

THE 

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LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



Give them
Faith



ENCOURAGING
WORD

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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KEEPING A SPIRIT OF CONFESSION

BY PASTOR KENT SPERRY

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Most of us recognize our sinfulness. We recognize our imperfection. We realize that, no matter how hard we try, no matter how hard we strive to do better, we always fall short.

This is good. It's important that we recognize our sinfulness. It's important that we recognize our inability to change ourselves. Without this recognition, we would never understand our need for salvation or look to Jesus in faith.

We would, instead, continue to look to ourselves. We would continue to trust in ourselves. And, in this way, we would miss out on this great blessing of God.

The problem is that we often resign ourselves to the sin with which we struggle. We tell ourselves that this is just the way we are. We tell ourselves that there is no changing. And for this reason, we, as well as others, have to accept ourselves warts and all.

In addition to recognizing our sin and our weakness, we must also realize that in Jesus we have hope. We must realize that He is able to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We must realize that He can change us for the better.

In I Thessalonians 3, starting in verse 12, Paul writes: "... and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your

hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."

We have hope because the Lord can make us to increase and abound in love. He is able to establish our hearts blameless in holiness before God. Although we are naturally selfish and self-centered, the Lord is able to work within us. He is able to transform us.

I'm not suggesting that we can be perfect on this side of eternity. Our sinful nature will remain a part of us until the end. However, we also don't have to resign ourselves to the sins with which we struggle.

We must, of course, bring our sin to Him in a spirit of confession. We must acknowledge to Him our guilt, asking for His forgiveness. But we can also ask God to help us with our sinful desires and tendencies. We can ask Him for strength that we might love one another as He has called us.

As we do so, we can trust that God can and will produce growth in our lives. We can trust that He will produce in us the fruit of faith. We can have hope that by His grace, things can change for the better.

Sperry serves Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah, N.D.

The devil is a better theologian than any of us and is a devil still.

—A.W. Tozer

Youth: Feed them, work them, love them—and you'll have them.

—Henrietta Mears

He who teaches the Bible is never a scholar; he is always a student.

—Anonymous

A major problem develops when there's too much feeding and not enough feedback, too much passivity and not enough participation.

—David W. Mains

To teach something you don't know is like coming back from somewhere you haven't been.

—Vance Havner

Our appreciation of salvation is in direct relation to our understanding of the pit of sin from which we were dug.

—Joseph Bayly

Give them **Jesus**



By Suzanne Davenport Tietjen

My little leather Bible contains some loving reminders within the pages of the Word of God. Aunt Kay's yellowed bookmark holds the location of the 23rd Psalm, while Mrs. Edwards' faded bookmark kept watch for more than 50 years at John 3:16, reminding me of her prayers every time I saw it.

They never met, this Sunday school teacher with snow-white hair and my childless aunt, but they were both instrumental in drawing me into a close, loving relationship with Jesus. These church ladies modeled their faith and nurtured my own.

Most young people aren't as fortunate as I was. It's easy to assume that children who have sat in Sunday school classes, around dinner tables saying grace, and in church pews drawing on bulletins since they've been able to hold a crayon will come to know Jesus as someone who sees, knows, and cares about them by the time they enter their teens. Sadly, despite being brought up in church and raised in loving families, the majority of our young people do not see God as intimately aware of them as individuals or as a source of real help in the difficulties they face.

Children without any Christian education have even less of a concept of a God who knows their name, much less, loves them enough to have died on their behalf.

How can we give them Jesus?

First, we need to recruit teachers with a deep, living faith in Him. These teachers need to communicate their faith in a personal, heart-knowledge way, along with the head-knowledge approach of confirmation and curriculum. Merton Strommen, in his book *Passing On the Faith*, quoted an observation made by an African-American sociologist who spoke in a group of Christian education researchers: "You whites know the advantage of having teachers in your congregations who have a good education and superior materials. In our churches Sunday school is often little more than a grandmother with little education telling her pupils what Jesus means to her." That would speak to hearts of any age.

We also need to find out where students are in their spiritual journey. Surveys, spiritual time lines, or conversations around a campfire could help us here.

Kids love to be heard, and what they share would reveal their needs. Surveys show many of our young people aren't aware of Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Most deny ever feeling any sense of

God's presence. According to Scripture, our God truly sees us (Genesis 16:13-14), but concepts like these can be hard to convey. Be alert for opportunities to talk about Jesus one-on-one with young people. This kind of mentoring has long-lasting, even eternal effects on our youth. It is crucial for us to communicate and model grace. Many of our youth agree with statements like, "The way to be accepted by God is to sincerely try to live a good life," or, "If I say I believe in God and do right, I will go to heaven." Seeing Christianity as something we *do* is not grace. All of us internalize rules in an attempt to figure out how to live effectively from infancy on. For instance, if I'm hungry, I cry. Mommy comes and feeds me, I feel better. So *that's* how this works!

Grace (unmerited favor) is counterintuitive. We struggle with it. I heard Phil Vischer (of VeggieTales fame) lament that he'd hoped to teach kids about grace and faith through his cartoons, but he ended up only telling them to be good. If we aren't careful to differentiate between law and gospel, our children won't comprehend the concepts of sin, God's mercy, Christ's sacrifice, and the gift of faith—trusting what Jesus has done for us instead of whatever filthy rags of righteousness we gin up on our own.

So, what do we do? What can we do?

In addition to showing our children that Jesus is personal, real and immediate, we need to explain what it is that He expects—to trust Him. Jesus invites us to come. To follow Him.

Faith is based on what God has done, what He's doing in our lives, and what He promises to do in the future. Teach and demonstrate forgiveness in Sunday school and church. Be alert for chances to offer grace within your family in this busy, broken world.

Most importantly, pray. As a congregation, in small groups, and individually, pray for the young people in your church by name. Seek God's will about whether your prayers for any child should be anonymous or not. Knowing Mrs. Edwards and Aunt Kay were praying for me helped me, but God knows every heart and what's best in each situation. Openly or in secret, pray. Pray for their friends, and their enemies. Take them before the throne of grace. Ask for and expect Jesus to act in very real ways in these precious, young lives. Because He will.

Just give them Jesus.

Davenport Tietjen, who serves on the AFLC Board of Publication and Parish Education, is a member of Calvary Free Lutheran, Eben Junction, Mich.

