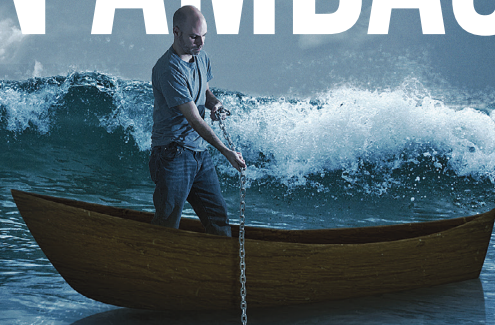


THE 

JANUARY 2019

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



FAITH & CULTURE

Keeping your anchor in a liquidly modern sea.





THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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ENCOURAGING
WORD

WHEN WE STRUGGLE WITH SIN

BY PASTOR KENT SPERRY

The Christian life can, at times, be discouraging. It can be discouraging because no matter how badly we long to live for the Lord, we continue to struggle with sin. It can be discouraging because no matter how greatly we detest our sin, we fall into it again and again.

Sometimes, by the grace of God, we are enabled to overcome a particular struggle. Addicts, for example, are sometimes empowered by God to overcome their desire for alcohol or drugs. And those who struggle with pornography or profanity are sometimes empowered by God to overcome those vices.

However, the struggle with sin continues for each and every one of us. Not only do we fall short in the eyes of God, we also fall far short of the expectations we've set for ourselves.

We tend to think that because of our faith in the Lord and because of our love for Him, it should be easy for us to live a godly life. We think that because of our faith and our love for the Lord, we should easily be able to resist any and every temptation. We think that because of our faith and our love for the Lord, we should be able to break free from our sinful habits.

When we fail, we become discouraged. We beat ourselves up. We sometimes even question if our repentance is genuine.

This is where the gospel offers to us a tremendous comfort. This comfort comes to us in the words of Paul to his young friend Timothy. He

writes: "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost" (1 Timothy 1:15).

Christ did not come for a people who were able to obey the law of God. He didn't come for a people who were able to resist their sinful desires. Nor did He come for people who had overcome their sinful tendencies. Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He came into the world to save someone like Paul, who described himself as the foremost of sinners. He came into the world to save sinners like you and me.

This, of course, doesn't justify our sin. It doesn't free us to indulge our ungodly desires. And it doesn't free us to thumb our nose at God when His Word challenges our lifestyle. However, it gives us peace in the face of our sin. It reminds us that our struggle with sin does not exclude us from salvation. It reassures us that our failures do not remove from us God's forgiveness.

Jesus came into this world to save sinners. He came because we are incapable of living up to the standards of God. He came because there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. He came because only He could free us from sin and its consequences, enabling us to live eternally in the kingdom of God.

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

God has wisely kept us in the dark concerning future events and reserved for himself the knowledge of them, that he may train us up in a dependence upon himself and a continued readiness for every event.

—Matthew Henry

Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.

—Martin Luther

I've read the last page of the Bible. It's going to turn out all right.

—Billy Graham

Christ told his disciples not to be anxious about tomorrow, but he never said not to consider tomorrow. Intelligent problem solving demands careful consideration of the future effects of present solutions.

—R.C. Sproul

Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.

—Corrie Ten Boom



Rod Dreher in his book, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post Christian Nation*, provides a sweeping answer to those who are asking what Christians should do in a changing culture. He takes a look at what brought culture to this point and he makes some suggestions for how to move forward.

He begins by sounding the alarm. Dreher writes, “We can see that we’ve lost on every front and that the swift and relentless currents of secularism have overwhelmed our flimsy barriers.” He cites the advance of gay rights coupled with the suppression of religious liberty, among other things, as a harbinger or signal of dark times for the church in the West.

Dreher points out that we didn’t get here overnight, providing a very simplified overview of the history of philosophy. Though it is quite possible to get lost in a chapter like this, Dreher gives a valiant effort to make the subject applicable and easy to digest, and even admits its short comings. Most readers who pick up *The Benedict Option* likely are not reading for a lesson in philosophical

history. He begins his overview of historical thought by looking at fragmentation in Western thought from the 14th century and traces his way through the Protestant Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and the sexual revolution.

Dreher contends that this is not the first time the church has been rocked by the tides of history. Following the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the outlook was bleak for Christians. Dreher contends that from the chaos of the Dark Ages, the light of Christ continued to shine in the communities of Benedictine monasteries and in the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, which governs monastic life for Benedictines even today. Dreher puts forth the *Rule* as an outline for the way Christians can move forward, not as a means of survival, but as a means of thriving in a post-Christian West.

The Benedict Option takes the *Rule* out of the monastery and adapts it to lay Christians for their own use. “The way of Saint Benedict is not an escape from the real world but a way to see that world and dwell in it as



COUNTER-CULTURE CHRISTIANITY

By Pastor Nick Schultz

it truly is. Benedictine spirituality teaches us to bear with the world in love and to transform it as the Holy Spirit transforms us,” writes Dreher. The purpose of adopting the Benedict Option is to strengthen Christians by building a life centered around Christ by developing practices designed to deepen our faith.

This is not just another charge to read your Bible and pray—a good thing which Dreher does obviously encourage. Instead, the Benedict Option challenges readers to consider God in a more wholistic worldview. Dreher draws on the teaching in the *Rule* to change the way Christians

approach politics, church, family, community, education, work, sexuality, and technology.

For people familiar with the biblical teaching of vocation, there is much to be commended in *The Benedict Option*. Dreher calls on Christians to see the divine in their work. Our professions are opportunities to glorify God and are an expression of love and stewardship for our neighbors. Work, when rightly ordered in this way, should not be a burden but a joy for a Christian. It may be necessary, Dreher points out, for Christians who are in certain professions to consider whether or not they are able to continue in their line of work. In the future, some doors may be closed or never opened to Christians.

For champions of the local congregation, the repeated calls to local community will have you underlining and writing, “the congregation!” in the margins of your copy. In nearly every chapter, Dreher points out the importance of focusing on and investing time and money in the local community. This absolutely includes the congregation. On more than one occasion, Dreher says that the point of the

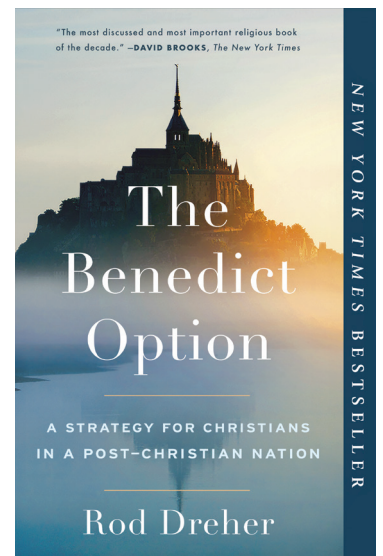
Benedict Option is not to cloister all Christians; however, it does mean living in a way that is countercultural.

There are some issues and places where a discerning reader will be able to easily critique *The Benedict Option*. At times Dreher assumes the worst in Christian leaders and makes broad generalizations of naivety when it comes to politics. Perhaps the biggest issue is the absence of hope. Dreher often despairs at the future of Christianity, and, at times, seems to reduce Christianity to being merely a cultural force for good which has an uncertain end. He writes, “There are people alive who may see the effective death of Christianity within our civilization.”

