 10:11–18).

Last year, I traveled to northern Italy (having the absolute pleasure of feasting while there) and found myself standing atop some of the most beautiful art I have ever beheld. In the fourth century, Christians in Aquileia created colorful and intricate mosaic floors in their church. Why? So that the gospel story would be remembered. "Here I raise my Ebenezer; hither by Thy help I'm come," penned Robert Roberson in the beloved hymn "Come Thou Fount." Drawing from I Samuel 7, Robertson acknowledges the



BY MADI TROST



desperate need of our wandering hearts to put up “stones” of remembrance. When we retell faithful acts of God to ourselves and to future generations, we are echoing the grateful heart of Samuel, who placed stones for the people to remember that “The LORD helped us” (v. 12). Raising an Ebenezer, Christians proclaim the message of the gospel: God has transformed and sustained our lives through Jesus Christ. This is good news for a world that is broken and starving.

Moses warns God’s people that forgetfulness leads to ungratefulness: “Your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Deuteronomy 8:14). Humanity is dead set on forgetting God and his ways. Israel forgot God’s covenant and rejected his law. In the establishment of the New Covenant, Jesus remembered and performed every element of God’s law on our behalf. When Jesus established the Lord’s Supper, he inaugurated a new covenant feast. In communion, we take the body and blood of our Lord; we lay down our desire to work for salvation and instead fully rely on the finished work of Christ—a meal and rest. The unfathomable happens in the remission of sins: God forgets what we have done. Of the new covenant, God declares, “I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). Sometimes I want to remember my sin, but Christ desires me to remember him instead.

Amid the strife of civil war, arguably our nation’s darkest moment, President Abraham Lincoln recognized the necessity of remembering the blessings of God. His “Thanksgiving Proclamation of 1863” reads:

The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and even soften the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God.

Lincoln not only called for the nation to remember God’s provision but also sought his mercy through repentance in a time of immense disunity and sorrow. He understood that repentance leads to gratitude—gratitude to the giver of every good gift. Our feast of thanksgiving can be an act of worship. Take some time in this season to be grateful for what God has done. Gather with your family. Build your Ebenezer. Tell them what you have seen Jesus do in your life. Remind your children of the finished work of the cross. Spread the bounty the Lord has provided and rejoice. Sit down and rest. Feast and remember. Remember God’s goodness to you—a God who forgets what we often remember and remembers what we often neglect.

Trost, Hastings, Minn., is an adjunct professor at the Free Lutheran Bible College. Artwork: “Prayer Before the Meal,” Jan Steen, 1660, The Leiden Collection.

TESTI- MONIES OF PROVISION

FINDING A COMMUNITY

It was with heavy hearts that my wife and I walked into Faith Lutheran Church in Durant, Okla., for the first time on Sunday, Aug. 13, 2023. This was one day after we chose to disaffiliate from our home church of many years, First United Methodist Church. This decision to leave FUMC was not taken lightly. It was a process that involved much prayer, soul-searching, and heartbreaking conversations with our church family. We finally realized that God's plan for us was not at FUMC.

Words can never express the profound impact it had on me to leave behind the very essence of my church upbringing and spiritual development—from baptism to the age of 80. As a couple, we had no choice in our decision to leave once our church hierarchy abandoned the law of God by ignoring and distorting biblical teachings, Scripture, and moral principles. Once the discernment process was over, God placed on our hearts to disaffiliate. Many friends left with us, but many stayed. We still keep those friends in our prayers.

From the moment we entered the front door at Faith Lutheran, we were greeted like family, not as guests. Members welcomed us with open arms. Stepping into the

sanctuary, we felt like we were home. Not particularly fancy or overly indulgent, the sanctuary is definitely a sacred place of worship. It felt good to sit in God's house and feel the Holy Spirit surrounding us.

Next came Pastor Jerry Peterson's message. Every word he said, every Scripture he referenced, seemed relevant to us. I thought to myself, "He is no doubt my brother in Christ." Sometimes our souls get hungry, and we do not know how to satisfy that hunger. Getting fed with God's Word, surrounded by a community of saints, will certainly fill you up. Pastor Jerry fed us that morning and continues to do so in every way. We have embraced this wonderful congregation, and our lives have been blessed in abundance. We both prayed that God would put us to work for him, and he has done so in many ways.

