

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

AUGUST 2003



Open door at Brookings

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

August 2003
Volume 41, Number 8



The magazine of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, 3110 East Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441. 763-545-5631

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The Lutheran Ambassador
(USPS 588-620 ISSN 0746-3413)
is published monthly by the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations.

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Subscriptions rates:
\$15.00 a year, Group Rate, U. S.
\$16.00 a year, Individual, U. S.
\$18.00 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., Minneapolis, MN 55441

Encouraging Word

The Exterminator

"Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes"
(Ephesians 6:11, NIV).

In the late 1980s as our children began to leave for college, the empty nest syndrome set in for us. Eventually, I became used to the quiet sounds. At night I heard the sound of branches rustling against the house in the gentle breeze. One night I detected a similar sound, even though the night was still. I lay in bed and listened to the subtle sounds. They seemed to be coming from the bedroom wall by the window adjacent to the oak tree. I got up and looked out the window to see

if I could discern where the noise was coming from. "It must be my imagination," I thought. I went back to sleep again.

In the morning the sound was even more pronounced. I looked up at the wall and saw a crack in the sheet rock by the window. More curious than ever now, I told my husband, Wayne, about it when he got home from work that evening. After finding a stepladder, he poked around at the crack, making a small hole. Out came an army of big, black carpenter ants. I ran for the vacuum cleaner and the duct tape. Wayne covered the hole first, and then sucked up the intruding giant ants into the vacuum cleaner. Next, we called the exterminator.

Arriving the next day, the exterminator followed me to the ant

site. He pulled the duct tape off the opening and out poured hundreds of carpenter ants again! They were everywhere — intruding in my home and my life! The exterminator proceeded to spray toxic ingredients into the hole. He sealed it up with duct tape, and once again the vacuum cleaner sucked up the remaining carpenter ants in our bedroom. A couple of days later, Wayne removed the duct tape and looked into the now large opening. He saw that a portion of the 2x4' inside the wall looked like honeycomb. The ants had lived in this secret location, eating away at the wood.

Carpenter ants are like sins that creep into our lives. Satan is very cunning, disguising himself like the oak branch rustling quietly against the house wall. He sneaks into our hearts and eats away at us until we look like honeycomb. Then it's time to call on the exterminator of sin, Jesus Christ. Prayer is our 911 connection to Jesus! He is always on call — 24/7. He comes immediately to wash away our sins with His shed blood on the cross. Cleaning house, He begins to fill the holes with truth and righteousness and readies our bodies as the temple of the Holy Spirit. He equips us with the whole armor of God, guarding against the craftiness of Satan.

Lord Jesus, help us not to become complacent in our lives. Help us not to leave openings for Satan's work. Make us aware of his disguises. Flush the carpenter ants out of our lives, and let Your light shine through the honeycomb in us. Oh how we love You Lord Jesus, our Savior and friend. Amen.



**Glorianne
Swenson
Calvary Free
Lutheran,
Fergus Falls,
Minn.**

SOUND BITES

From the 2003 AFLC Annual Conference

A wonderful, wide door of opportunity was opened for our church fellowship 40 years ago, and it remains open today.

— Pastor Robert Lee
AFLC President

We must use our time wisely since Christ's return draws closer each day. We must use our time, talents and blessings all for His glory!"

— Jon Galland
Director of Development

All members of a congregation have the privilege and responsibility to assure that the content of their Bible teaching materials are faithful to God's Word. ... Nurturing faith is one of the most important works of the congregation. This is done through the faithful teaching of the Word of God.

— Marian Christopherson
Parish Education Director

May it always be that our strength comes from God and our trust is in Him, to provide all our needs according to His plan in His time, for truly nothing is too hard for Him.

— Dr. Dan Mundfrom
Chairman, Schools Board of Trustees



— **Pastor Craig Johnson**
Editor

AN OPEN DOOR

Members of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations met June 11-15 in Brookings, S.D., for the 41st Annual Conference and considered the open doors God has placed before them. The conference, the first to be held in the state of South Dakota, met under the same theme as the first annual conference — “An Open Door” taken from Revelation 3:8.

Open doors in evangelism

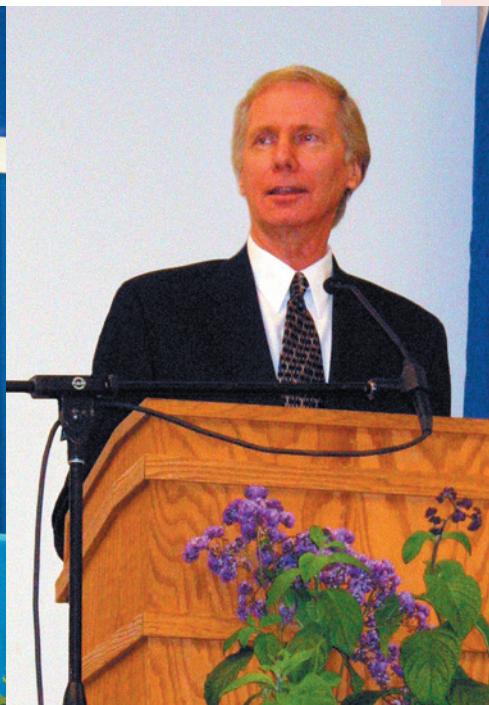
The conference was preceded by an event for pastors and their spouses in the afternoon and evening of June 10,

sponsored by the AFLC Commission on Evangelism. The guest speaker was Dr. Paul Cedar, chairman of the Mission America Coalition. Dr. Cedar also spoke at the June 11 opening service of the conference.

During his messages Dr. Cedar emphasized the importance of prayer in evangelism. He also encouraged pastors to minister first to their own families. God is continually placing before us open doors, Cedar said, and they are a blessing, a privilege and a responsibility. He stressed how we always need the Lord’s help to respond to open doors.

As the conference’s business sessions began on the morning of June 12, Pastor Robert Lee, AFLC president, asked those who were attending their first annual conference to raise their hands. A number of hands went up among the 535 people who registered for the conference. The mayor of Brookings welcomed everyone to the community and led in prayer for the conference.

In his report Pastor Lee spoke of open doors that have been set before the AFLC. In encouraging congregations to enter through God’s open doors he also stressed the importance of congregations studying



OPPOSITE PAGE: Pastor Mike Crowell, Arlington, Wash., and Pastor Rodger Olson, Camarillo, Calif., gathered in a small group to pray during an afternoon session at the Annual Conference. CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: Pastor Del Palmer, World Missions director, thanked Pastor David and Sarah Nelson for their years of service in missions, both in Brazil and Portugal. Dr. Paul Cedar, director of Mission America Coalition, was the guest speaker for the opening service of the Annual Conference. Volunteers from host congregations Calvary Free Lutheran, Arlington, S.D., and Grace Lutheran, Bruce, S.D., man the registration table. Eric Westlake, director of the Association Retreat Center, and Pastor Elden Nelson, AFLC vice president, catch up. Marian Christopherson, director of Parish Education, talks to Pastor Greg Schram, Northwood, N.D., about educational materials.



and following their constitution and bylaws. "These legal documents are an important protection for a free congregation, and it is absolutely essential that they be carefully followed."