Christianity, to be sure, is a cultural force. However, any culture that is affected by Christianity is affected primarily by the gospel—God incarnate in order to reconcile creation to Himself through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The end of God’s book has been written. God wins. Christianity, at its core, is God, His glorification, and the salvation which He has worked.

The Benedict Option does offer to answer an important question. In our changing world, what are we to do? The answer is simple: center our lives on Christ, live in the congregation, love our neighbors. This is nothing new. Perhaps the most important contribution *The Benedict Option* brings to the table is it reminds us to do this today.

Schultz, a 2018 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, serves Our Redeemer Lutheran, Kirkland, Wash.



Sentinel Press: New York, 2017.



In early November, nearly 500 AFLC Schools students and guests enjoyed listening to John Stonestreet speak at our Third Annual Friends of the Schools Banquet and a student assembly the next day. Stonestreet leads the Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview, and you can hear him regularly on podcasts like “Breakpoint” or “The World and Everything In It.” His message to us hit the core of our educational philosophy at the Schools: It is difficult to thrive as a Christian in today’s culture, but we live in just a moment of the story of God.

If we are to be prepared to live in this moment, or any other, we must understand the story.

“Anyone not immersed in the Scriptures will be incapable of handling the challenges of our cultural moment,” said Stonestreet. He then shared with us four truths in the story of God that help us understand the cultural moment in which we live.

First, Christ is risen. This claim is supernatural. God became man, was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin, lived a perfect life, died a sinner’s death, then rose again from the dead to conquer sin, death, and the devil. The resurrection of Christ is the central tenet of the

Christian faith, its earliest and most fundamental creed. The resurrection is the reason we have for the hope that we have within us (see I Peter 3:15).

Second, Christ is Lord. This cultural moment is difficult for many, and for some around the world it has been deadly. We are tempted to despair. Our cultural moment demands our capitulation. When we resist compromise, we fall prey to cynicism. We are tempted to place our trust in princes, but as Chuck Colson said frequently, “Salvation never comes in Air Force One.” We look to the risen Christ who is our living Lord.

Third, Christ will restore all things. God created the universe and everything in it, including man as the pinnacle of creation. Man rebelled against God and so fell; sin entered the world and death through sin. God redeemed fallen man through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. God then delivered that redemption, purchased at the cross, through His Word. As Christ ascended, so also shall He come again, “from where He will come to judge both the living and the dead.” (Apostles’ Creed).

This world is not what it once was, but neither is it



"Anyone not immersed in the Scriptures will be incapable of handling the challenges of our cultural moment."
-John Stonestreet



By Pastor Wade Mobley

OUR MOMENT IN HISTORY

what it shall be. This moment is not the end of the story.

Fourth, God has placed us in this time and in this culture. Our calling as Christians is not to mock our culture, criticize our culture, or certainly not to capitulate to our culture.

Rather, God has placed us here, and now, to be ambassadors for Christ (II Corinthians 5:20-21). From the beginning of the Church, Christians have run *into* the pain of society, not *away from* that pain. Even when Christians suffer or are persecuted, the world sees Christ.

Stonestreet's message to our campus squared with what I see every day in the lives of high school and college students. Young people who leave home for their first year of college are not as prepared as they anticipate. Most students lack a stable home life where both parents are actively discipling their children in Christ and participating robustly in a local congregation. Precious few have had Christ at the center of their secondary education. Nearly every college campus has excellent Christian ministry opportunities, but students need to seek out that ministry actively. Nationally, 70 percent of students who were involved in a congregation before their first year of

college aren't active one year later (Campus Renewal). Most students lack the spiritual maturity and discernment to do so and are pulled into the current of a river designed to take them places they shouldn't go.

Education is much more than training students to find a job to earn a living. At AFLBS we work with students from varied backgrounds, but we have the same goal for all: Becoming established in the eternal and inerrant Word of God for a life of faith in Christ and faithful service in His kingdom. That will look different depending on where God calls them after AFLBS, but every student has the opportunity to start here, then go anywhere, grounded in God's Word. We teach students that the world and everything in it is God's world, with the Word of God serving as the lens necessary to understand His world.

Christ is risen. Christ is Lord. Christ will renew all things. And God has placed us in this time and culture, in this moment, to be ambassadors for Christ.

Mobley is the president of the AFLC Schools and interim dean of the Association Free Lutheran Bible School.

This is a difficult one, a topic no one likes talking about: racism. And it's a topic that can spark heated debate and cause hurt on all sides. At its very core, it divides. We don't like talking about racism, or any of our dark sins, because we'd like to think it's not a problem. We'd like to think that just this one prejudiced belief embraced by many nations—including ours—is in the past and we don't have to worry about it. Others like to use the past to fuel their views of today, personally attaching themselves to those hateful

racism is still an issue today. God says that man is evil—Jews and Gentiles (Romans 3:9), and that our “feet are swift to shed blood” (3:15). If we know that we are sinful until the day that we die or until the day of Christ Jesus, why would we be so naive as to think that the sin of racism is an exception and that we could possibly eradicate it from our nation? It will always be a problem, because sin will always be a problem. And we are sinners.

As Christians, it's important to remember that we ultimately belong to a kingdom and not a nation, and therefore our allegiance is to God and His Word. Here is where there's grace. Isaiah writes, “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes

out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose or which I sent it.” (55:11-12).

Once when I was a Bible school student and forced to do street evangelism, I was sent to the mall to lead people to read through five verses that I have been given. I was supposed to ask them what it meant to them in the hopes of explaining salvation. It was awkward and scary,

and one man I was speaking to didn't seem to be connecting to the verses. Then we turned to one that I had accidentally highlighted (oops!). As he read it, I realized it was the wrong reference, but I didn't stop him. It read, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

I stumbled through my lines, one being: “Uh, ... so what does this verse mean to you?” The man smiled for the first time and said, “It means that the kingdom of God is for everyone, no matter your ethnicity!”

God used my mistake to show this man that the church of God was not meant for white folks only. At that time in my life I hadn't witnessed much racism, but he obviously had experienced

some form of it. And it was clear how much that verse meant to him. This one conversation taught me how much I didn't know about others' experiences outside of the church. This verse alone shows that there was some debate in the early church over which people group was godly and which wasn't. How prideful our hearts can be. Haven't we all done that in one form or another during our lifetime? Haven't we wanted to be better than someone else?

