

THE LUTHERAN 

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AMBASSADOR



mercy



Trust and never doubt

BY ANDREW KNEELAND

When we were young, our parents were our invincible superheroes. Even if we weren't gracious receivers, we still trusted them. We still knew they loved us. If only we had the same trust in our Heavenly Father.

"Trust and never doubt, Jesus will surely bring me out; He's never failed me yet." Those words of a popular gospel song are easy to sing, but incredibly difficult to live out. How can we "trust and never doubt" in this fallen world that is constantly throwing challenges at us and causing stress and doubt, panic and fear?

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were three Jewish teenagers who lived in the same fallen world we do. But when the most powerful king in the world demanded they bow down and worship the most impressive monument they'd ever seen, they refused. They trusted and never doubted.

God has a history of salvation. Our three teenagers knew how God had rescued their people from slavery, how God had delivered them to the Promised Land, and how God had struck down the invading Assyrians.

But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego knew that God isn't just a god of ancient history, and He isn't just a god of the end times. He's the God of today, too. He's the God of whatever circumstance you find yourself in, of whatever problem that is making you panic or stress.

When God promises in Psalm 121 to "protect you from all evil," "keep your soul," and "guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever," He's talking to *you* and *me*.



The same God who breathes stars promises to lovingly look after each of His children.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were rescued out of the furnace of blazing fire, but they knew that trusting God wasn't a "Get Out of Jail Free" card. They resigned themselves to God's will, trusted, and never doubted that God would either bring them *through* the fire, or *out* of the fire.

We aren't guaranteed protection from harm or persecution. But we are guaranteed an eternal home, free from all worry and strife. "I say to you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have nothing they can do" (Luke 12:4). That's not just a command from Jesus, it's a gracious

invitation from a loving God.

Our three Jewish teenagers didn't fear King Nebuchadnezzar. They knew God's promises were thicker than the mighty walls of Babylon, which made them fearless in the face of the king's fierce wrath. We can have that confidence, too. Just as these three were delivered from the wrath of a king, so we have been delivered from the wrath of the King. Because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, we don't have to be afraid of God's mighty wrath. Jesus satisfied it.

As we go through life and face many challenges and struggles, we can remind ourselves that God promises to either bring us *through* or *out* of all persecution. We can "trust and never doubt" because we have a God who is able to deliver and mighty to save.

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If we have no zeal for the glory of God our mercy must be superficial, man-centered human improvement with no eternal significance. And if our zeal for the glory of God is not a reveling in his mercy, then our so-called zeal, in spite of all its protests, is out of touch with God and hypocritical.

—John Piper

Faith is a divine work within us. It changes us and makes us to be born anew of God (John 1); it kills the old Adam and makes altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers, and it brings with it the Holy Ghost. Oh, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith; and so it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask whether there are good works to do, but before the question rises; it has already done them, and is always at the doing of them.

—Martin Luther

The most miserable prison in the world is the prison we make for ourselves when we refuse to show mercy.

—Warren Wiersbe

God never withholds from His child that which His love and wisdom call good. God's refusals are always merciful—"severe mercies" at times but mercies all the same. God never denies us our heart's desire except to give us something better.

—Elisabeth Elliot

Mercy, detached from Justice, grows unmerciful.

—C.S. Lewis

The
mercy
seat



by Pastor Oliver Olson

God's dilemma—does this seem like a strange thing to consider? After all, God is all-powerful, all-knowable, and everywhere present—all-everything. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Nothing stands before Him in authority, as Isaiah 40:15 clearly states: “Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust of the scales—all nations are as nothing before Him, they are accounted as less than nothing and emptiness.”

So how can God have any dilemmas of any kind? Consider three dimensions to God's dilemma:

First, bringing man—God's highest creation—into obedience to His will without losing the great potential that He created man to have. Man must then, in essence, be subservient to God and yet not lose his God-given potential and the ability to exercise his free will in the process.

Second, bringing man back into a right relationship with God after man's fall into sin without negating the penalty for sin—eternal separation from God.

Last, demonstrating God's wondrous mercy without negating His justice.

Thus God early on raised up a people group through whom He would demonstrate His infinite love and mercy—Israel.

The Hebrew people, through the deprivation they experienced in their wilderness wanderings, had to depend on God for daily survival. During these 40 years in the desert, God instructed Moses and the Israelites to build a Tabernacle, complete with all the essentials necessary to portray the mercy of God, including the Mercy Seat. He also instituted the Day of Atonement, when God would meet with the Israelites and reflect to them what it meant to be reconciled to God. The Mercy Seat illustrated the cost it would require on their part to make this happen.

The highlight of yearly Tabernacle rituals was enacted on the Day of Atonement, when the high priest was allowed to enter

into the Holy of Holies. There, in that awesome place containing the Mercy Seat, he made atonement for himself and for the people of Israel. The writer to the Hebrews makes a special note of this ritual, stating, “... these things are but a ‘shadow’ of the good things to come” (10:1).

The writer to the Hebrews goes into detail regarding the sacrificial system and the aspects of each part, relating how each aspect is a type or forerunner of that which was fulfilled in the coming life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Better Way, the Better Sacrifice, the Eternal High Priest.

Throughout the Book of Hebrews, such words as “substitution,” “ransom,” “covering,” “propitiation,” and “redemption” take on a reality in the life of Christ, by whom every debt was satisfied. The whole concept of justice and mercy was totally and wonderfully met on the cross. This wonderful fulfillment also brought about the total victory over Satan and all of his works. Christ is the victor (Colossians 2:14-15).

But one word used in Hebrews is very significant and foundational. The word “shadow” is defined as “an image cast by an object and representing the form of that object.” It is used in this way in Hebrews 8:5: “they serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things,” and also in Colossians 2:17: “these are a shadow of things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.”