By Pastor David Johnson

I worked several years in restaurant management, and much of that time I spent training both employees and future managers. Over those years, I invested hours teaching and reviewing a host of instructions from various staff memos and operation manuals. But the one thing I couldn't simply "teach" was an employee's desire to do things the right way. Oh, I could give them instructions, making sure they were proficient in each task, and then reprimand them when they failed. But I just couldn't make them want to do it, especially in my absence. That would have to come via a different means.

One of my favorite movies, the 1981 classic *Chariots of Fire*, speaks to this very issue. In this wonderful film, there are two primary characters: athletic rivals. Both are exceptional runners with powerfully competitive personalities. Both are determined to excel. But while one is driven by expectations and the need to prove himself, the other (Eric Liddell) is motivated by the desire to please his heavenly Father.

At one point in the movie Liddell tries to explain this passion to his concerned sister, "I believe God made me for a purpose [for missions], but he also made me fast! And when I run, I feel his pleasure."

At their core, these two gifted runners were driven by two very divergent forces—one the condemning

expectations of ridged obligation, the second the joyous passion of God's grace.

When our children were little my wife, Vicki, and I made the decision to homeschool them for this very reason. It's true, we were concerned about the unchristian social concerns building in the local public schools at the time. But what also mattered was our concern for their character development, as well as subject mastery. Oh, we wanted our children to learn the appropriate scholastic skills that would make them successful at whatever they pursued. But more than mechanical repetition, we wanted to impart a desire to do what's right, simply out of gratitude for God's gracious gifting and talents. Since those early years, Vicki and I have also worked with two different Christian schools, bringing that same grace-based passion to both.

Peter Marshall, the great preacher and former chaplain of the U.S. Senate, once observed, "Let us not fool ourselves—without Christianity, without Christian education, without the principles of Christ inculcated into young life, we are simply rearing pagans." And that is certainly true. But another element must be brought to the process of education, one that goes beyond replicating standards and the rote parroting of biblical principle.

"If a grace-oriented relationship with God is not modeled and taught in the home (and in the congregation),



Give them
Grace

the tendency of children and youth is to interpret Christianity as a religion of expectations, demands, or requirements; as a result, many grow into adulthood assuming that their efforts to live a good life qualify them as Christians. Their attention is on what they do and not on what God has done, is doing, and will do for them,” wrote Merton Strommen, Christian author, educator, researcher in his book, *Passing On the Faith*.

That was the primary concern of the Apostle Paul as he addressed his readers in many of his letters, and it came from deep personal experience. In Philippians 3 we see Paul delineate his various accomplishments. He explains how he had achieved all that there was to gain in his own little world of Hebrew culture and studies of the Torah. He could parrot chapter and verse, debating the most learned academics of his day. He had mastered every element and motion of religious ritual. He was, “a Hebrew of Hebrews ... a Pharisee ... a persecutor [protector] of the church ... blameless” (vs. 5-6). But yet he was lost!

But then he writes, “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

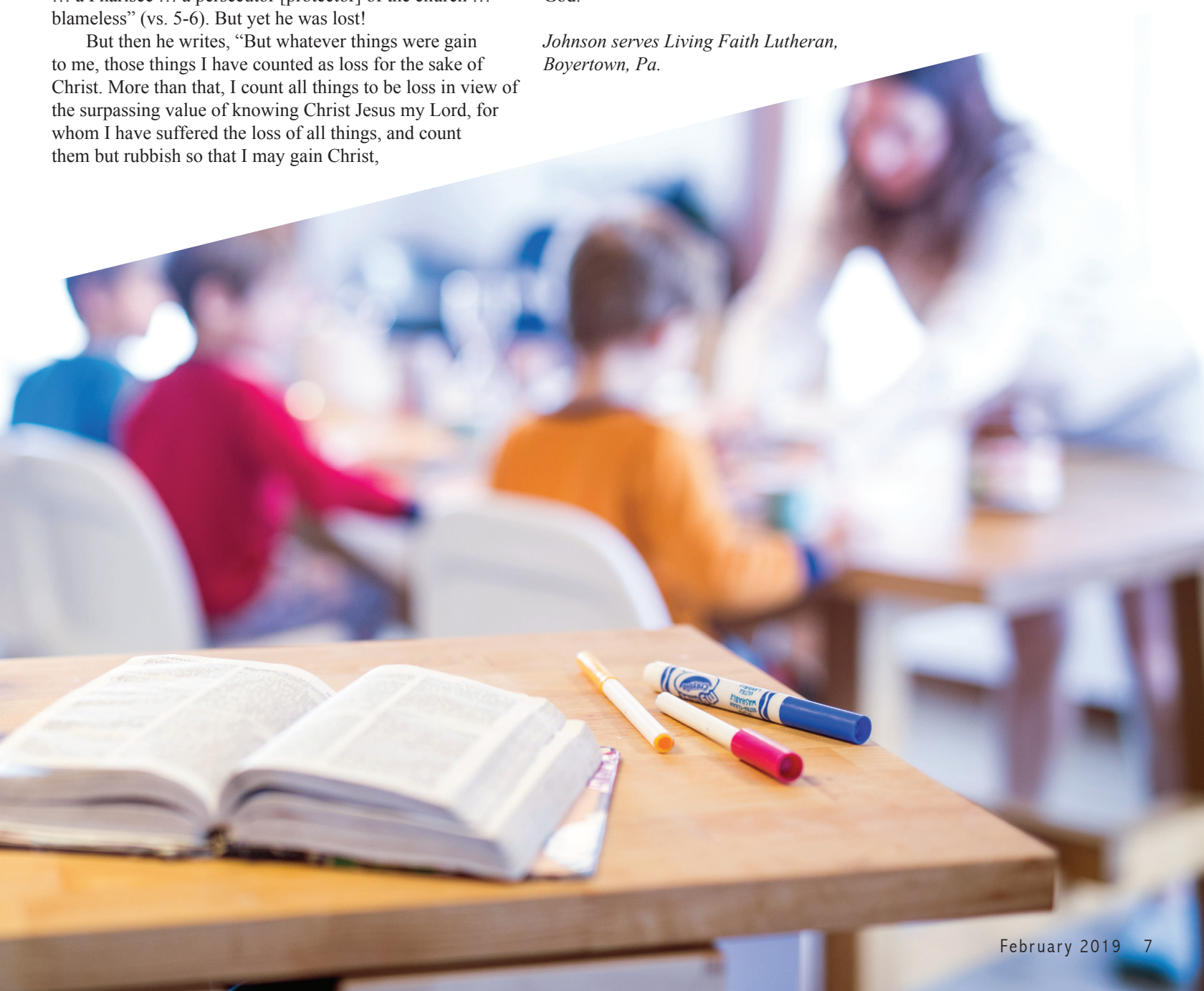
and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (vs. 7-9).