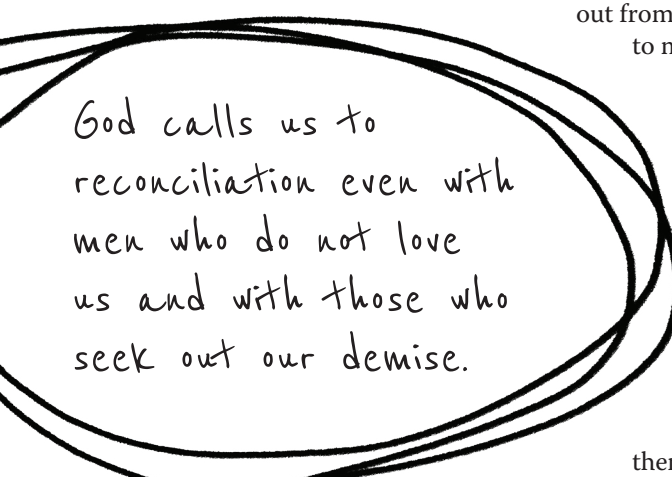
When listening to someone else's story, we again have to remind ourselves what filter we are using. Are we using God's Word, and His gifts given in the fruit of the Spirit? Are we praying for love, patience, kindness, and understanding? Or are we trying to figure out if the people we interact with are speaking the truth by using our own understanding and filtering what they say through everything else we have heard? There is no healing in that, and there is no reconciliation and no peace-seeking.

Paul wrote about reconciliation in II Corinthians 5:16-19: “So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”

We see from Paul's letter to the Corinthians that it is our job to be peacekeepers and seek peace between believers. God also calls us to reconciliation even with men who do not love us and with those who seek out our demise. Hebrews 12:14 says to live in peace with everyone, and that includes non-believers. How different does that sound from your news station? Verse 15 goes further, calling believers to “See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”

The bitter root of racism has no place in the kingdom of God. Instead, it is our job to reach all nations and bring them to Christ.

Berge, a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., is a 2011 graduate of AFLBS.



God calls us to reconciliation even with men who do not love us and with those who seek out our demise.

acts—as the doer or the receiver of hatred. Sometimes we don't see it because we don't want to see it.

And, sometimes, our very culture hides the truth from us. The world is so polarized that we can't seem to help running our information through a worldly filter before we look to God's Word for truth.

Let's establish whether or not racism still exists, since this is often a debate. Rather than assessing how big of a problem it might be, let's just decide if

Racial **RECONCILIATION**

By Abbie Berge



MY NEIGHBOR

By Hans Tanner



Zar Zar, don't walk on their grass!"
"Why?" my 5-year-old responded.
"Because it's not nice," was the best I could come up with in the moment. Often, I respond to my kids' questions with less than ideal answers, and in this particular instance, I was simply striving for quick obedience before we met our new next-door neighbors for the first time on Halloween night. Janna and I had bought and moved into our first house just two months prior, and in that time, we had never met our neighbors who lived one house to the west. An unusual nervousness and anxiety had invaded my soul concerning this meeting.

Within the first month of owning our new home, the one project that I set out to accomplish was to put a fence around the back yard—a barrier between me and my neighbor. This wasn't a painless decision because I value having an openness toward my neighbors, but it was a no-brainer. With three kids under the age of 6 and another one on the way, we knew we needed to be able to send the kids to the backyard to play without worrying if they would end up in the road out in front of our house. But still, we had willingly chosen to erect a barrier between ourselves and our neighbor—and we did it without informing them. (I would do this differently if I could do it again.) Worse yet, we cut their internet line when digging the holes for the fence posts. This was the source of my anxiety as we approached their front door.

"Ring the doorbell just one time," I commanded.

"Why?" came the inevitable response.

My need to provide an answer was rescued by the new neighbors who opened their door. They weren't as old as I thought they'd be; standing before me was a lovely couple in their late 60s or early 70s with a beautiful dog straining to get past their legs to my kids' eager faces.

"Trick or treat!" Zar Zar yelled, followed quickly by his younger sister's equally enthusiastic but quieter echo. With the grace of seasoned Halloween veterans, the couple laughed and placed candy (the good kind) in our kids' buckets while also allowing them to meet their gorgeous canine companion. It was time.

"Hi, I'm Hans, and this is Janna. We're your new next-door neighbors."

Honestly, I can't remember everything that happened and was said after that introduction—the effort of keeping kids appropriately contained has an unfortunate way of blocking memory recall—but I do remember that it was a very normal conversation. They were kind, and now I knew their names.

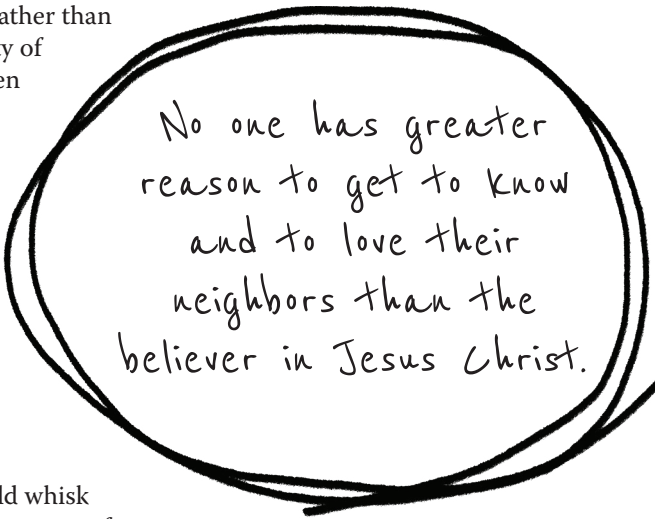
It has been easy in the more than three months that we've been in our new home to cast blame elsewhere for the lack of introductions in our neighborhood. We met many of the families that we had not yet met on our 18-house block that brisk Halloween night. But why had it fallen to us to introduce ourselves? Should not the whole neighborhood have gathered around us to make us feel welcome that very first week we moved in? *Daniel*

Tiger's Neighborhood would lead you to believe that this is an idyllic normality (for the uninitiated, *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* is a children's TV show based on *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood*). But in this era of the smartphone, our arrival went largely unnoticed by all save a few families on the block. I realized that if I was going to get to know my neighbors, I would have to go to them.

No one has greater reason to get to know and to love their neighbors than the believer in Jesus Christ. Behind only the first and greatest commandment to love the Lord is the command to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). Unfortunately, I often fall into the trap of trying to outwardly demonstrate an adherence to the first command, while not realizing that one of the chief ways that God has given me to show my love for Him is through the means of loving my neighbors. Rather than retreating into the safety of my own church and even home, where it seems my neighbors are content to leave me alone, God calls me forth to be a light-bringer and gospel-proclaimer in my cultural context. As John Stonestreet discusses in his book *A Practical Guide to Culture*, if God had no mission for us, He would whisk us away to heaven the moment after conversion. Rather, as Stonestreet puts it, "our salvation employs us in God's redemptive plan for the world" (64-65). Christians live out this reconciling role by loving their neighbors.

But who are my neighbors, and how do I love them in this day and age? To be sure, in one sense, everyone is your neighbor, and you have never met a mere mortal who is not in need of God's love. But if this is too general to be helpful at times, let's not forget that our neighbors are also our actual neighbors—the community of people in which God has placed us and to whom He has called us. This is true regardless of how much your neighbor may or may not be similar to yourself. It includes the Mormon, the faithful Christian, and even the LGBTQ activist. And if your neighbors are like mine, loving them might very well mean opening up your fence gate, walking down the street, and getting to know them, through whatever means necessary.

