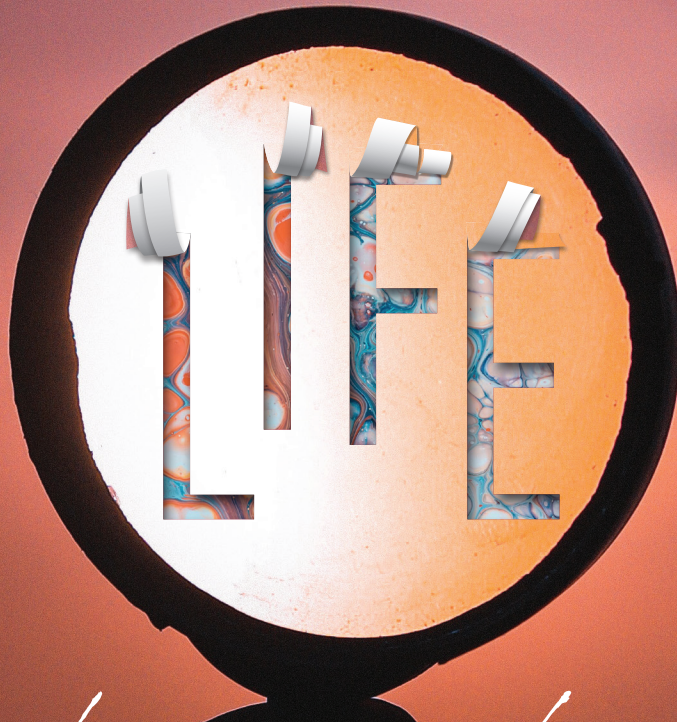


THE 

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LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



& human dignity



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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EDITOR

Pastor Robert L. Lee
rlee@aflc.org

MANAGING EDITOR

Ruth Gunderson
ruthg@aflc.org

CIRCULATION

Liz McCarlson
lasubscriptions@aflc.org

EDITORIAL BOARD

Monica Coyle
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ENCOURAGING
WORD

THOSE WAVES YOU FACE

BY ELIZABETH NEUFELD

God is in control. You hear this repeated to you whenever you express your struggles to a friend, but it's one of the hardest things to comprehend. "You mean, I'm not the one in control?" you ask.

It seems like the obvious answer is, "Of course you're not." But do we really believe that?

Matthew 8 records how the disciples struggled in the cramped fishing boat as it tossed wildly on the waves. They had likely suffered through dozens of storms before and knew exactly what to do—to a limit. This particular storm made them feel like they were at death's door. They cried out to Jesus at last, and said, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"

Jesus woke up, apparently unfazed by the tumult around them, and replied to their knotted up little hearts, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?"

Why are you so afraid, my friend? Who told you this was out of God's hands? Who told you that these waves you're facing don't answer to the Almighty God?

He says to us, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze" (Isaiah 43:2, NIV).

Through everything, God is there. He is aware of your hurts and struggles, and He will provide for you. This doesn't mean His provision will be what you think is best, but it means that by looking to God the ultimate outcome is His

glorification. He knows exactly the way it ought to go, despite your own ideas of man-made security. He loves and protects His children and makes His Kingdom greater through doing so.

"Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey Him!'" (Matthew 8:23-27).

Jesus pointed His disciples to His power and authority. The kingdom grew that day in the spirits of these men who witnessed an incredible display. But it was a mere sliver of the amount of control the Lord has in this world He created.

The winds and waves are there, the fire exists, but the Lord keeps you; He asks you to lean on Him. He says in John 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

There will be times when He rebukes the torrential storms, and they will cease. But remember that while there will be inevitable days when they'll go on, He graciously gives you the appropriate amount of strength and wisdom to walk through it and become more and more like Him—an illuminating light this world needs. He is in control, and He always will be, even over these waves you face.

Neufeld is a Home Missions parish builder serving at Calvary Free Lutheran, Mesa, Ariz.

Compassion for the mother is extremely important,
but is never served through destroying the innocent.
—Randy Alcorn

The quest for perfection, the notion that man is
the architect of his own heredity and the blurring
of what it means to be human are mainstays of the
new world view.

—Dave Andrusko

Just because something happens to be legal does not make it moral, ethical,
or right. Abortion is perhaps one of the most dramatic examples of a situation
where something is legal, but is very much a sin against God.

—A.L. Barry

No law can give me the right to do what is wrong.
—Abraham Lincoln

Pro-Lifers even have one big advantage over their
predecessors: now, wonderful photographs of
unborn children at every stage of gestation are
available.

—Marvin Olasky

The state has an interest in protecting the poor, the
elderly, and disabled persons. The lives of disabled
and elderly must be no less valuable than the lives
of young and healthy.

—William Rehnquist

When

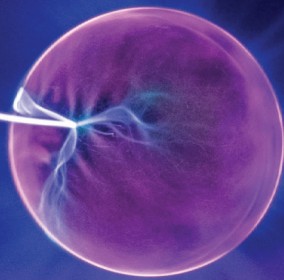
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begins





By Pastor Ken Hart

In the spring of 1995, I sat alone in a waiting room inside what had once been St Ansgar's Hospital in Moorhead, Minn. After a while, my wife appeared, a knowing smile brightening her face, and motioned for me to follow her. Back in one of the small examination rooms, a technician again positioned a Doppler device on her, and then I heard it—a strong thumping sound that was about 12 inches from her own heart. To my ears, this heartbeat testified to life.

Several months later we stared at a monitor. Sound waves revealed a very human shape, with that same heart beating, a brain inside the head, all the fingers and toes where they should be, and a thumb touching his lips. After a few moments, the arms stretched the same way that a baby's arms stretch in a crib, and the baby rolled over. To my eyes, the screen testified to life.

However, my ears and my eyes can be misleading. What is the testimony of Scripture? Did I really hear and see evidence of life?

Does life begin at the first breath? Genesis 2:7 describes God creating the first man from dirt and His own breath, and the man comes to life. However, this is the only time that human life begins this way. For those of us who were formed inside of our mothers, we cannot assume that the same applies to us. Secondly, the Hebrew word can also mean "spirit."

