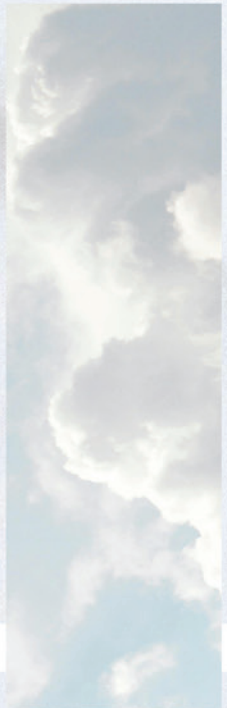


LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



**Missions:
What is your
role?**

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THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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The God who sends.

Through the pages of Scripture, one of the things God does consistently is *send* people. He sent Abraham to an unknown land. He sent the prophet Isaiah to be his messenger. He promised to send John the Baptist. And there are several commissioning passages in the New Testament where he sends his Church to accomplish his mission.

We're likely familiar with those "Great Commission" verses in Matthew 28, but what about Mark 16? "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation." And Acts 1: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

This issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador* explores the theme of missions, which is a word that means "sending." God is a missionary God. Jesus equips his disciples with his Word and sends them into the whole world to be his witnesses.

The mission we have been given is to love our neighbors in both word and deed and to share with them the good news of forgiveness of their sins in Christ. Words without deeds are relationally inauthentic, and deeds without words are spiritually irrelevant. We love the precious people God has placed in our midst through both word and deed, and always with the aim of bringing Jesus to them.

God is a sending God, and he's sent people to you. But sometimes he sends you to other people in other nations.

This issue will explore the many different roles that are involved in the work of international missions. Before a missionary even goes to a foreign land, there are individuals involved in their education and their training. Jon Nelson of AFLC Journey Missions writes an article in this issue about the role of education in missions. Pastor Andy Coyle, director of AFLC Home Missions, helps us better understand the importance of training.

Most missionaries are not solo artists. As missionaries leave for a different context and setting, they rely on individuals and congregations to provide them with prayer and financial support. Dave Perkins writes about the importance of praying for our missionaries, and Jonni Sliver gives us a missionary's perspective on the role of financial support.

And finally, there are those who go and engage in mission work, and there are those who receive missionaries. Todd Schierkolk offers some words of encouragement to those who might be considering becoming missionaries. And Michael Rokenbrodt reflects on the impact missionaries have on those in other countries who are waiting to hear the good news of Christ's free offer of forgiveness.

Each of these six roles is vital to the accomplishing of God's commission, and there are likely many more. Take away any of these links on the chain, and the work of missions would suffer. We're thankful for our missionaries, and we're also thankful for the many ways you and your congregations are involved in the work.

Also in this issue, Pastor Terry Olson walks us through a study of I Corinthians 13. Congregational life is marked by the love of Christ, Pastor Olson writes, and flows from the cross of Christ into the life of the congregation. On the back page, Kirstie Skogerboe encourages us with another "Something to Share" column. These devotional columns have been such a blessing to read!

Thank you for reading and continuing to support the work of *The Lutheran Ambassador*!

—Pastor Andrew Kneeland



Consider how precious a soul must be, when both God and the devil are after it. [Charles Spurgeon]

“

When Christ calls a man,
he bids him come and die.

[Dietrich Bonhoeffer]

Indeed, it is better to keep quiet about our beliefs and live them out than to talk eloquently about what we believe but fail to live by it. [Ignatius of Antioch]

For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ.
[Robert Murray M'Cheyne]

Since strength is found in weakness, our greatest need is neediness and our greatest enemy is needlessness.
[Bob Kellemen]

Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness. [Martin Luther]

Called to go there.

“... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

Matthew

28:20



By Pastor Todd Schierkolk



“You follow me.”

I was feeling nostalgic toward the end of my second year of Bible school almost 40 years ago. I had studied Spanish in college, traveled on a short-term mission trip to Mexico, and participated in the Missions Club. At a missions conference, I went forward to pray about the possibility of serving as a missionary. I thought about all that God had done and wondered where his path would lead.

So, in the mood for remembering, I pulled out the brightly decorated, metal German cookie box my grandma had given me. That’s where I stored my mementos. I opened the lid, and as I sifted through pictures, awards, ribbons, and cards, I came across my old confirmation certificate. And there on the envelope, I saw the verse I had chosen as an eighth-grade boy. “The one that says, ‘I am with you always,’” I told my mom when she asked which verse I wanted. My pastor included the whole verse. My mind and heart added the rest—The Great Commission, “Go, therefore ... and lo, I am with you always.” (Matthew 28:18–20) When I saw the verse, I fell to my knees and prayed, “Oh, God. Oh, God.” That’s all I could say. So, I went.

Looking back on almost 30 years of serving as missionaries, my wife, Barb, and I are in the mood for remembering again. As we sift through the pictures of people who have come and gone and the moments that make us smile, laugh, cringe, cry, and pray, themes emerge. These considerations are what we would recommend as someone ponders God’s call.

Remember the Context.

My going is always and only in the context of who came for me. Where would I be if not for Jesus seeking me out? And where would I be without the ones in history who came to my people, my family, or to me? We only go to others because someone first came to us, shared Jesus’ love, and told us Jesus’ story.

Accept the Paradox.

Serving in another culture is full of paradoxes. It was the “pair of ducks” for us, and we would quack with our girls whenever one manifested itself. I love it here; I hate it here. This is so wonderful; this is so terrible. Spanish is so hard; Spanish is so great! How can I put up with these people? How can these people put up with me? I can’t do this anymore; I can do all things through Christ who strengthens

me. At one moment, one side of the paradox dominates; at another, the other side dominates. Don’t be surprised at the paradox. You aren’t going crazy. Accept it with Jesus’ help. He is on both sides.

Live your own story.

When Jesus told the Apostle Peter how he would die, Peter looked at John and asked, “What about him?” And Jesus said, “What is that to you? You follow me” (John 21:18–22). Your story will be different because *you* are different. Your life history is different. Your personality is different. Your gifts, talents, and abilities are different. The culture you are serving in may be different. Your time in history may be different. The people you are reaching may be different. Hebrews 11 is filled with references to people of God with different stories. Some experienced great victories, some suffered, and some died, yet they *all* had great faith in God. Follow Jesus and let God write your story. It will begin and end with your Savior.

Appreciate the Sacrifice.

The story of Christianity starts with an incredible sacrifice. A Father sacrificed his only Son. Jesus willingly accepted it “for the joy set before him” (Hebrews 12:2). Missionaries give up many things. Their parents and families do, too. There is genuine grief and difficulty at the geographical loss of a child, grandchildren, and siblings. God is not callous to the broken hearts of those who go and those who stay behind. Jesus wept for a reason.