The concept of a shadow was not a vague lack of vision as in a dark room, rather, a living reality of the truth of God's character in concrete terms. It forecasted that which was to come in a greater reality. This concept was especially evident in the Tent of Meeting in the Old Testament, where the Holy of Holies contained the Mercy Seat. It wasn't a vague idea, but a tangible reality of the presence of God in the midst of the Israelites.

The reality of God's presence is seen in the very familiar 23rd Psalm: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil” (v. 4). It would

seem that the word “shadow” would be unnecessary here, but it is included by the Divine Author to point in a specific way that the living presence of God is especially present in time of need.

So when Jesus came, He demonstrated in tangible terms by His very life what it was like to be totally dependent upon the Father. He made forgiveness available to anyone who would be responsive to receive it. “On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out: ‘If anyone thirsts, come to Me and drink. Whosoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water”’” (John 7:39-40).

The motif of “shadow” in Hebrews 10:1 is not a vague apparition of reality, but the reality itself. For in order to have a shadow, there is a need for two things: light and an object. In our troubled times, it is encouraging to note that in the light of God's gracious promises of His ever abiding mercy, love and forgiveness, He also put into Scripture various concepts of His “shadow” to be a marvelous encouragement in our lives:

Psalm 17:8, “Keep me as the apple of your eye, hide me under the shadow of your wings.”

Psalm 36:7: “How precious is your steadfast mercy, O God. We take refuge in the shadow of your wings.”

Psalm 57:1: “In the shadow of your wings I will take refuge.”

Psalm 91:1: “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.”

James 1:7: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

Praise God for these assurances.

Olson, Spring Valley, Calif., is a member of Reformation Lutheran, El Cajon, Calif.

by Pastor Rick Long

I was just getting ready for bed when my cell phone vibrated. It was 10:30 p.m. The caller on the other end was a nurse from the ER at our local hospital. I was the volunteer chaplain on-call. Could I come in? A serious roll-over accident had taken place. I assured the nurse that I could be there in a few minutes.

Upon arriving I learned that one of the occupants of the car had been taken to a neighboring city. The occupant who was at our local hospital had died in the accident. I approached the shift supervisor to ask my next question: “Has a death notification been made?” The answer was no. They were considering making a phone call. But I said it would be much better if the family could be notified in-person rather than by phone—and I was willing.

That’s when I learned that the lieutenant of the fire department who had led the crew to deal with the call was a family friend of the young man who had died. He insisted on going with me to notify the family.

I don’t know of anything else in life that equates with telling a mother that her 25-year-old son—the fruit of her womb and one in whom she has invested years of love, work, and prayers—has suddenly passed from this life. Have you experienced such a setting? The desperate shriek of disbelief and pain, the grief that instantly takes such a one to the floor in tears, and the shouts of denial and questioning. Are we certain? Do we have the correct name?

What can the messenger do in such a situation? Why would a person volunteer for this assignment? The answer is about mercy and its relationship to suffering.

I am using the word “mercy” in a secondary way. I think the first and primary way in which we use the word “mercy” is to refer to God’s mercy toward us: withholding the punishment we deserve for our sin. The mercy about which I am writing is the compassionate care shown to our fellow man out of love for Christ.

How does this kind of mercy manifest itself in the midst of suffering?

Through Presence

Have you heard someone speak of the “ministry of presence” before? Mercy, or compassionate care, in a very difficult situation is sometimes best demonstrated—

at least initially—by simply being there without saying anything. Our presence itself at such times is a reminder to those who grieve that they are surrounded by others who care. In fact, there is a real danger of speaking words totally inappropriate to the situation during this freshly painful time. It is often enough simply to be there initially. By doing so, we are representing the Lord Himself. We are “God with flesh on” for those who hurt. Mercy is brought even through our presence.

Through Empathy

But a time comes to speak. My words in this situation were relatively few. Expression of, “I’m so sorry,” is all that was said for some time. But how important that we communicate those words from the depth of our own hearts, with sincerity and with compassion.

Hospital and law enforcement chaplaincy has thrust me into other incredibly tragic situations—a mother who ran over her own 6-year-old daughter in their driveway, a young man pulled from the water after drowning on a rafting outing, a suicide by hanging, a death by sliding off a snowing mountain cliff, a father who lost his wife and two children in a fiery head-on collision, children of two families who lost all four of their parents simultaneously when the car in which they traveled was t-boned by a drunk driver. In each situation, words of genuine empathy, though few, were an important element of mercy in the midst of unspeakable suffering on the part of those who experienced the loss.

Still, God has enabled us to bring more.

Through Prayer

A child of God who is called into a situation of suffering as a messenger of mercy has the incredible privilege and power of prayer. Recall how faithfully the Apostle Paul prayed for those to whom he wrote in his letters. I, too, am so thankful that we are equipped with prayer—for ourselves, but also for and with those who are suffering. Every pastor can think of numerous times of being called into situations for which we have no power or wisdom of our own, but we can know that God is present and longs to have us bring the matter to Him in prayer. I recall stepping into the hospital room of a woman who had contracted a mysterious virus the day before. It seemed

the illness would take her life within just a few hours. We seemed helpless of ourselves, but we could pray.

God’s Word calls us to pray in Philippians 4:6-7, “Be anxious for nothing, but, in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Through Practical Aid

We wouldn’t want to overlook the fact that mercy can also be expressed tangibly, as made clear through other articles in this issue. I’m reminded of Paul’s acknowledgement of the gifts sent to him in his time of need by the Philippian Christians. Paul writes, “You have done well that you shared with me in my distress” (4:14). When we recognize that Jesus demonstrated His love and compassion for others throughout His ministry by means of tangible acts of mercy—with the deaf and blind, the leprous, the hungry, and more—we must be moved to use the physical resources God has entrusted to us to meet the needs of others. Tornadoes, hurricanes, and typhoons give us an opportunity to express mercy in this way internationally. A simple meal prepared for a family that has lost a loved one gives us opportunity to express mercy through practical aid often right in our own back yard.

