

The Connection

Spring 2009

AFLC Youth Newsletter

LIGHTS...
CAMERA...
DRAMA



Welcome to your issue!

You are holding the dawn of a new day in *The Connection*. For over a dozen years, this newsletter has sought to nurture teens across the country with devotionals and information to nurture your walk with Jesus.

This issue brings that newsletter into a new phase as a periodical. From the front cover forward, we are seeking to present God's truths in an engaging and interesting fashion. (The Word is always engaging and interesting! Forgive us for the times in which it is presented in an ordinary way.) Just as I encourage you to dig into the Bible, I need to do it, too.

This month as I have been going through Romans, I was moved by chapter 8, verses 31-34. The end of the chapter is powerfully noting the unfailing love of God in Jesus. The earlier part of the chapter is full of how the Holy Spirit is working in a believer's life. In these four verses, Paul asks some powerful questions. What are the answers? In summary, since God is for us, it doesn't matter who is against us. It doesn't matter what we are up against!

So what will you find in here?

This issue entitled "*LIGHTS... CAMERA... DRAMA...*" digs into the world of teens and their lives: the pressures, the relationships, and the realities! Here's what you can check out:

- Stephanie Nelson, AFLBS student and someone who is currently stepping through the end of her teen years, gives you a glance into what she has seen and learned.
- Jim Clark, veteran youth director and man with cool hair, guides you through the tension of what the world wants and what God's wisdom says.
- Naomi Andrews, AFLC Youth Ministries Associate and wizard of web design, goes with you to the gritty path of faith prompting action.

It's like mom's cooking — dig in and enjoy!



Pastor Jason Holt

P.S. Don't forget to talk back at the Facebook discussion group "THE CONNECTION of AFLC Youth Ministries." I'll hear you there!



The Connection

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The Connection is published twice a year to encourage and engage youth and youth groups of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. The AFLC is a growing fellowship of 270 churches whose members believe that the Bible is true and that everyone needs Jesus. AFLC Youth Ministries exists for three goals: to win; to build, and to equip youth for Jesus Christ. We are here to assist in making disciples!

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From the moment I walked in the door of Ebenezer Lutheran Church, I knew this was going to be unlike any youth group I had ever seen. It was complete pandemonium. A very diverse group of 35 students from the heart of south Minneapolis had taken over the church basement and was making its presence known to the entire neighborhood. All night long they were running around and shouting across the room; I found myself wondering if these kids could ever be interested in hearing the Gospel. It sure didn't look like it.

Nevertheless, as the semester continued, it became clear that there was something going on below the surface that I couldn't see through the darkness of my judgmental eyes. Something was happening in the hearts of these students. Even though they appeared to have no interest in what we were telling them about Jesus and salvation, they kept coming back. Something was drawing them to church every week, and I could not figure out what it was.

In Matthew 11:1-5, John the Baptist sent word to Jesus asking, *"Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else? (v.2)"* I found myself asking the same question: "Jesus, this isn't what I was expecting. Are You working in this youth group, or should I look somewhere else?" Jesus' response to John's disciples blew me away; Jesus simply stated His resumé: *"The blind received sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. (v.5)"* That was not the Messiah the Jews were expecting! Why would their promised

Savior care about the blind, lame, deaf, and dead? He should be working with those who are powerful and influential, right? Wrong. The Jews had an inaccurate view of who Jesus was, just like I had an inaccurate view of what youth group was supposed to be.

Seeing the kids at Ebenezer through the light of Jesus' teachings suddenly changed my entire perspective of the church. Of course He was working in that youth group, just not in the ways I was expecting. We have this "cookie cutter" idea of the perfect church and the perfect youth group, but often these ideas don't resemble Jesus' teachings. He came to heal the blind, lame, deaf, and dead, and that starts with His church. We must ask Him to take away the preconceptions that blind us, the insecurities that cripple us, the prejudices that deafen us, and the judgmental attitudes that kill us. Only then can we minister like He did.

We must learn to overcome the lies of the world with the truth of the Light of the world — Jesus Christ. Our job is not to stay in our comfort zone and preach the Word only to those we deem worthy or receptive. Let us learn to see all those we come into contact with through the eyes of Jesus so we can follow the command He gave in Matthew 5:16 *"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."*

Nelson volunteers with the Ebenezer Lutheran Brethren Church Youth Group and is currently a junior at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School in Plymouth, MN.

CAMERA

37 JIM CLARK

What is it about the mall that makes my clothes feel old? How come I loved my cell phone until the iPhone came out? Why did I think I was rich until I started watching more TV? The world we live in is busy trying to influence and persuade us to love what it loves. It charms us with possessions. It beckons us with lust. It manipulates us with greed. And it's subtle. And it stands in opposition to God's truth. Like a strong ocean wave, if I'm not actively working to stand against it, I'm probably getting swept up by it.

In Matthew, Jesus seems to understand that we're susceptible to having our reality twisted. Listen to his words to the disciples, and to us, in chapter 6 *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where*

thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

How wonderful to have a Savior who lived in our world. Jesus knows how easy it is for those who live on the earth to chase after earthly things. The world is constantly telling us we can find delight and happiness in more stuff. But, Jesus lifts our hungry eyes higher, to joy and delight which are eternal. He continues, *"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

Jesus changes the game. Even though we know that the world we live in is clamoring for the most fashionable clothes, the fanciest gadgets, more and more money, fame and prestige, Jesus again lifts our vision to something higher. He offers us His Kingdom and His righteousness; things which will never pass away. And He promises that all the others things, like clothes and food and worldly needs, will fall into place.

I feel like every day my world and my values are in conflict. I want to be content with what I own, yet the world is constantly making me feel like I need something new. I want to watch programs that honor God, but it seems like the cool ones always have lots of violence and swearing. And if you're like me, you've already realized that there are several places where you've exchanged what God says for what the world says.

But, God has given us a plumb line for a crooked world. His Word stands as the only dependable and unchanging source of truth in a world of confusion and deception. How can you know when your view of reality has been twisted? How can you keep from being fooled by the world's "wisdom?" Surround yourself with God's Word.

Clark currently serves as the Youth Ministries Director at Ruthfred Lutheran Church in Bethel Park, PA.



DRAMA

37 NAOMI ANDREWS

My grandma's office was a wonderful play place for kids with active imaginations. I could amuse myself there for hours. One time in particular, my cousins and I were spending the day with Grandma at work. We decided to make a puppet show. We made good use of butcher paper, markers, glitter, and whatever else we could find on hand. Years later I don't even remember what the story was about. I do remember we spent the whole day in preparation making puppets, backgrounds and a script. At the end of the day we did indeed perform our play for an audience of kindly obliging adults.

Imagine you are an actor in a play on Broadway. You have a passion for the dramatic. You auditioned for a

part and you landed the role! You've learned your lines, developed the character, shown up for every practice, the stage is set and props are at hand. The audience is seated, waiting in expectation. You step out on the floor, the spot light hits you and a hush falls over the room. This is what it's all been leading up to. There's only one thing left to do. Act.

It's similar as a follower of Christ. You and I are part of the ongoing drama of Life. We have a passion to live a life modeled after Jesus Christ. We've read His love letter, the Bible, and even memorized some of it. We've written His Word on our hearts. We've shown up for church on Sunday mornings and our youth group meeting during the week. So where does the rubber hit road? How does your faith directly impact your life?

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 says "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and

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pray for aflc student missions

Prayer Requests for Uganda Mission Trip June 10–28, 2009:

- For the hearts of the youth and those they will minister to.
- For visas and passports for Uganda to come in.
- For wisdom and strength for Sam and Rachel and the students going to Uganda.
- For the funds to come in for all the participants.

join us in arizona

- Dates: Sunday August 9th - Friday 21st.
- Openings for 15 students.
- Serving in Tucson, AZ and taking day trips into Nogales, Mexico.

visit youth.aflc.org/events for more student missions info



make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

Paul is saying to receive the prize of eternal life, a crown that will last forever, we need to train, run with purpose to win, and be true to our convictions. Here are three tools to help you as you pursue a faith that directly impacts your actions.

TRAIN

The first step is to get spiritually in shape. No one goes into a performance or race intending to do well if they haven't properly practiced. Like anything else in life, our faith also requires proper training. We don't just wake up in the morning ready to do the right thing. We read the Bible, pray, meet with other believers for edification and encouragement, and grow in our relationship with Christ. We put doing the right thing into practice so that we excel at it. Training is intentional and faith prompted action comes out intentionally making positive choices.

HAVE PURPOSE

The second step is knowing where we are going and why we do what we do. In 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul says, *"Everything is permissible for me" – but not everything is*

beneficial. 'Everything is permissible for me' – 'but I will not be mastered by anything.' Being saved by grace does not give us "carte blanche" (the power to act at one's own discretion) to do whatever we want. Instead God's Word, not our own opinion, is the standard by which we evaluate all things. Discerning what we should and should not do, is not about legalism, but about having an attitude of the heart where we desire to live life God's way.

ACT

The third step is actually doing it. Who prepares for something but then never bothers to actually do it? We can get stuck forever preparing, but never putting anything to practice. We can spend so much time preparing that we forget we have a race to run. This is what it's all been leading up to. There's only one thing left to do. Act.

Train, have goals and a finish line in view. Get out there and run that race.

Andrews is the Youth Ministries Associate for the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations in Plymouth, MN



Association Free Lutheran Bible School SPRING CAMPUS DAYS March 20-22, 2009

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FIRMLY PLANTED

BY KEVIN & BETSY O'NEIL

FLY 2009 is coming! The time is almost here and hopefully all that fund-raising was worth the pain. Get ready to jump on the bus or hop in the van. Nothing makes people closer to God than spending 16 to 24 hours in a vehicle without showering or changing clothes. Fortunately, FLY accepts all people: young, old (this means over the age of 20), popular, super-popular, totally unpopular, and even foreigners, or as they call themselves, North Dakotans.

This is our 10th convention where youth groups from all over the nation have made the trek to the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colorado. Why does this biennial event occur? Some might say it's to convince you to go to Bible School. Others might say it's so you can hook up with that really tan, beautiful person from a different state who will love you unconditionally for 4 days and then become a distant memory as you return to your real life. Or maybe it's so you can barely see yourself in that mass picture they take at every FLY Convention. No, the real reason is the universal Sunday school answer: Jesus. Although people make their way to Colorado with a variety of motivations, the reason the FLY Convention exists is to point students to the Savior of the world and encourage them to seek Him closer every day.

Somewhere in every AFLC article a quote of Scripture is inserted, and this one is no exception: "And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he

will cast you off forever," (1 Chronicles 28:9). The desire of those involved in the planning, teaching, counseling, and organization of FLY is that everyone in attendance will be *Firmly Planted* in Jesus, as this year's theme

from Psalm 1:1-3 states. Here is a brief rundown of what you can expect at FLY: first, we can guarantee you'll hear solid Bible teaching.

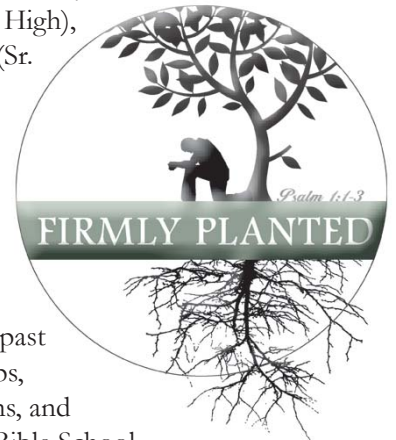
Our energetic morning Bible study teachers, Pastor Jim Johnson (Jr. High), and Pastor Todd Erickson (Sr. High), have been preparing some excellent lessons based on our theme Scripture. You will find diverse elective sessions that will encourage and challenge you in your spiritual life.

Some topics offered in the past include girl-boy relationships, missions, personal devotions, and why to consider attending Bible School – especially if you are from North Dakota. The evenings will involve a special service with a dynamic speaker (or two) each night who is excited about the Lord and ministering to youth. Their messages will all have one feature in common: a foundation on the Word of God.

And of course, there is free time at FLY. Some of the more popular options include climbing Eagle Cliffe, playing miniature golf (some people become very devoted to this activity, playing at least 30 rounds in the week), basketball, volleyball, soccer, ultimate Frisbee, sleeping (wait – why are you sleeping, you waited two years to come to FLY!), a talent show, and whatever adventure your youth worker decides to lead you on.

Though there will be certain aspects about the FLY Convention you can expect, there will also be changes, updates, improvements, and surprises this year. Ones that we look forward to introducing to you. But you have to come to FLY to find out!

In conclusion, drink plenty of water, gorge yourselves on the great food, laugh at the FLY news every night, remember to send in your funny youth group video, (visit youth.aflc.org/fly) be nice to the people from North Dakota, and remember to be *Firmly Planted* in Jesus before, during, and after the FLY Convention.



Kevin and Betsy O'Neil are members of Faith Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, MN, Betsy serves on the 2009 FLY Committee.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

March 20-22, 2009	Spring AFLBS Campus Day www.aflbs.org
June 5-27, 2009	Student Missions to Uganda, youth.aflc.org/events
June 16-19, 2009	Annual Conference www.aflc.org
July 6-11, 2009	FLY Convention youth.aflc.org/fly
August 9-21, 2009	Student Missions to Arizona youth.aflc.org/events
September 23, 2009	See You At The Pole youth.aflc.org/events

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