

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



Missions

■ FIELD DISPATCHES

■ ABEL REMEMBERED

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■ REIMAGINATION

■ HM GRADUATION



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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GRATITUDE ADJUSTMENT

BY ELIZABETH NEUFELD

My husband and I bought a used convertible, and it had all the charm and potential we could ever desire as a young married couple making time to explore Arizona together.

One night, we decided to go stargazing in the desert before the notorious summer heat swept in. We put the top down and had a picnic in the moonlight. But when we got home, we couldn't get the top back up. We tried for several days to fix our new problem, but it looked like I would just have to start getting used to driving to work every day with the top down until we could save up the money to fix it.

I had a miserable attitude about it. I felt like it was a great excuse to share a good story and complain, until one day I realized my spirit was in a very bad place. The Lord convicted me that my attitude was affecting how I was approaching work every day, and how I arrived in our home.

God opened my eyes to how nice it was that I was outside more, how wonderful it was that I could hear the birds and the curiously calm residential traffic and smell the flowery trees. Even as my attitude shifted and the temperature rose, the mentality of gratitude that I had now resolved to bask in was much more freeing, and the benefits of the things I was truly experiencing—the sky, the birds, and the wind in my hair—were vibrant and plentiful.

Imagine if the Lord had left me to wilt and boil in my own attitude! Sometimes He does that; sometimes we need something to look back

on for future reference. I can think of numerous occasions when situations could have gone far better had I maintained a grateful heart through it all.

While life can be uncomfortable or awkward or painful, a fresh attitude colors everything around us differently. Others can see our responses, too, and ponder, because it's not in our human nature to be joyful in trying seasons.

One day after my change of heart, I was soaking in the quiet solitude of our parking space, top still down, seven single flowers left on the bush in the fenced space before me, when our neighbor walked by and asked why the top was down. It had been 104 degrees that week. I told her it was broken, and she made a comment. But I told her that it was a good chance for me to practice gratitude.

She smirked, paused, and eventually said, "You're cute," and walked on. But she pondered.

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4 NIV). Having a grateful spirit opens the door to so many wonderful things the Lord can teach you. I certainly learned a thing or two.

Neufeld is a Home Missions parish builder serving at Calvary Free Lutheran, Mesa, Ariz.

We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God.

—John Stott

If we believe Jesus when He says, “I am the light of the world,” we must also believe Him when He adds, “You are the light of the world.”

—Ralph Mortensen

We talk of the Second Coming; half the world has never heard of the first.

—Oswald J. Smith

Never pity missionaries; envy them. They are where the real action is—where life and death, sin and grace, Heaven and Hell converge.

—Robert C. Shannon

If God’s love is for anybody anywhere, it’s for everybody everywhere.

—Edward Lawlor

If a commission by an earthly king is considered an honor, how can a commission by a Heavenly King be considered a sacrifice?

—David Livingston



Mission Dispatches

BY HEIDI NELSON

THIS UNIQUE SEASON has affected us all in different ways. For some people, the COVID-19 quarantine has been a welcomed change, including a special time of family bonding or personal growth. For others this season has brought hardship through unemployment, canceled special events, sickness, relationship struggles, emotional brokenness, loneliness, financial difficulties, or loss of loved ones. Around the world, other challenges have also been added to the mix, from flooding, tsunamis, locus swarms, increased persecution, official paperwork delays, riots, and starvation.

Yet God is still on the Throne. He sees each heart and cares about the tiny details and huge problems, too. How are we allowing God to shape us through this season? How are we reaching out? How are those we know and love being affected around the world?

Here is a glimpse of how our AFLC missionaries and missionaries on loan to other agencies are seeing God at work through the blessings and challenges of this season.

If you would like to receive more updates from any of these missionaries, please visit the missionary page at AFLCworldmissions.org and subscribe to the newsletters. Thank you for praying!

1 MICHAEL ROKENBRODT : UGANDA

COVID-19 has given me the chance to adjust ministry focus to networking with Christian dramatists, on both sides of the ocean, in experimental ministry videos. Please pray for open doors in these projects and for my first nephew/ second godson who was born in May.

3 BRENT AND EMILY RAAN : UGANDA

We have been blessed to spend lots of time with our parents [in the U.S.] these past couple of months while we shelter at home with them. However, there are many, many others, including many close family members, we have not yet been able to see. We are hoping to begin visiting with others, but we would welcome prayers for discernment and health as our world slowly begins to regain some normalcy.

4 MATTHEW AND EDNAY ABEL : PARAGUAY

We are doing great and are grateful for being [on furlough in the United States]. The trip went well; our kids are wonderful travelers. We have been here for several weeks and plan to stay in U.S. until the Annual Conference. Meanwhile, we are trying to connect with churches and supporters.

5 NATE AND RHODA JORE : UGANDA

In the midst of much suffering and uncertainty around us, we are grateful for the assurance of Christ's presence with us. We are seeing His goodness in many ways, and we are grateful for how He is caring for our family, as well as our Ugandan friends and neighbors.

6 TODD AND BARB SCHIERKOLK : MEXICO

Our daughter, Kirstie, got married on May 14 and we could not be there. We were grateful to be able to participate via a smartphone they had set up at their little service. We are also facing the challenge of getting our U.S. passports renewed. They expire June 14. We can get an emergency passport if necessary, but we'd like to avoid all that hassle, and it still won't take care of the renewal. We're praying God will open a way for us to get them renewed either in the U.S. or in Mexico.

7 MICAH AND FAMKE BERGER : UGANDA

We were waiting on an interview with the U.S. embassy in Kenya, so that we could go to the States and stay for a longer period of time, but that's all at a standstill now. I feel like we're at peace with that (most of the time). I think the hardest thing right now is that Uganda is at a pretty much full lock down and many locals are really suffering, especially from hunger and not having any means to get to the hospital when needed. Prayers for that are very much appreciated!

2 JONATHAN AND TAMBA ABEL : BRAZIL

We have opened the church again but still have some restrictions, such as the distancing and wearing masks. We also still do the Sunday service online, as not everyone is able to come to church, especially if they are at risk due to age or health. Seminary is back on schedule and Jonathan teaches on the major and minor prophets.



8 JONNI SLIVER : BRAZIL

Praise the Lord, all of our staff and children have remained healthy and happy! Campo Mourão has been one of the primary centers of the virus in our state. The Miriam Home is quite full, especially with very young children and babies. Access to the home is extremely restricted for their protection. Thank you for continued prayers that we would be able to meet the children’s spiritual, physical, and emotional needs, and that we would be able to work with their families even though we can’t do home visits right now. Bless you all!



9 JOHN AND HANNAH LEE : BRAZIL

We are doing well [in Brazil], but are stir crazy just like most people. The coronavirus will probably adjust the dates of both our moving plans and furlough plans. A prayer request would be that all the paperwork for us would get figured out in the midst of the many downs during the coronavirus.



