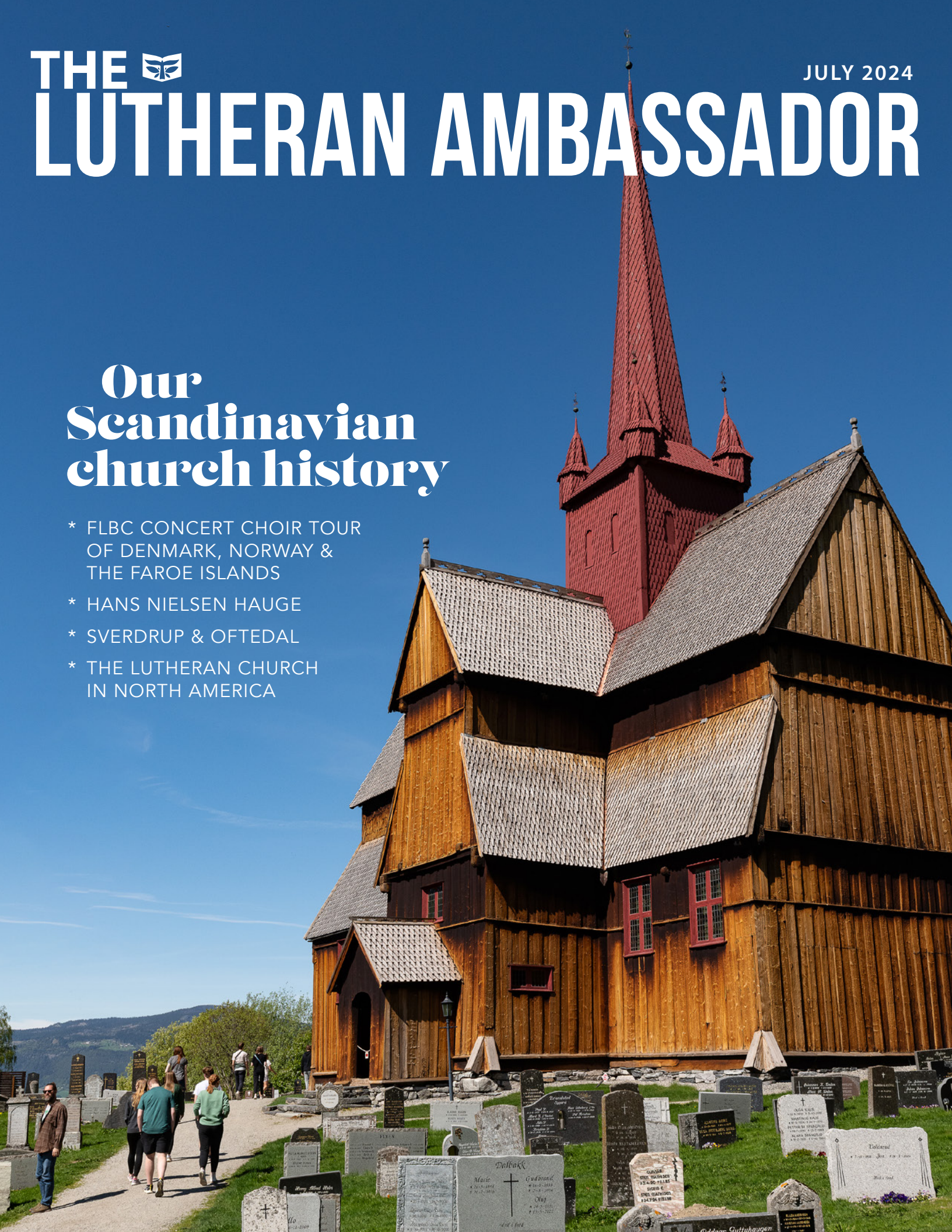


# LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

## Our Scandinavian church history

- \* FLBC CONCERT CHOIR TOUR OF DENMARK, NORWAY & THE FAROE ISLANDS
- \* HANS NIELSEN HAUGE
- \* SVERDRUP & OFTEDAL
- \* THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA



# Our roots.

**A**s an AFLC, we can trace our history back to our Scandinavian roots. But there is more to our heritage than our ethnicity.

The choir of the Free Lutheran Bible College recently completed a tour through Scandinavia, its first in nearly 30 years. The group spent several days singing on the Faroe Islands and in Denmark before visiting several churches and Bible schools in Norway. The choir—and the accompanying Companion Tour—saw impressive sights, experienced new food, and met faithful believers from the other side of the world. Enjoy the pictures and testimonies in this issue from these several weeks in Scandinavia.

The visit to Scandinavia also coincided with the 200th anniversary of the death of Hans Nielsen Hauge, the lay leader of an evangelistic revival through Norway in the 19th century. The government controlled the religious climate of Norway at this time, and Hauge felt they were stifling genuine spirituality and Christian life. Larry Walker contributed an article to this issue about Hauge. He writes about Hauge's life and background, but also about the spiritual renewal and awakening that took Norway by storm in the 19th century. Walker writes in his article that "Hauge was simply a man in love with Jesus Christ."



Pastor Marty Horn picks up the story from there, tracing this spiritual awakening to Georg Sverdrup and Sven Oftedal later in the 19th century. Their vision of free and living Lutheran congregations led to the Lutheran Free Church in the United States. These ideals are preserved today in our AFLC.

Our church body springs from this Norwegian heritage, and we can hold this history dearly as we continue stepping into the future. But ethnicity is not our defining characteristic or guiding principle. Pastor Horn writes: "The heart of the Association is, and always should be, a deep concern for freedom and life in the congregations. 'Free and living congregations' must be our continual rallying cry that leads us to pray for, preach for, and work for Spirit-wrought freedom and life in our congregations."

Also in this issue, Pastor Terry Culler tells the story of the early Lutherans in the U.S. Many were tempted toward theological compromise, but we can be grateful for our founders as they held on to our confessions and theology in the 20th century.

Near the end of his life, Joshua reminded the leaders of Israel: "You know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed" (Joshua 23:14). God is faithful to his promises! The theme of this issue is church history, but as you flip through these pages and think of the past, we pray you will also think of the future. Seeing God at work through our church body in the past reminds us that he will be faithful to his promises in the future.

And don't forget to check out the back cover! Pastor J. Christian Andrews wrote the last several "Building the Base" columns on the three articles of the Apostle's Creed. The next three columns will continue the series by walking us through the sacraments. In this issue, Pastor Jerry Moan, the new pastor of the McIntosh, Minn., parish, focuses on the Word of God. "Scripture is God's chosen vehicle or channel to communicate God's grace to us," Moan writes. "Don't overlook that, as a channel or means, the Word does far more than simply supply needed information."

We pray these articles, columns, and ministry updates are a blessing to you and your congregation. As always, please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any comments or questions.

—Pastor Andrew Kneeland



## THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

JULY 2024  
VOL. 62 NO. 7

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### THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

(ISSN 0746-3413) (USPS 588-620)  
is published monthly by the  
Association of Free Lutheran  
Congregations,  
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,  
Plymouth, MN 55441  
Phone (763) 545-5631  
Periodicals postage paid at  
St. Paul, MN and additional  
mailing offices.  
Postmaster send address  
changes to  
The Lutheran Ambassador,  
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,  
Plymouth, MN 55441.