Tanner is a member of St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D. For great ideas on ways in which to share God's love with your neighbors, he recommends The Gospel Comes with a House Key by Rosaria Butterfield.



No one has greater reason to get to know and to love their neighbors than the believer in Jesus Christ.

A couple of years ago I learned about Pulpit Freedom Sunday. I was puzzled because I thought every Sunday was pulpit freedom Sunday. But I was wrong. This day was organized to challenge the IRS policy on political activity by religious organizations. A law called the Johnson Amendment threatened the loss of tax-deductible status if pastors engaged in politicking from the pulpit. Pulpit Freedom Sunday supporters amassed legal teams and funding to defend pastors who spoke out on candidates and policy. They hoped to bring cases to court, but the IRS wanted nothing to do with this fight and gave the challenge a wide berth.

Donald Trump, in his campaign for the presidency, vowed to “totally destroy” the Johnson Amendment. In 2017, he inserted a repeal into a tax bill. The repeal was

removed on procedural grounds, but later President Trump effectively nullified the amendment by executive order, saying, “My greatest contribution to Christianity—and other religions—is to allow you, when you talk religious liberty, to go and speak openly ...”

Sermons about politics is a subject geared directly at preachers, but every Christian has to determine the relationship between their political beliefs and how they follow Christ. Whether we participate in them or not, politics shape our world. Christians have to know how we will live in society that doesn’t share our beliefs and values.

We sometimes use a theological tool to help answer that question: Martin Luther’s doctrine of the two kingdoms. That is, God is the ruler of the whole world, and He rules in two ways. First, God rules the worldly



kingdom through government and law. And second, God rules the heavenly kingdom through the gospel and grace. Christians are citizens of both of these kingdoms and have responsibilities in both.

The Apostle Paul probably didn't use the term "two kingdoms," but he understood the idea. He lived as Roman, a Jew, and a Christian. He claimed his rights as a Roman citizen to avoid being flogged (Acts 22:25). He used this fact to his advantage more than once. And he also used his Roman citizenship to claim his right to a fair trial. Yet Paul understood very well that he had two citizenships. He would write, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus" (Philippians 3:20).

In some ways Paul had it easier than we do. There was no confusing the Church of Jesus Christ with the Roman kingdom. The most drastic difference was that

For too long the commitment by too many to the kingdom of Christ has been so nominal that we are ineffective in our mission.

Rome taught its people to worship the emperor. Also, Rome had some good laws and some really horrific laws. And Rome had one standard for its citizens and another for slaves and

foreigners. Rome did not resemble a country founded on the principles of the Old Testament much less the teaching of Jesus. As you can see, there was no chance of confusing the two kingdoms.

For years I, like many other Americans, claimed that I lived in a Christian nation. But now that appears to be slipping away. Why? My opinion is that for too long Christians living in our society did not truly believe in the power and effectiveness of the kingdom of God and therefore did not practice its methods.

Here's what I mean: We show our unbelief in the power of the kingdom of God when we delegate the mission of Christ to others, when we let government enforce morality, and when we let specialists with amazing gifts and resources carry out evangelism. The role of most Christians has fallen to supporting the efforts of others as they work toward God's mission. I am not against evangelism or morality. But I am opposed to letting others do the work that Christ intends for all of His followers. We are all called to go "and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Living in the kingdom of God means each of us must follow Christ in what we believe and teach.

For too long the commitment by too many to the kingdom of Christ has been so nominal that we are ineffective in our mission. The kingdom of the world, with its ability to compel others through law and politics, is an attractive alternative to the personally challenging way of sharing and living the gospel. But marketing, politics, and brute force will not build the kingdom of God. When we try and use them, we will fail.

Now is not the time for Christians to give up and retreat from society or double down on past mistakes. We are living in a time when people desperately need the gospel. We need churches where people know each other enough to draw strength and encouragement from one another and where they are committed to each member being involved in the mission of Jesus Christ. This is and has always been the way Christians have impacted their world and spread the kingdom of God.

Snipstead serves Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont.

NOT IN PRINCES

By Pastor Steve Snipstead

By Chris Kumpula

THE IMMIGRANT



Immigration is an important current through which God brings His redemptive plan for mankind. Immigration began at exile from Eden, or at least when the people of Israel emigrated from Egypt to Canaan. As Israel began to establish themselves in the land, it became clear that God's purpose was to draw all nations unto Himself. Isaiah 42:6 announces God's missional purpose for Israel: "I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations." Amos 9:11-12 likewise speaks of a day when He "will raise up the booth of David" (his shelter) for the benefit of "all the nations who are called by my name." Israel was a busy intersection of the world that God used to draw the lost. And even after the people of Israel were themselves captured and taken to a foreign land, God told them to "build houses and live in them" in Jeremiah 29:5. Throughout the Bible, the people

of God emigrated and settled and emigrated again.

God's desire has always been that we love immigrants as our neighbors. Leviticus 19:33 instructed Israel that "when a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God." God shows that we love the immigrant because we, just like the Israelites captive in Egypt, were once immigrants loved by God.

This theme is prominent. Boaz showed this lovingkindness to the Moabite named Ruth. As she immigrated to Israel under distressing circumstances, she benefited from the law of gleanings for sojourners (Leviticus 23:22) and experienced the grace of God through Boaz's vocation. Paul wrote of God's grace for



gentiles, reminding us in Ephesians 2:13 that “now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” In John 4, while most Jews considered the Samaritans outside the covenant promises of God, Jesus invites and entreats a Samaritan woman to taste the living water of the gospel. Peter wrote that believers should live in the present reality as sojourners and exiles (I Peter 2:11), not seeing this world as our true home.

Immigration is beneficial. It does indeed supply additional labor and demand for goods. But immigration is now complicated by the cumbersome apparatus of the modern nation state.

After the Reformation and the Thirty Years War, a sweeping peace settlement was reached in 1648 called the Peace of Westphalia. This constellation of treaties established the political norm of “Westphalian sovereignty,” that is, mutually defined territorial borders and internationally recognized sovereignty of each state to conduct its internal affairs. Immigration now involved crossing controlled borders. The nation state and the modern welfare state necessitate immigration controls previously unnecessary to governments. These political issues are complicated.

Luther’s “two kingdom” theology is helpful here. We may refer to the “right hand” spiritual kingdom where the gospel is wielded or the “left hand” kingdom where the sword is wielded to execute justice in temporal governance.

On the right hand (eternal kingdom), we would see each and every eternal soul as a precious creation made in the image of God. Each is unworthy of salvation, yet each is graciously called to faith in Christ. Our concern in our vocation as believers is to show immigrants the grace of Jesus—to give them the gospel.

On the left hand (temporal kingdom), we affirm that people possess human rights from God, but we also submit to the governing authority of the state. For the sake of justice, security, and good order, we treat immigrants with caution. In our vocation as citizens, we struggle to balance a suspicion that immigrants are coming for the free goods of the welfare state with a realistic appraisal of the dismal circumstances they leave behind at home.