Through Power

In each of these expressions of mercy in the midst of suffering, the real one at work by His power is our loving God. The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter by Jesus in John 15:26. It is our privilege to be vehicles of God’s Word, to be ones to pray, and to be givers of tangible resources. But, in the end, God is the One who brings His comforting and healing power to bear through us. And how thankful we are that He does!

Mercy extended by the people of God in the midst of suffering is a precious and powerful thing. Be encouraged to be available to bring that touch of God’s power into the situations you may encounter. Others will be blessed and God will be glorified.

Long, who serves Atonement Free Lutheran Church, Arlington, Wash., also serves as a chaplain.

mercy
& *suffering*



bind *the* broken

by Renata Hinrichs

The picture of an older woman dressed in an old-fashioned black tunic and a white headpiece remains vivid in my memory. This dear, tender-hearted lady taught my religion class in elementary school. As children, none of us bothered to ask why we addressed her as “Sister Wanda,” and certainly nobody understood the more sophisticated term, “Deaconess Wanda,” which was used by our pastor.

Growing up in Catholic Poland, I got used to seeing nuns walking through my hometown with their black habits. Therefore, as a child, it didn’t matter to me that Wanda was not a nun but a deaconess.

Later I learned in my confirmation class the history of the Lutheran diaconate Eben-Ezer, which was founded in response to the needs of abandoned children and vulnerable adults. All across Europe there was a noticeable presence of Lutheran diaconal institutions at that time.

The Lutheran diaconate movement began in America after Lutheran pastor William Passavant visited Kaiserswerth, Germany. He brought four deaconesses to Pittsburgh in 1849, and they worked in

the city’s infirmary, now called Passavant Hospital.

No matter what country it was, the deaconesses helped in local hospitals as nurses, ran Christian orphanages, as well as nursing homes and schools for the disabled. Basically, they served with deeds of mercy. That group of devoted women was obedient to God’s call, and when the time was right they were ready to serve. Many of those servants of God have already passed on to eternity. Is there another generation who would pick up their task?

As the world around has been changing, so also hospitals and orphanages have become more secular and less associated with Christianity. Does this mean that people are less in need of the ministry of Christ at these moments in life? It seems just the opposite. If anything, the need for the mercy of Christ is growing. Living now in a very sophisticated, high-paced world, a lot of people feel lost and forgotten.

As a recently appointed deaconess of AFLC, I have the privilege of serving as a hospital chaplain. Although I don’t wear the black habit of a deaconess, I do feel that my mission is very similar—to bring comfort,



encouragement, and show mercy to those in need. A deaconess is an extension of God’s love no matter who the people are and what situation they are in.

The prophet Isaiah wrote about Jesus’ calling: “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners” (61:1). God has a great love for those who are downhearted, and He continues to use His people to reach out to them in mercy.

I am amazed how often the Lord gives me opportunities to watch Him at work



in the hospital setting. Physical suffering seems to open people's hearts to God. For example, I came across a patient who attended church regularly but she didn't quite understand the concept of salvation by grace through faith. She was too embarrassed to ask her minister for an explanation, but she opened up to me. She was relieved to hear that her salvation doesn't depend on her good works.

In my chaplaincy there are plenty of opportunities to bind the wounds of those who are hurting. Whether it is a loss of health or a loss of home with the perspective of moving to a nursing home, the pain is the same. In many of these situations,

what matters the most is being a pastoral presence. I am reminded of the grieving mother saying goodbye to her still-born baby. All she needed was a hand to hold and a silent prayer.

I have had the privilege of being with palliative care patients in their dying process. So often it is their last chance to be reconciled with God. Some of these patients have never heard the good news about the cross. What a blessing it is to watch them leaving this world in peace with assurance of eternal life.

Recently, I was touched by a patient who was a strong believer but didn't have any family. There was nobody to stay with

her in her hour of death. She requested that I sing her favorite hymns. Although every breath was difficult, she made an effort to sing along with me. With the words on her lips, "What a friend we have in Jesus," she went to be with the Lord.

What is it to be a deaconess today? It is simply to be ready to be sent wherever the Lord Jesus would have us show his mercy. After all, it is not that much different from the task my dear Sister Wanda had many years ago.

Hinrichs, Mankato, Minn., is the first AFLC deaconess.



a heart for the city

by Pastor Jeremy Vance

According to the World Health Organization, more than half of the world's population lived in cities in 2010, and by 2050 the figure is expected to be about 70 percent. Cities are expanding at an increasing rate as more people move in looking for jobs and other opportunities. Immigrants from all over the world over are moving into cities and creating a more multicultural atmosphere. Yet with all this positive expansion, a darker side remains. With the influx of people comes an increase in the number of poor and homeless. There may be a tendency in some to overlook these population groups, yet they remain a real part of the city. These are real people with real needs. Instead of ignoring them, churches have a genuine opportunity to make a difference in people's lives.

Consider what the Lord says in Deuteronomy 15:11, "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded towards your brothers and toward the poor and needy in the land." No matter how many government programs are started, they will never eliminate poverty. There will always be people with real financial need, especially in cities. God wants His people to recognize the needs that people have and to make an effort to give them relief. This does not necessarily mean that the church just hands out money. There are many things that can be done in order to help people in their distress. For instance, there are a number of Christian organizations reaching this section of the population. A contribution toward their efforts may be appropriate. They may have a better idea of what needs are the

most pressing. Churches in the cities should get to know the ministries that are currently reaching out to the poor and homeless and seek in some way to cooperate with them.

One way to assist these places would be volunteering at a local soup kitchen. During the holidays, it seems that everyone wants to volunteer their time to help the needy. While this is a good opportunity for churches to see the real needs occurring in their cities, this may not be quite the ideal time. With so many people volunteering during the holidays, there may not be enough work for everyone to stay involved. What may be better is to find out if the ministry holds meals at times other than just holidays. During these times, organizations like this may be short of volunteers and would welcome the help that is very much needed. Connecting with people would help put a face on a difficult problem in the city. One can talk about poverty and discuss the various problems that go along with it, but it remains an abstract idea until one comes alongside the poor, gets to know them, and sees their suffering firsthand.