### SUBSCRIPTION CHANGES AND INFORMATION

3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,  
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Remember the days of old;  
 consider the years of many generations;  
 ask your father, and he will show you,  
 your elders, and they will tell you.  
 [Deuteronomy 32:7]



When God's Spirit comes upon a congregation, the  
 first and most pronounced effect will be a living  
 zeal for the salvation of souls.

[Georg Sverdrup]

This is perfect and pure boasting in God, when one  
 is not proud on account of his own righteousness  
 but knows that he is indeed unworthy of the true  
 righteousness and is justified solely by faith in Christ.  
 [Basil of Caesarea]

Whoever doubts the forgiveness of sins insults Christ by  
 thinking that such sin is greater or stronger  
 than the death and promise of Christ.  
 [Apology of the Augsburg Confession IV]

There is nothing the modern church enjoys that is not  
 a gift from previous generations of God's people. ...  
 The more we know about how those gifts have come  
 down to us, the more we may humbly thank God for his  
 faithfulness to past generations, as well as to our own.  
 [Mark Noll]

# Grace all sufficient

ANDREW HANSON



**T**he day after graduation—Sunday, April 28—members of the FLBC Concert Choir, accompanied by 11 staff and family members, loaded up their backpacks and began a three-week Nordic tour. After a year of raising support, studying Nordic culture, and learning both American and Scandinavian songs centered on the theme “Grace All Sufficient,” the long-anticipated choir tour was finally here.

Our two full days in the Faroe Islands introduced us to a region only a few of us knew about prior to this tour. Dramatic cliffs, underwater tunnels connecting the islands, and consistent low cloud cover set the stage to meet warm, welcoming, and trusting people. With a population of only 55,000 in the whole country (and nearly twice as many sheep), we were enthusiastically greeted following our two church concerts. Members of “the only young adult choir on the islands” stayed after both concerts to visit and share with us. Two highlights from the Faroe Islands include a breathtaking lighthouse hike and an opportunity to join with the church choir at Christianskirkjan (see page 12) to

sing *Himnafaðir, vár vit biðja* (a Faroese arrangement of the Lord’s Prayer).

Following our time in the Faroes, we spent a couple days in Denmark. FLBC alum Karl Yri (who was the main connection for many of our stops throughout the whole tour) and a small group of Danes welcomed us to downtown Copenhagen. We had meaningful sharing time with them—they introduced us to what they loved about Denmark, and they wanted to hear about our observations of the trip thus far. The next day, following some time in the capital city, we took the metro out to a Bible school in Hillerød, a suburb of Copenhagen.

Luthersk Mission Højskole was the first of three Bible schools with which we were able to connect on this tour. The vast majority of FLBC students would say these Bible schools were the highlight of the trip. Meeting other 18- to 25-year-olds on another continent who also were setting aside time in their lives to study God’s Word, was inspiring and uplifting. Heartfelt concerts led to extended conversations and new friendships.



OPPOSITE PAGE: Visiting Mikladalur, Faroe Islands. ABOVE: The choir sings at Luthersk Mission Højskole, north of Copenhagen. LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM: On the island of Kalsoy, Faroe Islands. Choir students pray with members of Betania Church, Trondheim. A concert at Bibelskolen Fjellhaug, Oslo. Arriving at Bildøy Bibelskole.

Our final two weeks of the tour brought us to Norway. Circling from Oslo to Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim, and back to Oslo, we had the opportunity not only to be in the four largest cities in Norway, but also to see the incredible, vast landscape between them.

During our time near Stavanger, we sang a concert in the village of Gilja (where we had 15 FLBC alumni in attendance) and enjoyed the beautiful hike at Preikestolen (Pulpit Rock). In Bergen, the Companion Tour joined us, and we spent a couple days at Bildøy Bibelskole. Two days bussing from Bergen to Trondheim gave us spectacular views of Norway's fjords and gave us constant amazement of our Creator. In Trondheim, we had opportunities to build connections by singing in part of two church services as well as a full concert at Betania Church. We were also blessed to be able to sing a couple of songs in Nidaros Cathedral. In Oslo, we visited the birthplace of Hans Nielsen Hauge, singing at the field where he had his personal revival experience. Our final day, May 17, proved to be a fitting finale, as we joined a couple *syttende Mai* celebrations at local congregations, which graciously allowed a choir from the U.S. to sing for them on their national holiday.

Our concert theme, "Grace All Sufficient," provided us with a wonderful reminder throughout the tour. Traveling with others over three weeks gave us ample opportunity to see our own weaknesses. But praise be to God that his "grace is sufficient for (us), for (his) power is made perfect in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9). Developing this theme further, we shared of the grace we have through Jesus Christ, the grace God provides in our weakness, and the grace that leads us unto eternal life.

Thank you to all who prayed for us and for this ministry. Thank you to all who gave financially. Thank you to all who helped prepare us for the trip of a lifetime. God is good. His grace is sufficient. His power is perfect.

*Hanson, a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., is the music director at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary.*



TOP: The choir and Companion Tour buses traveled through the west coast of Norway. CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The author and her daughter, Malena, and Olivia Beck pose outside Edvard Grieg's writing hut. Members of the Companion Tour at a scenic overlook. The Twedt family prays with members of Betania Church in Trondheim. Walter and Jakob Rolf talk with members of Betania Church. Kya Schroeder, Anne Haugen, and Kelly McDonald in Bergen.



# Heritage of faith

JULIE TWEDT

**M**y heart leapt for joy when I heard that our daughter would have the opportunity to visit Norway during a Scandinavian choir tour. The moment I found out others could join on a companion tour, the planning began for me, my husband, and two of our other children to go as well. Having been born and raised in an area that was settled by a high concentration of Norwegian immigrants, our family roots can all be traced back to and throughout coastal Scandinavia.

The theme verse for the tour was II Corinthians 12:9: “And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.” The choir repertoire was thoughtfully arranged by director Andrew Hanson around the theme of “Grace All Sufficient,” including songs that had distinctively Scandinavian roots.

While attending the concerts, we heard audible gasps around us from the audience when the choir began singing one song in their native Norwegian tongue. “*Jesus, din søte forening å smake*” was the song Hans Nielsen Hauge was singing as he plowed a field and had his conversion experience. Thanks to the detailed work done by tour planner, Adam Lee, we stood at the edge of that very field! Another song, “O Day Full of Grace,” was sung to a tune by Norway’s foremost composer, Edvard Grieg. We visited his summer home and saw the little red fjord-side hut where he composed music. Next to their national anthem, that very tune by Grieg is a favorite to sing at their Constitution Day celebrations.

The opening congregational hymn that was chosen to begin each concert was one that can be downright boisterous in the right crowd. “Wonderful Grace of Jesus” was written by Haldor Lillenas, a name I instantly recognized as I’d seen it printed on several of the music books by the Lillenas Publishing Company that we had when I was growing up. What’s more, he was born on the island of Stord, just down the road from Tveit, where my husband’s grandfather was born. We saw the yellow road sign pointing to Lillenas as we drove by, nestled in the mountainside, near the mighty rolling sea.