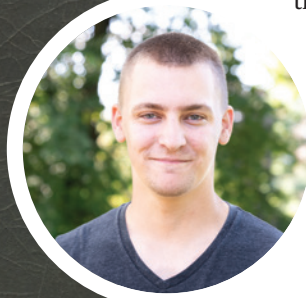
"Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; His greatness no one can fathom" (Psalm 145:3). We are so thankful and grateful to be part of the Faith Lutheran Church.

—Russell and Priscilla Washington are members of Faith Lutheran, Durant, Okla. Artwork: "Aurora Borealis," by Frederic Edwin Church, 1865, Smithsonian.



DEVELOPING IN FAITH

When I was growing up, my family never really found “our church.” We went from church to church every Sunday for a while, but none of them really stuck. Eventually, we settled at a large Pentecostal church with contemporary worship, light shows, and a pastor in skinny jeans. This church seemed to be “in.” It was the place where my parents wanted to go every Sunday. But as time passed and I grew more in my personal faith, researching more and more about my faith in Christ, I came to the realization that I needed something that was more like a church; I needed community and a pastor who I could actually talk to. I didn’t want the flashing lights, loud music, charismatic sermons, and the disconnect from traditional Christianity.



I decided I wanted to attend a new church, a Lutheran church, and to bring my fiancée with me. So, I contacted around a dozen Lutheran churches in my local area. After a few days, only one pastor responded to me, and that was Pastor Rick Long of Atonement Free Lutheran Church in Arlington, Wash. He told me they were a Bible-believing church that is a part of the AFLC and that they would welcome us. I was very relieved to hear this, and since going to Atonement for the first time, we have never left. I finally found a church that I could call home, a church that preaches the gospel message every Sunday, has an amazing community, and has a wonderful pastor. Atonement has really helped my fiancée and me develop in faith and find a loving Christian community. I am grateful that many people I already knew already attended Atonement and that Pastor Long is an amazing shepherd of his congregation, who invited us very warmly to the church.

It wasn’t too long after first attending that we heard about the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary from Pastor Long. I had a substantial desire to go after experiencing an AFLC church. I could only imagine how great the Bible College is. I didn’t know much about it, but Pastor Long, for whom I am very appreciative, invited me over to his house to help give information, which helped me decide to eventually go. As an outsider to the AFLC, I was lovingly welcomed into an amazing community of people, and I am filled with immense and overflowing gratitude because of it.

—Levi Taylor, a freshman at the Free Lutheran Bible College, is a member of Atonement Free Lutheran, Arlington, Wash.

BY PASTOR NATE JORE

A few years ago, I made my way on foot to my friend Rob's house. My walk took me through the beautiful farming village along the Nile River in Uganda, where my family lived and ministered for 7 years. Rob and his wife, Esereda, had become followers of Jesus and were raising their two young sons to follow him, too. I arrived at their house to find them just sitting down to have lunch under the shade of the jackfruit tree in their front yard. Rob's face lit up when he saw me, and he ran to get a chair for me.

Rob and his family live simple lives, growing their own food, rearing chickens, goats, and some pigs, and fishing in the river. As I sat down, Rob set his lunch in front of me on the small table, urging me to eat. Esereda had prepared a simple meal of boiled pumpkin. I was struck by how joyful he was that I had come and by how willing he was to offer his meal to his unexpected guest. There was beauty in this simple meal. There was beauty in Rob's generosity, which I believe stemmed from his faith in a loving Heavenly Father who had been generous to him. Our brothers and sisters in Uganda taught our family much about gratitude for what God provides and about contentment.

In Psalm 54, David writes, "I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good." The introduction to this psalm leads us to a story found in I Samuel 26. King Saul, in jealousy and fear, is trying to kill David. David runs for his life, and the people of Ziph report to Saul where he is hiding. Saul comes with Abner, his commander, and 3,000 soldiers. David sent spies to verify his arrival (v. 4).

I'm guessing that it was at this point that David wrote Psalm 54. There is an urgency in his tone as he cries out, "O God, save me by your name, and vindicate me by your might. O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth" (vv. 1–2). David is feeling the weight of the situation he is in. No less than 3,000 soldiers are coming for his life. "Strangers have risen against me; ruthless men seek my life; they do not set God before themselves" (v. 3).

At this point in the psalm comes the often-ignored word *Selah*. Pause and reflect.