At the 2002 Annual Conference a resolution was approved encouraging the creation of a part-time assistant to the president. Pastor Elden Nelson, AFLC vice president, has been serving in that position since last January, which has been funded through gifts from congregations designated for that purpose. The 2003 conference passed a resolution encouraging members of the Coordinating Committee to move toward permanent funding of the position. A motion was also made to amend

the AFLC Rules of Work, stating: "Whereas the demands on the office of president have greatly increased to the point of the recent addition of an assistant to the president position, be it resolved that we amend the AFLC Rules for Work No. 7, paragraph b, to read: 'The vice-president shall be elected for a term of three years to perform the duties of the president in his absence and assist him in his duties on a basis and with a salary determined by the Coordinating Committee.' Be it further resolved, that the position of assistant to the president then be discontinued." Since the motion involves an amendment to the Rules for Work, it was introduced at this conference and will be considered at the 2004 conference.

In the report of the Coordinating Committee it was noted that seven congregations joined the AFLC during the past year. They are Faith Free Lutheran, Bertrand, Neb.; Living Word Lutheran, Appleton, Wis.; Living Word Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.; Resurrection Lutheran, York, Pa.; Taylor Lutheran, Taylor, N.D.; King of Kings Lutheran, Lewisville, Texas; and Prince of Peace Lutheran, Kernville, Calif. Three congregations were removed from the AFLC congregational roster during the past year: Community of Hope Lutheran, Highlands Ranch, Colo.; New



Hope Lutheran, Janesville, Wis.; and Word of God Lutheran, Brooklyn Park, Minn.

Finances and open doors

In the midst of the discussion about the open doors and opportunities available to the various parts of the AFLC, the issue of the finances needed for going through those doors was also discussed. A position that deals with finances is the director of Development. Jon Galland was installed in that position at the 2002 Annual Conference. It was reported that the current means of funding the position through the AFLC Foundation would last only 15 more months. Consideration was given as to various other means of funding. The request is being made for special gifts designated to the support of that office.

As the various departments shared regarding finances, they gave thanks for the gifts they have received from congregations and individuals. However, the budget subsidy amount approved by the conference is generally not sufficient to fund the various types of ministries department members would like to be involved in. Members of the Budget Analysis Committee expressed concern regarding this in their report to the conference. They described "a disturbing trend among most depart-

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Prayer was an important part of the fellowship at the Annual Conference. AFLBS Dean Jim Johnson greets licensed pastor Don Norr, Proctor, Minn. Steve Jankord, Sioux Falls, S.D., brought the message during the layman's service

ABOVE: More than 500 people filled the conference room at the Brookings Swiftel Center during the opening service of the AFLC Annual Conference. Bringing the message was Dr. Paul Cedar.



ABOVE: Pastor Mauritz Lundeen, Brandon, Minn., shares a good farming story with Harold Erickson, Wadena, Minn., during a break from conference business.

RIGHT: Pastor Terry Olson, Thief River Falls, Minn., and Matt Olson, Crystal, Minn., gather to pray with Pastor Oliver and Pat Olson, Spring Valley, Calif.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Business sessions were put on hold and groups were encouraged to circle for prayer time.



ments who are finding great difficulty in making ends meet. As we met with representatives of each ministry, we found only two that were not either carrying past operating debt, projecting operating debt for the current year, or both. This is especially troubling in light of consistent meeting or exceeding of conference-approved budgets over the last several years."

Resolutions were passed in an attempt to address the situation, including one that resolved "that each department clearly report the current status of these debts to their respective boards and to the next conference with a plan to repay them." Another resolution was passed stating: "Whereas, the Lord has set before AFLC ministries 'an open door' to serve the local congregation and reach the lost through the gospel of Jesus Christ, be it resolved, that we recommend AFLC ministries work together to prayerfully set before local congregations the yearly vision for ministry, prayer support, and resources needed to accomplish the vision. Possibilities could include an attractive poster, and/or video and PowerPoint presentations that could be funded through a grant and distributed to each congregation."

The Free Lutheran Seminary, in particular, is one department that has dealt with ongoing debt. The school wishes to keep tuition as low as possible and does not see any way of cutting expenses further while still accomplishing its mission. In his report to the conference, Dr. Dan Mundfrom, chairman of the Schools' Board of Trustees, stated: "Our priorities must be and are to eliminate our Bible school debt and the seminary's almost annual deficit. ... We present this need to you, the people of the AFLC, and ask that you would make this need a matter of prayer. ... Pray with us that God would provide sufficient finances to erase our debt, to eliminate the ongoing deficits, and to enable us to call additional faculty."

Thanks was given to God for the funds that have come in for the schools, which has made possible the beginning of construction of a student center on campus.

Open doors around the world

In the area of World Missions, thanks was given for the years of service of Pastor David and Sarah Nelson, who served first as missionaries in Brazil and then in Portugal. They were unable to secure the needed visas to remain in Portugal and so have returned to the States. They now serve Christian Free Lutheran, Wheatland, Iowa. It was reported that in May the Lutheran Church of Portugal broke off fellowship with the AFLC.

Information was shared about the various other mission fields in which the AFLC is involved and about a team preparing to travel to Uganda and Tanzania this summer to conduct pastor-training sessions.

Regarding mission work in the United States, the Home Missions Department shared about congregations mothering new congregations and encouraged other congregations to do the same. The department also shared about progress in the ongoing work of closing down the Church Extension Fund.

In a related area the Free Lutheran Association of Pilot Supporters told of a new airplane that was recently donated to their work. The plane was dedicated at the close of the conference.

In their report members of the Parish Education Department spoke

of the recognition in the AFLC's early days of and the ongoing need for Free Lutheran teaching material. They told of various projects going on and also of increased expenses and the finances that will be needed if the projects are to be completed.

The Youth Ministries Department and the Free Lutheran Youth shared about various types of ministries to youths going on. One area in particular of increasing emphasis is ministry to college-age students.

The Pension Board shared about the severe difficulties being faced by the AFLC Health Plan due to rising costs. Its future health is in jeopardy. It was resolved "that serious prayer be given



to this urgent issue."

The conference closed on Sunday morning with the ordination service of Wade Mobley. The service was held at one of the hosting congregations, Calvary Lutheran, Arlington, S.D., Mobley's home congregation. Preceding the ordination service was a communion service at another host congregation: Grace Lutheran, Bruce, S.D.

The 2004 Annual Conference will be held at the Association Retreat Center in Osceola, Wis.