While the tour included many points of interest that connected the dots to our Lutheran and musical heritage, our family had the added pleasure of meeting with many

relatives at choir concerts and visiting the very farm where my husband’s grandfather had lived until he emigrated at the age of 19. Like many before him, the lure of friends and distant relatives who had gone to America pulled him westward across the sea. As the eldest son, he would have been first in line to inherit the family fjord-side farm, but he dreamt of days that weren’t spent fishing, raising sheep, or hauling rowboats full of potatoes to nearby ports. His young heart and mind decided to venture into the great unknown. He set off for North Dakota by himself, a land as far away from water and fishing as he could find. By the grace of God, he was able to make a living, raise a family, and pass along his heritage of faith.

Hearing the choir sing “Even When He is Silent” where it first premiered at Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim was breathtaking. Nidaros is the northernmost Gothic cathedral in the world, where Norwegian kings have been crowned since it was built in 1300. The royal regalia that have been used during coronations since 1818 were on sparkling display to view nearby.

Beyond choir concerts, extraordinary views filled our days. We stopped to take pictures at magnificent locations designed by our Creator. Nestled in the mountains but designed by master craftsmen, the stately Ringeby Stave Church (cover image) has a spire that pointed our gaze upward toward heaven. Its surrounding cemetery held generations of familiar names, even some of our own.

Many of the more agile folks on tour ran up 500 steps to the top of the famous Olympic ski jump at Lillehammer. I was quite content to watch them from the Olympic torch, a much less rigorous climb.

Attending the *syttende Mai* (seventeenth of May, Constitution Day) parade in Norway’s capital of Oslo is a memory I will recall fondly each coming year. We got close enough to the palace to see the royalty waving from their balcony! After the parade, our choir was warmly received at two different church celebrations near the palace. We joined in with the Apostle’s Creed and Lord’s Prayer, heard “Holy, Holy, Holy” sung in Norwegian, and tried to soak in all the beauty of worshiping with fellow believers across the sea.

Being where our roots and heritage of faith run deep was the trip of my dreams!

*Twedt, a member of Valley Free Lutheran, Portland, N.D., joined the Companion Tour.*



## FAITH PETERSON

**M**y breath was taken away as the cold water surrounded me. I rose to the surface to see my friend and fellow choir member, Gracia Rolf, treading water next to me. We laughed together, knowing we had both just jumped into the Trondheim Fjord in Norway. Neither of us had planned to do something like that, but we were so glad we did. Feeling refreshed from the ice bath, we climbed out on the dock and did it again.

Our trip to Scandinavia was filled with memories like this one. Whether hiking the grassy mountains of the Faroe Islands, walking the cobblestone streets of Copenhagen, driving up the west coast of Norway, or kayaking up the Nidelva River in Trondheim, the beauty and magnificence of God's creation were

evident everywhere we went. Looking at the tremendous landscapes of the Faroe Islands, Denmark, and Norway, it was nearly impossible not to see God's hand in creation. As Psalm 65:8 (ESV) says, "Those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at your signs. You make the going out of the morning and the evening to shout for joy."

While I was truly in awe of the scenery, my favorite part of our tour was the concerts. Singing at churches and Bible schools, it was encouraging to see the body of Christ at work in a different part of the world. I loved watching God work in the hearts of our audiences as we proclaimed the theme, "Grace All Sufficient" from II Corinthians 12:9.

Singing at three Bible schools gave us the chance to get to know people close to our age, as well. The most impactful

experiences of our tour happened while visiting with students about life and faith late into the night. As we compared our lives attending Bible school, it was clear that in both our trials and victories, God is the one who carries us through. These conversations with fellow Bible school students showed me that God is the same God here and in Scandinavia. As the words of the final song of our concert go, "He has made us a kingdom and priests to God to reign with the Son."

From jumping into the fjords of Norway to having conversations with fellow believers, Jesus Christ is worthy of all our praise.

*Peterson, who completed her first year at FLBC, is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Valley City, N.D. She is serving on the Covenant summer team.*



# Tour highlights

ELI HEDSTROM

I was so blessed to be able to be in Concert Choir this year and to be able to come on the Scandinavia Tour. I had such a great time on the trip and had so many unique and enriching experiences. One of my favorite memories of the tour was our stay at Bildøy Bibelskole in Bergen, Norway. One of our evenings there, I joined a group of guys from their school along with some of our choir members, and we sat in a sauna for a while, then ran outside and jumped into the freezing fjord. It was the coldest water I have ever been in! After that, we climbed onto the dock and did pushups. It was so much fun, and the water was very refreshing!

Another great memory was touring Nidaros Cathedral, the largest in Norway. It had such beautiful architecture and stained-glass windows. The staff there graciously allowed us to stand in a circle in the center of the cathedral, and we sang a few songs. The sound quality in the cathedral was amazing, and it was definitely the most memorable singing experience of the trip.

This trip was also a great opportunity to see the beauty of God's creation. Our bus rides, especially in Norway, included some magnificent scenery. The fjords in Norway were so peaceful and wonderful to look at as we drove by. We also went on several hikes in the Faroe Islands and in Norway. The scenic views from the cliffs that we walked on were amazing. Scandinavia is truly one of the most beautiful places on earth. God's design of the world is so amazing and evident everywhere we go.

In addition to fun experiences and really beautiful scenery, I also learned a lot. This trip showed me that even though Christians in other countries speak and live differently than I do in America, we all worship the same God, and have the same faith in Christ. At several locations, we did joint worship services with the local people. We alternated singing worship songs in English and in Norwegian. Even though I could understand very little of the Norwegian praise songs, we were still all singing praise to God, and it was such a blessing and a privilege to be able to witness that with my own eyes.

God blessed this trip so much, and I am so grateful that He was able to provide for me to go on our Scandinavian tour.

*Hedstrom, Lakeville, Minn., completed his first year at FLBC. He is a member of the Ambassadors summer team.*



TOP LEFT: The Concert Choir sings in Nidaros Cathedral, Trondheim, Norway. TOP: Gracia Rolf and Faith Peterson visit the shoreline while staying at the Utsyn Misjonsenter on Finnøy island in the Boknafjorden near Stavanger, Norway. MIDDLE: Students take in the views over Geirangerfjord. ABOVE: The men prep for a concert in Gilja, Norway.

# Hauge's Heart

LARRY J. WALKER

**I**n Hans Nielsen Hauge's memoirs, he describes a three-day trek through North Rane in Norway during the winter of 1803. He struggled with his skis (he wasn't much of a skier), crossed a mountain, ran out of food, his guide got lost, and he finally reached his destination in the middle of the night. After sleeping two hours, he heard the people there getting ready for church, so he got up and joined them.

I think we can safely call that "extreme" evangelism.

What motivated this remarkable man?

Hauge was born in 1771 in southeastern Norway, the son of a farmer. He had the minimal education Norwegians received in those days—enough to read the Bible and the *Small Catechism*. His temperament was serious, and for years he struggled for assurance of salvation.