I imagine David himself pausing for a good long time, his mind and his heart racing, his desperate prayers rising. Then, a ray of light: the perspective of faith and gratitude. God is here. He is with me. He loves me. He will not forsake me. He is almighty! He starts writing again, "Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life. He will return the evil to my enemies; in your faithfulness put an end to them" (vv. 4–5). If God is my helper, if he is the one who keeps me alive, then I have nothing to fear! I can even give thanks, in faith, that God will work this out for good too. "With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good" (v. 6).

As he ponders God's faithfulness, his mind goes back to the many times God had delivered him before. "For he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies" (v. 7).

As the story unfolds, the Lord causes a deep sleep to fall on Saul, Abner, and the whole army. David and Abishai walk into Saul's camp, where his army of 3,000 is encamped around him. Rather than kill Saul, David takes Saul's spear and water jug to show him that he could have killed him if he had wanted to. When Saul realizes the compassion that David had on his life, he calls off the pursuit. The Lord again delivers David. Again, David's faith grows.

How do we learn to "give thanks in all circumstances" (I Thessalonians 5:18) and "abound in thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:7)? It comes more naturally to give thanks after your prayer has been answered and your problem resolved. It takes faith to give thanks, like David, in the midst of the storm. "God, I trust you. Your will be done. Glorify your Name. I thank you for what you are doing."

On Thanksgiving Day 2016, I found myself on the construction site of our new home in the village of Nabukosi, Uganda. The house was almost complete, and we were to move in the following week. I had recently resolved (so I thought) some issues regarding my work permit (required for a foreigner to live in Uganda) at the immigration office, and we were excited for this new phase of our lives and ministry in Uganda. I received a phone call that morning with the message, "Stop what you are doing and go to Kampala (the capital) immediately. If you don't arrive before they close at 5 p.m., you will be arrested and deported permanently from Uganda." I was in shock. My thoughts were spinning. *I thought this was resolved! We spent this whole year building this house, and now I'm getting deported? God?? Selah. Hmm. Today is Thanksgiving Day.*

The Scripture, "Give thanks in all circumstances," popped into my head in that moment. I thanked God in faith that he was doing something beyond what I could see or understand in that moment. I did indeed receive a deportation notice later that day to leave the country one week later, the exact day we were scheduled to move into our house. The following week saw a mobilization of prayer, and God responded by sending a woman from the immigration department to investigate our case and to request the Minister of Internal Affairs to overturn our deportation notice. We moved into our new home as scheduled on the day we were to be deported.

Be blessed. God is love! He is good. Give thanks.

Jore is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove. Artwork: "Mercy: David Spareth Saul's Life," by Richard Dadd, 1854, The Getty.

CULTIVATING A THANKFUL LIFE





FLY Beyond 2026.

FLY Beyond is the national youth equipping conference for the AFLC. It combines preaching, teaching, apologetics, and worldview training with a small-group learning environment for a powerful week of spiritual growth.

- **Date:** July 12–16, 2026
- **Location:** Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis.
- **Theme:** Living Stone
- **Website:** aflc.org/youth/fly-beyond

Langness, the youth director at Hope Free Evangelical Lutheran, Ishpeming, Mich., is the FLY Beyond chairman.

Living Stones.

BY JORDAN LANGNESS

As a congregation, what do you do to intentionally develop students for stepping into meaningful ministries within the local congregation and community? I Peter 2:4–9 offers profound wisdom for consideration. Peter lays the foundation when he writes, “As you come to him, the living Stone—” We are reminded that preparing and developing students has to start with a call to come to Jesus. Any other foundation that is laid will not withstand the tests and trials that will come.

Having established Jesus as the foundation, Peter then moves on to the idea that each one called by Christ is called into a life of active service. He refers to these followers as “living stones” that are “being built into a spiritual house” and who are a “royal priesthood” that has been charged to offer spiritual sacrifices and declare the praises of him who called. This is the language of active discipleship.

The FLY Beyond planning team has chosen this passage to be our theme for the 2026 FLY Beyond camp: “Living Stone.” As we have been prayerfully planning this camp, our primary goal remains to create a week where students will be encouraged and equipped in their faith with the specific purpose of living that faith out through service to the local congregation. In other words, we seek to create a week where students will hear the call of Jesus and then learn how he has gifted and equipped each one to serve him in a unique and meaningful way. Each aspect of the camp has been prayerfully put together to provide opportunities for students to explore potential areas and avenues of service, prepare them to confidently be salt and light in the world around them, and help them think deeply about how the reality of the gospel informs every aspect of how they understand the world.