God calls people to go to the mission field in different ways. Barb was born there—in Tokyo, Japan, to missionary parents. Later, her father took a call to serve a church in Australia and then to an Aboriginal mission in tropical Queensland. So, when I met her, she had already “been there and done that.” She had a background for the call that made her a great candidate. When the call to go to Mexico came, we went together. Our three girls were born into the call. They were raised in the call. And Jesus, just as he promised, was with us every step of the way. And no matter what your story is or how the Spirit of God calls you, if you go, he’ll be with you, too.

Schierkolk is an AFLC missionary serving in Jerez, Zacatecas, Mexico.

By Pastor Andy Coyle

Training is the process of equipping workers with everyday skills and knowledge to most effectively perform their jobs. It is a necessary part of any healthy organization. Consider some of the key reasons why employers prioritize training: improved skills, enhanced productivity, increased job satisfaction, and employee retention. Note how these all flow together. Generally speaking, an equipped employee is a productive, happy, and longer-lasting employee. It's not complicated. It is also no different when we think of ministry. Training is vital.

Training is baked into the Scriptures. Notice that Jesus didn't simply call his disciples, announce he was the Messiah, and then send them out to make more disciples a week later. They spent three years with him. Every day was a mixture of formal and informal teaching and training. They listened, learned, watched, and were formed. Finally, after three years of intense training, he said, "Go and make disciples." The Apostle Paul trained local pastors. For some, like Timothy, it was a longer training period. Others went through shorter training depending on Paul's missionary travels. In some of those cases, he had to write letters to these new leaders and congregations to correct them as they needed more training. None of this is surprising. If being trained to work in a general business is necessary and helpful, how much more would training be necessary to do soul work in a secular and hostile environment? The stakes are so high. Without training, so much damage can be done.

Despite the obvious life application, believers can easily be unbalanced when thinking about training in ministry. On one hand, we can err in thinking that training must only be a certain format and utterly exhaustive in its contents. This can produce theological depth without mission fervor. On the other hand, we can err by thinking that training isn't all that important, equating our personal time with Jesus to the disciples' highly intentional three years. This can produce mission fervor without theological depth. In both cases, pride can grow based on training or lack of training. As a result, mission suffers.

Without getting into formats and models, the need for training is high. Arguments can be made for the benefits and drawbacks of every model. What I hope is clear is that soul work is absolutely serious business, and anything less than intentional training in the various disciplines needed for ministry is unwise and potentially harmful.

Let's focus primarily on training for front-line missions such as church planting and foreign mission work. I would argue that specialized pre-field training is a wise investment for sustained health and effectiveness. A common platitude

regarding training is, "They will get it on the field." Most certainly, a home or world missionary will get an education right out of the gate. However, the struggle is that once a person is "on the field," the pressure increases exponentially to produce results. Shortcuts can happen that can negatively impact missionaries or the mission. Thankfully, intentional pre-field training can help produce greater preparation and health. Here are some examples:

Key Components to Mission Training

- **Culture:** This is broadly contextual and includes language, history, religion, norms, and needs.
- **Skills:** Financial management, reporting, budgeting, navigating communication platforms, leadership, ministry skills for specific contexts, and team building.
- **Strategy:** The development of ministry systems, processes, and strategies that are in theological and philosophical alignment.
- **Pitfalls:** Learning about the success and mistakes of others enhances one's understanding of the mission task.
- **Spiritual life:** Growing in understanding of spiritual warfare and the importance of evangelism, prayer, and personal piety.
- **Evaluation:** Learning about your strengths and weaknesses. Red flags are spotted that might hinder your ministry (concerns include psychological, spiritual, discipline, and health). This is a vetting time that will enable the candidate to have greater emotional awareness to learn and grow.

One of the greatest benefits of mission training is that the Lord uses the gifts and experiences of his people to invest in the next generation of servants. I have personally benefited from a number of missionaries who poured themselves into me so I might be better equipped for mission challenges. Praise God for his people.

Serving as a home and world missionary is an exhilarating and ever-changing challenge. As a current AFLC mission director, my heart is for us to set up our planters and missionaries with the greatest chance to be spiritually and emotionally healthy as well as vocationally prepared for the demanding work of this front-line mission of God. It's a gift we can give them. May God continue to call, train, and send missionaries into the great harvest field.

Coyle, who serves Shiloh Church, Black Hawk, S.D., is the director of AFLC Home Missions.

Ephesians

4:12

“Their responsibility is to equip
God’s people to do his work and build up
the church, the body of Christ.”

Called to
train goers.



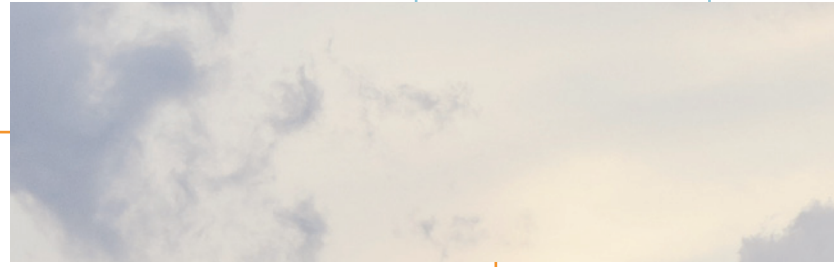
“Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”

Revelation

5:8

Called to
pray.

By David Perkins



Saints praying for saints

Have you ever wondered how the Lord himself views our prayers? If the Lord already knows our needs and the needs of those who are ministering the gospel around the world, then why do we need to pray? What is meant by “saint,” and who is one?

The word “saint” is related to the Greek word *hagios* (*ἅγιος*). It means to be holy or consecrated for Christ. In other words, saint refers to those people who have put their faith in Christ alone and have become holy or consecrated through faith in the Lamb of God who paid the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. Saints are simply Christians like you and me.

According to Revelation 5:8, our prayers are gathered in golden bowls and presented by the elders before the Lamb of God. Our prayers are a sweet aroma and blessing to the Lamb of God. The Lord loves to hear the prayers of his people. The Lord loves to hear saints praying for saints.

Praying is one of the most amazing things we can do because it’s a supernatural way to connect our focused needs directly to the Lord. The Lord delights in receiving those prayers, and he loves to act on them as we lay the needs of our fellow saints before our Lord.

During a short-term mission trip to our work in Alaska, I spent a day working on repairing and cleaning up a small church in Ekwok. The weather prevented us from flying there until early afternoon. We had an enormous number of tasks to be accomplished in a few short hours. I thought about all the people back home who were praying for our trip to be effective for his kingdom. We joined them in prayer to accomplish the tasks. After five hours, the amount of work accomplished was more than I could have imagined. Only the Lord could have helped us complete so much.

One morning a man walked into our men’s Bible study at the Net, and we shared the gospel message with him. He was led to tears and gave his life to the Lord right there. How was this possible? Prayer!

Truly, the work of the Spirit is guided by the prayers of his saints for the saints to accomplish the supernatural tasks that he prepared for us. We know that our family and friends were praying for our week in Alaska, and we felt it through his Spirit.