You see, up to that point, Paul’s education and apprenticeship had been completely steeped in a law-based environment. It was all about achievement, duty, obligation, and assumed righteousness. Paul had yet to experience the grace of Jesus, the personal transformation that can only come through the righteousness of Christ by faith.

But when he did, God’s grace changed everything. Suddenly, the Apostle wasn’t working to please God, but rather, allowing the grace of Christ to work through Him. All of the principles instilled through years of education were suddenly reclaimed by the mercy of God.

May each of our teachers rightly balance their expectations in education with the transforming grace of God.

*Johnson serves Living Faith Lutheran,
Boyertown, Pa.*



By Rebecca Moan

As parents, teachers, and mentors, giving instruction and communicating our values sometimes goes awry. What follows are such instances from the Moan household documented for posterity in the baby books where we dutifully recorded first teeth and first steps:

- I was attempting to teach our sons to come the first time they were called. Our 4-year-old instinctively made up a story: “What if a boy was playing downstairs and didn’t come when his mom called him, but then when he did come, he told his mom, “The Bible says to be patient.” Was the fruit of the Spirit *really* on his mind?

- Catching our toddler entertaining himself by nearly clogging the plumbing with a roll of bathroom tissue, I sternly asked, “What did you do wrong?” The caught-in-the-act reply: “I do wrong for Jesus.” Ah, such blending of law and gospel from a 3-year-old!

- An attempt to help our child develop a taste for broccoli yielded this response: “These taste like the bowling alley smells!”

- And then there was the memorable food chain lesson: I explained that a spider eats a fly, a chicken eats a spider, and we eat the chicken, to which one of our offspring added, “... and cannibals eat us!” Too many missionary novels.

- Our 4-year-old son was asked by his big brother, “Who is your best friend that you ever met?” He simply replied, “God.” Another big brother clarified the question: “Who is your best friend that you ever met personally?” Defending his original answer, our toddler replied in his vernacular, “We seen Him in a movie before.” Sigh.

We look back and smile, and yes, sometimes sigh at our attempts to train our children as we acknowledge our dependence on and thankfulness for the Lord’s mercy and grace. So how do we “reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” as we pass on the great treasure of God’s Word in our homes and congregations? Psalm 78:5-7 gives us insight as we seek to faithfully and accurately handle the Word of truth.

“For He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers that they should teach them to their children” (v. 5).

Parents, and fathers in particular, are entrusted with this wonderful privilege and serious responsibility to instruct their children. How can this be done unless parents submit to God’s instruction in Deuteronomy 4:9? “Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your

grandsons.” Deuteronomy 6:6-7 echoes the same thought: “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons.” This biblical instruction flows from the parents’ transformed hearts and then is lovingly shared with their children. Yes, this takes intentionality. And, taking direction from that instructive adverb in both passages, it must be carried out diligently.

“That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children” (v. 6).

A long time ago I heard a quip stating that you cannot accurately evaluate your job of parenting and educating your children until you actually see your grandchildren. That was simultaneously an amusing and a sobering thought. Are our children teaching godly values to their children? Is a biblical foundation being passed on to the next generation and the next? What a reminder of our need for prayerful reliance on our Lord, the builder of our homes.

“That they should put their confidence in God” (v. 7a).

Our striving would indeed be losing if we were relying on our own strength in passing on scriptural convictions. Because of God’s intervention, we can say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper” (Hebrew 13:6).

“And not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments” (v. 7b).

We are forgetful people. We need the injunction to “talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up ... bind them as a sign ... write them on doorpost of your house” (Deuteronomy 6:7-9). Interacting with God’s Word through visual, auditory, and kinesthetic means helps us recall these precious truths.

Ultimately, we desire that the young ones in our charge and the older ones we mentor in our homes or congregations would love Jesus and daily grow in a personal relationship with Him. We rejoice that God will equip us “in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight” (Hebrews 13:21a). May the footprints we leave lead others to the cross of Jesus Christ.

Moan teaches Christian education at the AFLC Schools, where she also works as the admissions coordinator. She is a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn.

Give them
Values



Give them
Tradition



By Joan Culler

People need structure. It gives a sense of security and a framework on which to build and base daily life. God knew this, and so from the very beginning He blessed humankind with a rhythm of life that would shape our relationship with Him.

“... God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation” (Genesis 2:3).

A little later, this becomes one of the Ten Commandments: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:8-10a).

When our children were young, Sunday services were simply a fixture of life. Sometimes we didn't feel like getting up. Sometimes our daughters were cranky, or somebody didn't feel so well. Sometimes the weather was nasty—still we went, week after week, year after year. What did our children (and now our grandchild) gain from this dogged persistence? The world might say, not much, a meaningless ritual. I beg to disagree and here are a few of my observations.

Our children came to understand that God is important, and so is His body, the Church. The things of faith are not kept in a separate compartment, to be brought out on holidays or special occasions. They are part of the ebb and flow of daily life.

Through the weekly liturgy, our children internalized the basics of the Christian faith. They memorized the Lord's Prayer and the Apostle's Creed, as well as many passages from Scripture which we recited or sang every Sunday. They learned that we need to confess, repent, pray, and give thanks regularly. They learned that our monetary offering gives back to God a small part of what He's already given to us. I remember hearing our daughters and our nephew play church as they sang parts of the service together.

Sunday services also walked us together through the seasons of the church year and the life of Christ. There were joyous times and sad times, times to reflect and times to anticipate. Each season had its own particular music and rituals. Advent meant lighting the advent candles and singing,

“O Come, O Come, Emanuel.” Lent was the time when flowers on the altar disappeared and songs became somber—“Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?” Easter brought lilies and “Christ the Lord Has Risen Today” along with flowering the cross, made from the church Christmas tree, which had stood plain and empty in the sanctuary until Easter morning.

I also noticed how children pick up on the special sacredness of the sacraments. My girls would crane their necks and smile when a baby was baptized. Then they might ask about their own baptism. One little boy at our church stands up straight and tall, like a little soldier, as the pastor blesses him during the Lord's Supper. He's proud to be one of God's people.

Do you think children aren't paying attention during the service? They are. Here are just a few of the questions my daughters and granddaughter asked me over the years:

Why is one of the advent candles pink?

What is a diadem?

What is that big candle (the Christ candle) and why don't we light it all the time?