I have had the blessing of being able to be involved with FLY Beyond for several cycles, and in that amount of time, I have been so encouraged to see how the Lord has worked through the lives of those who have attended. Many feel called to pursue deepening their understanding of God’s Word by going on to study at the Free Lutheran Bible College. Students also have returned to their local congregations and stepped into various roles of leadership both there and in their local communities. Year after year, it has been a joy to read testimonies from congregation and youth leaders noting how their students have been more engaged and active after attending FLY Beyond.

Students also have noted that they have felt better equipped and prepared to publicly live out their faith in service thanks to their time at camp. Hannah Bjorgaard, a recent attendee, writes, “FLY Beyond was so enriching to my faith: the apologetics grew my head knowledge, and the small groups and other sessions grew my heart knowledge. Seeing other young Christians on fire for the Lord gave me courage, and some of the conversations we had I will never forget.”

God has clearly been at work and is doing great things in the lives of our teens. If you are still looking for a tool to help you develop and prepare the students in your congregation for lives of faithful service, would you prayerfully consider if FLY Beyond is the right tool for you? Also, would you consider how the Lord might use you to encourage students in your congregation to invest in this impactful week? We are eager to see what God will do this coming summer. We hope to have students from your congregation there watching along with us.



Equipping teens.

BY DANIEL KEINANEN

What if there was no FLY Convention? What if a group of teenagers didn't gather in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, placing themselves under the Word of God? Before you let your mind wander too far, I don't think any of us want to think about a world where the FLY Convention doesn't exist. For many, it plays a significant role in their lives. Some can pinpoint a time at FLY when they heard God speak to them for the first time, a moment when their faith took on a new meaning. It can be said that FLY is important to the future of our church body.

FLY also plays a significant role in our current church body. One of the goals within the purpose statement of the FLY Convention is to provide a tool for the local congregation. When we think of what this could mean, we often think of materials or podcasts or information. While those are all helpful, I would challenge you to think beyond those tools. Think about the students themselves. Many students (and adults) return to their home congregations with a fire only God could ignite. A fire that burns so brightly that people see their good works and glorify God who is in heaven.

God speaks at the FLY Convention. He speaks to hundreds of students, calling them to greater participation in God's work in their lives and in the work of the Church. Many are seeking to mature in their faith, be challenged to grow further, and actively pursue the Lord in all that they do. An army of young people, brothers and sisters in the Lord, is a tool with great might and power! How is your church using that tool?

The opportunity is there for your congregation to continue the work God started at FLY and to use it for the glory of God in furthering his work within his church in your community.

Students from our church came back with a strong desire to be in God's Word. I heard of a couple of new Bible studies that were formed as a result of FLY. One mom noticed her children just reading whole books of the Bible at a time in their living room. Our church has seen an increase in the number of young people coming to our youth group. They are coming because God is at work, and he is drawing families to be a part of it.

There are many tools at our disposal, and the people of God are the tools he uses to do his work. There are teens in your church right now who are ready to carry this work, to come alongside adults, and to work together toward the same goal.

The FLY Convention has played a vital role in that development. Without the FLY Convention, God's work could continue. However, He uses FLY to further the work in our teens' lives, and that work continues in the local congregation. He is inviting you to be a part of that.

The 2027 FLY Committee.

The 2027 FLY Convention will be held July 5–10 at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colo. The 2027 FLY Committee consists of:

- **President:** Pastor Nick Dyrud
- **First Vice President:** Micah Moan
- **Second Vice President:** Iganacio Dávalos
- **Secretary:** Abby Smith
- **Devotional Life Secretary:** Brett Erickson
- **Treasurer:** Emily Goff
- **Youth Board Liaison:** Michelle Olson

Also serving are Daniel Keinanen, FLY Convention coordinator, and Chris Rasmussen, Youth Ministries' administrative coordinator.

Keinanen, the ministry coordinator at Christ is Lord Lutheran, Onalaska, Wis., is the coordinator for the FLY Convention.



Equipped to serve.

BY JANAY GRAY

“The idea of investing in a local church and specifically home missions really caught my attention during that first year as well as my second year of Bible college,” said Bria (Larson) Leseberg, class of 2022. Bria recently graduated from North Dakota State University’s School of Nursing in Bismarck, N.D., where she was heavily involved in her local congregation.

While expressing her gratitude for the education she received at FLBC, she emphasized the value that it has brought to her life now. “Principles of Congregational Life,” an FLBC class taught by Pastor Nathan Olson, deepened her love for the local congregation and church planting.