Ministry and missions are filled with tremendous distractions to daily plans. It is easy to lose focus and become pulled in many directions. When we pray for our missionaries and ministers, we are asking that the Lord will divinely act to orchestrate his plans. Prayer is a clear way to ask God to align daily ministry plans with the Lord’s plans. Jesus pulled away from the crowds daily for focused prayer time with his heavenly Father.

At Atonement Free Lutheran Church in Arlington, Wash., we have a practice of sharing a missions’ moment every month. We take about 10 minutes in a service to share about specific AFLC missionaries so that we can become more personally connected to the team or person. We contact the missionary for specific prayer needs and share them with our congregation. We corporately pray for these needs and bring the requests of these saints before the Lord. We also ask our congregation members to adopt a missionary for a year or multiple years. We encourage them to adopt missionaries’ prayer needs directly into their personal prayer times throughout the year.

The prayers of the saints for the saints are a way that we can actively participate in the Word of God being preached to the ends of the earth. We may not be able to be sent or become the physical hands of those who minister in mission work, but we can participate in the spiritual act of prayer for the saints.

One of my favorite verses throughout my Christian journey has been James 5:16b, “... the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Effectual, fervent prayer for God’s saints through the righteousness that Jesus Christ provides in salvation has great power to produce wonderful results! These words have been a powerful reminder of how much the Lord wants to accomplish through his saints and how he seeks to accomplish these mighty acts through prayer.

Saints praying for saints to produce more saints is a sweet incense placed in golden bowls before the Lord by the elders.

Perkins is a member of Atonement Free Lutheran, Arlington, Wash.

By Jon Nelson

Growing up in Northwest Montana, I had never really thought of there being different cultures. When I moved to Minneapolis to attend what is now the Free Lutheran Bible College (FLBC), I had my first real taste of culture shock. It was the first time I had to drive on a city freeway. There were no mountains to look to for directions, so I was frequently lost and began to have crippling anxiety. I didn't know where to go, I didn't know how to drive in a city, and for the first time in my life, I felt like a minority.

The Lord used this experience to begin to mold my heart and mind to see people who were different than me. It began to instill in my heart the question, Why are people geared so differently? I started to find myself in various restaurants around the cities exploring food I had never thought of eating and conversing with people I had never envisioned interacting with. These experiences led me to see even more of the intricacies in God's creation.

One of the highlights of my role with Journey Missions is being able to teach the cross-cultural ministries class to students at FLBC. We discuss what culture is, how each of us has a culture, and how to work within different cultures. One of the perks with this course is that students go on a city tour with Dr. Mark Olson. As a group, we find ourselves in different locations—the Hmong Market, the Somali mall, and the Latin *mercado*. There are a couple of facets to this outing. First, we want our students to feel like a minority. Next, we want them to have conversations with people who have a different cultural background and upbringing. Last, we want them to try their food. If you're willing to try the food, you've built a bridge to a conversation.

So, why is cross-cultural education important? Each of us has a different culture, which dictates how we see the world around us. Ryan Burge writes, "A phrase I often repeat to my students when we talk about respecting other people's political viewpoints is, 'Your world is not their world.' I might also say, 'Your story is not their story'" (*The Rise of the Nones*). As we move within the landscape of people's stories, worlds, and cultures, it helps to realize that people's worldviews vary depending on when, where, and how one was raised.

A simplistic narrative is that people fall into one of three cultural groups. Jayson Georges describes the three groups in his book *The 3D Gospel*. The first is guilt/innocence: "individualistic societies where people who break the laws are guilty and seek justice or forgiveness to rectify a wrong." The second is shame/honor: "collectivist cultures where people are shamed for not fulfilling group expectations seek to restore their honor before

the community." The third is fear/power: which "refers to animistic contexts where people afraid of evil and harm pursue power over the spirit world through magical rituals."

Many individuals in the West lean more into the guilt/innocence mindset, but as the culture around us continues to shift, it's helpful to better understand how to respond and relate to those who lean into the other major cultural mindsets. As believers, it's also vital to see that people from these other cultural worldviews view Scripture differently than we may be used to. It's often not wrong since the way Scripture is read is impacted by cultural influences.

Cross-cultural training and education have often been viewed as something only missionaries need. I would argue that because the United States has become more multicultural, many of us intermix with unfamiliar cultures. One of the goals in our class is for students to find encouragement in how God has given the world different cultures. I encourage them to stay away from right/wrong judgments (unless dictated by Scripture, in which case Scripture reigns supreme) and recognize that there is a gray area when working across cultures. How things are done in a Ugandan congregation will likely look very different than a congregation in North Dakota—and that's okay.

As believers in Christ Jesus, we have a unique opportunity to bridge cultural boundaries. There are challenges, but there are also many opportunities for growth as we work among the nations. Saying hi and asking how someone is doing is a great first step. In our culture, a "Hey, how are you?" is a greeting that doesn't warrant a response. When you ask that to someone from another culture, they might actually answer you. Be prepared to listen, not just to respond but to learn from them. A conversation with them can give you a picture of their lives and how they see God. This, in turn, gives you an opportunity to bridge the cultural gap in order to show them who Jesus is and what he means to you.

Cross-cultural relationships are a gift to everyone involved. Being educated in how to best relate to someone from a different culture leads to opportunities for further conversations. In learning more about others and how they view the world, we often have the opportunity to learn more about God. And, when we learn more about God, the author and creator of culture, there are multitudes of blessings ahead.

Nelson, a member of Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, is the department head of Journey Missions and teaches cross-cultural ministry at FLBC.



Called to teach.

“I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb.”

Revelation

7:9



By Michael Rokenbrodt

The Christmas movie *It's a Wonderful Life* allows the character George Bailey to look at an alternate history of his small town in which he no longer exists. His absence in that history has catastrophic impacts—people he knows are suddenly alone, in prison, utterly bereft, or dead. George learns he is needed in his town's timeline. Mordecai suggests about as much to Esther when he says, “And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). It would be an interesting thought exercise for each of us to ponder our impacts on the timeline of Kingdom history. Paul ponders this when he asks, “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?” (Romans 10:14-15a).

In the case of foreign missions, a large network of people are involved in educating, training, praying, giving, and going. Take away any of those pieces and imagine its impact on the receivers waiting in these other countries for their divine appointment with a missionary. Their testimonies give glory to God. Here are three examples from my own experience.

Eliab Kinene was a man who professed Christianity

and attended church. He had even served for years as a Sunday school teacher. But underneath he was a bitter man, far from Christ, and those who knew him best could sense it. His bitterness was rooted in betrayals from close family members that had occurred early in his life. He had joined resistance fighting in the bush during the bloody rule of Idi Amin, which had left him further confused and betrayed. It wasn't until his invitation to an Ambassador Institute class that he discovered the true character of Christ and his mission to free hearts held in bondage. The story Pastor Nate Jore was presenting that day was the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Pastor Nate explained the sordid history between the Jews and the Samaritans. Eliab heard the story of a member of an embittered tribe reaching out with love and compassion to a person from another tribe whose past, present, and future were colored with abuse. The Samaritan possessed a heart unshackled from bitterness and filled with love. That is the heart Eliab longed to possess. And Pastor Nate showed how the Samaritan's heart was replicating the love Christ had for his children and the love Christ wished for his children to bear toward one another. Eliab testifies that this was the day he was set free. In the weeks that

Romans

10:14

“How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”

Called
to receive.

followed, his wife and children testify that Eliab had become a different man, filled with joy and new zeal. Eliab now serves as a team leader for the Ambassador Institute.