We ought to be conflicted, empathizing with families escaping failed social experiments in Latin America, famine in Africa, and war in the Middle East on the one

hand, and seeing neglected vocation, complicity, and opportunism of those leaving the mess behind on the other. We love our neighbor but still ponder a fence. Some face real choices in their vocation about the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) reporting. Those choices should be hard for us as citizens with two passports, one in the kingdom of God’s grace and another in a land of the rule of law.

Christians today too often make the mistake of confusing kingdoms and conflating God’s mercy with temporal justice. It is little wonder that those outside Christianity are appalled by the apparent double speak: we ascribe our own human rights to God such that no one can take them away from us, while we deny those same rights to those who have experienced tragedy at the borders and beyond. Our humanity is questioned. Do we really believe in freedom?

To answer such questions, we need both doctrinal clarity and hearts of mercy, because immigration presents an immediate opportunity for the Church. The opportunity for congregations is missed when we fail to think about contextualization, assimilation, and acculturation.

Contextualization

All ministry is now cross-cultural, immigration aside. Each culture represents differing “common ideas, feelings, and values that guide community and personal behavior, that organize and regulate what the group thinks, feels, and does about God, the world, and humanity.”¹ Contextualization is the presentation of the gospel in a manner relevant to another culture without compromising the integrity of doctrine. Jesus, Peter, and Paul all worked to convey the good news in a manner that touched common cultural touchstones in a relevant way.

Because of immigration, we need to contextualize the gospel for a kaleidoscope of subcultures around us today. If we do not speak the truth in love with a particular target culture in mind, we will likely speak in terms irrelevant outside our own shrinking subculture.

We need to learn the culture of our congregations and the culture of the communities God is calling us to evangelize. We need to embrace our freedom of worship to smash otherwise invisible cultural barriers to the good news. As Lutherans who believe God has ordained the

... We need both doctrinal clarity and hearts of mercy, because immigration presents an immediate opportunity for the Church.

See page 16

Lord's Supper as a visible gift of grace in the form of bread and wine, and the waters of baptism, form does matter. Form helps convey the gospel, or it hinders it.

Immigrants and the unchurched come to church confronting strange language, practices, music, and maybe even strange people. Whether it is cracks in the paint or crackpots in the pews (counting myself), we must consider the gospel too precious to let culture get in the way. We are surrounded by immigrants who need Jesus. Even if we just find the touchstones for the cultures around us, that is at least a start at the relationship bridge-building Christians are called to do. Thanks be to God that the gospel is universal even when our congregational culture is not. The only healthy culture is one that seeks to emulate Christ.

Assimilation

Assimilation is the process of adjusting to and adopting the norms of the prevailing culture. We expect immigrants to assimilate to our customs, language, and practices. Previous generations of immigrants who tried to do without fell behind those who were able to adapt to the new context of life in America. But assimilation is hard, whether for immigrants meeting American culture or for the unchurched meeting our congregational cultures.

Assimilation is necessary because whether we recognize it or not our congregations have distinctive cultures.

Assimilation is rightly part of the process of teaching and discipleship that unites members of the congregation by grounding them in the Word of God unto faith and fruit. We desire that immigrants and the unchurched come to our

congregations, and in time become doctrinally vetted voting members in submission to the Word of God and in acknowledgement of the mission of that particular congregation. Obviously, assimilation to the family of God is what matters most, and sin means the culture of our congregations will always be flawed until Christ's return. But God desires that His Word sanctifies the congregation, bringing true unity as the many worship as one.

Assimilation ought not be a "get with the program" mentality, but we cannot sacrifice our identity to be "all things to all people" either. Many of our congregations have suffered from failure to assimilate members to our Lutheran distinctives and AFLC emphases of free and living congregations. A thoughtful membership process that looks to assimilation is vital to meet the opportunity of new waves of immigration.

Acculturation

Assimilation alone falls short of God's vision for the church. God desires that as He redeems His people

that they would gather in the congregation and use their gifts in service of the King. When members are asked to contribute their gifts to a static dead vision for ministry, people become frustrated. The vision for ministry of the church comes from the congregation (not excluding the pastor), and with each new member, the personality, gifting, culture, and God-given vision for ministry can shift. We need to be mindful of how our congregations will change in spreading the unchanging gospel.

Susan Beaumont in her book *Inside the Large Congregation* says "assimilation suggests one-way adaptation, in which the newcomer assumes the cultural norms of the dominant group. Acculturation is a broader concept that more appropriately recognizes the need for both the organization and the individual to mutually adapt to one another." If a Mandarin-speaking couple were to join your lefse-grilling congregation, should that not shift the culture? Does God use these culture shifts for His kingdom to reach unbelievers? I think the answer is a clear yes on both counts. The Kingdom of God takes the right form of the local congregation, and as our congregations grow, their culture will change, too.

Sacrificial love

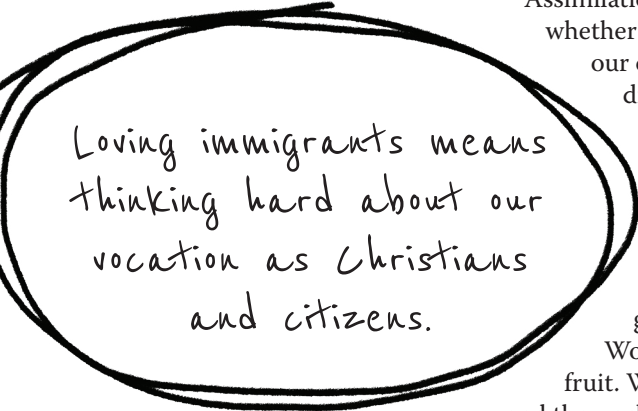
Contextualization, assimilation, and acculturation demand doctrinal clarity and hearts of mercy. We need to know what cannot be compromised. We need to be willing to love immigrants sacrificially to break down barriers to the gospel. This is God's heart for the immigrant.

In Acts 16:3, Timothy was circumcised not because of a need to fulfill the law but "because of the Jews who were in those places." Paul made it clear in Romans 2:25-29 that circumcision was always meant to be physical reminder of the heart and thus unnecessary under the new covenant under Christ's blood, yet he had Timothy circumcised to remove what was clearly a barrier between the Jews and the gospel. Paul and Timothy saw Jews who needed Jesus, and Timothy showed a sacrificial love for those lost souls by doing something most uncomfortable.

In considering a necessarily complex topic such as immigration, we must be careful to see things as God would have us see them. There are people coming to our communities who need the forgiveness of sins and love of their Savior. Loving immigrants means thinking hard about our vocation as Christians and citizens. It means prayerfully evaluating the culture and processes of our congregations we take for granted. It means that by the grace of God, we see "the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you," and that we "love him as yourself."

Kumpula will graduate from the Free Lutheran Seminary in May. He recommends a resource developed by the LCMS in 2012 titled Immigrants Among Us. This report offers a Lutheran framework for approaching immigration issues.

¹ "What is Contextualization? Presenting the Gospel in Culturally Relevant Ways," by Ed Stetzer, *Christianity Today*, Oct. 12, 2014.



Loving immigrants means thinking hard about our vocation as Christians and citizens.