“I definitely feel like God used my time at FLBC to kind of excite that in me: [to] be really invested in and see the value of the local congregation a lot more than I ever had before,” said Bria, acknowledging that God gave her the desire to pursue a calling that she stepped into with ease. “It’s kind of cool that even church planting and home

missions were something he put on my mind while I was [at FLBC], and then I got the chance to do it in real life!”

During her college years, she clearly saw God provide the means for her to continue to serve him in ways that deepened her love for his people. She thoroughly enjoys serving people and helping them in any way that she is able, which is one of the many reasons why she became a nurse. FLBC not only prepared her to serve in her congregation but also in her workplace.

“While at Bible college, I was really interested in and leaned into our classes and the conversations with classmates about how to talk to people about Jesus,” she said, noting that exegetical classes like Romans and Pentateuch helped her gain an understanding of God’s Word. She specifically enjoyed learning what Scripture teaches about “our role as lights to the world and witnessing to our friends.”

The tools and lessons she learned at FLBC motivate the way she thinks about her role in the workplace moving forward.

Understanding God’s Word, she said, “has been helpful in the sense that now I can look for opportunities to love and serve my patients and show them Jesus’ heart” while working in the hospital. “I’ve had several opportunities to present the gospel to my patients or my coworkers while I was in college or at my new job here in Fargo.”

Her heart for others and her desire to grow the kingdom of God have been fostered by the Holy Spirit. At FLBC, she was equipped with the eternal and inerrant Word of God to serve Jesus Christ in his kingdom.



Upcoming events.

- **Confirmation Refresh:** Nov. 21–22
- **Christmas at FLBCS:** Dec. 5–7
- **Seminary Symposium:** Jan. 14–15
- **Campus Days:** April 10–11, 2025

Info and registration can be found on our website:

- flbc.edu/events

Gray is the external relations assistant at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary.

Annual Fund campaign.

BY DR. WADE MOBLEY

Establishing students in the Word of God for life in Jesus Christ is a valuable mission. On our campus we are blessed to watch our student body start here, then go anywhere and everywhere grounded in God's Word. Our seminary trains future pastors for free and living Lutheran congregations—your next pastor may be in seminary right now! And our Bible college graduates will go out soon to start families, invest in congregations, and participate in congregations back home, in new locations, or around the world.

Like anything valuable, this mission is only accomplished through significant commitments of time, talent, and money. Every year, generous friends of FLBCS give enough to take almost 40 percent off the actual cost of educating, mentoring, housing, and feeding our students. This year, our student body includes 112 undergraduate and 24 graduate (seminary) students, and we rely on about \$1.5M each year to make this happen. To put it another way, for every dollar that students are billed, donors give another 50 cents.

Such gifts—including all gifts apart from specific projects such as capital campaigns—are part of our annual fund. The annual fund exceeded last year's goal of \$1.3M, finishing at 110 percent. The goal for this year's annual fund (August 2025 through July 2026) is \$1.5M. Such gifts cover all ministry expenses that are not covered by tuition, room, board, and fees.

For more on how to give to FLBCS, or to see the latest progress on this year's annual fund, please visit flbc.edu/annualcampaign or contact Sherry Mork (director of Donor Relations) at sherry.mork@flbc.edu.

Course Spotlight: Hebrews

• **Instructor: Dr. Jason Gudim**



The central assignment of Hebrews class involves producing a major exegetical paper (8–12 pages) on a passage of the book that isn't covered in class. In this paper, students are required to give a biblical interpretation of the text they have chosen and synthesize it with an early church (A.D. 33–800) as well as a Middle Ages/Reformation era (1300–1700) interpretation of the text. The goal behind this is to build each student's skills in researching while also realizing that our modern

interpretations of Scripture may not always zero in on the same issues that different periods of church history focused on.

One of the learning outcomes of the class is to recognize in the text of Hebrews that Christ is the superior option over other alternatives. The entire theme of Hebrews involves an appeal from the (anonymous) author to Jewish Christians. He urges them not to turn back to Judaism but rather to stay the course because Jesus is superior to any answer that Judaism can provide.

Dr. Gudim says, "I have never taught an elective where the students are so excited for class. Our students have an evident and obvious hunger to study the Word of God, and our curriculum at FLBC is feeding them."

Campaign progress

2024–2025: \$1.3M

110%

2025–2026: \$1.5M

29%

State of FLBCS.