Another way to help comes with the changing of the seasons. Moving into wintertime brings with it colder weather. The poor in the city may not have the best insulated houses and therefore may have drafts leaking in. This would be a good time for churches to have a blanket and quilt drive. Some people have been gifted with the ability to make them, and it would be a good ministry to stock up over the year in preparation for the winter. Perhaps even some Scripture verses meant for encouragement can be sewn into the quilts. While they are made, prayers can even be said

over them for the people who would receive the blankets.

Another group to remember during wintertime are the homeless. Every year homeless people die from exposure to the cold. They just are unable to find places to keep warm enough when the weather plummets. To provide for their needs, an option besides blankets would be hats and gloves.

Some people may say they are looking for a new way to minister to the people in the city. One challenge that the poor face in the city is affordable childcare. Young children are left at home while their parents work. Churches can come alongside the poor and offer them a place to care for their children. This may not mean beginning a full-fledged day care, because some churches may not have the necessary resources. City ministries may be able to get churches connected with families struggling with the childcare issue. Churches can adopt a family and rotate members who can provide the help that they need.

As cities expand, the challenge is for churches to keep up with the increasing needs. Partnering with city ministries can open up ways to meet these needs. These ministries have established a relationship with the poor and homeless and know how best to channel volunteers' gifts. In the New Year, consider the opportunities for ministry that lay ahead. Take a new step and see what God can do through His servants.

Vance serves Sunnyside Free Lutheran, Stacy, Minn.

being merciful

by Lydia Schierkolk

Why am I here? I sit in someone else's home, holding a tiny premature baby, trying to coax her into drinking her 4 a.m. feeding. Her two tiny sisters lay between hot water bottles beside me, cozy and warm in their far-too-big knit hats. Why did God bring me here? To Uganda? To this room? To this moment?

I know He has a purpose, because He has a purpose for everything. I'm here to love like Jesus loved, to serve as Jesus served, to have mercy as Jesus had mercy. But, how can I? "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Matthew 5:7). How can I have mercy on another when I am the one so desperately in need of mercy? I feel so inadequate. His name comes to my mind, repeating over and over, a needed reminder. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus! I let His truth sink in, filling all the broken, questioning places in my heart. He is the reason why a sinful, desperately-in-need-of-mercy human being can bring relief to others.

My eyes begin to flutter shut as sleep

comes while baby Babirye sucks away on her bottle. A weak, squeaking cry brings me back to reality. Another baby is ready to be fed. I pick her up and hold her close. I see myself in her, a helpless baby craving spiritual milk, craving understanding. When Jesus has showered mercy upon me, how can I help but show such mercy to others?

The daylight eventually emerges, streaming down and glistening on the wings of the white birds flying overhead. It's time for Ruth and me to head over to the Crisis Pregnancy Center. We make our way slowly, taking the shortcut through the park and enjoying the birds singing in the trees overhead. When we come out on the street by the Center, children's laughter can be heard, joy overflowing. Hugs are given as we near the cheery pink doors. I am so blessed to be here.

The Center focuses on walking teenage girls through pregnancy, but it also has a new children's ministry program, with which Ruth and I are involved. We go over Bible studies with primary school kids, helping them to understand God's Word.



I start sorting through Bible studies as we wait for the children to come. Agnes steps through the doorway, a beautiful 14-year-old Christ follower. "Osibye otya?" I ask, roughly translated, "Good afternoon/how are you?" as she walks over to the table where I sit expectantly. I look up into her bright, eager eyes and see another baby needing to be fed.

"Like newborn babes, crave pure spiritual milk ... now that you have tasted that the Lord is good" (I Peter 2:2).

Agnes is seeking God, craving her Maker, wanting more of Him. I ask what she has learned through reading the Bible lesson. "I learned that if anyone is of God



that he is a new person ... that God is my all in all." A smile spreads across my face and I pray this thirst she has will never die.

The kids come in one by one or in groups of friends with their completed Bible studies and question sheets. It is so good to hear about what they have learned, the simple gospel message shining through. This thirst that they have doesn't come from them. God is at work; our thirst for Him is yet another aspect of the mercy He has shown us. He didn't have mercy on the merciful, but on the merciless, as well. The poor, the broken, those wanting and those in need. In other words: us.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our

Lord Jesus Christ, who in His great mercy gave us new birth into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! The inheritance to which we are born is one that nothing can destroy or spoil or wither. It is kept for you in heaven, and you, because you put your faith in God, are under the protection of His power" (I Peter 1:3-5).

I have been made new. I know His mercy. I have a living hope which will never fail. Now He calls me to serve and share what He has given. All I can do is follow. Follow and trust that in His mercy He will equip this failure who is resting in His everlasting arms.

Another child comes up to the table

where I still sit, now lost in thought. He says his memory verse clearly, head held high. "Being confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). Those words are truth—real, almost tangible truth—and I am so thankful.

Schierkolk, a 2013 graduate of AFLBS, is serving as a short-term missionary assistant in Jinja, Uganda. She is from Eben Junction, Mich.



go and do likewise

by Betty McGuire

And,” queried the expert in the law, trying to back Jesus into a corner, “who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho ...”

By the end of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), we are faced with what is for most of us an answer with a difficult truth: It is “the one who has mercy” who fits God’s definition of “neighbor.” And worse yet, Jesus commands His listeners, “Go and do likewise.”

Mercy is not an abstract concept, is it? Mercy from God came only through the sacrifice of His own Son, in which Jesus came entirely out of Himself, surrendered Himself, and gave all of Himself.