Why does the pastor turn his back on the congregation while we pray?

And finally—hilariously—why does granddaddy (the pastor) need all that money?

These are important, teachable moments, which I cherished and used to initiate discussions about what we believe and why we do the things we do.

Of course, there are many traditions that take place outside of the sanctuary. Through these my children learned that the household of God is just like any other family. They got together to have fun and learn (vacation Bible school), eat (Lenten soup dinners), make some money (annual yard sale), decorate (especially the big Christmas tree), play games (New Year's Eve party), take a turn at cleaning the church (not a big favorite), and help others (like the group home residents who were members of our congregation). Memories like these reinforce Christian values. Little by little they shape our identity. They influence how we think, what we value, and what we do. Together the separate pieces of congregational life create a beautiful mosaic that depict the life of Christ in His body, the Church.

So, what can I say? Make the traditions of the Church your family traditions. The foundation you build will last through eternity.

Culler is a member of St. Paul's Evangelical Free Lutheran, Hagerstown, Md.



By Ednay Abel

You will be a great woman of God! You will change the world!" These are phrases that I love saying to my baby, Zoey. My husband and I intentionally prepare special moments with our daughter for reading Bible stories, singing Christian songs and praying together, even though she is just seven months old. Our desire is that Zoey may grow up knowing that Jesus is her best friend; knowing that she belongs to the Kingdom of God; knowing that she is a missionary and that God has plans for her life.

Christian parents want their children to know Jesus and grow in Him. They hope that their children will seek God's direction and have a heart to serve the Lord. This desire is wonderful, but it doesn't happen automatically. Purposeful parenting requires making strategic decisions. A few synonyms for the word "strategic" are: planned,

calculated, deliberate, premeditated, thought-out, conscious, and intentional. The great responsibility of strategically raising up godly children is a task shared by the church and Christian parents. God entrusts us with the development of the next generation of world-changers.

It is important to remember that you can only effectively teach about who God is if you know Him, and you can only expect children to be God's servants if you are a servant, and you can only expect them to be involved in church if you actively participate! A young family recently visited our church. After greeting them and making the initial conversation, they told me, "We don't attend any church, but we are looking for a church because our daughter is 3, and there is one more on the way, and the kids need a good church to grow up in." I quickly, and perhaps a bit bluntly, told them that the kids were not the only ones who need a good church. We all must recognize our total dependence and need for God's forgiveness and presence in our lives. If we as parents do not have a real relationship with Jesus and His church, how can we encourage our children to live for the Lord?

I became a Christian before my parents did. The intentionality of the church made all the difference in my life. I was 6 years old when I came to know Jesus. The



Give them Purpose

missionaries and the church strategically ministered to children through a variety of programs. For me it was especially important because I didn't have any Christian education at home. I was taught to read the Bible and pray and live in a personal relationship with Jesus my Savior. As I grew, I had opportunities to get involved in many different ways—praying for the conversion of my parents, helping with the overhead projector at age 10, singing in the praise group, teaching children, being a camp counselor, witnessing to my friends, leading a Bible study at school. As I look back on God's leading in my life, I recognize the graceful working of the Holy Spirit through strategic, purposeful, deliberate actions taken by my local church.

The church in partnership with parents can purposefully influence lives for eternity. Churches, invest in your children's ministry, looking for new and creative ways to teach the old, old truths of God. Find ways to get children and youths plugged into the life of the church. Parents, God has given you a mission to fulfill. Teach your children to know Jesus and understand His plan of salvation. Pray with and for your children, read God's Word to them, and value your own spiritual life. God has promised to answer our prayers, and He has promised to

bring faith through His Word.

God's instructions to His people in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 speak of parental responsibility: "These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." This most definitely requires intentionality—a strategy!

I have purposed to intentionally teach Zoey that she is part of something huge—the Kingdom of God. My baby is still very small, but I recognize the great potential I have to influence each phase of her life. I want to be faithful in helping her to know Jesus and to live for God. Galatians 2:20 says, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Through purposeful parenting I hope to help my own family and many others come to know that God has a plan and purpose for their lives.

Abel is an AFLC missionary serving in Brazil with her husband, Matthew, and daughter, Zoey. They are planning on beginning a new mission work in Paraguay.



Give them Prayer

By Susan Parsley

When our children were at home, we wanted to teach them how to pray. Easy, conversational, meaningful out-loud prayers directly to the Lord, outside the box of the memorized prayers that we grew up with. We did the best we knew how; it definitely was not perfect.

Our children prayed before mealtime. Each child was assigned a day that they would give thanks for the food. Sometimes the prayer would be succinct, sometimes long-winded, causing loud sighing from those waiting to eat. Again, it definitely was not perfect.

In the evening, we all prayed, each child taking their turn, with the child who was assigned for that day leading the prayer. We did not have a formula or a format that was the correct way to pray. But we did emphasize praying for others. Our sources were varied: the church bulletin, requests from the prayer chain, personal life, or family needs. Sometimes one child would offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the chair, for the doll, for the picture on the wall, or whatever his or her eye would land on. Often there would be intercessory appeal, that the widows listed by name in the congregation wouldn't be lonely (one affectionately named "the Fanster"), that an uncle in prison would come to Christ, that Grandma would get her memory back. We prayed for runaway dogs, children of church members, livestock, marriages, cousins, friends. Our youngest would often close with his favorite petition,

"that nothing would go bad and everything would go good."

There was often eye rolling by the older children, sometimes laughter, and sometimes tears when something dear to us was lost. Sometimes it got late, or it was hard to quit what we were doing and pray. As the kids got older, the prayers became more mature, but remained almost always simple, meaningful, and directed to the Lord. We definitely were not perfect, but we offered up our prayers to an omniscient God who knew the intent.

Now prayer has come full circle. We hear our grandchildren pray when they visit at mealtimes and at bedtimes. We hear them pray for the sick and lonely in their church, for the salvation of the neighbor kids, for a good night's sleep for everyone in the household—from the one keeping them up—for safe travel, for our dog who lost his leg. They are learning to converse with God and bring everything to Him.

When I texted our children recently about what they remembered about prayer at home, they sent all kinds of responses. People and situations we had prayed for in years past brought back all sorts of memories for us of sitting in the living room, going around the circle of kids, conversing with God about ... well ... everything.

Parsley is a member of Christ the King Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn.

WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION



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ast summer a team of 26 people from Amery, Wis., Beulah, N.D., and Minneapolis took

a three-week trip to Brazil. Among us were Pastor John and Hannah Lee and their girls, who were moving to Brazil to begin serving as missionaries.

The AFLC supports the missions we visited in Foz do Iguaçu, Campo Mourão, and Curitiba. While we know our missionaries, it was wonderful to see where and how they live and serve.

We worshiped in several AFLC churches during our trip, including Foz do Iguaçu. The Brazilians shared spiritual testimonies of God's faithfulness and we also shared ours with them with the help of Paul and Becky Abel translating for us. After worship services, we enjoyed talking with members, building relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We spent time at the Miriam Home located near Campo Mourão, where children up to 18 years old stay at the request of the government due to difficult or dangerous circumstances at home. The workers show them the love of Jesus and give them a sense of security and belonging. At the same campus there is a seminary and Bible school. We enjoyed interacting with the students as much as possible. We also did some yard work, cutting down dead trees,

SUPPORTING WORLD MISSIONS

BY TAMMY VUKONICH

painting window trim and playground equipment, and helping care for the children at the Miriam Home.

In rural Brazil, most adults are very shy about speaking English, but a few can understand it. The youth there have learned some English in school, and some attend English immersion schools. We visited one of these schools operated by Christina (Abel) Gabardo. We were there to give students the opportunity to use their English.

From Campo Mourão, we drove seven hours south by bus to Bateais, a suburb of Curitiba, where the ARCA Bible Camp is located. I never realized before that the ARCA is more like a little village, with several little houses on the property. Ten of us women slept in a small, simply quaint cabin in the woods. At the ARCA, we painted a house for a recent widow in the church and replaced her fence gate. We also helped prepare decorations and crafts for their children's camp, which was planned to begin the day after we left.

While in Curitiba, I was able to visit the home of my exchange student, Thalita, who lived at our house nine years ago. It was wonderful to meet her family and to see the city of Curitiba, where she lives.

Each of us stayed with a Brazilian family for an evening, practicing our language skills, often resorting to charades to act out what we meant. Sometimes we tried speaking Spanish, which is a little like Portuguese, but is not a primary language for either of us. So, we had a lot of friendly laughter, trying to understand each other.

Probably the most memorable part of the trip was interacting with the Brazilian people. Brazilians are typically very hospitable. We learned that everyone gets hugged, strangers and friends alike. Even in the middle of their church service, they made sure that nobody was left out. We were encouraged by hearing the life-stories of several of the missionaries, how they felt God's calling them to be a missionary. Even with the cultural and language barriers, we experienced the bond of Christian fellowship while there. Through all the challenges of work and the fun experiences, this trip will be one that none of us will ever forget.

Vukonich is a member of Amery Free Lutheran Church, Amery, Wis.



The author, above, visited sites in and around Jerusalem along with four of his seminary classmates, including the Garden of Gethsemane, the Western Wall, the house of Caiaphas, Mount Tabor, and the historical site of Jesus' burial. Photos courtesy of Erin Tormanen, AFLTS senior, who also toured these sites in an earlier trip last September.



THE WORD MADE MORE SURE

BY ANDREW KNEELAND

I took a trip to the other side of the world to help me better appreciate what I already had at home.

Senior seminary students have been blessed this year with the opportunity to travel to Israel. I went with four classmates in early December to walk, see, and touch the Holy Land. It was a whirlwind tour lasting just four days, but will have a profound and lasting impact on my life and ministry.

We spent the majority of our time in and around the Old City in Jerusalem, walking streets that have been walked for thousands of years. We lodged at Christ Church, the oldest Protestant church building in the Middle East, which is located in what was formerly the courtyard of King Herod's Palace.

With our time in Israel limited we were strategic in our tourist stops, though we still managed to see a great deal in both Jerusalem and around the Sea of Galilee.

One of the most memorable stops we made was at the house of Caiaphas, where Jesus was questioned before the Sanhedrin and imprisoned before His trial with Pilate. Standing in that prison cell—which was little more than a narrow hole in the ground—was the most sobering experience of the trip. The King and Sustainer of the universe was bound and thrown in a hole because He loved us.

It was also sobering to visit the Western Wall. Hundreds of Jews gather at this site every day and cry to God for deliverance and restoration. This is the last remnant of their temple and the closest they can get to where the Holy of Holies used to be. Almost everyone had a Hebrew Bible, and almost everyone was passionately pleading with God to send them a Savior. It was heartbreaking to know that the Savior they are waiting for has already come.

Somber reflection wasn't the only thing we did in Israel, though. Another great experience was visiting the synagogue in Capernaum, which was rebuilt in the 4th century on top of a 2,000-year-old black basalt foundation. It was joyful to read Scripture on the very spot where Jesus claimed to be the "Bread of Life."

Throughout the week, though, we saw one thing over and over: mysticism. Thousands and thousands of people make pilgrimages to these holy sites in order to experience God more fully. We struggle with spiritual apathy in the United States. Millions of people don't believe in God and

millions more don't care that they don't care. Religion is counter-cultural in our country. But it is part of the culture in Israel. People kiss the rock where Jesus prayed before His arrest and rub their scarves on the slab where Jesus was buried. It is special to see these sites, but at the end of the day it is still just a slab of rock. We shouldn't misplace the object of our worship.

But though I didn't try to soak up any spiritual blessings from any of the historical sites we visited, I couldn't help but want to feel *something* by being closer to where these biblical stories happened. As I walked the streets of the Old City, I wanted to feel closer to God; as I walked just yards from where the Holy of Holies used to be, I wanted to believe I was closer to God.

But that's not how God reveals Himself. That's not where God is found.

That is the idea that struck me as we were driving up Mt. Tabor, the location of the Mount of Transfiguration, where Jesus was glorified before Peter, James, and John. In his second letter, Peter remembered his experience on Mt. Tabor and made an extraordinary claim: "We ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place" (II Peter 1:18-19).

Made *more* sure. What is Peter saying? This Word we all have is more authentic and more reliable than even Peter's firsthand experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. We won't find God in the stone paths He walked or in the slab of rock mankind has turned into a relic. The stairway to heaven isn't climbed by you, it is descended by God, who seeks after you.

Where the Word of God goes forth, the Spirit of God is at work conveying the conviction of sin and the assurance of forgiveness. God uses the Word to elicit faith, not a pilgrimage.

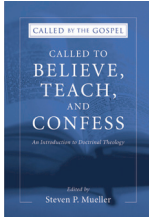
The Holy Land was filled with religious fervor and passion. But there was precious little Jesus. I pray the Jews never lose their appreciation for their history, but I pray that it doesn't continue to blind them from seeing Jesus the Messiah.