Picture the setting: It is sunny and 70 degrees. The citrus trees are loaded with lemons for fresh squeezed lemonade.

Last February several members of my church in Montana drove down to the Home Missions Conference in Mesa, Ariz. We stayed with snowbirds Randy and Twila Kjos. Little did they know at the time, but they would be called to serve in Alaska that summer.

Each conference day was opened with worship—music and Scripture combined in purpose to bless the Lord. Thank you, Laurie Nash, for leading this time. The organizers recruited a local piano player from a neighboring church and she really enjoyed it. It was a taste of heaven for us.

Speaking of taste, we were fed very well. After the opening service, we took part in a delicious banquet complete with lefse. We had not only food for our physical bodies but our spiritual bodies, as well. The ladies in attendance took part in a good discussion in small groups led by Linda Johnson. Johnson's husband, Jim, is the new Home Missions director. Dr. Steven Lombardo was the keynote speaker and Pastor Joe Ocker brought the Book of Ruth alive during Bible study.

One of the highlights of our time was making connections. Part of the burden of being a part of a Home Missions congregation is isolation from sister congregations.

THE WMF AND HOME MISSIONS

BY LAVONNE WEST

I loved meeting neighbors from our closest congregations in Calgary, Canada, and Butte, Mont. And for us from the farthest corner of Montana, having lunch with our church family from Maryland was such a treat. I even got to hug the lady who makes cookies for Pastor Jeff and Jane Swanson, who serve at The NET ministry in Naknek, Alaska. The voices of Calvary Free Lutheran Pastor Alan Monson, who passed away later this year, and church laywoman Barb Gustafson fill my soul. It's one thing to pray for these folks and quite another to pray with them.

Another challenge for Home Missions is outreach. Some ideas implemented by our congregations that your church might want to adopt include:

- Celebrating Christmas in a barn or Easter on the beach.
- Hosting a comedy night.
- Playing a sports video clip (the Patriots



had just won the Super Bowl and Pastor Johnson shared a testimony video from the team).

- Hosting a hayride. We had horses pull us through the streets of Mesa and followed up with testimonies around a campfire.

- Offering a food pantry. Calvary Free Lutheran in Mesa has a program called Desert Manna. Each week they distribute many boxes of food to the needy.

Picture a new setting: It is cloudy and 23 degrees. The spruce trees are covered in snow as we head back to work.

Returning back to Montana, Vicki, Dan, Darryl, and I traded our flip flops for snow boots as we considered anew our church mission statement: "Sharing Jesus with our neighbors." That's what Home Missions is all about.

West, a member of Stillwater Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont., is the president of the WMF.

Korhonen called as next WM director

Will begin role in March, and will travel to mission fields with outgoing director Palmer

Pastor Earl Korhonen has accepted the call to be the next AFLC World Missions director. Korhonen has served his current congregation, Stavanger Free Lutheran, in Garden City, Iowa, for the past 13 years. He has been in the pastoral ministry since 1995.

Earl and his wife Joan have had a long history of missions interest. Joan is the sister to Sonja Dahl, a former AFLC missionary. Her family was involved in the White Earth and Elbow Lake Village Indian Mission, and the Norwegian Lutheran Mission. After their marriage they became involved in the Hauge Foreign Mission. Earl has served on the Hauge Foreign Mission Board for 20 years, filling the role as the treasurer for the last 19 years. He is also on the AFLC Commission on Evangelism board.

The Korhonens have kept close contact with the Norwegian Lutheran Mission,

making frequent trips to Norway to attend their missions conferences and district meetings. Earl and Joan made trips to Hungary in 2004 and 2016 to work alongside of evangelical Lutherans in Hungary. They enjoy traveling and hearing from people who love missions, saying, "It's like getting re-fueled for ministry."

Earl graduated from AFLBS in 1988 and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin, Superior, and a Master's of Divinity from the Free Lutheran Seminary in 1995. Korhonen is in the process of finishing his Doctor of Ministry degree. Joan attended the Lutheran Brethren Bible School and continued at the NLM Bible Folk School in Melhus, Norway.



She has a Bachelor of Science degree in pre-school and elementary education from Crown College, St. Bonifacius, Minn.

They served AFLC congregations in Snohomish, Wash., and Cumberland, Wis., before taking the call to Garden City.

Korhonen plans to begin his work as World Missions director on

March 1, and will travel to each of the AFLC mission fields accompanied by the outgoing director Pastor Del Palmer.

Members of the World Missions Committee wish to thank you for your prayers and input as they walked through the process of calling a new director. Please continue to pray for the Korhonens as they take up the responsibilities of AFLC World Missions.

Benson retires from military service, honored for 18 years of chaplaincy

Chaplain Lt. Col. Craig Benson (right) was presented with the Air Force Meritorious Service Medal on Dec. 6, 2018. The award was presented by Chaplain Col. Scott Rummage (left), the Command Chaplain at Air Force Material Command Headquarters at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, where Chaplain Benson has served for the past 4 years. Benson retired from the Air Force Reserves, where he has served as a chaplain for 18 years and, prior to that, as an aviator for 15 years. Chaplain Benson, who serves Grace Evangelical Lutheran, Morris, Ill., thanks the people within the AFLC for their prayers and support as he served the spiritual needs of military members and their families on behalf of the AFLC these past 18 years.



Home Missions to host retreat

AFLC Home Missions will host a leadership retreat Feb. 4-8 at Calvary Free Lutheran, Mesa, Ariz. The theme for the 2019 retreat is "Overcoming Discouragement: Remember the Call." Speakers include Dr. Steve Lombardo, Pastor Joe Ocker, Pastor Harold Rust, Linda Johnson, and Joyce Rust.

Registration is \$100/individual and \$150/couple, with reduced registration for Home Missions congregational members. A limited number of host homes are available through Calvary Free Lutheran.

To register, visit aflchomemissions.org or call 763-412-2018.



I was sitting with a man in Mexico discussing a situation that had been sad and depressing for years. I have visited with him on numerous occasions as different events provoked a response from him and nothing ever seemed to change. Hope was long dead and gone ... until this visit.

As God patiently worked in his heart over the years, he slowly began to recognize his need to say something he had not wanted to say and to say it in a way that demonstrated his sincerity. And when he finally did, something happened that he hadn't expected and he asked me, "Could it be possible?" Could it be possible that what he had hoped for so long ago might really come to pass?

Well, no, not on this planet and not in this lifetime. Not if all you look at is the way human beings are naturally and how they naturally respond to being hurt or being angry or being bitter. After all, "Can a leopard change its spots?" (Jeremiah 13:23) If you take classes in relationships from soap operas or from men whose *machismo* (masculine pride) is foremost in their minds, then no. It will just be the same song with a different verse.

That is part of what makes sharing God's Word and God's

WHEN HOPE DAWNS ANEW

BY PASTOR TODD SCHIERKOLK

ways so difficult. What God says so often goes against the grain of what makes sense to people or the way everyone else seems to think life should be lived. Servants of Jesus can seem to come from a different planet, not just a different country. To change someone's mind requires changing their heart and that requires ... a miracle. It requires the miraculous, wondrous working of the Spirit of God.