Does life begin when the blood circulates? A human heart first beats at two to three weeks after conception. The baby's own blood is circulating through the body, different from the mother's blood. Scripture tells us that the life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11 and Deuteronomy 12:23), however, this is strictly within the context of the use of blood for the purpose of atonement.

Does life begin at birth? Exodus 21:22-25 begins, "When men strive together, and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined." But if there is harm, the penalty matches the harm, even "life for life." Some use this Scripture to contend that a miscarriage does not constitute harm, therefore the unborn baby is of lesser value. However, closer examination suggests the opposite. The Hebrew word for what comes out of the womb is *yeled*, which always refers to a child who can live outside the womb. The verb *yatsa'* refers to live births. The Hebrew

word for miscarriage is not used here. Therefore, verses 22 to 25 are contrasting a situation in which there is no harm and the baby is born alive as opposed to a situation in which there is harm to the unborn child. As a whole, this passage provides that the taking of the life of an unborn child is judged the same as the taking of any human life.

In Psalm 139:13, David praises God: "For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother's womb." What is translated into English as "inward parts" is the Hebrew word *kilyat*. While it does mean "kidneys," more broadly it refers to the heart, the soul, the personality, the emotions—all of which can only be found in life.

Verse 16 refers to David's "unformed substance" which was watched over by God. Even as David's body was forming and developing, God was observing and caring for him.

In Genesis 25:22, the wrestling of Rebekah's unborn twins inside of her was making her life miserable. Non-living things do not wrestle.

In Psalm 22:10, David wrote, "from my mother's womb You have been my God." God was already at work in his life before David was born. Likewise, Jeremiah was called to be a prophet before his birth (Jeremiah 1:5). In Galatians 1:15, Paul states that God had set him apart before his birth. In Luke 1:41-44, John the Baptist had three months to go before his birth, and he is described as "leaping for joy" because Jesus the Savior was near.

In Psalm 51:5, David admits that he was sinful at the time of his conception. Only a living human being can be a sinner.

In Luke 1:36, what was conceived in Elizabeth was not a thing or a potential person, but a "son."

Scripture interprets itself. Throughout Scripture, over and over again, the message from God is consistent. Before birth, this is a human being with a soul, loved by God, just as valuable as someone who has been born already, just as worthy of our care and protection.

Today, may our consciences be shaped by God's Word, not by the surrounding culture, as we love and respect human life from conception to death and into eternity.

Pastor Hart serves Faith Lutheran, Fairbury, Neb.



By Joel & Chris Rasmussen

ave you ever had a choice to make in which you so very clearly can see how your past and the things the Lord has taught you prepared you undoubtedly to make the best decision possible?

Even before we knew each other we desired to be parents. Joel even bought shoes and clothes for his future children during high school and college. Our journey to parenthood was difficult at times. After few years of struggling through infertility the Lord lead us to domestic adoption.

We received a handful of emails with adoption opportunities over the two years we waited to adopt. As we read every detail in every email, we so badly desired to be parents for each child. We said “yes” often and heard back “no” many times from birth parents. Each one of those lives meant so much to us, and with each “no” came a feeling of sadness and grief as we had pictured each child as part of our family.

On March 5, 2018, we received another email from our adoption agency as we had many times previously. The subject line read, “Urgent need for a family.” But this email seemed different than the rest. In order to fully understand why, you need to see how God prepared us for this baby years before we knew about him.

Joel’s brother Caleb was born in 1988. Doctors told Joel’s parents that there was a less than 1 percent chance of survival due to a mass in his chest and other life-threatening issues. Caleb was in the hospital for a long time. He was fed through a gastrostomy tube (G-tube), and required a lot of doctor visits and therapies. Caleb is now 31 years old. He has a diagnosis of Cerebral Palsy, but if you ever have the chance to meet him you will see his diagnosis does not define who he is. He is a miracle who joyfully lives boldly each day for his Jesus.

The email we received on March 5 explained that there was a 3-month-old baby boy who had been born completely healthy but was in an accident at 12 days old. Because of this accident he was without oxygen for an undetermined amount of time, which in turn caused brain damage. The long-term prognosis was unknown, but he would most likely eventually be diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy and be fed through a G-tube. There was little information other than that. We were given 12 hours to

decide if we wanted to be included with the other families who wanted to adopt this little boy. It didn’t take much discussion or time for us to say yes. We knew this was our son. After difficult years of waiting to be parents when we desired it so badly, we clearly saw how God prepared us specifically for this little boy.

We met via FaceTime with the birth parents and the conversation couldn’t have gone any better. We learned more about the baby boy, and the more we heard the more we fell in love with him. We shared with them our desire to be parents to this little boy and we also shared Caleb’s story. At the end of the meeting they told us they were going to decide between us and two other families. We were told we should hear something from the adoption agency the following day. At 4 a.m. the next morning, March 8, we received a text from the birth parents that read, “You convinced us. He’s yours now,” with a picture of our son. And just like that, we were parents. We had a son. He was 2,000 miles away. We hadn’t even met him. But he was our son.

The rush of emotions we felt in that moment is something we will never forget, and we will cherish forever. We decided to name our son Ezra.

We met Ezra for the first time on March 9. He was three months old and in a NICU in southern California. While talking with his nurses and doctors the word “miracle” was used to describe his life over and over. God had a plan for Ezra’s life that included us as his parents. The journey for us to be together was not what most would say is conventional, but it was all part of God’s plan.

Because of Ezra’s potential Cerebral Palsy diagnosis, he was placed for adoption. Obviously, we are happy for the choice his birth parents made but knowing how common disabilities are looked at in such a negative way in our culture today shows how little life is valued. Some children don’t even get the chance to be adopted by a loving family or born into a loving family solely based on a potential disability. Their lives are ended before they have the chance to live outside of the womb. We would invite anyone who thinks someone with a disability does not deserve life to meet our son Ezra or Joel’s brother Caleb, look them in the eyes, and tell them they do not deserve to be alive.

Last month Ezra turned 2 years old. He is an amazing little boy who has already taught us so much. His life and every life are equally important and valued.

The Rasmussens are members of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.



