

THE 

AUGUST 2024

# LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



GOD'S WORD  
DOES NOT  
RETURN EMPTY

+

The 62nd Annual Conference

# Coming together.

“The question has been asked: ‘What is the point?’”

I couldn't help but chuckle as one of the resolution committees at this year's Annual Conference responded to this question. It was a helpful clarification to an important resolution, but it also seemed to capture how many felt about the endless barrage of “whereas” and “be it resolved” statements that occupied our week.

As we haggle over comma placements and sentence structures, it can be easy to lose sight of what we're doing. What is the point of Annual Conference?

If you haven't noticed, we are a unique association. We are a congregation-centered church body. The only authority over each of our congregations—even *your* congregation—is the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Nothing that is decided at each AFLC Annual Conference has any legal bearing on the life and practice of any congregation.

So, I ask again: What is the point?

Pastor John Strand said in 1965: “While the congregation is free, it is constrained by the Spirit of God to work with others building God's Kingdom. There is to be inter-congregational unity and fellowship. Congregations working together can do such tasks that congregations alone cannot do ... A congregation's freedom does not exempt it from responsibilities in these tasks. As a matter of fact, it heightens the responsibility.”

We are individual congregations, but it is best for us to be individual congregations together. Together, we can better confront the enemy's attacks and fulfill our divine calling.

The Annual Conference is the time for us to come together. It's an encouraging time when we hear about the work God has accomplished through our ministries over the last year. It's a refreshing time when we see old friends and make new ones. And it's an equipping time when we are again reminded of our great calling to proclaim Christ's gospel to a world that needs a Savior.

Our Association-wide work is important and incredibly valuable. Most of our individual churches couldn't support an international missionary or a church plant. We couldn't single-handedly produce a Sunday school curriculum or train future pastors and lay leaders. Together, we can do all those things and so many more!

There might be ways to improve our time together at Annual Conference. Resolutions could be written more concisely, nominations could be given with more prayer and forethought, and there might be good ways to optimize the schedule. But the few days we spend together at Annual Conference are among my favorites of the year.

As Pastor Strand said, we have a responsibility to work together. But even more than that, we have the *opportunity* to come together. Pastor Richard Snipstead said to the Annual Conference in 1988: “God will knit us together in a tremendous bond as we pray and work together in this conference for the advancement of the Kingdom of God in our AFLC.”

What's the point? In-person interactions and shoulder-to-shoulder fellowship will knit us together and foster effective partnership in the gospel. Make plans to come to the Association Retreat Center next June for our Annual Conference. Encourage your pastor to come, and encourage other people from your congregation to make the trip.

It's important to be together. The work of the Association and the days we spend together at Annual Conference are valuable.



—Pastor Andrew Kneeland



## THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

AUGUST 2024  
VOL. 62 NO. 8

### EDITOR

Pastor Andrew Kneeland  
laeditor@afcl.org

### MANAGING EDITOR

Ruth Gunderson  
ruthg@afcl.org

### CIRCULATION

Liz McCarlson  
lasubscriptions@afcl.org

### EDITORIAL BOARD

Monica Coyle  
Pastor Jerry Moan  
Pastor J. Christian Andrews

### 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.

### SUBSCRIPTIONS & GIVING

The Lutheran Ambassador is a  
free publication of the AFLC. Our  
non-profit ministry is supported  
by readers' gifts. To subscribe  
and give online, visit our website

[afcl.org/lutheran-ambassador](http://afcl.org/lutheran-ambassador)

Checks may be mailed to  
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,  
Plymouth, MN 55441

Email inquiries can be sent to  
lasubscriptions@afcl.org

From the 2024 Annual Conference reports:

I praise God that the AFLC as a whole does not budge when it comes to questions of the inerrancy, authority, and efficacy of the Word. His excellent Word is truly the firm foundation that has been laid for us.

[Pastor Micah Hjermstad, AFLC President]

“

We never need to be fearful or concerned as His provision will always provide reasons to hope.

[Kirk Rautio, ARC Executive Director]

I see the unique historical context of the AFLC, as well as our Lutheran doctrinal distinctives, as assets to our congregations as they care for the long-term spiritual health of the teens in their midst.

[Adam McCarlson, AFLC Youth Ministries Director]

As the culture of this world shakes and crumbles, the unshakable Word of God not only stands, it thrives, accomplishing every purpose for which God intended.

[Pastor Michael Brandt, AFLC Foundation Board Chair]

Confessing God's Word is agreement with God about reality. Our confession of Christ in and through God's Word is not just a confession of faith, but also an exercise in sanity.

[Dr. Wade Mobley, FLBC President]



# HIS WORD DOES NOT RETURN EMPTY



THE 2024 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

By Pastor Andrew Kneeland

The Word of God has been central in the theology and worship of the AFLC since its beginning. This emphasis was again seen this year with the theme of the Annual Conference taken from Isaiah 55:11: “His Word Does Not Return Empty.”

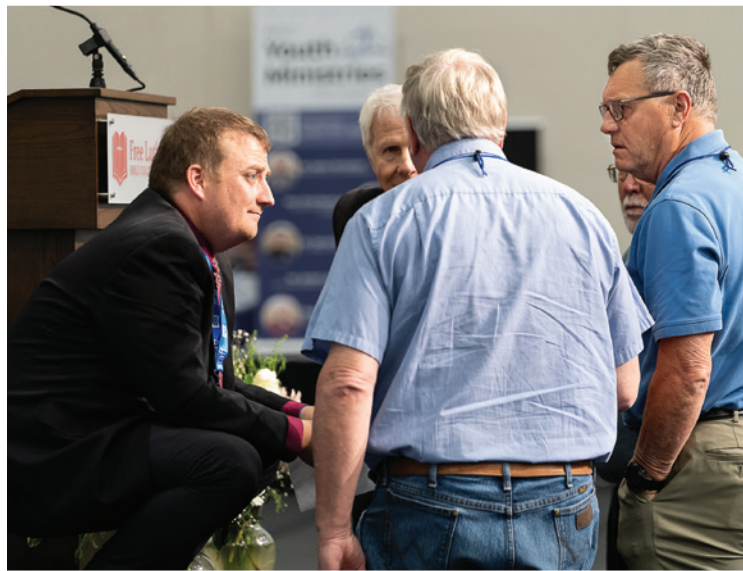
The 62nd Annual Conference met June 12–15 in Plymouth, Minn., on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College & Seminary. Dr. James Molstre, dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary, preached on the theme passage for the opening service on Wednesday evening, encouraging the conference with these words: “We have much to be optimistic about in the AFLC because God has given us His powerful Word.”

Much of the business sessions were occupied with several significant issues—covered below—but the conference was characterized by a continued high view of Scripture and healthy discussion and fellowship. The conference demonstrated a willingness to take on complicated issues with charity while not compromising the authority or sufficiency of the Word of God.

A total of 519 people (349 lay, 170 clergy) registered for the conference, the highest figure in a decade, and 170 children and youth were also on campus. The AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship (AED) department hosted a Rekindle the Fire event on Tuesday afternoon that included presentations from Pastor Eric Westlake and Micah Johnson (AED Board chair) along with testimonies from Jordan Langness and Pastor Ben Sollie. The Women’s Missionary Federation (WMF) Day also preceded the conference and featured workshops from Dr. Jerry Moan, Emily Raan, and Shiney Dasari Ramnarain (representing AFLC-India), and violin music from Angela Hanson. Angie Lombardo led a devotional time based on her 2024 Bible study. Karen Pederson was elected president and Linda Fugleberg was elected communications secretary.

Dr. Mark Olson led the opening ordination service on Wednesday evening. Dr. Jason Holt, the AFLC’s presidential ministry associate, led a service of remembrance for the following departed pastors: Michael Flechsig, Glenn Frecks, and Gordon Waterman. Marian Christopherson was the accompanist for the service, and the FLBC Ambassadors provided special music. Recent seminary graduate Pastor Scott Olson was ordained into the ministry on Wednesday evening. He will serve Grace Free Lutheran Church in Bagley, Minn.





LEFT: Conference attendees gather in a small group during the morning prayer time. TOP: Dr. Mark Olson reads the vitae for his son, Scott Olson, a 2024 seminary graduate who was ordained during the opening service. CENTER: Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck, who was elected as vice president, talks to Nancy and Erling Langness. ABOVE: Pastor Micah Hjermstad, AFLC president, talks with parliamentarians about the proceedings during a discussion from Committee No. 1.



Following the service, the conference recognized Pastor Bob Lee and AFLC Publications and Parish Education for the release of *From Freedom to Life: A History of the AFLC*. There was a Norwegian-themed dessert reception in his honor that evening in Heritage Hall, and he shared more about the book during a brief interview the next day. Excerpts of that interview, along with a review of the book, will be published in a future issue.

Conference business began Thursday morning, with Pastor Micah Hjermsstad (AFLC president) and Pastor Brett Boe (AFLC secretary) leading the proceedings. Hjermsstad shared a few comments on the heritage and structure of the AFLC and its history of emphasizing both orthodox Lutheran doctrine and vibrant spiritual life. He encouraged the conference to continue looking to Christ as they engage issues in love, truth, and respect. Hjermsstad asked, “Where is the AFLC headed? Where Christ leads us.”

Departments and ministries shared brief updates throughout Thursday and Friday. For more interaction with the departments, conference attendees participated in afternoon electives led by Home Missions, World Missions, Youth Ministries, the Association Retreat Center, the Free Lutheran Bible College & Seminary, Publications and Parish Education, Evangelism and Discipleship, and the Coordinating Committee. Their full, written reports are available in the Conference Booklet, which can be found on the AFLC website ([aflc.org/about-us/conferences](http://aflc.org/about-us/conferences)).

Pastor Jeff Swanson, stateside director of the Alaska Mission, shared the message at the Missions Festival service on Thursday. He preached from John 20, highlighting the calling of missionaries. Dr. Earl Korhonen, director of World Missions, led the service and the FLBC Ambassadors shared special music. The service also included recognition and prayer for AFLC missionaries and mission fields, including future church planting efforts with Pastor Brandon and Ashley Marschner (Fargo, N.D.) and Owen and Rachel Parsley (southeastern South Dakota). The conference enjoyed a dessert reception following the service to honor the Nate and Rhoda Jore and Brent and Emily Raan families for their years of ministry with World Missions.

Following the Pastors and Wives Banquet on Friday evening, Doug Hertlein of Canal Winchester, Ohio, shared the Word during the layman’s service. He preached from I Peter 3:15, noting our opportunity to share Christ with our neighbors. “We are chosen for a purpose,” Hertlein said, “and that purpose is to proclaim God.” Another dessert reception followed the Friday evening service to honor the 60th anniversary of the Free Lutheran Seminary.

Elections were held throughout the week, and full results can be seen on the following pages. For the association-wide offices, Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck was elected AFLC vice president, and Pastor Boe was re-elected secretary.

## CONFERENCE RESOLUTIONS

Committee No. 1 brought several resolutions to the conference floor that generated significant discussion. In one, the office of the president offered to solicit and compile data from AFLC congregations to assist congregational call committees as they put together compensation packages. There was speaking to confidentiality, factoring in non-financial compensation, and the importance of geographic context when making comparisons, and the resolution was adopted.

The Coordinating Committee asked Committee No. 1 to bring a resolution to the conference regarding the issue of divorce and remarriage





RESOLVED that the elections to  
ons on the Colloquy Committee be  
ged to a five year term with one  
ber's term being elected each year  
ning in 2025 with staggered terms.  
one member elected each year  
after. The chairman of the committee  
automatically be the 6<sup>th</sup> year member  
staggered years it will be the member  
is leaving the committee, AND:



THIS PAGE: Conference attendees (top) voted by a show of hands to approve a resolution to extend the terms for members of the Colloquy Committee to five years. Suzanne Johnson (left) talks with Isak Olson about the wording of a resolution as they work on Committee No. 2. Members of the clergy roster (above) joined together in prayer as Scott Olson, a graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, was ordained during the opening service. OPPOSITE PAGE: Brian and Shiney Ramnarain (top) joined a prayer group during the WMF Day. Conference members sang during the opening service. Pastor Robert Lee signed his book during a reception marking the publication of the sixth book in the AFLC Heritage Series. Conference attendees head to the cafeteria for a reception to honor AFLC missionaries.



THIS PAGE: Members of PACCT and others (top) join together to pray during a conference break. David Olson (above), chairman of the Coordinating Committee, addresses the conference. Pastor Ryan Tonneson (right) takes advantage of a sunny evening to play with his kids. OPPOSITE PAGE: Pastor Jeff Swanson (top) was the evening speaker for the Mission Festival service. Mike Gregory (center) listens as Pastor J. Christian Andrews speaks to a resolution. Dr. Anand Kumar, AFLC-India, is introduced to the conference.





as it relates to the clergy roster. David Olson, chairman of the Coordinating Committee, provided some historical context in his pre-conference report. The 1964 AFLC Annual Conference appointed a commission to do a biblical study on the issue, but in 1967 admitted it was “impossible to act.” They also stated that they “hope a report will be presented to the AFLC at a later annual conference.” No report has been received, but the 1985 Annual Conference passed a resolution—two-thirds in favor, one-third opposed—instructing the Coordinating Committee to not roster any divorced men. There is little discussion of the issue recorded in past conference journals, but there seems to be a variety of convictions within the broader association.

The proposed resolution requests the Coordinating Committee to appoint a group to do a biblical study of divorce and remarriage as it relates to the rostering of pastors. Following some discussion on the selection of the committee and the method and timing of presenting the findings, the conference adopted the resolution. The group will present their findings at the next conference, though President Hjermsstad suggested there could be additional opportunities to walk through the issue together, such as Pastors’ Conference Oct. 1–3 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis.

The conference also dealt with a resolution on the length of terms on the Colloquy Committee, a discussion that was first introduced last year. The Colloquy Committee is responsible for interviewing and recommending men for the clergy roster. During discussion, several expressed that the current one-year terms prevent effective coordination and continuity, while others noted the potential difficulty of finding clergy willing to serve for five years.

It was evident through the discussion that the conference recognized the importance of the Colloquy Committee as the direct voice of the congregations regarding the ordination and rostering of pastors. Speakers encouraged the conference to be more intentional with nominations to the committee and potentially move the election to an earlier time during the business sessions. The resolution to establish five-year terms was adopted and will take effect at the 2025 Annual Conference.

The conference also adopted a resolution encouraging congregations to develop policies and procedures to provide for the physical safety of their members. Speakers to this resolution encouraged the conference to take these issues seriously and recommended potential resources such as Alliance Defending Freedom and local insurance agencies.

Committee No. 5 offered resolutions to the conference floor encouraging congregations to make use of new resources produced by AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship, including training videos, in-person training workshops, and a podcast. Resolutions adopted from Committee No. 2 encouraged the Free Lutheran Bible College & Seminary to continue their efforts to disciple and equip students. In addition to resolutions regarding subsidy requests, the conference adopted a resolution from Committee No. 3 that affirmed the importance of planting churches in the work of both Home and World Missions. Finally, Committee No. 4 offered a resolution encouraging congregations to continue making use of resources from Parish Education and Publications, and to encourage any who feel called to higher theological education. Both resolutions were adopted.



THIS PAGE: Emily Olson (top left) talks with Carol Hoops during a conference break. Pastor David Jore (top right) joins with his family during an afternoon prayer time. Members of the FLBC Ambassadors (right, Esther Rabenberg, Zach Davis, Elsie Twedt, Eli Hedstrom, and Gracia Rolf) sing during the opening service. Pastor Joe Ocker (above) talks with Linda Korhonen during a conference break.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Children in the vacation Bible school program (top) return to Heritage Hall after some outdoor recreation time. Ken Graham (center) chats with other conference attendees during a break. Dr. Steven Johnson passes out copies of a conference committee's resolutions.





## CORPORATION MEETINGS

The four corporations of the AFLC also held their annual meetings during the week. Each corporation elected several members who had been recommended by the conference.

The World Missions Corporation and the Schools Corporation are both addressing the issue of women serving on their respective governing boards. There are a variety of opinions on the topic, but even in disagreement, both corporations are unanimous in their desire to understand and submit to the authority of Scripture.

The Missions Corporation studied the topic nearly 50 years ago, with a committee in 1976 recommending that women not serve on World or Home Missions boards because 1 Timothy 2:12 teaches that women should not have authority over men. They also recommended that women not serve in an advisory capacity on the boards and that a maximum of 20 percent of the corporation could be women. These recommendations were adopted by the corporation and reported to the conference. This year, the World Missions Corporation adopted a resolution to consult the AFLC president, the Coordinating Committee, and the dean of the seminary for biblical and theological guidance on the issue. Their findings will be made available to members by the 2025 corporation meeting, and the corporation will vote on potential changes to the bylaws at the 2026 meeting.

The Schools Corporation formed a subcommittee of members to review the issue in their academic context and bring a recommendation to the next corporation meeting. The corporation also formed a sub-committee to study a proposed resolution that clarifies the definition of clergy in the bylaws. In their meeting, they also discussed the appropriate relationship between the conference, the corporation, and the Board of Trustees.

The Association Retreat Center Corporation meeting reported on improvements made or needing to be made on their campus and provided an update on their continued debt reduction. They also shared their staffing challenges and encouraged the corporation to pray for “the next generation of ARC staff.”

The Home Missions Corporation also met to discuss personnel changes, financial updates, and the status of three current church plants in Ankeny, Iowa; Fargo, N.D.; and Flandreau, S.D. The corporation also adopted a resolution that reset the three-term limit in place prior to the legal separation of mission corporations in 2022.

Business concluded Saturday afternoon in the Student Life Center and the conference adjourned with the chorus “Thank You Lord” and the doxology.

## NEXT ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The events and facilities staff of the Free Lutheran Bible College & Seminary did a tremendous job hosting the hundreds of guests on campus during the week. Next year, the Annual Conference will be held at the Association Retreat Center near Osceola, Wis., from June 11–14, 2025.

*Kneeland, a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, is the editor.*



# The Potency of the Word

By Pastor Adam Osier

The theme of this year's AFLC Annual Conference centered on the promise, "His Word Does Not Return Empty," from Isaiah 55:11. For those gathered to collaborate for ministry "business," this theme aptly identifies the source of success for any ministry. It is God's Word that provides the fuel necessary for our work to be successful. It's the proclamation of his Word that brings success. In this text, God reminds us that his Word is living, active, powerful, and guaranteed to accomplish its work.

The power of God's Word is illustrated throughout Scripture. God's creative voice permeates Genesis 1. God commands light to be, and it is. God speaks to the waters and the land, and they obediently take up their assigned places. He commands vegetation to produce and trees to bear fruit. He commands the sun to govern the light of day and the moon to govern the light at night, so they do. When God speaks, things happen. The Word goes to work, and Word does the work.

This is not limited to the early days of creation. Creation also continues to obey the voice of God. When God, the Son, awoke to a stormy sea, he commanded it to quiet itself, and it listened. When he commanded demons to leave their victims, they fled. When he told diseases and disabilities that they had no more dominion over a person, they left. And when he spoke to release the bonds of the grave, death disappeared like a passing memory.

God speaks, and his will is accomplished. That Word still speaks today.

I have had the privilege of teaching the Book of Romans in our Bible College for the last five years. One of the main lessons in that letter is that the gospel (literally, the good news of God's love in Christ) is the *power* of God for salvation for all who believe (Romans 1:16). The message God provides is the very thing that changes our hearts. The voice that created the world, calmed seas, condemned demons, disabled disabilities, and destroyed death, is the same voice that proclaims salvation. The Word proclaimed goes to work, reveals God's will, exposes sin, prescribes forgiveness, and creates faith in us.

The AFLC exists for this Word proclamation. Our sole responsibility is to preach and teach its rightly divided truth. Sure, this teaching and preaching take different forms at different times. It will look different in Sunday school or youth group, for instance, than it will in small group studies. It will be different in midweek Bible study than in special meetings. Private visitation will look different than a Sunday

morning sermon or administration of the sacraments. And the ministries of local congregations will look different than the AFLC's cooperative ministry efforts. Yet, through it all, the Word is going to work, accomplishing that for which God sends it. If we lose this focus, the AFLC "spiritual movement" will quickly die. The proclaimed Word alone is both the means and end of our mission. If it's proclaimed, the mission is being accomplished.

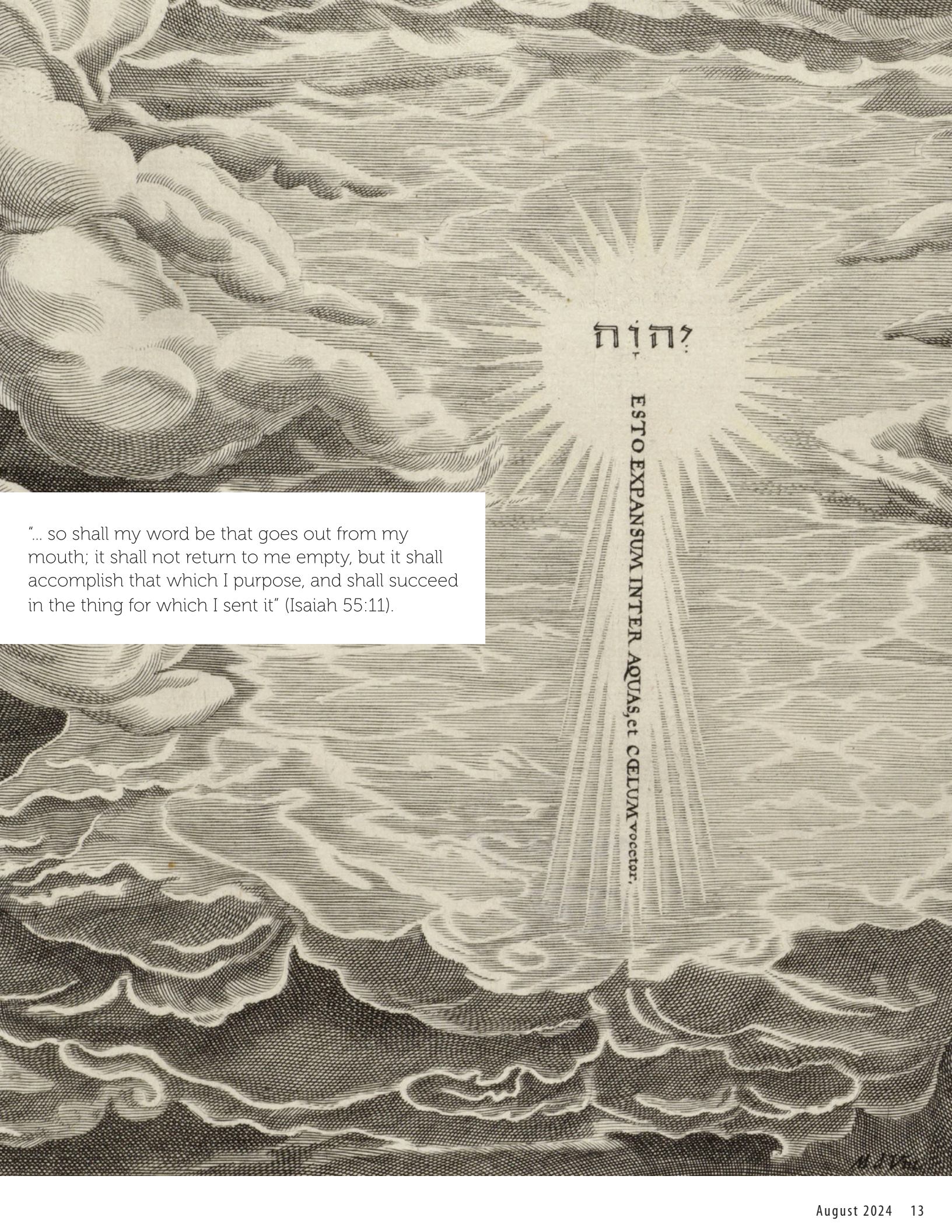
And because the Word is the operative agent in this mission, we don't have to worry about the outcomes. This helps us deal with the discouragements we face in the ministry of the Word. The Word will do the work God wants it to do. It will either leave hearers hardened, having exposed their sin and their rejection of him, or it will create and sustain faith in the finished work of the Savior.

Think of the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4. The seed, which was the Word of God, was scattered freely. Yet, much of that seed hit unfruitful soil and failed to produce fruit. A few reasons are given for this, and they correspond to the type of unsuccessful soil the seed was scattered upon. But, in each case, the fault lies with the person who hardened their heart to that Word. In each case, the purpose of God's Word was to expose the hardness of their hearts and leave them without excuse on the day of God's judgment (Romans 1:20). The Word of law served as a warning to them. It served to harden them, and in this way, its purpose was met.

But in this parable, the story ends with the seed finding good soil and producing abundantly. The Word of law had done its work of conviction, and rightly turned the broken sinner's eyes to Jesus. The Word of gospel worked faith in the sinner's heart and turned their fruitless barrenness into a beautiful and abundant harvest. The Word had its way, and God was glorified as the Word's saving purpose was realized.

This is the Word we are called to proclaim! It is a powerful Word. It is an active Word. It is a Word that cannot fail. When churches are rejecting that Word and inventing new ministry methods to achieve their version of success, we must remain faithful to the clear proclamation of God's unchanging Word. It will always accomplish God's perfect purpose.

*Osier is the dean of the Free Lutheran Bible College. Artwork: "Creation of the Air and Water," design by Maerten de Vos, 1588–1600, Rijksmuseum.*



הִנֵּה

ESTO EXPANSUM INTER AQUAS, et CELUM vocetur.

"... so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

# ELECTION RESULTS

20  
24

20  
24



## 2025 COMMITTEES

One-year terms, serving at the Annual Conference, June 11–14, 2025, at the Association Retreat Center near Osceola, Wis.

### Committee 1 • Administration

Pastor Dan Antal, Grand Forks, N.D.  
Jim Lilly, Plymouth, Minn.  
Leeanna Lunn, Upsala, Minn.  
Rebecca Mundfrom, Wayzata, Minn.  
Keith Sprecher, Corsica, S.D.

### Committee 2 • Schools

Adam Dalager, Fargo, N.D.  
Pastor Jim Johnson, Fergus Falls, Minn.  
Luke Pederson, Cannon Falls, Minn.  
Keziah Quanbeck, Moorhead, Minn.  
Levi Steele, Plymouth, Minn.

### Committee 3 • Missions

Pastor John Amundson, New Leipzig, N.D.  
Pastor Steve Berntson, Jamestown, N.D.  
Miciah Renn, St. Bonifacius, Minn.  
Jeremy Nelson, Shakopee, Minn.  
Ethan Zeltinger, Fargo, N.D.

### Committee 4 • Pub., Parish Ed. & Youth

Pastor Alex Amiot, Thief River Falls, Minn.  
Luke Dryburgh, Fosston, Minn.  
Miriam Schultz, Chamberlain, S.D.  
Kate Wholey, Bethel Park, Pa.  
\*Final elected nominee resigned

### Committee 5 • Evangelism & Benefits

Stan Strong, Blackduck, Minn.  
Pastor John Wellumson, Williston, N.D.  
Shelby Greven, Plymouth, Minn.  
Rodney Johnson, Buffalo, Minn.  
Kari Haugen, Binford, N.D.

## NOMINATING COMMITTEE

One-year terms

### Central Tri State

Paul Handsaker, Radcliffe, Iowa

### Eastern

Mark Riley, Bethel Park, Pa.

### Eastern North Dakota

Matthew Olson, Grafton, N.D.

### Illinois

Rachel Woodworth, Helmar, Ill.

### Lake Superior

Wanita Sletten, Duluth, Minn.

### Minneapolis

TBD: Elected nominee resigned

### Nebraska/Kansas/Colorado

Pastor Ken Hart, Fairbury, Neb.

### North Central Minnesota

Pastor Jerry Moan, McIntosh, Minn.

### Northern Michigan

Jordan Langness, Ishpeming, Mich.

### Northwestern Minnesota

Julie Fugleberg, Roseau, Minn.

### Pacific Northwest

Pastor Steve Snipstead, Kalispell, Mont.

### South Central

Sam Quanbeck, Granbury, Texas

### South Dakota

Phil Peterson, Beresford, S.D.

### Southwestern

Pastor Patrick VandenBos, Salinas, Calif.

### West Central Minnesota

Christian Bickel, Ortonville, Minn.

### Western ND/Eastern Montana

Pastor Gideon Johnson, Killdeer, N.D.



## OFFICERS One-year terms

### Vice President

Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck, Moorhead, Minn.

### Secretary

Pastor Brett Boe, Elk River, Minn.

## BOARDS, COMMITTEES, ETC.

### ARC Board

- Layman, five-year term  
Roger Benson, Brooklyn Center, Minn.

### Benefits Board

- Layman, five-year term  
Doug Hertlein, Carroll, Ohio

### Coordinating Committee

- Pastor, five-year term  
Pastor George Lautner, Clarion, Iowa

### FLAPS Board

- Pastor, five-year term  
Pastor Henry Mohagen, Reva, S.D.

### Youth Board

- Layman, five-year term  
Michele Smith, Brookings, S.D.

### World Missions Board of Dir.

- Pastor, two-year term  
Pastor David Johnson, Larimore, N.D.
- Layman, two-year term  
Samuel Quanbeck, Granbury, Texas
- Layman, two-year term  
Dr. Lyle Mattson, Greenbush, Minn.
- Layman, two-year term  
Ken Sletten, Duluth, Minn.
- Layman, one-year term  
Mark Riley, Bethel Park, Pa.

## COLLOQUY One-year terms

- Pastor Elden Nelson, Prinsburg, Minn.
- Pastor Tom Olson, Enderlin, N.D.
- Pastor Joel Rolf, Annandale, Minn.
- Pastor Nick Schultz, Chamberlain, S.D.
- Pastor Sam Wellumson, East Grand Forks, Minn.

### Bay Broadcasting

- Layman, three-year term  
Dave Perkins, Arlington, Wash.

### Budget Analysis Committee

- Layman, three-year term  
Paige Moan, Ontonagon, Mich.

### Evangelism & Discipleship

- Layman, five-year term  
Matthew Monseth, St. Michael, Minn.

### Parish Education

- Pastor, five-year term  
Pastor Erin Tormanen, Stanley, N.D.

### Schools Board of Trustees

- Layman, five-year term  
Dean Nelson, Vergas, Minn.
- Pastor, one-year term  
Pastor Rodney Johnson, Buffalo, Minn.

### Home Missions Board of Dir.

- Layman, two-year term  
John Greven, Big Lake, Minn.
- Layman, two-year term  
Dana Hagen, Sioux Falls, S.D.
- Pastor, two-year term  
Pastor Matthew Ballmann, San Antonio, Texas
- Pastor, two-year term  
Pastor Jon Langness, Blackhawk, S.D.

## CORPORATIONS Five-year terms

### ARC Corporation

- Thomas Asfeldt, Sioux Falls, S.D.
- Pastor Kevin Czymbor, Armour, S.D.
- Preston Hoffman, Binford, N.D.
- Dalton Jordahl, Plymouth, Minn.
- Flint McLoughlin, Berthold, N.D.
- Pastor Scott Olson, Bagley, Minn.
- Naomi Paige, Dayton, Minn.
- Fred Raasch, Zumbrota, Minn.
- Lori Thompson, Kenyon, Minn.
- Anna VandenBos, Salinas, Calif.

### Home Mission Corporation

- Pastor Matthew Ballmann, San Antonio, Texas
- Pastor Jeremy Crowell, Arlington, Wash.
- \*\*\*Ellen Dalager, Moorhead, Minn.
- David Hein, San Antonio, Texas
- Pastor Micah Klemme, Starbuck, Minn.
- Jacob O'Flanagan, Minneapolis, Minn.
- Dr. Mark Olson, Kasson, Minn.
- David Perkins, Arlington, Wash.
- Hans Tanner, Plymouth, Minn.
- \*\*Pastor Scott Stroud, Lake Stevens, Wash.
- Pastor Brian Westerbur, Grafton, N.D.
- Pastor Sam Willard, Shakopee, Minn.

### World Mission Corporation

- Rachael Ballmann, Kopperl, Texas
- Pastor Eugene Enderlein, Plymouth, Minn.
- Linda Fugleberg, Moorhead, Minn.
- Pastor David Johnson, Larimore, N.D.
- Isaiah Miller, Fargo, N.D.
- Andrew Quanbeck, Moorhead, Minn.
- Ken Sletten, Duluth, Minn.
- Bill Sheldon, Ray, N.D.
- Pastor Patrick VandenBos, Salinas, Calif.
- Pastor Craig Wentzel, Edmore, N.D.

### Schools Corporation

- \*\*\*\*Elisabeth Ballmann, Kopperl, Texas
- Gwen Berge, Maple Grove, Minn.
- Pastor Phill Hooper, Duluth, Minn.
- Pastor Gideon Johnson, Killdeer, N.D.
- Justin Jones, New Hope, Minn.
- Elika Korhonen, Fargo, N.D.
- \*\*\*Dan Larson, Tioga, N.D.
- Pastor Joe Larson, Pipestone, Minn.
- Heather Olson, Kenyon, Minn.
- Susan Parsley, Pipestone, Minn.
- \*\*Pastor J. Scott Pierson, Golden Valley, N.D.
- Pastor Kirk Thorson, Sioux Falls, S.D.
- Pastor Jon Wellumson, Williston, N.D.

\*One-year term    \*\*Two-year term    \*\*\*Three-year term    \*\*\*\*Four-year term



# Rekindling the fire.

BY PASTOR RANDY NELSON



*Pastor Alan Arneson (above), Amery, Wis., talks about those who inspired him in ministry. Pastor Eric Westlake (top) lead the main session.*

**E**mpowering lay leadership was the focus of this year's annual Rekindle the Fire, hosted June 11 at Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis. Always offered for free, the event had 179 participants representing AFLC congregations from across the country.

Pastor Eric Westlake shared the keynote message on how lay involvement is necessary for healthy congregations and how his congregation in Zumbrota, Minn., is working to equip and empower their members. We also heard from Micah Johnson, AED Board chair, on how lay leadership can spur congregational revival by reflecting on their church's mission and purpose and by coming together to create greater ministry unity. Jordan Langness and Pastor Ben Sollie gave testimonies on how equipping and empowering lay leadership in their congregations in Ishpeming, Mich., and North Minneapolis, respectively, have led to personal, spiritual, and ministry growth in their congregations. After a meal, we closed in worship and prayer for our Annual Conference and for revived congregations.

The sessions were live streamed, recorded, and are available to view on our website. Our plan for next year's event is to continue this theme and focus on equipping lay leadership for ministry. We hope many will attend!

We are also excited to announce our new podcast, "Living as a Disciple." As we have continued to develop disciple-equipping workshops like "Living as a Disciple in a Post-Christian World" and "Engaging Your Community for Christ," we have struggled to find efficient ways to share this content with our congregations and others. According to at least one survey ([demandsage.com/podcast-statistics](https://demandsage.com/podcast-statistics)), nearly 500 million people worldwide average more than seven hours a week listening to podcasts, and those numbers are projected to increase. With this in mind, we have begun recording 30- to 40-minute podcast episodes that will be rooted in the content of our workshops but presented conversationally as we discuss these and other relevant topics related to living as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The podcast will be available through our website as well as all podcast platforms. Our website will also feature additional content and opportunities to offer feedback and suggestions for future podcast topics.

We are also updating our Discipleship Manual. This edition will include an additional chapter on the uniqueness of Free and Living Congregations. We hope to have this available by the end of 2024. If you would like to support this project financially or AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship, visit the link in the sidebar. Thank you again for your prayers and support of AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship. It is our mission to encourage, equip, and assist our AFLC congregations and pastors in making and equipping disciples, who then make and equip disciples. If we can be of assistance to you or your congregation, please contact us by email or through our website.

## AED contact & links

- **Email:** [evangelism@afc.org](mailto:evangelism@afc.org)
- **Website:** [afc.org/evangelism](http://afc.org/evangelism)
- **Podcast:**  
Launching in September
- **Discipleship Manual:**  
[afc.org/evangelism/church-community/discipleship-manual](http://afc.org/evangelism/church-community/discipleship-manual)
- **Donate:**  
[afc.org/evangelism/donate](http://afc.org/evangelism/donate)

*Nelson is the director of AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship.*



# Supporting our youth workers.

Youth Leader Small Groups is a new resource focused on connecting and supporting the adults who work with youth in AFLC congregations.

Those who work with teens give of their time and energy to strengthen the spiritual lives of students. That could mean planning Bible studies, recruiting volunteers, promoting fundraisers, or organizing events. But it doesn't stop there. Youth workers also field phone calls and text messages with parents, attend school basketball games, compile reports for church council meetings, balance the budget, have many conversations with struggling teens, and often stay up-to-date on a host of cultural topics that are impacting youths, like social media, anxiety, suicide, gender identity, purpose, and relationships. For all they do, youth leaders need an opportunity to be filled up and encouraged in their work. To meet that need, AFLC Youth Ministries is excited to offer a new program called Youth Leader Small Groups to our youth leaders from around the AFLC—whether volunteer, part-time, or full-time. The program launches in September.

Each small group will include about three to five people who meet together virtually once a month. These groups will work through the four parts of each preplanned session.

“You can sign up for Youth Leader Small Groups either as an individual or with a group,” said Adam McCarlson, director of AFLC Youth Ministries. “If you sign up as an individual, we will work to place you in a group of other youth leaders. Alternatively, if you have someone else or a group that you'd like to sign-up with, we welcome that.”

The first part of the curriculum is an introduction question, which will serve to start the conversation and help group members get to know one another. These are questions like, “When you were in middle school, what was one dream you had for your future?” Or, “What is one way you like to relax during the summer?”

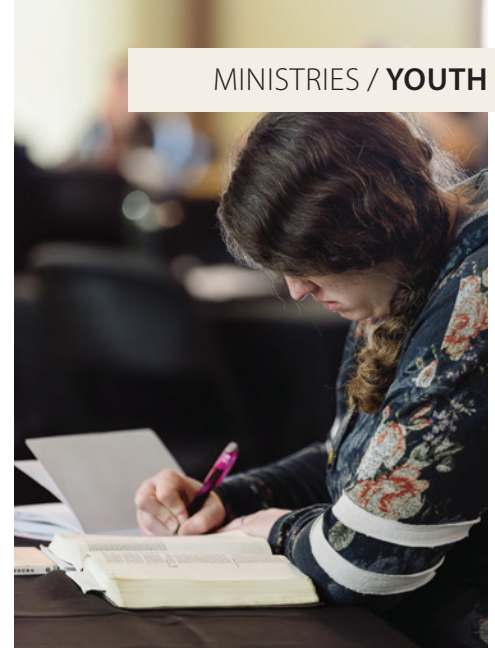
In the second part, the group will be asked to read an assigned passage of Scripture. For each passage, a “Gospel for You” prompt is provided to encourage and build up each youth worker in Jesus Christ.

The third part of the curriculum is a personal question, which helps group members pause and think about their own lives as well as provide a place for them to share their own struggles and ask questions from others who can relate.

The last section is a ministry question meant to help group members think about the teens, parents, and parishioners in their congregation. Examples of ministry questions are, “What is one new strategy you want to implement to better equip parents to lead the hearts of their children toward the Lord?” And, “Are there areas of ministry you hold too tightly that prevent young leaders from having opportunities to grow as maturing disciples of Jesus?”

Additionally, small group members will be given time to discuss other questions or issues that are going on in their lives, and they will be prompted to take time to encourage each other, share ideas, and pray for one another.

There is no cost to participate in Youth Leaders Small Groups. You can sign up on the Youth Ministries webpage. If you are interested in financially supporting Youth Leader Small Groups or other Youth Ministry events and resources, visit our webpage (see link at right).



## Youth Ministries links

- **Website:** [aflc.org/youth](https://aflc.org/youth)
- **Small Groups:** [aflc.org/youth/resources/smallgroups](https://aflc.org/youth/resources/smallgroups)
- **Email:** [youth@aflc.org](mailto:youth@aflc.org)
- **Giving:** [aflc.org/youth/donate-ym](https://aflc.org/youth/donate-ym)



# New ministry partnership.

Bible College announces agreement to host and partner with Beyond Limits post-secondary Christian college for students with developmental disabilities on Plymouth campus.

**T**he Free Lutheran Bible College recently announced a partnership with Beyond Limits that will start this fall. Beyond Limits serves students with developmental disabilities by providing a two-year, residential post-secondary Christian campus experience with a Beyond Limits life skills certificate. Since its founding in 2013, Beyond Limits has partnered with Bethany Global University in Bloomington, Minn. After Bethany Global announced plans to move to an exclusively online program, Beyond Limits contacted the Bible College about hosting the program.

After several campus visits and conversations, members of the FLBCS Board of Trustees approved the partnership for the coming school year. Beyond Limits students will live in the dorms, audit two to three freshman courses, and take life skills classes with a certified Beyond Limits instructor. Beyond Limits will also employ a student connector and residential assistants to provide additional support and a bridge with the rest of the student body and FLBC staff.

“The welcoming nature of the campus and the openness of staff and students to the idea of having students with disabilities on campus were evident,” said Craig Spofford, Beyond Limits executive director. “Beyond Limits not only wants to help students with disabilities have an inclusive college experience, we also want to build a vision for inclusion into the future leaders of the church. It was immediately clear that this would be possible in a partnership with FLBC.”

The FLBC campus will host at least five Beyond Limits students currently accepted for the 2024–25 school year. Each one will be preparing to live independently after graduation.

“We know the Lord will be working in the lives of the Beyond Limits students, bringing a great benefit to the FLBC community,” said Pastor Adam Osier, FLBC dean. “We look forward to welcoming them to campus this fall.”

## The Annual Campaign

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary is taking a new approach to funding the mission of establishing students in the Word of God for life in Jesus Christ. For the 2024–25 academic year, all necessary funding beyond tuition, room, board, and fees will be presented as an annual campaign. Donors can still give as they like to projects, scholarships, or general giving, but everything outside of items like a future capital or debt reduction campaign will be considered part of each year’s annual campaign.

FLBCS is taking this approach in order to tie the strategic plan and budgeting to anticipated revenue, thus improving both planning and communication. You will hear more about the annual campaign in the coming months. Read more by going to [flbc.edu/annual-campaign](http://flbc.edu/annual-campaign).

## FLBCS Prayer Requests

- The Bible College’s 25 students serving on summer ministry teams.
- A successful annual campaign.
- The 120 students who are planning to attend FLBC this fall.
- Campus move-in and orientation the last week of August.
- A smooth transition to campus for Dr. Gudim and Dr. Hylden, and to parish ministry for Dr. Jerry Moan, and their congregations.

# Interview with new faculty.

Dr. Jason Gudim and Dr. Jarrod Hylden share their thoughts heading into their first semester as FLBCS faculty members.

## • What do you remember from your time as a student on this campus?

**Gudim:** I think we have the most unique Bible school in the country because we don't do distance education. When you go through our residential program, that's where you meet the best friends you have in the world. You learn what it's like to exist in the community of God.

**Hylden:** In Galatians class, Pastor [Phil] Haugen had this study sheet for us, and I remember [being] more focused on that assignment than any other assignment I'd ever been on in my whole life. I was just so captured by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. I share that example because Bible college put me in a situation where God was able to get a hold of me through His Word because I was saturated with it.

## • What will you bring to the classroom from your time as a pastor?

**Gudim:** It's not like we're going to stop being pastors just because we don't have congregations. We're going to miss regular preaching, and the routine of the week is going to be different. But caring for souls and guiding them through life's troubles, I imagine, is going to be very much the same, just a different camera angle.

**Hylden:** At Skrefsrud and Immanuel the members appreciated the verse-by-verse teaching of God's Word and showing how it is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. I wouldn't know what else to say. I mean, the Bible is the message. And I just take it for granted. I grew up in the AFLC. I went to our college and seminary. That's the only way I know how to preach and teach. And sometimes I forget how awesome that is until someone from the outside comes in and says, "We have been missing this."

## • What will you be teaching this fall?

**Gudim:** Means of Grace, Intro to Christian Thought, Christian Education, and Pastoral Counseling.

**Hylden:** Captivity Epistles, Revelation, and Greek 1 in the Bible College.

## • Is there anything unique about your teaching style?

**Gudim:** I focus on teaching students how to think rather than just giving them the right answers. I want them to be processing. My classes end up being very little lecture and a lot more interaction.

**Hylden:** Sometimes preachers focus on whatever sticks out to them mentally, and that's what they share from the Bible. But there are ways of reading Scripture where we can actually find out what the main point of the biblical author is. I try to help people understand the Bible in its original context.

## • What do you hope your students take away from your classes?

**Gudim:** I hope they have an understanding that all doctrine is relevant for the Christian life. That it's not an academic exercise, but that it is the truth from God's Word. And it's my job to show students what that means and how to use it for their comfort and for their growth in the faith.

**Hylden:** I hope they gain a great love for God's Word, because God's Word is the means by which we can know God and come to have eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. And an excitement to get up and go live your vocations, to serve your neighbors, to serve the Lord.



*Dr. Jason Gudim and Dr. Jarrod Hylden*

*Listen to the full audio interview online:*

• [fbc.edu/new-faculty-2024](http://fbc.edu/new-faculty-2024)

# Upcoming AFLC events

## Ny Stavanger to celebrate 75 years

Members of Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran, Buxton, N.D., will celebrate the congregation's 75th anniversary on Sunday, Sept. 15. Beginning at 2 p.m., the event will include a program followed by a meal and fellowship. All are invited. The congregation is served by Pastor Dan Antal.

## All Boards & AFLC Pastor's Conference

The All Boards meeting of the AFLC will be held Sept. 30–Oct. 1 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary in Plymouth, Minn. Boards and committees will meet jointly for reports and the installation of new members.

The AFLC Pastor's Conference will be held Oct. 1–3 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis. Online registration ([aflc.org](http://aflc.org)) will open in early August.

## Fall events on FLBCS campus

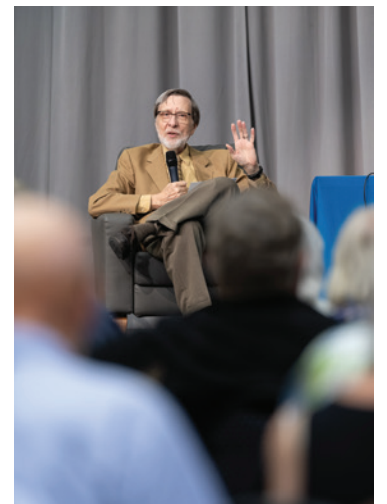
**UpClose:** Senior high school students are invited to attend the UpClose campus preview of the Free Lutheran Bible College Oct. 17–18 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. Prospective students will be offered the opportunity to attend classes, interact with current students, and take part in a worship service and vespers.

**Alumni Tournaments:** Former students and friends are invited to attend and participate in the fall alumni tournaments, held Oct. 18–19 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College, Plymouth, Minn. Men's and women's tournaments will be held for basketball and volleyball.

**Sixtieth Anniversary:** The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary will celebrate the seminary's 60th anniversary with a gala dinner on Nov. 14. For more information about the event, visit [flbc.edu/events](http://flbc.edu/events).

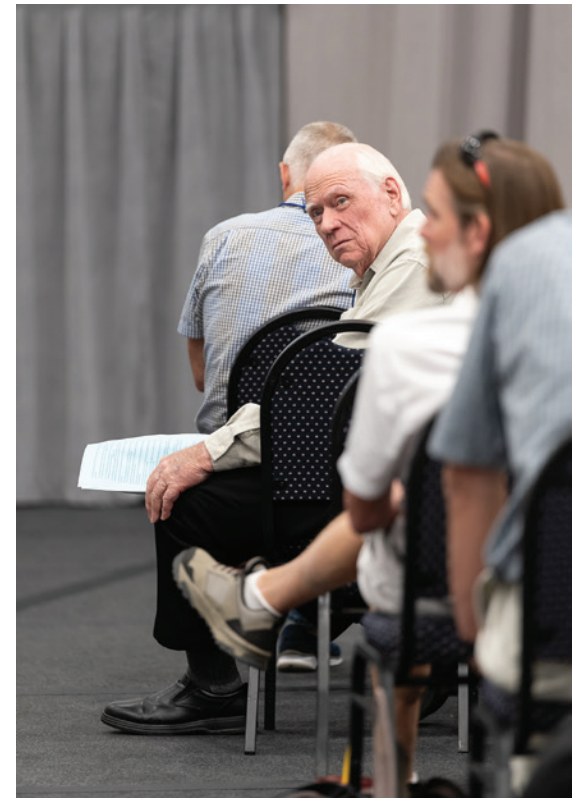
**Confirmation Refresh:** This two-day event held Nov. 22–23 provides biblical instruction and community connection for students in sixth through ninth grades. FLBC students and staff will facilitate learning sessions, worship, small group discussion, and application times that build confidence in the truths of Scripture.

**Christmas Concerts:** The Bible College and Seminary will offer a weekend of concerts to mark the Christmas season, Dec. 6–8. The concerts will include the Seminary Chorus and the FLBC Wind Ensemble, Concert Choir, and Proclaim Choir. Details on concerts will be available on the website ([flbc.edu](http://flbc.edu)).



THIS PAGE: (clockwise from top) Pastor Brent and Emily Raan address the conference during the World Missions report. Pastor Robert Lee was interviewed about his book on the history of the AFLC. Pastor Lloyd Quanbeck asked a question during the reading of a resolution. Members of Committee No. 1 meet to write resolutions. Pastor Richard and Clara Gunderson join a prayer group.

# Scenes from the 2024 Annual Conference



THIS PAGE: (clockwise from top left) Children participated in a VBS craft during conference business. Dr. Nathan Olson talks with Sara Baerbock, who is taking free books offered in the campus library. Stan Strong listens as an attendee addresses the conference regarding a resolution. Heather Fontaine stands at the Mission Festival service. Pastor Chris Kumpula holds his son during a conference service. Phoebe Olson takes notes while meeting with Committee No. 4. Arden and Marge Jacobson join with the conference in a hymn.

## PEOPLE &amp; PLACES

**Karen Pederson**, a member of Zion Lutheran, Tioga, N.D., was elected as the president of the Women's Missionary Federation during the recent WMF Day at the AFLC Annual Conference.

**Linda Fugleberg**, a member of St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D., was elected as the communication secretary of the WMF at WMF Day.

**Pastor Ryan Tonneson** has accepted a call to serve Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Cokato, Minn. Tonneson has resigned from Maranatha Free Lutheran, Glyndon, Minn.

**Steve Junker** was ordained July 14 at Chippewa Lutheran, Brandon, Minn., with Pastor Micah Hjermstad, AFLC president, officiating.

**Dr. Johan Koren**, Murray, Ken., was removed from the AFLC Clergy Roster by members of the Coordinating Committee at his own request.

Pastor Paul Kosel (non-AFLC) has resigned from **Buffalo Lake Lutheran**, Sisseton, S.D.

**Caleb Korhonen**, a student at the Free Lutheran Seminary, served as a short-term assistant with AFLC Journey Missions in Brazil in July. Korhonen assisted Pastor John and Hannah Lee and their family as they returned to Campo Mourão, Brazil.

**Olivia Underwood**, a member of Ruthfred Evangelical Lutheran, Bethel Park, Pa., and **Anna Renn**, a member of Bethany Free Lutheran, Bemidji, Minn., will serve as Journey Missions missionary assistants to Pastor Matthew Abel in Paraguay beginning in September through the fall.

## Support the AFLC's magazine

*The Lutheran Ambassador* is free for all subscribers. Our ministry is subsidized by your gifts. Thank you! For information on giving visit our website at [aflc.org/lutheran-ambassador](http://aflc.org/lutheran-ambassador).

## JUNE MEMORIALS

**Bible College**  
Ruth Claus  
Harold Peterson

**Home Missions**  
Dorothy Axvig

**Lutheran Ambassador**  
David Salvhus

**Parish Education**  
Betty Christopherson

**Seminary**  
Darrel Steien

... in honor of

**Bible College**  
Paul & Jenell Johnson

## Summer Institute of Theology Aug. 5–9

The Summer Institute of Theology will be held Aug. 5–9 on the Campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, Plymouth, Minn. The week-long lecture series features guest lecturers and FLBCS faculty.

Dr. Harold Senkbeil will present the plenary session on "Pastoral Theology: The Care of Souls" daily at 8:30 a.m. Senkbeil is an adjunct professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind., and executive director emeritus of Doxology: The Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care. He has authored several books, including *Christ and Calamity: Grace and Gratitude in the Darkest Valley* and *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart*.

Two lecture options will be available for the 10:30 a.m. session Monday

through Friday, including "Means of Grace in the Congregation" with Dr. Steve Mundrom and "Romans" with Pastor Adam Osier.

Following a break for lunch, two lectures will be offered for the 1:30 p.m. session (Monday through Thursday), including "Lutheranism in Scandinavia" with Pastor Brian Lunn and "Youth and Family Ministry Workshops" with Jordan Langness.

Participants may register for one, two, or three sessions. A discounted rate is available for a second registration from the same congregation. Optional additions include campus housing, lunches, a Saint Paul Saints game (Tuesday), and a barbecue dinner (Thursday). To register for the event, visit [flbc.edu/event/sit2024](http://flbc.edu/event/sit2024).

## Being Lutheran podcast offers conference

The Being Lutheran podcast will host its first conference, "Being Lutheran Out Loud," from 1 p.m. to 8:15 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 10, following the Summer Institute of Theology. The event will be held in Hauge Chapel on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary in Plymouth, Minn.

With special guests author Gretchen Ronnevik and artist FLAME, the one-

day conference will examine what it means to be a Lutheran who lives out their God-given vocation. Podcast hosts Jason Gudim, Brett Boe, and Adam Osier will interview these guests and do a live episode recording.

For more information about the conference and to register for the event (\$35/each) and a meal (\$10), visit [beinglutheran.com/outloud2024](http://beinglutheran.com/outloud2024).

## AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-June 30, 2024

FUND	REC'D IN JUNE	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% OF SUBSIDY	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$28,985	\$22,089	49	201,374
Evangelism	9,071	67,813	50	60,824
Youth Ministries	13,104	86,763	56	77,028
Parish Education	10,014	106,397	57	67,106
Seminary	17,460	139,945	49	144,139
Bible College	25,862	199,571	42	193,543
Home Missions	21,701	166,475	39	150,156
World Missions	35,615	194,096	40	200,803
Personal Support	51,832	441,693	57	389,704
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$213,644</b>	<b>\$1,627,843</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>\$1,484,677</b>

For additional financial information for each department, go to [www.aflc.org/giving](http://www.aflc.org/giving)



# One Spirit, many gifts

BY PASTOR JOE DOMBROWSKI

**A**s has been covered previously in this column, the congregation at Corinth in the early first century was not a healthy one. There was division amongst them: some had disdain for the ministry, Christian freedom was being abused, and disorder in the congregation was the norm. There was also what could be called a spiritual elitism at work. Those who had what were considered “superior” spiritual gifts looked down upon the gifts of others. What’s more, many eagerly sought after these superior gifts at the expense of the gifts they had already been given.

As much as we might like to consider ourselves and our congregations as better than the local congregation that the Lord placed at Corinth so long ago, we ought to remember that there have been many such problems in congregations since that time. None of us are immune. We are just as tempted and susceptible to falling into the trap of spiritual pride, prizing one blessing of God over others, and looking down on those we consider less blessed with spiritual gifts from the Lord.

## 12:1–3 • Concerning spiritual gifts

The Corinthians had inquired about spiritual matters, and our text is the first part of Paul’s response to their questions. As he states in verse 1, he does not want them to be ignorant about such things. Unfortunately, because of the egos and pride at work in the Corinthian congregation, that is just what they were

doing. Some in the congregation had placed an emphasis on the more outwardly spectacular spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues, a result of their pride and look-at-me attitude.

Paul begins by reminding the Corinthians of who they were prior to having a saving faith in Jesus Christ. When they were pagans and idolaters, they had no such spiritual gifts. Their idols were mute, and they had no utterance from them. It is only through the work of the Spirit of God that anyone could proclaim, “Jesus is Lord,” and only through him could anyone have spiritual gifts. Without God, the Corinthians, like all of us, have nothing. It is only through God working in us that we can claim any blessing or gift, the greatest of which is our faith in Christ.

## 12:4–6 • Varieties of gifts, one Lord

Paul then focuses on two teachings about spiritual gifts. First, the source of all spiritual things is the Triune God. Second, there are a variety of spiritual gifts given by God to his people. In these verses, it is wise to not go down the path of parsing out which person in the Trinity does what thing. Rather, we ought to focus on the fact that the Triune God is the singular source of all good gifts used in the service of his kingdom to communicate his love for us in Christ and to our neighbors.

## 12:7–11 • To each one is given

Verse 7 is the key to the rest of Paul’s discussion. Each one is given *the* manifestation of the Spirit, not *a* manifestation of the Spirit. There are

varieties of gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who gives the gifts and motivates each one to use what has been given for the purpose of the common good. Paul lists several examples of the variety of spiritual gifts the Lord gives in verses 8–10. But these are only examples, not an exhaustive list. Whatever gift the Spirit gives—whether the knowledge and wisdom to speak about faith or apply it to various situations, or a heroic faith in adversity, or the ability to heal and effect miracles, or the power to boldly proclaim God’s Word, or speak or understand a language—God’s desire is that it be used for the common good, not self-aggrandizement or personal gain.

The use of our spiritual gifts is for the benefit of our neighbors, an opportunity to love as God has called us and walk in the good works that he has prepared for those saved by grace through faith in Christ. The Holy Spirit is the one who works all of these things, continuously distributing the spiritual gifts of God to each one as he sees fit, to the end that each of us would use them for the common good, building up the kingdom of God through our local congregations.

All have been given a gift from God to share with others. Humbly walk with the Lord and make use of what he has given you to love and serve your neighbors.

*Dombrowski serves United Lutheran, Manteca, Calif.*

SOMETHING TO SHARE

# One with Christ in weakness.

BY KIRSTIE SKOGERBOE

I just finished rereading *The Book of the Dun Cow*. It's a fable about a group of homely and pitiful animals to whom God has entrusted the care of the earth, and through whom God intends to defeat the great and evil Wyrms—imprisoned, for a time, in the ground below them. The animals lack courage, charity, sense, and often hope, and only through God's special messenger, the compassionate dun-colored cow, are they empowered for the fight. It's the humblest and most pitiful creature of all who deals the final blow to end the war.

The story reminds me of a psalm I've been reflecting on recently: "Out of the mouth of babies and infants," David writes, "you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger" (8:2). This verse is quoted so often, and usually humorously, that I, for one, had lost sight of the shock value of these words. God is establishing the strength to conquer his enemies through *babies*.

Taking this to heart of late produces two reactions in me. First, I look down at my pregnant belly with awe. I am carrying a two-pound infant who, before she can speak and reason, will receive the gift of faith in her baptism and be inducted into God's spiritual army. She will be called, even in her infancy, to still the enemy with her childlike faith: a chosen instrument in the real cosmic battle. Adults, let us honor the children in our churches and look to them as examples of faith. Let us ask them to pray for us.

My second reaction is to look at myself. This is troubling

because I make a pathetic spiritual warrior. My prayers are most often petitions for fewer worries, less pride, less selfishness, more strength, more patience, more contentment, less desire for money—and so on. Moreover, my ability to speak and reason gain me no ground in spiritual warfare, because the devil can outdo me with both. Who am I that God is mindful of me, let alone loves me and wants me in his army to defeat evil?

It's a deep mystery that God takes what is foolish in the world to shame the wise and what is weak in the world to shame the strong (I Corinthians 1:27). It is an even deeper mystery that he took on foolishness and weakness himself in human flesh—and infant flesh, at that. Jesus has "crowned us with glory and honor," not by making us strapping spiritual fighters, but by becoming one with our weakness (Psalm 8:5; Hebrews 5:2).

In the same way, we fight the evil one by being one with Christ in our weakness. Spiritual warfare for the Christian can be summarized in one sentence: "Jesus, help me." If we feel powerless in the face of our sin and the world's suffering and evil, we are at our most deadly to the devil. He knows that infants cry for help, and his Great Enemy will hear their cry and save them (Psalm 145:19).

*Skogerboe, the digital communications coordinator for the AFLC, lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.*