Nicodemus was on a completely different plane from Jesus when he sat down for his midnight visit with the rabbi who was causing such a stir in Israel (John 3). Jesus' words about being born two times left Nicodemus shaking his head and asking in complete confusion, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (v. 4).

It has amazed me over the years of being Christ's ambassador how people's conclusions



about what Jesus says are just as absurd as Nicodemus' conclusions. "That isn't how it is around here," I've heard. I am imagining poor Nicodemus in his confusion thinking, "People just aren't born like that down here on planet earth." But as God patiently worked in his heart over time, Nicodemus slowly began to recognize that what Jesus said was true. And God took his heart of stone and, miraculously, gave him a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).

There are four sad and depressing situations that have all of a sudden shown the faintest signs of hope in our ministry here in Mexico. Thank you for your continued prayers to the God of hope for the people involved, "for nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

Schierkolk is an AFLC missionary serving in Jerez, Mexico.



Schools host Christmas concerts

The AFLC Schools hosted a weekend of Christmas concerts Nov. 30 through Dec. 2 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. Focused on the theme, “Come, Behold Redeeming Love,” the event featured an evening of gospel team concerts on Friday, and choir concerts on Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon. The service included performances from the AFLBS Concert Choir, Proclaim Choir, Symphonic Wind Ensemble, Handbell Ensemble and the Free Lutheran Seminary Chorus. Pastor Wade Mobley, president of the Schools, gave a message, and members of the congregation joined the choirs for the traditional singing of Handel’s “Messiah.” The musical groups were conducted by Andrew Hanson, and accompanied by Rachel Papillon and Marian Christopherson.





O

have I learned a few things in the nearly 12 years that I have served on the Home

Missions Committee. Foremost among those lessons is that new congregations don't grow on trees, by which I mean that they aren't just fully developed fruit hanging around waiting for someone to pick them. Planting a new congregation takes prayer, time, love, discipleship, patience, finances, and believers who are willing to risk much over the long haul, not knowing the final outcome.

Newborn, healthy, growing, free and living congregations are a blessing from the Lord. When a church body is multiplying new churches, it's much like when children are born to parents. Those sons and daughters are, as Solomon writes in Psalm 127, "arrows in the hands of a warrior" (v. 4). God says that "blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them" (v. 5). We want our AFLC quiver to be full of newborn congregations. Thank you for your partnership in this kingdom goal.

My tenure on the Home Missions Committee is coming to a close, and the timing of my leaving coincides with quite a few others, as well. Pastor Paul Nash, director of Home Missions, Julia Prichard, administrative assistant, and

NEW BEGINNINGS

BY PASTOR JOE OCKER

Laurie Nash, who filled in when needed, stepped down from their roles at the end of 2018. Two long-serving committee members were replaced this last June, and two more go off next June. One could say that, in 12 months' time, 70 percent of Home Mission's leadership team will be new. Wow! What does that mean for the future of newborn congregations?

I'm excited for AFLC Home Missions. It has been very encouraging to see Pastor Jim Johnson, along with his wife Linda, say yes to the call to become director of Home Missions with such faith and creative zeal. And our committee members have also taken notice that the AFLC is taking to heart the call to raise up congregations in their own regions and neighborhoods as God supplies the resources. Hallelujah!

There is no one formula for creating newborn congregations that always works because every church plant is made up of people just like you and me. Sometimes we fail. Sometimes, by the amazing grace of God, we succeed. But this we do know, when we ask, seek, and knock, the Lord has promised to give, to help us find, and to open doors (Matthew 7:7). We may plant and water, but

God causes the growth (I Corinthians 3:6).

The call to make disciples and birth new congregations can be daunting. Have you read the Parable of the Sower lately (Matthew 13:1-23)? Many of those seeds failed to bear fruit. They failed because of Satan's activity, unyielding hearts, and because of the worries and temptations of life. We can pray and move against Satan's activity. We can love and pray for unyielding hearts. We can come alongside new believers and congregations and encourage them in faith to overcome worries and temptations. We can trust the Lord of the harvest to defend His cause.

Thank you for redoubling your commitments to pray for Home Missions, and to generously support this ministry financially. May the Lord help us all run and not grow weary. Let us be praying for a 30-, 60-, and 100-fold harvest. Amen.

Ocker, a member of the Home Missions Committee, serves Dell Lutheran, Frost, Minn.

PEOPLE & PLACES

AFLC Home Missions announced that **Loren Tungseth** has accepted the position as the Alaska Mission Coordinator. Tungseth will work part-time, with a start date of January 1.

Pastor Gerald Peterson has accepted a call to serve Faith Lutheran, Durant, Okla., and will officially begin in mid-January.

Chris Kumpula has accepted a call to serve Word of Life Lutheran, Mankato, Minn. Kumpula completed his studies at AFLTS in December and will graduate in May.

Dr. Robert Kohl, 82, of Brookings, S.D., died Dec. 6, 2018, at home. He served on the AFLC World Missions Board, and taught two years at the Free Lutheran Seminary's Summer Institute of Theology. The service was Dec. 15 at Calvary Free Lutheran, Arlington, S.D., with Pastor Aaron Olson officiating.

Grateful for the talents shared with our readers, we thank our 2018 column writers: **Jenaya Crestik, Christina Osthus, Pastor Richard Gunderson, and Aila Foltz.** They have willingly shared God's work in them through their personal stories.

In conjunction with the AFLC Annual Conference, the Commission on Evangelism will host **Rekindle the Fire** on June 10 at Spruce Lake Retreat Center, Canadensis, Pa. At the retreat for pastors and their wives, the featured speaker will be author and evangelist Dr. Don Bierle of FaithSearch International.



Pastor David Keippela

Pastor David Paul Keippela, 71, of Wyoming, Minn., passed away on Dec. 11, 2018. Born Oct. 30, 1947, in Hancock, Mich., he was the son of Oscar and Svea (Kyro) Keippela. He graduated from Doelle High School in Tapiola, Mich. He met and fell in love with his wife, Barbara. Before being called to the ministry in 1985, he was a math and science special education teacher in Wrenshall, Minn. He served the Lord at Sunnyside Lutheran, Stacy, Minn., for 20+ years.

Surviving are his wife; two sons Jason (Joy) Keippela, and Jeremy Keippela; two grandchildren; two brothers, Donald Keippela and Robert Keippela; and four sisters, Shirley (Roy) Tapio, Carol (Donald) Petrelius, Doris (Carl) Grussendorf, and Donna (Kevin) Ruohonen.

The service was Dec. 15 at Sunnyside Lutheran, Stacy, Minn. Interment was in Linwood Cemetery, Linwood Township, Minn.



Stonestreet keynotes Schools banquet, speaks to student body

John Stonestreet, president of the Colson Center for Christian Worldview and host of Breakpoint Radio, was a special guest speaker at the AFLC Schools on Nov. 8-9, when he spoke at the Friends of the Schools Banquet and also spoke to the student body.