Fall 2025

- 112 current students
 - 50 traditional freshmen
 - 48 traditional sophomores
 - 6 pursuing a bachelor of arts
 - 8 Beyond Limits students
- 98 percent live on campus
- 65 percent are from AFLC churches
- 23 men pursuing God's call at seminary

Year-to-year stats

- 12:1 student to faculty ratio
- 40 percent of required courses feature verse-by-verse study of Scripture
- FLBC students take more Bible courses in one year than most Christian colleges require in four.
- 45,000 combined miles traveled by students on ministry teams yearly.

Mobley is the president of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary.

Spotlight event features FLAME

Grammy-nominated hip-hop artist and author FLAME was the featured speaker at the fall Spotlight: Extra Nos event Oct. 7 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary. In three morning sessions, FLAME talked about how he came to understand Lutheran theology by studying the history of the Reformation from John Calvin to Martin Luther. He also taught sessions on the two kinds of righteousness and the concept of *extra nos*, how grace is a gift that comes from outside of ourselves in the person of Jesus Christ.

(Clockwise from right) FLAME teaches a session during the Spotlight event. Seminarians Jeremy Larson and Kyle Erickson listen to a session. FLAME spoke to students during an evening concert.



Members of Bethel Free Lutheran celebrate 50 years

Bethel Free Lutheran Church, Minot, N.D., started as a Home Mission congregation in 1975. On September 20–21, we celebrated our 50th anniversary with a special concert, worship service, dinner, and program. Our anniversary theme was “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” and it was a blessed time of sharing memories with the congregation and the many friends who returned to Minot for the occasion.

Joining the celebration was our former Pastor Jerry Moan and his wife Rebecca, who were at Bethel from 1988 until 1995, when he was called to teach at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary (formerly AFLBS).

Our guest speaker was Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck, AFLC vice president, who came with his wife Jean, and son, Luke. Pastor Quanbeck served Bethel from 1996 to 2009, when he answered the call to Maranatha Free Lutheran in Glyndon, Minn.

As we celebrate the last 50 years, we are also focused on the future, as our Call Committee began searching a few months ago for a new shepherd to lead our congregation. We know that the Lord has planned someone really special for Bethel; great is his faithfulness!

Submitted by Carol Steffan, a member of Bethel Free Lutheran, Minot, N.D.



Pictured (from left) are Pastor Lloyd and Jean Quanbeck and Pastor Jerry and Rebecca Moan. Both pastors served Bethel Free Lutheran.

Boards, committees meet at conference



Members of AFLC boards and committees met Oct. 6–7 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary and the AFLC administration building. After a day of meeting separately in individual groups, the president's office hosted a group meeting on Oct. 7, which included devotions led by Pastor Brett Boe (AFLC secretary) followed by the installation of new board and committee members by Pastor Micah Hjermstad (president).

Hjermstad then led a discussion on the state of the AFLC and asked attendees to discuss in groups several questions, including what makes the AFLC distinct from other denominations, what are its strengths, and what are its weaknesses. Time was also spent in prayer for the ministries of the AFLC.

Boards and committees were then given time to give updates on their separate ministries to the group.

TOP TO BOTTOM: Pastor Micah Hjermstad installs board members. Pastor Wade Mobley chats with Mark Sivertson. Dana Hagen prays with a group. WMF Board members participate in a discussion group.



TOP TO BOTTOM: Pastor Micah Hjermstad leads a discussion on the state of the AFLC. Gwen Berge, a member of the Parish Ed Board, talks with Pastor Jason Holt about the strengths of the AFLC. A group discusses the distinctives of the AFLC.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor George Lautner has resigned from Alsace Lutheran, Reading, Pa., and is serving Holmes Evangelical Lutheran, Clarion, Iowa, as interim pastor.

Pastor Terry Culler has accepted a call to serve Alsace Lutheran, Reading, Pa., as interim pastor.

Pastor Gary Jorgenson has accepted a call to serve Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn., as interim pastor.

Dave Perkins, a member of the Bay Broadcasting Board, is serving remotely as director of the KAKN radio station ministry.



Janice Hanson

Janice Pauline (Bergstrom) Hanson, 82, of Fountain Hills, Ariz., died Sept. 24 after a short but fierce battle with cancer. Born March 5, 1943, in Bauxite, Arkansas, she was the daughter of Alvin and Clara (Likiskov) Bergstrom. She married Wayne Hanson on Dec. 11, 1965. He preceded her in death.

She graduated from Roosevelt High School, Minneapolis, in 1961. Along with her husband, a lay pastor, they helped found Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran, Lakeville, Minn. They also served King of Glory Free Lutheran, Eden Prairie, Minn.

Surviving is her son, Todd (Diana) Hanson.

A memorial service was held Oct. 13 at Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran, Lakeville, with Pastor Tom Olson and Pastor Clayton Wilfur officiating. Burial was in Fort Snelling National Cemetery, Minneapolis.

Support the AFLC's magazine

The Lutheran Ambassador is free for all subscribers. Our ministry is subsidized by your gifts. Thank you! Our mission continues to provide encouraging and informative content. For information on giving, please visit our website at aflc.org/lutheran-ambassador.

SEPTEMBER MEMORIALS

FLBCS

Dennis Strand
Ruth Claus
Jeff Dahl

WMF

Shirley Schroeder

World Missions

Richard & Joyce
Hinderaker
Robert Davidson

... in honor of

**Evangelism,
FLBCS, Home
Missions, Lutheran
Ambassador, World
Missions**

Aaron Arneson



2026 Lutheran Ambassador schedule

Below is the 2026 schedule for *The Lutheran Ambassador*. Please be in prayer for each issue. Note the deadlines and special emphasis of each issue. If you have an idea regarding a general article, a certain issue, or have an interest in writing, please contact the editors. Email us at ruthg@aflc.org or call (763) 545-5631.

ISSUE DATE

January
February
March
April
May
June
July
August
September
October
November
December

DEADLINE

November 28
December 15
January 30
February 27
March 30
April 30
May 29
June 29
July 31
August 31
September 28
October 30

ISSUE THEME

Life
Biblical theme: Romans
Lent/Easter
Hymn Origin Stories
Missions
The Torah
Christian Education
Conference Review
FLY Beyond
Church History
Thanksgiving
Christmas

Please note, information regarding the Annual Conference, scheduled for June 10–13, 2026, at Concordia College, Moorhead, Minn., will be featured in the May issue, with a deadline of March 30. This issue will include the schedule, board and committee nominees, registration, and WMF Day schedule and registration. Other conference information will be printed as it is available, including registration, housing, and youth and children's activities.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-September 30, 2025

FUND	REC'D IN SEPTEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% OF SUBSIDY	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$29,622	\$363,812	82	\$316,977
Evangelism	9,299	90,566	64	88,480
Youth Ministries	8,780	106,178	69	111,764
Parish Education	12,944	113,783	62	143,208
FLBCS	71,688	523,538	67	723,731
Home Missions	23,456	214,339	50	248,214
World Missions	28,485	309,021	62	301,502
Personal Support	46,108	472,168	61	597,925
TOTALS	\$230,381	\$2,193,404	64	\$2,531,801

For additional financial information for each department, go to www.aflc.org/giving

The goodness of God.

BY CLARA GUNDERSON

The babe lies quietly in her mother's arms. The mother smiles, and the baby's heart responds, smiling back while looking into Mother's eyes. She doesn't know that word yet, "mother," but she knows that the arms that always reach for her are just what she needs.

There are some word pictures in Scripture that bless my heart, bringing understanding and wonder. Psalm 131:2 is such. It reads: "I am like a weaned child resting against his mother. My soul within me is like a weaned child." Coming across this verse, I remembered a scene I witnessed in Bolivia. A little boy, maybe 3 or 4 years old, demanded the breast of his mother. Not yet weaned, he was self-centered and greedy. I saw the analogy and searched my heart, confessing my own inwardness, my self-seeking.

*Your goodness is running after, it's
running after me
With my life laid down, I surrender now
I give you everything
Your goodness running after me*

Another word picture comes to mind from Psalm 22:10, "I was cast upon you from birth. You have been my God from my mother's womb." What a start on life David had! From the arms of his mother he was "cast upon the Lord" and declared that all his life the Lord had been faithful.

*All my life you have been faithful
All my life you have so, so good
With every breath that I am able
I will sing of the goodness of God*

In Psalm 18, David paints yet another picture of God's goodness to him. Rescued from his enemies through God's intervention, he writes: "He rode on a cherub and flew; And he sped on the wings of the wind. ... The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered His voice ... He sent out His arrows ... And

lightning flashes in abundance ..." (vv. 10, 13–14). All to protect his son, David, his beloved! But there is more here. David declares, "For by you I can run at a troop of warriors; And by my God I can leap over a wall" (v. 28). And more, "He trains my hands for battle, So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze" (v. 34). This warrior David acknowledges God's care also in gentle terms; in Psalm 56:8 he asks God to "put my tears in your bottle."