In our great, dark need He was boundlessly merciful to us. But that is not the end of it. We are not to be only on the receiving end, but are to put ourselves—out of broken-hearted gratitude—on the giving end of mercy. We are to “go and do likewise.” We, too, are to come out of ourselves, to surrender self on behalf of others. Even for those who have no claim upon us.

The first step, of course, is that we actually see those in need of mercy. We cannot, as did the priest and the Levite, just look away and keep walking on down the road.

Those of us at City Life Center do not find the beaten and abused along the road. We have, however, taken up residence among those who live in the inner city of Minneapolis. Here, for the past 19 years, we have been a refuge to the beaten and abused, most of them women in various stages of pregnancy or early motherhood.

Many of these women come to us hav-

ing been abused by those who do not want them to be pregnant. They come to find shelter from more beatings and more abuse. They come terrified of being killed, and some of these even from other states. They come in need of warm clothing. They come seeking help with the physical needs of their pregnancies and their babies. They come to a place where, instead of being rejected, they are welcomed, cared for, and taught that the mercy we are able to show them is but a reflection of the infinite mercy of the God who made them and eternally loves them, even in all their brokenness.

Michelle* thought her only option was to abort her child. Her husband had recently lost his job, and what with the other children to feed and clothe, she saw no other way out. But before taking that step she decided to call our Center. She was invited to come and talk with us about her situation. By the time we were done talking, Michelle had enough new hope to decide to continue her pregnancy. We were also able to provide her with practical assistance. Sometime later, Michelle wrote us, “I thought abortion was my only option until I called the City Life Center. But since giving birth to my beautiful baby girl, I can’t imagine life without her.”

What was the cost of saving this baby’s life and this woman’s heart? The mercy of maybe a few hundred dollars and the time it took to talk with her, and let her know she is welcome back. And more than all that, it was a privilege to give her hope.

This is only one story of thousands here at City Life Center. Over the years we have become a true center in this neighborhood, a gathering place for women to

study God’s Word and where, from time to time, we host special events for women and their families. At one such gathering Juan* said to me, “This is the first time I’ve ever been invited to a Christmas party. I feel so welcomed here.”

People like Juan and Michelle live in the same communities, shop for the same groceries, and sit in the pews of the same churches that we do. Yet, how often do we see them as we go about our busy lives? Could it be that when they look at us they see, in all our busyness, a “Do Not Disturb” sign hanging on our hearts?

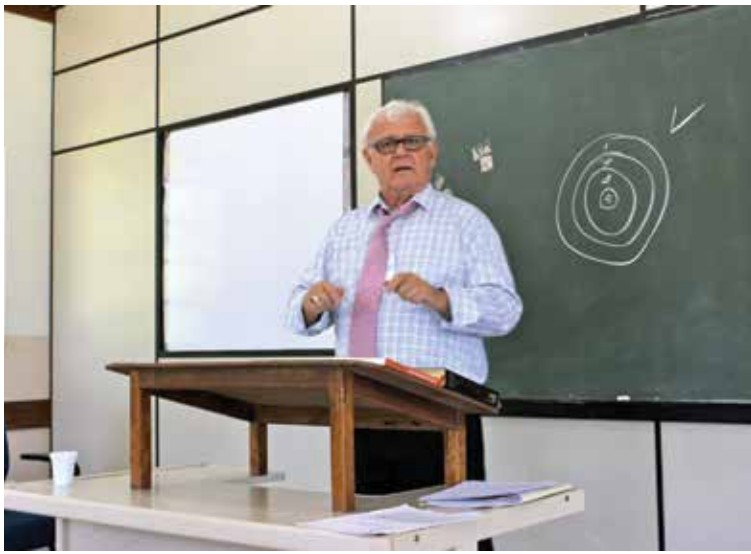
While following Jesus’ teaching may come at great cost to us, do we dare fail to “go and do likewise”?

Imagine, on the other hand, being the priest or the Levite safely at home later that night, knowing they had looked away and passed by the beaten, half-dead man on the road. What a dark night theirs must have been for all the light they thought was theirs, because of what they left undone. Jesus tells us, “If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matthew 6:23).

At City Life Center, we seek to provide for the immediate needs of those who come to our door and to build compassion-filled relationships with them, all the while demonstrating the hope and light that is theirs in the richness of the love and mercy of Jesus.

McGuire is the director of the City Life Center, a crisis pregnancy center serving the inner city of Minneapolis.

** Names changed.*



CLOCKWISE (from top left): Pastor Connelly Dyrud, former AFLC missionary to Brazil, speaks at the symposium. The entrance to the campus in Campo Mourão welcomed visitors. The outside of the chapel, with a roof in need of replacing. Pastor Iran speaks during a service. Pastors and leaders of the AFLC Brasil. Loiell Dyrud speaks and Pastor Jonathan Abel translates for him.

Hungry for God's Word



BY PASTOR CRAIG JOHNSON

A favorite meal in Brazil is a churrasco. It usually involves a lot of great tasting meat. On my trip to Brazil this past October I enjoyed a number of churrascos. I enjoyed even more, though, seeing the hunger many people had for the meat of God's Word.

The Free Lutheran Seminary in Campo Mourão, Brazil, sponsored a symposium to study the truths of the Protestant Reformation. Pastor Connelly Dyrud, who was a missionary in Brazil for 35 years, his brother, Loiell, and myself were invited to speak at the symposium. It took place Oct. 30 to Nov. 1. Sessions were held on the meaning of the main truths of the Reformation: Grace alone, faith alone, Word alone. Another session looked at how those truths relate to present-day issues. We considered how grace alone refutes the false claim that all will be saved no matter what they believe. Faith in Christ alone is the answer to the fear that is so prevalent in the world today. The modern world's questions about morality are dealt with by respecting and trusting in the authority of God's Word alone.