10 PAUL AND BECKY ABEL : BRAZIL

Our furlough travels halted abruptly with the quarantine, but with that arose some hidden blessings of spending time with daughter Joanna and family in Fergus Falls, Minn., and cleaning out and fixing up the Abel home to get it ready for sale. COVID19 in 2020 will always be remembered as the time of Dad’s final days on earth and his first days in heaven. We ask for prayer for the ARCA camp ministry in Brazil which was forced to reduce their staff to one person because of the economic situation.

11 JON AND HEIDI NELSON : JOURNEY MISSIONS

Because of COVID-19, we have postponed a few short-term trips and currently do not have short term assistants on the field. We are thankful for the extra family time and refreshed vision for Journey Missions, but we are also eager to “go” and “send” again soon. Please pray for wisdom and discernment as we approach each short-term trip and STA inquiry.

■ Missionaries on loan

LUTHERAN BIBLE TRANSLATORS

1 JOSH AND RUTHIE WAGNER : SIERRA LEON

We thank God for a season of care and rest for our family. We are in Minnesota on medical leave for Ruthie’s health. Thank you for your prayers for this and as we engage remotely with colleagues in Sierra Leone.

2 ANDREW AND ALEXIS OLSON : TANZANIA

Our family relocated to Minnesota for the current pandemic, and this unforeseen transition has been both a blessing and a challenge. We have been readjusting back to a unique version of American life but we are also very thankful for unexpected times with close family. We would love prayer for the ongoing work of the Kikerewe translation of the Bible.

STEVE AND GLENDA KVALE : WYCLIFFE BIBLE TRANSLATORS

We focused intensively on biblical unity as a team during the pandemic crisis with extra virtual meetings and are praying/ grieving the news of a cherished team member (Ted) facing stage-four cancer. The Kvales request prayer in the midst of change, grief, loss, and health needs. Praises are lifted to God for His miracles that enable His Word to spread more and more.





REMEMBERING JOHN ABEL, THE AFLC'S FIRST MISSIONARY PASTOR

Visionary Missionary

BY PASTOR CONNELLY DYRUD

PASTOR JOHN ABEL was a visionary. The first time I heard him speak was at our first AFLC Annual Conference in Fargo, N.D., in 1963. I was a young college student at the time, and John spoke about opening a mission in Brazil for the AFLC, but that was just the beginning. He then laid out a missionary vision for evangelizing the southern part of South America—something he called “Our Tri-nation Vision.” Using southwestern Brazil as its base, AFLC missions would then move west to Paraguay and south to Argentina. But in order to do this, there would have to be five missionary families willing to go to Brazil as soon as possible. That night the Lord spoke to me. Yes! I would be one of those five families.

After graduating from our seminary in 1969, my wife Carolyn, daughter Shannon, and I left for Campo Mourão, Brazil, where John had acquired land for a Bible school and seminary. We spent much of our 35 years as missionaries at these schools, and we watched John demonstrate his love for the poor and the suffering by bringing them the gospel of Christ through his tent meeting ministry.

“Where there is
no vision, the
people perish.”
Proverbs 29:18

Most of our congregations in Brazil began as a result of this ministry. John would bring students along with him to help put up the tent. He watched as they grew in their faith, and eventually he would have some share the speaking with him. Today, many of these men have become the leaders of AFLC Brazil (ILLB).

And though the Tri-nation Vision did not materialize in John’s time, God has His own time. Today, some 50 years later, John’s grandson, Matthew Abel, and family are now in Paraguay working to open an AFLC mission.

John and I were more than friends—we were family. There is a special bond between our families, and to the end, all our children referred to him as “Uncle John.” Today, John Abel, George Knapp, Frances Grothe, and my wife, Carolyn, are at home in heaven, together with many Brazilians who are also there as a result of John’s vision, all members of that greater family forever.

Dyrud, Maple Grove, Minn., an AFLC missionary for more than 40 years, served in Campo Mourão, Brazil.



Carrying the cloak

BY IRAN SANTIAGO GOES

I MET PASTOR JOHN ABEL in 1985 in the city of Vitoria, Espírito Santo, when I was still a new convert. He preached an evangelistic message, and upon hearing him I thought, “This preacher has a different kind of Portuguese, but a powerful message.” At that moment I had no idea that in the next 35 years he would be used by God to mold me into the man I am today.

I went to Bible school and seminary where I had the privilege of having him as my teacher and pastor. As a seminarian I was his partner in evangelistic trips and I “learned by doing” the importance of loving souls and preaching the gospel. I learned principles in the classroom and practical application of how to present the gospel as we traveled together.

After I was ordained as a pastor, I discovered that God had given me the gift of being an evangelist, similar to that of Pastor Abel. Through his influence I became like Elijah’s Elisha. When he retired from being a missionary in Brazil, he left me his “cloak.” He returned to Brazil for several months each year, and together we did evangelistic campaigns for 12 years in three different states. By the grace of God, from 1996 to 2008 beneath the “yellow tent,” many souls came to Christ and six new Free Lutheran churches were started. During that time, I would preach each night and he and Ruby would sing before and after the message. Untiringly he did all the logistic work of planning the campaigns and getting the tent set up and transported from place to place. Rain or shine, cold or heat, great evangelistic programs happened.

Pastor Abel was by my side at many important times—my graduation and wedding, the birth and baptism of my first child, and my dad’s funeral. His legacy will not disappear after his passing to eternity for as he influenced me, I will continue to influence today’s generation. In this way, those who learn with me will go on to influence others, and they will all be indirectly influenced by Pastor Abel. This is also true for countless others whom he discipled, taught, and influenced through his charisma, faith, and love for God. To God be the glory for the life of Pastor John Abel, a person who contributed so much to people and to the progress of the gospel.

Goes is president of the AFLC Brazil and dean of the Brazilian Free Lutheran Seminary.



BY JOANNA DINIZ

A blessed

GRANDPA JOHN SPENT his life discovering the “treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ” (Colossians 2:3). He loved Jesus and others as he pursued righteousness and lived an adventure-filled life. As his granddaughter I have been encouraged, taught, and loved by Grandpa John.

Grandpa loved to spend time with his grandchildren. He had fun with us while teaching us invaluable life lessons. He seemed to have a song for every occasion, and daily family devotions were special times. He loved it most of all when we memorized Scripture. There was always a stack of gospel tracks in his car, and every stop was a little longer because he could not pass up an opportunity to share Jesus. Oh, how many things we learned from him!

Besides all the great memories that have helped shape my character and strengthen my faith, Grandpa always encouraged me to become a teacher. He supported my husband and me in our dream of starting a Christian school in Brazil in 2007. I am so thankful that my four children were able to spend more time with him this year while we have been in the U.S.

Although the Abel family has grown and spread out over the globe, we are all very close. We love each other, pray for each other, and have so many shared memories because Grandpa



Adventure with a purpose

BY PASTOR CRAIG JOHNSON

AS I WAS GROWING UP, every week in Sunday school we prayed for our missionaries in Brazil: Pastor John and Ruby Abel and family. At home we would read in *The Lutheran Ambassador* articles from the Abels about their adventures in Brazil, starting congregations and telling people about Jesus. John Abel was our AFLC's first missions director and first missionary. He was also the first one who showed me what it means to be a missionary and what an adventure and privilege it is to share Jesus with the world.

When I was a seminary intern, I got to go to Brazil and live out some adventures with John. We went up and down dirt roads to get to villages to encourage Free Lutheran congregations. We visited people in their homes and had some *cafezinho*. Then I got to watch and listen as John did a masterful job of bringing the conversation around to checking on how a person was doing spiritually and sharing the gospel with them. I didn't know what John might have planned each day, but I always knew his purpose. He wanted to do whatever he could to tell as many people as possible the good news of Jesus.

John was convinced the good news of Jesus was the greatest news ever. He was also certain that the best thing every person could do was to trust in Jesus and follow Him. He knew the gospel was for everybody, no matter who they were or where they lived. He also believed every Christian needed to be part of a congregation where the Word of God was proclaimed. He saw the best way to do missions was to plant and build up congregations.

Some look at going to another country as a missionary as a costly sacrifice. John helped me to see that being a missionary is the greatest privilege and blessing a person can receive. What could be better than getting to tell people that Jesus loves them and died for their sins and offers them eternal life?

While dealing with the changes the coronavirus brought to church life, I thought of John's example. Even when we can't do things the way we usually do them, that doesn't stop us. We keep going and we do whatever we can to tell as many people as we can the good news of Jesus.

Johnson, chairman of the World Mission Board, serves Bethany Free Lutheran, Astoria, Ore.

heritage

and Grandma made the rounds to visit each one of their seven children, 28 grandkids, and 29 great-grandkids many times. Here is what some of them said:

Tami Abel Carver (Colorado): "I have been blessed because of your presence. (...) I will carry you in my heart and never let my kids forget the man you were. I pray your legacy lives on for many generations. 'See you here, there or in the air,' was what you'd always say. I'll see you in the air now."

Emily Gill (Minneapolis): "In one of our last conversations with Grandpa he told me with such conviction and joy that 'the best is yet to come!' Such faith, such hope! I am forever grateful for his eternal perspective!"

Christina Abel Gabardo (Brazil): "To me one of his most remarkable traits is generosity. He really didn't hold on to earthly treasures and was always giving and blessing those around him. He is an inspiration and an example to follow."

We are thankful for Grandpa John's life and will strive to live for Jesus with the same intensity and passion he exemplified. As he used to quote: "One life to live t'will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."

Diniz lives in Campo Largo, Brazil.

Opportunities

BY PASTOR KEVIN OLSON



“HOW CAN WE bring people in prison to Jesus today, like the parents brought their children to Jesus?”

There was little response among the 25 chaplains seated in the Malawi prison fellowship classroom. Slowly they gave general answers, but nothing like the prior enthusiasm that had filled the room.

“Are we at times like the disciples who rebuked those who were bringing the children to Jesus?” I persisted.

Again, a nervous slow response came from the previously energetic room of chaplains.

Finally, chaplain Steven Chikolosa responded, “Inmates are regarded as outcasts, people who don’t deserve good things, so we have found ourselves blocking them from receiving salvation because of who they are. Now we realize that Jesus is waiting for them.”

That was the response during the chaplain training sponsored by Prison Fellowship in Malawi last October, and it was the open door that led the International Orality Institute to begin a branch of training within that country. During those two weeks of training in Malawi, there were four separate ministries that requested orality training for their leaders. Their interest sparked a bigger discussion for the Orality Institute board. Specifically, they wrestled with two questions: How can we expand this training so that it is offered to more people? And, how can we keep up mentoring relationships while adding more locations?

These are important questions for individuals and organizations to address. Expanded training means more people are coming to faith, growing in God’s Word,

“Then children were brought to [Jesus] that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people” (Matthew 19:13).

and being given tools with which to disciple others. It is discipleship and multiplication for God’s Kingdom. However, it also means that our available time is divided between those receiving ministry.

Discipleship is relational ministry. If ministry expands beyond relationships, then information might be shared, but discipleship is lost. At the same time, it is possible to become content with ministry as it is without growth or expansion. When ministry seems to be going along peacefully, we sometimes relax instead of going forward and growing.

Members of the Orality Institute board decided to move forward with expansion plans. During these discussions it became clear that

another staff person would be needed to meet the needs of a growing ministry and continue strong relationships with those places that have been established. Pastor Paul Kneeland had been on two trips to Uganda with Orality Institute and had been personally impacted by the people of Africa, the oral teaching style, and the openness by people to learn the Word of God. It was on Paul’s second trip, while he and his wife Ruth were sitting by the Nile River, when they sensed that God was calling them to ministry in Africa. When he returned to ministry at Solid Rock Lutheran, in Anoka, Minn., the enthusiasm that he had caught was evident.

God’s still small voice in Paul’s heart and the questions our board was wrestling with began to come together in January. Paul’s addition to the Orality Institute comes at an important time because the Lord has



continued to open doors for ministry around the world.

One partnership is with Cristo Por Su Mundo Bible school in Vicente Guerrero, Baja, Mexico. Leaders there decided to make our curriculum a part of their two-year Bible program. They are using the orality strategy to reach out to migrant field workers and to native Mexicans during summer outreach in the mountains of Oaxaca, Mexico.

John Pabst, a missionary from Peace Lutheran Church, Canal Winchester, Ohio, invited the Orality Institute to teach 24 pastors and leaders in the Dominican Republic in May 2019. Those pastors were excited with the training and began three orality classes in three of their churches.

Pam Nersesian, a member at Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn., invited the Orality Institute to train pastors and leaders in Malawi with Prison Fellowship and Grace Bible Churches. The trainings in both locations were appreciated and people there wanted to go through the two-year curriculum. Two representatives from Iris Africa Bible School were at the training for the chaplains and they requested further training for their school.

In Uganda, the ministry team oversees nine zones, each zone supervising between two to eight classes. In

Tanzania, where Pastor Andrew and Alexis Olson are working on Bible translation, Bishop Andrew Gulle invited the Orality Institute to begin a ministry in an unreached area of his diocese.

Paul will be working with the ministries within Malawi as well being an Orality Institute representative to churches and individuals in the United States. He will begin his role on staff July 1, working out of Prescott, Ariz. Paul will also be working part-time to help cover his needed living expenses.

When the Lord gives us opportunities, we are faced with the same questions of those listening to Jesus or the prison chaplains in Malawi. How can we bring people to Jesus today? At times, are we like the disciples? Individually we are weak and incapable of much impact for the Kingdom of God, but when the Lord is at work there is no end to what can be accomplished. Malawi Prison Chaplain Steven Chikolosa said it well regarding his own anticipation of what the Lord will do, "We expect transformation in the whole prison chaplain department."

Olson, who is the associate pastor of Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn., is the director of the International Orality Institute.

