

THE 

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LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



UPWARD

FLY BEYOND 2022





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HIS DWELLING PLACE

BY KIRSTIE SKOGERBOE

“Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time” (II Chronicles 7:15-16).

These are God’s words to King Solomon after he finished building the long-awaited temple. They come right after Solomon’s devout prayer of dedication, where he asks God, “Let your saints rejoice in your goodness” (6:41). But the words also come three chapters before the rending of Judah from Israel and the idolatry of the kings Rehoboam and Jeroboam. The unfaithfulness of God’s beloved people incurred His wrath. About 400 years later, His glory—the sign of His presence—left the temple (Ezekiel 10), and the Babylonians destroyed it. It’s one of the most tragic stories in Scripture.

The desolation of Solomon’s temple, however, illuminates the truth of Stephen’s words in Acts 7:48:

“The Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?’” (ESV).

These are the kinds of words that should make us tremble. We cannot faithfully worship God, much less make a house and keep Him in it. He has made everything that we would use to

make it. He has made us, and He is able to destroy us for *our* idolatry. Fear would therefore be a rational response to Paul’s question: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple ...?” (I Corinthians 3:16, ESV).

But God does not act according to our reason. With divine foolishness, He has treated us tenderly (I Corinthians 1:25, 27). He knew we would fail to worship Him, so He made His own temple. We could not make ourselves holy enough to host Him, so He filled us with His holiness. We do not encounter that holiness as Israel did on Mount Sinai, in “... a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest,” but instead in “Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant” (Hebrews 12:18, 24).

God’s words to Solomon have, in fact, proven true for the Church. He not only promises His presence, but also His attentiveness, His gaze, and His heart. The “prayers made in this place” are the prayers on our own lips, and He receives each one intently. He dwells with us, not out of obligation but from love. He sees our spiritual wounds but covers and heals them; He even delights in us (Psalm 17:8).

The gospel tells us that God has made the unfaithful His home. We are a temple worthy of destruction, but Jesus’ blood covers the doorposts, and He will stay with us to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

Skogerboe, a 2018 graduate of the Free Lutheran Bible College, Plymouth, Minn., lives in Orange, Calif.

The Conference recommends that congregations be urged to designate one, or more, Sundays during the year as “Youth Sunday.”

—1963 Annual Report, Youth Committee Resolutions

... we feel the need of implementing a youth program centered strongly in evangelism, seeking to bring youth to a personal consciousness of sin, to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, expressing itself in a clear witness of salvation.

—1963 Annual Report, Youth Committee Resolutions

The Conference recognizes our continued responsibility to strengthen the confidence of our youth in the Bible as the infallible and inspired Word of God.

—1964 Annual Report, Youth Committee Resolutions

The Conference recommends to our Youth Board and officers that they actively and prayerfully support our Bible School and Seminary and encourage our young people to attend.

—1966 Annual Report, Youth Committee Resolutions

The Conference recognizes that the youth of today are the church of tomorrow; therefore we urge that our pastors and congregations reevaluate their local program for their youth.

—1967 Annual Report, Youth Committee Resolutions



IN CHRIST UPWARD

BY PASTOR RYAN TONNESON

Recently, a new political party was launched. This third party is comprised of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents who are looking for a political home. They are calling it the Forward Party. The United States, they claim, needs a new direction: “Not left, not right. But Forward.”

I cannot yet tell what the party’s platform is because so far they have not published one. But I have a hunch that in trying to pander everyone, they will, instead, please no one.

Yet, I would agree with the party’s claim that our nation needs a new direction. Not left. Not right. Not even forward. Instead, I would suggest we begin looking Upward.

In the middle of July, the students in our AFLC did just that: We focused our attention upward. We sought to minimize distractions as we gathered together for FLY Beyond, the national youth equipping conference.

During that week, we dove deeply into Ephesians 4:11-16. I’d encourage you to pause now and read those verses. As you do, you will discover the writing has a general trajectory upward. You’ll also discover that because of the grace given to us by Christ, we are to grow up into Christ, and then we are, in love, to build up the Body of Christ.

There are five words which guide us as we look upward.

Gave. Foremost is an acknowledgment of a dire need for each person to receive the grace of God that has been given through Jesus Christ (2:8-9; 4:7). By His shed blood, Jesus offers to you the forgiveness and grace your sin-sick soul desperately needs. This grace is available to you, freely and without merit.

Christ Jesus also gave gifts to His Church—four unique roles of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd-teachers—as well as various spiritual gifts to each believer. He uniquely gifts each individual and uses you in His kingdom as He has gifted you.

Gain. These gifts have been given by Christ so that the saints might be equipped, or outfitted, for service in the kingdom of God. The saying is true: God doesn’t call the equipped; He equips the called (Hebrews 13:20-21).

Christianity isn’t a spectator event. Each believer is to be engaged in “the work of ministry” (vs. 12). This looks different for each person as we use the gifts, talents, and abilities that we have been given.

Goal. Each business needs a mission statement that guides and motivates the company. Every journey needs

a destination. So, too, there are benchmarks after which Christians ought to be striving.

In verses 12-13, Paul gives four goals for believers. First, Christians are to be *united* in faith and knowledge (personal and experiential) around our common confession (4:4-6; the Apostles’ Creed). Second, Christians should be in the process of *maturing* in Christ. Third, as those who bear the name of Christ, we ought to be *transformed* into the image of Christ. This happens when we become new creations in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17) and daily as we are shaped and molded by Him as we spend time in His Word and in prayer. And last, Paul desires that Christians would be *anchored* in Christ, firm through the storms of doubt, and held fast against new and contrary teaching of man.

Grow. Growth in Christ happens as Christians “speak the truth in love” (vs. 15). In modern culture, truth is often seen as being relative or as a matter of perspective. However, truth is absolute, knowable, and is found in Jesus Christ (John 14:6). We are to speak truth, yet our speech is to be bathed in love. As we do that, the body of Christ, the Church, will grow together.

Go. Finally, as we turn our eyes upward, Jesus asks us to look at the fields, ripe for harvest (Matthew 9:35-38). He asks us to pray that the Lord would send laborers into His vineyard and bring in those who are lost and hurting. Believers are called to go, always being ready to share the good news of the gospel with the lost. May the Lord give us eyes to see the harvest and hearts to share with the lost.

Members of Gen Z quite often get a bad rep. They are accused of being glued to their devices. It’s said that they have no taste of the real world. Statistically, they are labeled the generation of “nones,” and as a growing minority (from 34 percent in 2018 to 45 percent in 2022) have classified themselves as having no religious affiliation.

However, in my work with students, I have seen the other side of Gen Z. I see a caring and compassionate generation of teens who are willing to reach out to the lost, the hurting, and the marginalized. I have seen students whose faith is alive and who are willing to be lights in dark places. I see a generation that is moving—not left or right—but upward.

Tonneson is the associate pastor of youth, young adults, and families at Maranatha Free Lutheran, Glyndon, Minn.





SPIRITUAL GIFTS

ASSESSMENT

BY MOLLY BARNNESS

As the FLY Beyond planning team began to meet for this cycle, we talked about what challenges youth are facing today. Through our discussions we concluded that there really is “nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9) and all believers are facing the same challenge—we are to be continually growing in Christ. This realization brought us to our theme verses for the week from Ephesians 4:11-16. Here Paul reminds us that we are to continue to grow together using the gifts the Lord has given us as many members of the body of Christ.

That isn’t the only admonition; these verses go further. While the entire Bible is important to each believer, I see verses 14 and 15 as especially important for students today: “We will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of His body, the church” (NLV).

So how could we, as a planning team, set up students attending FLY Beyond for that upward growth?

Typically FLY Beyond has a similar year-to-year format with sessions focused on Bible study, apologetics, evening worship, and discussion. Often there is one variable session each year. What would we

do with that session to connect to our Upward theme? In multiple places in the New Testament, spiritual gifts are associated with Christian growth and the body of Christ. We decided to focus on spiritual gifts during this open session. Our students took a spiritual gifts assessment the first night at FLY Beyond, then on nights two and three there was an opportunity to attend a breakout to look closer at individual spiritual gifts. Finally, on night four students met in their youth groups to explore how to bring this knowledge home and act on it.

Throughout the week at FLY Beyond it was a joy to see students not only realizing what spiritual gifts are and which gifts they may have, but also how those gifts could be used to build up the body of Christ at their own churches. One student commented to me that he was quite sure walking into the week what his spiritual gifts were but that it was quite nice to have the time together to talk about ways that those gifts could be used even while still in high school. For me, this was one of the biggest joys of the week: seeing students feeling equipped to return to their own churches and body of believers ready to lift each other up and encourage each other as members of that one body.

Barnness is the youth director at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Kenyon, Minn.



MY GIFTINGS

BY JACOB GULLICKSON

During the week of FLY Beyond, I realized what my spiritual gifts were and learned more about them as a whole. I learned how I could use them to benefit my community, my church, and my school.

At the beginning of camp, I did not know anything about spiritual gifts or what gifts I even had. The first night we were there, however, every camper took a spiritual gifts test. Even though I felt like I had an idea of what my spiritual gifts were, I was surprised with my results.

My top three spiritual gifts are discernment, faith, and serving/ ministering. Before camp, I was not sure what discernment even was, but the lessons and small group discussions during FLY Beyond taught me what it meant and how I could use my gift of discernment in my life to help others.

Spiritual gifts are special talents that God has given to every believer on the planet. Some may not know what their spiritual gifts are, but when you take the time to study for yourself, it seems easy to realize what gifts you have.

In my church, I use my spiritual gifts to serve as an usher and sing for special music. I also serve in the kitchen during coffee hour and help clean up afterwards. In my school, I used my spiritual gifts by playing sports and by attending extra-curricular activities. During these activities, I could show my faith to others through my actions. During my junior year of high school, I joined a traveling choir that sang at many different churches near the cities. Singing in this choir enabled me to share the Word of God with others through praise and worship, potentially bringing others to faith.

Gullickson, a member of Emmanuel Lutheran, Kenyon, Minn., is a 2022 graduate of St. Croix Lutheran Academy in West St. Paul, Minn. He plans to attend the Free Lutheran Bible College in the fall.





MY GIFTINGS

BY ANIKA ANDERSON

When I heard the main theme of the message at Fly Beyond this year was spiritual gifts, I was surprised. Though spiritual gifts aren't usually a much-discussed topic, FLY Beyond did a very good job breaking down the different gifts. We started with a test that asked us many questions about how we would respond to certain events. The outcome of my test stated that my top spiritual gifts were administration, discernment, and leadership.

To my surprise, there were a lot of people whose top spiritual gift was administration. Administration is organizing, planning, and allocating people (or yourself) in order to accomplish a task. Administration also plays a vital role in the church, such as in organizing and planning events and music.

My second top gift was discernment. Discernment is also known as perception, and the ability to judge well. In addition to being an important virtue to have for everyday life, discernment also has some biblical purposes, as well. I Corinthians 12:10 says, "... to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues." The central point of the small group discussion on discernment was about distinguishing between spirits, which is being able to tell if a spirit is of God or not. Discernment is also seeing where someone's intentions lie. This spiritual gift can be very useful in all areas of our lives.

My third spiritual gift was leadership. Leadership is not only taking charge or control of every situation, but also inspiring and influencing others to achieve a goal or grow in their faith. This is a very important spiritual gift for a pastor, youth leader, teacher, and even a parent to have. I Timothy 4:12 says, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity." I believe this is the main job of a leader—to set a good example for others. God gives everyone different spiritual gifts and expects us to use them wisely.

Anderson is a member of St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D.





THE BODY OF CHRIST

BY JEREMY LARSON

I was blessed to attend the FLY Beyond training and equipping camp this past July. One of the emphases of the camp related to spiritual gifts. It was eye-opening to both the youths and adults as we took the spiritual gifts inventory. The assessment’s goal was to assist in seeing God’s gifting in our lives. Some gifts were expected, while other results came as a surprise. It was especially fun to hear the “ah-ha” moment when a student could point to various ways God was already working through them in gifts not previously seen as particularly spiritual.

In each case, spiritual gifts are given to be a blessing to the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” God graciously equips us with the tools needed to function together within the body of Christ. He has a unique calling for all of us who jointly function in concert with others to make up the whole.

After identifying their gifts, the students attended workshops to learn practical ways to use those gifts in their churches. Some of our youths saw ways they could exercise gifts of leadership and administration by organizing projects to bless

the needy in their community or help facilitate programs in their local youth group. Some recognized how their gifting of faith could be an encouragement to others as their confidence in the Lord “rubbed off” on those serving with other gifts. Others got excited about how even behind-the-scenes giftings were an important part of building God’s kingdom. All were encouraged to use what they have been given.

Sometimes it’s easy to decline an opportunity because it can feel like someone else would do it better, or we might think we are prideful to put ourselves into a certain position. But with the realization that God has gifted us (no thanks or praise to us) for the purpose of it being “for the common good,” it can get us past that false notion and enable us to serve with both humility and expectation.

We watch with delight as someone uses a gift we have given them. This is no less true of God. May we each delight the Giver as we use His gifts for the work to which He has called us.

Larson serves as the associate pastor at St. Paul’s Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D.

GIFTS ARE FOR MINISTERING

BY PASTOR DAVID NIEMELA

I knew something was wrong this spring when I considered our youth ministry—or did I use the words, youth group?—for this coming school year. The problem first seemed to be that we lacked numbers. Only two regular attendees would be left after the graduates moved on. Then I realized that wasn't the problem. The problem was that I was thinking about numbers. Since when did we need numbers for ministry? I heard something about where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name ...

Pastor Dan Hurner, AFLC Youth Ministries network coordinator, emailed me around this time to see how youth ministry was going. While acknowledging the blessing of numbers, he counseled me, "I'd argue that being small allows you the opportunity to be more creative and flexible than you may realize. Your church's youth ministry may not look like the classic youth group that we're used to—and that's okay." I also had in the back of my mind a saying I heard at seminary: "Youth ministry is not junior varsity ministry."

So, two members of our varsity team (one graduate, one returning starter) situated themselves in my vehicle for the long trip to the Association Retreat Center for FLY Beyond. Much teaching and fellowship happened at the camp, but the spiritual gifts inventory we took factored in throughout the week. We split into groups the second and third evenings based on spiritual giftings and led by adults who measured high in the respective gift. For example, one evening in the discernment spiritual gifting group, we discussed Scripture passages (such as 1 John 4:1-6), a real-life example of choosing worship music with sound doctrine, and a temptation that could be manifested with this gift, namely, being over-critical of others.

We discussed these gifts as youth groups on the fourth evening. Our small group adopted two youths from Westaker Free Lutheran in Newfolden, Minn., along with their friend. We discussed a hypothetical situation, suggested by a group member, of reaching out to young families in a community. Everyone had a gift to contribute in our example, from the one gifted with leadership identifying the need and envisioning a way to serve these young families, to the ones with the gift of mercy welcoming them into a young families' Bible study. The laughter may have made it appear our discussion was inefficient, but these youths enjoyed one another's

fellowship, and seem to understand their gifts were meant to also serve their home church fellowship.

The intent of the spiritual gift inventory wasn't to box them into a spiritual gift, rather, that they'd see they are gifted to serve the body of Christ, as evening speaker Pastor Ryan Tonneson exhorted us from Ephesians 4. "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift" (vs. 7, ESV). This gifting includes teens, whom we tend to overlook. David Ross, author of *Youth Ministry That Lasts a Lifetime*, corrects the misuses of this developmental stage: "... a biblically sound perspective will approach [youth] as a distinct grouping of young adults rather than a grouping of leftover children." He exhorts readers to challenge youths to give of themselves in ministry, going against the grain of a culture bent on consuming. It is also a challenge to the adult to guide youths in this regard.

Before you take too much weight on yourself, or push all the weight on a group of teens with a challenge, consider what, or Who, we are gifting to one another. It is Jesus Christ in His Word. We might be tempted to say, "To gift others with Christ, you must first be gifted yourself—both with Christ and His spiritual gifts." This would be wrong, since God's Word goes forth powerfully and does not return void (Isaiah 55:10-11), regardless of the agent God uses to distribute it. The Augsburg Confession says, "the sacraments are efficacious even if the priests who administer them are wicked men" (article VIII). In other words, God can use an unsaved and ungifted minister. God accompanies His Word, which anyone can carry, whether they know Him or not. And yet, what confidence we have when we know that God not only accompanies the Word we gift to others, but He also accompanies those of us who know Him, the ones He gifted.

We all left FLY Beyond gifted by God. It is bittersweet that I only have one month with one of these youths before he heads to Minneapolis, gifts and all, to bless another body of believers while he studies at the Free Lutheran Bible College. Missing him, I'm not sure what the plan is concerning this age group at our church. If it isn't youth group, it still will be youth ministry. And even better, gifted youth (and adults) *ministering*.

Niemela serves United Free Lutheran, Greenbush, Minn.







BIBLE STUDY

TOOLS FOR LIFE

BY SETH SKOGERBOE

Students at FLY Beyond this year were tasked with finding answers to some life-defining questions: What am I made for? What are my spiritual gifts, and how can I use them in the church? How can I use my gifts for God's glory at school, at home, at work, or anywhere? One such fundamental question considered in morning sessions throughout the week was, "How should I go about studying the Word of God?"

Speakers and their answers varied. Youth leader Seth Larson started us off with a "cheesy pick-up line" approach: "Lord, I think it's time that you and I have a DTR ..." (an acronym, FLBC students may know, for a "define the relationship" talk). Breaking I John 1 into three thematic sections, Larson focused on corresponding names for our relationship with God: He is our Forgiver, our Father, and our Future. These names, and the underlying questions they answer—Who am I, and who are You?—are a good reminder of where we always stand when we open the Word of God. How should we go about studying God's Word? Seth's text answered the question well: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (vs. 8). Who am I? A sinner. And who are You? "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive ..." (vs. 9). My saving God. We come to the Word unworthy, with humility, in repentance.

Part of that humility is allowing Scripture to speak for itself. On our second morning, Pastor Wade and Michelle Mobley presented on the first chapter of I Timothy, offering up their own three-letter acronym: CIA. In this case, the letters mean content, interpretation, and application. Each letter, they reminded us, was critical. By studying content, we ask, "What does this passage say at face value? Who wrote it—and where, and when? What culture received it, and what is its genre, and who on earth is it for?" This leads to interpretation, when we identify why it was written and ask the question, "What is the purpose of this passage?" Finally, we dug into the application when our answers to "Why?" spur us into correlating action. The Mobleys grounded their answer in I Timothy 1:5, "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." They

drew their application from verse 11's "accordance with the gospel," thus: Go down Paul's list in vs. 8-11 and see how forgiven you are. Again, how should we study God's Word? In the knowledge of our absolution.

Pastor Matthew Pillman, for the third morning's session, presented on the "Rock Solid Hope" of the gospel in I Peter 1. He might reasonably have been understood to answer our starting question on how we study God's Word with, "As a student!" With Pastor Pillman, students considered Martin Luther's thoughts on I Peter, the most common words in the chapter and book, significant cross-references, traditional and biblical perspectives on its author, and differing translations of key words and phrases throughout. Despite the scholarly accoutrements, the end point of the study (as in all other sessions) remained the revelation and glorification of Jesus and His work for us. Pastor Pillman guided students to "rejoice" in the "great mercy" of "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading," to the "praise and glory and honor ... of Jesus Christ" (I Peter 1:3-7). How to study? In a word: thoroughly.

And is there any better way to study a text than by preparing to teach it? Our last morning session of the week aptly focused on how to compose a Bible study. Walking us through a by-then familiar question-and-answer process, Pastor Brett Boe paused at moments along the way to highlight study tools and tips he'd used to pull together our morning session, a study on Psalm 147. He talked about reading and re-reading, journaling, and filing away scriptural cross-references for use at opportune moments. He also talked about finding law and gospel "handles" in the text for readers (and Bible students) to grab onto. One such: "The Lord lifts up the humble; he casts the wicked to the ground" (147:6). Another, Pastor Boe's theme: "He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds" (147:3). Students learned through this—as in every other morning session that week—how to come and bring others to the feet of the Giver of every good and perfect spiritual gift, the Word, Jesus Christ.

Skogerboe, a 2018 graduate of the Free Lutheran Bible College, lives in Orange, Calif.



TRAINING ON THE JOB APPRENTICE

BY COLTIN COX

The apprenticeship program through AFLC Youth Ministries has had an amazing impact on my first year of youth ministry and will continue to have a lasting impact on how I serve in the future. I truly valued the weekly connections with my mentor, Pastor Jason Holt, who helped me walk through and combat some of the struggles that presented themselves over the past year. Through those weekly meetings I have been well equipped to handle and facilitate future conflicts. I was asked to think critically and I was pushed to work and serve to the best of my ability, and for that I am thankful. Between the support of my mentor, other students, and my local pastor, I have built up a great network for support in ministry within this past year. I also know that this will continue to be a group of believers who have a common goal, to bring the saving message of Jesus to the youths of our congregations.

Looking back over the past year, one thing that I struggled with and viewed as a weakness of mine was my ability to network with and involve parents in our congregation. Over the past year, I have been trained in how to intentionally pursue relationships with them. This has been at the forefront of my mind

when thinking about how to serve more effectively in ministry. The catalyst for this was the program and how it pushed me to further dissect my work to improve for the betterment of my congregation. Over the past year, what I viewed as a flaw has been transformed into an area in ministry that I am really passionate about. Parents are a crucial part of youth ministry. Without solid parent involvement in some capacity, youth ministry suffers in many cases. This mindset was stirred because of the apprenticeship program, and because of that I am a more diligent youth worker in that area especially.

I am also thankful for my prayer partners in the program. This reminded me that there are others who are deeply invested in the youth of their congregation. The network of youth workers that I gained because of this program will not soon be forgotten. I value each one of them and their opinions. If it was not for the apprenticeship program, I would not have been connected to and invested in these other leaders like I have the privilege to be now.

Cox, pictured at top, serves as the youth ministry worker at United Lutheran, Laurel, Neb.



BY PASTOR MATTHEW QUANBECK

As our congregation called Coltin Cox to serve as our youth worker, I was thrilled to hear about the apprenticeship program offered by AFLC Youth Ministries. What a practical way to help AFLC congregations as we seek to strengthen our ministries to the youths of our congregations and our communities. Looking back on Coltin's year of apprenticeship, I can affirm the program is tremendously helpful for not only the youth worker, but also for the congregation.

During the program, Pastor Jason Holt, director of AFLC Youth Ministries, met with Coltin weekly as his mentor. One of the stated goals of the program is to train the apprentice in spiritual leadership, logistical organization, teaching, and interpersonal communication. Coltin's continual growth in these areas helped make our youth ministry more effective. It was clear that Coltin was not only being trained to *do* youth ministry, but he was being taught how to *think* about youth ministry. As he has thoughtfully led in our congregation, youth group time has grown into more than a Bible lesson and a game on Wednesday nights. It has developed into a ministry where youths are being well-trained scripturally and apologetically in their faith, they are being taught what living in gospel community looks like, and their growth is having an impact on their families.

The apprenticeship has proven helpful for our congregation beyond simply training our youth worker. Holt has been eager to assist us in developing our youth ministry program. For example, he helped us think through what reasonable expectations are for a part-time youth worker. He shared with us several components of youth ministry and how much time each tends to take within a week. He also expressed that if we saw particular areas for Coltin to work on, he was glad to work on them with him. He was willing to tailor the program to fit the needs of our congregation.

The program was also invaluable to me as a pastor. When a staff position is added in a church, the pastor is often relieved to pass on some responsibilities to the new staff member. In reality, the position often removes some responsibilities, but also adds new ones such as oversight and training. The apprenticeship program helped to minimize this. I met with Coltin regularly as a ministry teammate, but I didn't have to become an expert in youth ministry in order to train him. Instead, I could trust he was being mentored by someone with years of experience and extensive training in youth ministry.

AFLC Youth Ministries' apprenticeship program is a practical and effective way to help both a youth worker and a congregation build a strong foundation for enduring ministry to youth.

Quanbeck serves United Lutheran, Laurel, Neb.

YOUTH MINISTRIES' APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

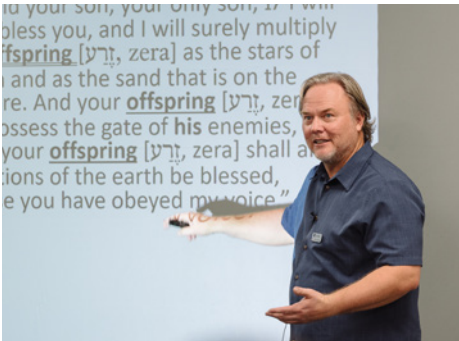
Almost a decade ago, the AFLC Youth Board identified that many volunteer and vocational youth leaders expressed significant challenges during the first couple years of serving a local congregation. The youth leaders had a burden for today's teenagers, and the congregations wanted to see them be effective. But a gap often appeared between calling and effectiveness.

The Apprenticeship Program was developed to address this gap. With weekly components in the areas of spiritual leadership, biblical teaching, interpersonal communication, and logistical organization, the Apprenticeship Program offers skill development while the apprentice regularly serves the local congregation. This effort positions a congregation and youth leader to apply together, so that the 12-month experience can connect the growing youth leader with veteran voices in youth ministry and the congregation can have a stronger link to the national youth ministry efforts.

For more information, please contact Dr. Jason Holt. Email him at jasonholt@afcl.org, or call him at (763) 412-2005.

Summer Institute of Theology held Aug. 1-5 on FLBCS campus

Fifty-four students registered for the 2022 Summer Institute of Theology, held Aug. 1-5 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, Plymouth, Minn. Featured classes included “Salvation History,” by Dr. Brent Olson; “Servant Leadership in Free and Living Congregations,” by Dr. James Molstre; “Christian Ethics,” by Dr. Nathan Olson; “Adult Catechesis,” by Dr. Jason Gudim; “Confirmation Workshop,” by Pastor J. Christian Andrews; and “Adult Sunday School Workshop,” by Marian Christopherson.



Instructors included Dr. Nathan Olson (top left), Pastor J. Christian Andrews (middle left), Marian Christopherson (far left), Dr. Brent Olson (near left), and Dr. Jason Gudim (below left). Students (above, with instructors) came from as far away as Puerto Rico (Pastor Hector Hiraldo Sosa, below middle) and Louisiana (Pastor Peter Ford, top middle).





FLY
FREE
LUTHERAN
YOUTH

The 2023 Free Lutheran Youth Convention is less than a year away. Members of the FLY Committee have been actively planning for our week together July 3-8 at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colo. The theme is “Restored” from Revelation 21:5-7, which says, “And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ And he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.’”

Let’s imagine the day we arrive at FLY 2023. Can you see all the buses rolling in or the vans pulling trailers of luggage? Remember that one year when a double decker bus pulled up? Can you hear the moans and groans of people stretching after traveling for many hours? Can you smell the crisp, clean air of the mountains?

MAKING ALL THINGS NEW

BY DANIEL KEINANEN

There is something special about being in the Rocky Mountains. There is excitement about the fun activities that are going to happen. There is beauty surrounding us in the hills and snow-capped mountains. There is great anticipation about what God will teach us. The evening, workshop, and elective speakers have been faithfully preparing the words they will speak. The Lord is preparing that week for us, and it will be made new. There will be new experiences, new friends, new stories, and new-found faith for many. The FLY Convention is about God and His work in our lives. He will make it new for all of us. He will restore His people.

Now imagine what God will do in your life. Imagine how He will speak to you, and how His Word will transform you into something new. You don’t want to miss this week.

Early registration, with the best rate,

begins October 20. Regular registration begins November 4. The non-refundable registration deposit is \$150 per person. Note the registration chart and visit our website (flyconvention.org) for more information on speakers and other promotional materials. Check with your youth leader or pastor to see if there is a registration event at your church. See if your church received the FLY promotional packet with a poster, stickers, and other goodies. Updates will be communicated on our social media pages. Make sure to follow the FLY Convention on Instagram and Facebook. Can’t wait to see you next summer at FLY 2023.

Keinanen, who serves as youth and worship director at Christ is Lord Lutheran, Onalaska, Wis., is the FLY Convention coordinator.

Registration	Oct. 20-Nov.3	Nov. 4-Jan. 19	Jan. 20-April 20	April 21-May 25	Walk up
Student	\$499	\$649	\$749	\$849	\$949
Dorm room leader	\$399	\$399	\$499	\$599	N/A
Staff	\$399	\$399	\$499	\$599	N/A
Adult	\$799	\$949	\$1049	\$1149	\$1249
Child	\$199	\$199	\$199	\$199	\$199



Tordenskjold congregation marks 150 years of history

Members of Tordenskjold Free Lutheran, Underwood, Minn., celebrated the 150th anniversary of the congregation on July 17 with a morning worship service and afternoon anniversary service, which included testimonies, greetings from former pastors, music by an anniversary choir, and a message from Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president. The celebration was delayed one year after the official anniversary due to COVID.

The congregation was founded in 1871 by Danish and Norwegian settlers, early membership reached more than 150 people. The first sanctuary, a wood frame construction built with 100 feet of lumber donated by each settler, was completed in 1879 on property donated by Peder Jensen. A belfry, funded with money raised by the young people's society, and a basement was completed in 1904, and a

dedicatory sermon was given by Professor Sven Oftedal, one of the founders of the Lutheran Free Church (LFC). Other land grants, given by George and Clara Lee in 1907 and Ole and Hansine Sonstebø in 1916, added to the property. The church was struck by lightning in 1924, causing it to burn to the ground. A new brick building replaced the structure, and was dedicated in 1927 by E. E. Gynild, president of the LFC.

Tordenskjold's first church affiliations were with the former Norwegian-Danish Lutheran Conference, followed by a brief affiliation with the former Norwegian United Lutheran Church (1890-93). The congregation joined the LFC, whose Fundamental Principles were adopted in 1915. When the LFC merged with the American Lutheran Church in 1963, the Tordenskjold congregation, along with Kvam,



TOP: Those present at the 150th anniversary celebration. MIDDLE: Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, Pastor David Skordahl, Pastor Wendel Johnson, Pastor Mark Johnson, Pastor Dan Hurner, and Carl Juhl. ABOVE: Members of the anniversary choir sing during the service.

Sarpsborg, and Zion, chose to remain independent. They later became charter members of the AFLC. Parish ties with Kvam and Sarpsborg were established in 1884. In 1937, Zion of Dalton was added to the parish. The four-point

parish remained until Palm Sunday 1986 when Sarpsborg Church was destroyed by fire. Currently, the parish consists of Kvam, Tordenskjold, and Zion-Sarpsborg churches, which are served by Pastor Mark Johnson and Pastor Dan Hurner.



INTRODUCING BOARD MEMBERS

“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

Anne Presteng, first vice president

I am humbled and privileged to be serving a second term on the WMF board. The last three years have shown me God’s continued faithfulness to our WMF, our national and local church, and to my own family which consists of my husband John, three sons, and 16 grandchildren. God has truly blessed us as we live and serve Him in Grafton, N.D., where we attend Bethel Lutheran Church.



I was born in Canada and came with my parents (Richard and Leone Snipstead) to the U.S. when I was 3. We moved several times while I was growing up. My most vivid memories are Sunday school experiences and the dear people who loved the Lord in each church where we worshiped.

I was blessed to be taught to love God and His Word as a child. In high school God impressed upon me the words from John 1:14, “... the word became flesh and dwelt among us ...” and the personal realization that Jesus really came to earth to save me.

I graduated from the Free Lutheran Bible College in 1975 and later became a speech language pathologist. My true love is music, which has been a blessing and powerful tool in my life as God has used music to speak to me. I am blessed to be part of that ministry at my church.

As I grow older, I am reminded of the briefness and futility of life without the Lord. How important it is for each of us to focus on God’s Word and His plan for us.

“Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12).

Karen Floan, recording secretary

In the September 2019 issue, I was listed as one of the newly elected WMF board members. In that article I shared a brief biography along with my testimony of how the Lord brought me to assurance of salvation in my junior high years, claiming I John 1:9. That assurance of salvation is something I have clung to especially when facing difficulties. Having been re-elected as the recording secretary, I look back over the last three years and marvel at God’s faithfulness.



Who would have thought our world would have encountered a pandemic and experienced the unrest we are seeing today. And the changes have happened so quickly. Over the past three years I’ve also experienced stressful life-changing events: the sudden loss of my husband’s dear mom, my husband’s intense cancer treatments which included a stem cell transplant, retirement with financial changes, and remodeling and moving to a new home.

I am guessing you have faced many challenges, too.

In all these changes one thing has remained constant and that is the faithfulness of God. He has met all of our needs and more. He has provided exactly what we needed at the time we needed it.

I could list so many ways that He has faithfully met our needs: provisions for treatment for my husband’s cancer both financially and with excellent health providers; safety and needs met for family members especially during COVID; and opened doors to purchase a new home near family in a very competitive housing market.

Along with His faithfulness, His daily mercies have provided abundantly for me. I can only agree with the hymn writer: “Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father, there is no shadow of turning with Thee. Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not; as Thou has been Thou forever wilt be” (Thomas Chilsholm).



Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Imagine you are a visitor to an AFLC gathering. This could be Annual Conference, a WMF Rally, Bible camp, or your Sunday morning service. You are wondering, “What is Committee No. 1? Who are Paul and Becky Abel? What is the ARC?” You would definitely feel like an outsider.

We are writing a note of encouragement to anyone in the AFLC who is up front at any AFLC gathering, whether you are sharing, preaching, or leading. We all want new people to join our church family. But often what we don’t say up front makes the first-time attendee feel unwelcome. Here are some suggestions to help the new person feel at home, based on what we have heard from those speaking at AFLC gatherings we have attended.

Avoid name dropping. Never refer to any certain person, either present in the room or not, or from the AFLC past, without some explanation of who that person is.

Introduce yourself. When you go up front, explain who you are.

Explain places. Every time you mention headquarters, FLBCS, the ARC, or your local Bible camp, explain what that is.

Explain what is happening. Whether it is a retreat, Bible camp, or Annual Conference, explain the schedule, the procedures, the committees, the locations, etc.

To sum up, every time you are up front, assume you are talking to someone who is there for the first time. This is because most likely someone is there for the first time.

Look at it this way. God has answered the prayers of our AFLC predecessors. He has grown our AFLC family. With this extra effort made, we can help others enjoy the people, places, and events that the AFLC has to offer.

*Signed, Pastor Alan and Lisa Arneson
Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis.*

Upcoming AFLC events

The AFLC All Boards meeting will be held Oct. 3-4 on the AFLC campus in Plymouth, Minn. Members of AFLC boards and committees are asked to attend.

Pastor Micah Hjermstad will be installed as the sixth AFLC president at 7 p.m., October 3, in Hauge Memorial Chapel, on the AFLC campus. All are welcome to attend.

The AFLC Pastor’s Conference will be held Oct. 4-6 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis. All AFLC pastors and their wives are invited to attend. The conference theme, “God’s Redemptive Plan,” comes from Titus 2:11-14. To register, visit the ARC website (arc-aflc.org). For more information and an event schedule, visit the AFLC website (aflc.org/2022-pastors-conference).



Barnett leads FLY Beyond sessions

Tim Barnett, a speaker and teacher with Stand To Reason, led an apologetics session at FLY Beyond, the national youth equipping conference held every two years at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis. Barnett’s daily session gave students and adult leaders tools to think and act with a Christian worldview when encountering culture. Barnett touched on topics



from history, science, philosophy, and arts and culture. His videos called “Red Pen Logic with Mr. B” have taken on such culturally relevant topics as abortion, sexuality, sanctity of life, biblical authorship, politics, progressive Christianity, and following God’s law.

FLBC to host Spotlight: Defending Life conference

Megan Almon from the Life Training Institute will be the featured speaker at the fall Spotlight: Defending Life conference on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College. Almon, a former gymnast with the University of Georgia, is an award-winning journalist and apologist. She has trained thousands of individuals in the U.S. and abroad to articulate and defend a pro-life view. The conversation is expected to

be relevant for students and guests as each navigates a post-Roe world.

The conference will be held at 7 p.m. Oct. 9 and 8:30 to 11 a.m. on Oct. 10 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. Registration is \$10 with a max of \$20/family. To register, visit the FLBC website (flbc.edu/events).

Other campus events:

- Oct. 20: Up Close
- Oct. 21: Alumni Tournament
- Dec. 2-4: Christmas concerts

WHEN FAMILIES MATTER

BY PASTOR MATTHEW ABEL

When I began mission work, I was single. More than that, I was determined to be a single missionary. As a single missionary I had more time for outreach. I had more freedom to stay up late, to engage in diverse and radical ministry, and to travel. I had fewer responsibilities, considerations, needs, and expenses. All these were positive aspects of my mission strategy. I was content and had a plan, but God had other plans for me.

Now I am married and have three children; a lot has changed. God had to change my perspective to prepare me for a different kind of ministry. Singles have very important ministries, and all the factors mentioned above are unique to them. Even the Apostle Paul seemed to think that his own single status was a benefit (I Corinthians 7:7).

Nevertheless, I am thankful to God for calling me into family ministry. As we minister here in Paraguay we are faced with the stark reality of brokenness in families. I don't have any official statistics to share, but our own experience has revealed a scenario where—except for some pastors and missionary friends—we have yet to find an intact family.

I grew up in a Christian home with one mom and one dad who love God, love each other, and love us. This is the privilege of few. As we minister to people, we hear their stories of selfishness, abuse, neglect, and abandonment, which have led to the same patterns being repeated by the next generation.

Only the gospel can heal these wounds. Only the gospel can transform families. Of course, the principal purpose of the gospel of Christ is to reconcile sinners to God unto everlasting life. But it is only in the gospel that we learn to forgive, to repent, and to love expecting nothing in return. The gospel frees us from sin and the need to selfishly seek our own happiness at all costs.

God has placed my family on the mission field as a beacon of hope. Our family seeks to model the blessedness of a Christ-centered home: a family life that is based on love, forgiveness, and grace and guided by godly principles according to the Word of God.



Pastor Matthew, Ednay, Zoey, Ian, and Boaz Abel

Family ministry not only equips me to counsel and teach about such topics with first-hand experience, but it also brings hope to those who dare to dream about the possibility of a happy family.

Please pray for our mission work in Paraguay. Pray for spiritual fruit, conversions, faith, and discipleship. Pray for the restoration of families. Pray that through the preaching of the gospel and the salvation of souls, all of society might be transformed.

Abel is an AFLC missionary serving in Villarrica, Paraguay.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Todd Erickson has accepted a call to serve Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., beginning Sept. 1. Erickson has resigned from his call to the Roseau, Minn., Parish of Rose and Spruce Lutheran churches.

Pastor Scott Erickson was installed Aug. 21 at Our Saviour's Lutheran, Dickinson, N.D., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating.

Larry Grove, Wanamingo, Minn., was issued a lay pastor license by members of the Co-ordinating Committee and is now on the licensed pastor roster. He serves Hauge Lutheran, Kenyon, Minn.

Pastor Rodney Johnson will retire in December after serving Our Savior's Free Lutheran, Stanley, N.D., and First English Lutheran, Lostwood, N.D., for 33 years. With his wife, Candice, he will move to Buffalo, Minn., and will be available for pulpit fill and possible interim work.

Members of **St. Petrie Lutheran**, Leland, Ill., will celebrate the congregation's 175th anniversary on Oct. 16. The congregation's former pastor, Dr. Mark Olson, Kasson, Minn., will speak at the morning worship service (9:30 a.m.) and afternoon program (3 p.m.). All are welcome to attend.

Pastor Gary Jorgenson, Ramsey, Minn., will complete his role as the assistant to the president of the AFLC on December 30. He will begin his role as AFLC vice president on Oct. 3 during AFLC All Boards.

Pastor Paul Kneeland, Prescott, Ariz., has accepted a call to extend his part-time position with the International Orality Institute to full time. **Nathan Monseth**, St. Michael, Minn., has accepted a call to serve on the Institute's board, replacing Pastor Wayne Hjermstad, Elk River, Minn.

Support the AFLC's monthly magazine

The AFLC's monthly magazine, *The Lutheran Ambassador*, is now free for all subscribers. The ministry is subsidized by your gifts. Contact lasubscriptions@afcl.org for more information on giving to our ministry. Or, visit our website at afcl.org/lutheran-ambassador.

JULY MEMORIALS

Bible College Claudia Hooper
Ruth Claus Arlene Carlson
Roger Spilde



Pastor Robert Rieth

Robert "Bob" Eugene Rieth died July 26 at his home in Valley City, N.D. Rieth was born Oct. 9, 1940, in Rugby, N.D., and was adopted as an infant by

John and Ida (Kiser) Rieth, who raised him on the home farm near Valley City. The family worshiped at Zion Lutheran Church of Green Township. He married his college sweetheart, Marion Walth, in May 1961, and graduated from Valley City State College with a degree in education.

It is difficult to think of anyone more involved in the early years of the AFLC than Bob. After college graduation he served as lay assistant to Pastor John Strand at Tioga, N.D. He was present at the 1962 organizational conference of the AFLC and testified in court at the first trial. His call to prepare for pastoral ministry was strong, and he enrolled in 1964 as a member of the first class in the new AFLC seminary.

During his seminary years he served as pastor of the Sunnyside Community Church, Stacy, Minn., which he guided to become a Lutheran congregation, and during his spare time he recruited several seminarians to survey the nearby Coon Lake neighborhood, where he planted a new congregation.

After seminary graduation and ordination in 1967, Bob was called to serve a new AFLC church plant at Kirkland, Wash., called Our Redeemer Lutheran Church. He led the congregation through the construction of a new church building, and during his 14 years there he continued his graduate studies in ministry and attempted to plant two new congregations in the Seattle area. He also served the AFLC as national secretary and as a member of the AFLC Schools' Board of Trustees.

Bob had the heart and gifts of an evangelist. A growing involvement in the greater Seattle area led to ministry as chaplain for the NBA's Super Sonics and the MLB's Mariners. Open doors for ministry to radio, television, and theatrical personalities led to his leaving pastoral ministry and the establishment in the early 1980s of Media Fellowship International, and he served as executive director until his death. Always a visionary, his current project was overseeing the construction of a new building at the retreat center he and Marion established south of Valley City. After a long battle with cancer, the Lord took him home on July 26.

Preceded in death by his parents and wife Marion, Bob is survived by his brother John Rieth, daughter Renae (Ron) Frye, son Paul Rieth, and four grandchildren. A funeral service was conducted on August 9 at Grace Free Lutheran Church, Valley City. A celebration of life service will be held in October in Los Angeles.

Blessed be his memory.

—Ed.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-July 31, 2022

FUND	REC'D IN JULY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$24,714	\$251,437	\$242,123
Evangelism	6,683	80,113	79,220
Youth Ministries	8,169	92,788	107,840
Parish Education	28,644	107,899	117,575
Seminary	18,231	160,110	173,383
Bible College	29,297	270,562	255,562
Home Missions	23,624	206,639	333,103
World Missions	19,652	254,379	247,111
WM Personal Support	50,881	439,857	490,799
TOTALS	\$209,893	\$1,863,784	\$2,046,716

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

A HERITAGE OF STUDENT PASTORS

This is an anniversary year for the AFLC, marking 60 years since our organizational conference in October 1962. Our next issue will especially be dedicated to the anniversary, but there was an interesting and unusual development during our early years that belongs in this youth emphasis issue and deserves to be remembered.



Pastor Robert Lee

It's not clear when or where the term "student pastor" originated, but it probably serves well to describe a number of young men in their late teens and early twenties who were serving congregations during the formative years of our fellowship. A few of them had Bible school training, but most were college students, and almost all served with little or no pastoral supervision. Their pastoral service usually consisted only of Sunday preaching, but at times there were adult Bible classes, confirmation instruction, and youth ministry.

These were growth years for the AFLC, and multiple parishes (some as large as five to seven congregations) were the norm. Former Lutheran Free Church congregations opposed to the 1962-63 merger and others withdrew from their parishes, new congregations were organized, and there simply were not enough ordained pastors or gifted lay pastors to serve them.

Was there someone who originated the idea of making use of these young men in this emergency situation? Or did it just happen? All we can say is that the need was there, and this was a way that the Lord was filling it.

Several of the young men were from Valley City, N.D.: Francis Monseth, Roger Strom, Gary Skramstad, and Bob and John Rieth. Others were Al Hendrickson, Erling Aasrud, Oliver Urdahl, Connely Dyrud, and your editor.

When our theological seminary began in the fall of 1964, the program included

summer internships required for each student. Many of the students, however, were also preaching almost every weekend. Dr. Iver Olson, one of the early professors, once commented that this was quite unusual, but he thought (hoped?) that this pulpit experience was making us better preachers.

Here's one story: It was Pastor John Abel, our first mission director, who offered me a position for the summer of 1963 in Thief River Falls, Minn., assisting the local pastor who was serving five congregations. When I arrived, the pastor said that three congregations in the Newfolden, Minn., community had asked him for help, and so it would be better if I lived there for the summer. I was 20 years old and had just completed my second year of college. (When I spoke a few years ago for the centennial observance of the Westaker congregation in Newfolden, I asked the people, "Did you realize how young I was?")

Pastor Abel was the one in the fall who encouraged me and Gary Skramstad (who had been serving that summer with the pastor in the seven-congregation Greenbush, Minn., parish) to enroll at the university in Grand Forks, N.D., to help with the new congregation that was forming there. Pastor Raynard Huglen contacted us a couple of months later and asked if we would also serve the newly established Hatton-Portland-Buxton, N.D., parish.

The next summer I was asked by AFLC President John Strand to travel to Ferndale, Wash., and serve the two-point parish there, after which I returned to Minneapolis to complete my college studies. During that year there was regular Sunday preaching for a new congregation in southern Minnesota. Pastor Strand contacted me in the spring for service with three congregations during the summer of 1965 in Bagley and Fosston, Minn. My seminary studies began in the fall, and the next winter I began to travel by train for services at the four-plus point

Tioga, N.D., parish, alternating weekends with two other students. The weekends stretched into summer internships, as the congregations continued to search for a pastor, and during my senior year at the seminary I accepted a call to serve full-time after graduation.

Now I am surely not recommending a recovery of the student pastor program. And yet ...

"Let no one look down on your youthfulness, (*Let no man despise your youth*, KJV) but rather in speech conduct, conduct, love, faith, and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe" (I Timothy 4:15).

An internet article that planted a seed for this editorial noted the surprising youthfulness of some of the founders of our nation in 1776: James Monroe (18), Aaron Burr (20), John Marshall (20), Alexander Hamilton (21), and James Madison (25).

Most of the student pastors in those

All we can say is that the need was there, and this was a way that the Lord was filling it.

early years later became pastors, and the need is great for more to train at our seminary. Our Bible college, Youth Ministries, Home Missions, and FLY (Free Lutheran Youth), plus the seminary's SIT (Summer Institute of Theology) also offer possible training opportunities for the young men and women of the AFLC to do missions in a multitude of ways without becoming pastors.

So, we continue to pray to the Lord of the harvest to supply workers (Matthew 9:37-38). Perhaps He may surprise us in new ways again.

something to share

THE LOST

BY JOYCE ERICKSON

I recently lost an item of value. A search ensued, but the lost remains missing. As I write, it has been almost a week since the loss. I have invested a lot of mental space thinking about where it could be and have searched every possible location. It has also become a matter of prayer, and as the days pass, my prayers have become more urgent and frequent.

This experience has reminded me of a parable that Jesus taught about a lost item in Luke 15:8-10, “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ Just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

This parable is sandwiched between the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the prodigal son, both familiar stories. What was new to me as I revisited them was the context and the audience: “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing

near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:1-2). Surrounded by the religious elite, Jesus proceeded to tell them these parables.

In all three, a celebration follows when the lost item is found. There is rejoicing! Friends and neighbors are called upon to join in the celebration. There is one, however, who does not want to join the party—the brother of the prodigal son. Rather than being grateful that his younger brother received mercy and was given a second chance after messing up his life, the older brother was caught up in his own “rights.” After all, he was the one who had been the obedient son, following the rules, but never receiving a party with his friends. He, like the Pharisees, was so wrapped up in himself that there was no room for mercy and love. The eternally significant had taken a backseat to the temporally insignificant. Here Jesus was on a mission to save the lost, and the Pharisees were offended that He disturbed their religious propriety by hanging out with sinners and healing on the Sabbath.

Things like this happen in the body of Christ ... churches have split over superficial topics like décor; believers have rejoiced that someone “got what they deserved;” instead of welcoming sinners who desperately need salvation, we have avoided them because it would be too messy and awkward. We have traded a life-saving mission for status and comfort.

My own story of loss has, quite honestly, been convicting. I am struggling with the reality that I have been increasingly seeking God about this lost item which is physical and temporal while my intensity in seeking Him for the spiritual and eternal is mediocre by comparison.

Lord, I repent. Have mercy. May I not be passive and apathetic about lost souls and your Word, both of which are eternally significant. Create in me a love for the people You came to save. May it not be about my kingdom but Your kingdom. Amen.

Erickson is a member of Rose and Spruce Lutheran Churches, Roseau, Minn.