On April 5, 1796, he had a spiritual awakening while plowing his father's fields. He was singing the hymn, "Jesus, I Long for Thy Blessed Communion," when he was suddenly overwhelmed by God's grace. He described it this way in his memoirs (my own translation):

... My mind was so lifted up to God, that I was unable to perceive, nor to express, what happened then in my soul. For I was transported outside myself, and as soon as I came to my senses, I was convinced that I had not served the God who is beloved and good above all things, and that I now thought nothing in this world worthy of esteem, that my soul was feeling something supernatural, divine and blessed; that there was a glory that no tongue can express. ... I desired now to serve God, [and] begged Him to reveal to me what I ought to do. The answer echoed within me: "You shall confess my Name before men, exhort them to repent and seek Me while I may be found, call upon Me while I am near and am touching their hearts, so that they may turn away from darkness to light."

No one, friend or enemy, could ever deny that Hauge did his utmost to live out that calling. He was not a thinker. He was certainly not a gifted writer (as I can testify, having worked at translating his writing). Some of his decisions may have been ill-advised. But he was

like D.L. Moody, who, when criticized for his evangelistic methods, reportedly said, "I like my way of doing it more than your way of *not* doing it." Hauge traveled the length of Norway (a long country), speaking to small groups. He wrote books and printed and distributed them. He built businesses, often employing the disabled. He learned about the latest agricultural techniques and spread the information. And wherever he traveled, he left behind small groups of awakened believers who gathered regularly to study the Bible and edify one another.

This was a time of ferment in Europe. Revolution was in the air. The authorities were frightened of agitators and found Hauge's activities alarming. They believed God, in his wisdom, had placed each person in their proper class. Those fit only for physical labor were born into the lower classes. People a little more intelligent were born into the upper classes and the clergy. And the wisest of all were born to be kings, nobility, and church leaders.

But here were these Haugeans, upsetting the arrangement. They thought they could preach, and teach, and write. They read their Bibles, as was proper, but they also read newspapers and talked about the issues of the day. In time, they started their own newspapers. Some who were born poor became rich. They were getting uppity.

Hauge had to be stopped. He was arrested for leading religious meetings without ordination and spent 10 years in prison. By the time he was released, his health was broken (he died in 1824, at the age of 52). But his movement only grew stronger. When, in



1884, Norway got its first popularly elected parliament, the prime minister was Johan Sverdrup (uncle to Lutheran Free Church founder Professor Georg Sverdrup), a Haugean.

Studying Hauge's writings has convinced me of one thing: all his labors, all his patient sufferings, were not the fruits of superhuman self-control, legalism, or workaholicism. Hauge was simply a man in love with Jesus Christ. If he sometimes seemed demanding, it was because he took it for granted that every awakened Christian must possess, and be possessed by,

that same kind of transcendent, transforming love for "the God who is beloved above all things."

"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:3-4, NASB).

*Walker is a member of Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis. Artwork: "Low Church Devotion," an illegal gathering of Haugeans in Norway, by Adolph Tidemand, 1848, Nationalmuseet. Above: The Concert Choir sings "Jesus I Long for Thy Blessed Communion" at the site of Hauge's spiritual awakening in Rolvsøy, Norway; his birthplace; his grave site in Oslo.*



# Free & Living

PASTOR MARTIN HORN

In the early 1870s, two young men came to America to teach at Augsburg Seminary, a small Norwegian Lutheran school in Minneapolis. Georg Sverdrup and Sven Oftedal were both highly educated and came from prominent families in Norwegian society. They could have remained in Norway and established comfortable careers in the church, in education, or even in government. Instead, they came to America and cast their lot with the immigrant farmers in the Upper Midwest.

Why did they come? Because they had a vision. They saw America, with its guarantee of freedom of religion, as an opportunity to establish their vision of free and living Lutheran congregations.

Sverdrup and Oftedal's convictions were largely shaped by religious life in Norway. Through the spiritual awakening initiated by the young layman Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771–1824), thousands were converted, primarily among the lower-class peasant farmers. But in Norway, the local congregations were under the authority of the crown and had little to no control over their own affairs.

What did Sverdrup and Oftedal mean by “free and living congregations”?

We often think of free congregations only in terms of polity: that free congregations are subject only to the Spirit and the Word and are free to govern their own affairs. However, for Sverdrup and Oftedal, free congregations are, above all else, congregations that enjoy real spiritual freedom through the work of the Spirit. Congregational polity was an essential part of Sverdrup and Oftedal's vision for the congregation, but they insisted that a truly free congregation is primarily a congregation that is set free from bondage to sin and worldliness by the Holy Spirit through the liberating gospel.

What is a living congregation? Simply defined, the living congregation is one where the members are made alive by the Spirit of God and where these living members in the congregation serve each other and the world around them through the exercise of their spiritual gifts.

Sverdrup and Oftedal's vision of free and living congregations found realization through the formation of the Lutheran Free Church in 1897. The Lutheran Free Church (LFC) was envisioned as a spiritual movement that would prosper as the Spirit of God brought renewed spiritual life and freedom into the congregations.

After the deaths of Sverdrup and Oftedal, their vision of free and living congregations was affirmed within the LFC. In 1918, John Evjen, a professor at Augsburg Seminary, argued that the primary issue in the LFC was its congregational polity. The leaders of the LFC agreed that

congregational polity was essential, but the primary concern of the LFC was for freedom and life in the congregations.

However, the commitment of the LFC to the ideals of Sverdrup and Oftedal dimmed over time. At the 1948 LFC annual conference, John Stensvaag charged that the LFC was losing its vision for freedom and life in the congregations. What was needed, he said, was a “great spiritual revival” that would again fill them with a “burning heart and a burning vision” (*Do you Really Want the Congregation? Georg Sverdrup For Our Day*). By 1963, the vision of free and living congregations had so dimmed that the LFC gave up its unique identity and merged with the American Lutheran Church.

Was this the end of Sverdrup and Oftedal's vision of free and living congregations? No. The vision continued as 41 mostly small, rural congregations formed the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations under the Fundamental Principles of the LFC. Pastor John Strand, in his president's report to the 1964 annual conference, affirmed the AFLC's commitment to Sverdrup and Oftedal's vision of free and living congregations:

We believe in living congregations, where the Spirit of God does His gracious work of creating saving faith in the hearts of repentant sinners and calling them to use their gifts for Christ ... We believe in free congregations, congregations that are free to serve their Lord as they are guided by the Spirit through the Word of God. The Word and Spirit are the only authorities over them.

What about today? Sixty years separate us from the beginning of our fellowship, and the AFLC has grown from the initial 41 congregations to more than 250. And the question before us is this: do we still have the same vision for free and living congregations as Sverdrup and Oftedal, or has the vision dimmed as it did in the LFC?

“Free and living congregations” cannot become a mere slogan we can safely ignore in our pursuit of lesser goals. The heart of the Association is, and always should be, a deep concern for Spirit-wrought freedom and life in the congregations. “Free and living congregations” must be our continual rallying cry that leads us to pray for, preach for, and work for Spirit-wrought freedom and life in our congregations.