NOVEMBER MEMORIALS

AFLBS

David Van Hoveln
Diane Lane
Ruth Claus
Bernace Papillon
Aini Myking
Julie Slieter

AFLTS

David Van Hoveln
Beverly Heylens
Ken Schaller
Wayne Deubner
Mark Amiot
Alice Parish

Evangelism

Alyce Olson

Home Missions

Thelma Lombardo
David Van Hoveln
Jeanne Backstrom

General Fund

Elsa Reagan
Aini Myking

Parish Ed

Mabel Johnson

WMF

Diane Lane
Harold Ruud
Marilyn Foss
David Biber

World Missions

Pastor Richard Dahlin
Roy Hilde
Mildred Marks

... in honor of

Home Missions

Pastor Paul Nash
Jayce Hall

AFLC BENEVOLENCES November 1-30, 2018

FUND	REC'D IN NOVEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$29,011	\$359,798	\$369,131
Evangelism	23,896	117,523	122,483
Youth Ministries	9,067	129,534	120,180
Parish Education	8,689	154,690	156,689
Seminary	29,085	260,956	249,622
Bible School	24,935	474,077	491,548
Home Missions	86,115	430,783	407,004
World Missions	31,203	353,218	411,648
Personal Support	45,876	605,079	559,399
TOTALS	\$287,877	\$2,885,658	\$2,887,703

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

DISCERNING THE TIMES

"These modern times ... will they never end!"

A few of our readers might recognize the quote, spoken by an older man from one of our congregations who was frustrated by what he deemed undesirable changes in society and church life that seemed to be happening so fast. Those of us who empathize with him might feel at times like singing, "Change and decay in all around I see" (from "Abide With Me," *Ambassador Hymnal* 601).



Pastor Robert Lee

There's an interesting word for us in the description of King David's army, of all places. The sons of Issachar are described as men who understood or discerned the times in which they were living, and knew what to do (I Chronicles 12:32). The word "understood" is a translation of a Hebrew word which means to have insight or to act with prudence. According to *Strong's Concordance*, it comes from a root verb that means to separate something mentally and distinguish its parts. In other words, this is not just knowledge of the facts, but it indicates an understanding of what something truly means. The sons of Issachar knew what was happening, knew what it meant, and knew what to do.

Our AFLC founding fathers and mothers discerned the times correctly in the early 1960s and took a costly stand that was not an easy one. I visited with a retired pastor a few years ago of another Lutheran church body. When he discovered my affiliation, he said that he had been watching the AFLC since we first organized, and in his opinion current developments in church life were making it abundantly clear that our concerns were absolutely correct. Bigger is not better, piety is not synonymous with legalism, and scriptural authority is under attack. One size doesn't fit all, and an association of congregations that preserves local autonomy is preferable to a synod. Yes, these concerns were valid in the past and

are still at the heart of what the AFLC seeks to be in the 21st century.

Discerning the times may also apply to the return of Jesus Christ. No doubt most believers have been troubled and even embarrassed by past and present date-setters who have been wrong again and again. (Anyone still remember the *88 Reasons* book?) But don't miss the fact that there is something commendable in these errors, and it is the longing for Christ's return. At the 100th birthday celebration for the late Pastor Lars Stalsbrotten, his wife wondered why he was still alive. One reason, she suggested, was his hope that he might escape death and be caught up at the Lord's coming (I Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Jesus is coming again, and Christians want to be ready for that great hour. Perhaps today! Faith in the Second Coming of Christ is not an excuse to be passive, but instead provides a powerful motivation for evangelism, seeking the lost that even more might be ready to meet Him.

O hasten Thine appearing, Thou
Bright and Morning Star!
Lord, may we soon be hearing the
trumpet sound afar.
Thy people all are yearning to be Thy
raptured bride,
And at Thine own returning be
caught up to Thy side.
(Samuel Miller)

So, while we watch and wait, how do our congregations discern these modern times and what should be done to build free and living congregations today? Luther suggests planting trees, which means that it is not wrong to plan and prepare for the future. What is the so-called "Benedict option," and what might be learned from it and adapted to our mission? This is the attempted focus of our first issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador* for the New Year, as various writers grapple with a biblical response to contemporary issues. A sincere thank you to those who were willing to

serve our church family in this way!

No, modern times will never end, and tomorrow will soon be yesterday. We might be wise to pray for the anointing of the sons of Issachar, to know what is happening, to know what it means, and to know what to do. And for those of us who struggle with

*The sons of Issachar knew
what was happening,
knew what it meant, and
knew what to do.*

"change and decay" and are tempted at times to think that the two are the same, the next line of the hymn verse mentioned above must be remembered: "O Thou who changest not, Abide with me."

In Memoriam

A funeral service for Aini Myking was held Nov. 26, 2018, in her home church, St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran, Cloquet, Minn. Aini came to our schools' campus more than 40 years ago as a young widow to serve as the Bible school dean of women. After that ministry concluded, new avenues of volunteer service opened for her, including many years coordinating Sunday service at the Crystal Care Center. She often recruited seminary men to preach, and was not hesitant to offer kind constructive criticism, so we called her our adjunct homiletics instructor. Keeping plants alive and healthy on campus was another of her projects, and for several years she prepared an annual index for *The Lutheran Ambassador*. Blessed be her memory!

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

association retreat center

EACH MOMENT IS IN HIS HANDS

BY KIRK RAUTIO

I woke up a morning not too long ago and had an abnormal urge to look back on the year. I found myself hesitant to do so as this is usually an attack on my day from the enemy. I have learned that looking back tends to blind me to what is directly in front of me. But this time I started thinking about all of the little struggles that we have overcome out here at the Association Retreat Center, and it brought joy into my heart.

It didn't take long for this small moment of joy to change to panic and defeat when a building flooded because of a broken connection in the pump house. While I spent the next hours working on this new challenge, God and I had some quality time together. I had a very wet and cold opportunity to ask Him, "Why today?"

The next day during prayer at our morning devotions with the crew I had a moment of clarity to answer my question.

Every morning we thank God for the day of life we have right now and the opportunity to use it here on His property. We also thank Him for one more day of protection from all of the things that could have gone wrong and did not. We ask Him to do the same today, and we ask that we might go home to our families at the end of the day with our digits and faculties intact.

For some reason, this seemed like a truly heartfelt moment for me that morning. The challenge from the previous day could have been a lot worse than it was. In the many alternative versions of the day which flashed through my mind, some portion of our prayers had not been fulfilled. But praise God, He never fails us. I was reminded of Isaiah 41:13, "For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you. Do not fear; I will help you."

This whole event was a gentle reminder that the past is a blessing, so it is good to

thank Him for yesterday. I was reminded to focus on the task at hand, but also to thank Him for today and the protection He granted me to make it through.

Thank Him for the work He has for you today; it is for His glory and your development. Push forward one step, one challenge, one broken pipe of spraying cold water at a time. He has what you need for each moment, each challenge, and every learning experience that will come your way. As Isaiah shows us, we enter these moments not through fear but by knowing that each moment God is here to help, to hold onto, and to walk with us. May you be blessed as you see Jesus as He "takes hold of your right hand" today.

Rautio is the executive director of the Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis.