

THE LUTHERAN 

JANUARY 2013

# AMBASSADOR



life  
IS SACRED

# A penetrating light

BY PASTOR KEN MOLAND

**T**he season of Epiphany leads us to look at the light which our Lord brought into the world with His coming. During these short days of winter, we reflect on what it would be like to have no light, and to still be walking in darkness. Thank God, the “Light of the World” is among us, and within us!

As the Epiphany season unfolds, however, every enlightened believer wrestles with the implications of this “great light.” In the midst of the deep darkness of our world, what does it mean to be the light and to bring the light of Christ to this present darkness? Should we glow or glare? Or is there something in between these extremes?

The Christmas message is effectively symbolized with a glowing candle. The light from the candles is soft and warm. In our sanctuary, the banks of fluorescent lights are turned off during the candlelight service and the glow of many small candles creates a beautiful, peaceful atmosphere. There we celebrate His coming, and there we welcome His glowing light into our lives.

Contrasted to glowing, some presentations of the light of Christ might be characterized as glaring. A glaring light is a harsh, uncomfortably brilliant light that may drive animate objects away. Consequently, we use the verb form of glare as a metaphor to illustrate what it means “to stare angrily or fiercely” at another person. Perhaps you have had such a glare directed at you. Do you remember how you felt and how you reacted? Were you drawn to or driven from such a bright light?

Followers of Christ are concerned about being effective as the light of the world. Our calling is to shed the light of the gospel not only on individuals, but also on our culture and the cultures of the world. Is there a way we can more effectively do so?

Consider the evangelical Christian’s influence on the is-



sue of sanctity of human life in our country. For 50 years we have sought to shed light on practices that demean and destroy human life. Thankfully, I believe that the Church has made an impact in this crucial area, but the battle is far from over. How do you envision the Church continuing to bring light to our culture? Do we need more “glow” or do we need more “glare”?

While I don’t pretend to have the final word on this dilemma, one principle I have found helpful is the Apostle Paul’s counsel in Ephesians 4:15, to “speak the truth in love.” Love takes the edge off of the glare—it puts some of the warmth of candlelight into the truth that is

being communicated. The hostility that can characterize cultural warfare is replaced by a genuine concern for the well-being of everyone involved.

This truth was illustrated to me some years ago when a friend was describing a baking project which took all day. He was preparing a certain kind of cake to be given to a friend as a gift. He described a part of the process which took several hours. I expressed my amazement at how much time he was spending on this; then he gently chided me, “Don’t you realize that during those hours is when the love is put in?” Now that was some light shed on my quick-fix, off-the-shelf gift-giving, but it also helped me better understand that putting palpable love into communication takes time and focus.

The penetrating light of the gospel of Christ is that which reaches into the hearts of those who are gripped by the darkness. Prayerful, loving communication of that light may well improve its chances of dispelling that darkness.

*Moland serves Our Redeemer Lutheran, Kirkland, Wash.*

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Editor Pastor Robert L. Lee  
rlee@aflc.org

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Managing Editor Ruth Gunderson  
ruthg@aflc.org

Editorial Board Oryen Benrud  
Pastor Jerry Moan  
Pastor James L. Johnson

For subscription changes and information:  
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## Life Quotes from Lutherans For Life

The Bible has much to say about God's concern for the defenseless. And the most defenseless of all people are unborn children. They are speechless to plead their own cause and helpless to protect their own lives. So it is our responsibility to do for them what they cannot do for themselves.

—John Stott

What does it say to our neighbor when in our own families we care for our elderly, become foster parents, adopt children, care for the handicapped, or carry through with an unplanned pregnancy? What does it say to our community when in our churches we care and pray for each other, offering families respite care, visit nursing homes, or provide for the needs of pregnant women? It says that we are truly for life because we are living it.

—Diane E. Schroeder

Humanity is very gifted at comparing the values of various objects, but we must not carry over that pride into the judgment of life. We don't get to be life connoisseurs, claiming to know what life is worth trying—and what life is not. Children with disabilities will know life differently than you and I, but their lives are not worth less than our own.

—Lucy Lefever

There are many perspectives from which to view adoption. Perhaps we Christians will find needed strength and encouragement and hope when we view it through our adoption by God in Christ. Apart from Christ, all His children are adopted. He must know something about it!

—Dr. James Lamb



# Christ

**GIVER OF LIFE**

By Pastor Greg Schram

“BUT IN FACT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD, THE FIRST FRUITS OF THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP. FOR AS BY ONE MAN CAME DEATH, BY A MAN HAS COME ALSO THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD. FOR AS IN ADAM ALL DIE, SO ALSO IN CHRIST SHALL ALL BE MADE ALIVE.”

~I CORINTHIANS 15:20-22

**O**n Jan. 20, 1973, abortion became legalized in America. Since then, countless numbers of Christians and Christian churches have observed January as “sanctity of human life” month.

Both January and “sanctity of human life” have significant meaning for me and my family for very personal reasons.

What do we mean by sanctity of human life? We mean that all life, beginning at conception, is sacred. That’s what “sanctity” means. It means “holy” or “sacred.” Life is sacred because God, who is life (John 14:6) and who is the author and giver of life, is holy (Leviticus 19:2).

When I think of sanctity of human life I have a tendency to think of it in the larger scheme of things. For instance, when we regard life from God’s perspective (that life is holy and sacred), such a perspective impacts us in at least two ways. One way is in how we view and treat other people. If we truly believe that all life is sacred, that every human being has divine worth, then we will treat one another accordingly. We will treat one

another with the utmost of care and consideration. We will not use others to meet our own selfish desires, or take advantage of them to satisfy the lust of our own flesh.

For example: a young man who regards life from God’s perspective will give dignity, respect and consideration to his girlfriend. He will not manipulate her to please himself, or to get his needs met at her expense. To do so would be contrary to true love (I Corinthians 13:4-7), and would cheapen her. To do so would imply that he thinks he is better than her and that she doesn’t deserve any better treatment from him. Instead, he values her and honors her, and does what he can to protect and uphold her purity.

The other way we are impacted is in how we view death. The secular world (even Christians who do not hold to the sanctity of human life) fear death. They are forever trying to find ways to take charge over it in the hope of avoiding it all together. But such attempts are futile. Paul reminds us in our text that because of Adam and Eve’s transgression in the Garden of Eden, sin entered the world—sin whose consequence

is death—and that both are passed on to all mankind. “For as in Adam all die ...” Because we are all by nature sinful, we will all die. Human attempts to take charge of death are futile because death is inevitable.