Fauzia was a 12-year-old Muslim girl, abused and despised by her stepsiblings and stepparent. She was terrified by the teachings of her Muslim faith. She had been taught that if she did not keep the Muslim laws perfectly, she would be afflicted by demons both in this life and the next. But try as hard as she could, the demands of those laws continued to elude her ability to obey. Her stepbrothers delighted in tormenting her and had even put a poisonous serpent in her bed. She was frightened by the thought of demons, and she had seen them visit her in the night. Her heart was filled with anger and bitterness at Allah for stealing from her any chance of hope or happiness.

Then a missionary told her about a God who loved her so much that he had assigned the demands of the law to a Savior. This Savior could live the perfect life that Fauzia couldn't. Fauzia could see that this was the God she needed—a God who could free her and love her despite her imperfection. Fauzia took the new name of Tracy. She serves alongside Eliab as a leader in the Ambassador Institute and delights to tell anyone, especially Muslims,

about the law and the gospel.

One memorable day, I drove with a van of Ambassador Institute teachers to a metal-lined church building in a remote village. Our objective was to present the Ambassador Institute discipleship program to a group of prospective students. I had the privilege of introducing our team. “This is Momma Nissi. She was my teacher who trained me into the ministry you are about to see. And this is Alex, who became my first student. He is standing next to his wife Mary, who was his first student. And Mary is standing next to Sarah, who was her first student. Sarah will be coming out to be your teacher. Our hope is that one day you will introduce her as your teacher to your first students. And that one day your students will introduce you as their teacher to their first students.”

It is a true blessing to see one's place in the line of dominoes Christ has erected for the building of the Kingdom. In whatever part or support position you have decided to take in foreign missions, you have my gratitude. Along with Eliab's, Tracy's, and countless others.

Rokenbrodt, an AFLC missionary and seminarian, is the Ugandan national director of the Ambassador Institute.

By Jonni Sliver

Generosity is a funny word. It means different things to different people. Many people inwardly cringe when they hear the word because they assume they are going to be “touched” for a donation. For those people, generosity is an obligation. For others it is associated with guilt—you know the commercials on television that use everything from abandoned puppies to homeless children to make you feel bad about what you have? These tactics try to guilt you into giving some of it up. But real generosity comes from a different place and has a very different result.

Real generosity comes from following God’s example. We all know that God loved us first, but sometimes we forget that he also gave first. Think of the first Bible verse you learned (at least one of them): “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son . . .” (John 3:16). The Bible is full of God giving—from the first breath given, to bread from heaven, to the precious promises of the prophets, to his own Son. God loves to give good things to his beloved! And because we are created in his image, the closer we walk with him, the greater joy we have in generosity.

The joy of giving comes from a perspective I learned from my mom: the I-get-to, not I-have-to perspective. Obligation creates the cringe response, but when we understand that we have the privilege to be a part of what God is doing, the “have to” becomes “get to,” and the joy flows! How can we be anything but cheerful givers?

Felipe is a boy from our church in Campo Mourão. He is now a teenager and helps to take the offering during the Sunday service. But when he was as young as 4 or 5 years old, he loved to give offerings at church. If the usher accidentally didn’t stop with the collection bag, Felipe would chase him down the aisle. He loved giving!

I have seen the same joy in the hearts of precious children in our churches. Honestly, I have been amazed by vacation Bible school gifts that have come from children who have seen pictures and videos of the Miriam Home, who identify with our children, and joyfully want to share. Gifts have been given that far exceeded everyone’s expectations. Other times, local Women’s Missionary Federation groups have reached out in amazing ways. And more times than I can count, these precious gifts have arrived before an unexpected need came up. God used the loving gifts of children to meet a need he saw coming—needs that we hadn’t anticipated. At other times, small gifts came at special moments when the gift, though not large, was specific to a need. Praise the Lord for sensitive hearts!

More than we know

When we think about giving, it is normal to only see the one-way action of something going from me to you, like an arrow. But giving looks more like a star. One act of giving can reach out and touch many people.

A lovely example of giving can be found in Acts 2. The new church in Jerusalem was marked by several features, among them their love for one another and their great generosity. And these qualities had results of their own—a tremendous testimony to the community in general and more people coming to Jesus every day.

It is delightful to see the varied ways we can give, from love offerings to hospitality to meals shared. God provides all that we need “according to his riches in glory” (Philippians 4:19). He allows his children to deliver his gifts. Whatever you have in your hands can be used by God for his glory.

A Delightful Circle

There are so many ideas the world just doesn’t understand. The giving circle is one of them. In the world, people strive to receive and strive to hold on. It reminds me of the old Daffy Duck cartoons. Daffy tried to find a treasure, and when he did, he sat on top of it crying, “Mine! Mine! Mine!” But in the kingdom of God, we receive so that we can share. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about this: “You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God” (II Corinthians 9:11–12). We learn through experience that it is wonderful to receive God’s blessings, but the joy increases as we share.

Another sweet reminder is in Luke 6:38: “Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

God is doing amazing things around the world. In AFLC World Missions outreaches in Uganda, India, Switzerland, Brazil, Paraguay, and Mexico. In AFLC Home Mission ministries from Alaska to Hawaii, and from Arizona to North Dakota and more. We can all be active participants in his good work, we just have to consider what God has put in our hands to share.

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



Called to give.

II Corinthians

9:11

“You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”



• HOPE FREE LUTHERAN, KILLDEER, N.D.

Building dedication.

BY PASTOR ANDY COYLE

Homes do not make a family, yet homes provide stability and a place to nourish a family. Buildings matter. Church buildings matter. Sometimes it's easy to overvalue them. Yet it's also easy to undervalue them. Hope Free Lutheran in Killdeer, N.D., can now testify to the blessing of a facility. This young congregation recently dedicated their new building on August 25. It was a packed sanctuary with guests from across the region. Here's the story of how this happened.

A number of years ago, congregations from the Western North Dakota district had a vision for a new congregation in the Killdeer area, which was growing and in need of a strong and healthy congregation. They prayed, worked, and invested. The Lord opened the door, and a new congregation was birthed. Pastor Gideon and Erin Johnson received the call to pastor this new group of people, and the ministry continued to grow and be established.

In 2023, the Lord opened up a local facility in Killdeer. It was a large Department of Transportation building right off the main highway. Members of Hope Free Lutheran sensed this was an open door and quickly proceeded to investigate the possibilities.