EZRA

*Our
son*





LIFE

matters



By Rev. Michael Salemink

e had much to celebrate as 2019 ended. Lutherans For Life completed a fourth decade of equipping gospel-motivated voices for Life. Our Life Chapters and Life Teams increased, and their members declared and demonstrated the sanctity of life in more congregations and communities than ever before, including high schools and college campuses. Print resources, digital materials, expert consultations, and ongoing conversations reached some 200,000 individuals nationwide in 2019. Life-affirming donors continued to offer their fellowship and invest their support in our ministry and mission. And the message of how Almighty God creates, redeems, and calls every human life as His own precious treasure forever changed untold hearts and saved countless lives.

Yet we have much to challenge us as 2020 commences. Here are the biggest problems we see and how we intend to meet them:

Abortion: The deliberate killing of unborn children remains legal for all and reasonable to many across our country. It has prominent public advocates, particularly when those children come with disabilities. We testify instead how science observes a human person begins at fertilization; how common sense verifies that ages, appearances, and abilities do not diminish value; and how Holy Scripture insists that God's labor of creating proclaims every human life special.

Embryo experiments: An estimated 250,000 to as many as 1,000,000 little ones lie frozen in laboratories like prisoners. Vaccine manufacturing, in vitro fertilization, genetic editing, and stem-cell collecting endanger them when they are most vulnerable. We rejoice that the gospel of Jesus Christ announces God became incarnate as a human embryo. This—His labor of redeeming—proves every human life precious along the entire spectrum of development, and it comforts each of us in our own weaknesses and darkness.

Assisted suicide: Nine American jurisdictions allow physicians to diagnose certain persons as better off dead. A doctor can prescribe patients fatal doses of pharmaceuticals if the patient feels his/her life has become useless. Even though most medical associations oppose it, "death-with-dignity" enthusiasts are getting organized and subsidized. Their arguments about bodily autonomy are only intensifying pressure on elderly, incapacitated, and chronically afflicted folks. We delight that our Heavenly Father has fashioned human flesh to serve as His Spirit's temple. His activity of calling all to His kingdom pronounces every human life priceless and gives purpose even to impaired bodies.

A culture of results: The devil, the world, and our sinful nature still seek to assess worth by one's works. Society assumes that whoever exercises power,

whoever displays productivity, whoever appears pretty, whoever accumulates property, and whoever attains popularity matter more than others. We maintain that God's graciousness gives every human life sanctity and significance. No one else's efforts or failures can either add to or take from it, and this forgiveness and salvation rescue us from using death as a solution.

Pursuit of every sexuality: Satan and selfishness have twisted God's gift of physical intimacy into a smorgasbord of options. They promise fulfillment in expressing oneself however one pleases, including pornography, promiscuity, and perversion, which ultimately turn destructive. We contend that one's identity does not derive from carnal stimulation but from the Creator and His community to whom we belong. And keeping marriage, sexuality, and procreation connected best receives His blessings.

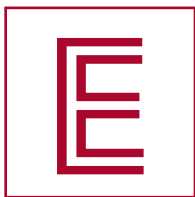
Prevention of every suffering: We live in an age that would rather die than hurt. We dwell in a land that would rather kill than not have control. This perspective sees pregnancy as an obstacle and aging as a burden. We believe that the presence of our crucified Savior brings meaning even to our pain. In our aching He can still benefit our neighbors, and needing one another has a profound beauty to it.

Disagreeing without disrespecting: Twenty-first-century conversations mostly go one of two ways—either we tolerate or we berate. We're told to accept and affirm opposing opinions as equally valid, or we're taught to silence them by insulting and shouting. We invite both courage and compassion, because the Lord our God of law and gospel has shown how both prevail. We can refute ideas even as (and because!) we respect individuals, and we will question while we cherish each person with whom we come into contact.

Feelings beat facts: Narratives carry more weight than reality because they appeal to emotion, and emotion can nullify reason and better judgment. Unwritten rules demand "safe" discourse. We are told, "When given the choice between being right and being kind, choose kind." We take heart in God Who has brought truth and love together, the truth that saves and the love that rejoices with the truth.

Apprehension encounters hope: Life-issue situations always involve anxiety, which often exerts more influence on our decisions than anything else. Dread makes treaties with death without considering how it invites enslavement. We resound the hope and the joy of Him Who has risen from the dead. If He has sanctified causes as lost as us, then He will withhold nothing wonderful even in the very valley of the shadow of death itself.

Salemink is the executive director of Lutherans For Life.



By Julia Amiot

Ephraim Mark arrived four weeks before his due date. It was a little early in the pregnancy, but I had peace. We were overjoyed to have him with us. He was sweet and looked like our other babies. I noticed a couple of things about him right away that made him unique. He seemed limp and he had a long tongue, but he melted into me knowing that I was his mama and I was the one to keep him warm and safe. He was perfect.

While he was laying in front of me getting a checkup, I had a fleeting thought that it looked like he had Down syndrome. I got a shot of adrenalin and felt a little scared. But I brushed it off. I thought that the nurses or doctor would have said something if they had suspected anything.

Twelve hours after Ephraim was born, he went to his second of four hospitals. He needed breathing support, which was typical for a preemie. We had peace. We knew he was strong, and we expected him to be home in a few days. This was just a small hiccup in our journey. He would be fine.

Ephraim did well and was soon breathing on his own. He was strong and brave. We stayed the night at the

bigger hospital and the next day talked with the intensivist, a doctor who cares for critically ill patients. He told us that he thought Ephraim had Down syndrome and a heart condition that would require open heart surgery. We felt shocked. Our whole world was rocked.

We went back to our room and cried. We grieved the loss of our expectations and feared for Ephraim's future. We wondered about his heart, his health, and how society and culture would treat him. We prayed and talked and knew that even though this was unexpected we would love our boy no matter what.

It eventually occurred to us that this was something that happened to our child in the very first stages of cell divisions. We felt compassion and an urge to help and protect Ephraim, like Jesus when He said, "Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?"

Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:9-11, ESV). We chose to love and cherish Ephraim whatever his future abilities would be and no matter how quickly he would accomplish his goals. We were on his side and would advocate for him to get him the best care.

Loving Ephraim in his first few months consisted of learning a whole new language of medical jargon and acronyms, learning more about Down syndrome from credible sources, and advocating for him. We tried to learn as much as we could about his heart and other conditions and to ask questions and better understand doctors' decisions and suggestions. It was an intense in-depth study on our boy, what made him unique, and what we needed to expect. We realized that we need to keep what we learned in mind and to continue learning.

Now our son is growing and doing so well. We bring Ephraim to therapy to get him help with walking, talking, and even eating. We consciously include him with everything our family does. We wash our hands very frequently to prevent respiratory infections. We talk very openly with our children about Down syndrome and other conditions that people have.

A few months ago, I had an overwhelming surge of love and admiration for Ephraim. He has brought us so much joy. His hard work and determination, smiles and snuggles, giggles and hugs make us so proud that he is our son. Even with the hard times we have grown closer as a family and as a couple. Because this experience has been so beautiful, I almost wish it for everyone.

Ephraim is amazing. He has done really well and accomplished so much. He has hit many milestones at typical times and has worked so hard through therapy to get there. We are so incredibly proud of him. We are honored that Ephraim graciously includes us in his accomplishments. Milestones that we were happy about with our older two have now turned into miniature family parties when Ephraim reaches them. The older two kids love this and are so proud of him.

Even though Ephraim has done so well, it is not his accomplishments that give him worth. Ephraim is created in the image of God. This is what gives him value. This is what his worth is wrapped up in. This is why he has the right to live. He is human. All humans have value because God has made each one.

Amiot is a member of Our Saviour's Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn.



To LOVE phraim



SPEAK

Life





By Alison Opdahl

don't believe birth is a miracle. "What?" you might ask. Not long ago, I would have reacted the same way—then I would have grown curious. You may be curious now and I can explain. I recently heard a scholar teach about the cultural geography of the ancient world. Unlike modern society, the Israelites made no distinction between the natural and supernatural. Instead, there was no aspect of their lives in which YHWH was not involved—it was all supernatural. They had no understanding of "intervention" because YAH (the Hebrew name for God) was always acting. The word "miracle" assumes there is something not being done which requires intervention. But Jews believed God never had to intervene because He was never outside of a situation.

I do believe birth is a sign and wonder. When it comes to procreation, is there ever a time when our Creator, *Elohim*, is not active? When He spoke, not only did Adam and Eve come into existence but so did we. Our potential was in their DNA. *Elohim* was involved. He was displaying creation through signs and wonders.

To understand that birth is a sign and a wonder is to define abortion as an abomination. And to understand the abomination of abortion, we must know what it means to be made in the image of YAH. In western civilization, our organizational thinking can create limits on a limitless God. Am I a physical body apart from my spiritual presence? Or am I more? I am so much more. I am *nephesh*, Hebrew for the homogenized embodiment of a person which encompasses mind, body, and soul. I am made in the image of YAH. I am not a duplicate in the way a page or picture can be copied. That type of copy is material, we define it as a noun. But I am not a statue filling space. I am not a noun or a material. Action, not substance, is what matters in the Hebrew language. Hebrew perspective recognizes that when *Elohim* created man in His image, He was creating a verb, not a noun.

I am a supernatural verb: a living, breathing, image of YAH. I am made to glorify Him, to speak His name as His creation to His creation. If I discard my life—or any other life—whether through disobedience, rebellion, or complacency, it is as if I am throwing away the image of God. This is the abomination of abortion.

In America, more than 2,800 babies are aborted each day. Some are left to die in "comfort rooms" if they aren't first suctioned from the womb with a bladed vacuum or harvested for their tissue and organs. These murders of innocent children should raise a national roar of outrage, but beware the insidious darkness spreading like a scourge: the death of human dignity. All life is under attack—yours, mine, the unborn, the terminally ill, the aged, and the disabled.

The first and most important action we can take in this battleground is prayer for the restoration of human dignity. Abortion is a symptom of the problem, not the source. And as you pray, I encourage you to praise God; it is a powerful weapon against darkness.

Second, we must speak life with authority. Why do our words matter? Remember the creation account in Genesis? How did *Elohim* create? "And God said ..." How could He have spoken our world and us into existence unless language was created first? As His image-bearers, when we speak life we come into agreement with His design for mankind. As we align with His agenda, we step into His authority.

How can you speak life? You already are. You are a living, breathing verb. But abortion will not end until the battle for the dignity of life is won in the hearts and minds of those who do not understand their unique identity. We need to testify of *El Olam*—our Everlasting God—lovingly, compassionately, and most importantly, humbly.

Did you know that when one person comes alongside a woman considering abortion, she is 20 times more likely to choose life not only for her baby, but for herself as well? A staggering 35 percent of mothers who abort commit suicide. Simply speaking to a woman considering abortion can be life changing.

One day, the Holy Spirit (*Ruach Ha-Kodesh* in Hebrew) whispered to me, "You're going to write a column: *Speak LIFE*." My first response was to mentally list everything I was doing, concluding I had no time. But time was not mine to measure. I began to write a short column—100 words or less—imparting facts and provocative commentary regarding abortion. Currently, it is in newspapers, church bulletins, on social media, airing on my local secular radio station, and will be on a digital billboard.

We have burgeoning opportunities to speak life. As we embrace our eternal, irreplaceable value, we will be vessels of signs and wonders, pouring out messages unique to each of us within our spheres of influence.

Opdahl is a member of the McIntosh, Minn., AFLC parish. Her column, "Speak LIFE," is available without cost by request. Email her at speaklife139@gmail.com.

"Take no part in the
fruitless deeds of darkness,
but rather expose them."

Ephesians 5:11

Watching LIFE APPEAR



By Rebekah Knapp

God called me to be a midwife when I was a couple months shy of turning 15 years old.

I had no idea what my life would look like in the future. Today I am very busy with a home birth practice, which serves a radius of about two- to three-hour drive from my home in rural Fertile, Minn. I have been a midwife now for almost 22 years and have helped with the births of 877 children to date. By the end of this year alone I will have witnessed 80 births. Two years ago that number was 100. Next year is looking to be busier again.

When I first started out, I was doing three to four home births per year. Then, in my sixth year the number climbed to 11 and I said I would be happy to slow down a bit—which of course it hasn't. Now there are many months each year when I have 11 births, with the average between six to 12. The most I have had was 15 births in one month.

God is constantly sustaining and protecting me in the 80,000+ miles I drive every year in all kinds of weather, often having gotten little sleep. There is no other way a person can be awake for 68 hours, sleep one night, and then repeat the process. Babies love to come in bunches.

I serve a huge variety of clientele which includes the communities of the Amish, Mennonite, Russian, home schoolers, Christians, English (what the Amish refer to as anyone non-Amish),

“crunchy” (those who have adjusted their lifestyle for environmental reasons), Air Force families, and so many more. My clients live in the bigger cities of Fargo and Grand Forks, N.D., and rural Minnesota and North Dakota.

I do get asked about my faith by many of my families and it gives me a great opportunity to share about Christ. I strongly believe in tithing, so any money I earn during births that happen on a Sabbath are tithed, along with everything else with which I am monetarily blessed. I work completely on a donation basis and it has been amazing to see how the Lord has blessed me. This year I was able to purchase a farm after having lived in town for eight years and having that house completely paid off in just under five and a half years. I look forward to seeing how quickly my new place is paid for.

I love my calling. I am able to provide my clients with prenatal care all the way through the birth and up to six weeks of postpartum care.

Recently I was at a sweet waterbirth, with the Christmas tree set up in the background and mom's favorite music playing softly as they welcomed another son into their family. I had arrived, along with my assistant, in a blizzard. After baby was born and the family was safely tucked into bed, we slept a few hours on their extra bed and couch. When the storm had let up, we slowly made our way home. This is what I love about

home birth: laboring mom didn't have to leave the warm house in the raging storm, and then she was able to sleep in her own bed that night. We had a similar story a week before in the previous blizzard, only that time because the weather was so bad, only my assistant made it before baby arrived. I made it about an hour later to help with laundry and paperwork.

Today I left my house just after 8 a.m. and headed to the Detroit Lakes/Frazee, Minn.,



area. I did a prenatal check for a mom due in about four months, and then dropped off a glucometer I had forgotten to bring to a client last week. Next, I took time to eat some food, make some phone calls, and schedule appointments while sitting in a church parking lot. Then it was off to check the iron level for a mom who miscarried a few months ago—we have been working hard to get her levels back up. I arrived to find her in bed with morning sickness, so some time was spent reassuring her that things were going to be okay this time—her iron levels were great too! After that I took a note over to their neighbor to let them know the dad wasn't going to be able to help lay flooring the next day since his wife was in bed for a few days. These two families are Amish, so they don't use phones to communicate. In my last visit of the day I saw a family for

an initial prenatal check (I helped them nearly three years ago with their first home birth). When their older children came home from school they found me there doing the prenatal, and that's how they found out about the new blessing they are going to get around the end of the school year. This was a fun and new experience for me. I was home by 7 p.m.—just one day in the life of a midwife.

No it's not an easy life, but with God, all things are possible.

Knapp, of Fertile, Minn., is the daughter of Pastor Charles and Joyce Knapp and was the subject of a recent article in the Fargo, N.D., Forum.



FLBCS hosts Christmas concerts



The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary hosted a weekend of Christmas events Dec. 3-5, featuring a presentation by gospel teams, two choir concerts, basketball games and an open house for family and friends of students. The campus welcomed guests for its annual Christmas concerts under the theme, “My Soul Magnifies the Lord,” with choirs from the college and seminary, which were joined by a wind ensemble and bell choir. Andrew Hanson directed the musical events, and Pastor Adam Osier, dean of the Bible college, gave a short meditation. Guests were invited to participate through congregational singing, candlelit carols, and joining the choirs for Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus.”





LIVING A FULL LIFE

BY BRADY ARNESON

Barefoot and wearing board shorts, I leap off a 50-foot cliff under the hot Hawaii sun and free-fall forever above the crystal-clear waters. This is living life to the fullest for me.

Jesus came into our world so that we may have life and have it to the fullest. Are you living life to the fullest?

A favorite quote of mine is from Charles Spurgeon, who said, “Little faith will take your soul to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your soul.” Do you have confidence that God will do great things?

I think a great faith and a full life are connected. We can accept Jesus as our Savior and then easily coast through life waiting for heaven, or we can realize there’s more. We have the power of the Holy Spirit living inside of us. He brings heaven to our souls, allowing us to live life to the fullest right now as His kingdom comes and His will is done. Let’s bring heaven down to earth, believing God is who He says He is and will do what He says He is going to do.

Can God plant an AFLC church in Hawaii? He did. Can God finally build a gym at the Free Lutheran Bible College? He’s doing it. Can God plant 15 new AFLC churches in the next five years? He will.

In order to reach people who have never been reached before we have to do things that have never been done before. Let’s risk following the Spirit, having great faith that God will come through.



At the Waikiki Beach Gathering this fall we hosted our first ever “One Night With the King” fine dining banquet and live entertainment event for the homeless. Our church had never put on an event of this size before and we had zero money to pull it off. But we knew the Spirit was leading and God would come through.

God provided us with a spoken word poet, a stand-up comedian, a Nashville singer/songwriter, and thousands of dollars for the event. The Pavilion Church of Nashville partnered with us, sending eight young adults and their lead pastor to help us out. On the day of the banquet we prayed for 50 homeless people to attend and 45 came! We washed their feet, they enjoyed a three-course meal, and three people accepted

Jesus as their Savior. We made a great impact in our community and now many of the homeless people are a part of the Gathering. God came through!

When we trust in the Lord with all of our hearts, we are living life to the fullest. Let’s follow the Spirit’s lead, being open to change and trying new things. Let’s pray for big things because with God all things are possible. Let’s step out in faith, jumping off the cliff into the oceans of God’s grace knowing He will do great things.

Arneson serves the Waikiki Beach Gathering, an AFLC Home Missions church plant.

WHERE DO THE GUILTY GO?

BY PASTOR TODD SCHIERKOLK

When people think of Napoleon, it is generally in connection with France, but his influence extends to Mexico, as well. One of his most enduring legacies around the world is the Napoleonic Code: a system of law that helped countries reform their legal frameworks and modernize their societies. One critique of the code is that while there may be an assumption of “innocent until proven guilty,” in actual practice it’s the other way around. That unfortunate reality here in Mexico provides a stark contrast to the real-life Bible story of the woman caught in adultery.

Our Wednesday Bible study group was examining her story in John 8. Her guilt was not in doubt. The question was what would happen to her. Jesus affirmed the law that condemned her when He said, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw

a stone at her.” However, Jesus did not affirm their desire to condemn this woman, loved by God. In affirming the law, He swiveled its white-hot light onto their own hearts ... and one by one they walked away. There in the temple, Jesus and the woman were alone.

That’s when the conversation got very interesting in our group that night. “What does a bus driver do if they are in an accident and someone dies?” I asked.

I knew what their answer would be based on a number of stories in the news over the years. Everyone knows that in practice here you are guilty until proven innocent. There was no hesitation after I asked the question. A chorus of four voices immediately pronounced, “He runs!”

Then I asked, “Since all of her accusers were gone, and this guilty woman was alone with Jesus ... why didn’t she run?”

Eyes were wide and wheels were spinning in the minds of those gathered. After long seconds of silence, their answers started to come. “She felt safe.” “She felt protected.” “She wasn’t afraid.”

We reminded ourselves of Jesus’ words in John 3:17, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Then it got more personal as we put ourselves in the woman’s place in light of Romans 2:18, “Therefore, as one trespass [Adam’s] led to condemnation for all men [all of us], so one act



of righteousness [Jesus’] leads to justification and life for all men.”

Then it got more hopeful, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2). The peace in our group was palpable.

“Jesus stood up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord!’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.’”

I asked my last question at the study, “Where is the best place to run to for a guilty, condemned sinner?” The relieved smiles showed that they knew the answer. The cookies and tea were especially good that night.

Schierkolk is an AFLC missionary with his wife, Barb, serving in Jerez, Mexico.

Every Tribe, Every Nation

By Doris Stensland

There are times when we get a glimpse of the vastness of the kingdom of God and can only stand back in awe and excitement as we feel a part of it. It was a summer Sunday morning in a little country congregation where my husband had grown up attending church and Sunday school. We came to hear a pastor from Norway deliver the Sunday sermon in the Norwegian language. Most of the people in the pews were older and there was an eagerness about them as they anticipated hearing a message from the Lord in their native tongue.

My husband and I weren't sure how much we would be able to understand. Our familiarity with the language was mostly from our youth when we listened in on our parents and grandparents, plus this past year when I had been trying to brush up with an adult education course in Norwegian.

Included in the church bulletin were two hymns in Norwegian. I studied one and tried to pick out the words that I knew and finally got the meaning.

Velt alle dine veie (Cast all your decisions)
Og alle din hjertesorg (and all your heartaches)
På ham, som har i eie (on him, who has control)
Den hele himlens borg! (of the whole heavens)
Han, som kan stormen binde (He, who can still the storm)
Og bryde bølgen blå (and control the waves)
Han ska log veien finde (He shall find the way)
Hvorpå din fod kan gå (where your feet can go).

As we all sang it together, it was beautiful. The message was old, yet fresh and new for each of us today.

The pastor, a tall middle-aged man, stepped into the pulpit and began reading God's Word in a simple straight-forward manner. I strained both my ears and my understanding to catch what he was



“Behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from all tribes and people and tongues, standing before the throne and the Lamb ...”

Revelation 7:9

reading. When I recognized the words “one hundred sheep” and “ninety and nine” it was like discovering the road number you were looking for. From then on it was easy to follow along.

He went through the 15th chapter of Luke about the woman with the lost coin and the man with the son who was lost, and the joy when these were found. As he expostulated on these passages, I rejoiced that I could understand his thoughts and this old favorite chapter took on an international air. I could envision him standing in his own church in Norway each Sunday, communicating God's Word to people in this very language. God became bigger in my thoughts as I considered all the tongues that on this very day were hearing about Him, and praising Him, in their own language. The Lord Jesus and His church is bigger than just this little country gathering in northwest Iowa. The precious Word is heard and understood also in Norwegian, Spanish, German, French, and all the many languages around the world. And these words can

change lives there, as well as in our America, even if they are visualizing a coin that is a *kroner*, or a Father that is called *Far*.

The next hymn had a well-known melody and the words could easily be translated. “*Så Tag Da Mine Haender*” (“Oh, Take my Hand, Dear Father”). After the singing was finished, I heard another melody. Through an open window drifted the happy tune of a meadowlark, and tears came to my eyes as I absorbed this morning of languages: English, Norwegian, and now even the little meadowlark had sung her praises in her own tongue. I knew that God Himself had been listening to us and to people all around the world. No tongue is strange to Him, for His kingdom is from all nations, all tribes, and all tongues. My heart rejoiced that morning that I was able to understand a little better the greatness of it all.

Stensland is a member of Redeemer Free Lutheran, Canton, S.D.

WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION



M

embers of the West Central District WMF gathered for a rally on Oct. 5, 2019, at

Zion Free Lutheran, Wadena, Minn. With about 30 people gathered, and a few husbands too, the theme was “Jesus is the Light,” from John 8:12, “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the Light of life,’” and Matthew 5:16, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Gracious greetings were brought to us from Margaret Berg and Jane Emerson. The delightful special music sung by Sunday school children blessed all. A worship team led us in singing “Cornerstone,” and the theme hymn, “The Light of the World is Jesus.” Lonna Olson led us in encouraging devotions to let Jesus light our lights and be our guide, and to trust Him.

We were greatly blessed by Joye Peterson, who led the Bible study on the theme verses. We were reminded that mankind is in darkness and is in need of a way into the light. Joye shared a Venn diagram, which overlaid a circle of attributes associated with darkness with a circle of those associated with light, in an effort to see if they have anything in common. Through

A LIGHT FOR THE WORLD

BY DEANNA LARSON

Scripture, we understand that Jesus is the light, and He shows us mercy, bringing us into light through His shed blood and resurrection. When darkness is exposed in our lives, how should we deal with it? Should we run away or run to Jesus? Running to Jesus, we will find light, life, and victorious living. With Jesus in us, His light can shine through us so that others may see and glorify God. Joye closed by singing “Living Hope,” with these words in the chorus, “Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free. Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me. You have broken every chain. There’s salvation in Your name, Jesus Christ, my living hope.”

An offering for World Missions was taken, followed by a short business meeting. Reports were reviewed and approved, and a current prayer list was made available for all. An election for three district officers was conducted. Jane Emerson was elected as the president; Sharon Karanen was elected as the treasurer; and Linda Nelson was elected as the mission secretary. A resolution committee of three to four volunteers was also decided upon. A lunch was served in the beautifully decorated fellowship hall. Favors of note cards with a lighthouse key ring were at each place.

Maxine Erickson gave an informative mission report. After special music from Margaret Pohlman, the afternoon’s special speaker was Pam Olson of Orality Institute International. Her presentation was enthusiastic and fantastic with a history of how she and her husband, Kevin, came to be in this ministry. We learned a new appreciation for the importance of sharing the Word of God through many methods like song, acting, preaching, and storytelling over and over to memorize God’s Word exactly.

Offering was taken for the Orality Institute and for the Alaska Mission. Pastor Curt Emerson installed the new officers. Closing prayers were led by Margaret Berg. Members of the Bethany Free Lutheran WMF, Sebeka, Minn., served afternoon coffee with great fellowship. Members of Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Brainerd, Minn., will host the next district rally in the fall. Thanks to all and thanks to God.

Larson, Ortonville, Minn., is the communication secretary for the Women’s Missionary Federation.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Resurrection Lutheran, San Juan, Puerto Rico, was added to the AFLC congregational roster by members of the Coordinating Committee during their November meeting. **Pastor Hector Heraldo**, who serves the congregation, was installed Nov. 23 by Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, president of the AFLC. Heraldo has been added to the licensed pastor roster.

Pastor Lee Kuhns was removed from the fellowship roster at his own request. He formerly served Faith Lutheran, El Campo, Texas.

Leah Erickson is serving for six months as a Home Missions parish builder at Hope Free Lutheran, a new church plant in Killdeer, N.D. Erickson is serving alongside Dan and Bethany Aichele of Killdeer.

Pastor Dan Giles has accepted a call to serve Calvary Free Lutheran, Mesa, Ariz. Giles had previously served as interim pastor.

Pastor Brian Davidson, who serves Our Savior Lutheran, Dickinson, N.D., announced plans to retire at the end of May 2020.

Pastor Mark Antal, who serves Victory Free Lutheran, Park River, N.D., and Grace Free Lutheran, Edinburg, N.D., has announced his plans to retire at the end of May 2020.

Pastor Rodney Johnson, who serves Our Savior's Free Lutheran and First English Lutheran of Lostwood, Stanley, N.D., has announced his plans to step down as senior pastor at the end of July 2020.

Youth Worker Weekends

AFLC Youth Ministries will host its annual Youth Worker Weekend Jan. 17-19 at the Association Retreat Center, located near Osceola, Wis. Bo Boshers, president of LEAD222, a national youth leader coaching community, will be the guest trainer during Saturday's sessions, which will focus on the theme, "Be With." Visit aflc.org/youth for more information.

Home Missions Retreat

AFLC Home Missions will host a winter leadership retreat Jan. 27-30 at Calvary Free Lutheran, Mesa, Ariz., with a goal of equipping and encouraging pastors and their wives, and leaders in church planting ministry. Sessions will focus on building shepherding skills, using your time to reach out to your congregation personally, and helping pastors get out of the office and into the lives of those they serve. Speakers include Pastor Eric Westlake, Zumbrota, Minn.; Ralph Rittenhouse, Ferndale, Wash.; Pastor Mike Brandt, Rapid City, S.D.; Pastor Jeff Swanson, Naknek, Alaska; and Bekah Mulvaney, Rogers, Alaska. For more information visit aflchomemissions.org.

January Term & Winter Bible Conference

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary will host a week-long January term of continuing education classes for AFLC congregations and friends on its Plymouth, Minn., campus. Held Jan. 6-9, courses will include a morning class titled "Soul Care in the Congregation," taught by Pastor Jerry Nelson, a licensed therapist who serves as pastor of marriage and family ministry at Christ Is Lord Lutheran, Onalaska, Wis. Afternoon sessions will focus on a course titled "Youth, Family, and Intergenerational Ministry," with lectures by Pastor Jason Holt, director of AFLC Youth Ministry; Daniel Keinanen, youth director at Onalaska, Wis.; Jordan Langness, a director of youth and family ministry in Ishpeming, Mich.; and Dr. Ron Hunter, CEO of Randall House Publishing and founder of D6 Family Ministry. Visit flbc.edu for more information.

A one-day winter Bible conference will be held from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m on Jan. 11, featuring Dr. Ron Hunter, who will give an introduction of intergenerational discipleship, Pastor Gary Jorgenson, who will speak on the temptation of Jesus, and Dr. James Molstre, who will speak on the theodicy and theology of the cross in pastoral care. All sessions will be live streamed. Visit flbc.edu for more information.

Sverdrup Forum

The Georg Sverdrup Society will host its annual discussion forum from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Jan. 10 on the FLBCS campus, Plymouth, Minn., under the theme, "The Living Congregation at Work."

NOVEMBER MEMORIALS

- AED**
Pastor Ron Pulscher
Arnie Kooiman
Pastor Tom Baker
- Bible College**
James Bounds
Lois Thielen
Ruth Claus
Lawrence Hemmesch
Janice VanDellan
- General Fund**
Steve Sveningson
Joel Johnson
Alice Rudebusch
Pastor George Knapp
- Home Missions**
David Rasmussen
- Parish Ed**
Dr. Mary Lindquist
Pastor Dale Mellgren
- Seminary**
Alice Rudebusch
- World Missions**
Pastor George Knapp
Avis Van Wechel
... in honor of
- FLBCS**
Pastor Wade Mobley
Dr. James Molstre

AFLC BENEVOLENCES November 30, 2019

FUND	REC'D IN NOVEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$31,548	\$373,929	\$359,798
Evangelism	9,198	117,017	117,523
Youth Ministries	9,550	122,595	129,534
Parish Education	17,057	139,046	154,690
Seminary	27,218	252,542	261,014
Bible College	53,084	482,661	474,185
Home Missions	26,793	355,217	430,783
World Missions	24,354	379,166	353,218
Personal Support	61,229	572,785	662,661
TOTALS	\$260,030	\$2,794,957	\$2,943,407

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

SOMETIMES I WONDER

Sometimes I wonder—with apologies to Lewis Carroll—if I’ve wandered down a rabbit hole into a strange new world where everything seems upside down. Yes, I am fully aware of my age and the danger of growing negative and critical because things aren’t the way they used to be. But really?

A restaurant where my wife and I often eat has changed the signs on the restrooms to, “Men, Women, or Whatever.” News reports tell of a growing conflict in athletics as biological men who “feel” like women are defeating biological women in several sports. Several years ago a candidate for mayor in my county was asked if he would promote gender equity in his cabinet. “Yes,” he replied, “all thirteen genders will be represented.” That figure is quite outdated, however, because now *Facebook* lists 58 gender options for users, and a recent news article suggested that we need to ask people in conversation what pronoun they prefer. Really?

This is our “Life” issue of the *Lutheran Ambassador*, and it’s difficult to know where one might begin to address the topic, as confusion and conflict reigns across the world. I get nervous when “quality of life” is mentioned in regard to assisted suicide. Check out the internet the story of my distant Norwegian relative, Torstein Lerhol, who is a successful businessman in spite of extremely severe handicaps. Read, too, about cases in Europe where some afflicted with Asperger’s syndrome (a form of autism) were assisted to die. And what about the elderly? Aren’t they a burden on society, using up precious resources?

Abortion is the first issue that comes to mind when we think of the battle for life today. I have determined not to use that word anymore, but to say “the killing

of children before birth” instead ... and yet that may have even become outdated as some advocate the killing to be allowed afterward, as well. One politician compares it to a tonsillectomy, while another dares to use Scripture to teach that there is no life until the baby breathes a first breath. My wife and I read one chapter of Luke’s Gospel during every day of December, and the account of the baby in Elizabeth’s womb “leaping for joy” at the greeting of Mary (1:44) settles it for me.

Did you know that there were more deaths of unborn babies in 2018 than all the deaths by cancer, malaria, HIV/AIDS, smoking, alcohol, and traffic accidents COMBINED? It may be correct to call the pro-life movement the social justice cause of our time.

What should we do?
What can we do?

- My membership in Lutherans for Life is a small thing, but it is something, and there are area and national pro-life organizations as well which one might support.

- Some of our readers have traveled to Washington, D.C., for the March for Life every January, the largest event of its kind in the world. One might wonder about the effectiveness and impact of protests—I know that I do—but it was a privilege several years ago to stand in front of the Minnesota State Capitol and pray together with politicians and clergy in the battle for the unborn and other life concerns.

- Encourage adoption. This is not always easy, as many of you can testify and as we know from our own extended family, but the results may well count for eternity

- Be grateful for progress: *LifeSiteNews* reports that the U.S. abortion rate has fallen

by 25 percent since 2007, and approximately 50 percent since 1980.

- Point to science: The use of the ultrasound equipment and the fact that an infant in the womb has different DNA are powerful arguments.

- Search the Scriptures: What does the Bible teach about the sanctity of life? You will be able to locate other references, but these might be a good starting point: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and

... it’s difficult to know where one might begin to address the topic, as confusion and conflict reigns across the world.

female He created them” (Genesis 1:27). “Did not He who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?” (Job 31:15) “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward” (Psalm 127:3). “For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:13-14). “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5).

- Pray! Ask the Lord to open the eyes and hearts of those who have tumbled into fearful rabbit holes that they believe are reality.



Pastor Robert Lee

association retreat center

MISSIONS ON THE FRONT LINES

BY KIRK RAUTIO

One evening I said to my wife, Ruth, "I've come to realize that this job has one of the most intense commutes I've ever experienced." She and I laughed and ask me why. I explained, I have a commute of approximately 30 feet, but the second I walk out our garage door I need to be ready for mission work. I went on to tell her what happened earlier that evening.

While I was filling in at the canteen I had a conversation with four young people who were on a retreat with a faith-based organization. The group consisted of an atheist, an agnostic, a Mormon, and a self-labeled "recovering Catholic." We talked for about an hour about all sorts of things: politics, world economics, world religions, angels, demons, faith, and the current inner workings of high school hierarchy.

They eventually asked about the ARC. I told them it was a Christian camp that was started 40 years ago. They stopped me mid-sentence. One young gal looked me straight in the eye and said, "Wait, this is a Christian camp? You're a Christian?"

"Yes ma'am," I replied. She looked shocked. "You're not like any Christian I've ever met."

I chuckled and replied, "Do tell."

She went on to explain, her friends all nodding in agreement, that the Christians they've had contact with have been very judgmental while having no interest in anything they have to say or about how they view the world. "I can't stand soap boxers," one young man stated.

We talked for some time. They asked a question and would tell me their point of view. I would come at it from a Christian point of view. We then compared Christianity to other religious views. We had a wonderful conversation until they were late for their next session.

As I reflected on the conversation, I wished I had said things differently or remembered another piece of information. Yet I had a peace come over me and the thought that some of the best mission work is done when you're just being yourself. It is good to be honest and kind to people who hold different views and let the seeds fall

where they're being sown. It's not our job to be perfect or to make people grow, that's God's job. He perfects the work from there.

That comforting thought was affirmed the next morning at breakfast. Two of the young ladies came up to me and handed me a piece of paper. It read, "Kirk, IDK (I don't know) about the whole angel/demon thing but thanks for the perspective and open-minded view to others' beliefs." I told them it was my honor.

I have this note pinned to the cork board in my office. It serves as a reminder every day that I am serving on the front lines and to be ready. I'm not sure where they are now, but I have peace that seeds have been sown and the knowledge that the conversation was well received. This is missions, right outside the garage door. In every moment be honest, kind, receptive, and be ready.

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