*I love you, Lord
For your mercy never fails me
All my days, I've been held in your
hands
From the moment that I wake up
Until I lay my head
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God*

In the work of the Holy Spirit convicting me of sin, I see the mercy and goodness of God. I like to think of it as "keeping my account with God short." This means daily confession—some days, hourly! As Jesus teaches the crowd on the mountain, he addresses so many areas of our lives. This teacher who knows us so well paints a word picture as he asks, "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye? Or how can you say to your

brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, and look, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:3–5).

*I love your voice
You have led me through the fire
In darkest night you are close like no
other
I've known you as a father
I've known you as a friend
And I have lived in the goodness of God*

The heart of Jesus for his own is revealed in Luke 15 as he tells the listeners about a shepherd risking all to find one lost sheep and a woman lighting a lamp to find her lost coin. And then of a father waiting, longing for the return of his son. Each incident ends in rejoicing over the recovery of the lost. The goodness of God!

*Oh, shepherd of my soul, oh
What a joy to know you
Oh, the joy of knowing you, God
You're everything to me
So wonderful in all your ways. Amen*

Gunderson lives in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.
Lyrics: "Goodness of God," by CeCe Winans.

BUILDING THE BASE \\ THE LORD'S PRAYER \ Part 6

A greater delivery from evil.

BY PASTOR NICK SCHULTZ

But deliver us from evil.

Public figures have said things like, “Prayers aren’t enough to prevent evil.” The mayor of Minneapolis mocked prayer and Christians with his comments following the horribly tragic shooting at Annunciation Catholic School.

Unbelievers will often point to this petition of the Lord’s Prayer and say, “See! Prayer doesn’t work. If prayer worked, evil wouldn’t happen!” Our unbelieving neighbors get something right. Evil is all around us. On our phones, on our televisions, in the news, in our schools, and in our communities. But what about prayer? More specifically, what about this petition? Setting aside the question of evil in general, why do evil things happen to people who pray the Lord’s Prayer?

This petition is probably the most misunderstood and publicly maligned petition of the Lord’s Prayer. Luther’s explanation of this is simple and beautiful. We pray that our Father in heaven “would rescue us from every evil ... and give a blessed end ...” The words of the petition are simple enough that no one misunderstands the meaning of the petition. The misunderstanding comes when we don’t

understand prayer and when we don’t understand evil.

Simply put, prayer is “letting your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6). Prayer is faith. It recognizes that God is God, I am not God, something isn’t right here, and I can’t do this on my own. Because prayer is faith that recognizes our weakness and God’s power, it is always humble. We pray in Jesus’ name because without the cleansing blood of Jesus we would have no place to even pray to God. We pray according to the will of God because we trust that he knows what is best for us in all situations. Sometimes, this means that the answer to our prayer is “Not yet” or even “Never.”

What about evil? Evil is real. What is more, evil is personified in the devil. Matthew 6:13 makes this explicit. My Bible has a footnote here, and it seems that the best translation from Greek to English is “but deliver us from the evil one.” The devil’s desire is to separate you from God. He does this with all sorts of tricks. He uses boredom, guilt, disasters, illness, addiction, politics, technology, or any other thing to distract you from the gospel. He wants to rob you of the gospel because he understands *eternity* is in the balance.

So how do we put this all together to better understand this prayer? We must see that this is a petition for *temporal* and *eternal* delivery from evil.

This petition asks for delivery from temporal evil. This would cover concerns over safety for travel, good government, good health, and the like. Sometimes we are delivered from these evils because of God’s fatherly love for us. Sometimes, temporal evil still afflicts us. This does not mean God does not answer this prayer.

If we only focus on temporal evil, we miss the greater delivery from evil that is accomplished through faith in Christ. Through faith in Christ, we are finally and eternally delivered from evil. Even if evil results in our death, our eternal salvation in Christ Jesus means that evil can no longer touch us—forever. That is what our unbelieving neighbors do not understand. Jesus’ death and resurrection from the dead gives Christians a delivery from *eternal* evil. The world scoffs at this sort of teaching. But we believe, “To live is Christ, but to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

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