

# THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

OCTOBER 2003



The fields are  
**White**  
unto  
harvest



# THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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# Encouraging Word

## Touching the mountain

**“One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple”  
(Psalm 27:4).**

**I**n the early years of marriage and children, my husband and I sacrificed many things so we could take a modest family vacation every year. We felt it was so important in the busyness of life to take time to be together and experience the world that God had created.



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

One year we planned a trip to Yellowstone National Park. It was the first time I had seen a real mountain. I had enjoyed seeing mountains in pictures, but I knew I would never fully understand the breathtaking beauty of a mountain

until I saw it before me with my own eyes.

As we drove, I saw the mountains in the distance. However, I could only imagine what it would be like to actually touch the mountain. The closer we got, the more majestic the mountains became and the more excited I got.

Finally the mountains encompassed us. I got out of the car and stood in awe as the mountains towered over me, dwarfing me as I gazed at the handwriting of God in my surroundings. The river on its own journey rushed to its destination. Waterfalls tumbled down the mountainside. A bird sang to me from the very top of a tall tree. A squirrel

scampered at my feet. It seemed that I could almost reach the sky. Then, I touched the mountain. For me, the trip was complete.

Another journey exists for us in our lifetime. Surely God's creation on earth is only a taste of what it will be like to see heaven — to see God the Father and Jesus, His Son. Imagining what heaven looks like is only part of the journey. The true reality of Heaven's beauty and magnitude will only be revealed when we finally touch the hem of Jesus' garment and hold the hand of God in heaven.

The trip is planned for us. God's Word is the road map. The path is clear. “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (II Corinthians 4:18). We travel on the ultimate journey, and the closer we walk with God, the more real He is to us.

God wants His family to reach the mountain. Jesus is our rock and our salvation. One day we will come to the end of our life travels here on earth and spend eternity with Him. He sacrificed His life so that we could make the trip. Let us give ours in return to Him.

Lord, shelter us under Your wings on our journey through life. Let us breathe in the beauty of all You have prepared for us. Let the trip be good. Help us through the rocks here on earth, and give light to our pathway. Let our eyes be set on heaven every step of the way until we finally reach home. Amen.

# SOUND BITES

**G**od sends his messengers as a king sending his emissaries to invite people to the feast of his Word and his love. ... The messengers run with the new and glad tidings. They must never stop. They are to run to the uttermost parts of the earth.

— C.O. Rosenius  
“Romans: A Devotional Commentary”

**T**he scope of who it is that God means to invite to the feast, you see, is not ours to define. We are not put in charge of the guest list.

— Don Skinner  
Passage through Sacred History

**T**he church doesn't exist to satisfy the consumer; it exists to mobilize men and women for God's mission in the world.

— Brian McLaren

**M**ay you become an intercessor with a world vision that prays Satan-defeating, kingdom-taking, people-reaching, captive-releasing, revival-giving, Christ-glorifying prayers.

— Patrick Johnstone  
Operation World





# Journey into AFRICA



In Aug. 7, a team of six AFLC representatives left Lindberg Terminal in Minneapolis on a multi-day journey through Amsterdam to the heart of Africa. On the team were AFLTS Dean Dr. Francis Monseth and his wife, Ellen, AFLTS student Nate Jore and his wife, Rhoda, MTI director Pastor Richard Gunderson and World Missions Director Pastor Del Palmer. Dr. Robert Kohl, a member of the World Missions Committee, caught up with the group a few days later. During the three-week trip they visited both Uganda and Tanzania with three objectives in mind:

- To determine the feasibility of providing permanent conservative theological training for Lutheran pastors in Eastern Africa so that they can be equipped to start free and living congregations.
  - To provide pastoral training seminars for untrained pastors.
  - To meet with Lutheran church leaders from Congo and Burundi who had expressed an interest in the AFLC.
- The team returned on Aug. 28, tired, but with a

fresh passion for missions and the possibility of beginning a new work in Eastern Africa with the people they so much enjoyed fellowshiping with.

“There was an openness to the gospel in Africa that there isn’t here,” said Palmer. “You could walk up to anyone on the street and talk to them and they were willing to talk about it.”

Pastor training seminars were sometimes taught in the open air or under a corrugated steel roof held up by steel poles. Though the logistics changed frequently, the response to the message was the same, said Palmer: “People would stand up and say, ‘This is good. But we need in-depth training for our pastors.’”

Under a tight schedule, team members met for worship in the morning, then broke off into groups for Bible studies. Nate Jore brought to life the story of Job during classes with the youth. Rhoda brought the gospel message during children’s lessons. Ellen discussed different women of the Bible with the ladies. In the evenings, the whole group would gather together for evening worship.



# NOTES

## Excerpts taken from the diary of MTI Director Richard Gunderson

### August 10

We met so many people and little by little I am beginning to remember the names of at least the pastors. The worship service was held in one of the elementary school rooms. The service was with a full liturgical service, using robes, yet opened with praise songs like “From the cross to the grave ...”

There was a very special conclusion by going outside, forming a large circle, holding hands and praying.

... The evening service was very formal with robes, etc. But it was unbelievable to hear the praise team/choir singing and moving in such an infectious way. I was moved to tears. ...

### August 11

Awake at 2 a.m. until 5 a.m. It was a good time for my devotions ...

Went out to Bwenge — Visited the home of the pastor in the rural area. So much like Latin America — banana trees, coffee trees, avocado trees, cookhouses, house structures.

Classes were held under a shelter behind the Landmark Hotel. Events proceed according to Uganda timing: Singing, fellowship time, visiting David Natema and his family. Nate (Jore) has the youth and Rhoda (Jore) just started a children’s class as I am writing. Ellen (Monseth) has a women’s class. Everything was late with each of the three of us presenting our material in an abbreviated time period.

There was an early evening service with a great message from Matthew 22 — the Parable of the Wedding Feast — many were prayed for, both for special needs and for salvation.

### August 12

It was a good day getting closer to the schedule. It was interesting to hear from the pastors that tomorrow we will be on schedule. Our team assured the leaders that we are more than willing to be flexible. I see that both the believers and the expatriates are striving to accommodate one another.

Another good response from the believers following



the message. Children are coming later in the day with the numbers growing from five to about 50. Rhoda took the classes outside the hotel compound which resulted in the growth of such numbers.

### August 13

Dr. Bob Kohl arrived after landing at 12:30 a.m. and 36 hours of travel. The schedule was changed to have a

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**Continued on page 6**





welcoming service. Brother David, president, was talking about the world and time we live in as God's creation. He mentioned the various demands of our lives we face, such as technology. Just at that moment, his cell phone rang.

Late in the afternoon I was able to meet with David, Michael and John. Having talked with John seemed to be the key to get the meeting with the men to speak to them about the MTI program and placing an MTI student in Uganda. It seemed to me that their response was that it was a no-brainer. David said to me that we should send them 10 students ...

### August 14

The plan for today is to go out into the community of Bwenge to invite people to the service for today ... It was an interesting dynamic to experience the gradual growing of the group of children to come around the keyboard player and singer. The beat, the singing and the response of children. The movement — dancing of the children to the music! What a

powerful impact it makes.

### August 15

Norvald preached and I shared a short testimony for the evening service. Bibles were handed out with great anticipation by all who received them.

I was deeply moved by the young people coming up to us expressing their thanks and asking for prayer.

### August 17

Travel to Tanzania.

We are met at the airport by Mbulu diocese people — Zakaria Axwesso and two drivers. After lunch downtown, we go to Waama Bible School. It is a trip of 220 kilometers, 100 of which is brand new. The rest — shake, rattle and roll! They drive fast and the trip is five and a half hours.