ELECTION RESULTS

Vice President

Pastor Elden Nelson, Kandiyohi, MN

Secretary

Pastor Brian Davidson, Hopkins, MN

Coordinating Committee

Pastor Kenneth Moland, Kirkland, WA (5 years)

Committee No. 1

Pastor Ken Hart, Greenbush, MN

Pastor Wayne Hjermstad, Bruce, SD

Willis Kettlehut, Deshler, NE

David Jameson, Earlville, IL

Jason Norlein, Amery, WI

Committee No. 2

Jon Dryburgh, Grafton, ND

Tim Johnson, Fertile, MN

Nathaniel Olson, Fargo, ND

Marlin Benrud, Goodhue, MN

Paul Handsaker, Radcliffe, IA

Committee No. 3

Pastor Alan Arneson, Ottawa, IL

Pastor Larry Haagenson, Loveland, CO

Harvey Matheson, Amery, WI

Roger Timm, Wilson, WI

Vernon Russum, Grafton, ND

Committee No. 4

Pastor Earl Korhonen, Cumberland, Wis.

Dee Berkas, Wallace, S.D.

Pastor Mark Antal, Park River, N.D.

Julie McCarlson, Webster, S.D.

Helene Olson, Camarillo, Calif.

Committee No. 5

Al Twedt, Portland, ND

Marcia Pavesi, Bethel Park, PA

James Rolf, Brandon, MN

Pastor Ray Ballman, Kopperl, TX

Pastor Craig Benson, Radcliffe, IA

Nominating Committee

Tim Berntson, Buffalo, ND

Ron Jorgenson, Beulah, ND

Pastor Ken Hart, Greenbush, MN

Pastor Martin Horn, Fosston, MN

Joel Erickson, Maple Grove, MN

Denis Parsley, Flandreau, SD

Pastor Frank Cherney, Duluth, MN

Pastor George Knapp, Willmar, MN
Rodney Kirchhof, Hebron, NE
Pastor Lyle Aadahl, Byron, MN
Pastor Clyde Grier, El Campo, TX
David Blake, Ontonagon, MI
Bill Fish, Everett, WA
Vint Bruflat, Mesa, AZ
Pastor James Molstre, Pittsburgh, PA

Board of Publications/Parish Ed

Loiell Dyrud, Thief River Falls, MN (5 years)

Youth Board

Eric Christenson, Richfield, MN (5 years)

Commission on Evangelism

Dean Hobelman, Republic, KS (5 years)
Pastor Tim Johnson, Beltrami, MN (3 years)

Stewardship Board

Licensed Pastor Don Norr, Proctor, MN (5 years)

Board of Pensions

Leroy Sletten, Larimore, ND (5 years)
Pastor Mike Klenner, Freeman, SD (3 years)

Colloquy Committee

Pastor Peter Franz, Maple Grove, MN
Pastor Steve Carlson, Dalton, MN
Pastor Joel Rolf, Valley City, ND
Pastor David Nelson, Wheatland, IA
Pastor Jim Johnson, Fergus Falls, MN

Budget Analysis Committee

Kermit Nash, Plymouth, MN (2 years)
Jeff Jacobi, Wheatland, IA (2 years)

Missions Corporation (5 years)

Pastor Mark Antal, Park River, ND
Robert Christian, Newark, IL
Pastor Eugene Enderlein, Plymouth, MN
Pastor Peter Franz, Maple Grove, MN
Larry Gustafson, Thief River Falls, MN
Pastor Philip Haugen, Crystal, MN

David Jameson, Earlvile, IL
Willis Kettlehut, Deshler, NE
Dwight Kiefert, Valley City, ND
Carol Knapp, Willmar, MN
Pastor George Knapp, Willmar, MN
Clyde Lundgren, Bethel Park, PA
Pastor Elden Nelson, Kandiyohi, MN
Leroy Schierkolk, Prairie Farm, WI
Pastor Thomas Schierkolk, Eben Junction, MI
Robert Schwartz, Brookings, SD
Pastor Tim Skramstad, Eagan, MN
Grace Syverson, Tioga, ND
LaVern Thompson, Fergus Falls, MN
Darrell Tungseth, Fergus Falls, MN

(1 year term)

Ken Sletten, Duluth, MN

World Missions Committee

Kevin Olson, Eden Prairie, MN (5 years)
Pastor Craig Wentzel, Edmore, ND (5 years)

Home Missions Committee

Eldwyn VanBruggen, Mesa, AZ (5 years)
Ken Graham, Camarillo, CA (5 years)

FLAPS Committee

Ralph Peterson, Portland, ND (5 years)

AFLC Schools Board of Trustees

Pastor Mark Olson, Tioga, ND (5 years)
Brent Peterson, Valley City, N.D. (5 years)

Schools Corporation (5 years)

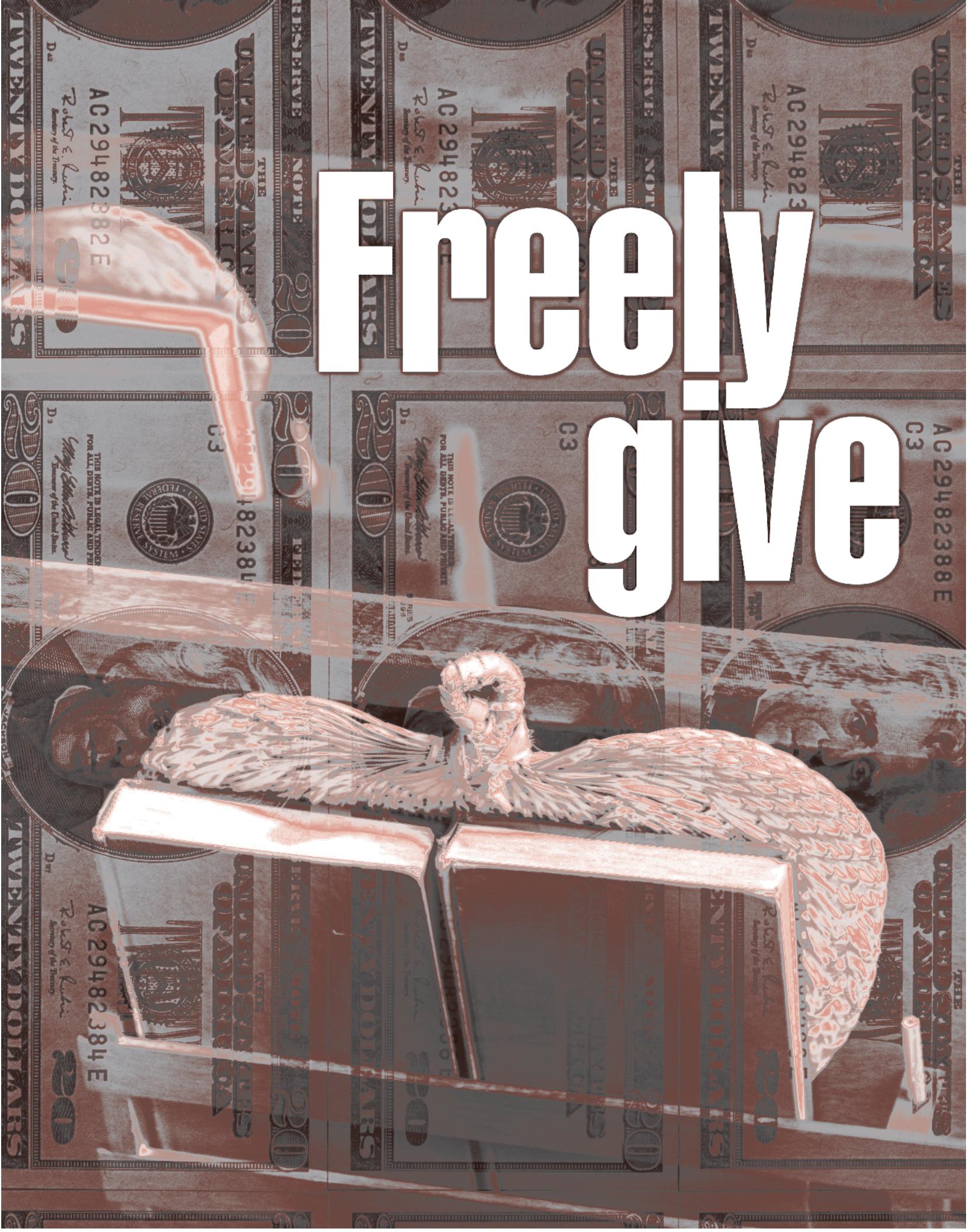
Pastor Jon Benson, Upsala, MN
Arne Berge, Binford, ND
Pastor Frank Cherney, Duluth, MN
Pastor Bruce Dalager, Grand Forks, ND
Steve Jankord, Sioux Falls, SD
Pastor Craig Johnson, Astoria, OR
Pastor Gary Jorgenson, Durant, OK
Pastor James Molstre, McMurray, PA
Pastor John Mundfrom, Eugene, OR
Pastor Brian Pearson, Montgomery, Ill.



OPPOSITE PAGE: Pastor Jim Johnson, Fergus Falls, Minn., hands out ballots. Pastor Wade Mobley volunteered to count ballots.

THIS PAGE: Pastor Jon Benson, Upsala, Minn., gives out instructions to ballot counters. Kay and Rich Ramsbacher, Plymouth, Minn., mark their ballots.

recv give



Having served the same congregation for 53 years, I have seen growth and commitment beyond my dreams. And the joy of it all just supercedes any efforts that were involved in the unfolding of a mission congregation in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, Pa.

Our church strongly believes in giving, whether that is through tithing/proportionate giving, pledging or through Christian stewardship.

When I speak of giving, first of all, I speak of commitment to Jesus Christ and His lordship. The only reason for giving is for us to count our blessings and to realize what God has done for us and, in a special way, what He has given in the life, death and resurrection of His Son. When we try to evaluate this, our minds and souls are lost in adoration and praise.

A synthesis of God's directive in giving is found in the words of Scripture from Malachi 3:8: "Will a man rob God?" Our answer is, "Of course not. How can that be possible?" But it is possible. It is a reality. One dear Christian told me that the Lord had converted her heart a long time before He converted her pocketbook. She had come from a state church in Germany where taxation supported the church. A few coins were added to the plate here and there by individuals. She became an ardent believer, but it took her a while to understand Christian stewardship.

Tithing is a beautiful way to begin to give to the work of Jesus Christ. Yet, tithing is from the Old Testament. While tithing is found in the Word of God, and found many times, the New Testament view of giving is this: proportionate giving. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by Him in store as God hath prospered him," (I Corinthians 16:2, my emphasis).

I am fond of II Corinthians 5:14, where, in the King James Version, we get the translation from the Greek: "For the love of Christ constraineth us," or from the New American Standard: "For the love of Christ controls us." It is that love for God that motivates us to give.

Our church also strongly believes in pledging. We have undergone four building programs. Before we could go to the bank for a loan, the bank had to have the assurance that we were able to assume the payments needed and, of course, the interest. And each time, with God's supervising love, we pledged and met our needs, and the buildings were paid off in record time. But one thing was never forgotten: the benevolence giving of our people to missions and other ministries. We never slighted that.

For those who do not believe in pledging, I ask you these questions: Do you pay cash for every purchase and every financial transaction in your day-

by-day experience? Do you use credit cards? Do you have a mortgage or car payments? Do you have college tuition obligations to meet monthly? It is nonsense and an untruth to say, "I do not believe in pledging to the work of the church and of Christ. After all, I am not sure of my ability to meet that pledge." If this is the sincere expression of your soul, then remember that nothing from this day on can ever be borrowed by you with a pledge to repay it.

Someone has said that when we begin to give it may hurt at first. But when we continue to give, it always makes us feel good. The word stewardship is a beautiful word for it means this from the standpoint of our dictionary: "managing, administering." We own nothing. We are only managers. God owns it all, but we need to give unto Him some of that which He has given unto us. When we know that all is from God and that He has given us the privilege of sharing with His work, it overwhelms us and we ask, "How much can I do for you, Lord? You have done so much for me."

Matthew 10:8 says it well: "Freely, you have received, freely give." But if we do not love Jesus Christ and feel His blessings, we shall never give as we should. It is only when we know that He is worthy of our best, and know that our best is not really good enough but we continue to give, that we really shall be spiritually happy. Praise be to the Holy Spirit who, in the Word and sacraments, guides us to respond to the love of God, given in Jesus Christ. One response is to give of our means so that the one eternal kingdom may have first place in our hearts.

— **Pastor John Dennis**
Ruthfred Lutheran
Bethel Park, Pa.

Pastor Dennis has served Ruthfred Lutheran since 1950, seeing it grow from a mission of the former American Lutheran Church, which merged with the Norwegian and Danish branches of the church in 1960.



A new approach to LAY MINISTRY

St. Paul's Lutheran teaches members to become a part of a visitation team

When so many businesses and organizations are cutting back, consolidating or even closing their doors, St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Cloquet, Minn., is spreading its wings. The church commissioned eight lay pastors who will minister one-on-one to members of the congregation. It's an idea whose time had come.

"The church has changed in America," said Pastor Tom Olson. "The amount of people who get there is less. There's a very high percentage of either non-church people or inactive members. I think that has increased the need for getting out and seeing people on their own turf because they're not going to come and see you on your turf."

There is a large senior population among those who were once active, and a younger generation that is basically disconnected from the church at large.

"Our perception of the ministry is changing, and I don't think it's all bad," said Olson. "I think that we've had very much of a focus on the ordained pastor doing all the ministry on his own. But there's quite a change in our culture with both husbands and wives working. It's hard to get into homes and visit during the day because everybody is gone ..."

Another factor that makes the church's new lay ministry program expedient is money.

"We would like to be able to call a full-time assistant pastor here," Olson admitted. "But health insurance alone is \$10,000 a year plus you need to compensate them fairly for the fact that many of them have \$30,000 to \$40,000 in education expenses from eight years or more of higher education."

Olson said all these factors and many more have forced St. Paul's to re-look at its way of doing things. The church members knew something had to

change. Enter Pastor Wayne Juntenen of Esko, Minn., a former colleague of Olson's [now retired]. ...

"... I thought about calling him many times," said Juntenen. "Finally, two years ago, I did. I have to believe it was God's timing."

Just two hours before his call, the church had learned that a man they had called to be their visitation pastor [declined the position].

Olson asked Juntenen if he would consider helping St. Paul's out with visitation. Juntenen, who had already asked God to use him in whatever way He directed, [met with the deacons and trustees]. He was soon hired as a part-time visitation pastor. ...

[Juntenen] got hold of two books by Dr. Mel Steinbron called, "Can the Pastor Do it Alone?" and "The Lay-Driven Church."

"... I thought, 'This is the way to do ministry,'" Juntenen said. "If I'd have known this 40 years ago, this is the way I would have done it."

What was so exciting about the message that Steinbron had to tell was the way in which the church could make use of lay pastors from its own congregation ...

"This church has always used lay people for various tasks, so it's not new or shocking," said Olson. "But getting it organized and getting the people trained and to the point of feeling comfortable with it has been a hurdle in the past." ...

The outset was a 15-hour training seminar using material developed by the Lay Pastors Ministry and conducted by Juntenen. Some 20 parishioners signed up, read the book and took the seminar ...

The seminar included such [instruction] as role playing about how to introduce themselves and get to know the people they will be calling on, and learning the limits of what they should and shouldn't say. ...

Juntenen said the approach toward lay visitation ministry differs from other lay ministries that train people to be involved with others in their congregation during times of crisis.

"The ministry is geared toward developing a relationship with people both in times of need and in

Concluded on page 15

Our President Writes

Songs of heaven

It was about 30 years ago when an elderly lady told me that she was soon going to die. One does not know that for sure, I reminded her, but she disagreed.

"I've heard the angels singing," she told me. I asked her what they were singing, and she said, "*Den Himmelske Lovsang*"

(translated, "The Heavenly Song of Praise"), a favorite old Norwegian choir anthem of a century ago, which afterward I discovered in a songbook called "*Frydetoner*." Later I found it mentioned in a history of the Norwegian-Danish Methodists in America, but, apart from hearing a choir sing it for a church anniversary, I have never heard it sung again, and assumed that it belonged to the many hymns that never made the transition to English and was therefore forgotten.

The memory of this long-ago encounter flooded my mind recently at the funeral of Ardys Knutson, who had served with her husband, Merle, as missionaries to Madagascar. At one point in the service, without any announcement, a couple dozen or so former missionaries stood up from their pews across the church and began to sing in the Malagasi language. The second tune sounded strangely familiar, and suddenly I realized that it was "*Den Himmelske Lovsang*" ("*Ny hiran ny lanitra*").



Robert Lee
AFLC
President

Afterward, some of the missionary family told me that this old anthem, traveling from Scandinavia to America to Madagascar, is still one of the favorites of the Malagasi Christians and is traditionally sung at funerals. Pastor Carl Vaagene provided me with his English translation, which I was delighted to receive and have already passed on to others.

The last verse and chorus go like this: "May all join in singing the heavenly praises Whom God has redeemed by His grace! Believing in Jesus, and serving our Father, Christ's bride we will be and forever sing praise! Sing glory to God in heaven above! O heavenly host, exult in His name!" The Malagasi chorus simply repeats "*Haleloia, Amen!*" over and over again.

This is what life is all about, isn't it? Preparing for heaven, we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and point others to Him so that they will be there, too. Will we become so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good? Not a chance! The opposite is true, for the more heavenly minded we become, the more earthly good we will be.

The song of heaven is praise to the Lamb that was slain (Revelation 5:12), and He alone is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing. We sing it now, imperfectly, looking forward in faith with great joy to joining the celestial choir and singing the heavenly song of praise for all eternity.



times of joy, at times of sadness and at times of celebration," he said. ...

St. Paul's now has eight members trained, commissioned as lay pastors and assigned to "flocks" of five or six randomly chosen family units or members each. ...

St. Paul's new lay ministry program is not intended to replace the primary responsibilities of the regular pastor — but to enhance them. ...

With these eight initial lay pastors alone, St. Paul's will give 50 of its families effective, meaningful monthly contacts at relatively no cost to the church. ...

[Olson] said St. Paul's goal is to someday have enough lay pastors to minister one-on-one to their entire congregation. He said the benefits of lay pastorship will undoubtedly be reciprocal.

"I believe that those who become lay pastors will have more of a reason to attend things like Bible studies because they'll want to be able to answer questions when they're ministering to others." ...



Reprinted by permission from the Cloquet, Minn., *Pine Journal*.

Vision 2004 A refuge



"He is my refuge and my fortress; my God in Him I will trust." Ps 91:2

Actually being able to watch the foundation and bricks being laid for the new AFLC Schools student center is exciting! With three walls taking form the brick-layers are completing the west front entrance wall and will soon begin on the fourth wall. Despite rain and bad weather, the work continues.

Jesus calls us to continue on in good and bad weather, too. In one of the "Our Daily Bread" devotions for June, Richard De Haan shares about two men assigned to stand watch on a ship out at sea. During the night the waves from a raging storm washed one of them overboard. The sailor who drowned had been in the most sheltered place while the one who survived was more exposed to the elements.

The work on campus reminds us that we need to set our foundation firmly in Him so that when the storms of life come and we are exposed, we can stand firm.

Praise God we have a place where individuals can be prepared to face the storms of life by becoming grounded in the Word of God!

Please continue to pray for the building project, the workers, staff and students as we continue to press on in Him. See more photos at the Vision 2004Web site of building pictures at [www.flbs.org/vis2004/index.html](http://flbs.org/vis2004/index.html).



FLAPS New airplane dedicated

AFLC Free Lutheran Association of Pilot Supporters (FLAPS) is the recipient of a Sweringen SX 300 airplane. The plane was anonymously donated to FLAPS in June by a Christian living on the West Coast who had been praying that the plane would be used to further God's kingdom work.

With just 240 hours of flight time, the two-seated plane is very fast, clocking about 275 miles per hour. The plane will be used for emergency runs when one or two people have to be somewhere "right now." It will provide needed transportation as FLAPS continues to expand. We are thanking and praising God for it.

Pastor Michael Crowell, director of the Mission Aviation Training Academy in Arlington, Wash., delivered the SX 300 to the Annual Conference in Brookings, S.D., where it was dedicated at the close of the conference at the Brookings airport.

Travel is expensive. Besides the cost of gas and meals, lodging and other expenses make it easier and cheaper to fly. Flying this way also permits our department leaders to spend less time away from their families.

Please pray for FLAPS pilots and those who ride with them that they would be safe and good stewards of God's resources. God has been blessing us. We're thankful for your prayers. Let's keep praying. Let's remain faithful in responding to the open doors He sets before us.

*— Pastor Paul Nash
Home Missions director*



ABOVE: Pastor Paul Nash, director of Home Missions, tells the story of the new plane to a group of AFLC Annual Conference attendees at the Brookings, S.D., airport.

LEFT: AFLC President Pastor Robert Lee dedicates the new plane at a special service held at the end of the Annual Conference.

BOTTOM LEFT: The Sweringen SX 300 was flown to the Annual Conference in Brookings, S.D., by Pastor Michael Crowell. The plane was given anonymously to FLAPS by a Christian living on the West Coast.

Foundation A prayer ministry

As I travel around the AFLC to visit with congregations and individuals, I share on the various ministries of our church fellowship. It is a joy to tell others what the Lord is doing among us. He is changing lives through our local congregations, missions, schools and various other ministries.

I am available to assist AFLC members and other interested friends in their estate planning needs. We



Jon Galland
Director of
Development

are certainly thankful for each and every gift that is given. However, the greatest gift that can be given is that of prayer. I urge people to pray for each ministry within our church fellowship. Prayer is the most valuable and important gift that can be given. A prayer ministry is so vital in both the local congregation and other ministries within our church body.

I think of the words in Psalm 116:1 which say, "I love the Lord because He hears and answers my prayers." This is such a powerful reminder to us Christians! Our Lord and Savior is so awesome and powerful, yet He is able to hear and answer each request we bring to Him. The needs we face as individuals or congregations may seem totally overwhelming. We are reminded to bring these requests to the Lord and He will answer each one

according to His will.

Prayer is not to be used only for our needs or requests. It is a time when we are able to praise our Lord and Savior. Psalm 100:4 says, "Enter His gates with thanksgiving; go into His courts with praise." We are reminded in these verses to bring praise and glory to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We should praise Him for all the blessings He has so richly given to each one of us. We have seen these blessings in our own personal lives as well as within each congregation. We rejoice together as the Lord has provided for the building of the new Bible school student center that should be completed sometime this fall. Praise Jesus!

Prayer can also be used to encourage others. We need to remember to pray for each of our pastors that the Lord will continue to strengthen and encourage each one in their ministries. It is very encouraging for our pastors to hear that members of their congregation are praying for them. We also need to remember other members of the congregation who are involved with various ministries.

The Lord has really blessed each one of us in diverse ways. We need to remember to always use these blessings for His glory. Each one of us has the opportunity to bring our requests, blessings, praises and thanksgiving before the Lord. He will continue to guide and lead in the way we are to go.



AFLC member/teacher wins federal suit against school district

Barbara Wigg has won her case against a South Dakota school district. A school teacher and member of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, Wigg was prohibited from leading a Good News Club after-school program on campus. Why? As an elementary school teacher, said the Sioux Falls school district's lawyers, Wigg would give students the impression that the district supports Christian teaching.

In a July 9 article, Charisma News, an online news service, reported that the Sioux Falls federal court ruled in favor of Wigg. She sued in February, claiming her constitutional rights were violated after

officials told her she could not help the Christian club on her own time.

A U.S. Supreme Court ruling states that religious clubs must have the same access to public school facilities as non-religious clubs. According to Charisma News, the school district prohibits teachers from involvement with religious groups unless the organization has leased school space.

The federal court ruling strikes down the district's policy, saying it trumped Wigg's free speech rights.

"Sunday morning is that the only time when I can put on my Christian hat?" Wigg asked in a Fox News article from June 9. "After

3:30 p.m., I am someone who wants to work with The Good News Club ... I am not an agent of my school."

The Good News Club ministries are designed to teach children ages five through 12 about the gospel and moral and character development. They are not school sponsored but often use school facilities.

The Charisma article quoted Mathew Staver, president of Liberty Counsel, an Orlando, Fla.-based law firm that represented Wigg: "We warned the district that its policy excluding school employees from participating in after-school Christian clubs was unconstitutional. The court has now vindicated our arguments."

World Missions Brazil

Partnership church building in the 21st Century

The Brazil National Church Assistance Program (BNCAP) is an approved project that partners with the AFLC sister churches in building at least one new church a year.

How does the BNCAP project work?

The AFLC Brazil National Church buys property in a populated area, preferably where AFLC members have moved. Monies are used to build a first unit so that funds are not tied up in rent payments. Interest rates to build in Brazil are extremely high. Therefore, help from the U.S. sister churches or individuals could make this joint effort a realization.

Why is this project needed now?

Since 2000, more AFLC national pastors are entering the ministry. And more will be graduating and ordained soon. In this period, just two and one-half years, three pastors have been ordained, two more have

been licensed and two others have graduated from our Brazil AFLC Seminary and are praying about specific ministries.

The urgent need is new church works. The last AFLC church built was in Campo Grande, MS, before the year 2000. If there are no new churches to go to, our pastors could lose their vision. Another reason is that the Brazil mission is short of church-planting missionaries.

What is the cost of the BNCAP project?

From the spiritual point of view, souls could be affected for all eternity. From the physical point of view, just \$10,000 a year could build a yearly unit on the nationally church-bought property. I truly believe this partnership project could revitalize the Brazil national church vigor and growth and multiply blessings on the AFLC stateside churches and individuals because the mission command of Jesus Christ is being fulfilled. Also, the Brazil national church can share the blessings of missions as they catch the vision of the “fields white unto harvest.”



*Connely Dyrud
Missionary to
Brazil*



An education in a Christian worldview

Events scheduled throughout United States

How are we to respond to our changing world? What is a Christian response to media, education, government and social issues? As adults we need to be ready to address our culture. It is even more essential in training our youths. Members of the AFLC Youth Board have been encouraging biblical worldview training for our youths. This topic will be addressed at youth rallies and the Leadership Training Conference. It was also addressed at the Free Lutheran Youth Convention in Colorado last month. But training time is limited. In order to offer more in-depth training on a Christian's view of the world, we are encouraging participation in some of the other training events on this topic.

An event called Worldview Weekends is hosting this training at a number of cities across the country. The next event is scheduled for Oct. 17-18 in Minneapolis. You can find other cities and dates on the Internet at www.worldviewweekend.com.

Spencer Creek Lutheran plans events for centennial celebration in September

Church gives invitation to events

Members of Spencer Creek Lutheran, Eugene, Ore., will celebrate the congregation's 100th anniversary Sept. 12-14. With the theme, "Celebrating a Century of God's Faithfulness," several events have been scheduled. An old-fashioned hymn sing and pie social will be held Sept. 12. An open house will be held at the church on Sept. 13 with a dinner at a local restaurant that evening featuring sharing by former pastors. A worship service will be on the morning of Sept. 14 with a special anniversary service that afternoon. AFLC President Pastor Robert Lee will be the special speaker. All are welcome to the event.

WMF Convention report

Two hundred and seventy-three ladies met in Brookings, S.D., on June 11 for the annual WMF convention hosted by Calvary Lutheran, Arlington, S.D., and Grace Lutheran, Bruce, S.D.

WMF President Cheryl Skordahl led the business meeting. A budget of \$149,300 was approved. The entire constitution was presented for revision. The name and purpose of the WMF will remain the same, however, the rest was amended and will be presented to the convention next year, where it will require a two-thirds vote for passage. Many ladies offered helpful comments as we went through the constitution article-by-article and then on to the by-laws. We thanked the committee of Phyllis Peterson, Dee Berkas and Dawn Johnson and ex-officio member Skordahl for all their work.

Skordahl and Barbara Elmquist, second vice president, were reelected to another term each. Lynn Wellumson was elected as the new treasurer and Sharon Borg was elected as executive secretary. Leaving the board are Tammy Vukonich, treasurer, Cheryl Aakre, executive secretary, and Faith Nelson, Women's Outreach coordinator. Pastors Paul Nash and Al Monson testified to how helpful Nelson had been when she visited the ladies in Home Mission churches. Because of lengthy discussions on the floor concerning the constitutional changes, there was no time to discuss calling a new Women's Outreach coordinator. The WMF is now seeking someone to fill the position.

The highlight of our convention was the opportunity to have our missionaries report on their field-work. Our mission family this year was Pastor Paul and Becky Abel, who work in Curitiba, Brazil. The Abel family, along with their three youngest children (all teenagers), sang together for us, including one song in Portuguese, the language of Brazil. Becky shared with us about the progress of the work at the ARCA, a facility used for camps and outreach, and challenged us all to be missionaries where we are. At the mission festival service, the Abels sang and shared pictures of the beautiful area where they work. They have planted three churches and are beginning work on another church. During the mission festival service on June 12, Paul challenged us



in his message and shared examples of work at the ARCA. Also during the service, Pastor David and Sarah Nelson and their family were recognized for their mission service to Brazil and Portugal.

Food and fellowship are an important part of our meetings. The snack breaks, luncheon and banquet provided an opportunity to get acquainted with ladies from other churches. Faith Nelson emceed the luncheon and — by way of paper airplane — helped us to exchange names so that we might encourage each other in the next year. Several ladies shared how they had been blessed or had opportunities to witness.

Two afternoon workshops were offered: "How to do a Mission Festival," by Carol Knapp, and "Tell Yourself the Truth," by Kristi Nelson.

Jan Galland, vice president, was mistress of ceremonies for the evening banquet, while Amy Dalager, Argyle, Minn., provided dinner music. AFLC President Pastor Robert Lee was our evening speaker and presented many interesting and humorous facts concerning the early days of the WMF. He encouraged us to us the word "ministry" regarding the WMF, since the word is biblically used when speaking of women and is interchangeable with the word "service" in the Bible. Vukonich closed with songs that were appropriate to the message that we should continue serving locally and overseas through our gifts.

— *Elaine Kohl*
National WMF secretary



OPPOSITE PAGE: The Paul Abel family were special guests this year at the WMF National Convention held in Brookings, S.D. Pictured are Andrew, Becky, Christina, Paul and Matthew.

ABOVE and TOP RIGHT: During the afternoon sessions, women chose from two workshops. Here, ladies take notes from Kristi Nelson's workshop titled, "Tell Yourself the Truth."

RIGHT: Going along with the theme of missions at the June 12 mission festival service, a group of ladies dressed in traditional Indian clothing.



Morning is a time to stand in awe of the Lord

"You who fear the Lord, praise Him ... glorify Him ... stand in awe of Him" (Psalm 22:23).

I woke this morning to the sound of singing birds. Little chirps and strong calls greeted the morning. I wondered later as I read this psalm, "Does my morning song praise my Lord?"

Summer mornings are glorious. New rain wet our garden during the night. As I watch plants grow and gain maturity, I stand in awe of Him who created the springtime and the harvest.

I am free to worship because of

where I live. I am free from sin because of God's mercy. And I am free to choose to glorify Him because of God's will.

Jesus, my Lord, is worthy of praise in the morning and all the day. I am in awe when I think on His death, resurrection and promise to come again.

How can I glorify Him? I believe one way is to remember Him in the morning. When I spend time in His Word I am reminded of my helplessness and His mercy. There are words of comfort in times of sorrow and words to express joy and challenge, like these, for example: "You are my witnesses and my servants, chosen to

know and to believe me and to understand that I alone am God. There is no other God; there never was and never shall be" (Isaiah 43:10).

May my morning song honor Him. May I awaken with an excitement and anticipation that will keep me faithfully doing the work of awakening and deepening "interest in and love for the kingdom of God at home and abroad," as written in our WMF constitution.

I noticed later that those birds were still singing in the afternoon, and in the evening, too.

— *Dee Berkas*
Calvary Lutheran
Wallace, S.D.

Pastor Harvey Jackson, Hatton, N.D., retired from the ministry on May 31. He served Zoar Free Lutheran, Hatton. He and his wife, Shirley, will make their home in Park River, N.D. Their new address is P.O. Box 802, Park River, ND 58270.

Pastor Dan Brue was installed May 18 at Living Word Lutheran, Windom, Minn. AFLC President Pastor Robert Lee officiated.

Pastor Herb Hoff, pastor of St. Ansgar's Lutheran, Salinas, Calif., was placed on the regular clergy roster of the AFLC by action of the Coordinating Committee. Also approved for the regular roster was **Pastor Paul Wigtil**, pastor of Living Word Lutheran, Mankato, Minn.

Dr. John Eidsmoe will be a special speaker Aug. 6-9 at the Western Hemisphere Consultation on Theology. The event, held in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., is hosted by the International Church Council Project and will debate if it is possible to establish a biblical, theological standard of doctrine for the global, Bible-believing body of Christ in the 21st century. Delegates from North America and 15 Latin countries will discuss 20 theological documents. Dr. Eidsmoe, a professor at Jones Law Schools and adjunct professor at Regent Law School, will speak on "The Christian's Civic Duties."

Dan Keinenan, youth worker at Ruthfred Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa., will leave his work later this month and plans to study organizational administration at Northwestern College, St. Paul, Minn.

Members of **Good Shepherd Lutheran**, Ponca City, Okla., closed the church. They are working with the Home Missions department to sell the property. The pastorate had been vacant and members now look for a new church home.

Members of **Grace Lutheran**, Buckley, Wash., celebrated the church's 20th anniversary with a special worship service on June 22.

A memorial service for **Ardys Knutson** was June 26 at Hawley Lutheran, Hawley, Minn. Ardys was a missionary to Madagascar with her husband, Pastor Merle Knutson, and they served AFLC parishes in Newfeden, Minn., and Boscobel, Wis., before retirement.

Members of **Minnewaska Lutheran**, Starbuck, Minn., will celebrate the congregation's 120th anniversary on Aug. 10.

Fergus Falls church hosts mission convention

Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn., will host the Alaska Mission Convention Aug. 8-10. The schedule of events includes an evening service led by Pastor Tom Olson, Cloquet, Minn., on Aug. 8. A business meeting will be held the morning of Aug. 9 with a board meeting

that afternoon. A banquet will be held that evening, with missionary volunteer Doug Niesen speaking. Calvary Free Lutheran will host a church service on Aug. 10. For more information, contact Pastor Jim Johnson at (218) 736-4282.