*Horn, Saint Michael, Minn., serves on the AFLC Coordinating Committee. The Concert Choir sings in Christianskirkjan, Klaksvik, Faroe Islands.*

# A Struggle for truth

PASTOR TERRY CULLER

**T**he Lutheran Church had a rocky start in North America. The first Lutheran congregation was established by Swedish immigrants in what is now Wilmington, Del., in 1641. The congregation was under the authority of the Lutheran state church in Sweden, which tried to supply pastors for the congregation and control their work as if they were still in their home country. It did not work out well. Other congregations were formed, mostly by Germans in Pennsylvania and New York, which struggled to find and retain qualified pastors. A significant difficulty for these immigrants was their inability to find qualified Lutheran pastors. Having come from state church situations, the congregants, who were themselves often poor, were unused to having to provide salaries for their shepherds. One congregation wrote that they were seeking a pastor who would live in “holy poverty.”

In 1745, Henry Melchior Muhlenberg arrived in Philadelphia, sent by the University of Halle in Wittenberg, Germany, and spent the rest of his life bringing order to Lutheran efforts in Pennsylvania and Maryland, writing constitutions, sending pastors to lead congregations, organizing a ministerium, and vetting those who applied for ordination. Few people could have done the work as well as this German pastor.

By the 1820s, there was a movement among Lutherans to form a national organization that would bring together the various synods for the common work. The organization was known as the General Synod, which established the first American Lutheran seminary in Gettysburg, Pa. From the beginning, however, there was discord within the General Synod over its role in the



life of Lutheranism in America. The Pennsylvania Ministerium, founded by Muhlenberg, withdrew shortly after the larger organization was founded.

Charles Porterfield Krauth was born in the parsonage in Martinsburg, Va., in the midst of this organizing among Lutherans. His father, who was very active in the General Synod, soon accepted a call to be the president of Gettysburg College and to teach at the seminary. Raised in a strong intellectual and religious atmosphere, Krauth finished his college and seminary training and took his first call to the preaching office at the age of 20. He also began a deep study of the Lutheran confessions and the history of Lutheranism. The more he studied, the more convinced he became that the Lutheran faith was the best statement of Christian truth. This soon put him at odds with those who were often seen as the leaders of Lutheranism in America—especially the president of the seminary, Samuel Simon Schmucker, and the editor of the *Lutheran Observer* newspaper, Benjamin Kurtz.

Both Schmucker and Kurtz, along with other well-known men in the General Synod, were strongly influenced by the so-called Second Great Awakening, which often used strong emotional appeals and decision theology to achieve their goal of bringing people to Christ. In the 1850s, this culminated with the presentation of a pamphlet called the *Definite Platform*, which circulated within the General Synod. Written by Schmucker and Kurtz, although published anonymously, this was an attempt to “Americanize” the Augsburg Confession by denying such central Lutheran doctrines as baptismal regeneration and the real presence in Holy Communion in an attempt to make Lutherans more like other American Protestant denominations. Despite never being approved by the General Synod, there continued to be a great deal of support in that body for a less confessional Lutheran Church.

The final straw for many people unhappy with the direction of the General Synod was the admission to membership of the Frankean Synod from New York State. This synod was indifferent to the Lutheran Confessions and did not require their pastors to adhere to the teachings of the Augsburg Confession nor the Small Catechism.

Krauth and the Pennsylvania Ministerium soon

issued a call for a meeting of synods interested in a more confessional national body. Thus was formed the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Krauth served as president of the Council and as professor at its seminary in Philadelphia, as well as professor of philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania and editor of several Lutheran publications.

He continued in these roles until his untimely death. He is best known today for his important theological work, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology*.

Krauth and his close associates Adolph Spaeth and Beale Schmucker fought the good fight for a confessional Lutheran Church in the United States. The General Council was an active and successful organization, but after the passing of its early leaders, those who followed lost sight of its original purpose, and, in 1917, the General Council merged with the General Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the South to form the United Lutheran Church in America, a principal ancestor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Those of us in the AFLC should be proud of our founders for their continuing dedication to the Fundamental Principles of the Lutheran Free Church and our orthodox, pietistic theology.

*Culler serves as interim pastor at Alsace Lutheran Church, Reading, Pa. Portrait: Charles Porterfield Krauth photograph (ca. 1880), Alumni Records Collection, JSTOR.org. Artwork: “At the Religious Service,” 1830, Old Book Illustrations.*



# Scandinavia Tour Photos

FLBC Concert Choir traveled to the Faroe Islands, Denmark, and Norway April 28 through May 18



TOP TO BOTTOM: The Concert Choir sang at Lutherisk Mission Højskole in Hillerød, Denmark. The Gilja Bedehus (prayer house) in Gilja, Norway. Visiting the childhood home of Hans Nielsen Hauge in Rolvsøy, Norway. CENTER, TOP TO BOTTOM: The choir and staff begin the trek up to Kallur Lighthouse on the island of Kalsoy, Faroe Islands. Ole Magnus Brievold welcomes students to Bildøy Bibelskole in Bergen, Norway. Breanna Heinrichs, Kylee Greene, and Hallie Halverson show off their *syttende Mai* (May 17, Norway's Constitution Day) memorabilia. The choir sings at Misjonssalen in Oslo on May 17.



ABOVE MIDDLE: Will Stromstad prays with students at Bildøy. ABOVE: 1994 FLBC alum Tove Lill Gustavsen welcomes the choir to her home church, Gilja Bedehus, in Gilja, Norway.





TOP TO BOTTOM: Students at Luthersk Mission Højskole indicate if they've had a relative emigrate to America. The tour buses head to one of many ferry crossings. Kelly McDonald, Diana Wessels, and Melissa Lynnes at the North Sea. Dean Adam Osier greets members of Betania Church, Trondheim.

TOP: Tour planner Adam Lee chats with FLBC alum Stefan Bergdorf and his wife, Marie, in Hillerød, Denmark.

ABOVE MIDDLE: Gracia Rolf, Esther Rabenberg, Eli Hedstrom, and Olivia Johnson sing with the choir as they greet the Companion Tour members in Bergen.

ABOVE: FLBC alum Elisabeth Gilje Rørtvedt (center) talks with Ava Talley following the concert in Gilja, Norway.

CENTER: Kenzie Henderson gives her testimony at Betania Church in Trondheim, Norway. One of many tunnels the tour buses went through in Norway.



# Steps of faith: 60 years.

BY PASTOR CRAIG JOHNSON

**M**issionaries John and Ruby Abel had been serving in Brazil with the Evangelical Lutheran Church. They returned to the U.S. on furlough in the fall of 1962. They were concerned about the direction the ELC was going and not at peace about continuing to serve with that church body. They heard about a new group organizing. In the winter of 1963, Pastor Abel began meeting with the leadership of the group that became the AFLC. In April 1963, he was called to be the executive director of missions for the AFLC. The first employee of the AFLC was a missions director/missionary.

In June 1963, the AFLC Annual Conference was held in Fargo, N.D. The group was less than a year old. There were only about 100 rather small congregations. But they wanted to be involved in the work of world missions. The conference resolved to “send forth three missionary couples in the coming year (1964)” and “that the land of Brazil be considered as a field of operations.” It was understood that the Abels would be one of the couples sent to Brazil. God was calling another couple, as well: Alvin and Frances Grothe, a carpenter and farm couple from Badger, Minn. Alvin softly explained to the conference, “I love my hammer and saw, but God is calling me to the mission field, and so I must go.”

The 1963 conference saw the first ministry of the AFLC incorporated: the Missions Corporation. That conference also decided to spend half the AFLC budget for the next year on missions.

The 1964 AFLC Annual Conference was held in Valley City, N.D. The Sunday afternoon closing service was the commissioning service of the Abels and the Grothes. Pastor Raynard Huglen, editor of the *Lutheran Ambassador*, made clear the importance of the commissioning in an editorial:

“There is no doubt in our mind that the high point in the Annual Conference was the commissioning of the two prospective missionary couples ... An air of expectancy prevailed as we awaited the service. Our congregations have a history of mission interest and we have known that we could not be what we ought without a mission work of our own.”

The Abels had seven children and the Grothes six. The congregations of the AFLC were not overflowing with money or numbers of people. But they took a step of faith and responded to God’s call.

In 1963, Alvin Grothe heard Pastor Abel preach on Romans 10:14–15: “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?” He and his wife were convinced God was calling them to go and share the gospel with those who hadn’t heard it.

We pray today for those who will respond to God’s call in a similar fashion. And we celebrate this year the 60th anniversary of the commissioning of those first AFLC missionaries. Their step of faith continues to serve as an example for us. The need still exists for full-time missionaries. The promise still exists that when God calls he will provide.



*Pictured are Pastor Connely Dyrud and Helen, Carol, and Karen Knapp (former Brazil missionaries), and Pastor Iran and Janisley Goes (center, president of AFLC–Brazil).*

*Johnson, chairman of the World Missions Board of Directors, serves Triumph Lutheran, Ferndale, Wash.*

# Gathering in local districts.

• AFLC WOMEN FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY MEET AT DISTRICT RALLIES

**W**omen of the AFLC from across the United States meet in the spring and fall at district rallies. They gather together to hear God's Word through devotionals and special speakers. Speakers may share about our WMF projects or community issues that we, as God's people, may be involved in. These gatherings are another way to connect with the women of the AFLC. Below are a few brief reports about some of the gatherings that took place this spring.

## • Pacific Northwest District • By Lavonne West

Our spring rally was hosted by Triumph Lutheran, Ferndale, Wash., with the theme "Rejoice in the Lord Always." Triumph WMF President Norma Christensen opened the day. Lois Grothe led the devotion and prayer time. Pastor Craig and Cathe Johnson shared about their recent trip to India. The ladies from Triumph made bead bracelets with the wordless book colors for the ladies in India. There was a card with Scripture to accompany each bracelet, and it was translated into Telugu, the local language. In the afternoon, our focus was on the Alaska Mission. We heard from Pastor Jeremy Crowell, who worked for the Alaska Mission before stepping down last summer. His talk gave us current news from the field and his passion to bring up a new generation of missionary pilots.

## • Eastern North Dakota District Spring Rally • By Anne Presteng

Our spring rally was held April 20 at Grace Free Lutheran, Edinburg, N.D. The rally theme was "Be Joyful in Hope, Patient in Affliction, Faithful in Prayer" from Romans 12:12. Pastor John and Hannah Lee and their children shared about the AFLC mission work in Brazil. John works with SETELL (Seminary) and DRELL (publishing house). Students attending the seminary produced and shared a video explaining the joy and blessings they received as they translated materials provided by Ambassador Publications. We were reminded that pastors need the encouragement of other pastors to uphold the Word of God and point others to Christ. We were challenged to pray for additional missionaries and leaders.

## • Minneapolis District • By Karen Floan

More than 100 ladies from the Minneapolis district gathered on March 16 at Emmaus Lutheran in Bloomington, Minn. Candice Johnson shared the theme "Taste and See that the Lord is Good" from Psalm 34:8. Alicia Baird gave a taste workshop on types of chocolates. And an offering was taken for missions and designated to the mission house and WMF General Fund. Outgoing officers Ruth Ratio and Naomi Paige received WMF pins.

## • Western North Dakota and Eastern Montana District • By Judy Tolosky

Our rally was held on April 13 at Bethel Free Lutheran Church in Minot, N.D. It was a joyful occasion! We sang songs of joy and had a devotion based on Philippians 1:6 titled, "Joy of Rebirth." Nurse Nadia Smetana spoke on the "Joy of New Birth." Nadia works at the Dakota Hope Clinic, a pro-life and Christian-based clinic that helps women who find themselves pregnant and afraid. Nadia shared statistics regarding abortions in North Dakota and a video. After a delicious lunch, we saw a video from the International Orality Institute as we focused on the "Joy of Missions." The Orality Institute teaches people to orally share and act out the good news of Jesus Christ to people who may not have written language or don't know how to read.

As always, it was such a wonderful time of refreshing from the Spirit.





# Investing in ministry.

BY JEREMY LARSON

“**Y**our family is going to Alaska this summer? That’s awesome.” That was the response that I typically received whenever people heard about my family’s summer plans. Some were surprised because they knew we had just moved from Fargo, N.D., to the Free Lutheran Seminary’s Plymouth, Minn., campus 10 months earlier to start school. They wondered if we hadn’t made enough changes to our lives lately. I guess we hadn’t.

Going back to school after 25 years reminded me that being on an academic schedule offers some options that are not normally available.

I asked my wife, Rachel, “When will we have the chance again to do something unusual in the summer?”

She asked what I was thinking about. I reminded her that there was a need for a pastor at the Naknek church in Alaska. Since she has come to expect unusual ideas from me, she laughed and said, “It’s always something with you, isn’t it?” But then she said, “That could be fun.”

Pastor Jeff Swanson, the coordinator for the Alaska Mission, confirmed that there was a need for pastoral help in the summer months. The crazy idea was starting to seem more like a good idea. Our oldest daughter, Bria, who is a nursing student, was then able to get a job at a local clinic in Naknek. Our youngest two children, Grant and Paige, were even able to find jobs as salmon processors. (Admittedly, some of us are more excited about our jobs than others.) For me, however, I’m just so thankful we can have this experience together with three of our four children.

I have only been in Naknek for three days, so I can only share my first impressions. The other members of the mission have been wonderful to work with. We have been having dinner together most nights at the apartments in the radio station. The team there had everything set up for our arrival. Our family can stay in the parsonage, which is perfect for us.

My schedule includes preaching in Naknek on Sunday mornings and then traveling to one or two remote villages for additional services. I will then return to Naknek for an evening Bible study. There is a midweek Bible study in Naknek and another on Thursday in one of the nearby villages. Additionally, on my first Monday here, I accompanied Josh Fish as we flew a local student out to a Bible camp. If you are keeping track, that is seven flights in one week!

I have found the people in the churches to be genuine, sincere, and very kind. The prayer time together is long and heartfelt. Within a week or two, the local population will grow from 500 to 15,000 as they welcome the seasonal salmon cannery workers to the area. I pray that the message of the gospel will be proclaimed to as many people as possible this summer through the radio station, the church services, and by God’s people in daily conversations.

May the seed of God’s Word that is scattered this summer find good soil where it can produce a crop many times what has been sown. I am thankful for the opportunity to sow in my Master’s field.

## Alaska Mission

### • Ministries:

FLAPS, Bay Broadcasting, the NET coffeehouse, Hilltop Christian Fellowship, Naknek, and outreach to remote villages.