### August 18

After breakfast we are shown around Waama. They have the capacity of 65 students with over 200 applications. They have four teachers, the director, who are Tanzanian. ... We spent time with the staff in

devotions. Then it was off to Mbulu, just nine kilometers. ... went to see the church and where they are planning a new building that will be 50 meters in size. The present building holds about 200 and it is full for two services each Sunday.

### August 19

We arrived in Dongobesh in less than an hour from Mbulu. We went to Malekwa's to eat and then the choir sang. What a great message and sound. Mercifully we have a couple of hours to rest before supper. Then to eat again and an evening service.

### August 21

I was able to get in an hour and 15 minutes of teaching in the afternoon following a long and powerful testimony of a lady from the Hadzabe tribe. I had the message for the evening service that started after 9 p.m. Lots of sleepy people! Zak translated and even his booming voice couldn't keep them awake. The Witness choir closed and again I, even though very tired, was deeply moved.

### August 22

Today we close out the sessions and go to Haydom. ... We did go to the secondary school to speak to the students — actually Q and As. Bright kids with good questions.

### August 23

It has been another very long day. After touring the grounds starting at the school of nursing, we went through the hospital. It was a big operation with a new pediatrics ward. ... Tomorrow after church we are scheduled to go to Karatu.

### August 25

The day was spent at the Ngorongoro crater. Rough ride out ... Very dry and dusty. We see something like 25 or more different species of animals and birds. Zebras, wildebeests, hyenas, jackals, elephants, rhino, hippos, storks, ravens, monkeys, baboons, impalas, antelopes, giraffes, lions.



# Samuel's story

**H**is name is Samuel Tibenkana, and I met him at the training seminary in Buwenge, a community in Uganda. As we sat under the shade of the open-air structure during a lunch break, he began to tell me about God's protection in his life. More than being protected, but how God has led him through dangerous times because he was willing to be obedient to serve. I found his story to be especially meaningful because he is only a year younger than me and has gone through such serious situations in his country's history, which I heard about but have been spared from experiencing.

Samuel was a prison warden, beginning his career as far back as 1956. In the 1970s Samuel was a senior warden in the prison near Jinja, which held younger boys ages 8 through 17. At that time two boys were imprisoned for attempting to poison Uganda's dictator, Idi Amin. Too young to be sentenced to death, the boys were permanent residents of the prison. Under Samuel's custody, they were favored with a Christian witness and concern for their souls. By visiting the missionaries in the area, Samuel was able to secure tracts, Bibles and Christian movies. As a result, these young boys were won to Christ.

Samuel went on to tell me that as God worked in their lives, the boys came to a point where they requested to be baptized. At that time, Amin, who ruled with a violent hand, would allow only Muslims, members of the Church of Uganda and Catholics to practice their faith in Uganda. It was not permissible for anyone to be baptized without a permit. So Samuel requested baptism on behalf of the boys and received a most interesting reply from Idi Amin, also known as The Big Daddy: "Bring the boys to the State House in Entebbe to prepare for them a special banquet before they are baptized." Samuel said that they got the boys cleaned up and dressed for a presentation before The Big Daddy. Samuel was a part of the escort accompanying the boys to the State House.

As they entered the courtyard, The Big Daddy met them in person, dressed in his field marshal's uniform, and was happy to receive them. But things turned bad very quickly. Big Daddy swiftly pulled his pistol from its holster and shot both boys dead on the spot. He went over and dipped his finger in the blood of each boy and tasted it. Turning to the guards, he then asked who had taught these boys this Christianity. Samuel responded, saying that it was a guard by the name of Samuel, not revealing his own

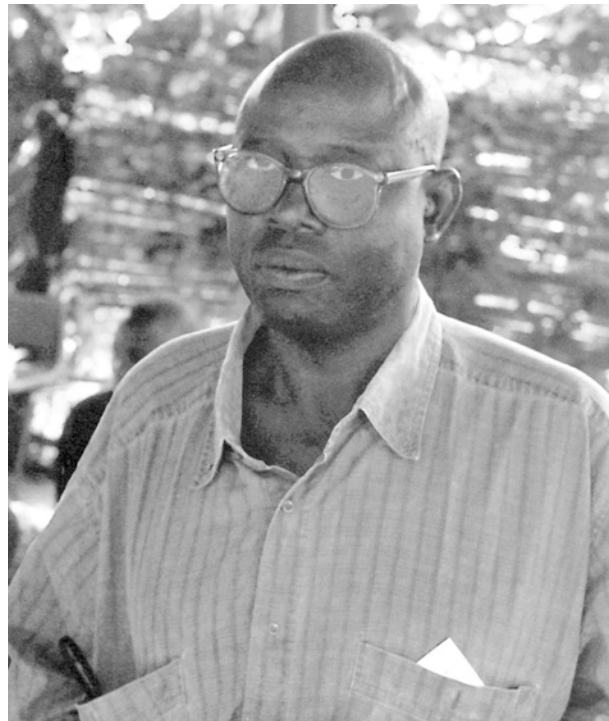
name. The Big Daddy then asked for pen and paper to write and sign a death warrant for one Samuel Tibenkana, prison warden of the Jinja boy's prison, who, unbeknown to him, was standing right in front of him.

Upon leaving the State House, Samuel returned to his own village and found it already surrounded by soldiers who immediately arrested him. Samuel waited in prison for two years for his own execution because there were so many being arrested and executed in those days of terror in Uganda. Three days before his execution date, he was helped to escape from prison by fellow guards and friends. He was put into a canoe and paddled across Lake Victoria to freedom in Kenya. There a refugee organization received him and heard his story. Samuel was given passage to Italy, Sweden and England where he told his story and declared God's protection and deliverance.

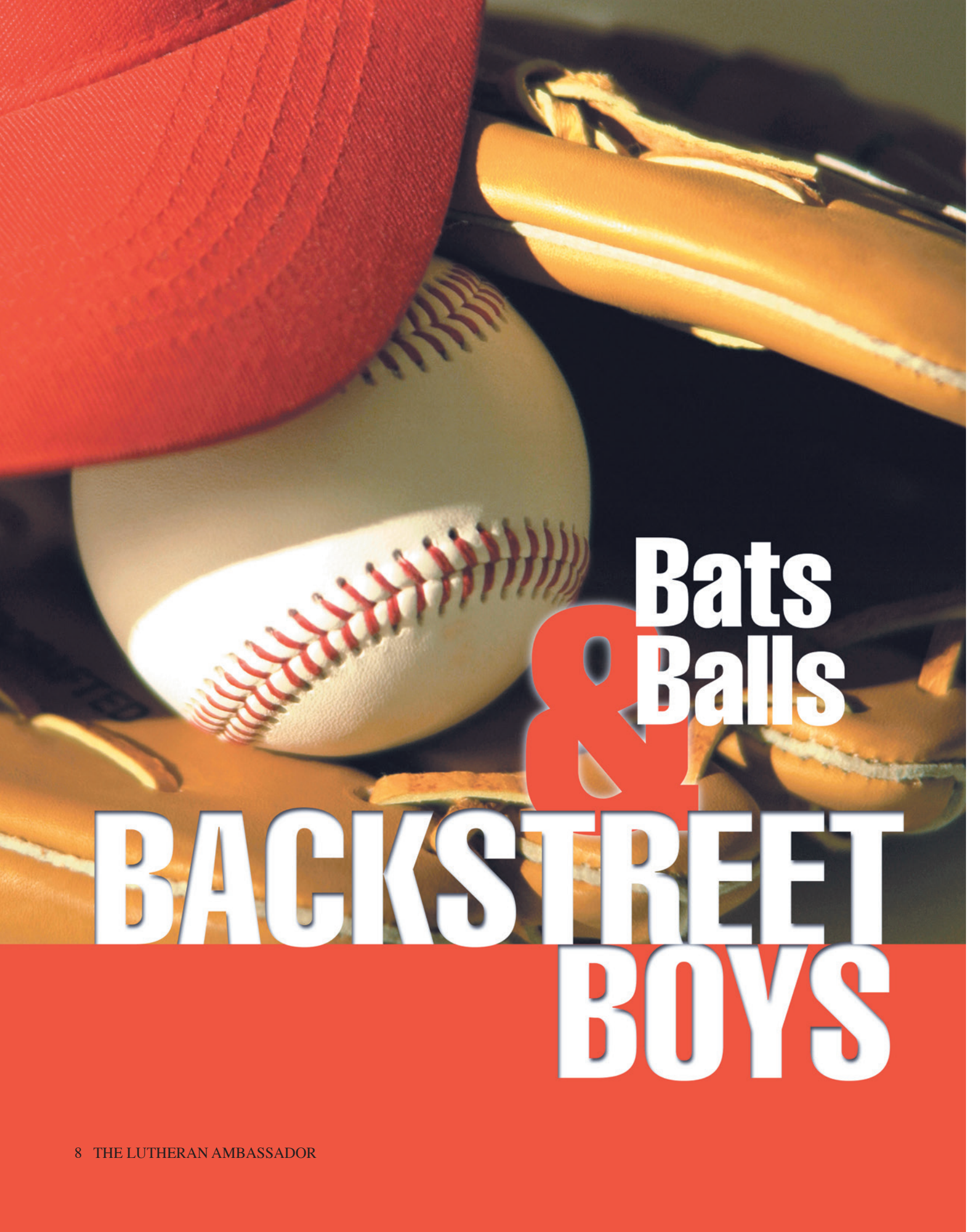
The Big Daddy, Idi Amin, was deposed as dictator of Uganda and Samuel was permitted to return home, where he once again became a prison warden. More, Samuel became a witness for Jesus Christ to those who needed the message of spiritual liberation. Samuel is now retired, but he continues to serve the Lord as a part-time evangelist, traveling to various churches.

It was during those very same days that we were in Uganda that Idi Amin died. The local newspaper's front page was filled with the picture of The Big Daddy and this verse from Isaiah 14:10: "They will respond, they will say to you, 'You have become weak as we are; you have become like us.'"

— **Pastor Richard Gunderson**  
**MTI director**







**Bats  
&  
Balls**

# **BACKSTREET BOYS**



**I**t's almost 11 on Saturday morning. The girls are doing their schoolwork upstairs while I am setting the garage up for the day's activities. All of a sudden I hear footsteps coming down the sidewalk outside. Then someone starts pounding on the big metal garage doors and a number of loud voices start shouting out, "T-e-o-DOOOO-ro." One of my daughters comes downstairs and breaks the news, "Da-a-d, your boys are here." It's the backstreet boys and they've come to play baseball.

If I'm on my toes, I already have the white '85 Suburban out on the street when it's time to go. If not, I better make sure there isn't anything in the garage when I open the doors, because when I pull them open and those boys come pouring in, whatever is there is sure to be bent, broken, torn, crushed or otherwise rendered unusable.

I unlock the doors and the push-and-pull competition begins for the preferred seats. Bodies go flying over seats and a few arguments break out. The truck isn't quite full, though. As I back out of the garage I note that there are at least two boys on top of the truck with another two or so standing on the rear bumper. I jump out to close the garage doors and, sure enough, there's Gerardo jumping into the driver's seat ready to drive away. After saying no at least five times to his incessant begging to let him drive down the street, I take my place behind the wheel again, pop in a Spanish Promise Keepers cassette and we're on our way to the baseball field.

The ballfield doubles as a horse pasture. So after crossing over the creek with the bats, balls and gloves (donated by friends from Camarillo, Calif., and by my baseball-coach dad) the boys dump the equipment out and we strategically position the bases so we don't have to step in any unseemly piles. Play lasts about an hour.

After we're done we all pile into the truck and head back to the garage for pop and chips. I've learned to give the chips *after* the Bible story so I can have some small hope of maintaining a hint of discipline and keep them there to listen to the Word. The Bible story is short: one paragraph on the back of a card with a picture. It lasts about three minutes with explanation. That seems to be the extent of their attention span. And that explains why most of them will have a hard time making it through junior high.

Of this motley crew, at least three have a mom involved with the Jehovah's Witnesses, two have a dad with another family somewhere on the other side of town. One of them has a dad who is falling-down drunk almost everyday after he comes home from work. Another of them has a dad whose taxi stand is in the red-light district in town.

Of this group two came to Christ a year and one-half ago, but getting them to come to church has been a major challenge. But it is Jose Luis who has

recently been on my heart — not to mention on my back.

Sometimes he comes out of nowhere and with his 13-year-old, 180-pound body jumps on me for a piggyback ride. After I recover from the shock, I might trot down the street a ways with him or else he gets to be the recipient of any wrestling holds I happen to remember from junior high. The holds are really just an excuse to give him a big bear hug. Jose Luis is gregarious, boisterous and rough. He craves love and attention.

One day a few weeks back I was walking by his house and saw his dad crouching down with a fiendish grin on his face as he cackled with a couple of younger guys who were there to get drunk with him. Jose Luis came out the door quietly with two drinks he had been ordered to bring, and as I walked by he looked up at me with sad eyes.

He was trapped and full of despair. God loves that boy so much.

Jose Luis felt that love recently when a very well prepared group from Arlington, Wash., came to share about sin and God's love in songs and skits and then led the kids in a sinner's prayer.

It was a prayer that Jose Luis told me he prayed. It's a new beginning for him, but he's got many battles left ahead. So pray with us for him as the Spirit of God begins the process of making him look more like Jesus.

An unspoken *uffda* slips into my mind as I think about next Saturday's baseball game. But the hope of seeing these boys come to know Jesus and begin to follow Him renews my strength. I drive the truck back into the garage and put the baseball equipment away. It is rather amazing how God uses bats and balls to worm His way into these rowdy boys' hearts. Whatever it takes.

— **Pastor Todd Schierkolk**  
**Jerez, Mexico**

**Of this group two  
came to Christ a year  
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# Long ride to Russia



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**A**s I boarded the bus at the break of dawn in Estonia that bitterly cold February morning heading for Russia, I had finally succumbed to a messy stomach flu. The miles dragged on and on for nine hours as the crowded bus lurched and bounced from side to side on the curves and bumps. The white and gray landscape in its winter garb passed by in a blur over the many miles. My fellow passengers could only be sympathetic or annoyed with the pathetic American who spoiled their trip. Finally reaching the outskirts of St. Petersburg, the flu began to subside as I sat staring out the window, weakened but returning to a sense of equilibrium once more. In just a few minutes I would be meeting my host during the days of

teaching in St. Petersburg.

“How was your trip?” my genial new friend asked as we met at the bus station. “I’m very glad to be here!” was all I could manage at that moment.

So began some very special days with the dear people of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria (ELCI). I had been invited to conduct classes at the seminary of ELCI, which is located in a small village (we would say suburb) on the outskirts of St. Petersburg. It was not my first trip to the area, nor was I unacquainted with the ELCI. One of my first professors at Free Lutheran Seminary, Dr. Uuras Saarnivaara, had grown up in this church body in Russia as the son of one of its pastors, and he had often talked about his boyhood in Ingria.

The ELCI is one of the two oldest Lutheran church bodies in Russia, dating back nearly 400



years. Before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, membership in the ELCI amounted to nearly 150,000. In the late 1930s, Joseph Stalin sent thousands of members of this church fellowship along with their pastors to Siberia, where many suffered and died. However, house churches were formed and spiritual life not only maintained, but also flourished. With the fall of Communism beginning in the late 1980s, conditions began to improve and members of the ELCI could once again worship openly. A revival of church life in an era of freedom began again at long last.