Kneeland, a senior seminary student at AFLTS, is a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn.



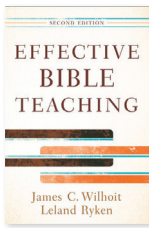
Resources

Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess



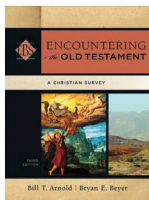
Bible Doctrine class for AFLBS juniors and seniors, taught by Pastor Steve Mundfrom

Effective Bible Teaching



Summer Institute of Theology Christian Education courses taught by Dr. James Molstre

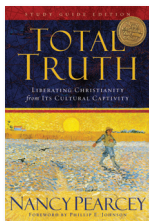
Encountering the Old Testament



Historical Books class (AFLBS juniors) and Minor Prophets class (AFLBS seniors) taught by

Pastor Brent Olson

Total Truth



Apologetics and Christian Thought class for AFLBS seniors taught by Pastor Wade Mobley

Worship Matters



Worship, Hymns, and Music course for AFLBS students taught by Andrew Hanson

The Measure of a Healthy Church

Principles of Congregational Life course for AFLBS juniors taught by Pastor Robert Lee



Book Nook serves local congregations

Ambassador Publications partners with AFLC Schools in new venture

Through a cooperative effort with AFLC Schools, our Parish Education department is managing the Book Nook in Heritage Hall this year. People's first impression might be that the campus Book Nook only benefits students and others who come to campus. But in reality, it is an extension of the ministry of Parish Education serving our congregations.

The most obvious way might be in providing textbooks and resources for Bible school and seminary students to help equip them to go back to AFLC congregations across the country and serve in various roles: pastor, Sunday school teacher, youth and family ministry leader, or worship and music leader.

Realistically, not everyone can attend Bible school or seminary, but everyone can have access to the same resources through the Ambassador Publications online bookstore (ambassadorpublications.org/store, click on the "Textbooks" tab to view options by course name). You can read and study the same books that are being used for classes at our AFLC Schools. Do you want to learn how to study the Bible? Does the Old Testament seem hard to understand? What's the big deal about law and gospel? What do Lutherans believe? What's the history of

the AFLC and what makes it unique? How are apologetics, evangelism, discipleship, missions, and vocation related? What is the role of worship and music in the church? Reading and studying books related to the classes offered on campus can help enrich your understanding.

Biblical illiteracy is a widespread challenge in congregational ministry. Even though there is greater accessibility to the Scriptures and biblical resources than ever before, attempting to sift through the abundance of material can be overwhelming. How do you know what's worth reading and what's not? AFLC Parish Education provides carefully-selected resources to help you and your congregation grow in knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures. And these resources can help teach members of your congregation about the beautiful things this *Ambassador* issue focuses on, such as: give them Jesus, give them grace, give them prayer.

In turn, when you purchase books through Ambassador Publications for yourself, for your church library, or to give away as gifts, you are also supporting the AFLC ministry of publishing educational resources such as Sunday school curriculum and Bible studies that serve our congregations in their educational ministries.

—Marian Christopherson is the director of AFLC Parish Education.

A NEW DIRECTION

BY PASTOR CRAIG JOHNSON

T

he AFLC World Missions Committee recently announced

the call of a new director of World Missions: Pastor Earl Korhonen. Pastor Del Palmer is retiring from the position after serving as director since 2006. He served part-time as director from 2002 to 2006. The committee is very thankful

for Pastor Palmer's faithful service.

Pastor Korhonen will begin serving as AFLC World



Korhonen

Missions director on March 1. From then till the AFLC Annual Conference Pastor Palmer will be assisting Pastor Korhonen with training and transition. Part of that transition time will include them traveling together to the various AFLC mission fields.

As committee members looked for a new director and considered the responsibilities of the position, providing pastoral care to AFLC missionaries was a top priority. Serving the Lord on a mission field brings unique challenges. The director provides encouragement and support to our missionaries. This involves frequent travel to the mission fields. Even in this day when so many different forms of communication are available, nothing can replace face-to-face communication.



The director serves congregations of the AFLC by keeping them informed about what is going on in AFLC World Missions. This involves letting people know about praises and prayer needs. Various means of communication are used to do this along with personal visits to congregations and with individuals.

Another part of the director's position is encouraging future missionaries. We want young people to be inspired to consider whether God is calling them to serve in world missions. The director provides encouragement and a listening ear to those who are prayerfully seeking to discern God's call.

The director is also involved in managing the various administrative needs of the World Missions department. Conducting work in numerous countries around the world, each having their own currency and their own way of doing business, can create a variety of unique challenges.

The director serves under the World Missions Committee, which serves under the AFLC Missions Corporation. The 100-member corporation is a servant of the congregations of the AFLC. Our AFLC World Missions

department exists to plant, build up, and nurture free and living Lutheran congregations around the world.

Committee members appreciate those who have prayed as we have gone through the process of seeking a new director. We give thanks for God's leading. We ask for continued prayers for Pastor Korhonen and Pastor Palmer and their families during this time of transition.

The importance of prayer has been stated by Pastor Korhonen: "Above all, missions must begin with prayer: Zechariah 4:6b says, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of hosts.' This verse reveals that no amount of giving or manpower can replace our need for humility before God in prayer. We must pray for souls to be saved, and for our missionaries who need strength and encouragement in the ministry. Only God can soften hearts to receive the gospel, and only God can create the passion for Christ in us that the world so desperately needs."

Johnson, who serves Bethany Lutheran, Astoria, Ore., is chairman of the World Missions Committee.



Dr. Bryan Chapell, of Peoria, Ill., taught a January course at AFLTS titled, "Christ-Centered Preaching: Recovering the Expository Sermon."

Chapell teaches course on preaching

Dr. Bryan Chapell, founder and chairman of Unlimited Grace, a radio and online Bible teaching program, led a January-term class on expository preaching at the Free Lutheran Seminary. The class, held Jan. 14-17, showed how expository preaching can reveal the redemptive aims of Scripture. His course covered the basics of preparation, organization, and delivery of great preaching.

Chapell, who serves as senior pastor

at Grace Presbyterian Church in Peoria, Ill., is the president emeritus of Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, and serves on the faculty of Knox Theological Seminary, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

The AFLC Schools also hosted a Midwinter Bible Conference Jan. 19 with AFLTS faculty teaching. Then, Pastor Nathan Hoff, of San Pedro, Calif., keyed the annual Missions Conference, held Jan. 21-22, with a focus on the heart of the Trinity in missions.