Those, however, who view life from God’s perspective have no fear of death. Why? Because of what God has done for us regarding sin and its awful consequence.

We all come into this world in bondage to sin with no way to free ourselves. The good news is that, out of His great love, God did for us what we were unable to do for ourselves. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to fulfill the demands of the law for our sake, and to suffer and die as our substitute for the punishment of sin. Three days later, God raised His Son from the dead, “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep,” giving Him victory over the power of sin, death and the grave—victory Jesus gives to all who believe in Him (I Corinthians 15:57). Thus, “... so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”

Through the resurrection God demonstrated His own character. He is life and He is holy. Because He is the author

and giver of life, all life is sacred. Even though sin changed all that, God did something about our sin, that we might have life, and have life everlasting.

Those who regard life from God’s perspective have no fear of death, for they know that because in God’s eyes life is sacred (as demonstrated in the resurrection), they will pass from death to life (John 5:24; 11:25-26). The resurrection has freed them from trying to take charge over that which God, and only God, has already taken charge. And so they say with the psalmist: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil” (Psalm 23:4).

Sanctity of human life. When we regard life from God’s perspective, we are freed from the fear of death, and thus freed to abandon ourselves unto Christ, loving one another, and viewing them and treating them as God in Christ Jesus has loved us.

*Schram serves Our Saviour’s Lutheran Parish, Thief River Falls/Goodridge, Minn.*

# living WITH DYING

By Dr. James Lamb

**O**n his death bed, an elderly pastor dictated a letter to his last remaining seminary classmate. He told his wife to write, “I am soon to leave the land of the living and will be with the dying.” But after a pause he said, “No, no! Change that. I am soon to leave the land of the dying and will be with the living.”

We all in one sense or another live with dying. We all live in a dying, sin-broken world and in dying, sin-broken bodies. Sin pays its wages of death. No matter how robust we might be right now, no matter what advances might be made in medical science, death awaits us all. We also live with dying if we have, or care for someone who has, a terminal or chronic illness. We live with dying because we live in a culture that turns caring into killing and promotes the message that certain people are “better off dead.”

## FAR BETTER

This idea creeps into Christian thinking, as well. Maybe you know someone who has asked, “Why doesn’t God just call me home?” Maybe you

have asked that same question. Paul addresses this kind of question in Philippians 1. Imprisoned in Rome, he faced possible death. But he was ready. Paul said “to die is gain,” and he desired “to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (23).

It’s okay to join Paul in wanting to be with Christ or to want this for a desperately ill Christian relative or friend. You know it would be a gain. We honor Christ in such thinking because He gives this confidence. He conquered death and brought life and immortality. Because of Him, “to die is gain.”

## MORE NECESSARY— GOD’S CHOICE

But death is not the only possibility for Paul. Paul knew it would be “more necessary” (24) for the Philippians and others that he keep on living. God had some “fruitful labor” (22) yet to accomplish through Paul. Christ would be honored as He worked in Paul’s life.

Death is not the only possibility for the elderly, disabled, or ill, or even the unconscious. As we said, it is certainly okay to desire to depart and be with Christ, but as long as God gives

life it is “more necessary” for life to continue. And as long as God gives life, He gives life purpose. God has some “fruitful labor” left to accomplish just as He did in Paul.

## FRUITFUL LABOR— GOD AT WORK

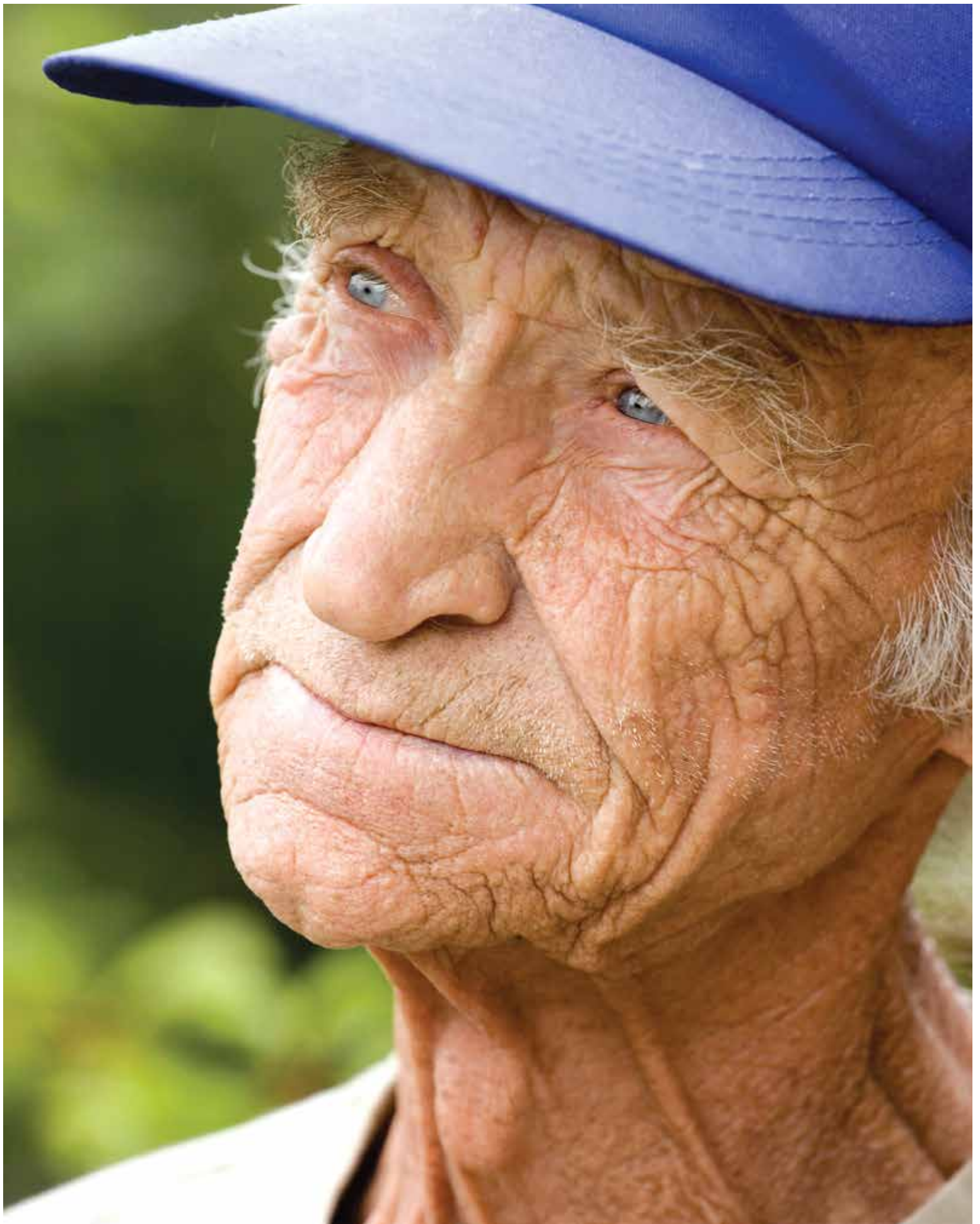
Now you might say, “But Paul was different. He traveled and preached, and taught others about Jesus. But what about people not so able? What possible “fruitful labor” could they do?” But remember, it wasn’t Paul. It was Christ in Paul accomplishing this fruitful labor. We limit the power of God if we say He can accomplish things only in people who are healthy and up and around. He can work in the life of the chronically ill, the terminally ill, or the bed-ridden grandma unaware of her surroundings. Christ isn’t honored because of what we do. He is honored because of what He does in us. In fact, you could say that the less we are able to do, the more Christ is exalted as He works through us. What an insult to Jesus to want to kill those through whom He is still at work.

Now certainly we can and should allow the dying to die.

When a person’s body starts to give up and shut down, we can discontinue treatment that no longer enhances life but merely prolongs the dying process. We must guard against any action, however, that would *cause* someone to die for we can never be sure how Christ might be at work in someone’s life. What we can be sure of is that Christ is at work.

We all live with dying. We also live in a culture that does not know how to live with dying and turns to death as a solution to the problems of life. Paul reminds us that as we live with dying, Christ comforts us with the certainty that it would be “far better” to depart and be with Him. But he also reminds his readers that the timing belongs to God. If He gives continued life it is “more necessary” that we go on living. But whether we live or die, Christ is at work and He will be honored.

*Lamb is the executive director of Lutherans For Life, a pan-Lutheran ministry advocating for the sanctity of human life.*



A photograph of a man with a beard and a plaid shirt carrying a young girl with long blonde hair on his shoulders. The girl is pointing forward with a joyful expression. The background is a bright, out-of-focus outdoor setting.

# leading

## BY EXAMPLE

By Jeri Richard

**M**inistry flows from relationships.” These are sage words of advice from Pastor Doug Merkey, president of Churches for Life, a ministry partner of Lutherans For Life.

What greater example of cultivating relationships in ministry than from Jesus Himself? Jesus selected disciples to carry on the gospel message, but before He asked them to go forth and make “fishers of men,” He taught them *how* to carry forth this message. He walked beside them, mentored them, and showed them how to be a disciple of Christ. Children don’t learn about life by what parents tell them, they learn by how parents live. I saw a quote that read, “Adults teach children in three important ways: The first is by example, the second is by example, the third is by example!”





ransom for many.” Our model for ministry within the Church is based on God’s love for life. He created life, redeemed life, and calls us into eternal life with Him. This is why we love life. From conception to death, life is precious because it is a life given by God.

My own personal journey in the life arena took on new meaning when my son was diagnosed with Tourette’s Syndrome, a genetic, neurological disorder. Our normal was no longer recognizable or accepted by the world’s standard of what normal is. But God’s protection and constant love for us brought us within the loving arms of our church family. It is a place where people fully grasp that life is precious because each life is created by God, redeemed by the Savior, and called to a personal, eternal relationship with Him. This kind of acceptance reminds me of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus used this parable to explain what it looks like to live out the law, as found in Luke 10:27, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Christ’s love and sacrifice for us should move and compel us to be the hands and feet within the Church and in society to reach a lost and fallen world.

Jesus didn’t hand the disciples a book, or brochure, or video and send them on their way. He walked beside them, leading by example. This example of mentoring, guidance, and genuine caring is our model in the Church to reach hearts and minds with the gospel message of life.

And what topic could be more fundamental for us to focus on in the Church than life? Jesus’ entire ministry was centered on life. Mark 10:45 says, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a

We can’t fully know the struggles and hurts of the people around us without building relationships. Asking one simple question, “How are you today?” or “How can I pray for you?” can be the start of a forever relationship. It’s all about Jesus and what He has done for us that will move us to honor life around us.

Once the light bulb goes on, there is that “aha” moment when someone is touched by the gospel and recognizes that life issues are spiritual issues. One of the most common questions we receive at Lutherans For Life is, “What can I do?” People recognize that they need to start addressing life issues in their own congregations.

At Lutherans For Life, we answer that question by encouraging the Church to renew the three “Rs.” First, renew the *responsibility* of addressing life issues as that of the Church, because life issues are spiritual issues. Second, renew the *relevancy* and power of the gospel in addressing these issues. And third, renew *resources*. Assuming the responsibility to deal with the life issues cannot be done effectively without help. We have found that building relationships, and maintaining a healthy life ministry requires a leader and a team working together toward the same goal—just like Jesus and His disciples.

One avenue we use to implement the life issues within the congregation is through an outreach ministry, Renewal For Life. Implementing a Life Team within your church is equally as important as a missions or education team. Through a discipling approach, each congregation identifies a Life Team leader. Working with Lutherans For Life, these leaders receive training and guidance on forming a team. This Life Team, then, utilizes their existing relationships within the congregation to spread the message of life with the help of LFL resources. Our vision of every Lutheran congregation upholding the God-given value of human life and influencing society to do the same is only attainable by the example Christ has given to us, His disciples, by taking a stand and speaking the truth in love.

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that every man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (II Timothy 3:16-17).

*Richard is the director of Renewal For Life, a ministry of Lutherans For Life. She is a 1992 alum of AFLBS. She is a member of Stavanger Lutheran, Garden City, Iowa.*

# hope

## FOR TOMORROW

By Tom Prichard

**B**ack in the summer of 2005, I came across a fascinating article on abortion. The article considered the attitudes toward abortion by young women at a major secular university. The magazine was *Glamour* and the article was entitled, “The Mysterious Disappearance of Young Pro-Choice Women.” Now *Glamour* is anything but a pro-life magazine. It has received numerous awards from Planned Parenthood, the nation’s largest facilitator of abortions. Yet the article discussed a major shift among young people toward the pro-life position. What they found was a growing disenchantment and disillusionment with abortion among young coeds.

These anecdotal stories were buttressed by several national opinion polls which found a remarkable shift in sentiment toward the pro-life position. From the early 1990s to 2005, support for abortion restrictions increased by a third while support for an outright ban on abortion increased by one half.

Now fast forward to November 2012. The nation has re-elected President Obama, the most pro-abortion president in our nation’s history. (He’s come out in support of across-the-board taxpayer funding of abortion.) His health care plan, Obamacare, requires that all health care plans provide coverage for abortifacient drugs.

And he may well get an opportunity over the next four years to appoint new Supreme Court justices, ensuring a pro-*Roe v. Wade* majority for the next generation. (*Roe v. Wade* and its progeny court decisions established the most liberal abortion laws in the western world—abortion on demand—allowing only minor restrictions by legislative bodies.)

Based on these recent developments it sounds like things are getting worse and there’s reason for pessimism. Yet I am, in fact, hopeful for the future. Why? Because public opinion continues to move against abortion. In a May 2012 Gallup poll, 41 percent of people self-identified as “pro-choice,” the smallest percentage of people since they’ve been polling and down from 56 percent in 1995. Those who said they were “pro-life” counted at 50 percent.

Additionally, the number of abortions continues to drop. In 2011, the number of abortions in Minnesota dropped to its lowest level since 1975. And the number dropped 3.7 percent from 2010 to 2011. Nationally, the annual number of abortions peaked in 1990 at 1.6 million and is today around 1.2 million a year. While these numbers highlight a positive trend, the current numbers still constitute a tragedy and remain far too high. Why the changes and optimism for the future?

First, the Church, God’s people, are deeply involved in the battle for life, especially

since the infamous 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. Now young believers are more pro-life than their elders. They are involved in the national network of crisis pregnancy centers across the country. Crisis pregnancy centers help confused, struggling pregnant women decide to keep their babies rather than abort them. Also, the Church is praying, praying that God will deliver our nation from the curse of abortion. And at the same time, the Church is extending the message of grace and forgiveness to those burdened by guilt from their decision to have or encourage someone to have an abortion.

Second, new technology—the ultrasound—is aiding in the effort to save young lives. When a woman who is considering abortion actually sees and hears her unborn child’s beating heart or sees her child sucking his or her thumb, she often chooses life.

Last, the word is getting out that not only is the unborn child an innocent human life but also abortion hasn’t solved the problems women hoped it would. In fact, abortion has made things worse. The emotional and spiritual trauma which comes from killing an innocent life leads to depression, thoughts of suicide and enormous guilt. More women are aware of this and taking note.

I remain hopeful because the history of the Church reveals there’s nothing new under the sun. In the first and

second centuries the Church confronted a similar situation in the pagan, ruthless Roman Empire. The Church, in its own infancy, engaged in the seemingly hopeless task of rescuing the unborn and those infants abandoned to die. The Church ultimately prevailed. Political leaders in the Empire eventually passed laws restricting abortion. These changes were evidence that the acts of Christian charity and mercy ultimately changed the hearts of the powers-that-be and established a pro-life consensus throughout the Empire. Their challenge was much greater than ours today and thus should encourage us to persevere.

Certainly success isn’t coming as quickly as we’d like. It may take another generation or two before the political and cultural elites, who are strongly against us, have a change of heart. Yet we serve the Lord of heaven and earth with Whom all things are possible. Our responsibility is very simple: be faithful and obedient ambassadors of His love to the unborn, their moms and dads, and even to those who aggressively promote the evil of abortion. If we remain faithful, I have no doubt that the future looks bright for the pro-life cause.

*Prichard, a member of Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, is president of the Minnesota Family Council.*



# HOPE DESPITE • grief

By Anders Macy

“FOR TO ME, TO LIVE IS CHRIST AND TO DIE IS GAIN.”  
~PHILIPPIANS 1:21

Maybe you have heard the phrase, “He will be the last one to let you down.” Well, I’m that guy—a licensed mortician in the state of Minnesota. Having a deep desire to help people in difficult situations with the message of Jesus Christ led me to pursue a career as a funeral director. For more than 26 years, I have worked with people from all walks of life during emotionally charged periods of their lives. Having a loved one die leaves an emotional hole in a survivor’s heart. Over the years I have learned several life lessons from my work. I would like to tell you

of some of those lessons with the hope that you, too, can grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Watching and listening to people is a great way to learn what to do and what not to do. By listening I have learned that there are good ways to grieve and bad ways to grieve. Grief is a powerful emotion that can take over a person’s life. It involves anger, denial, pleading, depression and a sense of abandonment. Grief often distorts ways of seeing God and other people. Many people’s perspective on life changes while they grieve, and certain aspects of their character get magnified. For example, non-religious

people all of a sudden become religious and religious people can become skeptical about what they have believed.

Each and every one of us differs in our response to grief. Yet there is a common thread that seems to be a part of the human race—the need for closure to a relationship. Some want to quickly remove the body and be done with it, while others want to hang on to the loved one as if he or she never died. Dealing with grief in a healthy manner requires personal time with the deceased. This can be at the place the person died, in a funeral home, or at some other facility. Ignoring the reality of death in

order to make life bearable does not work for the average person.

My insight into grief comes from my belief that God designed us so that we would not experience physical death. In the beginning, Adam and Eve were created to live forever. Death entered the world because of sin. All of us will die at some time and in one way or another because of sin, yet our spirits live. Standing in the presence of a dead body is a stark reality of sin, death and the pending outcome for all. What I have noticed is that people who have a personal relation-



ship with Jesus Christ can look beyond these to the hope of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This confidence tempers their response to grief and affirms what Scripture teaches us about living and dying.

On the useful side of healthy grief are certain practices that seem to work better than others. Writing a note to the person who died expressing your thoughts, wishes, and desires is a great way for people to get in touch with their feelings. For younger children, drawing a picture of their favorite memory is a great way to get the children

involved in saying goodbye. Spending time with the deceased body, especially in sudden deaths like heart attack, a car accident or suicide, is a good practice. For many people in these situations, the death will seem like a dream and spending time with the body helps the reality of the separation to settle in. I counsel these families to come to the funeral home multiple times and extend the burial out an extra day or two. Also, be present at the viewing and funeral to receive the hugs, thoughts, and companionship of those who desire to support

you. Looking through pictures is a great way to remember the person's life.

I believe the greatest lesson I have learned as a funeral director is this: when you stand next to the casket of someone you loved, what you have left are your hope and memories. People with a lot of memories but little or no hope in the promise of eternal life have a big hole in their hearts that may never be fixed. And people with a lot of hope and few memories also have a large hole in their hearts that can never be changed. Funeral service has

taught me to value the time with my family and friends as an opportunity to tell of my faith in Jesus Christ and develop lasting memories of fun, shared values and integrity. In the end, these are all that matter.

May you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as you live today as though it could be your last.

*Macy, an AFLBS alumn, is a member of Resurrection Free Lutheran, Beltrami, Minn.*

A person is walking away from the camera on a wide, sandy beach at low tide. The person is silhouetted against a bright, overcast sky. The sand is wet and reflective, showing ripples and tracks. In the foreground, there is a large clump of seaweed with long, thin blades. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

# LOOKING FOR help

By Stephanie Kantonen

**E**ach morning just after sunrise I start my car and join the crowds of people heading toward Minneapolis. After arriving at work and pulling into my parking spot, I stop to prepare myself for the day. When working at a women's ministry center one can never really know what to expect each day. Because we are located in the heart of the Phillips neighborhood, almost anyone could show up at our door. I could answer the door and find a single mom who drove in from the suburbs, a recent immigrant who needs baby supplies, or even a woman who is jumping from shelter to shelter and just simply trying to get by. However, I have learned that all of these women have some things in common: they are looking for help of some kind, they all have a story to tell, and each one is passionately loved by God.

Sometimes it is easy to look at everyone who surrounds me and choose whether they are a friend or an enemy. If they are living an openly sinful life, then obviously they must be an enemy and not worthy of my time or help. At least, that's what I used to think until I took a closer look at Jesus' life.

Jesus lived on earth for about 30 years. During that time He was friends with quite a few people who were not openly accepted by the religious leaders. In fact, at one point, Jesus looked at the religious people of His day and told them not to judge unless they had never sinned. At times Jesus was surrounded by the prostitutes, the sick, and the tax collectors—people whom the world looked down upon. Why would Jesus do that? Why would He, of all people, stoop down to the lowest in society and befriend them? I think I John 4:7 answers that question, "Beloved, let us love another, for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God for God is love." God has made it clear how His followers are to treat others with the unselfish love He showed.

January is Sanctity of Human Life month and discussions of pro-life issues will be common. Sometimes it is easy to discern right from wrong concerning moral issues. But it is not as easy to understand the struggle that goes on in a mother's mind and heart when she tries to decide whether or not to give life to her baby. I may never be able to understand the forces and thoughts which drive a woman to consider having an abortion, but I am able to do the same thing Jesus did in Matthew 9:36, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them."

I think the words of a popular Christian song gives us just a glimpse of that struggle:

Does anybody hear her? Can anybody see?  
Or does anybody even know she's going down today  
Under the shadow of our steeple  
With all the lost and lonely people  
Searching for the hope that's tucked away in you and me  
Does anybody hear her? Can anybody see?

If judgment looms under every steeple  
If lofty glances from lofty people  
Can't see past her scarlet letter  
And we never even met her

*(Does Anybody Hear Her, by Casting Crowns)*

If the Church is not going to open its doors to women who are struggling, and if its members are unwilling to help them, where will they go? Perhaps they feel they have no other choice but to turn to a shelter, an abortion clinic, or an abusive relationship. The Church should be the first place someone in need would run to. But because of fear of judgment and of being refused, people in need seek help elsewhere. We are called to be the hands and feet of Christ. Yet far too often Christians are the ones who sit on the sidelines, watching the number of abortions rise with disgust and anger but do very little about it. Just as women are given the choice to choose life for their babies, we are given a choice to choose to love or to condemn.

Working at a ministry center in Minneapolis has provided me with opportunities I never expected to see and introduced me to people I never imagined I would meet. God's love is so powerful, and I am so honored that He has chosen me—someone who sins and falls short every day—to serve others and tell them of His love. Each and every life is precious. Every mother, father, and child is loved by Him. There is no greater honor than to be able to help the needy, not only with their physical needs, but to share love and friendship with them. I pray that as the New Year rushes in, all of us, rather than casting anyone aside, would be compelled by the love of Christ to reach out to those who need His love.

*Kantonen, a 2012 AFLBS graduate, is originally from Cloquet, Minn., where she is a member of St. Paul's Lutheran.*



# JANUARY 4 WATERS IN THE WILDERNESS

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

Students often demand to know why they are forced to study history in school. They ask their parents, who usually reply that it is a subject which they themselves studied and is “nice” to know about. To learn of Christ one must study history. Jesus lived on this earth at a certain time and place, but the exact dates and places are not as important as what He did and why. Even this may not seem important until we consider what He did in the past as it affects us today, thereby creating a personal interest. This is the importance of history, that the study of the past may help with the problems of today and those to come.

One characteristic of Christ which is rarely seen in history, except in a negative sense, is that of stability. The stability of Christ

makes life worth living. Jesus offered salvation to all in the first century. He offers salvation today. He will continue to offer it as long as the earth remains and men continue to sin.

For our own spiritual stability, we must rely on Christ. We all feel weak and inadequate at times and wonder if God is really concerned about us. The problem is not God or that He has forgotten us, rather, the problem is that we have rejected Him. Jesus gave us the perfect example of love and forgiveness. Let us seek for the faith to follow Him.

*Pastor Timothy Skramstad, who serves Living Word Lutheran, Eagan, Minn., is currently serving as chairman of the AFLC Coordinating Committee.*

*Waters in the Wilderness* is a daily devotional published by the AFLC Board of Parish Education in 1971 with Dr. Iver Olson, editor. All 365 meditations were contributed by AFLC members from many walks of life. “Here, they offer each a glass of cool and refreshing water each day to thirsting souls,” wrote Olson in the preface. Reprinted by permission. The volume is out of print.





# The value of human life

BY LYNN WELLMUMSON

**I**t happened every time. Four times we were given the privilege of welcoming our offspring into the world. Each time, instantly, without thought or planning, our hearts fully belonged to each new little one. We knew instantly there was nothing we would not do for our child's benefit.

Recently, we met and welcomed the fourth child of our oldest son and his wife. On the fourth day after his appearance, we stared at this new little one, unable to take our eyes off him and memorizing every feature, even though all he did was sleep. As with the others, when our turn came to hold this tiny bundle, we knew we held a treasure of incalculable value. As great an emotional experience as this has been each time, somehow the awareness of each child's value is more than just emotional.

This awareness of the value of human life is universal. It is seen at funerals as people sense how great a loss has occurred at the death of a loved one and weep. It is seen in people's reactions when senseless murders are on the news and become the topic of conversation at coffee. It is seen in the universality of laws that provide protection for human life. And yet, in our society and others, we see an erosion of that value in many ways.

A utilitarian view of life is creeping into our culture's estimate of each individual's value. As those who hold to their innate understanding of the value of each life see that value eroding and fight against it, the question arises as to whether there is an objective reason to uphold that value. Or is our fight simply based

on different perceptions by different people? Are views changing because we are becoming more enlightened?

Thankfully, as Christians, we know the answer, and it is no. Because we have come to know that the Bible is God's Word, we have an ultimate authority, which stands above our human intuition and culture's vacillating opinions. In it, God says human life is sacred. He declared at the time of creation: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground! So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26-27, NIV). This truth was declared when God gave His law to Israel in the wilderness: "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Most of all, the value of human life was declared at the cross: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

God has placed a value on human life. All people are worth the life of His Son. That is the price He paid for us. Despite how others may drift, as Christians we have the solid foundation on which to stand, upholding each person's incalculable value in every way. It is a wonderful thing to know the love of God.

*Wellumson, of Williston, N.D., is the president of the National Women's Missionary Federation.*

# Brookings congregation celebrates 50 years

## Special event includes installation of new pastor

October 28, 2012, brought a wonderful home-town feel to Trinity Lutheran Church, Brookings, Ore., as the congregation celebrated 50 years since its establishment in 1962. Several charter members of Trinity returned to help us celebrate and photo albums recalling the history of the church and activities were displayed in the narthex for all to enjoy. There was also a photo wall of many of the confirmation classes with Trinity's past four pastors.

Making the day extra special, Pastor David Nelson, who recently accepted a call to Trinity Lutheran, was installed as pastor. Pastor Richard Gunderson, assistant to the president of the AFLC, presided over the installation and gave the Reformation Sunday sermon. Assisting Pastor Gunderson with the installation service were Pastor Gordon Myrah, who served Trinity for 31 years, and Pastor Berry Scruggs, a former member of Trinity.

The choir of Trinity Lutheran was honored to be the first to perform composer Joel Raney's anthem, "Built on a Rock." This work, inspired by a poem by Trinity choir director Charlotte Heatherly, was commissioned by Trinity to celebrate its 50th anniversary. A special 50th anniversary banner was designed, quilted and



Pictured (above, from left) are Pastor Gordon Myrah (former pastor of Trinity), Pastor Richard Gunderson (AFLC representative officiating at installation), Steve Denny, Pastor David Nelson and Roger Cox. Behind them are Mary Jo Delaney and LaVonne Engstrom.

displayed behind the altar.

Approximately 155 people enjoyed a lunch following the service in the beautifully decorated fellowship hall. Many memories were shared from the past 50 years.



## Home Missions given airplane

On Oct. 29, 2012, I received a phone call as I was leaving for the airport to go to Mesa, Ariz. On the phone was Gordon Bakke, the director of MATA (Mission Aviation Training Academy), who asked me if Home Missions had need of an airplane. He went on to explain that there was a donor who wanted to give a Bellanca airplane to missions. I told Gordon that we had been praying for another plane. I also told him I was heading off to Mesa. Gordon began to chuckle as he told me that the donor lived near Mesa.

I spent the next day with this godly man who quickly became a friend. Members of the Home Missions Committee accepted his gift, and I flew the plane to Mesa the next morning. The plane is now based out of the Crystal Airport in Minneapolis.

This 1966 Bellanca Viking 260 is a four-place, retractable airplane with 2400 total time hours and only 1100 hours on the engine. It is quite fast and fuel efficient.

It is so humbling to see the provision of my heavenly Father.



I believe that this gift is the result of the prayer support of our KneeMail recipients and the AFLC family. Thank you!

*By Pastor Paul Nash, director of Home Missions.*



# Big steps, little feet

BY JONNI SLIVER

*“And he said: ‘Truly I tell you, unless you are converted and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’” (Matthew 18:3).*

**W**hen did you first catch a glimpse that God could move through your life? When did you understand that God not only loves you, but wants to love others through you? Sometimes we think that the time to begin offering children challenges to serve is during Confirmation class or in our youth groups. But it is thrilling to see how very young hearts can be moved to serve the Lord when the opportunity is given.

Just a few weeks ago I was in Curitiba sharing in the Free Lutheran Church of Campo Largo. After the service the leader of the Sunday school came to me and asked for some help. It seemed that the children had been raising money to send to Africa, but they wanted to make sure that the money would be used for children in Africa. The amount raised was R\$130, or \$65 U.S. That may not sound like a huge offering, but when it comes from a 7 or 9 year old, it is a fortune. These little ones are not members of a large, wealthy congregation, but they have wonderful riches, generosity, compassion and faithfulness.

The children in Campo Largo have already received pictures of the Jore family (AFLC missionaries serving in Uganda)—more

specifically, the pictures are of the Jore children. The Campo Largo children are excited to see who will be helping them share God’s love. Not coincidentally, the Jore children are youngsters who took up the call to friendship evangelism very early.

I am really excited about this one simple offering. It is thrilling to see young hearts responding to God’s call to the harvest. Once you get a taste for being part of God’s work you just can’t stop. These children have a wonderful head start. And praise the Lord for the grown ups who didn’t think that children are too young to take part in missions.

But there is another side of the Sunday school project that touches my heart. It is so lovely to see the Free Lutheran churches reaching out to each other. Our family spans continents and oceans, but it is easy to focus our eyes on our own little corner. There is a strong desire here in Brazil to see the Church grow, but our natural tendency is to see the fields nearby—the AILLB (Free Lutherans of Brazil). We need a new vision of the work God is doing all over the world and to have a clear understanding of how He is using the Free Lutheran family. This precious group of children is reaching out their hands from Brazil to Uganda; what a wonderful example for all of us grown ups.

*Sliver is an AFLC missionary serving at the Miriam Infant Home in Campo Mourão, Brazil.*



## Schools hosts Christmas concerts

The AFLC Schools hosted a weekend of Christmas events Dec. 7-9 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. On Friday evening, members of the Bible school's gospel teams hosted an evening worship service. Pictured at right are members of the men's quartet, including (from left) Tim Papillon, Kyle Arneson, Marcus Goodfellow and Matthew Pillman. Concerts on Saturday and Sunday evenings included the Wind Ensemble, Concert Choir, Proclaim Choir, and Seminary Chorus. Pictured at the top, members of the audience join the choirs for the Hallelujah Chorus. Pictured above, the audience lit candles for a portion of the service. (Pictures by Samuel Nelson, AFLBS junior.)

# The light of God's good news

Arizona congregation hosts neighborhood outreach event on Halloween

BY LIZ LACKEY

Every time I glanced up from my work, the line seemed to have grown longer. Lady bugs, Snow Whites, wild animals, princesses, zombies, and superheroes waited patiently (or not so patiently, depending on their sugar consumption) for a butterfly, rainbow, baseball, or flower to be painted on their cheeks. It was Halloween night, and I was perfecting my drawing skills in the face painting booth at Calvary Free Lutheran's Harvest Festival in Mesa, Ariz. The three hours that the festival lasted just flew by as child after child came up to the table, sat as still as each possibly could, and left with colorful artwork on their cheeks.

My favorite moments of the night were when children came who were dressed up as witches, monsters, or other horrible things with gray face paint, fake stitches, and even a little bit of fake blood running down their faces. Maybe they wanted to dress that way; maybe it was their parents' idea. Either way, I didn't like seeing young kids dressed to look so scary. When a little witch asked for a rainbow on her cheek, or the zombie wanted a baseball, it was so fun to be able to paint something colorful and full of life over the gray and black of their costume. It became a form of redemption, of continuing the "Light Up the Night" theme of the Harvest Festival, and a return to child-like innocence.

Many of the children who came that night have rough backgrounds and home lives. They may have only one parent at home, or be mostly raised by grandparents. The neighborhood they live in is very dark, both physically because there aren't many streetlights, but also spiritually, as Pastor Al Monson reminded the volunteers as we prepared for the night. We took care of the physical darkness by installing tall light towers, making the parking lot as bright as day. We attempted to tackle the spiritual darkness with



A volunteer at Calvary Free Lutheran's Harvest Festival in Mesa, Ariz., paints the cheek of a neighborhood kid attending the event.

prayer, sharing the gospel, and expressing God's love by serving local families.

The Harvest Festival offered these neighbors a safe place to eat a hot dog, get some nachos and cheese, a latte, and a homemade cookie, and let their kids run around and play. We had a rock wall, miniature train, some inflatable games, and a very popular balloon artist. We were also blessed to have 50 volunteers from the church and from all over the United States serving and loving the members of the community. The care and concern expressed by all of the volunteers, no matter their role, really seemed to touch the families who came to the festival. Most importantly, we were also blessed to have a talented ventriloquist to captivate audiences of adults and kids with the gospel several times during the night.

The painted butterflies and baseballs were probably washed off cheeks and hands a few hours later, sugar highs wore off, and tired kids tumbled into bed. But our prayer is that the hope, joy, and light that they experienced at the Harvest Festival will stay with them and draw them closer to Christ. And maybe, just maybe, the neighborhood around Calvary will grow just a little brighter.

*Lackey, a dorm assistant at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, is volunteer with AFLC Home Missions.*

## AFLC memorials: November

### AFLBS

Jeremy Erickson  
Ruby Holm (3)  
Jonathan Rinden  
Charlotte Smith

### Home Missions

Kenneth Myhre  
Lynn Beck  
Sally Carlson

### AFLTS

Fauncie Erickson  
Ruby Holm  
Charlotte Smith  
Merlen Perseke  
Betty Haw

### World Missions

Clifford E. Johnson

... in honor of

### World Missions

Emma Rodvold

### General Fund

Clifford E. Johnson

## People and Places

**Pastor David Hesje** is the new pastor of Christ Centered Fellowship, Camrose, Alberta, Canada. Hesje previously served Bethel Lutheran, Elbow, Sask.

**Brandon Marschner**, a student at the Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary, was recently appointed by the AFLC Youth Board to be the Student Missions Coordinator.

**Pastor Gary Skramstad** was installed Dec. 2 at the Badger, Minn., parish of Badger Creek and Oiland. AFLC President Pastor Elden Nelson officiated.

Members of the Coordinating Committee approved the move of **Pastor John Kiehl** from the Fellowship Roster to the Clergy Roster. Kiehl serves Faith Lutheran, Metropolis, Ill.

**Pastor David Johnson** was installed Dec. 2 at Living Faith Lutheran, Boyertown, Pa., and Disciple Lutheran Fellowship, Reading, Pa. Pastor Paul Nash, director of AFLC Home Missions, officiated.

## Fiftieth anniversary book available

A book commemorating the 50th anniversary of the AFLC is now available for purchase. Titled *Jubilee! The AFLC at 50*, the book includes photos and testimonies from many AFLC personalities. The book costs \$18 plus shipping costs. To order, or for more information, contact the AFLC at (763) 545-5631.

## With thanks to Roscoe Printers

Roscoe Printers from Wanamingo, Minn., has produced our magazine for us for a significant portion of the past 50 years. Ellis Bloomfield, the proprietor, has gone the extra mile on innumerable occasions, and took a deeply personal interest in our publication. A grateful word of appreciation is offered to Ellis for his many years of excellent service. The decision was recently made to contract with Nystrom Publishing Company in nearby Maple Grove, Minn., for future printing, and we look forward to working with them.

# 2013 Ambassador schedule

Volunteer writers are welcome to contact editors

Below is the 2012 schedule for the *Lutheran Ambassador*. Please be in prayer for each issue. Note the deadlines and special emphasis of each issue. If you have an idea regarding a general article, a certain issue or have an interest in writing, please contact the editors. E-mail us at [ruthg@aflc.org](mailto:ruthg@aflc.org) or call (763) 545-5631.

ISSUE DATE	DEADLINE	ISSUE THEME
February	December 17	AFLC Schools
March	January 25	Lent/Easter
April	February 25	Missions
May	March 25	Pentecost
June	April 22	Evangelism
July	May 27	Christian Education
August	June 24	Conference Review
September	July 22	Youth
October	August 26	The Kingdom of God
November	September 23	Reform./Thanksgiving
December	October 28	Advent/Christmas

*The Lutheran Ambassador* is celebrating the publication's 50th anniversary in 2013, having published its first issue in February 1963. The February issue will include remembrances from the magazine's founders and editors.

Please note, information regarding the Annual Conference, scheduled for June 11-14 at the Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis., will be featured in the May issue, with a deadline of March 25. The theme of the conference is "Hope for Your Future," from Jeremiah 31:17. The May issue will include the conference schedule, board and committee nominees, registration and WMF convention schedule and registration information. The registration will also be printed in either the March or April issue. Housing information will be printed as soon as it is available.

## AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-Nov. 30, 2012

FUND	REC'D IN NOVEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$31,311	\$285,172	\$292,129
Evangelism	7,681	119,940	113,654
Youth Ministries	8,730	91,394	107,690
Parish Education	15,393	106,154	118,294
Seminary	19,900	203,441	202,306
Bible School	26,813	375,051	404,603
Home Missions	24,134	411,192	405,582
World Missions	37,297	372,659	384,390
Personal Support	39,060	434,079	365,075
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$210,319</b>	<b>\$2,399,081</b>	<b>\$2,393,723</b>

Contact the individual departments for further information about specific financial needs.

# What if?

A popular Christian magazine asked the question in a recent issue. What if they simply shut down today? What if, in other words, the magazine was no longer published? Would it make any difference? Would anyone miss it?

Next month marks the golden anniversary of *The Lutheran Ambassador*. In February 1963 about 2000 households received the historic first eight-page issue. Perhaps it might be profitable on the eve of

this milestone occasion to ask two similar questions to the ones raised by the magazine mentioned above.

What if our church magazine had never been published?

What if *The Lutheran Ambassador* simply shut down today?

Your editor is one of a number of our readers who have been subscribers since the first issue and maintains a complete collection. Looking back at them, year after year, it is not difficult to answer the first question. *The Lutheran Ambassador* has served a unique and irreplaceable function within the AFLC, highlighting our common endeavors, plus providing a multitude of writers the opportunity to tell their stories and to proclaim the message of God's Word. Especially during the early years our church magazine was probably the main instrument for informing our people and binding us together as a family. Yes, it was truly a letter from home, and people throughout our fellowship (and beyond) eagerly awaited the arrival of each issue. What if it had never been published? Then the AFLC would have missed the blessing

that its ministry has bestowed by the grace of God upon our fellowship, and we would be weaker as a result.

The second question may be more difficult to ponder. What if *The Lutheran Ambassador* simply shut down today? The world is changing, new forms of information technology abound, the printed media faces critical challenges in the 21st century, and both secular and religious publications struggle to survive. Does *The Lutheran Ambassador* still have a worthwhile and meaningful role to play in the life of our church body?

The Christian magazine mentioned at the beginning of this editorial responded to the "what if" question by declaring that, if publication ceased, someone would try to build its replacement tomorrow. In other words, the staff believed that there was no other magazine doing what they were doing, let alone doing it as well, and that it filled a vital role within the Christian world.

Might we make the same claim for *The Lutheran Ambassador* ... that if it were to cease publication some would immediately come up with a replacement? It would seem so, for our church magazine really does fill a vital role within our fellowship, and there is no other magazine or newsletter that even comes close to doing what we are doing. Each issue includes news of the congregations, devotional articles written by our own people, reports from the conferences, information and inspiration from the various ministries that we sponsor and support.

Let's not forget about the "beyond," either, for there is a real sense that our magazine is the voice of the AFLC to

those who are not a part of our fellowship. "You're from the church that publishes *The Lutheran Ambassador*," a man said to me after learning of my affiliation. "I always feel like I know your church body after I read it," he declared, commending us for the emphasis as well as the quality of our publication.

Here are a few more "what if" questions:

What if ... each of our pastors subscribed to *The Lutheran Ambassador*? (Check and see if your pastor is receiving

*Yes, it was truly a letter from home, and people throughout our fellowship (and beyond) eagerly awaited the arrival of each issue.*

the magazine. If not, a subscription might be a great gift idea.)

What if ... each of our congregations had a group subscription, providing copies for every family, as well as for area retirement homes, hospitals, etc.?

What if ... every congregation that did not have a group subscription would appoint a "subscription secretary," whose responsibility was to contact each subscriber and encourage them to renew each year?

What if ... a core of our readers would commit themselves to pray for the ministry of our church magazine?



Pastor Robert Lee

*association retreat center*

# To be just like you

BY PASTOR DAVID JOHNSON

**N**obody likes to be alone. I'm not talking about having a bit of quiet time every once in a while. I am talking about being really alone, like being the only-one-on-a-deserted-island, alone. Many years ago, Tom Hanks played a character in the movie *Castaway* who was so starved for companionship that he created an imaginary friend out of a volleyball. He named it Wilson.

There is a part inside of every one of us that craves companionship. In fact, our need for relationship is as critical as the air we breathe. But there is one sense in which we are truly alone in the world. And that is the fact that there is no one else exactly like us. No one knows the world like we do. No one has heard what we have heard or seen what we have seen.

No one else knows exactly what it is like to be us, have our experiences, our feelings, our memories. Only we know the life we have had. Only we know how things look, taste, feel, smell, or sound to us. In one sense, we are alone in the world.

But that is not necessarily bad. In fact, there is amazing wonder in this personal uniqueness.

Psalms 139:14-16 says, "I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your

book were all written The days that were ordained *for me*, When as yet there was not one of them."

I don't believe God will ever take away all of our aloneness because to do that would be to take away the very thing which distinguishes us from others. Our own wounds, our own perspectives, our own tastes are what make us unique. It's that uniqueness that we contribute and share with others. We can tell each other how we feel. However, we cannot give away what has made us distinct. And that sense of uniqueness should also remind us of just how valuable we are to our creator God, in the same way that each individual facet provides its own unique sparkle in a diamond.

It is this distinct personal value which the Association Retreat Center seeks to celebrate and foster. It is obviously a place for groups to meet. But it is also a place where individuals can meet with God, experience His creation and presence in an intimate way, and then bless others by sharing their gifts and experiences with the body. It is our prayer that each person who visits the ARC will experience the true significance of their lives in Christ, but also find opportunities to share the benefits of their unique perspective with other valuable individuals, gathered as the beloved Body of Christ.

*Johnson serves Living Faith Lutheran, Boyertown, Pa., and Disciple Lutheran Fellowship, Reading, Pa.*