Workshops were also part of the symposium. Some of the topics included the history of pietism in the Free Lutheran movement and the nature of the kingdom of God. In addition to the guest speakers from the United States, workshops were led by Missionary Jonathan Abel and Pastor Iran Goes, dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary in Brazil.

Approximately 70 people attended the two evening services of the symposium. About 50 took part in the morning and afternoon workshops. Others took part in the symposium from around the world, via the Internet. The evening sessions of the symposium were recorded and streamed live over the Internet.

The Free Lutheran Seminary in Brazil has seen growth during the past year in various ways. The student population has grown to 24 students this past school year, which ended in November. They anticipate 30 students in attendance next year. Some of those students will be taking the first two years of instruction, which is equivalent to Bible school training in the United States. Others will

be continuing on for additional training and preparation for pastoral ministry.

The seminary has grown in its use of technology with expansion of the school's website and Facebook page. They also have a regular radio program from the seminary and hope to expand that ministry with the development of a radio studio on campus in the future. The outreach vision of the students has grown during the past year, as well. Students and faculty have been involved in various evangelistic events in Free Lutheran congregations in Brazil. This has contributed to a growth in unity between the school and the congregations, which is an ongoing goal of the Free Lutheran Church in Brazil.

The main sessions of the symposium were held in the school chapel. The beautiful worship setting of the chapel is covered by a roof that needs to be replaced. The AFLC of Brazil is hoping, by God's grace, to raise part of the funds needed to pay for a new roof. Help in this project from congregations and individuals in the U.S. would be appreciated. The AFLC World Missions Committee has approved the \$20,000 project. As the seminary in Brazil makes positive strides forward, contributions to this project would be a great source of encouragement. You can contribute by sending gifts to AFLC World Missions, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441, and designate the gift for the Brazil seminary roof project.

I first visited Brazil on my seminary internship in 1987. Ones who were in youth groups then, Pastors Iran and Silvio, are now leaders and teachers at the seminary. Growth has taken place. Interest in the solid food of God's Word is evident. I came away from this visit to Brazil much encouraged and optimistic about God's plans for the future for His church there. You are encouraged to pray with thankfulness and hope for the AFLC in Brazil.

Johnson, former editor of The Lutheran Ambassador, serves Bethany Lutheran, Astoria, Or.



Consider Him

BY CHRISTIE FRIESTAD

“Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted” (Hebrews 12:3).

Sometimes the busyness of serving in ministry chokes out the practice of pausing to consider what the LORD Jesus has done and is doing around us. AFLC Home Missions invites you to get away for a few days to consider Him at the 2014 Leadership Retreat. Our retreat vision is to encourage the heart and offer practical application to the hands of the Home Mission pastor and his wife, Parish Builder, and other congregation leaders. Anyone who is interested in serving with Home Missions is welcome to attend.

Change Ahead ...

Traditionally, the annual Home Missions Leadership Retreat has taken place in January, prior to the AFLC Pastors' Conference at the Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis. This year, however, the leadership retreat has undergone a dynamic makeover: it is two days longer than past years, in a new location (Mesa, Ariz.), offers a revised, more relaxed format, and is scheduled in February.

We are preparing and praying for a wonderful time of refreshment through preaching, teaching, panel discussions, worship,

fellowship, and revival. Guest speakers include Pastor Ollie Olson (Calif.), Pastor Paul Nash (Minn.), Pastor Dan Giles (Ariz.), Ryan Egan (S.D.), and Pastor Al Monson (Ariz.).

Under the banner of “Consider Him,” the retreat schedule includes the following sessions:

- Considering Christ when the Heart is Worn
- Considering Christ in Worship
- Help! We aren't On the Same Page: When People Disagree
- Reaching Across Cultural Differences
- Balancing Family and Ministry
- Social Media as a Tool for Ministry

The retreat will also include a forum on favorite ministry resources, small group prayer and discussion, and much more.

Dates: Feb 24- 27, 2014

Location: Calvary Free Lutheran, 590 N 96th St, Mesa AZ 85207

Housing: Host homes arranged by Calvary Free Lutheran

Meals: Provided by host homes and Calvary Free Lutheran

Cost: \$50/individual || \$70/couple

Complete details available at www.aflochomemissions.org

Friestad is an administrative assistant for AFLC Home Missions.



Supporting the Alaska work

BY CAROL MACKEY

It was the end of May 2013 when a group of eight volunteers from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan ventured to Naknek, Alaska. Five men from our group installed several new windows at the KAKN Radio Station. The remaining three women went there to help prepare The Net, an outreach center where people can stop in for coffee, cookies, quilts, sweat-shirts, and most importantly Bibles and tracts in many different languages. It was amazing to see the generosity of God's people as they sent donations from across the country to help with this ministry.

Just before we left for Alaska, I was reading in the Book of Acts about the day of Pentecost and it made me think about Naknek, where thousands of people from all over the world would soon descend upon that small village to work during the fishing season. It was amazing to think that these men and women speaking different languages could stop at The Net and find God's Word in their own language. It has been a blessing to read Pastor Jeff Swanson's reports of souls who came to know Jesus this last summer in the Home Missions Knee Mail. Please remember to pray for the Swansons, the Lees, and the Crowells as they endure the cold and dark winter months. We were so thankful to them for their warm hospitality. We enjoyed seeing the Mattsons there this summer, also.

We met several locals who invited us to their homes, where we tried some interesting foods. They showed us many of their beautifully handmade purses, garments, furs, and parkys (parkas).

On Sunday morning, we went to Hilltop Church, where Pastor Jeff Swanson preaches. That afternoon we split into two groups to attend church in remote villages. I was amazed that the plane that I was about to board had only four seats. We brought some food along to share for a potluck after the service. I never imagined that I would go to a church potluck in such a small plane with the food on my lap. I was thankful that our pilot, Pastor Jeremy Crowell, shared a comforting word of prayer before we took off. It was only a year and a half ago that I had a fear of flying and did not even have the courage to open the window shade on a flight with my husband, Kyle, to Italy. On that day, God used a daily devotional from Colossians 3 to calm my fears. Verses one and two say, "If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on earth." I am so thankful for the comfort God gives through His Word and prayer.

Though only eight of us traveled to Alaska, we felt the presence of many in the Body of Christ. While in Alaska my sister, Sue, emailed me Scriptures that were fitting for the needs of the day, and there were so many brothers and sisters in Christ who covered us with prayers and financial support. What a blessing.

Mackey is a member of Hope Free Evangelical Lutheran, Ishpeming, Mich.



AFLC Schools host annual Christmas concerts



The Association Free Lutheran Bible School and Seminary hosted a weekend of Christmas concerts Dec. 6-8. The weekend started with a gospel team concert on Friday night, followed by two candle light musical services on Saturday and Sunday. Pictured (top) are the Proclaim Choir and Concert choir singing the "Hallelujah Chorus" with members of the audience. The seminary chorus (above) also participated in the concerts.

BY JONNI SLIVER

Answered prayer



The northeast of Brazil is very dry, and it is common for churches in the area to have prayer meetings, seeking God for rain. On one such occasion, as a family was setting out for a meeting, the father was surprised to see his youngest daughter come out of her room dressed for church and holding an umbrella. He asked her why, on a hot, sunny day, she was bringing an umbrella to church. She looked surprised at the question and asked, “Aren’t we going to pray for rain?”

I love this story. It makes me think about what I am asking God for and what I am expecting Him to do. It can be a little scary to see how far apart the answers are sometimes.

Daniel is a precious young man here in the Miriam Home. He is 10 years old, and this is the second time he has come to live in the house in less than a year. Both times he came because his mother’s alcoholism was putting his well-being at risk. The first time he came I was very concerned about how Daniel would interact with the other children because he had experienced a lot of violence and abuse. What a surprise I received. Daniel’s heart was tender and his attitude toward the other children was positive, though he had a deep sadness at being separated from his mother.

When Daniel left the Miriam Home it was to live with his grandmother, but soon he was back with his mother. She had not stopped drinking, and Daniel followed her wherever she went, ending up living on the street. He was registered in school, but in the first six months he missed more than 60 school days.

Just recently Daniel returned to the Miriam Home, this time as a different boy. The sadness that he had at being separated from his mother grew into a hardness. Where most boys have dreams for their future—firemen, astronauts or Spiderman—his one dream is to be with his mom. But that is the last place it is safe for him to be. Daniel had become aggressive toward the smaller children and unwilling to talk to the adults.

One morning while I was talking with Surai (the Miriam Home administrator), I said that Daniel made me think of Mark 9:17-29, when Jesus told His disciples, in response to a father’s desperate need, that some answers only come from the Father through prayer and fasting. It was hard to see the answer for Daniel’s desperate need. At 1 p.m. that afternoon we received a call from a counselor who works with us. She asked us if we had talked to Daniel’s brother. We didn’t know he had one. We only knew the mother and an older sister. His half-brother is the son of Daniel’s father, now an adult and married. Receiving his name and phone number, we called him at work. In less than half an hour he was in the Miriam Home office. He is a hardworking young man who has a deep concern for his younger brother, but Daniel’s mother wouldn’t let him be a part of his life.

Praise the Lord, for His precious answers to our prayers.

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

AFLC memorials: November

AFLBS

Ruth Claus
Pastor Dale Mellgren
Edsel Anderson (2)
Edith Gudim (2)

Parish Education

Pastor Dale Mellgren

Vision

Edsel Anderson

World Missions

Sandy Rieschl
Edith Gudim
Emma Fuglesten

AFLTS

Edith Gudim
Edsel Anderson

HIS Fund

Pastor Dale Mellgren

Lutheran Ambassador schedule for 2014

Volunteer writers welcome, contact editors

Below is the 2014 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 or call (763) 545-5631.

ISSUE DATE	DEADLINE	ISSUE THEME
February	December 30	AFLC Schools
March	January 27	Lent
April	February 24	Easter
May	March 31	Missions
June	April 28	Evangelism
July	May 26	Christian Education
August	June 30	Conference Review
September	July 28	Youth
October	August 25	The Pastor
November	September 29	Reform./Thanksgiving
December	October 27	Advent/Christmas

The Free Lutheran Seminary is celebrating the school's 50th anniversary in 2014, having been established in 1964. The February issue will include some remembrances from the school's instructors, students and friends of the seminary.

Please note, information regarding the Annual Conference, scheduled for June 10-13 at Valley City, N.D., will be featured in the May issue, with a deadline of March 31. The theme of the conference is "Let Us Rise Up and Build," from Nehemiah 2:8. 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.



Mt. Carmel church celebrates 50 years

Members of Mt. Carmel Free Lutheran, McIntosh, Minn., celebrated the congregation's 50th anniversary on Oct. 20 at a special service, with former Pastor Tom Tuura officiating. The congregation is pictured above.

Northwest Minnesota district to host mid-winter conference

The Northwest Minnesota district of the AFLC will host a mid-winter Bible conference next month. Using the theme, "The True Light" from John 1:9, the district will host the conference Feb. 7-8 at Abundant Life Free Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn. Special guest peaker will be Pastor Tim Skramstad.

The conference begins at 7 p.m. Friday night and resumes Saturday, running from 10:30 a.m. to about 3 p.m. Lunch is provided by the church.

For more information about the conference, contact Pastor Greg Schram by phone at 218-681-4643, or email pastorgreg@mncable.net.