### • Coordinator:

Pastor Jeff Swanson

### • Website:

[afchomemissions.org/alaska](http://afchomemissions.org/alaska)

*Larson, who is the director of discipleship at FLBC and a student at FLS, is serving at the Alaska Mission in Naknek this summer.*

# Training in church planting.

One of the greatest gifts AFLC Home Missions can give our planters is training. Sending a planter or a lay group out unprepared sets them up for great frustration and potential failure. Consequently, research from across denominations and planting networks shows that a robust philosophical, theological, and practical planting foundation helps them better navigate the unique challenges of starting a congregation. In May, we sent two planting couples to a week-long camp to receive intense planting training. Thank you for partnering with us to be able to prepare our planters. Hear the value of this experience in their own words.

## Gideon and Erin Johnson (Hope Lutheran, Killdeer, N.D.)

Going into the Always Forward church planter training, my wife and I didn't know what to expect. We knew that it was crafted toward those of the Anglican tradition, which we didn't know much about. We also didn't know how much of the training would especially apply to our personal context since we're well into the planting process in Killdeer. But from the teaching on God's overall (and exciting) purpose for planting local congregations to the many practical insights, challenges, and encouragements in what it looks like and entails to plant local congregations, my wife and I were very blessed to be part of this training.

Here are a few of the specific things we took away from the training. First, the importance of building a healthy culture within a congregation. We need to be intentional in the sort of culture we want to see develop and grow. For example, if we want to see the congregation as a people of prayer, we need to work on building that culture through our preaching, teaching, and practice. The same can be said about building a culture of hospitality, volunteerism, etc.

Second, we were reminded of the importance of knowing and acting our age as a congregation. It was comforting and a little convicting to hear that, as a young congregation, we don't need to have all the programs or opportunities that might be seen in an established congregation, nor do we need to perfectly implement the programs and opportunities that we do have.

Last, we were reminded of the importance of bringing the whole congregation into the work of planting, both for the congregation's sake and our own. Each person, from the youngest to the oldest, needs to see that they have a valuable part in this work of God. As church planters and pastors in general, we need to remember that we can't do this alone, nor should we.

Because we do share common ground in what kind of congregations we're seeking to plant—Word and Sacrament—I'd conclude that 95 percent or more of the training was applicable to our Lutheran context, which the leaders of the training were gracious enough to note. If I were asked to attend this training again or to encourage other Free Lutheran Church planters to attend, I would give it a resounding yes.

## Brandon and Ashley Marschner, Fargo, N.D.

The training intensive was invaluable. Church planting is such a huge endeavor that it's difficult to know where to begin. The training provided a systematic approach, breaking the process down into benchmarks so that you can see the whole picture without forgetting the details. I learned a lot about building the culture of a church with intentionality and then the importance and process of instilling that culture in others. Also, hearing stories from veteran church planters was both insightful and encouraging and helped me craft a vision of my own.



*Always Forward church plant training intensive was held May 13–16 at Greensboro, N.C.*

## Church planting resources

**Podcast:** The Lutheran Church Planter Season one, now available: Strategic foundations  
Season two, August release: Blueprints for starting a congregation.

• [thelutheranchurchplanter.com](http://thelutheranchurchplanter.com)

**Blog:** News and updates.

• [aflchomemissions.org/blog](http://aflchomemissions.org/blog)

**Training:** Through Always Forward church planting intensive

PEOPLE & PLACES

**Pastor Kris Nyman** has resigned from his call to Christ Community Church, Williamsport, Md., and is retiring in July.

Members of **Faith Lutheran**, El Campo, Texas, have called Pastor Richard Turner to serve their congregation.

**Licensed Pastor Mark Olson** has resigned from his call to Good Shepherd Lutheran, Cokato, Minn., and retired in May.

**Pastor Michael Onstad** will be installed June 30 as associate pastor at St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D., with Pastor Jason Holt officiating.

**Pastor Brandon Marschner** has accepted a call as the church planting pastor at St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D. Marschner resigned from Bethel Community, Culbertson, Mont., and Faith Free Lutheran, Brockton, Mont., effective in August.

**Pastor Mark Antal** is serving as interim pastor of Faith Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn. **Adam Erickson**, a student at the Free Lutheran Seminary, is serving the congregation as a pastoral assistant during the summer.

Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee have approved the appointment of **Wayne and Jane Smith**, Pipestone, Minn., as the PACCT coordinators.

Members of **Sunnyside Free Lutheran**, Stacy, Minn., have called Dr. Pat Hall to serve as interim pastor.

AFLC **Home Missions** announced the planning stages of a church plant in Flandreau, S.D., during the Annual Conference.

**Pastor Tom Bowers**, 78, of Red Wing, Minn., died May 16, 2024. Bowers served multiple AFLC congregations in Minnesota. Surviving are his wife, Mavis (Lindgren) Bowers; and one sister, Donna Reeves. The service was held May 24 at First Baptist Church, River Falls, Wis.



**Pastor Gordon Waterman**

Pastor Gordon Lee Waterman, 86, of Tomball, Texas, died May 5, 2024. Born Oct. 11, 1937, in Berlin, Wis., he was the son of Lewis Waterman and Ella Strey. He married Arlene Neben in 1962.

He grew up on the family dairy farm. He attended Berlin High School and then graduated from Concordia High School, Milwaukee, Wis. He earned a Bachelor's Degree from Concordia Senior College, Fort Wayne, Ind., in 1959, and a Master's Degree in classical languages from the University of Chicago in 1960. He pursued the ministry, obtaining a Master of Divinity Degree from Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, Mo., in 1964. His vicarage was at Concordia Lutheran Church, Maplewood, Mo., in 1962 to 1963. While in Saint Louis, he earned a Master's Degree in music, with an emphasis in organ performance from Washington University, Saint Louis, 1965. In 1966, he taught Latin, German, and music as a professor at St. Paul's College, Concordia, Mo. In 1967, he became an associate professor of Latin, Greek, and music at St. John's College, Winfield, Kan., where he was ordained. He served the following congregations: Concordia Lutheran, Hoisington, Kan.; Good Shepherd Lutheran, Panama City, Fla.; St. John's Lutheran, Lake Charles, La.; Zion Lutheran, Tomball, Texas; Abiding Faith Lutheran, Pinehurst, Texas; Crown of Life Lutheran, Tomball, Texas. His ministry to the church encompassed 59 years.

Surviving are his wife; one daughter, Stephanie; one brother, Robert Waterman; two grandsons; and two great-grandchildren.

The service was held May 12 at Crown of Life Lutheran, Tomball, Texas, with Pastor Jason Holt, the AFLC presidential ministry associate, officiating. Burial was in Klein Memorial Park, Cypress, Texas.

**Raan family announces plans to step down from AFLC World Missions**

Pastor Brent and Emily Raan have announced plans to resign from their call to AFLC World Missions at the end of December and pursue a different call. The Raans served for nine years with World Missions, in both Gulu, Uganda, with the Ambassador Institute and previously in Chirala, India, with AFLC-India. The Raans are on furlough through October. A reception was held for both the Raans and the Nate and Rhoda Jore family during the Annual Conference held on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, Plymouth, Minn. The Jores are currently traveling to Uganda to wrap up their 18 years of ministry with World Missions.

**AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-May 31, 2024**

FUND	REC'D IN MAY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% OF SUBSIDY	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$31,255	\$196,105	43	169,933
Evangelism	18,122	58,742	43	55,555
Youth Ministries	9,124	73,659	48	65,585
Parish Education	18,272	96,382	52	51,939
Seminary	14,974	122,485	43	116,830
Bible College	22,585	173,709	37	158,127
Home Missions	18,647	144,774	34	126,387
World Missions	25,244	158,481	33	176,445
Personal Support	95,319	389,861	50	321,638
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$253,543</b>	<b>\$1,414,861</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>1,242,438</b>

For additional financial information for each department, go to [www.aflc.org/giving](http://www.aflc.org/giving)  
 \* Reflects correction to February gifts reported in the April issue.

**MAY MEMORIALS**

**Alaska Mission**

Dorothy Krantz

**Bible College**

Ruth Claus  
Harold Pedersen

**Home Missions**

Pastor Paul Nash

**Seminary**

Michael Trousbridge  
Marlin Balstad

**World Missions**

Charles Bjerke  
Ginger Feiock  
Marvin Urke  
Pastor Alvin & Francis  
Grothe

Harold Pedersen  
Dorothy Krantz

# God's deep love.

BY AMY SKOGERBOE

**A** few years back, I was invited to speak at a women's event, and when I asked for the topic for that evening, the response was, "Please talk about love and how deeply we are loved by God."

If that's not a soft pitch to a preacher's daughter grown up to be a pastor's wife, I don't know what is. Easy. I prepared to hit it straight out of the ballpark with complete confidence in my ability to lay out the character of God's love for us and how that plays out in our love for each other ... until I tried to write. The accumulative effect of 50 years of attempting to love others as I felt I should instinctively know how, combined with a jaded perspective from being loved imperfectly by others as inept at figuring it out as I was, led my processing straight into a wall. What is love?

The world and the Word vastly diverge in answering this question. As believers, if we are not intentional in seeking biblical truth, we will lean toward the world's definition without realizing how far off target we've gone. We settle for a shallow substitute for what God had in mind. The message of the world in regard to love contorts it into a conditional commitment based on the affections of the giver and the perceived worth of the recipient. The gurus of this age tout the importance of loving oneself before all others and never extending love at the expense of one's own self. You deserve to come first; the love of others is secondary. Love is dependent on circumstance and can change, shifting at will to the current object of our affections. We become disillusioned by a lesser love that we fear will no longer love us when it truly knows us. And we are right.

Preparing to present on God's love was more of a challenge than I expected because my thinking was so swayed by our human version of it. Taking a full dive into the Word to focus on what love truly is as found in the nature of God was clarifying and soul affirming. These three aspects stood out:

## God's love is *sure*.

"... but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

We are *fully* known for exactly who and what we are, yet, loved so entirely and fully that God sent his Son to the cross. He saw us. He saw the death in us, and he made us *alive* again. Fully known. Fully loved. "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations ..." (Deuteronomy 7:9).

## God is the *source of love, both his love for us and our love for others*.

"Beloved, let us love one 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, because God is love" (I John 4:7–8).

In our own strength and watered-down version of love, we love the easy ones. We love those who are "of us" in our bloodline. We love the ones who stand in our weddings and speak at our funerals. We love the ones who love us back. Church, if we are

not careful and incredibly intentional, we will find ourselves skimming the surface of what God's *deeper* picture of love truly is.

## God's love is *sacrificial*.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (I John 4:9–11).

In these Scriptures, I found my message on God's love and our love for each other: God's love is sure and steadfast. He alone is the source of love and our love for others. He loved us enough to sacrifice his only Son so that we might live with him forever. We are indeed perfectly loved, and out of that love, we are to love others.

*Skogerboe is a member of St. Olaf Lutheran, Montgomery, Ill.*

BUILDING THE BASE \ \ Part 4

# God's Word, the chief means.

BY PASTOR JERRY MOAN

**T**he truth that God's Word is a treasure intended for all people was etched on my heart in my early Sunday school years. Our faithful superintendent, Harriet Rolf, taught us this powerful hymn:

God's word is our great heritage,  
And shall be ours forever;  
To spread its light from age to age  
Shall be our chief endeavor;  
(*Ambassador Hymnal*, #258)

What is it that makes the Bible "our great heritage"? What makes it stand apart from all other books ever written? Has God really left us a trustworthy revelation that tells us how we can be reconciled to our Creator? The truth we confess is that there is an almighty God who has created us and all that exists. This is what Scripture tells us. It is the Bible that reveals that when sin entered the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, God's good creation fell under his curse (Genesis 3:17). The Bible declares that sin separates us from our perfectly holy God (Isaiah 59:2). The Bible makes it unmistakably clear that it is impossible for sinners to atone for their own sin through good works or sacrifices (Ephesians 2:9; Hebrews 10:4).

The haunting question loomed large: *how shall the problem of our sin be dealt with?* God's answer broke into our fallen world in the person of his beloved Son. Jesus came as our beautiful Savior, our

Redeemer. His cross reminds us that our salvation has to be totally by grace—by his work, not ours.

This is why we rightfully speak of God's Word, the Bible, as a *means of grace*—the *chief means*, in fact. Scripture is God's chosen vehicle or channel to communicate God's grace to us. Our reason could never decipher the sin-triggered disaster unfolding before our eyes had it not been for God revealing this to us via the law. Nor could we have known or embraced our Savior's rescue plan apart from hearing the gospel message (Romans 10:17)! Don't overlook that, as a channel or means, the Word does far more than simply supply needed information.

Planting seeds this spring prompted the follow-up routine of watering. "Means" can be compared to using a garden hose. When we speak of the means of grace, we are acknowledging that grace is exactly what we need to deal with our sin problem, just like seeds need regular hydration. Grace describes everything that Jesus, the Living Water, has done for me that I simply cannot do for myself. In short, everything. My contribution is zero. Jesus' body on the cross, like a vessel, was broken and poured out for our sins. How exactly does that precious blood reach me in my need?

There had to be a means. That means is the gospel message we proclaim: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it

is the power of God" (I Corinthians 1:18, ESV). Grace comes to us by means of God's promise. What God promises, he is *able* to do, and He *will* do!

Even as God created everything out of nothing using only his powerful Word, so our gracious Lord is able to make his saving grace available and effective to all who will receive it: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

Dear friend, receive his gift. Rely on his powerful, life-giving, and nourishing promise. Receive his grace, which is more than sufficient for you today. Trust that your heavenly Father will deliver on his promise. Drink of his grace through his thirst-quenching Word. This is what the Word as the "chief means" does. Our Deliverer delivers!

Future installments of this column will focus on the other scriptural means of grace, namely, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The authors will explore the meaning and unique relationship of these subordinate means as they relate to the chief means, the Word of God. Spoiler alert: these three means are essentially the same in that they all consist of the promise of God through his Word. But why are there three? And what makes them unique? Stay tuned!

*Moan serves the McIntosh, Minn., Free Lutheran parish.*