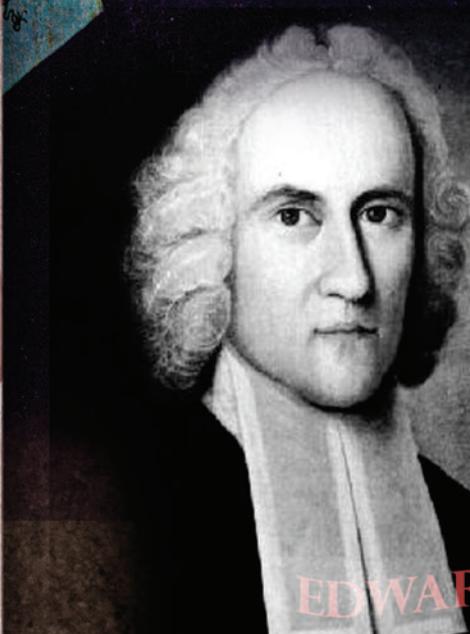


THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

NOVEMBER 2003

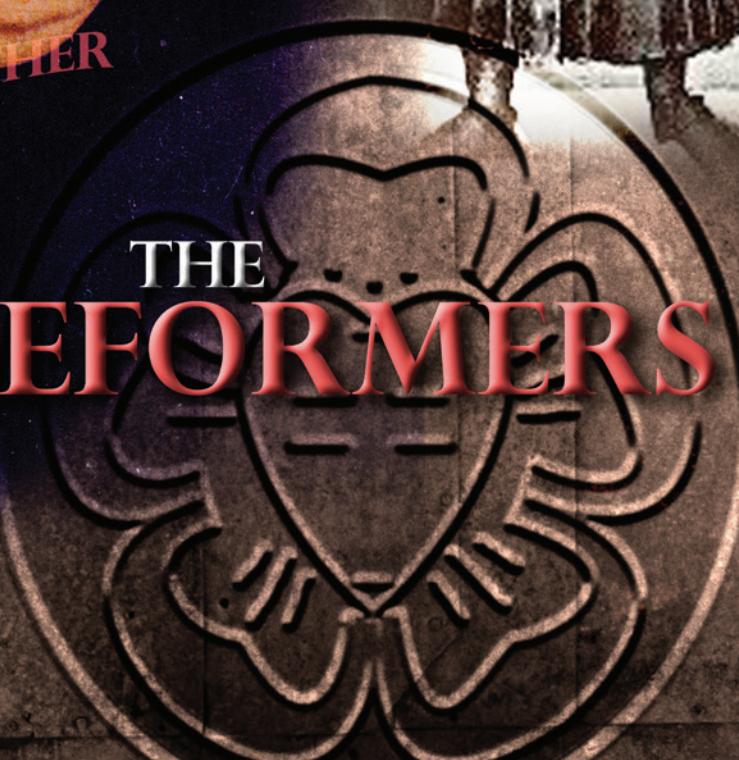


MELANCTHON



THE
REFORMERS

LUTHER



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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Encouraging Word

The Potter's clay

Jeremiah 29:11

I was 50 something, and my life was about to change forever. I didn't realize it at the time, but I soon learned that the journey I was on was part of the Master Potter's greater plan for my life.

In mid-November 1995, I was having a major flare-up of fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome, but I kept pushing to get ready for the holidays. My life had been a series of health problems. I would get better, I thought. By January 1996, my illness was worse. I came home from work and went to bed. I could hardly lift my head.

The diagnosis came slowly. It was finally determined that I had eosinophilic pneumonitis in both lungs — PIE Syndrome, a rare and serious autoimmune disorder. My doctor stood by my hospital bedside and told me I had a 50-50 chance to live if my body did not respond to prednisone therapy. His words resonated in my ears. As I spent the day in prayer, it was the first of many times to come that I felt the gentle touch of angel's wings.

I knew no one else with this autoimmune disorder. Where would my support system come from? Community wings of prayer surrounded me as I fought to hold on to life. The medical staff urgently instructed and encouraged me to "Keep breathing — just keep breathing!"

I wasn't afraid of dying, but I was certain that I had too much liv-

ing to do yet and that God still had plans for me here on earth. I cried out to Him, "You are the potter, I am the clay; mold me and make me, this is what I pray."

Knowing that God uses us not only in our abilities, but in our disabilities as well, I set my mind to recover and live. I would shoot for the 50 percent chance of survival. God gave the doctors wisdom, and He gave me strength to fight for my life.

Adjust, modify, and simplify were now part of my vocabulary. My business suits and uniforms were replaced with pajamas and robes. Naps became a necessary part of each day. Pain, pills, and breathing difficulties became my traveling companions. It was time to accept that I had a different lifestyle now. I would have to rebuild my body and my spirit in the process.

With this disability, my life still has purpose. I am thankful for the gifts God has given me. I can still be a witness and strength for other people, and God inspired me to pursue my dream of being a writer. I was fitting into His plan.

I am thankful for friends and family who encourage me, laugh with me, share a tear with me, pray with and for me, and love me unconditionally.

I am thankful for the kind of days that are better than the bad days. When I wake up in the morning, I say, "It's going to be a great day!" And someday if I don't wake up in the morning, I'll know it's an even greater day!

Oh Lord, in this season of Thanksgiving, I say, "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" Amen.



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

SOUND BITES

For through Christ we come to the Father; and having received the forgiveness of sins, we become sure that we have a gracious God who cares about us, we call upon him, give thanks to him, fear and love him.

— *Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV*

You have reason to open your mouth in God's praises, both here and to all eternity, for his rich and sovereign mercy to you.

— *Jonathan Edwards*

The conscience cannot come to rest and peace through works, but only through faith, that is, when it is assured and knows that for Christ's sake it has a gracious God

— *Augsburg Confession, Article XX*

And so we shall commend our cause to Christ, who will one day judge these controversies. We beseech him to regard his afflicted and scattered churches and to restore them to a godly and abiding harmony.

— *Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Preface*

Sola Scriptura

By Christie
Ballmann

A personal reformation



W

e've all heard about fasting from food, caffeine, and TV. What about a reading fast? Earlier this year, the Holy Spirit prompted me to take a brief fast from all my "outside" reading and focus on Scripture alone.

Because of the volume of Christian books, magazines, newsletters, and devotionals that come our way we sometimes read *so much* that the one good and essential book is relegated to second place. Truthfully, it is temptingly easier to let man tell us about God rather than let God speak for Himself through personal study of His Word. Now and then, we need to evaluate our reading priorities.

The 16th century Church demonstrated the consequences of letting man's teaching and writing overshadow Scripture. Pope and priest led the populace to believe that they couldn't understand the Bible themselves; it had to be *interpreted* for them. Without the pure Word in the hearts of the people, faith was stifled and heresy abounded.

Martin Luther pierced this smothering condition with his battle cry, *Sola Scriptura*. It is "Scripture alone," Luther said, that reveals our source of salvation and freedom; man can never interpret God's Word better than the Holy Spirit can in a believer's heart. When the Bible regained its rightful place, a revival in the church began.

There was an immense revival in my own heart as my reading fast progressed. My hunger for Scripture was renewed and I was reminded how completely superior Scripture is as a source of humility, cleansing, spiritual growth, empowerment and Godly perspective.

Humility

Scripture is a mirror that reflects the desperate condition of our hearts. It pierces our pride and enables us to walk humbly before God. Pride cannot reside in a Scripture-saturated heart. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit..."

Cleansing

The most powerful washing machine for our soul and mind is the living Word of God. As we gulp Scripture into our thirsty, sinful soul, it washes over our hearts and imparts *life* to us. That's something no other book can do! Ephesians 5:26 proclaims, "That he might sanctify and cleanse it (the Church) with the washing of water by the Word." God's Word *alone* has the ability to clear the guilty conscience and bind the broken.

Spiritual depth

Intimacy with Jesus Christ results from personal intake in *quality* and *quantity* of the living Word of God. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Christian devotionals, novels, and self-help books can assist in giving us a hunger for God, but they cannot fill that hunger. All too often my tendency is to busy myself reading about God and serving Him, minimizing time spent on my first priority: to be still before Him and His Word, and know that He is God. I end up with lots of knowledge — "having a form of godliness" — but little depth and spiritual power.

Empowerment

No author has a corner on the market of God's plan for a blessed life. Psalm 25:14 tells us that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." What an awesome thought! The fullness of the Deity is available to believers through Jesus Christ, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. There are no newfangled principles (or prayers) for procuring God's blessing or finding emotional healing. His truth has been there from the beginning, and it has never changed. If you don't get around to reading the latest bestseller, don't despair that you've somehow missed out. Turn to Scripture and study the topic yourself.

Perspective

Faithfully prioritizing the Word of God sharpens our spiritual discernment to quickly root out false doctrine as it surfaces. "Prove *all* things; hold fast that which is good" (I Thessalonians 5:21). As we feed on Scripture it is apparent in our "outside" reading when a passage has been taken out of context or misapplied.

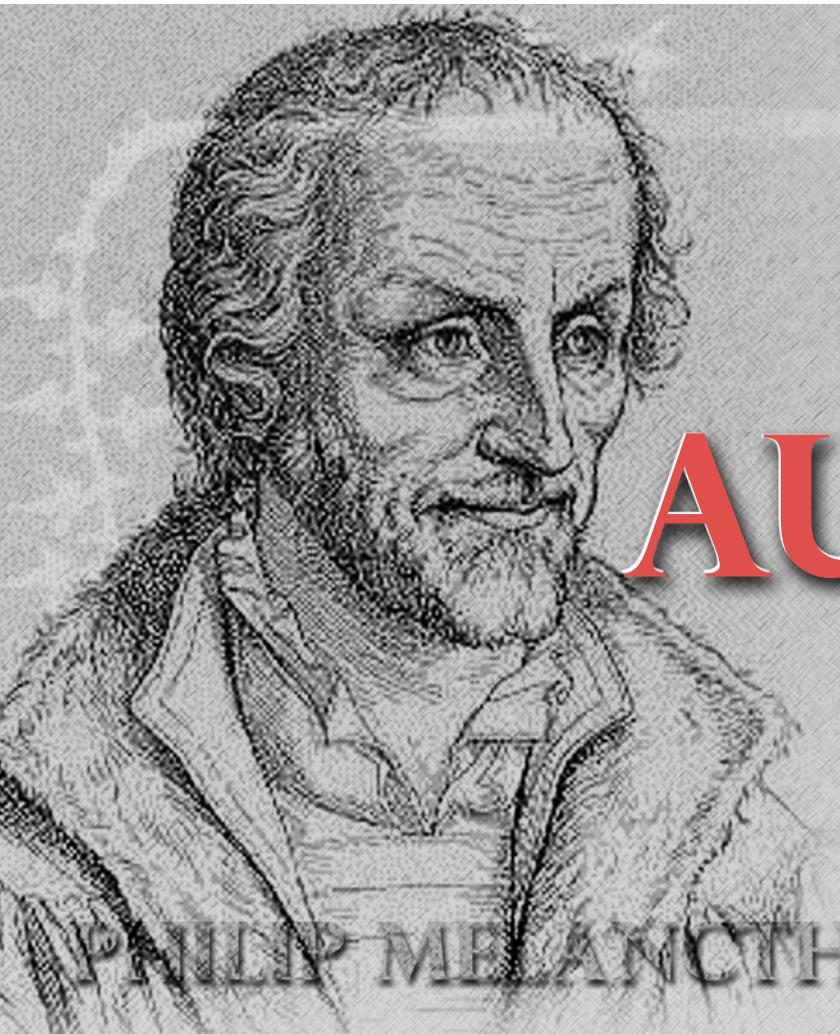
An imbalanced reading diet, on the other hand, subtly opens us up to tragic and sometimes damnable heresy. Evangelicals should shudder that books like "If Grace Is True: Why God Will Save Every Person" actually make it to "Publisher's Weekly" religious bestseller list. A person lacking a firm grasp on law and gospel is easily tossed to and fro by persuasive winds of doctrine.

Sola Scriptura doesn't mean we read nothing but the Bible, but it does mean that no matter how devoted and respected an author is, we remember the vast gulf between man's writing and the inspired Word of God. We show our allegiance to Scripture, not just in word, but in action, by delighting in spending all the time we can in its sacred, life-giving pages. Why not try a reading fast yourself and see if it doesn't spark a revival in your heart?

"O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97).

*Ballmann is a member of Word of Truth
Free Lutheran, Glen Rose, Texas.*





THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION:

THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

PHILIP MELANCHTHON

By Pastor
Steve Mundfrom

Every Lutheran figures that the name Augsburg must be significant since it has lent its name to a college and seminary, an old publishing house, and an important historical document: the Augsburg Confession. But what happened in Augsburg, and why does it matter?

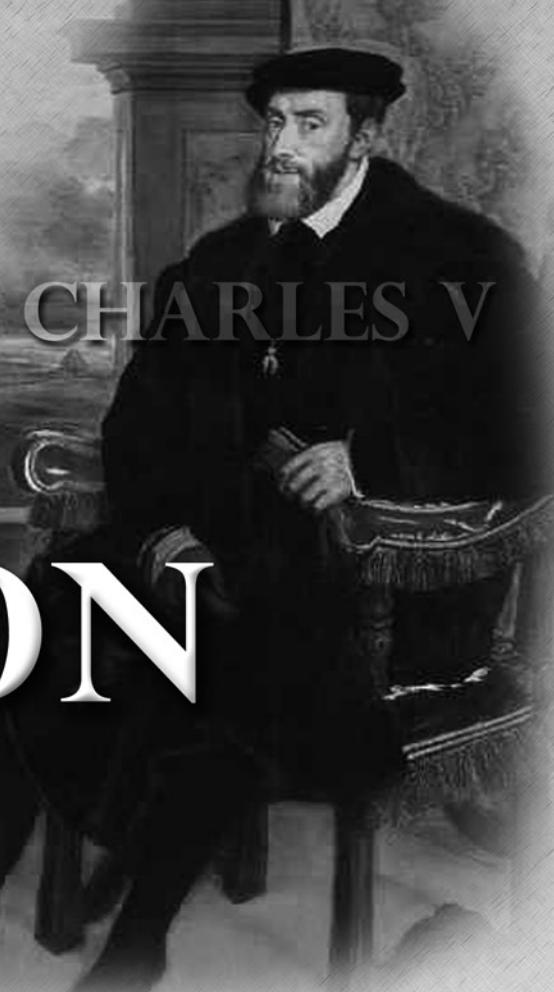
The year was 1530 and the movement, which later became known as the Lutheran Reformation, was picking up momentum. In the 13 years since Martin Luther had gained a reputation for his criticisms of the Roman Catholic Church, the teachings of Luther had become widely accepted in central Germany. Luther had not expected to become the founder of a new church or even start any trouble in the Roman Catholic Church. However, he was dismayed to discover how deeply entrenched both false doctrine and corruption were. Once he began his criticisms, he would not back down.

It was a time when church matters were under the strict control of the state, and no teaching or practice was allowed in the Church without the consent of the civil ruler. Many of the mid-level civil authorities had already allowed the "Lutheran" teaching in their domains, some had even embraced it personally. Because religious matters were tied so closely to civil affairs, the new Lutheran teaching had caused political unrest along with considerable

controversy in the churches. As the new teaching spread it became a matter of concern for the Holy Roman Emperor himself, Charles V.

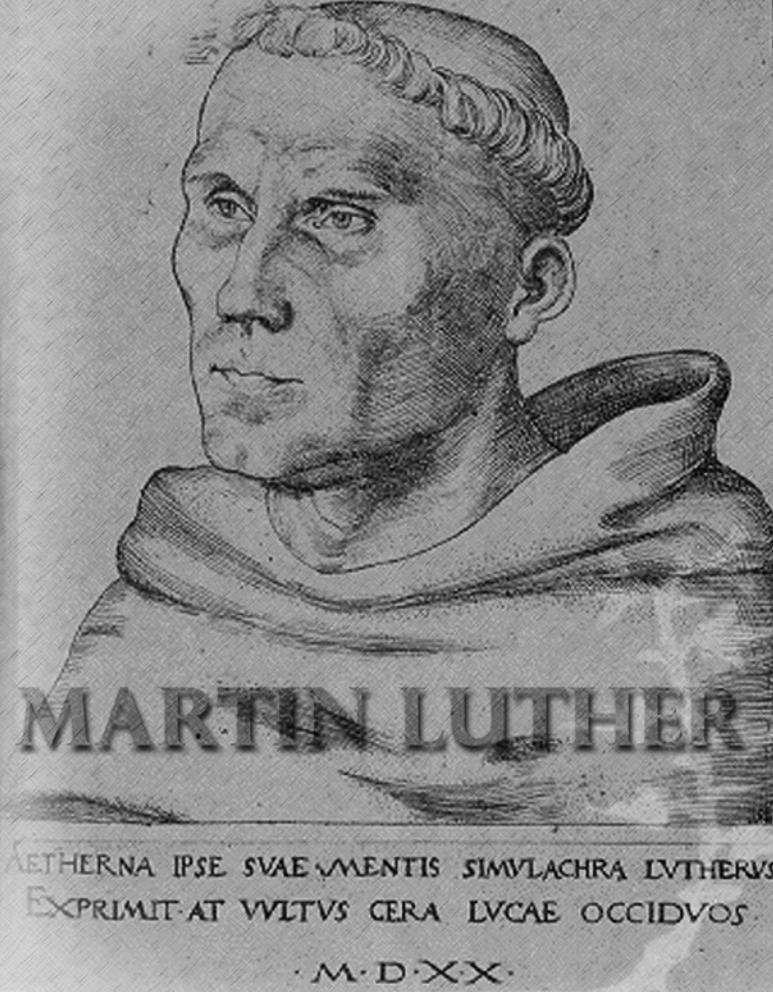
Charles V, ruler of the Roman Empire, was a devout Catholic of Spanish ancestry (he was the grandson of Ferdinand and Isabelle). He now asked to have Luther's teaching presented to him so he could decide whether these new ideas should be accepted or banned. Charles had previously ruled against the new teaching, but seeking peace in his dominions, he wanted to address the issue again. Representatives of the new teaching were assigned the task of setting down in clear and precise terms what exactly Lutheranism stood for. The defenders of Rome and opponents of the new evangelical teaching would also make a statement. Both sides were to present their confessions to the German Diet — or congress — when it met in the southern German city of Augsburg in the summer of 1530.

The leading Lutherans never viewed themselves as revolutionaries. They had no intention of creating a new church with a whole new teaching. In their minds they were calling the church back to its foundations, back to the Biblical truth from which it had strayed. With this firm conviction, they proceeded to formulate their confession with an emphasis on the common ground between themselves and the orthodox church teaching of the centuries. The Con-



CHARLES V

G SION



fession contained two parts: the first stated the common ground between the Lutherans and historic Christianity while the second part explained how the differences with Roman teaching and practice had been restored to a Biblical pattern.

Philip Melanthon was the chief author of the Augsburg Confession. He was a fellow professor with Luther at the University of Wittenburg and his close associate of many years. Luther did not personally attend the proceedings in Augsburg (Charles V had already declared him an outlaw in 1521); instead he made his contributions by correspondence. Known for being less strident than Luther, Melanthon wrote the confession carefully avoiding unnecessary contention and stressing the points of agreement.

The presentation was made to the Emperor on June 25, 1530. Despite the conciliatory tone of the Confession, the Emperor rejected it. Charles seemed more interested in what he felt was politically expedient than a concern for matters of theology or Biblical truth. In spite of the Emperor's denunciation, the Lutheran teaching now had a clear focal point. This new Confession had wide appeal because it represented the convictions of a larger circle of reformation thinkers and had been simply worded for the sake of the theologically untrained and Spanish-speaking Emperor. The simple truths clearly outlined in the Augsburg Confession won the hearts

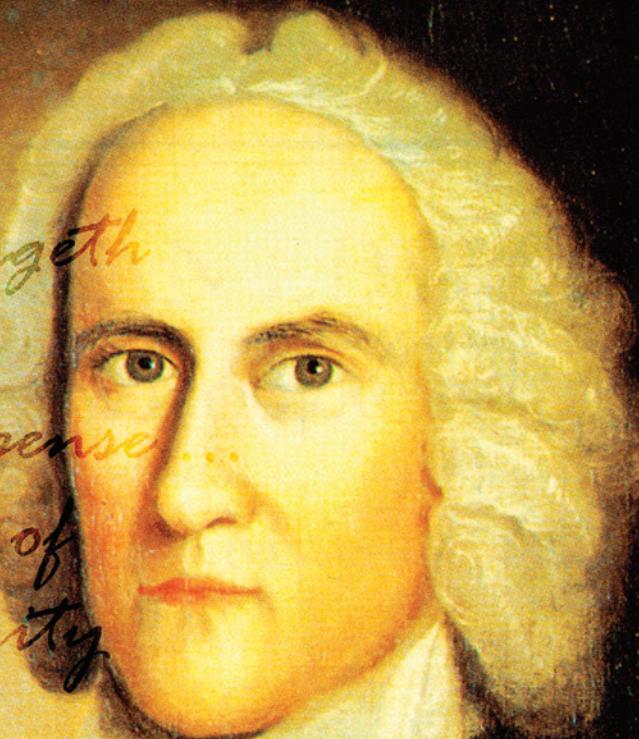
and minds of Christians throughout the northern half of Europe.

Perhaps the most important doctrine addressed by the Augsburg Confession is justification by faith. Article IV states so clearly: "It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for His sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5."

As we stand today, almost 500 years after the fact, we can be grateful for the clear path that Reformation teaching has left us because of the reformers' own struggles with false teaching and spiritual confusion. The world continues to be in constant need of clear, Biblical teaching like the Augsburg Confession provides. We should learn and confess the faith of the Reformation, or we may end up fighting the same battles again.



*Mundfrom is pastor of Calvary Free Lutheran,
Arlington, S.D.*



To me belongeth
vengeance
and recompense...
for the day of
their calamity
is at hand

BY PASTOR
STEVE CARLSON

JONATHAN EDWARDS

Champion of living faith

Ibelieve “Sinners in the hands of an angry God” is the most memorable sermon ever preached in America. Never on this continent has a sermon so stirred people and had such lasting results.

Jonathan Edwards preached the sermon on July 8, 1741, during the height of the Great Awakening in colonial America. The text was Deuteronomy 32:35: “To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at

hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste” (KJV). In descriptive language, Edwards painted the picture of God’s certain judgment and the torments of hell.

At the time, people broke out in tears sobbing, clinging to the church pews as if they were about to plunge into hell beneath them. The outburst was so loud, that Edwards stopped preaching and begged them to be quiet so that he could finish the message.

In his day, some people condemned Edwards

for preaching a message that would make people uncomfortable and evoke such an emotional response. Interestingly enough, Edwards was known as a very calm, thoughtful, unemotional, logical, rational, intellectual man. Of the more than 1,000 of his sermons still in existence today, very few could be placed in the category of his most famous one. He was a preacher of God's great love and grace. Yet, he was keenly aware that for God's grace, forgiveness of sins and salvation to be received, people first had to come to grips with their sin and their need for a Savior.

Edwards was a Lutheran-law-and-gospel preacher, though he was a Calvinist (not a staunch one) and did not use Lutheran terminology. He was God's man for his day. The Protestant Reformation theme of justification by grace through faith was dear to him and he preached thoroughly on it. But he became increasingly concerned that for grace to be desired, sin had to first be exposed and truly repented of in the heart.

Born Oct. 5, 1703, in East Windsor, Conn., he was the son of a pastor and to his mother's family belonged a rich Puritan heritage of spiritual giants, including the famed Rev. Solomon Stoddard who served the Congregational Church of Northampton, Mass., for 60 years. A brilliant student, Edwards entered Yale at age 13. He completed his studies and was poised for the ministry. In a few years he succeeded his grandfather as pastor of the prestigious church in Northampton.

Unfortunately, the spiritual fervor and life of the New England Puritans had been sinking to an all-time low. There had been many religious compromises, like the "halfway covenant" (those who had no conversion testimony could be church members), and the offering of Holy Communion to the unsaved so that they would not be offended, etc. The result was a slumbering church that had head knowledge about God and the Bible, but no heart conversion. There was a "form of godliness," but no spiritual power. Not only was the church dying, but also rationalism, deism and the beginning strains of Unitarianism were flourishing.

Edwards was gripped with the absolute necessity for people to come under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and to face the prospect of judgment at the hands of a holy and just Judge who in His righteousness looked upon all sin with terrifying wrath. He was convinced from Scripture that due to an inherited sinful nature, the unsaved are blind to their sin and live in alienation toward God, all the while believing the delusion of self-sufficiency. For Edwards, the detailed preaching of sin, judgment and hell were never sensationalized (he cautioned those in the Great Awakening to guard against excessive emotion), but rather he preached so that people would be gripped in their heart with the seriousness

of their spiritual condition and the certainty of an eternity in heaven or in hell.

The results of the Great Awakening were seen in the tens of thousands of people who were "awakened to Christ." Rationalism and liberalism were also dealt a severe blow. New schools were started that were solid on the Word of God and passionate about pointing seminary students toward a personal Savior. It was an awakening that literally rescued our nation when it looked like the spiritual battle was lost and the future of the church and nation was in serious question.

Iain Murray quotes D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his book, "Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography," when he reminds us of Edwards' importance for today, "No man is more relevant to the present condition of Christianity than Jonathan Edwards ... He was a mighty theologian and a great evangelist at the same time. ... He was pre-eminently the theologian of revival. If you want to know anything about true revival, Edwards is the man to consult."

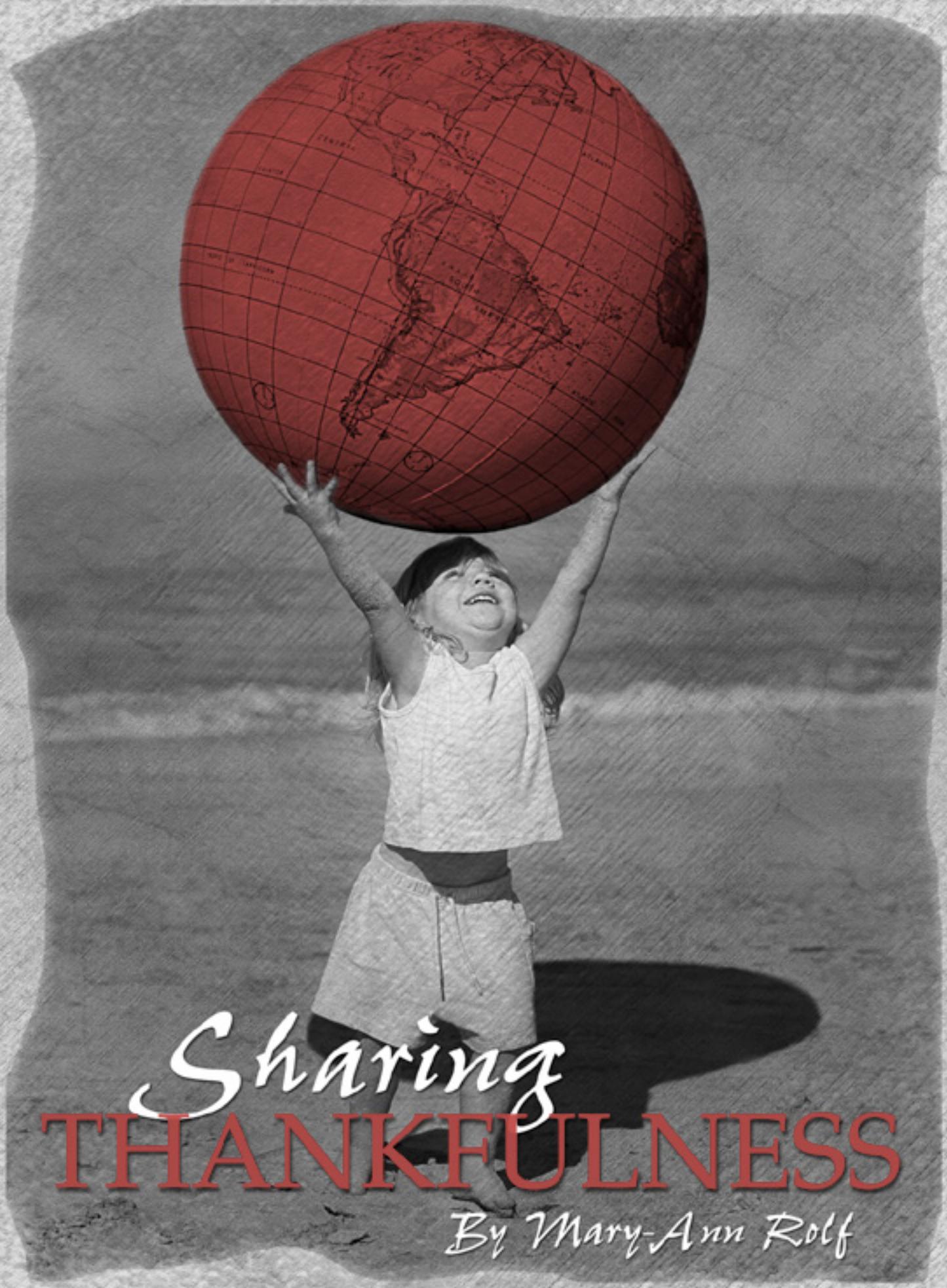
Today we find ourselves in a similar situation to colonial America. Again the question has become not "How can I be saved?" rather, "Why do I need to be saved?" An inoculating acquaintance with religion, a growing dependence on the goodness of human nature, and an incessant mantra of toleration of sin seem to have deluded the minds and deadened the hearts of many to the wickedness of sin, the certainty of judgment, the absolute holiness and justice of God, and the imminence of our eternity.

Perhaps it is timely and again providential that the sermons and writings of America's greatest theologian are attracting renewed interest today. As we mark the 300th anniversary of his birth this month, let us listen again to his preaching of sin and grace, hear his plea for the conversion of head and heart, and reflect on the spiritual influence of his ministry upon our nation these past centuries.

THREE HUNDRED YEARS OF SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE

Carlson is Pastor of the Dalton, Minn., parishes of Zion-Sarpsburg, Tordenskjold and Kvam Free Lutheran.





Sharing
THANKFULNESS

By Mary-Ann Rolf

T

he parents sitting across from me looked upset. The members of the team had each given an assessment report on their daughter's abilities in speech/language, fine motor and gross motor skills. Each therapist reported that the 3-year-old girl functioned at a

12-month level, indicating a significant developmental delay when compared to her peers.

Now it was my turn to give a report on her cognitive ability, where I found similar results. I prayed silently that God would help me to convey sensitivity as I gave my report. I wondered how I could encourage these parents, who were obviously struggling to understand their child's disability. As I went through my report, I described areas of need as well as strengths I observed. The parents looked more hopeful as areas of strength were reported.

Our team let the parents know that our program could help their child. We shared proposed goals designed for the child's areas of need. The parents left the meeting reassured that the team would do all they could to help. God had answered prayer and given us an opportunity to encourage others!

I work as an early childhood special education teacher for the public school system. Many of the staff and parents I work with have struggles in their lives. Some of the staff members struggle with burn-out. Most parents struggle with acceptance of their child's disability and coping with day-to-day life. I often ask myself how I can help and am continually looking for adaptations to help meet the children's individual needs.

The children in my classroom struggle in areas that are easily dealt with by typical children. I find it overwhelming at times. Perhaps many of you face similar types of challenges in your workplace. Perhaps you are feeling rather discouraged personally and the idea of spreading thankfulness to others seems but a remote possibility. In order for God to use you and me to spread thankfulness, we must pray for a thankful spirit.

These verses in II Corinthians 9:6-8 help me: "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed."

Bountiful harvest

Verse six proclaims the *bountiful harvest principle*. In order to reap bountifully, we must also sow bountifully. Jesus encourages us to sow bountifully in the many opportunities He gives us and to pray, depending on Him to change lives. Sowing can mean having a cheerful spir-

it, sharing words of encouragement and Bible verses, and doing kind deeds.

Cheerful giving

The concept of sharing thanksgiving goes beyond the receiver. Verse seven tells us about the *blessings of cheerful giving*. As we make time for others, God gives us opportunities to cheerfully share His love.

Abounding grace

Then God gives us the means to spread thankfulness. Verse eight explains *God's abounding grace for every good deed*. All that we need for sowing and reaping thanksgiving is found in Christ and His Word.

I have observed special people who are great examples of thankfulness. They have thankful hearts and spread thankfulness to others with words, deeds, and positive attitudes. Often they have experienced great trials in their lives, where they've learned to trust in Jesus. God's Word sustains them, giving them courage and comfort. They thank God for allowing them to experience trials, because it caused them to depend on Him. Their experiences in trials enable them to help others in similar trials.

Thankful people often had few material possessions during their early years. One example of this is my mother. She immigrated to America at 16 with all her belongings in a small trunk and throughout her life has been content with few things. As a young mother she experienced health problems that made parenting especially challenging. At 50 she suffered the tragic loss of a 16-year-old son. Four years later she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. That same year another son was diagnosed with the disease as well. She also developed diabetes and glaucoma. In spite of trials, she continually places her trust in God. Daily reading of God's Word and prayer has kept her faith strong. She often shares what she is thankful for, but rarely complains about her circumstances.

As you examine your life, ask yourself if you are thankful. Do you spread thankfulness to others? I challenge you to pray about this area. Remember people in your life who have positively influenced you, and seek to follow their examples. Ask God to give you opportunities to spread thankfulness to others. Depend on His Word and prayer to help you.



Rolf is a member of Grace Free and Zion Free Lutheran churches, Valley City, N.D.



*Frosty air, cold wind,
gray sky, bare trees
deliver ... Thanksgiving
Day and the beginning
of the winter season ...*

THANK GOD

By Linda Lein

The frosty air, cold wind, gray sky and bare trees in the Midwestern part of the United States deliver Thanksgiving Day and the beginning of the winter season. Sometimes even a blanket of soft, white snow covers the ground. Travelers find their way to a loved one's home. The guests — grandpas and grandmas, sons and daughters, grandchildren, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, cousins, friends, and neighbors — warmly greet one another in spite of the temperature outside.

Amid the laughter and fellowship, aromas of a roasting turkey, homemade breads, and pumpkin pie permeate the house. The table is bountifully set with an array of other traditional foods: mashed potatoes and gravy, dressing, cranberry sauce, and pickles. With everyone gathered around the big dining room table, Thanksgiving grace is said. And the guests fill their stomachs so full that the buckles on their belts need adjustment.

What a contrast to the first Thanksgiving the Pilgrims and Native Americans of Plymouth, Mass., celebrated. On the Mayflower, the Pilgrims traveled two long months over 3,000 treacherous miles of water from England to the new land. Why? To find religious freedom. However, their first year at Plymouth was one of severe hunger, cold, fear, sickness and death.

Yet, when spring came, the small group of Pilgrims who survived the harsh winter did not return to England because they valued their newfound freedom to live and

worship God. They developed a peaceful relationship with the Native Americans and learned new survival techniques.

With a steadfast faith the Pilgrims sowed seeds, particularly Indian corn. The summer days went quickly with more than an adequate amount of rain and sunshine. The crops grew.

In the fall when red, yellow, and orange foliage dressed the countryside, the Pilgrims harvested their crops. Governor William Bradford, the leader of the Pilgrims, stated that because of God's goodness, they should have a special day of thanks. After all, God had remembered them in their winter of hardship and, now, in their fall of provision. Therefore, they remembered God. They feasted for several days with their new Native American friends, who also contributed wild game to the feast.

May we remember God also this Thanksgiving season. Thank Him for meeting our needs — in youth and old age, in hunger and fullness, in sickness and health, in prosperity and poverty. And, most importantly, thank Him for loving us first by sending Jesus to die for us so that we can love Him in return.



Lein, a member of Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn., writes a column titled, "A Day in the Life of a Farm Wife," for AGRI-GUIDE, a farm newspaper serving five Midwest states.

On Aug. 1-3, members of Zion Lutheran Church, Tioga, N.D., celebrated their centennial year with a weekend celebration. The theme for the weekend was taken from Psalm 100:5, "For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and his faithfulness endures to all generations."

Weekend events included a ladies tea, a homesteading skit, vintage dress and special services. Pastor Steve Odegaard, a former confirmand, brought the Saturday evening message. The Sunday service began with a hymn sing led by Pastor Rodger Olson, who grew up in Tioga. Pastor Robert Lee, AFLC president, brought the message. Olson led an informal celebration on Sunday afternoon. Pastor Gary Jorgenson, who also grew up in Tioga, brought the Sunday evening message.

The congregation began with a house meeting in August 1903. At the time, the congregation met in a local schoolhouse, area homes and a local store. Zion was formally organized in 1906. Along with another Lutheran congregation in Tioga, the members of Zion purchased the local schoolhouse. Pastor A. G. Logeland built the congregation's first parsonage. During his tenure, the name of the church was changed from *Zion Norsk Lutheriske Meninghed* to Zion Norwegian Lutheran Free Church. The congregation's articles of incorporation were signed in 1910 and a Young People's Society was established.

Work then started on a new church building, which was completely finished, including pews and altar furnishings, in 1917. The congregation led a parochial teaching program in both English and Norwegian. A Men's Society was organized in the early 1930s. The Young People's Society was renamed Zion Luther League in the late 1930s. In the 1940s, the church underwent a \$15,000 remodeling project, and was reded-

icated in 1951. A new parsonage, designed by Pastor John Strand, was built in 1953, the same year the congregation celebrated its 50th anniversary. The church grew to two worship services. A youth center, also designed by Strand, was completed and dedicated in 1957. In the late 1960s, Rodger Olson served as youth director in the summers.

In 1980, Zion voted to leave the four-point parish and operate on its own. A new parsonage was purchased in the mid-1980s. A three-year internship program began in 1986. Serving in this program were Jim Rasmussen, Tim Carlson and Steve Mundfrom, who all went on to be AFLC pastors.

Replacing this program was the creation of a youth parish worker position, filled by Paul Kneeland in 1990. Others have since filled this position.

Pastors serving Zion Lutheran include: O.C. Dahlager (1904-05), A.G. Lee (1905-1906), Hans Helseth (1906-1909), A. G. Logeland (1909-1915), Arthur G. Hansen (1916-1920), A.T. Moen (1920-1930), E.M. Hanson (1930-1935), E.A. Evanson (1936-1941), Harold Grindal (1942-1946), Carl Carlson (1946-1951). im pastors filled

Inter- Zion's pulpit for one year before Pastor John Strand accepted a call in 1952. Strand resigned in 1964 when he was asked to be the first president of the newly formed AFLC. H. Albert Larson (1965-1966). Robert Lee (1967-1972), Reuben Wee (1967-1970), Trygve Dahle (1972-1973), Forrest Swanson (1973-1978), Karl Stendal (1978-1979), Al Monson (1979-1984), Paul Nash (1984-1985), Orville Olson (1985-1986), Dale Mellgren (1986-1993), Mark Molstre (1993-1999). Currently serving Zion is Pastor Mark Olson, who accepted a call in 2000.



The measure of

By Pastor Robert Lee

It was a sentimental journey, decided on the spur of the movement, to see what remained of a closed church building where I had preached more than 30 years ago. We had to leave the highway in order to find the church, and it was farther than I remembered. The road was graveled instead of paved, which is common in the prairie states — and an improvement from plain dirt.

“Just a little farther,” I said to my wife, Gloria, who wondered if we had taken a wrong turn and wished that I would stop to ask directions. Soon a familiar farm appeared, and then we arrived in the churchyard. A light rain was falling as I ran for the door, which was secured with a simple deadbolt lock that opened easy by hand.

The congregation, organized in 1907, probably never reached a membership of 50 souls. Perhaps they had big dreams during the early years, but the finances were never available to construct a complete church building. So they met

for their entire history in a basement chapel. For all of its years, the little congregation was part of a multiple parish, and usually survived with afternoon services on alternate Sundays. During my years of ministry there, the number of hymns sung was limited to a short list of those that the pianist could play. The main feature of the annual meetings was the lunch served afterward, as the routine agenda was covered quickly and the same slate of officers re-elected year after year. My recollection is that the same man made most of the motions.

Several years ago the few remaining members decided to join an AFLC congregation in the nearby town, and now the little building stands empty. It was surprisingly clean and neat when I visited. The altar and piano are gone, but the pulpit and pews are still in place. A Concordia Hymnal rests on the pulpit, and two plaques on the wall recall a previous pastor’s service as a chaplain during World War II and a concert by

a congregation

one of the Association's Bible school choirs. The entrance area doubled as a kitchen, and there are still a few old dishes in the cupboard.

This was a congregation that didn't amount to much, most people might say. But I wonder ...

The Word of God was preached and the sacraments were administered. Families faithfully worshipped together — although the custom of men sitting on the opposite side of the church from the women and children continued decades after others abandoned it. Summer vacation Bible school was a major event. Boys and girls were driven many miles for confirmation instruction. Marriages were celebrated, too, although always in neighboring churches borrowed for the occasion — funerals, too. Former members nurtured through the ministry of the little congregation are now a blessing where they currently worship and serve. A congregation lived, and died, and the impact of its ministry lives on.

Kingdom success is not measured by numbers or facilities or activities, but by faithfulness. It is God who does the measuring. So we labor, and look to Him for the increase. He is faithful, and this is our strongest confidence of all. Let the words of the old gospel song encourage those who may be discouraged by their own measurements of the work in which they are involved:

*Does the place you've called to labor
Seem too small and little known?
It is great if God is in it,
And He'll not forget His own.
Little is much when God is in it ...*



Pastor Robert Lee is president of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations.

Development

Alive in CHRIST

Grow in God's Word this fall

We are in the middle of another fall season. The long, hot summer days are a distant memory. The leaves on the trees have changed color and died. The World Series has been decided and the frozen days of winter lie before us.

As we ponder the arrival of winter, do we find ourselves in the same cold and distant relationship with Christ? I am reminded of the words in Revelation 3:16-17 that say, "... You are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! Because you are lukewarm ... I am about to spit you out of my mouth." This was a strict admonishment for the church of Laodicea, where members were not being faithful to the call the Lord had given to them. Their hearts apparently were not focused on serving the Lord.



Jon Galland
Director

We can learn much from this biblical example. We need to be in the Word and taking part in prayer daily. We also need to be involved in a congregation that preaches the inerrant Word of God. This is our only means of spiritual survival in a world that has long forgotten Christ.

We also need to share and be witnesses for Christ daily. Oftentimes we feel that we are not effective in sharing Christ with others. We maybe think somebody else could do a better job. However, that is not the case. As long as we stay focused on Christ and share His love with others, the Lord will use our efforts to His glory.

We need to stand firm in the promises of God's Word. We must wait upon the Lord for His leadership and guidance in our lives. We can consider it a real joy to proclaim the Lord's faithfulness to others. We may be due for another arduous winter outside, but we can still enjoy a spring-like rebirth and growth in Christ!



Vision 2004

Dedication service, open house planned for Heritage Hall

A dedication for the new Heritage Hall student center has been set for Dec. 6. An open house with guided tours will be available from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., with a special dedication service scheduled for 3 p.m.

All are invited to participate in the event, which has been scheduled during AFLBS' Parents Day weekend. A Bible school Christmas concert will be presented at 7 p.m.

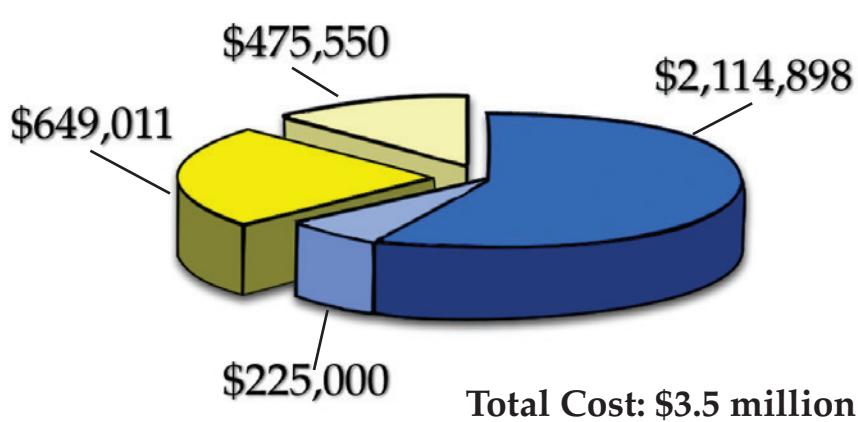


A Kinghorn Construction worker lifts a glass window into place just to the right of the front entrance to Heritage Hall. The windows in the entire building were in place by the end of September.



Eric Westlake places tiles in the kitchen area in mid-October. By then, bathrooms upstairs and downstairs were tiled.

A look at Heritage Hall construction costs



- Construction paid to date with cash gifts
- Construction paid to date with loan dollars
- Construction left to be paid, cash needed
- Construction left to be paid with commitments and pledges

Missions Meeting every need

Ministry takes place in many ways, and God has given His people special gifts. There are so many people in our church body at large who have an interest in short-term missions and who have a desire to use their talents and time for the benefit of those in need. Many want to go, but are looking for a place to serve.

Through a resource program, the AFLC's FLAPS program (Free Lutheran Association of Pilate Supporters) offers a way to match willing workers with those in need.

In the last several years, three such teams have traveled on work/mission trips, including church construction projects in Durant, Okla., and Tomball, Texas. A team of volunteers also spent two and one-half weeks in Brazil last year working on our mission fields.

This winter, several more trips are planned. Crown of Life Lutheran in Tomball, Texas, (near Houston) needs help in finishing the inside of the church that was built by a team of volunteers last spring. In January 2004, at least two teams will go to Mesa, Ariz., at different times to help Calvary Free Lutheran renovate a building they purchased that will become their new worship facility.

Internationally, at least one short-term mission trip early next year to Brazil is being planned. A multipurpose activity building is under construction at the ARCA where missionaries Paul and Becky Abel serve. The walls and roof are complete, but the inside work needs to be done. There may be a need to construct a new church building in the Brazilian cities of Curitiba or Londrina as well.

One of our AFLC mission affiliates, Partners In Mission Outreach, busses volunteers to our mission fields in Mexico for short-term work as well. They have a trip planned for Jan. 2-16, 2004.

We know that not everyone is able to go on a mission trip. However, the Lord can use resources in other ways. Women from Faith Lutheran in Ottawa, Ill., make infant clothing that they donate to those in need. They are working closely with the Mesa congregation to distribute these items to needy families in the neighborhood where their future church building is located.

The Lord can also use the elderly, shut-ins, those living in nursing homes, etc., as prayer warriors. We need this powerful and effective resource.

Those who give of themselves to help others in the name of Christ feel so richly blessed through the experience. All of God's people have God-given gifts that can be used to help with the Lord's work. God



Last spring, a group of AFLC missions volunteers traveled to Tomball, Texas, to help a congregation build a new church building.

didn't intend for us to keep our talents, skills, and resources to ourselves. "... And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:16).

If you have an interest in giving of yourself in this way, please contact the mission office and ask to be added to our resource pool of persons who are interested in short-term mission trips. You will be notified of upcoming trips and related information. Call (763) 545-5631 for more information.

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4).

— **Lavon Bohling**
Director of Resource Management
AFLC Missions

Piano fund to honor leader Don Rodvold

A special fund has been established in honor of Donald Rodvold, longtime music director at AFLBS, which will be used to purchase a new piano for the chapel. Gifts in honor of Rodvold may be sent to AFLBS, 3120 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441, earmarked for "AFLBS chapel piano."

Hubert DeBoer 1919-2003

Pastor Hubert DeBoer died Sept. 8 at the age of 84. Born Sept. 7, 1919, he was the son of John and Lydia Brueggeman DeBoer. He moved with his father and step-mother, Anna, to Washington. He graduated from high school in Anacortes, Wash. He served in the U.S. Coast Guard for six years, retiring as a petty officer first class. He then attended Lutheran Bible Institute, Minneapolis, where he met Emerald Opland. They married in 1947. He graduated from Augsburg College in 1951 and Luther Seminary in 1955. While at seminary, he took a year off so they could afford to adopt children. He was ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1955. He served at Elk Mound, Wis., and Clearbrook, Minn. He then served the AFLC congregations at Austin, Fosston, Willmar, and Granite Falls, Minn., and Colfax, Wis. He also served as interim pastor at numerous congregations and as secretary of the AFLC.

Surviving are his wife, three daughters, Ann (Mike) Sherf, Rice Lake, Wis., Lori (Ron) Lee, River Falls, Wis., and Sandy (Russ) Eblen, Waconia, Minn.; one sister, Francis Shull; five grandchildren, and one great-granddaughter.

The service was at Living Word Lutheran, Eagan, Minn., with Pastor Tim Skramstad officiating. Burial was in Fort Snelling National Cemetery, St. Paul, Minn.

ABC Bible verses

Do you know your ABC Bible verses? Submitted by Adeline Haugen, Elim Lutheran, Lake Stevens, Wash., this list can be used for Sunday school classes or at home. "It is a good way to memorize Scripture," said Haugen.

A	"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).	H	"Heaven and earth shall pass away but the Word of God will last forever" (Mark 13:31).
B	"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).	I	"I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the father but through me" (John 14:6).
C	"Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1).	J	"Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).
D	"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8).	K	"Keep yourselves pure" (Psalm 24: 4).
E	"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from God" (James 1:17).	L	"Love not the world nor the things in the world. If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you" (I John 2:15).
F	"For the son of man came to seek and to save those who are lost" (Luke 19:10).	M	"Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Deuteronomy 8:3).
G	"God so loved the world that He gave His one begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).		<i>See the December issue for the remaining verses.</i>

Pastor Orville Hiepler, Fallbrook, Calif., is serving as interim pastor for the North Dakota congregations of Ny Stavanger Lutheran Church, Buxton, and Valley Free Lutheran Church, Portland. He has also preached at a congregation in Heber, Ariz., since concluding his ministry in Oceanside, Calif.

Pastor John Skeie, New Hope, Minn., is the new part-time chaplain for the Ambassador-Good Samari-

tan Home, located on Medicine Lake Road, which serves the western suburbs of the Twin Cities.

Michelle Satren began working as a full-time youth director at Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, starting Oct. 1. Satren had been a part-time youth worker at Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn., for the past two years, and as a volunteer before that.

A necessary tool for religious training

Parish Education publishes new study guide

Have you been looking for something to grab the attention of your Sunday school class or confirmation students? Are you struggling to find a new approach to teaching the basis of our Christian faith and make it interesting? Parish Education has the answer in a recently published 32-page illustrated guide. Parish Ed has many helpful resources, but they have put together some especially useful teaching tools in four beautiful posters that illustrate "Luther's Small Catechism" and a new study guide that explains the illustrations.

For example, the poster of **The Ten Commandments** begins with two stone tablets. There is what I call a "chain of humanity" twisting from behind the tablets and flowing to the bottom of the poster. The interesting thing about the chain of humanity is that it changes color as it winds downward.

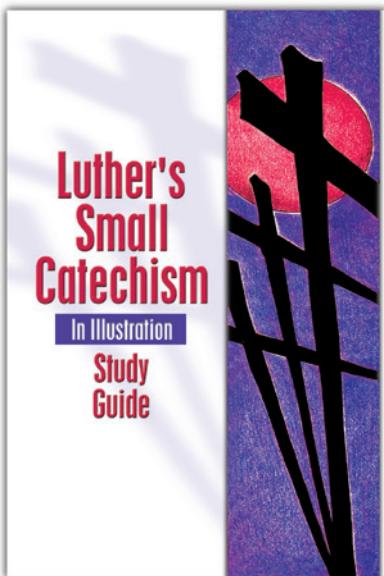
The color black indicates that we are indeed sinful, unclean, and guilty before God and in need of salvation.

As the chain winds around the cross, it turns red. The study guide explains that this red color represents man encountering the cross and the blood of Jesus. "If

we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

Then the chain becomes white, symbolizing man who is now clean and righteous before a Holy God. Because of the cross, God looks at us in Christ as though we had never sinned. We are "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24).

The yellow light streaming downward from the cross represents new life which begins at the



The guide (\$4) may be used independently or as a supplement to explain the illustrated posters (\$12.50 each or \$35/set of four).

The Ten Commandments

I am the LORD thy God.

I
Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

II
Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.

III
Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

IV
Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

V
Thou shalt not kill.

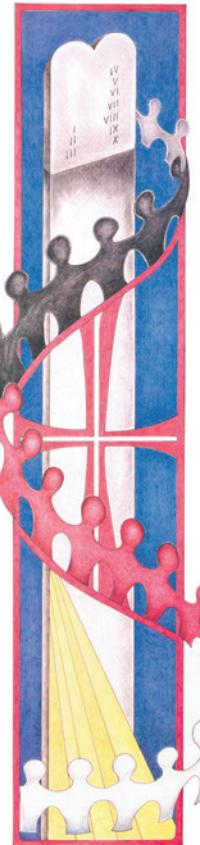
VI
Thou shalt not commit adultery.

VII
Thou shalt not steal.

VIII
Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

IX
Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house.

X
Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maid servant, nor his cattle, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.



cross, growing brighter until its fullness in heaven. The study guide tells us that the yellow light signifies the glory of God (Romans 3:23) and the presence of Jesus in the life of the believer (I John 1:7).

I can honestly say I have not found a teaching tool that quite grabs the attention of the students as do the four posters of the Ten Commandments, Apostle's Creed, Lord's Prayer, and Means of Grace. The illustrations are well thought out and carefully designed to be a visual reminder of essential Bible truths. And the study guide makes teaching from the posters very simple and interesting.

I have used these posters in my confirmation classes for about four years, and the students always sit up and take notice when I explain what each poster represents. The students also explain the posters to their parents, and the parents think the posters are very colorful and interesting and a wonderful teaching tool. The posters, when laminated or framed, become a very impressive part of the classroom, and the study guide is a handy size for youth and adults to keep in their Bibles as a quick reference.

I am completely sold on the usefulness of the posters and study guide and recommend them as a valuable tool for personal or classroom study for both youths and adults.

— Pastor Alvin Sather
Pukwana Lutheran Church
Pukwana, S.D.

WMF, Youth Ministries benefit from Thrivent grants

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans presented grants to the Women's Missionary Federation and the AFLC's Youth Ministries.

The Thrivent Foundation presented a check of \$10,225 to the WMF for a grant project entitled, "Renewal of AFLC Women's Missionary Federation, Part II."

The WMF was given a grant for revitalization of the WMF in 2001. The new grant will provide continued renewal of the WMF through leadership development and evangelism outreach with an emphasis on prayer and devotional life. Specifically, the grant will provide training for national and district officers through seminars, retreats, materials, etc., in an effort to call all women in the local WMFs to a deeper devotional life through prayer and the Word of God.

A grant of \$7,275 was given to the Youth Ministries department for the development of a student missions program, including coordinating and leading work projects, afternoon kids programs, and evangelism opportunities for youth groups within the AFLC in 2004. Their destinations will range from AFLC Home Missions congregations to



Kristen Davis (second from right) presented grants to the WMF, represented by Jan Galland (right) and Youth Ministries, represented by Karisa Finstrom (left) and Pastor Kevin Olson (second from left). AFLC President Pastor Robert Lee is pictured at center.

Mexico.

Thrivent also provided a \$5,000 grant to Youth Ministries for a college ministry emphasis program. It is the desire of Youth Ministries leadership to communicate the need of college-age students to all AFLC churches, to make them aware of the challenges students are facing, and

the simplicity of meeting those needs so that churches can stay connected to those students. Pastor Kevin Olson and Eric Christenson will be visiting AFLC churches with a presentation, as well as providing a booklet to each attendee with resources for reaching out to college-age students.

Gloria Dei reaches out to community

Members of Gloria Dei Free Lutheran, St. Louis, Mo., hosted a game booth Oct. 4 at the eighth annual Lutheran Family and Children's Services (LFCS) of Missouri Family Walk and Fall Festival held at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis.

In addition to a toy, Gloria Dei helium balloons were given to all participating children. The game booth offered an opportunity to tell others about the AFLC and the Lord's ministry at Gloria Dei. AFLC brochures were distributed, along with brochures describing Gloria Dei ministries.

The game booth was another servant event for members of Gloria Dei, a way to give back to the local community by making every child a winner. Other events included distributing cold bottled water on many hot summer days to individuals exercising on a local recreation trail, giving balloons to children at a local supermarket, and distributing carnations to the children at an elementary school to take home for Mother's Day.

— *Dave and Diane Berg*
Gloria Dei Free Lutheran



Diane Berg, Lillian Schnuriger and Dave Berg, members of Gloria Dei Free Lutheran, man the game booth during a community outreach event.

Testers needed for Parish Ed study

The Parish Education Department is looking for a couple of AFLC congregations who would be willing to field test a Bible study on I Peter in a classroom setting prior to its publication, beginning in January or February 2004. If interested, please contact Parish Ed at (763) 545-5631 or parished@aflc.org.

Memorials: September

Home Missions

*Teddy Tofte, Vivian Gorder,
Josephine Brandenburger,
Jan Fatland, Kermit Helland*

AFLBS

Edward Mundfrom, Emma Lou Larsen

AFLTS

*Vernon Erickson, Dr. Howard Franzen,
Pastor Hubert DeBoer*

Vision 2004

*Carol Kooiman, Pastor Hubert DeBoer,
Roger Amundson, Edroy Boe,
Esther Boettcher*

General Fund

Pastor Hubert DeBoer

World Missions

*Edroy Boe, Kermit Helland,
Esther Boettcher*

WMF memorials

July- August-September

Dorothy Terry, Morris, Ill.
Marilyn Wigtil, Morris, Ill.
Leona Hammerback, Argyle, Minn.
Anna Erickson, Spicer, Minn.

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations
3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

AFLC Benevolences (8 month) – January 1 - September 30, 2003

FUND	TOTAL Subsidy	REC'D IN SEPTEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$305,568.00	\$23,454.20	\$199,994.92	65
Youth Ministries ...	48,154.00	2,458.12	27,980.86	58
Parish Education ...	90,907.00	3,289.15	57,615.53	63
Seminary	150,070.00	10,962.04	98,517	65
Bible School	263,356.00	17,004.58	169,670.02	64
Home Missions.....	305,087.00	22,380.47	186,959.78	61
Church Extension ...	28,945.00	585.29	12,921.37	45
World Missions.....	247,082.00	19,312.46	134,715.36	55
Personal Support ...	301,156.00	23,563.34	259,445.07	86
TOTALS	\$1,740,325.00	\$123,009.65	\$1,070,678.78	61
TOTALS 2002	\$1,521,284.00	\$104,690.64	\$1,204,254.49	79

The Evangelism Department received \$6,103.71 in September.
The office of director of Development received \$708.29 in September.

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/s/ Ellis L. Bloomfield, Printer

Editorial What makes them mad

You can learn a lot about a person by noticing what makes them mad. It indicates their passions and priorities. It shows what matters to them and is close to their heart.

A person who gets irate over a slight ding to their car may care too much about their possessions. Someone who gets furious if they're not properly noticed

may have an issue with pride and worry about what people think of them.

The Protestant Reformation began in the 1500s because Martin Luther was upset. The false teaching that was going on in the church of that day disturbed him. It angered him when people were told they needed to do certain works in order to have their sins forgiven. He got mad that people weren't being pointed to

Christ's work and told the good news

of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. His anger and passion was so intense he could not keep silent.

In accord with the practice of the day for inviting debate, Luther posted 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. The biographer Roland Bainton said, "Luther's *Theses* differed from the ordinary propositions for debate because they were forged in anger. The 95 affirmations are crisp, bold, unqualified."

To Luther, this was not merely an issue for intellectual debate. This was the fundamental issue of life. This involved how a person could deal with their sinfulness and get right with God.

The truth of justification by faith, that we can be right with God by faith in Christ's completed work, meant everything to Luther. He went from someone who was fearful and full of guilt to a man at peace with God. This happened when he discovered the truth that "in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Romans 1:17, NIV). This truth changed his life, and he got upset when it was perverted and others were prevented from hearing it.

Jesus got upset for similar reasons. In Matthew 18:12, 13 it says, "Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He



Craig Johnson
Editor

overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves. 'It is written,' he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,'" but you are making it a den of robbers.'" What angered Jesus was not just where the moneychangers had set up shop, but that they were giving the people a false message of how to get right with God. They were telling the people they had to buy a high-priced sacrifice from them in order to find peace with God and be acceptable to worship the Lord. Instead of declaring the truth of salvation by faith they were saying it was all about what you buy and what you do. Jesus saw people seeking God but being blocked, ripped off and told lies. It distressed Him greatly and led to some strong and clear actions.

The group that angered Jesus the most was the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. He called them hypocrites, telling them, "You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to" (Matthew 23:13).

They were adding to people's burdens instead of pointing them to God's truth. They were spreading the lie that righteousness could be found by keeping the law, and they were getting in the way of people coming to faith.

Of all the congregations Paul was inspired to write to he got most upset with the Galatians. Even in his letter to the morally corrupt Corinthians he begins by thanking God for them and recognizing the Lord's work in

their life. But he tells the Galatians they were "turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all" (Galatians 1:6, 7). He declares, "You foolish Galatians! ... Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? ... Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Galatians 3:1, 2, 10).

Someone had come in among the Galatians and told them keeping the law and the traditions was the way to get right with God. Paul's anger at the spreading of this lie and the people's listening to it comes forth clearly through his letter.

Sometimes in life we get upset about a lot of little things, but we don't worry much about the big thing. The big thing is the truth that the only way to be saved is by faith in Jesus who died for our sins and rose again. May the spreading of that glorious truth be what we care about the most.

Building the Base Holiness

We have learned to live with unholiness and have come to look upon it as the natural and expected thing." Written by A.W. Tozer, this statement grabs me every time I read it. It grabs me because it is true. It grabs me because it is all too true of me. It indicts me, and I cannot ignore it.

I am too often comfortable with the unholy. I too often take it for granted. I too often thoughtlessly participate in it, not even realizing what I am doing. Even when I do, I too often participate anyway!

Perhaps the statement is true about you, too. Perhaps, like so many, you have grown accustomed to the godlessness that characterizes our society. You, too, have come to view it as normal. But, my friend, unholiness is not the norm. I know, however, that life around us is, by and large, a godless mess.

But God is holy. He is personally involved with this world. He is Lord. And He is to be the primary focus of each of His people. If the eyes of our hearts were focused on Him and not on the world around us, we would see things differently and our daily lives would be vastly different.

I am reminded of the experience of Peter in one of his early encounters with Jesus. Peter and several other disciples had been out on an

unsuccessful fishing excursion. Jesus came along as they were cleaning their nets and stowing away their gear. Jesus urged Peter to try once more. Peter, who had a reputation as an experienced fisherman, knew that conditions were not right for a successful fish. Others heard Jesus' admonition. Peter was concerned about his reputation, but at the same time did not want to disobey Jesus. I think his answer was an attempt to protect his reputation and yet obey Jesus at the same time. "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but at Your bidding I will let down the nets" (Luke 5:5). If they didn't catch any fish, Peter could say, "I told you so." But at the same time he could claim obedience to his Master.

What happened next turned Peter's life upside down. The disciples not only caught fish, they had the greatest catch of their lives! What was Peter's response? Joy over his success? Humble admission that maybe someone else knew more than he? Neither. Peter fell at Jesus' feet and begged him, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8).

Why would he respond in such a way? It was because the experience enabled him to see who Jesus really was. He was God. He was holy. By contrast Peter was profane. It terrorized him to realize who Jesus really was.

Fortunately, Jesus didn't acquiesce to Peter's request — fortunate for Peter. He didn't leave the fisherman there on the shore lost in his sins. He dealt graciously with Peter and called him to become a fisher of men. Peter wasn't perfected that day. But it must also be said that Jesus became the focus of his life. The holy God became His master, teacher and friend. And just a few years later the holy Son of God laid down His life so that Peter and each of us might be redeemed to God and saved for eternity.

The Psalmist declares in Psalm 145:17-21 "The LORD is righteous in all His ways, And kind in all His deeds. The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them. The LORD keeps all who love Him; But all the wicked, He will destroy. My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD; And all flesh will bless His holy name forever and ever."

God grant that this declaration might be yours and mine, that our focus would be on the Holy One, our Savior, and that our lives would reflect His presence and leading both now and forever. Bless His holy name!

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