People and Places

Pastor Brett Boe, Dalton, Minn., has accepted a call to serve King of Glory Lutheran Church, Shakopee, Minn.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-Nov. 30, 2013

FUND	REC'D IN NOVEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$21,105	\$302,255	\$285,172
Evangelism	7,491	119,641	119,940
Youth Ministries	7,276	94,407	91,394
Parish Education	8,650	136,137	106,154
Seminary	13,767	260,245	203,441
Bible School	24,887	430,709	375,051
Home Missions	23,605	409,568	411,915
World Missions	27,164	367,449	371,936
Personal Support	39,293	412,366	434,079
TOTALS	\$173,238	\$2,532,777	\$2,399,081

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

Faith active in love

Some of our readers may be familiar with a document called the “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” formulated in 1978 at an international summit where a group of noted theologians and church leaders hammered out a lengthy definition and defense of their high view of Holy Scripture. The opening paragraph of the preface declares the clear convictions of the authors as follows:

The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of



Pastor Robert Lee

their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God’s written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.

It is unfortunately possible to heartily agree with the doctrinal theses of the statement and miss the emphasis in the second and third sentences, that the reality of faith in Christ is revealed in obedience to His Word, that straying from Scripture “in faith or conduct” is disloyalty to our Master.

Many are not aware that the Chicago inerrancy statement is one of three. A second summit was held in 1982, producing a statement on biblical interpretation, and a third summit in 1986 issued the “Chicago Statement on Biblical Application.” In other words, the formulators of these confessional statements recognized that it was not enough to profess faith in Scriptures’

inerrancy without dealing with issues of Scriptures’ interpretation and application, and it is the latter that is the focus of this editorial. The question is “how a trusted Bible directs prayer, planning and action in today’s drifting society.”

“Sanctity of Life” is the title of the fifth article in the statement, affirming that this conviction is based on the creation of mankind in the image and likeness of God. Article six denies “that the biblical ideal of marriage can be fulfilled either by a couple living together without a lawful marriage covenant or by any form of same-sex or group cohabitation,” and that “the state has the right to legitimize views of marriage and the family unit that contravene biblical standards.” Divorce and remarriage are addressed in the seventh article, and sexual deviations in the eighth. Some of these theses seem even timelier than when they were formulated 28 years ago.

Justice, discrimination, human rights, economics, work and leisure, wealth and poverty, stewardship of the environment ... these are among the other issues addressed by the third Chicago Statement, building on the firm confidence that there are no areas of life to which God’s Word should not be applied.

Last year marked the 350th birthday of August Hermann Francke, one of the most important leaders of early Lutheran Pietism. Too often in church history, the relationship between faith and works has become blurred, leading either to works righteousness or to faith without works. Francke was concerned that true piety should always be marked by “faith active in love,” and to that end he was instrumental in establishing institutions of mercy such as an orphanage, a school for the poor, and a home for the aged. He was a leader in the cause of world missions, but has often been called the father of the “inner

mission” movement, dedicated to social ministries. He would have heartily agreed with the words of the following hymn:

“Tis all in vain that you profess the doctrines of the Church, unless

You live according to your creed and show your faith by word and deed.

Observe the rule: To others do as you would have them do to you.”

(*Ambassador Hymnal*, 297, verse 2)

The author of a history of the deaconess movement wrote: “To walk the tightrope of retaining the truly evangelical relationship between faith in God and love

Too often in church history, the relationship between faith and works has become blurred ...

for the neighbor has been the continuing chore of Protestantism” (*Love’s Response* by Frederick Weiser, page 34). True faith will always be active in love, for “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26).

How can our congregations provide opportunities for their members to express their faith in loving service? Some of our Twin Cities congregations cooperate in a ministry called “Love INC” (Love in the Name of Christ), providing assistance to many families in need within our communities. Perhaps your congregation has found a similar open door for service. Or maybe it’s been simple acts of kindness rather than part of an organized program.

We stand for the inspiration and inerrancy of God’s Word. Let us also stand for faith active in love, as Holy Scripture is applied to every area of our lives.

association retreat center

Agape love in action

BY PASTOR KARL ANDERSON

“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19, ESV).

Love may be demonstrated in many ways, depending on the kind of love being shown. Hugs may demonstrate a sisterly love. The advice a father gives to his son reveals his concern. An embrace between husband and wife reflects yet another kind of love. Yet the love that God has given us goes deeper.

The Greek language used by the original New Testament writers had many words that can be translated in English using the word love. One word highlighted the fondness we have for friends and family. Another speaks of the passion and romance between husband and wife. The word that John used to describe God’s love for us was *agape*. Agape love wants the best for the one who is loved without regard for any affection that may or may not be given in return. When God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, it wasn’t because the world deserved it. It wasn’t so that people would serve Him or obey His commandments. God wanted the best for His creation.

Love is revealed in actions. God’s love is best seen in His mercy toward His creation. God’s love for us led Him to send His only begotten Son as a sacrifice to pay the price for our sins. Throughout the Bible the word mercy is used in hundreds of verses to speak of forgiveness or salvation. I read in I Peter 1:34 that it was according to God’s mercy that “He has caused us to be born again to a living

hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” I read in Ephesians 2:4-5 that because of God’s great mercy and love for us “even when we were dead in our trespasses, He made us alive together with Christ.”

Because we have been loved in that way, we are empowered to love in that way, too. In Matthew 25 Jesus tells a parable of some people who had received His love and shown it to people with a variety of needs: hunger, thirst, sickness, or imprisonment. Those He welcomed had not acted so that they would get on God’s good side. They had loved their fellow human. They loved with an agape love that reached out with care and concern to those in need. Where did that love come from? The Apostle John tells us that it comes from believing in Jesus, trusting Him as Savior and Lord. We love because He first loved us.

The ARC provides many opportunities to show God’s love to others. Volunteers serve ice cream to fellow campers at family camp. Many plant flowers or rake leaves during family weekends. Some share their skills helping to maintain buildings or equipment. Gifts from across the AFLC help purchase supplies or pay salaries. Because so many have demonstrated their love for God and others in these ways, the ARC has been a place where people “come away and rest awhile” for nearly 35 years.

Anderson, a member of the ARC Corporation, serves Alida and Rice Lutheran churches near Bagley, Minn.