This is where the story gets inspiring. Our AFLC Fundamental Principles clearly lay out how free congregations can mutually assist one another for the advancement of the Kingdom. This happens in many ways. In this specific case, congregations from the district rallied around Hope with very generous and sacrificial giving. It wasn't just this district, though. Home Missions was able to give Hope Free Lutheran a gift from our Builders Fellowship Fund, a fund that is supported by faithful givers throughout the AFLC and which is designed to help new congregations get in buildings.

The truth is that it would have been very challenging for a member of Hope to procure and remodel this facility on their own. Yet, they have never been on their own. They have a family around them: congregations working together to advance the kingdom of God. When all was said and done, the members of Hope Free Lutheran were able to raise almost the exact amount needed to purchase the building (33 percent Hope, 40 percent district, 27 percent Builders Fellowship). This wasn't just a transactional event. This was missions: our AFLC people passionate for new believers in Christ.

Is this reproducible? I think so. Friends, we are not meant to do ministry alone. What a joy it is for us to come alongside new missions with our time, treasures, and talents. May the Lord continue to use our AFLC to plant and develop more life-changing congregations across the United States and beyond.



Pastor Gideon Johnson (right) serves Hope Free Lutheran, Killdeer. The congregation worships in their new facility.

Sponsored congregations.

- Hope Free Lutheran, Killdeer, N.D.
- Living Stone Chinese Fellowship: St. Paul, Minn.
- Waikiki Beach Gathering, Honolulu, Hawaii
- Hope Lutheran, Enderlin, N.D.
- Emmanuel Lutheran, Ankeny, Iowa

Coyle, who serves Shiloh Church, Black Hawk, S.D., is the director of AFLC Home Missions.

New board members.

Fall is here and members of the Women's Missionary Federation Board are preparing our 2025 Bible study. Our newly elected officers will take their positions on the national board during the All Boards meeting this month. We have asked them to share a short biography as an introduction to you.

Karen Pederson, president

A song by Casting Crowns came to mind when I was asked to write about myself: "Who am I that the Lord of all the earth would care to know my name?" The most important fact about me is that I am a child of the King and have been since my mom and dad baptized me.



My first memories of the WMF come from my mom. I can picture her Bible being open as she went through the WMF Bible studies. My parents were active in everything at church. On our family vacations as kids, we attended the AFLC Annual Conferences as well as family Bible camps. My next step was attending the Free Lutheran Bible College (formerly AFLBS) for two years, where being in God's Word established a faith deep in my heart. Desiring to live out my faith and share it with others led me to the Lutheran Bible Institute in Seattle, where I earned a Bachelor of Arts in Christian education.

That led to a position as the Christian education director at Zion Lutheran in Tioga, N.D. There, I met my husband, Randy. We raised our four kids while I worked at Zion. I wanted those in Sunday school, youth group, and our local WMF to know Jesus deeper through Bible studies. My desire is for all ladies to "know Christ and the power of his resurrection" (Philippians 3:10), then to live it out daily and experience God's grace through the WMF. Ephesians 4:12 has focused me on another goal, "to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up."

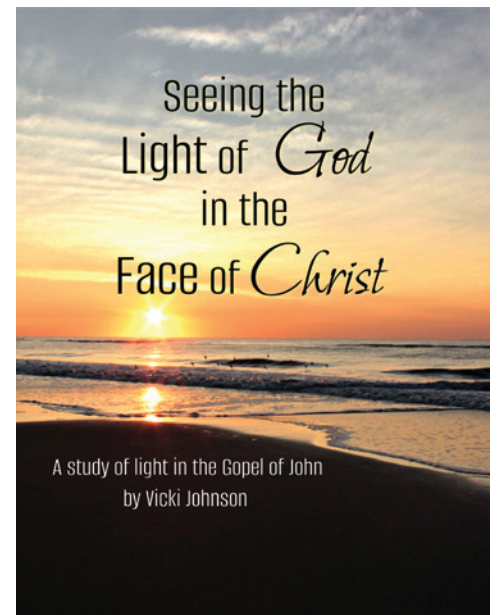
Linda Fugleberg, communication secretary

I am so thankful that God sought me out when I was a little freckled farm girl from Salol, located midway between Warroad and Roseau, Minn. I am also grateful for parents who brought me to the Lord in baptism, where his saving work began in me. They faithfully brought me to hear the Word of God in Sunday school and church, where God continued to work in my life. A big transformation took place when I attended the Luther League Convention (now called FLY) in Moorhead, Minn. After one night's convicting message from the Word, I responded to God's call. The speaker helped me understand more fully the grace of God, and I received an assurance of salvation.



Later, I attended and graduated from the AFLC's Bible school (now FLBC), where the teaching of the Word and the fellowship of believers solidified that faith and helped me to go forward in confidence to serve God. I am blessed to be married to Pastor Jim Fugleberg, to serve the

Lord together in the churches he has called us to be a part of, to be active in the local and district WMFs, and to serve in various offices at both levels. I am humbled and overjoyed to serve in our local jail ministry, to lead a local GriefShare ministry, and to serve on the Fargo Church Plant Steering Committee. Because God continues to burden me for the lost, I love mission work at home and abroad. I have been able to visit our AFLC mission fields in India and Brazil, and just recently Naknek, Alaska. I love people and love communication, so it is with joy and dependence on God that I now have the opportunity to serve him as communication secretary on our national WMF board.



2025 Bible study

The 2025 WMF Bible study, *Seeing the Light of God in the Face of Christ*, written by Vicki Johnson, is a study of light in the Gospel of John. More information on this study will be available later this fall. Visit our website:

- **Website:** aflc.org/women



Pray earnestly.

BY PASTOR JOHN LEE

I am amazed at the power of God at work in Brazil's national leaders. They often serve without regard to their retirement, personal development, comfort, finances, or families' sacrifices. Only the Lord knows how to repay them for all they have sacrificed for the gospel.

My pastor, Alex Veiga (senior pastor at Central Free Lutheran), is the fruit of the work of Pastor Connelly Dyrud (former AFLC missionary to Brazil) and the congregation's volleyball ministry. He works bivocationally in the congregation that introduced him to Jesus. He mentors three of our Free Lutheran seminarians, helps our congregations with audiovisual needs, leads worship (locally and nationally), helps our Bible camp, and often serves as a national youth leader. He is a gift to our congregations.

Our layman Claudio, besides being an active member of his congregation and serving as a children's ministry leader in local and national contexts, works bi-vocationally as an evangelist on Friday nights at long-time preaching point Garden of Hope (Jardim Esperança) in a challenging neighborhood. The congregation's building has been eaten out by termites and is in a state of disrepair. They are beginning to have more Sunday services and perform more marriages, baptisms, and communion services in the neighborhood. He is a gift to our congregations.

Pastor Marcos is in full-time ministry and serves the congregation in the Lar Paraná neighborhood (Lar Paraná FLC). He has also served faithfully for years as a professor at our Free Lutheran Seminary (SETELL). He is a gift to our congregations.

My Brazilian brother-pastor Fernando is the senior pastor at our preaching point in a governmental housing neighborhood (Cohapar FLC) and teaches at SETELL. His congregation has outgrown its building, which has fallen into disrepair. He often organizes Free Lutheran camps and events at our seminary and serves as the director for our Free Lutheran publishing ministry in Brazil (DRELL). Fernando mentors three seminarians who attend his congregation, and we work together to mentor seminarians in the afternoons during the time set aside for DRELL. He is a gift to our congregations.

My focus is discipleship—getting behind the Brazilian congregations, pastors, seminary students, and professors—and making connections between our maturing Brazilian congregations and their mother American congregations. We have great spiritual and tangible needs.

My schedule includes regular meetings with Alex and Fernando and connecting with several other pastors; teaching two classes in the evenings at SETELL; and translating materials that instill our biblical emphases on law and gospel, repentance and faith, and servant leadership and the congregation.

Recently, Fernando and I translated *The Modes and Meaning of Baptism* for Pastor Jonathan Abel's class on the means of grace. He is also making use of our translation of Dr. Francis Monseth's piece, "Means of Grace," in *One Thing I Seek*. There is a great need for a Lutheran understanding of the means of grace here. Pastor Jonathan is uniquely capable of ministering to our students.

Fernando is busy reworking courses on the Gospel of John and the Minor Prophets. I am working with seminarian GianLuca to prepare material for my Greek I and Captivity Epistles courses.

My wife, Hannah, hosts and leads a Bible study for moms with young kids with Bruna (Pastor Fernando's wife). They will soon make use of our latest women's study, Fernando's translation of the WMF Bible study, *A Study on Hope* (by Joyce Erickson). Bruna helps us make the appropriate corrections for our final version, which we hope to release at the annual Free Lutheran Women's Congress.

I ask you in Jesus' name: "Pray earnestly" for our daughter congregations. Pray for more workers. Pray for seminarians from our Free Lutheran schools to come and strengthen our Brazilian daughter congregations.

Lee is an AFLC missionary serving in Campo Mourão, Brazil.



Marking ten years.

BY JON NELSON

The dream of Journey Missions began on the back of a napkin on a flight back from South Africa. My girlfriend, Heidi—who is now my wife—and I were talking about how the Lord used our experiences with short-term missions to give us a heart for cultures and nations. We wanted the people of our AFLC to have opportunities to experience missions, too, and for God to work in their hearts like he had in ours.

Heidi and I have just completed our tenth year of service with Journey Missions, and we are so thankful and encouraged that we are able to live out this dream every day. Not every step has been perfect, but we know the Lord has been in each step of the process.

Over the last ten years, Journey Missions has taken 22 trips to seven countries. Our goals on these trips are to encourage our missionaries and ministry leaders while giving opportunities to our AFLC congregation members to serve in different cultural contexts.

On mission trips I have had many blessings, from seeing someone realize a new ministry focus to having students choose to attend our Bible college and watching people experience a passion to be involved in their local congregations when they return home. In the missionary assistant program, I have seen the Lord move in people's lives to confirm a call into a new vocation, and I have watched them bring their experience of working with a missionary in a new cultural context into their lives to impact the world around them. The Lord has truly worked in the lives of those who chose to go.

A few months ago, I had a meeting with a friend to ask how we can keep a fresh vision for our ministry. Ten years is a long time for one vision, and I want to be sure we don't become stale. My friend reminded me that short-term trips may be repetitive to me, but they are always new for the team. As I've reflected on the last ten years, I've found this to be a driving force for Journey Missions' longevity. Yes, some of the trips may be similar, but the teams are always new—and what a blessing it is to see the Lord work in people's hearts to encourage them to serve him through Journey Missions! I am so blessed and honored to have this opportunity.

Ten years is a long time. Heidi and I have been blessed with four kids. And as I look over our prayer cards, I can see a few more details of my aging (Heidi, of course, looks the same). Life has changed a lot, but the Lord has stayed constant. For that, I am eternally grateful.

Thank you for your support of Journey Missions. Thank you to each of you who pray, give, and go. This work could not be done without you, and this ministry couldn't be sustained without your prayers and gifts. Most of all, thank you to God, who has made this all possible. Only the Lord knows what these next years will hold, but I'm thankful for the opportunity to continue serving him and our congregations with Journey Missions. We look forward to the blessings ahead.



Journey Missions trips

- **Israel:** Fall 2024
Limited to 10 people
- **Brazil:** February 2025
Open
- **Website:** aflcworldmissions.org/journey-missions

Nelson, a member of Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, is the department head of AFLC Journey Missions.



Upcoming Bible College and Seminary events

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary will host several upcoming events on their Plymouth, Minn., campus. For more info, visit flbc.edu/events.

Spotlight: Apologetics

Christopher Talbot, the Youth and Family Ministry Program coordinator and campus pastor at Welch College, Gallatin, Tenn., will be the guest instructor at the fall Spotlight: Apologetics conference, with a focus on Francis Schaeffer and his vision for the application of apologetics in the Christian life. The conference will be held Oct. 7–8 in Hauge Chapel. Talbot, who is a Schaeffer scholar, specializes in topics related to the influence of popular culture on the Church, the importance of discernment in Christian living, and how believers can view culture through a biblical lens. He is the author of *Remodeling Youth Ministry: A Biblical Blueprint for Ministering to Students* and a co-editor of *Christians in Culture: Cultivating a Christian Worldview for All of Life*.

Through four sessions, he will explore the implications of Schaeffer's work on contemporary Christian thought. The opening session (6:30 p.m. Monday) will introduce Frances Schaeffer. Tuesday's sessions include "Ideas Have Consequences" (9 a.m.), "Schaeffer's Pro-Life Legacy" (10 a.m.), and "Schaeffer: A Prophet for Today" (11 a.m.).

UpClose and alumni tournaments

Junior and senior high school students and recent graduates are invited to attend a free two-day preview event in which they will be welcome to sit in on classes, attend chapel and vesper services, play volleyball and basketball, and meet current students and professors. The event will take place Oct. 17–18.

The alumni tournaments will follow, beginning at 6 p.m. on Oct. 18 with the women's volleyball tournament, followed at 8 p.m. by the women's basketball tournament. The men's basketball tournament will begin at 8 a.m. on Oct. 19 with lunch served at noon. Children's activities will be offered from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Individual registration is \$20 (women) or \$40 (men). The men's tournament team fee is \$300. Register online at flbc.edu/alumni-tournament-registration.

Sixtieth Anniversary Gala

Friends of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary are invited to a gala on Nov. 14 to celebrate the schools' 60th anniversary. The event will include a catered dinner, student testimonies, a ministry update, and a keynote address from Dr. Phillip Dearborn, president of the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE). Registration is requested.

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/s/ Ruth Gunderson, Managing Editor



Pastors' Conference schedule

The event theme focuses on the pastoral call to ministry

The AFLC Pastors' Conference will be held Oct. 1–3 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis.

The theme this year is “Called to a Holy Calling” from II Timothy 1, through which participants will pray, listen, think, and encourage one another in the reality of God’s call as a servant shepherd.

The schedule begins with an opening service at 7 p.m. on Oct. 1. Sessions on Oct. 2 include “The New Testament Basis for the Pastoral Call” with Dr. Jarrod Hylden, “The Role of Congregations in the Pastoral Call” with Pastor Brian Lunn, and “Call Process Discussion” with

a panel of AFLC pastors. In addition, Wednesday afternoon’s schedule will include sessions on two topics impacting ministry today: divorce and remarriage, and mandatory reporting.

The day will close with a banquet and session led by Dr. James Molstre.

Thursday morning’s schedule includes two sessions: “Luther and the Office of the Ministry” with Dr. Jason Gudim and “Walther and Sverdrup on Ordination” with Dr. Steve Mundfrom. The conference will close following lunch. For more information, visit aflc.org/pastorsconference.

FLY Convention registration now open

Youth event set for June 30–July 5, 2025, in Estes Park, Colorado

Online registration for the 2025 Free Lutheran Youth Convention opens October 1. The event, a ministry geared toward teens through AFLC Youth Ministries, is held every two years at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colo.

Registration is organized in four deadlines, beginning with an early date and the best rates set for Nov. 21, 2024. The second deadline is Jan. 23, 2025. The third and final online registration deadline is May 15, 2025. Last, walk-up registrations are available at the event on June 30, 2025.

Registration tiers include students, dorm room leaders, staff, and children ages 4–11. A breakdown of the rates and costs can be found on the FLY Convention website (flyconvention.org). A non-refundable and non-transferrable deposit of \$150/ person is required for registration.

The FLY Convention website includes many resources for those interested in more information, including tips for registration, a digital media kit, policies, etc. The



BEHOLD

FLY 2025 | JOHN 1:29

FLY Convention Podcast (found on all podcast apps) also includes helpful registration tips.

The theme for the 2025 convention is “Behold,” with a focus on John 1:29. Evening speakers, workshop and Bible study leaders will focus on the theme throughout the week. Evening speakers include Pastor Nathan Olson, Matt Monseth, Pastor Scott Stroud, Pastor Eric Westlake, and Pastor Ben Sollie.

KAKN KAKD KIGI RADIO

HOME ABOUT CONTACT SCHEDULE DONATE LEGAL LISTEN ONLINE

Listen Online



KAKN radio now offers online streaming option

The Alaska Mission’s radio station, KAKN 100.9 FM, is now available to stream online at KAKN.org and will soon be available on online streaming sites. KAKN is owned and operated by the Bay Broadcasting Company and is part of the AFLC Alaska Mission in Naknek, Alaska. KAKN is a vitally important resource in rural Alaska villages. Missionaries working at KAKN share the love of Jesus through Christian programming, music, news, and local events. We covet your prayers and support as we run this nonprofit station to bring Christ to those living in bush Alaska. If you feel led to support the cost and work of KAKN, visit our website (aflchomemissions.org/home-missions-alaska-mission-online-giving) and select “KAKN Radio” from the dropdown box.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Joshua Skogerboe accepted a call to serve Veritas Church, Prescott, Ariz.

Pastor Philip Kittelson has accepted a call to serve St. Petrie Lutheran, Leland, Ill.

Michael Rokenbrodt has been named as the national director of the Ambassador Institute in Uganda.



Pastor Roy Johnson

Pastor Roy Berent Johnson, 88, of Fergus Falls, Minn., formerly of Big Fork, Minn., died Aug. 29. Born May 19, 1936, in Brooklyn, N.Y., he was the son of Alfred and Emily Johnson. He married LaVonne Sjule in 1956 in Fergus Falls. She preceded him in death.

He graduated from Hillcrest Lutheran Academy in Fergus Falls, in 1954. After marriage, he attended the Church of the Lutheran Brethren seminary in Fergus Falls. Following graduation, he served various Lutheran Brethren congregations in Malta and Sidney, Mont., and Dickinson, N.D.. He also served many AFLC congregations including Maple Bay, Minn., Ortonville, Minn., Ortle, S.D., Durant, Okla., Roseau, Minn., Northome, Minn., and Grand Rapids, Minn.

Surviving are five children, Rhonda (David) Freeh, Robb (Karla) Johnson, Rick (Barb) Johnson, Ryan (Heather) Johnson, and Robyn (Aeric) Larson; one sister, Dorothy Bearse, 14 grandchildren, and 14 great-grandchildren.

The service was held Sept. 6 at Bethel Lutheran, Fergus Falls. Burial was in Audubon City Cemetery, Audubon, Minn.



Marcella Sather

Marcella Alvina Eleanor (Puttbrese) Sather, 83, of Greenbush, Minn., died Sept. 6. Born Nov. 28, 1940, in Poplar Grove Township, Minn., she was the daughter of William and Marcella (Vanous) Puttbrese. She married Alvin Sather on June 3, 1958, in Strathcona, Minn.

She attended Grass Lake Country School, rural Greenbush, Minn. After marriage, they moved to Illinois where Marcie worked for Del Monte and Ideal. After returning to Greenbush in 1968, she worked at Polaris Industries. She owned Marcie's Kitchen and later The Coffee Cup in Greenbush. They served the following AFLC congregations: United Free Lutheran, Greenbush, Minn.; Bethany Free Lutheran, Bemidji, Minn.; Warroad Free Lutheran, Warroad, Minn.; Pukwana Free Lutheran, Pukwana, S.D; and St. Olaf Free Lutheran, Chamberlain, S.D.

Surviving are her husband, Pastor Alvin Sather; two sons, Aldyn (Brenda) Sather, and Rick (Trish) Sather; one daughter, Tracy (Nathan) Halbakken; one brother, Rudy (Butch) Puttbrese; three sisters, Carol Paine, Kay Lee, and Ginny Johnson; 12 grandchildren; and 16 great-grandchildren.

The service was held Sept. 16 at United Free Lutheran Church of Greenbush with Pastor David Niemela officiating. Burial was in Old Bethania Cemetery, Greenbush.



Pastor Jan Horne

Pastor Jan Horne, 88, of Robins, Iowa, died Aug. 26. Born Feb. 5, 1936, in Oslo, Norway, he was the son of Arthur and Solveig Horne. He married Linda Nelson on July 19, 1964.

He survived the Nazi occupation of Norway in World War II. Along with his two older brothers, he was sent to live in an orphanage. He was adopted by his paternal aunt and uncle, Karl and Herborg Steen, and grew up in Kristiansand, Norway. He served in the Norwegian Air Force for three years as an airline mechanic. He immigrated to the United States in 1957, where he learned about working on jet engines. While serving in the U.S. Air Force, he received a call into the ministry. He attended Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa, graduating in 1963, and then attended Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, where he received his pastoral training. After marriage, they served parishes in several states, but spent the most time in Illinois. He served Faith Lutheran, Fairbury, Neb., and Zion Lutheran, Ashkum, Ill. He combined his love of flying with ministry by becoming an airline pilot with Mississippi Valley Airlines, now known as Wisconsin Air. After retiring to the Cedar Rapids, Iowa, area, Jan served as a substitute pastor at area churches.

Surviving are his wife, Linda; four children, Erik (Michele) Horne, Brent (Becky) Horne, Kirk (Julie) Horne, and Kari (Gary) Sicard; 11 grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

The service was held Aug. 31 at King of Kings Lutheran, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Memorials may be given to Variety Children's Charity of Iowa.

AUGUST MEMORIALS

Bible College

Ruth Claus
Dennis Strand
Annette Fagerberg
Vonnie Torkelson

WMF

Edith Johnson

World Missions

Alvin & Francis Grothe

General Fund

Stuart Flaa

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-August 31, 2024

FUND	REC'D IN AUGUST	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% OF SUBSIDY	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$30,209	\$286,421	62	\$268,791
Evangelism	6,411	81,636	60	77,115
Youth Ministries	8,159	104,118	67	93,843
Parish Education	8,910	129,391	69	102,920
Seminary	18,333	190,480	67	184,208
Bible College	36,121	463,879	99	270,495
Home Missions	19,077	204,196	48	196,166
World Missions	24,566	255,538	53	245,933
Personal Support	50,378	546,742	71	499,165
TOTALS	\$202,164	\$2,262,401	67	1,938,635

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



The way of love.

BY PASTOR TERRY OLSON

Congregational life is not always a picture of love. So it was in Corinth. Gifted speakers boldly declared the purposes of God regarding his salvation. People were drawn to Paul, Apollos, or Cephas. To know and understand the hidden things of Christ and the cross was a gift that many had received. And, in turn, they had increased in faith and confidence in Christ, who granted the forgiveness of sins to the repentant. This had led them to “give all possessions to feed the poor” and even to be ready to give their lives for Christ. I suppose that this would be an attractive congregation to many. But here in I Corinthians 13 we are told that these necessary marks of a free and living congregation make us nothing more than noise, both in the fellowship of believers and to the world around us, if love is missing.

Many might ask, “How could love be missing in such a congregation as Corinth—especially when a concern for teaching the truth was prevalent?” But it can be noted that the lack of love was affecting their teaching and understanding. Throughout both epistles to Corinth, Paul had to clarify that the gospel of Christ is the message of the preaching and of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Is there a difference between doctrine and life? At first glimpse, we could answer no. Life comes from truth, and truth produces life. And we need the Word

to create life out of nothing. But Paul is drawing the distinction between doctrine and life and the importance of both in the congregation.

Luther stated, “Doctrine is heaven; life is earth. In life there is sin, error, uncleanness, and misery, mixed, as the saying goes, ‘with vinegar.’ Here love should condone, tolerate, be deceived, trust, hope, and endure all things (I Corinthians 13:7); here the forgiveness of sins should have complete sway, provided that sin and error are not defended. ‘One dot’ of doctrine is worth more than ‘heaven and earth’ (Matthew 5:18); therefore, we do not permit the slightest offense against it. But we can be lenient toward errors of life. For we, too, err daily in our life and conduct; so do all the saints, as they earnestly confess in the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed. But by the grace of God our doctrine is pure; we have all the articles of faith solidly established in sacred Scripture” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 27, pp. 41–42).

Congregational life, then, is marked by Christ’s love—that is, his mercy, grace, and forgiveness. We say in the Apostle’s Creed that “I believe in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins ... Amen.” But why and how is this love manifested in the Holy Christian Church and the Communion of Saints? It is in the forgiveness of sins! We are told in the Word that “just as Christ laid down his life with the brethren, so we too should lay down our lives for the brethren”

(I John 3:16). And also in John 13:34–35 Jesus says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also should love one another. By this, all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” This love is seen at the cross of Christ: “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing ...” (Luke 23:44). God’s love is expressed in Psalm 103:8, 10, and 14. And when one is captured by his love, then life takes on a new spirit of mercy and forgiveness.

The way of love in the congregation flows from the gospel of Christ and is marked by the description in vv. 4–7: “Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

The way of love flows from the cross of Christ and permeates the congregation. The way of love, therefore, has its roots and foundation in God himself. And the only revelation and power of that way is the Holy Word and his Holy Spirit. Thus, flowing from truth, it touches the hearts, lives, and souls of the brothers and sisters in Christ and the world around us. With both the truth of God’s Word and the Spirit of love in the congregation, the testimony of Jesus shines brightly. The way of love reinforces the gospel of Jesus’ love through his forgiveness.

Olson is the assistant pastor at Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D.

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SOMETHING TO SHARE

The violence of God.

BY KIRSTIE SKOGERBOE

My favorite author is a Southern Gothic horror story writer named Flannery O'Connor. For anyone who knows me, this is not intuitive. What draws me to her stories, however, is their profound Christian engagement with a theme that unsettles, confuses, or grieves most believers at some point in their lives: the violence of God.

O'Connor's stories are horrific because they display ordinary people's proclivity for abject evil, forcing readers to admit their own complicity in the wreckage of our world. They also point to the opposite spiritual reality: there is a God who is not blind to evil, and he has done and will do something about it. Interestingly, in O'Connor's stories, the details that suggest God's activity and presence are also violent: a drowning that points to baptism or the body of a despised but innocent man crushed by a tractor.

Stories like these make me wonder: What do we make of the fact that God can be violent? Can it rightly disturb us? Can it comfort us? The more I've thought about it, I've noticed three ways that I observe and experience God's violence, and three ways it points me to Christ.

Believers experience God's protective and victorious violence against evil. Sometimes this occurs in a unique way: our baptisms, for example, when our sinful nature is killed and buried with Christ (Romans 6:3–6). But it also happens any time he crushes Satan under our feet by strengthening our faith, drawing us to repentance, and thwarting evil activity around us. Some violent images in the Old Testament—like Jael driving a stake through Sisera's head—prefigure the violence that Jesus exerts against evil on our behalf.

Truly, he has bruised the serpent's head.

I've also seen the mystery of God's violence in suffering. Some Christians confidently assert that God allows our suffering but doesn't cause it. Yet the biblical narrative makes it hard to assert anything about God's responsibility for our pain. Scripture tells us that God *allowed* Satan to torment Job (Job 1:12) but *caused* the illness that killed David's first child with Bathsheba (II Samuel 12:15). Jesus also said that the men who died when a tower fell on them did *not* die because of specific divine judgment (Luke 13:4–5). When we see suffering, then, we find ourselves asking Christ, "Are *you* doing this?" The fact that it is a painful question does not change that we must turn to him to ask it.

When we do ask that question, we encounter a third form of divine violence, and it's the most brutal and comforting of all: the Father's violence against the Son on the cross. God does not meet the devil's violence with gentleness, but with a violence so destructive against himself that it destroys the devil's works. All our hope depends on this single act of divine violence, and all our suffering flows into Jesus' blood.

How do we relate to a violent God who loves us—or to a loving God who is violent? We thank him that he is our defender. We wrestle with him in confusion, anger, and grief. And we rest because it was his will to crush our Savior and spare us (Isaiah 53:10).

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