Memorial gifts: June

AFLBS

Gerald Mundfrom, Harold Masted, Maurice Martin, Bennie Foss, Marsie Larson, Clyde Mortenson, Fritjof and Olga Monseth

Vision 2004

Walter Reiners, Clyde Mortenson, Bennie Foss, Ken Thompson, Gerald Mundfrom, Richard Reinke, Henry & Burdeen Peterson, Harry Gulbraa, Ernie Lauritson, Fritjof and Olga Monseth, Bob Rudebush

Miriam Infant Home

Elda Woltje

Youth Ministries

*Gerald Mundfrom
LeRoy & Minnie Anderson*

Home Missions

*Amelia Mackey
Sherly Cavarollo
Henry Peterson*

Church Extension

Gerald Mundfrom

World Missions

*Ardys Knutson
Parish Education
Marlys Moberg*

... in honor of Parish Education

Dr. Tim Skramstad

Home Missions

Pastor David Skordahl

Vision 2004

Howard & Dorothy Christians

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations

3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard

Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

AFLC Benevolences (6 month) – January 1 - June 30, 2003

FUND	TOTAL Subsidy	REC'D IN JUNE	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$305,568.00	\$18,670.55	\$133,408.60	44
Youth Ministries ...	48,154.00	2,209.56	20,610.32	43
Parish Education ...	90,907.00	8,381.10	38,131.03	42
Seminary	150,070.00	6,589.62	62,645.18	41
Bible School	263,356.00	16,936.39	110,596.96	42
Home Missions.....	305,087.00	12,755.71	113,288.65	37
Church Extension ...	28,945.00	3,807.05	9,973.69	34
World Missions.....	247,082.00	10,243.80	93,300.17	38
Personal Support ...	301,156.00	29,503.34	181,632.37	60
TOTALS	\$1,740,325.00	\$109,097.12	\$763,586.97	44
TOTALS 2002	\$1,521,284.00	\$123,606.54	\$808,110.89	53
Goal 50%				

The Evangelism Department received \$3,766.22 in June.

The director of Development received \$100 in June for a total of \$310/year.

Editorial Money, money, money

Money seems to be a main topic of discussion at most church conferences and business meetings. Money was talked about a lot at our recent annual conference. Limited financial resources are a challenge faced by each department. It is a challenge faced by many of our congregations as well. Sometimes it seems that the expenses have been cut to the bare minimum, but still they exceed the income.



Craig Johnson
Editor

Budgets are meant to be a planning tool to help us in handling finances. A budget is put together at the beginning of the year, and throughout the year it should be referred to when decisions need to be made. It is an aid in determining how much to spend on office supplies, travel and the various other expenses that come up. It is a useful and important guide and tool for

departments, congregations and families. Without a budget a group may spend a lot at the start of the year on something like furniture and then find at the end of the year there isn't money to cover salaries.

Members of the AFLC Budget Analysis Committee have worked hard over the past few years to remind us that budgets need to be based on the projected income. A budget based on the desired income instead of the realistic income is essentially meaningless and no longer a useful tool. I am thankful we resisted the urge at the conference to raise budgets beyond the amounts the committee recommended. History has shown that an increase at conference of a budget does not result in a similar increase in giving.

Budget Analysis Committee members based their recommendations not on what they want the departments to spend but on what, based on the giving of previous years, they expect the departments will receive. We hope more will be given to the departments, but they need to start out the year spending only on the basis of what they can realistically expect to receive.

Limiting your spending to your resources isn't a demonstration of limited faith. It is more about being a good steward. We live by faith and not by income projections, but that does not mean we spend money we do not have. We live by faith when we trust that God can

do great things with whatever resources He gives us, even when the amount seems small.

The disciples had only five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus told them to feed 5,000 men plus the women and children. The task they were called to was obviously far greater than the resources they possessed. But Jesus didn't tell them to start an aggressive campaign to get more bread and fish. He simply said regarding what they had, "Bring them to me" (Matthew 14:18, NIV). They brought the little they had to Jesus. He blessed it. "They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over" (Matthew 14:20).

We bring the little we have to Jesus and then prepare to be amazed at how much He can do with it.

That little bit of fish and bread didn't seem like enough to feed the 12 disciples, much less a crowd of thousands. Likewise, in this day and age when everything seems so expensive, our resources don't seem like nearly enough to enable us to do much for the Lord. We

need to buy all this equipment and have the right kind of buildings and pay all these salaries if we're going to be effective in God's service — or so we think. Maybe instead of spending so much time trying to figure out how we can get more, we ought to spend more time honestly asking if we have brought the little we have to the Lord.

Jesus did talk a lot about money in the Gospels, but in a different way than we often do. We talk about

how we don't have enough and wonder how we can raise more. Jesus and His disciples got by on meager means, and then when a rich ruler showed interest in joining them Jesus told him, "Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Luke 18:22). His call is: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" (Matthew 6:25).

Sell everything. Give to the poor. Do not worry. It doesn't sound like good financial planning. It's not practical or reasonable. But that could be a sign our ears have become too accustomed to hearing the materialistic moaning of this world. The message of Christ is different — and a much more pleasant sound.

We bring the little we have to Jesus and then prepare to be amazed at how much He can do with it.

Building the Base Open drawer

Last month the AFLC met for its 41st Annual Conference in Brookings, S.D., under the theme “An Open Door.” In pondering what I should write about for this conference review edition, I thought about an article on the theme verse from the conference — Revelation 3:8. But while thinking about an “open door” I remembered an encounter that I had about 17-18 years ago with an “open drawer.”

We were living in Stanley, N.D., at the time and it was late at night. My wife, Jeanne, was already sleeping when I came to bed. Trying to be thoughtful of her, I decided not to turn on the light, but rather to make my way in the dark. Since I knew the layout of the furniture in the room very well, I anticipated no problems navigating my way. To my left was Jeanne’s dresser. To my right was our bed. There was a pathway approximately two feet wide between the two pieces of furniture. Unknown to me, Jeanne had opened one of the drawers to her dresser and forgotten to slide it shut after using it. I walked into the room and into that open drawer going full speed! I hit it head on — no “shin on”. I let out a cry of pain, falling over on the bed while reaching for my bruised left leg. Jeanne

woke with a start. Realizing what had happened to me and why, all she could offer was a nervous laugh! (There must be a sermon illustration about mercy somewhere in this.) I learned something important that night. You might be able to walk through an open door but you can’t walk through an open drawer!

Could I have avoided the accident? Yes. If I had turned on the light (even at the risk of incurring my beloved’s ire) I would have seen the open drawer and could have prevented the painful accident. All I needed was light.

As believers we need light — the light of God’s Word. We need it to illumine our pathway so that we can walk safely. The Word of God is, as the psalmist declares, a light for our feet and a lamp for our paths (Psalm 119:105). It provides needed guidance for us.

But sadly, we don’t always walk in the light as we should. And because of that fact we stumble on “open drawers” spiritually speaking — we sin. God’s Word can bring light to help us in that respect as well. In I John 1:5-9 we read, “This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship

with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

It’s no fun to have our sinfulness exposed, but that is only the first step in the process. We can then confess our sin to the Lord and be renewed in His gracious cleansing from all unrighteousness.

What tremendous promises God’s Word gives us! His Word gives light to illumine our paths and helps keep us from stumbling on those “open drawers” in our paths. And His Word enlightens us to know that when we do sin, we can be forgiven and renewed through Jesus’ finished work in our place.

Don’t walk in the darkness. Keep the light on and avoid those “open drawers”.

— Pastor Gary Jorgenson
Faith Lutheran
Durant, Okla.