Today, congregations of the ELCI are located all over the former Soviet Union, including Siberia. In 1995, the church began to broadcast weekly radio programs. A bilingual church magazine, "The Church of Ingria," is published quarterly. A new hymnbook has been published as well as much Christian literature. There is an extensive work under way in the restoration of the historic old church buildings across the country. A highlight of this restoration was the recent completion of the central church of the ELCI in St. Petersburg, an important event in the life of the whole church.

Pastor Alexander Prilutskii, ELCI secretary, said, "The church of Ingria keeps to traditional Lutheran theology, which is based on the unchanging truth of Holy Scripture. We stress a biblical approach in training men for the pastoral ministry." In visiting with Pastor Prilutskii and Bishop Arri Kugappi, president of ELCI, I was encouraged by the common heritage and convictions we share with them as evangelical, conservative and pietistic Lutherans. Evangelism and mission work is high on their list of priorities.

At the ELCI seminary, I had been asked to teach 10 hours of classes on prayer in addition to conducting a seminar for Russian pastors and workers and also Bible studies with a number of Lutheran missionaries who live

and work in the St. Petersburg area. What a thrill it was to sense the oneness we share in Christ and the truths of His Word. It was a great encouragement as well to see the Holy Spirit's work in several of the students those days. The dean of the seminary, Dr. Tapio Karjalainen, said as we bade farewell, "This is the emphasis we need and want. There is an open invitation to return for more classes." I was humbled by such a gracious response, but it does elicit thankfulness to God for His Church everywhere and the ongoing fulfillment of His promise, "I will

build My church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Yes, it was a long ride to Russia, but what a blessing awaited me at the end of the ride, blessings in the presence of His precious people and in the ministry of His powerful Word.

— **Dr. Francis Monseth**  
*Dean, AFLTS*



**The village church and chapel for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria Theological Seminary.**



Note: Members of the ELCI share their long history as a church body in Russia with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States (ELKRO). While the ELCI has Finnish-Russian roots, ELKRO is of German-Russian descent. Both church bodies have congregations in most parts of the former Soviet Union. Monseth has taught in the ELKRO seminary, also located near St. Petersburg, and has preached in some of ELKRO congregations in Siberia.





# NEIGHBORHOOD

# MISSIONS

Calvary Free Lutheran, Mesa, Ariz., started five years ago as a Home Missions congregation from a home Bible study group. The congregation currently rents storefront property and is in the midst of purchasing property, where they hope to remodel a building on site. If you would like to volunteer for a workgroup this winter to help with the construction, contact FLAPS Director Lavon Bohling: (763) 545-5631.



**E**arly on in the formation of Calvary Free Lutheran of Mesa, Ariz., a mission statement was adopted for our congregation: "Knowing the Savior and making Him known." Members of our congregation have taken that mission statement seriously.

When we were told we needed to move from the storefront location we are now meeting in, we began to look for property to either rent or buy. In the process of so doing, the Lord led us to some property in a very needy community. As we were looking at the property, Pastor Gerald Gettis and Harvey Loftsgaard, one of our committee members, went out into the surrounding community.

The community has many needs, but our committee was encouraged as they met people in the community. There are from 700 to 1,000 children in the area. The property is only two blocks from a local elementary school. As Gettis and Loftsgaard were visiting, they decided to stop at the school and were warmly received by the superintendent and Pat Yard, a lady who works with school activities and those who have special needs. At the meeting, the men asked if there were some way we could help in the community. Thus a new relationship began.

While the community has many needs, of special concern are the children. When we met her, Yard was working at establishing a community outreach room to supply clothing for the school children, to help adults looking for work and also to establish a food pantry. We soon became aware that they needed a lot of help. Many of our people became involved by taking home tubs of clothing to be washed, sorting clothes, building shelves, rearranging the room, and painting the walls. Dressing rooms were set up and a reception area was added for those who were coming in for help.

One of Pat Yard's goals was to make sure every needy child had a backpack, a new pair of shoes and two clean sets of clothes to start school with.

This new ministry has been a wonderful opportunity for our congregation to become involved in the community. Our church has become the sponsoring institution for the food shelf, and we are delivering between 25 and 40 boxes of food each week to those who are in need. It really makes us count our blessings when we see the needs that others have. And it is such a blessing to help — to be able to serve. In Matthew 25:41-46, Jesus tells us how important it is for us to serve. Colossians 3:23 says, "Whatever you do, do heartily as to the Lord and not to man."

There are other churches now getting involved in this ministry. A church in Illinois is making baby clothes and other clothing. They are working with Yard to meet other needs new mothers may have.

We just want to praise God for what He is doing. We are a praying congregation. We have seen God lead in so many ways because, I believe, our people are sincere and faithful in prayer. Philippians 4:6 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." We are praying that as we build a church building in this community, we can continue to be of service so that His name may be uplifted and that, as we labor together, we may be able to share Jesus.



**M**embers of Calvary Free Lutheran in Mesa, Ariz., were presented with an outreach opportunity before they have even had a chance to move into the community where they plan to build their church. It all started with a chance meeting between church members and Pat Yard, activities coordinator and special needs liaison at a local elementary school.

In a letter from La Una Hermanson, a member of Calvary Free Lutheran, Pat is described as a woman who helps people in her community during her own time.

"As we visited with Pat, she stated that there were many things we could be involved with at the school," wrote Hermanson.

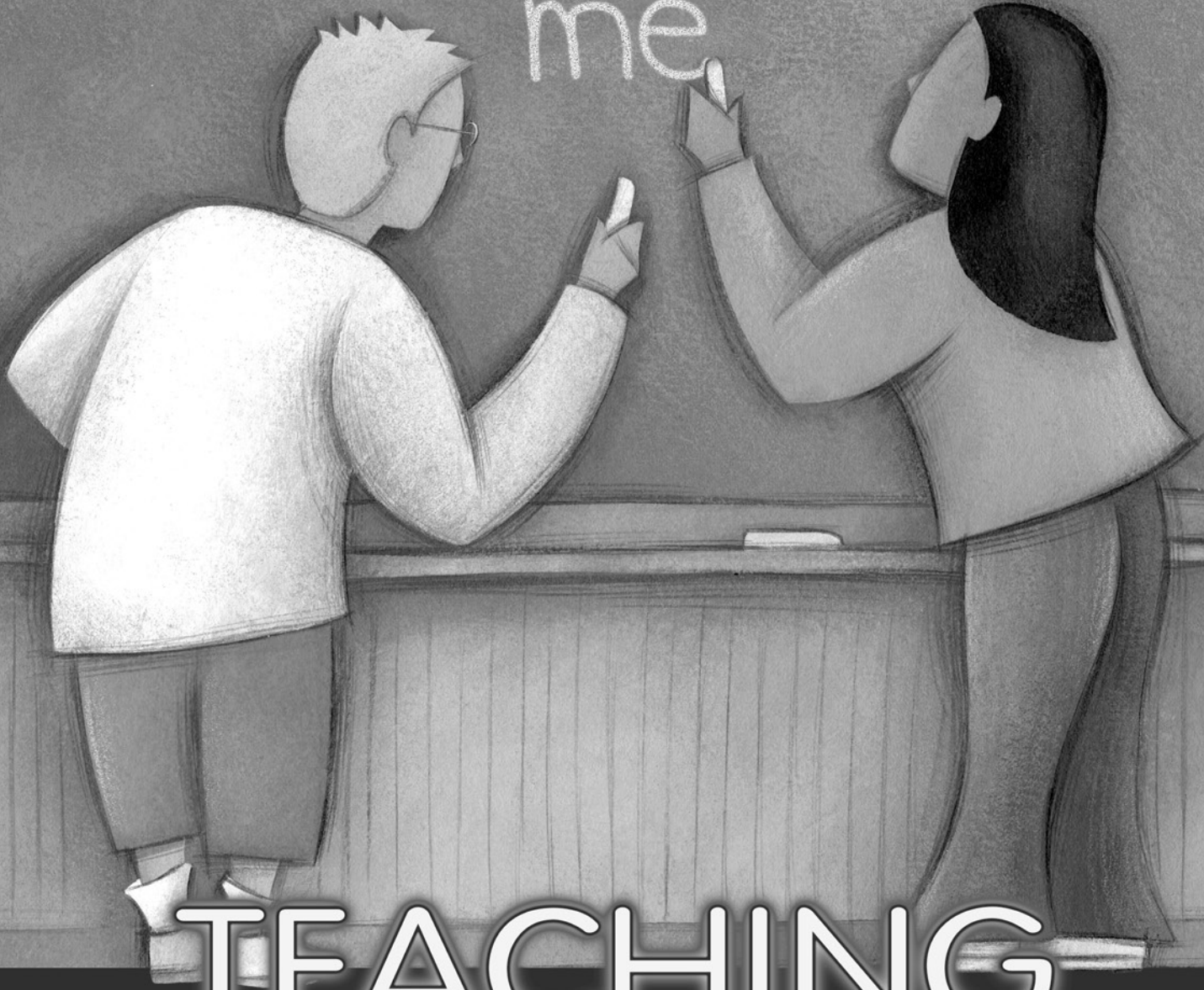
Soon members of the congregation were involved in a project to help local needy children through the establishment of a community outreach center where kids could find clothing and shoes, families could find food and adults could find help in looking for jobs.

"The ladies counted bags of coupons and got them ready to send in for award money from food and cereal companies. The school uses this money for materials needed for children's activi-

— *Eldwyn Van Bruggen*  
Calvary Free Lutheran  
Mesa, Ariz.

See MESA, page 19

Jesus loves  
me



# TEACHING MISSION

Christian day schools  
reach local communities



I have been involved in planting congregations over the years and starting several preschools and Christian day schools. Before I would start another one I would ask six questions: Is there a need? Will it help children and their parents fulfill their baptismal promises? Will it help the child as well as their parents to find Jesus and become church members? Will it help fill single-parent voids? Will the school utilize the church and Sunday school facility investment more effectively? Will it grow the church?

In the schools I have been involved with, the answer to all these questions has been yes.

## THERE IS A NEED

Do you know anywhere in the U. S. where there are working mothers who do not need a good licensed Lutheran childcare center? As childcare is furnished we share Christ, "the Way and the Truth and the Life." We give all the values attached to being a member in the Lutheran church. We also benefit the community by helping them to grow in wisdom. "Getting wisdom is most important, and with your wisdom develop common sense and good judgment" (Proverbs 4:7).

## BAPTISM

As the school surrounds the children each day in a setting with the Word, the baptismal covenant can be strengthened. In so doing, and by home visitation, the whole family can be won for the Lord.

In our congregation and school our new board of education chairperson, her daughters and husband all found Christ and the church through our preschool. This family is an example of how a school draws people to the church even from a more distant area.

Parents usually like the fact

that your school is centered in the Bible as you have daily Bible times and weekly chapel with the pastor in the church. Having a committed director who is loving, friendly and kind is also key.



May I mention here that our financial goal is that the school will be self-supporting, and almost immediately this is what happens. Besides, the schools help provide excellent playground facilities as well as learning centers for Sunday school and confirmation, and contributes financially to the church and other outreach ministries.

## SINGLE PARENTS

If there were no other reason for adding a preschool, it would all be justified for what it does for single-parent families. The pastor, the director and other members help to fill a void in these families. The school brings them to the church so they can experience the love of Jesus.

## FACILITIES

Businesses would go broke if they didn't use their facilities and investments more completely than do most of our churches. Many church facilities are unused five days a week. Non-church sponsored schools put out thousands of dollars for facilities, often inferior to the ones belonging to our churches. It's a joy to see cars and people around the church on days other than Sundays.

## GROWTH

Different churches have different experiences. My experience has been that I have had the privilege of starting several churches, as well as being senior pastor of a 2,700-member congregation and a school of 500. In Sacramento, Calif., our church grew from nothing to 1,200 members in seven years. We credit the school for being second only to evangelism teams in being a tool God used for bringing about conversions, baptisms and adult confirmations. One of our schools added 47 educational workers to our church membership.

I believe God has provided the preschool as an additional way for leaders, church officers and parents and congregational members to fulfill God's great commission: "Therefore go and make disciples ... baptizing them ... and teaching them to obey all the commandments" (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Yes, I will start a preschool childcare center almost immediately as I begin my next church.

— *Pastor Orville Hiepler*  
*Fallbrook, Calif.*

# World Missions **Being used**

**J**esus said; “All authority (power) in heaven and on earth has been given me. ... Go ... and surely I am with you always, to the very end” (Matthew 28:18,20). Jesus also promised that we would receive power from the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses (Acts 1).

Corrie ten Boom, the famed speaker and writer who, with the rest of her family, harbored Jews from the Nazis and consequently spent years in a concentration camp, once wrote. “It is not my ability, but my response to God’s ability that counts.” (“The Hiding Place”) Wow! How true. As I contemplated this thought, I was hit with another thought similar to it. It is not my ability, but my availability to be used of God that counts. So many times people have come to me and said, “What can I say to a lost person? I don’t have the gift of evangelism; I don’t know what to say.” So I ask them: “What has God done for you? Just tell them that. Was it not God who told us to just open our mouths and He would fill it?” What God meant is that when He gives us the opportunity to witness, he just wants us to be available for Him to use us.

Remember Philip? He was one of the seven chosen to be deacons in the early church. His mission was to serve and be a servant to the widows and other needy people in the church. He was chosen because he was totally devoted to God. He was first and foremost a servant of God. He was a Greek-Jew-Christian whose job it was to make sure that the neglected old widows of the church had all their material needs met. This he did faithfully along with his friend, Stephen, till a persecution against the church arose and Stephen was killed. This persecution led Philip to flee to Samaria where he started a marvelous ministry (Acts 8). God was blessing this ministry and the church was packed

out, but then one night God spoke to Philip: “Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza” (Acts 8:26). Go to Gaza! Where’s that? It’s in the desert on the edge of nowhere.

Imagine if Philip had given the excuses that we so often give to God: “But God, things are going so good here I can’t leave this

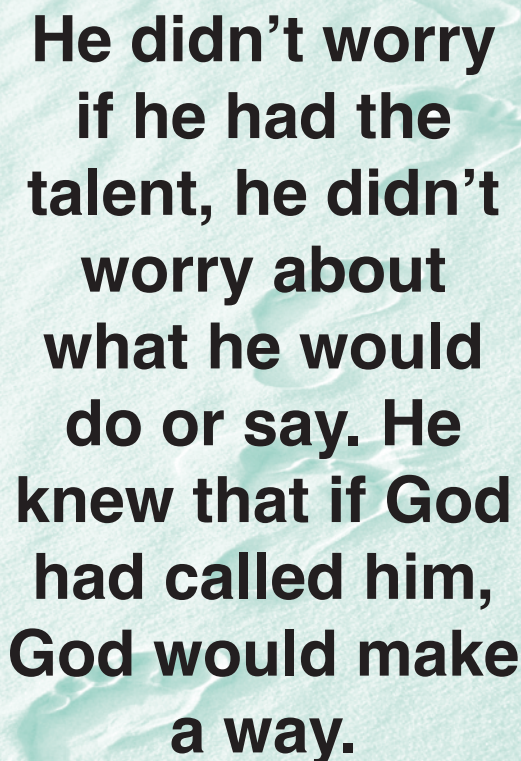
work now,” or, “Lord, that’s not my call,” or, “These people need me,” or, “What about this or that or whatever!” Not Philip! He was available to do anything God wanted of him. He didn’t worry if he had the talent, he didn’t worry about what he would do or say. He knew that if God had called him, God would make a way.

We notice that as Philip went God led him to the Ethiopian eunuch. The Bible says that he was an “important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians” (vs. 27). Probably no match for Philip, but what did he do? Nothing but answer the man’s questions about the Bible and about Christ. Not too hard, but the key factor is that Philip was available to be used by God. Like Isaiah, he had said in his heart, “Here am I Lord, send me!” Tradition says that there was a

great change in North Africa from that time on, and later one of the strongest primitive churches was established there.

I love that song that says: “You can use anything, Lord, you can use me.” God can use us, in our homes, in our jobs, with our friends, with our neighbors, in our country, in our world. But are we available?

— **Jonathan Abel**  
**Missionary to Brazil**  
**now on furlough**



**He didn't worry  
if he had the  
talent, he didn't  
worry about  
what he would  
do or say. He  
knew that if God  
had called him,  
God would make  
a way.**



# Vision 2004 School begins



**TOP LEFT:** The front entrance to Heritage Hall is nearing completion as students arrive for another year of studies on the campus of AFLBS.

**ABOVE:** The back entrance to Heritage Hall faces the men's dorm and leads into the top level of the new building. The library and classrooms will take up the majority of the second level while the first level is being framed for a kitchen and cafeteria, offices and music space.

**LEFT:** Dean of Women Brenda Stilley, left, greets incoming students on Sept. 6 while handing out room assignments and keys.

# Chaplaincy Joining the harvest

“**A**cross the street or around the world, the mission’s still the same; proclaim and live the truth in Jesus’ name.” In this contemporary song, these powerful words are very true as I look at where the Lord has sent us as a family with “the mission.” I want to focus in on the main ministry God has given my family and me these past nine years.

We had a taste of the mission overseas, serving in Ecuador for eight years before returning to the U.S. in 1990. Now serving AFLC congregations, we began to look for a family ministry. When we moved to Menomonie, Wis., we started visiting a nursing

home each week. After two years, employees there asked me to consider taking a chaplain’s position in two facilities. I want to share with you what I have seen the Lord do in lives. Understand the names are changed for privacy issues.

Barb’s chart was placed in my hands with big words highlighted in orange, “Afraid to die.” She was in the last stages of cancer. After some casual talk, I asked her how she felt. She just shook her head. I asked if she was afraid to die. She looked at me and nodded in agreement. I told her that the Bible says perfect love cast out fear, and then asked if I could share with her that perfect love. She said yes. I told her of her need for Christ and the love He showed by dying on the cross for her sin. In the end, she, together with her husband, prayed to receive Jesus. During the next three weeks I visited her every day I was there. I would share Scripture, talk of heaven, sing, pray with them and answer any questions they had. In one of our last visits, I asked her if she was afraid of dying. She looked at me, smiled and said no. Barb’s family asked me to officiate at her funeral, and I had her permission to share her testimony with her unchurched family.

One day, he said he still had this bit of doubt that kept him from accepting Jesus. So I prayed that the doubt would be removed and his eyes opened. The next day I visited him, the first thing he said to me was, “It’s gone.”

me.” I was asked to sing at his funeral and to share how he came to know Christ.

Janet was an adamant agnostic. Through many contacts and the prayers of various Christian caregivers, the Lord touched her and she had a dramatic conversion. Her joy was inexpressible. Her cancer took her quickly, but she had opportunity to give a bold

and joyous witness to agnostic friends and any who would listen.

Mary came looking very yellow with her liver shutting down. She prayed to receive Christ shortly after coming to the nursing home. To the bewilderment of the medical people and her family, the Lord gave her a year to learn more about Jesus in His Word.

Floyd was unchurched all his difficult life. He had no concept of faith in Jesus. He was very frank, but friendly. Finally, one day he broke and acknowledged his need of Jesus. The icing on the cake was that I baptized Floyd the next week in his room with his family present.

There are more stories to tell, but you can see how the Lord Jesus has done a marvelous work. Truly, the field is white unto harvest. Death is imminent. May we sense the urgency of His call. I say to you, as another contemporary song puts it, “Come and join the harvest ...” in a nursing home near you.

— **Pastor Paul Pillman**  
**Free Lutheran Church of Ella**  
**Pepin, Wis.**



# WMF Being mission-minded

**H**ow mission-minded is your congregation? Do they know their AFLC missionaries? Does your congregation have involvement with missionaries and mission work?

Maybe now is the time to do something to encourage greater understanding and connection with missions in your congregation. Here are some ideas:

- Place a world map in a visible place, with pictures and information about missionary families connected to their location of ministry.
- Set aside one Sunday school time per month to share information on missions or a specific missions family. Encourage letters and email to be sent during that month to the featured missionary, maybe even setting aside Sunday school time to do so.
- Have a special day, afternoon, or evening set aside for a program with missions emphasis, employing a variety of venues to do so such as games, skits, videos, songs, food, and sharing by those who have been in a cross-cultural experience.
- Have someone from another culture share

from his or her life. Being a missionary does not mean that you have to go overseas. Research your own community and you may find many countries represented there.

● Research your church library for mission/missionary books and videos and share them with your congregation through some kind of a report. Encourage families and individuals to take them home and read or view them.

There are many missions resources available. You may want to start with the AFLC World Missions department and the national WMF. Your congregation has many talented and creative people. Get together and plan, share and encourage missions.

“How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Isaiah 52:7).

— Carol Knapp  
Maranatha Free Lutheran  
Willmar, Minn.

## MESA, from page 13

ties,” wrote Hermanson. “Clothing was washed and ironed by the ladies.”

A room in a local middle school was set up as the distribution center.

“The shelves and rods were made and put up by the men at Calvary. Boy Scouts also came in and helped,” wrote Hermanson.

The ministry, now established, is growing now that families are finding out about it.

“Food requests are coming more often,” wrote Hermanson. “Jobs are lost, which means no money coming into the homes.”

While plans are still under way for the new church, members of Calvary are grateful for the opportunity to reach out to a community they plan to become members of.

“[We] feel it is our opportunity to help others. We have been blessed by reaching out,” wrote Hermanson.

## Thrivent Financial for Lutherans Foundation approves \$1,500 grant to AFLC for annual conference

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans Foundation recently provided a \$1,500 grant to the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations in support of the annual conference, June 11-15 in Brookings, S.D.

Formed in 1962, the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC) is the fourth largest Lutheran Church body in the United States with more than 250 member congregations. The AFLC is a fellowship of independent congregations that have chosen to be interdependent for the purpose of accomplishing service in the Kingdom of God that cannot be done alone.

The Thrivent Financial for Lutherans Foundation is a private foundation funded by Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. The foundation is organized and operated exclusively for charitable, scientific, literary and education purposes and makes grants and gifts to 501(c)(3) exempt organizations. The Foundation does not provide grants to individuals. To learn more about the Foundation and its programs, visit: [www.thrivent.com/fraternal/foundation](http://www.thrivent.com/fraternal/foundation).

To-date this year, the GivingPlus program operated through Thrivent Financial has supplemented a total of \$9,639 to the Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary.

# Spencer Creek celebrates 100 years

## Congregation joined AFLC in 1965

**B**y the grace of God and with thankful hearts Spencer Creek Lutheran Church, rural Eugene, Ore., celebrates 100 years of God's faithfulness.

In 1903, eight families began meeting together for Bible study and worship, longing for a nearby church home reflecting their Norwegian heritage. In 1904 the church was formally organized as Spencer Creek Norwegian Lutheran Church under the guidance of the Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Church of Silvertown, Ore. Their pastor was Rev. E.C. Reinertson, who served this new congregation along with nearby Lewellyn Lutheran Church.

In 1910 the Ladies' Aid began meeting with a charter membership of 28 women, a tradition that lasted for 75 years. At first their main purpose was to support the building of a church home.

Construction of the church building began in 1912 at the present site on land donated by Mr. and Mrs. K.M. Hansen. Lumber was freighted from town, and work done on a volunteer basis.

Sunday services were held about every other week following much the same order as is used today. Communion was celebrated only on very special occasions. A choir of about 20 members was organized under the leadership of Mr. K.M. Hansen, who also served as the first teacher for the Sunday school that met before worship. In 1913 an organ was purchased and placed in the sanctuary.

Young people's meetings were held monthly in various homes following a short program that often included special music.

Services continued in Norwegian until the late 1920s when English



**Spencer Creek Lutheran, rural Eugene, Ore., was founded in 1903 when eight families began meeting together for Bible study and worship.**

became the primary language used. Official church records were maintained in Norwegian, although correspondence and Ladies' Aid minutes were in English.

By the 1940s attendance at both worship and Sunday school had declined as families moved away, children grew up and many original members advanced in age. Sunday school was discontinued in 1942, but Sunday worship was retained for 17 Sundays that year, with a pastor traveling from town. The first resident pastor was Gottlieb Schmitt, who came to serve in 1953. In 1955 discussion arose about moving the building to a new site or constructing a new church, but the decision was made to keep the original building on the site where it sits today.

The annex addition to the sanctuary, with four classrooms, a kitchen, fellowship area and restrooms, was dedicated on Sept. 27, 1964.

On March 7, 1965, the congregation withdrew from the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and affiliated with the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC). Pastors who have served the congre-

gation since it joined the AFLC include Lars Stalsbrotten (1962-65, 1969-73); Elmer Strand (1965-67); Elden Nelson (1973-76); Steve Odegaard (1976-80, 1983-86); Bill Moberg (1982); Craig Johnson (1988-97) and John Mundfrom (2000-present).

Sunday school now meets throughout the school year and vacation Bible school is held each summer in cooperation with two neighboring churches. Although the Ladies' Aid was disbanded in the 1980s, a women's Bible study and fellowship group (Sisters-in-Christ) now meets regularly, along with a monthly men's Bible breakfast.

In spite of the outward changes, God has remained the same. His faithfulness to those who organized our little church, to those who have worshipped here throughout the years, and to all the pastors who have served as shepherds has been constant. We praise God for his faithful mercy and continuing grace, as we look forward with joy and expectation to what God still has in store for Spencer Creek Lutheran Church.







New members were received on April 13 into Ortley Free Lutheran, Ortley, S.D. Pictured are (back row, from left) Galen Gibson, Willis Palmer, Pastor Michael Peterson, Rick Breske, and Kevin Barse. (Middle row, from left) May Gibson, Jannis Palmer, Kathy Breske, Shana Ness holding Tristen and Michael Ness. (Front row, from left) Alexis Ness, Shelby Ness and Brandon Ness. Not pictured is Mary Clark.



On Aug. 10 members and friends of Trinity Free Lutheran in Minnewaukan, N.D., rededicated their recently moved and refurbished church building, and also dedicated a new addition, including a new fellowship hall, kitchen, Sunday school rooms, church office, library and pastor's study. Pastor Dennis Gray led the afternoon rededication service. Several members shared written letters from former pastors Michael Peterson, Philip Rokke, Timothy Skramstad and John Rieth. Three former pastors shared in the message during the rededication service, including Trinity's first pastor, Gene Enderlein, as well as Leslie Johnson and Jerome Nikkunen. The congregation was led by Pastor Gray on a prayer walk through the church, the new addition and outside around the new church location. The church building had to be moved because of flooding in the Devils Lake area.

**Pastor Tom Gilman** was installed as associate pastor Sept. 21 at Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn. AFLC President Pastor Robert Lee officiated.

**Licensed Pastor Lee Hoops** accepted a call to serve St. Peter Lutheran of Metz, Posen, Mich. Hoops completed two years of studies at AFLTS this spring.

**St. Matthew's Lutheran**, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, voted June 5 to affiliate with the AFLC-Canada. Members of the AFLC-Canada coordinating committee received the new congregation on July 12. Thirty-seven families who wanted to start a German-speaking congregation based on the teachings of the gospel founded the congregation in 1963. Previously members of the Wisconsin Synod, the congregation voted to

become independent in 1971. Services in German and English are offered every Sunday. They are served by Pastor Rainer Kroeger.

**Pastor Arlin Olson** was installed at Bethel Lutheran, Elbow, Saskatchewan, Canada, on June 29. Arlin, his wife, Ruth, and children, Lois, Ben, Karen, Timothy and Daniel, previously served as missionaries with World Mission Prayer League in Afghanistan.

**Pastor Orville Hiepler** has resigned from Community Lutheran, Oceanside, Calif. Replacing him is Pastor Tim Jones, who was installed Aug. 17. Members of the Coordinating Committee accepted Jones for the AFLC licensed pastor roster in August. Hiepler, who has plans to serve as interim pastor in both Arizona and North Dakota, will keep his

residence in Fallbrook, Calif.

**Pastor Kelly Henning** has accepted a call to serve Faith Free Lutheran, Lake Alma, Saskatchewan. Henning will leave his work at Emmanuel Free Lutheran, Salmon Arm, British Columbia, in November.

**Pastor Wade Mobley** was installed Sept. 7 at Living Word Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., by Pastor Elden Nelson, AFLC vice president.

**Pastor Carlton Voelker** was installed Sept. 7 at the South Dakota churches of Skrefsrud Lutheran, Beresford, and Redeemer Free Lutheran, Canton. Pastor Robert Lee officiated at the installation.

# Parish Education completes project on Small Catechism

Parish Education recently completed a grant project funded in part by Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. The colorful designs of "Luther's Small Catechism in Illustration Study Guide" give a visual explanation of the basics of God's Word as found in the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Means of Grace. This

32-page guide is appropriate for confirmation students and is also a useful resource in personal and classroom study for youths and adults. The guide serves as a supplement to a set of four large wall posters produced by Parish Ed, but the practical guide may also be used independently. The study guide (\$4) and wall posters (\$35/set or \$12.50 each) can

be obtained at 763-545-5631 or parishied@aflc.org

Note that the "Study Guide" (\$5) correlating with the new "Free and Living Congregations" book is now available from Parish Ed and is recommended for adult classes, small group discussions, and personal study.

## World Missions updates current budget needs

In the World Missions department's January newsletter we explained how personal support for our missionaries works and challenged individuals and groups to commit to support our missionaries financially. Your response was overwhelming. Thank you! As a matter of fact, your response was so overwhelming that gifts to World Missions have switched to personal support from our outreach /home budget.

The outreach budget provides funding for just about everything on the field in each country we work in except the missionaries' salaries. It also provides the needed funds for the administrative expenses in our home office.

Because people have given so enthusiastically to the personal support of the missionaries, the outreach/home budget has not been sufficient to meet the budgeted needs. At the first of the year, members of the World Missions Committee made the decision to cut the funding through outreach/home budget to each field by 10 percent. Unfortunately, our receipts have been even less than we anticipated, and we may have to cut the funding even more.

Would you help us by giving to the outreach/home budget? Any undesignated funds given to World Missions will be used for the outreach/home budget. Address your gifts to: AFLC World Missions Dept., 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441.

## August memorials

### Vision 2004

*Harry Dale  
Bevan Vanasse  
Eunice Knudsvig  
Esther Bakke  
Carol Kooiman  
Otton Bakken*

### World Missions

*Franklin Larson*

### AFLTS

*Arnold Stai*

### Miriam Infant Home

*Martha May*

### AFLBS

*Myrtle Katka  
Harry Dale  
Vilma Rugland*

### Home Missions

*Marge Bolstad*

*... in honor of*

### AFLBS

*Don Rodvold*

### Vision 2004

*Mary Nash  
Pastor and Mrs. Morris  
Eggen*

### World Missions

*Carolyn Dyrud*

### Association of Free Lutheran Congregations

3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

### AFLC Benevolences (7 month) – January 1 - August 31, 2003

FUND	TOTAL Subsidy	REC'D IN AUGUST	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund . . . . .	\$305,568.00	\$19,752.55	\$176,540.72	58
Youth Ministries . . .	48,154.00	1,659.05	25,522.74	53
Parish Education . . .	90,907.00	5,569.05	54,326.38	60
Seminary . . . . .	150,070.00	10,569.75	87,555.25	58
Bible School . . . . .	263,356.00	20,479.24	152,665.25	58
Home Missions. . . . .	305,087.00	21,794.11	164,579.31	54
Church Extension . . .	28,945.00	783.87	12,336.08	43
World Missions. . . . .	247,082.00	9,284.89	115,402.90	47
Personal Support . . .	301,156.00	25,543.82	235,881.73	78
<b>TOTALS . . . . .</b>	<b>\$1,740,325.00</b>	<b>\$115,719.03</b>	<b>\$947,669.13</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>TOTALS 2002 . . . . .</b>	<b>\$1,521,284.00</b>	<b>\$113,062.91</b>	<b>\$1,055,746.63</b>	<b>69</b>

### Goal 67%

The Evangelism Department received \$4,140.75 in August.

The office of director of Development received \$4,000 in August.



# Editorial It's not about looks

If we asked a child in one of our Sunday schools to draw a picture of a missionary they would probably draw someone who is white and male. They'd most likely draw a wife and kids beside him. If we asked for a picture of what they think a missionary's past should look like it would be clean, beautiful and nice, with a Bible school and seminary somewhere in the scene.



*Craig Johnson*  
Editor

Some missionaries fit that kind of drawing, but some don't. Some of the ones who the Lord has used as missionaries in the past and the present don't resemble that type of picture at all.

We read of one in John 4. She was a woman. She was a Samaritan, an ethnic group the Jews considered "unclean." Her life was a major mess. She had had five husbands and the man she was now with was not her husband (v. 17). Her understand-

ing of things was far from complete. But still Jesus revealed to her that He was the Messiah (v. 26). She went back to her town and told people about whom she had met. "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (v. 29). "Many of the Samaritans from the town believed in him because of the woman's testimony" (v. 39).

If someone like her came to us and expressed an interest in missions, what would we say? Would we do as Jesus did, using her to bring the good news to a whole community?

Jesus used a woman to announce to His disciples the good news of His resurrection. He appeared to Mary and told her, "Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father, and your Father, to my God and your God.' Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her" (John 20:17, 18).

While in Philippi, Paul and his companions shared the good news of Jesus with a group of women. One who responded was named Lydia. God used her as a leader in the planting of a new church in that town (Acts 16:13-15).

Even Paul wouldn't have fit the picture of an ideal missionary. His past was ugly. He "was once a blas-

phemer and a persecutor and a violent man" (I Timothy 1:13). He had some type of physical problem that he prayed about but didn't receive healing for (II Corinthians 12:7, 8). He apparently was single. We'd probably be awfully suspect of how effective someone like that would be over the long term, and yet Paul is looked upon as the greatest missionary ever.

A Jewish child in Jesus' day wouldn't draw a picture of a tax collector to portray a missionary and leader in the church. Tax collectors were looked down upon as cheats and traitors. Yet Jesus chose Matthew, a tax collector, to be His follower and the writer of the first Gospel.

Failure isn't something we draw into the ideal missionary picture. Shortly before Jesus went to the cross Peter denied even knowing Him. He let his friend down at the most crucial time. But the Lord later used him in powerful ways in the beginning of the new church.

Our picture of what a missionary should be like usually doesn't include times of doubting. Thomas

wasn't convinced even though the other disciples said they had seen the risen Lord. Jesus came to him, however, and Thomas came to a solid faith (John 20:24-28). History tells us Thomas became the apostle who traveled the farthest with the good news, becoming a missionary to India.

"But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He

chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are" (I Corinthians 1:27, 28).

The Lord often chooses as missionaries people who do not fit the mold. Sometimes he chooses ones to plant new churches who, in our estimation, don't seem to have what it takes. He chooses people to go to other lands with the good news, who, we think, are all wrong for the job.

As we draw a picture of what a missionary should look like, a heart of love for the Lord and love for people needs to be at the core. There needs to be humble hands that hold not onto personal achievements but to the cross of Christ. There needs to be eyes that see the power of God. There needs to be ears that listen to the call of God. The color, shape and size may vary because our God can use a variety of people to do His amazing work.

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**The Lord often  
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# ARC A time to celebrate

“**T**he Lord spoke to Moses in the Desert of Sinai in the first month of the second year after they came out of Egypt. He said, ‘Have the Israelites celebrate the Passover at the appointed time. Celebrate it at the appointed time, at twilight on the fourteenth day of this month, in accordance with all its rules and regulations’” (Numbers 9:1-3).

The Lord commanded the Israelites to celebrate the Passover. This celebration came only two years into their journey out of Egypt. The Israelites were still in the middle of the desert with trouble looming on every side. Some people would question taking time to celebrate anything in those circumstances. But it was God who commanded them to celebrate.

Throughout the Bible, we see many different gatherings and celebrations that God ordained. Each celebration focused on giving thanks to God for what He had done. The Passover reminded the Israelites that God delivered them from slavery. The feast of harvest celebrated the first harvest, early in the season. The feast of ingathering celebrated the final gathering of crops from fields. At times, searching through the early books of the Bible, I have wondered if the Israelites ever had time to do any-

thing but celebrate God’s goodness to them. But can you think of anything better?

This same principle should apply to God’s people today. We — as individuals, as families, and as churches — have become so busy that we forget to stop and thank God for what He has done. Philippians 4:6: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God.” That phrase, with thanksgiving, parallels celebrating what God has done. When we remember His goodness and faithfulness, it should cause us to celebrate with thankful hearts.

Celebration does not mean that everything is perfect and all the projects are done. Let’s face it, we live in an imperfect world, and if we wait for everything to be perfect and completed we would never celebrate or give thanks. God designed us to celebrate Him, and we need to look for more opportunities to do just that. Look at the growth of the AFLC — praise the Lord. Look at the number of youths who attended the FLY convention — praise the Lord. Look at the building project at our Bible school — praise the Lord. Look at the number of faithful men and women serving the Lord in ministry — praise the Lord. Look at the beautiful and informative “Lutheran Ambassa-

dor” that we get each month — praise the Lord. Look at the wonderful materials being published by our Parish Ed department — praise the Lord. Look at the number of missionaries we have the blessing to support — praise the Lord. Look at the old Air Force base that was bought and has been operated as a Bible camp for the last 25 years — praise the Lord.

Are all the projects completed at the Association Retreat Center? Are all the debts paid off? Do we have more cash than we know what to do with? No, no, and, really no. Will this keep us from celebrating our 25th anniversary next year? A resounding *no*. Praise the Lord for the opportunity to celebrate and give thanks for what He has done at the ARC. The ARC is asking the AFLC to celebrate with us next year at one of the camps or the Annual Conference. Our hope is that people of the AFLC will help us by continuing to pray for the ARC and partnering with us financially. We are also extending a special request to write a little note about some way the ministry here has blessed you. We will be using the letters to encourage the staff and to go into a brochure for next year to remind people to celebrate with us.

— **Eric Westlake**  
**ARC Director**