P

astor Jon Benson,
director of AFLC
Police and Fire
Department
Chaplaincy,

shared a note from Pastor John Amundson, who serves in New Leipzig, N.D., with regard to how beneficial the last two fall chaplaincy conferences have been.

Amundson wrote, “Just wanted to let you know, and you can pass it on to the others, how much I appreciated the chaplain’s training events the past two years. Prior to Thanksgiving I had to do a debriefing for our hospital medical staff, ambulance crew, and sheriff’s department following the suicide of a 27-year-old young man from our community—one of my kids from confirmation days. There is a team available in Bismarck (N.D.), but that week there had also been a med-air ambulance flight that had crashed and killed all three on board, so their hands were full—and the folks out here needed to talk right [away]. The sheriff and ambulance crew leader knew I had done this training, so [they] asked me if I could do the debriefing with them. It went well—God gives us strength as my emotions were high, too, since he was part of my flock. The neat blessing [was that] Pastor Mike ... was in the area for Thanksgiving and



EQUIPPED FOR MINISTRY

BY PASTOR MARLIN HARRIS

present at our service, so Velma and I asked if we could spend some time with him to take care of ourselves as well. [Pastor Brandt offers counseling for those in ministry, particularly pastors, through *Shepherding the Shepherds*.] Truly, though, I feel blessed to have received this training and [to be] able to walk with these folks through this tough time.”

I appreciate Pastor Amundson sharing how he used his training to serve Christ, fulfilling what Jesus said of those who would follow after Him, “for I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matthew 25:36). Pastor Amundson was equipped to provide emotional care in those tough times of ministry. Providing emotional first aid may be the experience God uses for a person to come into a relationship with Jesus Christ. What a great opportunity he had to

manifest the love of Christ.

The annual AFLC chaplain’s conference is designed to “equip the saints for ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). Pastor Amundson benefited from the training and so can you. We have opened up the conference to all AFLC pastors and laymen and women. This year’s conference will take place Oct. 18-20 at the Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis. The topic will be announced at the AFLC Annual Conference in June.

“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Hebrews 13:20-21).

Harris, the director of Institutional Chaplaincy, serves True Vine Lutheran, Mora, Minn.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor David Skordahl is serving as interim pastor at Newark Lutheran, Newark, Ill.

Pastor Ron Pulscher, who served Pukwana Free Lutheran, Pukwana, S.D., and St. Olaf Free Lutheran, Chamberlain, S.D., has retired.

Ryan Patenaude, a 2019 graduate of AFLTS, will be installed Feb. 3 at West Prairie Free Lutheran, Kindred, N.D.

Journey Missions is planning two short-term mission trips this summer and another this fall. A group will travel to visit AFLC mission work in Brazil July 31 through Aug. 16. A second trip has been planned during the same dates, with members of the team visiting AFLC missionaries in Jinja, Uganda. This fall, Journey Missions is hosting a trip to Israel, planned for Nov. 4-15. Participants will partner with an outreach ministry focused on friendship evangelism for half of the trip, and tour historic sites for the second half. Contact Journey Missions for more information about short-term trips (aflcworldmissions.org/journey-missions).

AFLC Home Missions is looking for volunteers to serve at **The NET** in Naknek, Alaska, during June and July. If interested, contact Home Missions at 763.545.5631.

Contact Spruce Lake Retreat Center to make your accommodation reservations for the **AFLC Annual Conference**, scheduled for June 11-14 (800.822.7505).



Pastor Einar Unseth

Pastor Einar Unseth, 93, of Lester Prairie, Minn., died Jan. 2, 2019, at his home. Born June 29, 1925, in La Crosse, Wis., he was the son of Edward and Ovedia Unseth. He married Luella Duncomb Aug. 23, 1952.

Unseth grew up on a dairy farm near Westby, Wis., graduating from Westby High School in 1943. He worked on the family farm until he was drafted into the U.S. Army, serving in Japan from 1946 to 1948. He enrolled at Augsburg College, graduating in 1951 and continued his studies for the ministry at Luther Seminary, graduating in 1954. He was ordained as a Lutheran minister. They moved to Japan, where they served as missionaries in Yaizu, Shimada, Kikugawa, and Fujieda. They returned to the U.S. in 1963, serving congregations in Woodland, Mich.; Mona, Iowa; and Lyle, Minn. He joined the AFLC roster and served Ortleby Free Lutheran, Ortleby, S.D. They moved to Bismarck, N.D., where they helped plant Calvary Lutheran, which he served for 10 years. He served Faith Lutheran, near London, Minn., which started as an AFLC Home Missions congregation, until 2001, when he retired. They moved to Lyle, Minn., in 2008 and to Lester Prairie in 2014. He served on the board of directors for the Latin American Lutheran Mission, as secretary for the AFLC, and as a member of the AFLC World Missions Committee.

Surviving are his wife; six sons, Nathan (Ruth) Unseth, Lester Prairie, Peter (Carole) Unseth, Duncanville, Texas, Andrew (Eliane) Unseth, Shakopee, Minn., Reuben (Amy) Unseth, Rochester, Minn., Benjamin (Ellen) Unseth, Camarillo, Calif., and Joseph (Joy) Unseth, Peoria, Ill; one sister, Alice Johnson, La Crosse, Wis.; 21 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren.

The service was held Jan. 8 at Faith Lutheran, London, Minn.

FLY Committee announces workshop leaders, topics

Members of the 2019 FLY Committee recently announced workshop leaders for the FLY Convention, scheduled July 1-5 at YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colo.

- Dr. Walt Mueller, founder and president of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding, will address the topic of pornography and sexuality.

- Ben Monseth, a licenced individual and family therapist, will cover the topic of suicide.

- Pastor Wade Mobley, president of the AFLC Schools, will address the topic of gender identity.

- Pastor Jonathan Unverzaagt, and AFLC pastor, will talk about how to live out the law and gospel.

DECEMBER MEMORIALS

AFLBS

Randy Strand
Ruth Claus
Barbara Hagen
Dr. Robert Kohl

AFLTS

James Bounds
Sharon Anderson
Dallas Grieger
Dale Western

All Departments

Aini Myking

Evangelism

Jeanne Backstrom
Gale Berry
Harlan Olson
Janice Schmitke

Home Missions

Pastor Allan Monson

General Fund

Dr. Robert Kohl

FLAPS

Pastor Oliver Olson
Janice Schmitke

World Missions

Dr. Robert Kohl
Jeanne Backstrom
Pastor Samuel Flores

... in honor of

Home Missions

Jayce Hall

World Missions

AFLC Staff
Pastor Peter Franz
Family of Pastor Jim Rasmussen

AFLC BENEVOLENCES December 31, 2018

FUND	REC'D IN DECEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$47,183	\$407,161	\$422,680
Evangelism	18,243	135,766	136,035
Youth Ministries	12,269	141,803	165,246
Parish Education	12,561	167,251	169,346
Seminary	32,006	292,963	276,140
Bible School	48,645	522,722	572,237
Home Missions	43,452	474,235	599,751
World Missions	41,696	394,914	462,344
Personal Support	69,241	674,320	653,849
TOTALS	\$325,296	\$3,211,135	\$3,457,628

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

OF READING MANY BOOKS

How many of them have you read?" This is the typical question asked of those who have accumulated an extensive personal library at home or in the office. A pastor's (and professor's) library is his tool chest, one will rightly explain to those who wonder, an important aid to ministry, worthy of comparison to a carpenter's or mechanic's equipment. Thus, many of the books on the shelves are consulted in part, not totally read. Does one read a concordance?



Pastor Robert Lee

This is a season of life for your editor when something needs to be done about the size of his library. I almost cringe at the NASV translation of Ecclesiastes 12:12b: "Excessive devotion to

books is wearying to the body," because that weariness has afflicted me, too, at times. During the past year some volumes have been sold or given away, and full boxes have been donated to the thrift stores and to a library book sale (from which I emerged without purchasing any new ones). The book shelves in my home study are currently only one layer deep and somewhat organized by topic, but I gaze up from my computer now and acknowledge that there is more to be done. Much more, my wife would agree.

Some of us grew up in homes without many books. I recall when my mother started earning at a local grocery store one book a week of an encyclopedia set, and I devoured each new volume when she brought them home. And then there was the county bookmobile that visited our small village school once a month or so, and it was a special honor to be among the few chosen to enter it and select books for our classroom. I had never been to a library, and the walls of books enthralled me.

Convinced that reading is an important element of education, my wife and I wanted

to encourage our children to be readers, and so there were books in our home and trips to the library were scheduled. When they were young, we read to them, of course, and there was a great variety of subject matter. The Bible stories began to become familiar to them, and we enjoyed other books especially written for their ages. Remember Amelia Bedelia? We do.

Responding to the common question at the beginning of this editorial, there are many books on my shelves which I have not read. Probably most of them are about certain historical periods or personalities—*Jesus Wars, The Thirty Years War, 1066, The Lost History of Christianity, The House of Medici, Constantine the Great, Jonathan Edwards*, to name a few—that I would like to better understand.

A welcome Christmas present this year was *Scandinavian Pietists: Spiritual Writings from 19th Century Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland* (purchased from AFLC Ambassador Publications bookstore)

which I look forward to reading soon. Don't be embarrassed that there are unread books on your shelves. One blogger calls this his "antilibary," contending that unread books are more valuable than read ones because they indicate that you are still learning. There are also books on the shelves that one hopes to read again due to the insights or pleasure gained from the first reading.

One should not feel guilty about simply reading for personal pleasure. Many of us have copies in our homes of C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* series and J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, classics written from a Christian worldview that have delighted several generations of young people. Missionary biographies are a special category, and it was the story of

L. Nelson Bell (*Foreign Devil in China*) that introduced me many years ago to reading fictional mysteries by authors like Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, Ralph McInerney (who taught me much about modern Roman Catholicism), Harry Kimmelman (my source for information about American Judaism), and more recently the delightful African lady detective stories of Alexander McCall Smith. And then there are the short stories of the English writer P.G. Wodehouse, which can sometimes make me laugh out loud.

What are you reading? What are your children and grandchildren reading? I've started two new devotional books this year. The first is a collection of meditations on

Don't be embarrassed that there are unread books on your shelves.

prayer by various writers, and the second is a plan for reading through the Bible in one year. Then there is a history of the 20th century, entitled *Modern Times*, which a radio speaker recommended, and which is very insightful but slow going. There will be more volumes from my shelves sold or donated during the coming months, and realistically that's as it should be ... perhaps for you, too.

P.S. Read all of the closing verses of Ecclesiastes 12, fellow book collectors, and note that the Preacher has some good things to say, too.

building the base

FEAR NOT!

BY PASTOR GIDEON JOHNSON

In my house a new phenomenon has taken place recently: my 4-year-old son refuses to go upstairs when it is dark. And, honestly, even if the lights are on, he is still hesitant at times. I understand those fears. In fact, as I jokingly mentioned to my congregations recently, my own fear of the dark is why I got married in the first place.

However, if I go with my son, he is more than willing to go upstairs. In other words, it is as if the darkness no longer exists and all fear is gone, because he knows I am there and that I will protect him.

Throughout the Bible there are times when the people of God faced times of uncertainty or fear. For example, in Joshua 1, as God is speaking to Joshua and commissioning him as the new leader of Israel, it is likely that he faced some fears. So, God promises him, "Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous."

In Matthew 28 Jesus is commissioning His disciples to go out and spread the

good news that there is salvation by faith in Him, and understandably the disciples were probably a little fearful. After all, Jesus had told these same disciples that those who oppose them "will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God" (John 16:2). But here in Matthew 28 Jesus gives them the promise, "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Finally, while Paul was ministering in Corinth, he was reassured by the risen Lord, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you" (Acts 18:9-10).

This direction to fear not because the Lord is present continues to be God's call to His church today. I recently heard it mentioned by John Stonestreet of the Colson Center for Christian Worldview that 2018 was the worst year of documented persecution among Christians, and 2019 does not promise anything different. And although at this time we in America may not face physical persecution, we do face other threats to our faith. Yet, the command

and promise of God still remains true for His church, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ... I will be with you" (Isaiah 43:1-2).

In Psalm 46, which served as the basis for Martin Luther's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God," the psalmist confidently proclaims, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea ... The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

My son's fear of the dark may not subside for some time, but until then I will be with him to hold his hand. The fears we face on this side of eternity will likely not go away either, but our heavenly Father, who has redeemed us through the blood of His Son, will be with us, His children, by faith.

Johnson serves Hauge Lutheran and Emmanuel Lutheran churches, Kenyon, Minn.