Reimagination

BY PASTOR MATTHEW BALLMANN

IF YOU ASK FARMERS if it's a good idea to plant their crops during the worst drought in 100 years, you would get a resounding, "worst idea ever!" Having a worldwide pandemic and quarantine just 10 weeks after starting weekly worship feels a little like that—worst idea ever. When the pandemic hit, all of our plans came to a screeching halt: no Sunday morning worship, no living room Bible studies, no backyard parties, no mom's playtime in the park, no discipleship group at the coffee shop. All things crucial to any congregation, but especially crucial for a mission congregation. But thanks be to God He is wiser than we and able to bring good through all situations, even quarantines.

Since March, we have experienced three phases of journeying through a quarantine as a church plant: Reimagining Sunday worship, reimagining community, and reimagining outreach.

The first phase of reimagining Sunday worship started the second week of March. As the news updates rolled out by the hour, many questions needed answering: What are the Centers for Disease Control and state government recommending? What is our city and county recommending/mandating? What are the other churches in our area doing? How is our congregation handling all this? Which city pastor meetings do I have time to attend online via Zoom?

Similar to every congregation in America, the immediate focus became researching technology, ordering technology, learning how to use it, and getting our Sunday morning services online. This was a big task considering we had not been recording or streaming our services prior to this; it was an exhausting process. We opted to pre-record our services and then stream them on Sunday mornings. The second focus was to provide pastoral care to our congregation, which involved touching base with each of them every week by phone as well as offering the Lord's Supper either at their home or on our front porch.

As I began to streamline the technology systems and acquired a better sense of the needs of our congregants, we shifted into the second phase of reimagining community. In this phase we started adding more things back into the week to help keep our people connected. We hosted an online game night, a movie night where we watched the same movie and then discussed it online, started our men's discipleship group back up online, and started a midweek Spiritual Formation class—thank you Zoom! In addition to all these online meetings, Natalie and I began inviting a different family over each Sunday to watch our online worship service with us and to share lunch together on our back porch. These Sundays were some of our favorite times of beautiful worship and fellowship. We will treasure the memories of celebrating the resurrection with a table set up in our backyard filled with an Easter feast, with a sweet friend from our congregation and a neighbor family from across the street.

During this season my heart was overjoyed to hear stories of the body of Christ at work as our congregants called and checked up on each other. I also began receiving text messages from several families who were not part of our congregation saying they were watching our services; one of





Church planting challenges in the midst of a pandemic.

these families has now joined our weekly worship. Praise God! Although the local assisted living home is still closed to all but staff, I have been able to continue my chaplaincy at the fire department and connect with the staff serving faithfully through this season.

The third phase—reimagining outreach—is where we find ourselves now. We met for nine weeks online before feeling comfortable going back to in-person services as allowed by our state governor. Our first two services were held outdoors under a pavilion at a park, which worked beautifully, other than the gust of wind that flipped the altar and communion five minutes into the sermon. I was encouraged to see people introducing themselves to each other in person who had only met online up to that point. We were also able to have many good conversations with people visiting the park, and one of these families came back the next Sunday to fly kites with us as we celebrated Ascension Sunday. We are praying for this family, who expressed a strong interest in visiting in the coming weeks.

As we determined where to meet, we received word that the elementary school we were meeting at prior to the pandemic was remaining closed for the summer. By God's gracious provision, the new family that has joined us lives in a neighborhood with a beautiful meeting room. We were able to meet in this location for Pentecost Sunday and reserved the space for the next five weeks at a better rate than what we were paying for the school. Praise God! Our first service in this space was such an encouraging time as we celebrated a baptism and joined our voices together in praise in a building for the first time in months. We are excited to see what this next phase brings as we begin more and more in-person ministry. We appreciate your prayers for wisdom in outreach as people are able to slowly start getting out again.

While a pandemic initially seemed like a disaster for a new church plant, we have so many things for which we are grateful to God in this season. We see now how He has used and continues to use this time powerfully in our congregation. We have seen an increased desire and love among our people for the public gathering around Word and sacrament, increased exposure by placing our services online, a new family has joined us, and the provision of a new worship location for this season. Had we known what was ahead, would we have chosen to launch into weekly worship during a worldwide pandemic? Probably not. But now that we have experienced God's provision and leading throughout, we wouldn't change a thing.

We want to thank each of our partnering AFLC congregations, families, and individuals who are actively partnering with this new mission work. We are here because you are there praying, encouraging, and supporting. Thank you and may the kingdom continue to expand.

Ballmann is working with Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., to plant a new AFLC church in San Antonio, Texas, called Trinity San Antonio. Visit their website at trinitysa.org. (Photos by Nate and Grace Photography.)





Graduation

BY PASTOR JIM JOHNSON

MY FAMILY HELD a big graduation day in May. Everyone was there—all 21 of the Johnsons. With government COVID-19 limitations in place, we kept it small and held it at the house. Four of our adult children were celebrating graduations at the same time: Isaiah from the local high school, Grace from a state university, Seth from a private college, and Miah from Bible college.

Grace, 24, kick started the idea earlier. She was depressed by the school closures and the social distancing. Each month brought an extended lock-down date. Her student teaching assignment was cut short and her church closed down. Enough was enough.

“I want to wear my graduation robe,” Grace said. “I want to give a speech.”

With that declaration, we decided to make a fuss. We filled the house with balloons, took pictures in the Johnson backyard, and had a party for the grads in robes and mortar boards. We held a formal dinner on the deck, gathered for speeches, cheered and cried and passed out cards. With a volleyball game and an ice cream social at the end, we loved every minute of it. We didn’t go home until 11 p.m.

Why not celebrate the graduations, big or small? That’s what members of the AFLC Home Missions Committee want to do every year. At the Annual

Conference in August, our committee will graduate several new churches into status as “established churches” and get busy with new plants. Come and join us at the church planting celebration during the missions night at the Annual Conference in Osceola, Wis.

CHURCH PLANT GRADUATES

Like at the Johnson graduation service, we are not afraid to start with a few. The AFLC church planting ministry is working with 20 new congregations. We hope to graduate six of them in August: Christ Community, Hagerstown, Md.; Calvary Free Lutheran in Mesa, Ariz.; New Hope Free Lutheran in Jamestown, N.D.; Shiloh Free Lutheran in Black Hawk, S.D.; Living Faith Lutheran in Boyertown, Pa.; and Good Shepherd Free Lutheran in Madison, S.D. Graduating them forward gives us time to focus on church plants in Loveland, Colo.; Honolulu, Hawaii; Enderlin, N.D.; and Mesa, Ariz. We pray that we can help start three new churches every year, and we hope to graduate the same number.

STARTS, PLANTS, AND NEW CHURCHES

As an association of free churches, we don’t claim ownership over any of our congregations—not even the new ones. Our mission is “to help churches plant churches.” Our job: to identify future planters, equip them



for ministry, and rally supporters who want to get involved in the Matthew 28 adventure. So instead of putting a fence around 20 churches and calling them Home Mission congregations, we are working with all 250 AFLC congregations to partner in starting new churches.

PROGRESS

We have six new starts, five church plants which have been accepted into the AFLC with legal constitutions, and eight new congregations nearing graduation status. But we are seeing many new believers come to Christ. Several new leaders and converts are stepping up. We are praying for three new starts a year. This year we have double that number. A Chinese church plant was started by a small group at Emmaus Lutheran in Bloomington, Minn. Three were sparked by Abiding Savior Free Lutheran in Sioux Falls, S.D. One began with five Bible college graduates around a picnic table in Hawaii. Two pastors in Minneapolis birthed a new start last year. Another church began in Western North Dakota when a pastor's wife asked: "Why can't we start a new church?" Three families around a coffee table started a growing new church in Jamestown, N.D. Others are growing in St. Paul, Minn.; Killdeer, N.D.; San Antonio, Texas, and the Northwest Corridor of Minneapolis.

CHURCH SUBSIDIES

We do not subsidize churches as much as we used to. Our budget is decreasing. Our focus is changing. Great churches aren't built on money. But we do need people who will help us provide matching grants. This year we are adapting: financial gifts for AFLC church planting in 2019 was at a 10-year low. We learn to be content, gathering volunteers, praying for open doors and equipping new bi-vocational partners to start gospel-

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congregations ...**

centered congregations. Our goal is to offer grants and subsidies with a total investment of \$150,000 per year.

Are we still currently giving direct subsidies to new churches? Not for long. The four Johnson graduates are adults now. We get behind them and provide emotional support, but we don't hand money to the adult children anymore. After age 18, our grown children need to make their own way through life. They are adults now. We back them and love them, but gifts of money would be rare beyond holiday gifts or birthday presents. It's the same with

new plants. We currently support only four churches directly. We believe it is better to invest in training. Those subsidies are reduced by 20 percent a year. We look to see these churches become self-sustaining within five years.

PROCESS

We want to limit our help to a maximum 10 years. But we're always looking for the new churches to plant the new ones. Some of our best church planters are "graduation age." These young believers know how to get along with a little. They have the faith required to pursue the miraculous. They know how to win souls, have started in warehouses, use public schools, rent aging church facilities, and care for new converts.

Like the recent grads at the Johnson house, they look to the future. They know their generation. They bring friends. They raise children. But they need us, too, to help encourage and cheer them on. We'll gather to hear their speeches, dream about their future, and bring cards and encouragements, and celebrate new life pursuits.

Johnson, a member of Living Hope, Rogers, Minn., is the director of AFLC Home Missions.



Construction progresses at FLBCS

A slate of warm, dry days has contributed to progress on the construction of the Student Life Center at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary in Plymouth, Minn. In June, the southeast corner foundation (top) was laid, plumbing and electrical work was installed (right), the roof of the gym placed (top), and the floor for the entrance, classrooms, and gathering area on the west side of the building (above) was installed.



FROM WHERE WE STAND

BY PASTOR TODD SCHIERKOLK

This year we are remembering two anniversaries of sorts. The little Schierkolk family—Todd, Barb, and two precious little girls (a third would come along later)—started Spanish language school 25 years ago. This is also our 20th year ministering in the city of Jerez, Mexico. As we look back over these past years as missionaries, we do so with some deep sighs. Some disappointments have been very hard to get over. But we also look back with sincere gratitude for God’s faithfulness, the work of His Spirit, and for His grace that has been sufficient down to this very day. If we had a big rock, we would set it up like Samuel in the Old Testament and name it “Ebenezer” because “thus far the LORD has helped us,” too.

We remember with joy playing baseball with a group of rowdy neighborhood boys and teaching gawky Daniel how to stand at home plate and hit the ball using the “squash the bug”



technique. We remember Betsy and her sister, Diana, precious grade-school girls who came to classes with Barb and practiced their “one, two, three” in accented English. That English class launched the Kids’ Clubs, and we smile and shake our heads at the kids who still want to come and play and hear Bible stories with a grandpa and grandma like us.

With grateful hearts, we think of our little congregation. We are in awe at the profound change God accomplished in Leobardo, who read His Word from cover to cover with only a second grade education. And every time we remember little Fernanda playing the angel of the Lord in our Christmas program, confidently telling the shepherds to “fear not,” a smile breaks out on our faces.

Some of our best memories are from raising our three girls in Mexico. It was a profound joy to be able to teach them at home and listen to them learn to speak another language. It was a privilege

to have them share the ministry with us as they taught alongside us in the clubs and classes. We were so proud of them as they participated in the community choirs and guitar classes. And we were very grateful to be able to learn about God’s world with them through the eyes of people from another country.

What now? Where do we go from here? In all honesty, there are many unknowns, but Jesus is in the middle of every single one of them. We have hopes that hard hearts would soften, that prodigals would come home, and that people trapped in sin would be set free. We pray fervently that God’s children will grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus and that the words they speak and the testimonies they share will bear fruit in a new harvest of souls for the glory of our beloved King Jesus. We also have hopes that God will provide a shepherd for our little congregation from among God’s people here in Mexico.

That’s how we see things from the vantage point of 25 years as missionaries and 20 years in Jerez. Along with all of our memories and hopes, we have the sure expectation that at whatever milestone comes next, we will be looking for another big rock. We will set it up, remembering His faithfulness in the past, confident in His help in the future.

Schierkolk and his wife, Barb, are AFLC missionaries serving in Jerez, Mexico.



Annual Conference Schedule Change

Aug. 10-12: Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis.

Theme: "Will He Find Faith?" (Luke 18:8)

More conference information can be found at:

aflc.org/conferences

Bible college plans for in-person fall classes

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary plans to conduct classes in-person and on-campus for the fall of 2020.

The past several months have been challenging for higher education, and President Wade Mobley expressed thanks to God for His provision, along with students, faculty, and staff who worked hard to finish a challenging year with diligence. "Our students faced adversity with grace, and despite the barriers of taking an in-person program online, grew in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Plans will be in place to address potential interruption in instruction or campus life, but all indications point to a substantially normal fall semester. FLBCS covets the prayer and support of alumni, friends, and supporting congregations. For more information, please contact Executive Assistant Sherry Mork at sherry.mork@flbc.edu or (763) 544-9501.

FLBCS modifies SIT plans

The staff at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary have modified plans for the Summer Institute of Theology, which will take place Aug. 3-7 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. These modifications are designed to accommodate public health concerns and potential government restrictions.

Registrations will now be accepted through July 20, and are refundable upon request. Classroom and lodging capacity are not known at this time. Registrants will be kept up to date as details become known. Please consider your own comfort level and health needs.

Content from most classes will be made available online through live-streaming with limited opportunity for interaction. Registration is required in order to receive a link. This method of delivery will be offered for a free will gift.

The theme of SIT this year is "The Care of Souls," and featured presenters include Dr. Timothy Lane (author of *Unstuck and How People Change*), and Dr. Lucas Woodford (president of the LCMS Minnesota South District, and co-author of *Church Leadership and Strategy for the Care of Souls*). They will join several AFLC pastors, including Rich Carr (Tioga, N.D.), Terry Olson (Grafton, N.D.), Jerry Nelson (Onalaska, Wis.), Brett Boe (Shakopee, Minn.), and James R. Johnson (Fergus Falls, Minn.).

For more information, or to register, go to flbc.edu/SIT2020, or contact Olivia Pavlish at olivia.pavlish@flbc.edu, or (763) 544-9501.



Annual Conference Registration

For an online registration form for the Annual Conference Aug. 10-12 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis., visit aflc.org/about-us/conferences.

Food & housing options

To reserve lodging and register for food at the ARC, call 715-294-2877.

If you are planning to stay off of the ARC campus, hotel options include:

Osceola, Wis. (8 miles)
• River Valley Inn & Suites: 715-294-2877

St. Croix Falls, Wis. (13 miles)
• Holiday Inn Express: 715-483-5775

New Richmond, Wis. (13 miles)
• AmeriVu Inn and Suites: 715-246-4606
• AmericInn by Wyndham: 715-246-3993
• Best Western Plus: 715-243-5600

Amery, Wis. (18 miles)
• Forest Inn: 715-268-4100

Chisago City, Minn. (20 miles)
• Comfort Inn & Suites: 651-213-3400

Stillwater, Minn. (25 miles)
• Water Street Inn: 651-439-6000
• Lora: 651-571-3500
• Comfort Inn & Suites: 651-275-1401

MAY MEMORIALS

AED

Iola Rokke

Bible College

Ruth Claus

General Fund

Pastor Andrew Hanson

Parish Education

Kent Quanbeck
Cordelia Agrimson

Seminary

Irene Westby
Raymond Haugland

World Missions

John Abel

Annabelle Eichhorst
Vernon Russum

WMF

Vernese Hartsoch
Lynn Ferguson

FLBCS

Irene Westby

... in honor of

Bible College

Dr. Wade Mobley

Seminary

Dr. Wade Mobley



L

ast month, we established that spiritual mentoring is a nurturing

relationship where a spiritually mature woman encourages and equips a younger woman to live for the glory of God. Let's consider a lifestyle and structured approach to spiritual mentoring.

Lifestyle mentoring involves the weaving of lives into the fabric of day-to-day life. There are a variety of opportunities for an older woman to support a young woman's faith and love for Jesus. With the leading of the Holy Spirit it may include using various ways to encourage, sharing a meal, carrying on a conversation at church, taking part in a small group, praying, or meeting occasionally as needs arise.

For me, lifestyle mentoring has involved my mom's availability to pour into my life when I need to process a decision, ask a question, or be encouraged. I know whenever I talk with my mom, she will point my gaze to Jesus. Her presence in my life is a gift.

Jenny was my piano teacher from second grade through high school. A few years later

TYPES OF MENTORING

BY ELIZABETH JORE

as I gave piano lessons, Jenny mentored me in teaching. When the Lord directed my path to more full-time women's ministry, Jenny became a spiritual mentor. We meet almost every month for a walk. As I give updates on my life, she shares nuggets of wisdom from her own life experience and always ends our walk with prayer. I come away from these times refreshed and with a renewed desire to live for Him.

Structured mentoring is meeting regularly for a season with a specific goal in mind. During time spent together, there might be a sharing of ideas on how to cultivate a daily devotional time, prayer for applying God's Word to everyday life, helping to develop a spiritual discipline, or giving practical and spiritual wisdom for the season the young woman is experiencing.

In recent years, structured mentoring has involved two older women supporting me in God's call to women's ministry. Through phone calls and meeting together, they have given His love, listened well, shared my burdens, counseled me, and prayed with me. I am eternally grateful.

Another example is an older woman who has made memorizing Scripture a priority in her life. She desired to see me faithfully hiding God's Word in my heart and has become my accountability partner and cheerleader.

Older women, whether in your own family or in the family of God, there are younger women who would benefit from your walk with Jesus, life experiences, and godly wisdom. Reading *Adorned* by Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, based on Titus 2:1-5, is a great book for a one-on-one relationship or a group to learn about God's plan for spiritual mentoring and living out biblical womanhood.

"Woman to woman.

Older and Younger.

Side by side.

Life on life.

This is God's good and beautiful plan."

(From the book *Adorned*)

Jore is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.

EEMN renamed to SON

Rebranding better reflects the ministry's mission and goals

The East European Missions Network (EEMN), established in 1992 by AFLC Pastor Don Richman and others to serve believers in Russia and the former Soviet bloc nations, is responding to new partnerships that expand its mission by adopting a new name: Spiritual Orphans Network (SON). The rebranding better tells the story of what the ministry actually does.

A recent letter from Pastor David Breidenbach, current director of SON, explains that the old name no longer tells the whole story of all of those whom they seek to serve—people in “many places in our world suffering from the effects of communist imposed scientific atheism (both former and current).” Their goal is to connect these spiritual orphans to the global family of Christ. You can find more information on the ministry website at sonetwork.org.

Pastor Roger David

Pastor Roger Eugene David, 74, of Minier, Ill., went to be with his Lord and Savior on May 25 at his home surrounded by his loving family. Born May 26, 1945, in Watseka, Ill., he was the son of David and Eva (Shear) David. He married Rose Stamm on June 5, 1965, at St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Thawville, Ill.

Roger worked several jobs over the course of his life including as a contractor, farmer, working for the State of Illinois in the personnel department, and nursing home administrator. He obtained his Doctor of Jurisprudence in 1986 and was a hearing attorney at the State Board of Education. He was also an ordained minister, and his mission was to spread the gospel and bring people to know Jesus Christ. He served Good Shepherd Lutheran, Lincoln, Ill., and Ebenezer Free Lutheran, Humbolt, Tenn.

Surviving are his wife; two sons, Joel David, and Jason David; one daughter, Andrea Mlacnik; three brothers, Jim David, Larry David, and Bill Kaeding; eight grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

A private family burial was held at Mount Joy Cemetery in Armington, Ill. Memorials may be made in Roger's name to Minier Christian Church, Minier, Ill., Samaritan's Purse, or Ebenezer Free Lutheran Church, Humbolt, Tenn.

Pastor Lyle Twite

Pastor Lyle “Bud” Irving Twite, 92, of Cloquet, Minn., passed away on May 21 in Sunnyside Health Care Center in Cloquet. Born September 18, 1927, in Veblen, S.D., he was the son of Lewis and Ida Twite. He married Alda Peterson on Nov. 8, 1951, in Sisseton, S.D.

He grew up in Claire City, S.D., and worked on the family farm. Lyle eventually took over the family farm and for a short time he owned a roller-skating rink in Claire City. After marriage, they moved to Kansas in 1954 and to Cloquet in 1956. Lyle worked in construction, mostly working on bridge building, including the Blatnik Bridge, until starting his own construction company, T&T Construction. In 1981 he started as a lay pastor in Finlayson, Minn. He attended Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary in Plymouth, Minn., and began his full-time ministry at Grace Free Lutheran, Bagley, Minn., in 1987 until retiring in 2008. After retirement he moved back to Cloquet. His greatest satisfaction came from serving his Lord, his church families, and others. Lyle had a servant's heart and he was always kind and generous.

Surviving are his wife of 68 years; three sons, Kent Twite of Acworth, Ga., Richard (Lynn) Twite of Cloquet, Minn., and Tim (Jan) Twite of Prior Lake, Minn.; two daughters, Muriel (Kevin) Gustafson of Cloquet, and Myrna (Jeff) Alley of Kennesaw, Ga.; eight grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

Private family services will be held at a later date. Letters and cards of condolence may be sent to the family c/o Atkins Northland Funeral Home, 801 14th St., Cloquet, MN 55720.

Vernon Russum

Vernon Lyle Russum, 93, of Grafton, N.D., died on May 22 at Edgewood Vista in Fargo, N.D. Born Nov. 4, 1926, in Grafton, he was the son of Palmer and Magda (Molskness) Russum. He married Dorothy Johnson Jan. 14, 1951, in Park River, N.D.

He graduated from Grafton High School in 1944 and attended Aakers Business College in Grand Forks, N.D. He served in the U.S. Army in counterintelligence in Atlanta, Ga. After marriage, they built their home near the Russum homestead south of Grafton, where they farmed for 40 years. He was a charter member of the Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, and was involved in many leadership positions. Vernon and Dorothy were involved in the establishment of the Association Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC). Vernon served on the board for Galilee Bible Camp, Partners in Mission Outreach, and AFLC World Missions for 27 years, making multiple mission trips to Brazil and Mexico. He was active in the Heritage Village, Walsh County Soil Conservation, NE Pioneer and Pembina County Tractor associations, the Walsh County Rural Conservation Development, and the Gideons International. While farming, Vernon worked at the U.S. Post Office. He owned and operated JDK Trailer Sales & Leasing, the local Montgomery Ward store, and loved working with fellow farmers as a crop insurance adjuster. He also owned Russum Realty, becoming a real estate broker at age 70. After retirement, Vernon became a bail bondsman, sharing Jesus with the people he helped. They moved to Edgewood Vista in Fargo in January 2017. Vernon leaves behind a legacy of faithfully serving his Lord Jesus Christ, finding satisfaction in hard work and with a smile, always demonstrating his compassion for others.

Surviving are his wife of 69 years; one son, David Russum of Fargo; four daughters, Judy (Bruce) Seibel of Fargo, Karen (Randy) Pederson of Tioga, N.D., Sandra Harthan of Fargo, and Cheri Nelson of Fargo; 17 grandchildren; 41 great grandchildren; and one brother, John (Delaine) Russum of Grafton.

A private family service was held, and a public service was planned for a later date. Burial will be at the Grafton Cemetery. Memorials may be directed to AFLC World Missions or a ministry of your choice.

PASSION LED US HERE



I am obsessed with church planting. Ever since I became a follower of Jesus as a young girl, I have wanted to be used by God to impact the world. Now I'm seeing the great need for my generation to start new churches, and I can't stop thinking about it.

When I was in high school attending a Lutheran church in Roseau, Minn., I didn't know about church planting. I didn't know that God could use me to be part of the mission. But after I left Roseau, I enrolled at a dynamic two-year Bible college, and the Lord began to open my eyes to what He was doing all around the world.

After my second year of Bible college, I served on a summer team that visited church plants. I loved getting to meet new people. I became captivated by the children. I saw the need they had for the gospel. My heart craved to be in each of those cities longer than a week. So, I signed up for a program to help new churches grow. As a part of that ministry, I was sent to Springfield, Mo. My heart was excited to get to be in one place for a whole year. It was a unique opportunity which stretched me, challenged me, and helped me grow.

Now I'm deeply involved. I serve as the administrative assistant for church planting with the AFLC. Our mission is

CHURCH-PLANTING OBSESSED

BY HALEY THRAMER

"to help churches plant new churches." We eat, drink, and live it. When I talk to people about our mission, something sparks inside of me. What excites me the most is that God wants to use my generation and the young adults around me who seem hungry for the task.

I'm encouraged by young Minnesotans who moved to Hawaii. They started a church aimed at reaching sinners. Their ministry is not a church building, it's the people who gather together, sharing the Word and fellowship, encouraging one another and building each other up.

Let's not just build buildings, let's build congregations. That's all I think about now as I write letters to donors and supporters. I send weekly Knee-mails to 1,000 people who have committed to pray. I help administer checks to support young pastors in Hawaii, Arizona, or subsidy checks to places in Colorado and rural North Dakota. I get to help a man from China with a doctorate who, instead of becoming a professor, wants to be a soul winner with his wife at a new AFLC Chinese church.

In I Corinthians 3:6-7 the Apostle Paul wrote, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the

growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." I think of all the times that God was able to use me on summer teams. There were times when I felt discouraged and thought, "Am I sure the kids are understanding me?" I didn't get to see the fruit of what was shared, but I take comfort in that fact that it isn't me doing the work. It is God who uses us to share, but He does all the growing, and His Word doesn't return empty.

So, I want to get my generation excited about Christ's mission. It's a basic calling: gathering people together to grow in Jesus. I'm praying that my 20-something friends will help us dig into our free and living congregations and live life out, full-speed, without social or spiritual distance. Let's infect a world that needs Christ with the gospel. God has called us into a fearful and paranoid world to bring the healing power that Christ offers through the cross and His resurrection. We can't wash our hands of that responsibility.

Thramer is the administrative assistant for AFLC Home Missions.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Center Free Lutheran, Salem, S.D., has been approved as a new congregation in the AFLC by members of the Coordinating Committee. The congregation is served by Pastor James Lindgren.

Pastor Brad Novacek has resigned from Zion Lutheran, Dexter, Minn., and Mount Sion Lutheran, Kasson, Minn., and is serving as a chaplain with the Minnesota National Guard.

Pastor Dick Hueter has resigned from serving Christ Lutheran, Shingelton, Mich.

Pastor Ed Kok will retire from serving United Lutheran, Manteca, Calif., in July.

Seth Moan, a 2020 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, was ordained May 31 at Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating. Moan has accepted a call to serve Emmanuel Free Lutheran, Williston, N.D.

Kevin Hall, a 2020 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, was ordained June 14 at Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating. He was installed June 21 at Westaker Free Lutheran, Newfolden, Minn.

Bryce McMinn, a 2020 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, will be ordained and installed June 28 at Ruthfred Evangelical Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating.

Andrew Kneeland, a 2020 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, will be ordained July 12 at Atonement Free Lutheran, Arlington, Wash., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating. He has accepted a call to serve Gloria Dei Lutheran, St. Louis, Mo., while he pursues a PhD in Historical Theology from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

Luke Long, who serves as the youth pastor at Atonement Free Lutheran, Arlington, Wash., will be ordained July 12 at Atonement Free Lutheran, Arlington, Wash., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating. Long completed his studies through the 12-year program at the Summer Institute of Theology.

Brian Westerbur, a 2020 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, will be ordained and installed July 26 at Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D., with Pastor Terry Olson, vice president of the AFLC, officiating.

Brian Lunn, a 2020 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, will be ordained and installed Aug. 2 at Word of Life Free Lutheran, Upsala, Minn.



The Barnabas team includes (from left) Isak Olson, Phoebe Holt, Megan Thonsgaard, Miah Johnson, and Mark Thonsgaard.

Home Missions sends out Barnabas summer team

When COVID-19 upended summer ministry plans for many college students and congregations, those willing and able to serve were left without an opportunity. AFLC Home Missions assembled a team of four students and one alumnus of the Free Lutheran Bible College to serve their mainly small, rural church plants in areas reopening after the pandemic.

Forming the Barnabas team, these five students are serving for 10 weeks (June 8-August 14) leading vacation Bible school programs and serving at AFLC Family Camp and Annual Conference near Osceola, Wis., and Pickerel Lake Bible Camp, Grenville, S.D. Team members include Isak Olson, Phoebe Holt, Miah Johnson and siblings Megan and Mark Thonsgaard.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-May 31, 2020

FUND	REC'D IN MAY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$32,627	\$161,654	\$190,716
Evangelism	11,146	42,065	55,945
Youth Ministries	13,602	45,464	52,586
Parish Education	19,086	56,206	85,666
Seminary	24,872	127,252	121,755
Bible College	33,160	183,304	258,528
Home Missions	31,179	133,706	177,577
World Missions	38,181	162,129	213,336
Personal Support	89,675	334,252	262,261
TOTALS	\$293,528	\$1,246,032	\$1,418,370

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

FREE + LIVING + CONGREGATIONS

The goal of missions is to see women and men, girls and boys, come to a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is central and must never be forgotten or neglected. How sad to recently read of a mission organization celebrating its centennial anniversary, with one of the leaders noting that their founders would probably be disappointed that conversion is not longer a goal in their common endeavors. There are many things that can be and should be done to meet the temporal



Pastor Robert Lee

needs of hurting people, but the greatest gift of all is denied them when the gospel is not proclaimed.

AFLC missions, at home and worldwide, has another important goal which is part of our DNA: to gather believers into congregations,

for that's where believers are nourished through Word and sacrament, and it's where discipleship is taught and modeled. Acts 2:42 provides a pattern from the first post-Pentecost congregation, where "they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Our congregations are Lutheran by conviction, not merely by profession, committed to the centrality of the means of grace (the inerrant Holy Scriptures, baptism, and the Lord's Supper) to healthy spiritual life, convinced that the Lutheran confessions are a faithful exposition of biblical truth.

A current discussion among some of our pastors concerns the meaning of the word "free" when applied to the congregation. "Free and living congregations," that's who we are, right? Are we indeed? Would to God that it was so!

The term refers to polity, of course, that a congregation should be under the authority of the Word and the Spirit of God alone, as our guiding principles teach, and this is the polity or form of church government under which our AFLC

operates. But to assume that congregational polity *guarantees* in any fashion the freedom in Christ at the heart of the true meaning of the term is a serious error. I remember an older layman in one of our congregations telling me of a time when there seemed to be more spiritual life in the local "synod" church than in his "free" congregation. To assume or suggest that this could never be true may reveal a dangerous and near-sighted arrogance. If you or I speak of our congregation as "free and living," let it always be done with deep humility, for it is only by the grace of God through the "quickening preaching" of His Word that it might be true.

The application of this goal on the world mission field is to see these congregations united in associations that seek to serve them, not control them, equipping them to accomplish together what a single congregation cannot do best alone. We believe that such associations are best because they are biblical and because they leave the most room for the Spirit of God to lead.

This is not an easy goal for missionaries due to the exercise of some level of control that may seem necessary at the beginning stages of the work. But what is modeled may often be more influential than what is taught, and too many national church bodies have established a more centralized polity, far removed from the free church pattern.

I recall the late Pastor Merle Knutson telling about an old national pastor who was concerned that the missionaries filled all of the leadership positions.

"You're not ready," he was told.

He replied, "You've been working here for over 50 years. When will we be ready?"

Pastor Knutson and the other missionaries were convicted when they heard their words and felt guilty over their failure to prepare the national church for the future.

Free + Lutheran + Congregations describes who we are and defines our mission goals. There is no need for us to apologize for our congregational polity, which serves us well and is both biblical and situational. Yet there is a need for us to admit that the organizational freedom which we prize has not automatically resulted in the spiritual freedom which is our true goal.

The Free Lutheran movement in America was conceived and constructed

... the organizational freedom which we prize has not automatically resulted in the spiritual freedom which is our true goal.

during a season of spiritual awakening and was renewed with the formation of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations in 1962-63. Spiritual life movements are fragile and may fossilize with the passage of time. Today is filled with new challenges that cannot be met by sleeping and satisfied congregations.

"Will You not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in You?" (Psalm 85:6)

"If My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (II Chronicles 7:14).

association retreat center

STICKING TO THE MISSION

BY KIRK RAUTIO

The summer season at the Association Retreat Center has started once again with our staff and employee training time. During our training sessions our staff members had long discussions this year about the current world situation with COVID-19 virus and the fear associated with it. Our staff members were trained on new protocols and procedures that we know are going to affect our camp property and ministry for an unknown time frame.

Throughout these discussions our staff have expressed differing levels of concern and differing opinions about the situation. It was through these conversations that we were reminded about the mission here at the ARC—"to glorify Jesus Christ by providing a place where people can be equipped to make a positive difference in their lives, homes, churches, and communities." We realized that it is even

more important to be the hands and feet of Christ to the groups that will eventually bless us with their presence.

With all of the fear, anger, anxiety, and unknowns about the future due to the current world situation, we have a perfect opportunity to offer a place of peace and rest to our guests. The Apostle Paul writes in II Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

At our staff training, we concluded that although we will face hard situations this summer, and though individually each person might not struggle with fear or anxiety, we do have the unique opportunity to be strong, fearless, kind, and compassionate. We want to take people's concerns seriously, even if we may not have any ourselves. We could be the only representative of Jesus someone might see this summer, and we need not waste the opportunity.

Seeing the response of the crew through these discussions gave me reassurance that the ARC is still on its missional target. We are here to stay. Although times are tough and fiscally extremely tight, God has His plan for this place and we are ready to do the work whenever the guests arrive by His will.

Wherever you are and whoever you are with, take the time and opportunity to be strong, fearless, kind, and compassionate. We thank you for your continual prayers as you think about the ARC. We have you in our prayers. We ask that in your own mission field you open your hearts and your doors and remain faithful to God's call on your lives as we are standing here faithful at the ARC.

Rautio is the executive director of the Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis.