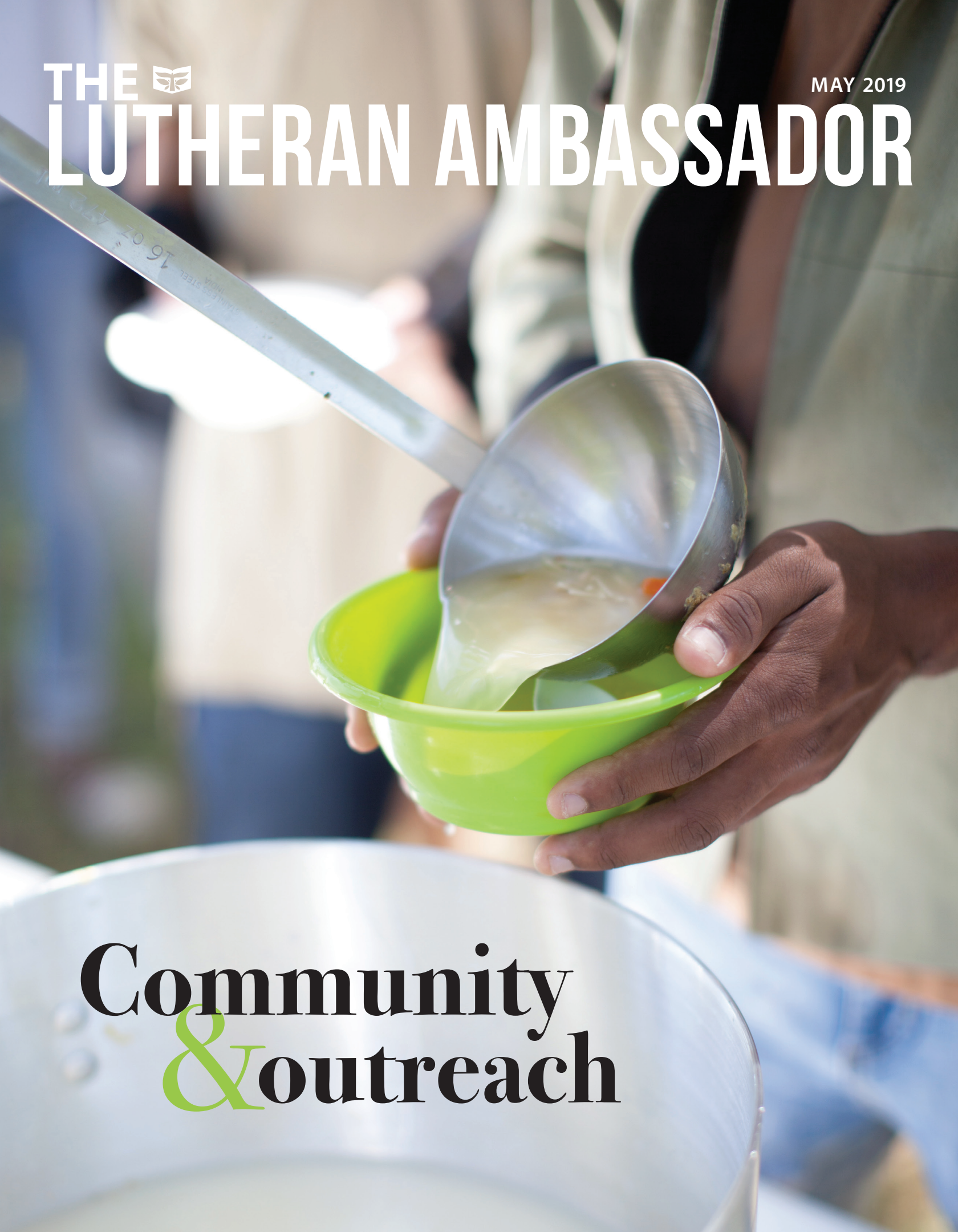


THE 

MAY 2019

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



**Community
& outreach**



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

MAY 2019
VOL. 57 NO. 5

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THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

(ISSN 0746-3413) (USPS 588-620)
is published monthly by the
Association of Free Lutheran
Congregations,
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Plymouth, MN 55441
Phone (763) 545-5631
Periodicals postage paid at
St. Paul, MN and additional
mailing offices.

POSTMASTER

Send address changes to
The Lutheran Ambassador,
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Plymouth, MN 55441.

SUBSCRIPTION CHANGES AND INFORMATION

3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.,
Plymouth, MN 55441.
763-545-5631
lasubscriptions@aflc.org

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

\$24 a year, Group, U.S.
\$25 a year, Individual, U.S.
\$27 a year, International



ENCOURAGING WORD

THE GREATEST INFLUENCERS

BY PASTOR KENT SPERRY

There are many great people in the world who fill positions of power and authority. Due to their office, they have influence over peoples and nations. They are able to turn the tide of world events by the power afforded them.

We know of these people. It's impossible for them to escape our notice. Their decisions, actions, and statements constantly come before us. They are seen on TV. They are heard on the radio. We receive notifications of their activities on our phones. Yet, as powerful and influential as they may be, I do not consider them among those who have most impacted my life.

As I consider those who have most influenced me, I think of people like my parents. I think of the pastor under whom I grew up. I think of Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, and others who have mentored me in the faith. I think of teachers at school who have taught to me useful life skills or given to me godly advice.

In short, those who have most influenced my life are those who have served me in some way. They have ministered to me in some capacity. Even though they may not be great in the eyes of the world, they are great in mine.

This fits the definition of greatness given by Jesus in Mark 10. As two of His disciples requested the positions of greatest honor in His kingdom, Jesus told them what it means to be truly great. And we find that greatness in the eyes of God is a stark contrast to that of the world.

Even though the rulers of the Gentiles lord their position over their subjects and exercise authority over them, this isn't how it's to be among the people of God. Jesus said that anyone

who wants to be great among us must be our servant, and whoever would be great among us must be the slave of all.

He then pointed to Himself as the ultimate example of this truth. In verse 45, He said: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus came into this world not to be served by His people, but to serve them. And He came to serve them by giving His life on their behalf.

If anyone deserves to be served, it's Jesus. He is, after all, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He's the eternal, almighty, and omniscient God. He's the creator and sustainer of all that exists. He's the giver of life, both in this world and in eternity.

However, even though this is true of Him, He didn't use His position to demand service. He, instead, used His position to serve. He went to the extent of giving His life upon the cross to accomplish our redemption.

Even knowing this, we continue to seek greatness in the worldly sense. We continue to seek power and influence. We continue to seek fame and fortune.

We do so without realizing that the greatest influence is attained when we emulate Jesus and serve those whom God has placed around us and under our care. We attain the greatest influence as we love and care for our children. We attain it as we teach Sunday school or work with youths. We attain it as we use the gifts God has given us to serve Him and the body of Christ.

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

We may be evangelical and yet be cold and uninviting. We need to be evangelistic, with a zeal to press the need of salvation upon unsaved souls about us.

—A.W. Knock

I have but one passion: It is He, it is He alone. The world is the field and the field is the world; and henceforth that country shall be my home where I can be most used in winning souls for Christ.

—Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf

Being an extrovert isn't essential to evangelism—obedience and love are.

—Rebecca Manley Pippert

Evangelism is, "So to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Savior, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church."

—Archbishop of Canterbury Committee on Evangelism

The church is under orders. Evangelistic inactivity is disobedience.

—John R. W. Stott

The salvation of a single soul is more important than the production or preservation of all the epics and tragedies in the world.

—C. S. Lewis



Manna for the hungry

Words and images by Elizabeth Neufeld

Often, it doesn't take a whole crew of fantastic connections to fan into flame a spark of beckoning from the Holy Spirit. Some of the greatest tasks of evangelism often begin with just one person showing up and saying, "Here I am, Lord, send me."

Calvary Free Lutheran Church moved to East Mesa, Ariz., and took notice of a starving community. The people not only ached for physical food, but the whole of the town yearned for spiritual sustenance. At the local elementary school, one lady had said yes to the Holy Spirit and was sending out 20-30 boxes of food every Saturday morning to people in need. Members of Calvary showed up and offered their aid, but the school was wary.

"What's in it for you?" they would frequently speculate.

The church family had never carried a hidden agenda.

"Well, we'll find out in a couple weeks what your real motives are," the people scoffed.

But the community was left bewildered. The goal of the congregation was to reach out to the community and to show them that there was a church group that cared about their needs. There was no other motive better than to love to the best of their God-given ability the people He had placed right in front of them.

It took nearly 10 years to gain the trust of the hurting souls in East Mesa. But soon, the need arose to move the growing operation from the confines of the school to a warehouse on the church's property. There, they could store food throughout the week and create an assembly line for the increasing number of boxes needed each week. Nearly a dozen stores made produce available to the ministry, and now up to 600 boxes are distributed every week.

Pastor Al Monson named the ministry "Desert Manna" after God's provision to His children in the Old Testament. It's a miracle how today in the city of Mesa a family of four can be fed from the Calvary Free Lutheran

Church parking lot for \$1 a week because of the people who said "yes" to being vessels for Christ.

Volunteers show up every Saturday morning starting as early as 7 to pray over the boxes and begin the distribution process. Cars line up as soon the sun begins to rise, and the multitude is obvious. Often, people will stop to eat from their boxes before they even leave the parking lot, and it's clear that several haven't eaten for a couple of days. Ask anyone in the throng of hungry visitors what they would consider their church, and they would tell you without hesitation that it's Calvary. Pastors, along with many others, interact intentionally with drivers and passengers, and it's not uncommon for them to ask for prayer.

"Only a half a dozen have ended up coming to Sunday services, but that's not the point," said Pastor Daniel Giles. This doesn't discourage Calvary. In fact, every single person who makes a decision for Christ makes the whole operation worth it.

As the church's love for the community grows, creativity blossoms. Between the food pantry, Harvest Festivals, kids club, and English classes, the community has begun to understand that the church's agenda is simply saying "yes" to Jesus and welcoming them with open arms.

"In Jesus' Name," the Desert Manna sign reads. Every box and every event come with prayer and open doors. Surrounding congregations have heard the call, too, and volunteers arrive as they hear about Calvary's ministry to take part in God's work in the community not only with their time, but they also take it upon themselves to donate financially to keep the pantry running in full force.

"It's a fulfilling outreach," many of them will say.

When you enter the warehouse where the boxes are packed, joy is evident on every face. Even people who have been coming every weekend to acquire boxes for their families say, "We want to give back," and get to be a part of an incredible project that reaches out to their neighbors.



Calvary is not a congregation that excludes people. The people who come every Saturday morning feel like they are a part of the family, too. You can't help but notice when you cross the threshold of the church doors that you are absolutely a friend to everyone. The church has put in the effort to reach out and ensure that no one is left behind. The building's walls are not to keep any person out, but to offer grace and love to everyone who walks in. The Desert Manna food pantry is just one vessel God is using to help members step out and prove to any passerby that it is in fact true that the church welcomes all.

Desert Manna has impacted a community far more than any onlooker or volunteer had expected. It has provided food for the hungry, hope for the lost, and news of a home to the wanderers in the Arizona desert. And it started with a mere spark when just one person said, "yes."

Neufeld is a parish builder at Calvary Free Lutheran with her husband, Eli.





Outreach in a barn

By Tim Hager

Never in a hundred years would my grandfather have ever dreamed that his red two-story barn built in 1918 would be used to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Where once fragrant hay was stored upstairs and milk cows, horses, and calves lived downstairs is now the Homewood, a concert hall and dining room.

How, why, and what were the circumstances that would allow the barn to be a lighthouse of God's love and grace on the North Dakota prairie? Perhaps the beginning of the answer is God's question to Moses, "What is in your hand?"

The restored barn was what was in our hands, and we sensed His call to use it to share gospel music.

People of various or no religious backgrounds readily attend a gospel music event in a barn, whereas a denominational label or church building might exclude many. There is no understood protocol, so there is freedom to dress as you wish, stand, sit, move about, clap, etc., in an informal relaxed setting.

Beginning in 2009, we hosted gospel concerts two to four times per year with a number of incredible musicians from our community. Attendance has grown from just more than 100 people to regular capacity

crowds exceeding 300. Musicians from many different churches introduce their music with a personal testimony of what God's grace has done in their lives or how the music they are about to sing has affected them. The "word of their testimony" paints a very beautiful gospel picture (Revelation 12:11).

At one of our concerts a self-proclaimed atheist stayed for the whole evening. After the concert, while my wife Becky was serving food, he came through the line and said, "Very interesting!" What a great opportunity for him to clearly hear the gospel through testimony and song. I doubt he would ever come to any church, but he readily came to the barn.

In recent years at Zion Lutheran Church of Valley City, N.D., where we are members, there have been a number of discussions regarding how to reach our friends and neighbors who seem to have little connection with God. Many events were tried, including a Christian movie night, dinners, Sunday breakfasts, gospel concerts with church talent, and mission reports. Each month, for many months, postcards were sent into the community and personal invitations were made to

neighbors reminding them of church services and special events. Although we did not see the results we wished, we felt that the efforts were valid and that God would use what we had done.

Evangelism within a church building seems to be less effective than in the past. Those who need to hear the gospel the most tend to be those who are least likely to seek out a church for help. We concluded that church members need to extend evangelism beyond the church walls. This understanding motivated us to move toward a stronger evangelistic program in our barn.

This past September Homewood hosted an Old Fashioned Barn Revival for four evenings. Scott Wesley Brown, a nationally known gospel singer, and Paul Howard, a non-denominational pastor from South Dakota, were featured so the event would not be linked to a local church. We were concerned that a church name might exclude those who would not attend another denomination's services. There were a few hundred who came to the event; many requested prayer after the services and some came to faith in Jesus. We praise God for His presence and the lives changed by this outreach.

Our next concert, scheduled for June 2, will have several musicians but will feature a singer from South Carolina who will share her unusual journey to Christ. We will invite those who would like prayer to stay after to visit with her. We are expecting this to be a great blessing, and perhaps some will come to faith in Jesus.

We've learned several things through experiences with our church outreach efforts and our barn events. First, use the gifts, talents, and resources God has given and He will bless those efforts. Second, adjust when efforts do not bring the desired results. Third, as members of our church, we can be effective in reaching our neighbors and friends. And last, keep praying and keep going.

The apostle John wrote some encouraging words we can take to heart, "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (I John 3:18). We can minister to others through caring hearts and actions even in unusual places where God is welcomed, even in my grandfather's barn.

Hager and his wife, Becky, have been Gideon and Auxiliary members for 49 years with mission experiences locally, state wide, nationally and internationally. He is a deacon at Zion Free Lutheran, Green Township, N.D.





Back to special meetings

By Pastor Joe Ocker

I've been a Lutheran for 56 years, a pastor for nearly 30 years, and I've never been part of special evangelistic meetings in my life. The congregation I serve hasn't done anything like this in 50-60 years, either, the last time during the old Lutheran Evangelistic Movement. So, how did we decide to host a series of meetings for our community? God kept knocking on the door to our hearts.

Over the years, since becoming a grateful part of the AFLC, I've heard testimonies of the impact of special meetings. The stories blessed me, but they seemed like a movement of God from days gone by. Then, Pastor Tom C. Olson began to share his dream and vision of gifted Lutheran evangelists being invited into congregations again for special meetings. I was intrigued by the vision, but I did not seriously consider it for my own setting at the time.

Then a year ago at the Home Missions leadership retreat in Mesa, Ariz., Pastor Al Monson shared his heart's desire for AFLC congregations to begin anew to prayerfully offer special meetings centered on evangelistic preaching. The whole time Al shared, I felt a stirring in my heart, and I began to seriously consider what it would look like to host such meetings in our setting.

Dell Lutheran Church is "in the middle of somewhere," we like to say. It's not nowhere, it's somewhere. We are three miles outside a town of 200 souls. We are half a mile off the highway, on a gravel road hidden by trees along the river. You can't even see the church from the highway. It's 15 miles to the county seat of 3,000 folks and it's a half-hour drive to a city of any substance. Demographically, our county is one of the least populated with the oldest population in the state of Minnesota. At first glance, it's not the ideal place for special meetings.

But I sensed the Lord telling me to take another look. My first step was to visit with Pastor Jim Rasmussen, director of AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship, about how to do such meetings. Jim rightly emphasized, "The meetings are fruitful or not depending on how much prayer is lifted up and how willing your people are to do the work of discipleship."

Then I was prompted to give Pastor Olson a call for advice. Tom, who has hosted and preached at such meetings, told me about the necessity of follow-through. At some evangelistic events, the staff are asking the folks who fill out follow-up forms for their first name and phone number, and for text or phone call contacts. There has been great fruit from these contacts. Most of the people want to talk about their faith. Many have questions and appreciate prayers.



Some are following through with discipleship sessions.

So, what is our approach? Our target market is unchurched pre-believers. We are asking God to show each one of us who the Lord wants us to invite to the Good News Weekend sessions. We decided to host our event in the local old school gymnasium so that truly unchurched people might be willing to come to a neutral setting. When the Lord lays individuals on our hearts, then we also pray for their hearts to be ready to receive the invitations (John 6:44).

The invitation part of this whole plan is what we feel is



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the key to success. It also seems to be the hardest part, especially for Minnesota nice Lutherans. To help with the invitations, we are printing 1,000 business cards with the details of the weekend to be handed out as we invite people. We plan to approach folks with something like this, "For months I've been praying and asking God who He wants me to invite to these Good News messages. When I pray, you always come to mind. Here's the dates, times, and talks. I'd love to see you there. This weekend could really change your life."

We are advertising on our local country music radio station and putting up posters in bars and public places, but we really expect the best response to come from our personal invitations. We are not advertising on Christian radio and we are not bringing in a well-known Christian band. No offense, but we don't want to fill up the room with Christians. We want to fill up the room with hungry souls in need of Christ Jesus.

Pastor Eric Westlake will be our featured speaker, with talks on these subjects: Is the Bible unique? Is Jesus unique? Jesus is real.

Our follow through? We have the *Becoming A Disciple-Maker* materials on hand and we will train our congregation with these materials. We are praying that God will compel event attendees to fill out the response forms, give us their phone contact info, and/or commit to follow through with the person who invited them.

Honestly, I don't have any idea how this is going to turn out. But God keeps reminding me that as we are faithful to pray, believe, and invite, God will do His good and perfect will in hearts. We can trust the results to Him.

Ocker serves Dell Lutheran, Frost, Minn.

Bearing our burdens

GriefShare ministers to those experiencing loss

By Tom Mathre

My wife, Linda, and I lost our 16-year-old daughter Jessica in a car accident on Jan. 11, 2003. To say the least, this was the toughest challenge of our lives and marriage.

In the middle of our grief, it was a neighbor who told us about GriefShare, a program that had just started for the first time at his church; he thought we should try it. Linda went the first time without me. I thought I didn't need to go. I had faith; I would get through this on my own. But Linda came home after the first meeting and told me I would go with her the next week.

I did go with her, and yes, after that first session I looked forward to each session to follow. We were in such deep grief; we couldn't talk for the first three weeks we attended. I couldn't say my daughter's name without losing it. But after several sessions, this group of people became our core support group. It was our safe place where we could share confidentially with others walking the same journey.

GriefShare is a 13-week video series that is packed with biblical information to support people who are walking through grief. The videos offer expert advice from many well-known Christian pastors, counselors, and many others who have walked a journey of grief. Each video is followed by a time of small group discussion. It is very important to note that whatever is shared is kept confidential. As you can imagine, this is a tender, wounded group of people who need to feel that they are sharing deep pain in a safe environment.

We went through this series two and a half times at our neighbor's church before we felt we could continue on our journey. The sessions taught us as a couple how we each grieved so differently. It allowed us to give each other our own space. It made us aware of our other children's emotions as they grieved the loss of a sister. It probably saved our marriage because more than 80 percent of marriages fail with the loss of a child.

Later in 2004, we started a GriefShare program at our own church. We were still finding our new normal ourselves, but Linda knew a lady who partnered with us to facilitate the sessions. This lady had been widowed more than 20 years earlier; her husband had died of a heart

attack and left her with two children to raise. She was a great help to us, and she, too, felt the calling to reach out to other grieving people.

Over the past 15 years we have had more than 130 folks come through the program. A few have become leaders of GriefShare groups at their own churches, as well. While this program is offered to church members, often the people who come are from a local community, other denominations, and non-believers who are struggling with loss. Sadly, the toughest people to get to come will likely be those within your own church body. At times as Christians we feel we can't show our true, real, raw emotions. We all do a great job of putting on that Sunday smile when asked at church, "How are you doing?" and we say, "Great!" when the truth is, we aren't sleeping well, we are living in a fog, and we really feel alone in the church pew.

We need to remember that "Jesus wept" over the loss of his friend, Lazarus (John 11:35). He wept knowing full well that He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead in a little while. Jesus could have scolded Mary and Martha, who questioned why Jesus had delayed His coming when He knew Lazarus was dying. He could have questioned the strength of their faith. But He didn't. He loved Lazarus as well as Mary and Martha. He felt their heartache and pain. When you love a lot, you grieve a lot.

In the Old Testament, Job was put through deep grief with the loss of his children and possessions. Even his wife told him to curse God. In the end, he said, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see You" (Job 42:5). Because of his faith, Job's family and possessions were all restored. But that wasn't the most important thing to him. It was that during his trials and grief, Job got to know God in a much more intimate way as his own personal Savior. Never waste a trial, God always has a plan in our darkest times.

Even in your loss, God can use a tool like GriefShare as an excellent ministry for your church and an excellent outreach to your community.

Mathre is a member of Helmar Lutheran Church, Helmar, Ill.





believe most Christians want to share their faith but struggle with questions of fear and inadequacy. Some muster up enough courage to plow through a presentation of the gospel and complete the task. But is that really what sharing about Jesus should be like?

When you experience a relationship that really blesses you, it's pretty natural to tell others about your admiration and love for that person. That sharing about Jesus with people is so different tells us there are other variables involved. Maybe you aren't experiencing a relationship with Jesus that brings you joy and encouragement. Or, since a relationship with Jesus involves the spiritual life, perhaps there is another force at work trying to discourage you from sharing Jesus.

Satan's will is the antithesis of God's will that all should be saved and come to the knowledge

of the truth (I Timothy 2:4). Jesus even refers to Satan as the father of lies (John 8:44), and he is the ultimate example of rebellion against God (Isaiah 14:12-15). So, you shouldn't be surprised when you struggle to share about life with Jesus. We wrestle not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12).

Then how can you come to the place where sharing about Jesus becomes natural? James 4:7-8 says, "Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you ..." When you submit yourself to God and seek to draw near to Him, you begin to realize that He is the One pulling you in so that you can get to know His heart and have the fruit of His Spirit at work in you. Developing this relationship is how sharing about Jesus with others can become more and more natural.

My fear is that Christians have unknowingly



A relational faith

By Pastor Tim Johnson

it to Jesus at the top of your lungs while driving your car? How long has it been since you laid your head down on your pillow at night and fell asleep while telling Jesus about a concern or a victory?

When was the last time you were mindful of His presence and asked for His wisdom or understanding or empowerment? After all, He is with you always.

A relationship with Jesus isn't just something you do, it's something you have. When you are experiencing a growing relationship of admiration and love, one that really blesses you, it's not so hard to share about that relationship. In a growing relationship with Jesus, Satan's relevance fades, inhibitions disperse, and what seemed scary becomes more and more natural. Your inadequacies also become obsolete because your relationship with Jesus supplies a new, daily testimony to share.

Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

So, while you are with a friend or co-worker and the conversation reminds you of a Scripture that blessed you earlier that day, why not share it? Maybe God blessed you with something you saw in creation or by some insight you gained when going for a walk the previous evening. Why not share it? It's part of who you are. People value those who are genuine, sincere, and caring. A growing relationship with Jesus produces this fruit in your life.

Most church-going Christians know the gospel basics: that we are sinners in need of a Savior, and that Jesus is that Savior who wants to live in you and guide you. That relationship begins the moment you trust in what He has done for you. Share from your growing relationship with Jesus and let Him direct the conversation. He is really good at it.

Johnson serves Christ the King Free Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn.

reduced their relationship with Jesus to something they do instead of something they have. They go to church and they do their devotions. Certainly, these are good things to do, but how many relationships are built that way?

When was the last time you decided to read one of the Gospels with the goal of trying to understand Jesus' heart for you and all people? How did He interact with people and why did He interact that way? How does He want to interact with you and why does He want to interact with you?

When was the last time you went for a walk just to share your heart with Jesus and then in silence, listened for His heart? Or, on that walk, have you looked for reasons in God's creation to praise Him?

When was the last time you tried to memorize a hymn or spiritual song and then sang



Community impact

By Adam Erickson

During my very first Sunday service after moving to Montgomery, Ill., Pastor Josh Skogerboe asked all of us, “What kind of a church are we?” The recent AFLBS graduate in me was ready to piously shout, “Lutheran!” but everyone in the pews behind me replied, “a disciple-making church,” instead. It didn’t take long for me to learn that this theme is not just a program or sermon series here; evangelism is a core part of St. Olaf’s Lutheran’s identity.

It’s simple, but one of the most practical ways that we reach out to our community is through food. Jesus Himself preached, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). Jesus didn’t speak this out of the blue, He said it after having fed 5,000 men. At St. Olaf we want our community to learn the same thing that those men learned—Jesus satisfies.

Anytime we have a special event or congregational meal, we actively invite those who live nearby. And I wouldn’t be surprised if some of the people who come show up only because they’re hungry. That opportunity to love someone by meeting a physical need is still a success. We also have a food pantry with a similar focus, and some of those who visit the pantry have become regulars with whom we can build relationships. People know when they’re physically hungry, but there seems to be a lot of people spiritually starving with absolutely no clue why. We have an opportunity to feed them, whether it’s a through a specific sermon that impacts their heart, or even just experiencing the love of God from people who know what it feels like to truly be accepted for where they’re at and who they are.

St. Olaf’s mission as a church is, “To know and love God. To know and love people.” We believe that God has placed our church at this exact location and in this exact time purposefully. Identifying with this community boils down to building close relationships with the individuals in it. This is our community, and the people here are what make it remarkable. It barely seems like I work with youth sometimes because they’re my close friends. It doesn’t feel like work to drive down the street and see people who really matter to me. Maybe those friends are beginning to see what following Christ looks like. Maybe they have no interest in living a godly life. Regardless, they’re human souls whom God created and loves, and that fact is what makes ministry both the best and hardest thing imaginable.

As Jesus’ hands and feet, time we get to spend with anyone is never a waste. Paul wrote, “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (I Corinthians 12:27). Inviting people to a meal, helping somewhere you’re needed, or merely showing someone you care is all part of gospel work. Ultimately, it opens the door to real conversations about the Word and who Jesus is. When people build relationships with the Church—Christ’s body—they’re meeting Jesus face to face.

Erickson is a youth worker at St. Olaf Lutheran, Montgomery, Ill.



WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION

THE MINISTRY OF THE ARC

BY IONA FOUKS

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he postcard from the Association Retreat Center read, “Celebrating 40 Years of Ministry.” It was a simple thank you that triggered a flood of memories.

The ARC was the starting point in my adult faith journey. In the winter of 1981, I had my first encounter with the AFLC’s new endeavor. I was a student at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, and the junior and senior classes were on a cold, snowy retreat. We stayed in the Good News Lodge which was one of the first renovated buildings of the former radar base. It was warm and inviting. Bob and Carol Dietsche were our hosts, along with their children. The lodge made a perfect meeting place to grow in relationship with each other and our Lord. Even back then we embraced the winter wonderland. The ARC offered cross country skiing, skating, and snow tubing with good food, warm drinks, and a large dose of spiritual medicine.

Nestled on the edge of the St. Croix River Valley, this abandoned radar base was purchased by the AFLC in 1979 by visionaries who trusted God to grow a ministry. They desired a ministry focused on providing an environment where one could come away from the hustle and bustle of life and reflect on, or maybe embrace for the first time, God’s great love for them. The ARC has become a place of rest and rejuvenation. Even in its beginnings, it was a safe place to deepen and strengthen relationships and renew old ones.

After my introduction to the ARC in 1981, it became a place where I would return to again and again as a fresh AFLBS graduate, youth leader, a young teacher, and as a seasoned wife and mom. My four children made plenty of memories and forever friends at retreats, camps, and leadership training events. It has

been inspiring to watch God work in not only the structure of the ARC, but more importantly in the lives of those who have and will experience time there.

It was primitive in the beginning. The barracks were uninsulated, the metal bunks lumpy, and the water heater allowed about ten hot showers each morning. The big concrete bomb shelter became the worship center. Season by season, year by year, the staff and many church groups started to transform the base into a beautiful retreat center.

The ARC now boasts many dorms, some cottages, camping spots, a large worship and fellowship hall, a gym, many smaller meeting areas, picnic and barbecue areas, a lake, a water slide, playgrounds, yard games, walking paths, prayer chapel, ballfield, fire pit and dining hall.

The transformation took place while retreats, camps, and conferences continued. AFLC members know that growth and fellowship aren’t about buildings. Lives have been changed, encouraged, and uplifted, not just in our church body, but in the surrounding community, as well. The radar base which served as a communication hub for the USAF, has become a place of refuge in our ever changing world.

My prayer is that the ministry of the ARC will continue for at least another 40 years. And, if you haven’t had a chance to visit, make plans to “Come Away and Rest Awhile” in 2019 as we celebrate God’s continued faithfulness.

Fouks is a member of Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis.

The 2019 Annual Conference

We invite you to come to the 2019 AFLC Annual Conference June 11-14 at Spruce Lake Retreat Center, Canadensis, Pa., in the beautiful Pocono Mountains of Eastern Pennsylvania.

Nestled in the woods and mountains of central eastern Pennsylvania, Spruce Lake Retreat Center is only hours away from some of the most historic parts of America. New York is a short drive to your east (1.25 hours), with the beaches of the Atlantic Ocean situated just to the south in New Jersey. Philadelphia, the seat of our nation's independence with its Liberty Bell, is just more than a couple hours' drive to your south. The rolling hills of Lancaster County (Amish country) are only three hours' drive or so to the southwest. And the battle grounds of Valley Forge, Gettysburg, and Antietam lie to the south along the Pennsylvania and northern Maryland borders. You will be literally surrounded by early American history during your stay at Spruce Lake.

The place to begin your exciting journey to this year's conference is by visiting the AFLC Conference registration page at www.aflc.org/about-us/conferences. Here you will find the appropriate links to Spruce Lake Retreat Center's registration site (food and lodging), as well as the general registration information for the conference meetings, including WMF Day. Because of the recent heavy activity in registration at Spruce Lake, we suggest that you call the conference center directly at 800-822-7505 with your food and lodging needs. We encourage you to register as soon as possible to better secure your lodging selections and to assist in the preparations of Spruce Lake Retreat Center and the host congregations.

We pray and trust that the upcoming conference will be a special event for all who can take part. Let us know how we can serve you.

The conference will offer something for the whole family. We are planning a full morning and afternoon schedule for all children and youth. Because Spruce Lake Retreat Center is a Christian campground facility, it offers a wide variety of activities for youth while adults are in session. See you in Pennsylvania this June!

—The churches of the Eastern District, 2019 Annual Conference hosts



2019 Annual Conference

June 11-14

Spruce Lake Retreat Center,
Canadensis, Pa.

Host: Eastern District congregations

Theme: "As for me and my house we will
serve the Lord."
(Joshua 24:15)

Online registration, housing information,
and conference schedule can be found at:

aflc.org/conferences

ARC Corporation

(10 terms of five years each)

Thomas Asfeldt, Sioux Falls, S.D.

Dan Ballmann, Hico, Texas

**Pastor Richard Carr, Tioga, N.D.

Pastor Leroy Flickinger, Thief River Falls,
Minn.

Lori Lyon, Kenyon, Minn.

Penny Nash, Lidgerwood, N.D.

Pastor Elden Nelson, Prinsburg, Minn.

Brian Rice, Williston, N.D.

Curtis Twedt, Oxbow, N.D.

Eleven more names needed

Schools Corporation

(10 terms of five years each)

Scott Bauer, Stover, Mo.

Mike Borg, Sioux Falls, S.D.

Nathan Dalager, Argyle, Minn.

Erika DeWitt, Brandon, S.D.

Pastor Rob Edwards, Dassel, Minn.

Joel Erickson, Oslo, Minn.

Bonnie Handsaker, Radcliffe, Iowa

Robin Johnson, Esko, Minn.

Pastor Rodney Johnson, Stanley, N.D.

Pastor Gideon Johnson, Kenyon, Minn.

Pastor Todd Klemme, Bagley, Minn.

Elika Korhonen, West Fargo, N.D.

Susan Parsley, Pipestone, Minn.

Thomas Propst, Stover, Mo.

Diana Richardson, Faith, S.D.

Pastor Kirk Thorson, Sioux Falls, S.D.

Pastor Peter Ward, Pelican Rapids, Minn.

Pastor Jon Wellumson, Williston, N.D.

Two more names needed

Missions Corporation

(20 terms of five years each)

Pastor Matthew Ballmann, San Antonio,
Texas

Pastor Ray Ballmann, Kopperl, Texas

Pastor Michael Brandt, Rapid City, S.D.

Pastor John Brennan, Melvin, Ill.

Michelle Brennan, Melvin, Ill.

Pastor William Buck, Sioux Falls, S.D.

Mary Ann Christensen, Laurel, Neb.

Pastor Luke Emerson, Lake Stevens, Wash.

Gloria Flaa, Sioux Falls, S.D.

Linda Fugleberg, Moorhead, Minn.

Paul Handsaker, Radcliffe, Iowa

Mary Jo Jackson, Versailles, Mo.

Michael Jackson, Versailles, Mo.

Pastor David Johnson, Boyertown, Pa.

Pastor Richard Long, Arlington, Wash.

Kurt Mortensen, Underwood, Minn.

Pastor Jerome Nikunen, Richfield, Minn.

Jacob O'Flanagan, Wayzata, Minn.

Pastor Mark Olson, Minneapolis, Minn.

Andrew Quanbeck, Fargo, N.D.

Pastor Tom Reagan, Wahpeton, N.D.

Pastor Mark Richardson, Faith, S.D.

Jordan Rumohr, Monticello, Minn.

Pastor Greg Schram, Loveland, Colo.

Bill Sheldon, Ray, N.D.

Kenneth Sletten, Duluth, Minn.

Pastor Ron Smith, Brookings, S.D.

Nancy Staudinger, Tamarack, Minn.

Pastor Scott Stroud, Salinas, Calif.

Pastor Jonathan Unverzagt, Sparta, Wis.

Pastor Craig Wentzel, Edmore, N.D.

Dr. Lyle Westrom, Crookston, Minn.

Eight more names needed

BOARD NOMINEES

ARC Board

Voted on by corporation members

(One layman, five-year term)

Roger Benson, Brooklyn Center, Minn.

X

Bay Broadcasting

Voted on by corporation members

(One pastor, three-year term)

Pastor Thomas Olson, Farmington, Minn.

Pastor Joe Ocker, Frost, Minn.

Coordinating Committee

(One pastor, five-year term)

Pastor Jason Gudim, Golden Valley, Minn.

Pastor Mark Johnson, Dalton, Minn.

Schools Board of Trustees

Voted on by corporation members

(One layman, five-year term)

*Don Balmer, Thief River Falls, Minn.

X

World Missions Committee

Voted on by corporation members

(One pastor, five-year term)

*Pastor Kent Sperry, Beulah, N.D.

Pastor Jon Langness, Deshler, Neb.

(One layman, five-year term)

Stephen Deysher, Fleetwood, Pa.

X

Youth Board

(One layman, five-year term)

Michele Smith, Brookings, S.D.

Christina Hoops, Deshler, Neb.

(One layman, four-year term)

Adam Erickson, Montgomery, Ill.

#Adam McCarlson, Sioux Falls, S.D.

* Incumbents

** Must be elected to corporation to remain on/be elected to committee or board

Appointed to fill unexpired term until Annual Conference

X Nominations not named by press deadline

AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship Board

(One layman, five-year term)

*Michael Lynnes, Leonard, N.D.

X

Board of Publications & Parish Education

(One pastor, five-year term)

Pastor Ryan Patenaude, Kindred, N.D.

Pastor John Kiehl, Metropolis, Ill.

FLAPS Board of Managers

Voted on by corporation members

(One pastor, five-year term)

Pastor Henry Mohagen, Reva, S.D.

X

Home Missions Committee

Voted on by corporation members

(One pastor, five-year term)

**Pastor Mark Richardson, Faith, S.D.

**Pastor Ron Smith, Brookings, S.D.

(One layman, five-year term)

David Strand, Kindred, N.D.

**Kurt Mortensen, Underwood, Minn.

Budget Analysis Committee

(One layman, three-year term)

*Roger Benson, Brooklyn Center, Minn.

Nathan Dalager, Argyle, Minn.

(One layman, three-year term)

X

X

Benefits Board

(One layman, five-year term)

Don Buck, Zap, N.D.

*Phil Peterson, Beresford, S.D.

Nominees to serve at the 2020 conference

Committee No. 1

(Administration)

Pastor Ken Hart, Fairbury, Neb.

X

X

X

X

Committee No. 2

(Schools)

Joel Erickson, Oslo, Minn.

Pastor Barry Nelson, Tripp, S.D.

Pastor David Tilney, Cloquet, Minn.

X

X

Committee No. 3

(Missions)

Pastor Karl Anderson, McIntosh, Minn.

Iver Heier, Prairie City, S.D.

Jessica Smith, Brookings, S.D.

Stewart Vachal, Epping, N.D.

X

Committee No. 4

(Publications and Parish Education)

Pastor Brett Boe, Shakopee, Minn.

Amy Dalager, Argyle, Minn.

Pastor Rob Edwards, Dassel, Minn.

Albert Engevik, Eden, S.D.

X

Committee No. 5

(Evangelism and Benefits)

Pastor Craig Wentzel, Edmore, N.D.

X

X

X

X

2019 SEMINARY GRADUATES

KEVIN CZYMBOR

Park River, N.D.

I was born July 10, 1976, in Saginaw, Mich., to Andrew and Cynthia Czymbor. I have a certificate for having been born in the 200th year of our nation's birth.

Considering the path God has taken me through life, I feel like an odd duck. I was baptized Lutheran, completed my first communion in the Catholic Church during my early childhood, and was confirmed at St. Martin



Lutheran Church (LCMS) in Birch Run, Mich., where I spent 25 years actively serving God. During college I associated with Baptists who were in transition to non-denominational faiths, and I have a brother who was ordained in the Nazarene Church.

I love learning a lot about everything, but do not enjoy learning everything about any one thing. I completed an associates degree in science but ceased pursuing a bachelor's degree when I settled into what would be a 14-year career as a customer support agent for an internet service and webhosting company. I moved from Michigan to Park River, N.D., when I married my wife, Jaelyn (Reinarz) Czymbor, in 2012. I discovered and embraced the AFLC when I met my wife. We became active members of Victory Free Lutheran Church, Park River, N.D., from which God called me to seminary.

Seminary tests and challenges many aspects of a person's life. Two life-changing aspects of my time in seminary have been the discovery that God has wired my brain in an ADHD manner, and the birth of my two sons, Noah (3) and Ezra (1).

My internship at Ruthfred Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bethel Park, Pa., has been amazing thanks to pastors Steve Carlson and Adam Osier and their wonderful flock. I have accepted a call to serve St. Peter Lutheran Church in Armour, S.D.

JUSTIN NELSON

Kalispell, Mont.

My route into seminary has not been a straight one, in fact you could call it the long and winding road. I was born in Kalispell, Mont., to John and Jackie Nelson. I married my high school sweetheart, Betsy Elgin, on June 28, 1997. We have three beautiful children: Julia (18), Isaiah (10), and David (6). I grew up going to church at Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, where I was baptized and confirmed, and went to a private Christian school. As I grew older, I began to drift from the head knowledge I had about Christ and began



following my own will, the things that I thought would make me happy. I struggled with alcohol addiction through my teens and into my adult years. However, this lifestyle was not sustainable and eventually I crashed.

My relationship with Jesus Christ came at a Christian men's retreat in 2005. I realized that I could no longer endure this lifestyle. I was tired of hurting my wife and daughter and being a horrible husband and father. I submitted my life to Christ. I thought that this would change everything immediately, that I was now cured, and that I would no longer struggle with my addiction lifestyle, but I was wrong. It did not take long for my old self to reemerge. Only this time, alcohol was no longer a comfort but a burden.

I finally found peace with God in recovery. I learned that I was precious to God, that I mattered to Him, and that faith is not about what I did for God but what He had already done for me. He had created me for a purpose and that purpose was to help other people who are struggling with addiction and self-hatred to find hope, peace, and healing in Jesus Christ. That is why I came to seminary. I have a heart for the lost because I know first-hand the loneliness, hopelessness, and desperation of life without a Savior. I know that God never wastes a hurt. God has taken the train wreck that I made of my life and used it for His glory.

I have seen God work through me in people's lives as I have served at Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn., as an intern. I look forward to serving God in the ministry he has laid before me as the family life pastor at Abiding Savior Free Lutheran in Sioux Falls, S.D.

MATTHEW PILLMAN

Menominee, Wis.

It was a snowy winter in 1994 when I joined my parents. I was born to Paul and Josie Pillman on February 13 and 14 days later I was baptized. Our home congregation would become Christ the King Lutheran in Wilson, Wis.



During my last two years of high school, I began working toward my four-year undergraduate degree. I graduated in September 2013 from

Thomas Edison

State University with a BSBA. While completing my online degree, I also attended the Association Free Lutheran Bible School (AFLBS) from 2012 to 2014.

The call to prepare for ministry came to me through various still small voices in my life. The first of these voices was at an evening missions meeting when I was around 8 years old. The next voice came during my first year at AFLBS. While on choir tour in the spring of 2013, we received word that Dr. Francis Monseth had passed away suddenly. In Pastor Joel Rolf's absence, I joined a number of men in the choir to preach for the concerts. God used this to confirm my call to prepare for ministry.

Preparation came in the form of studies at the Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary. The Lord taught endurance and humility through the intense time of readings, assignments, and classroom training. During my three years on campus, I also had the privileged of serving as an AFLBS dorm assistant and admissions coordinator.

On May 26, 2018, I married the beautiful Julia Erickson. We moved to Pipestone, Minn., for my one-year internship under the direction of Pastor Tim Johnson at Christ the King Free Lutheran. On March 8 we added the newest addition to our family, James Pillman. We are also thrilled to have recently accepted the Lord's call to serve as an associate pastor here in Pipestone.



CONFIDENCE DESPITE TRIALS

BY MICAH BERGER

As Michael Rockenbrodt and I entered the health center in Karenga, Uganda, we asked to be directed to the Christians from Lokori. We were brought to a room with a handful of patients and pointed to a bed at the back where two women lay resting. As we approached, one of them noticed us and roused her neighbor. They turned to face us with pain evident in their movements. Though limited in our communication by the language barrier, we made our introductions and asked if we could pray for them.

Of course, as a missionary, it wasn't my first time to go and pray for those who were sick or injured. But the difference this time was that I knew these sisters in Christ had suffered

this affliction for the sake of the gospel.

The two of them had been sharing the good news in their village (a place of few Christians and no churches) and had been severely beaten as a result. That was why we'd come to pray for them. Not only for their physical sufferings, but for their spirits as well. We prayed that they wouldn't lose heart in their afflictions, rather, that they might be strengthened in their faith.

For Michael and myself, it was a sobering reminder that even here in Uganda, where the church is growing and thriving, there are still pockets of darkness where the enemy has a hold. We'd been told stories about the Lokori area and how it was sort of a special stronghold of unbelief and witchcraft. But we'd never seen evidence of it until that day at the health center.

Even as missionaries we feel the resistance of the enemy and his agents. It might come in the form of sickness, discouragement, or anxiety. It's a real battle but it's not a hopeless one. For the God we serve is greater than all the forces of darkness in the world. And He has given us His sure and certain promise that the strongholds of the enemy will not be able to hold out against the message

of Christ's salvation (Matthew 16:18). And the kingdom of God will continue to grow until it has covered the globe (Daniel 2:35,44). As children of God, we believe that we, too, will be witnesses of this victory if only we persevere against the darkness.

I recall a similar story from another part of Karamoja. Our friend Lopeo told us how his father had also been beaten and threatened with death when attempting to bring the gospel to an unreached village in his area. Yet, with time and with perseverance a church was planted in that very village, and I've seen it myself.

It's our prayer that we'll one day see a church in Lokori, as well. And we pray it with confidence in spite of any trials. For our God is faithful to His Word, and He has proven His faithfulness and love toward us by taking on flesh, bearing our sins, and winning our victory on the cross.

Berger is an AFLC missionary serving in Karenga, Uganda.



AFLBS students partner with Ecuador church

A group of eleven students from the Association Free Lutheran Bible School in Plymouth, Minn., spent their spring break in Ecuador, working with the young adults from Paz de Dios church in Cuenca. The team, led by Pastor Mark Olson, presented dramas, songs, and crafts at a partner school, Unidad Educativa Biligüe Interamericana, and in a trilingual school in a nearby village, El Tambo. The trip was part of a class on cross cultural ministry, offered during the spring semester.

Corporation approves Student Life Center groundbreaking

Members of the AFLC Schools Corporation approved groundbreaking for the Student Life Center at a special meeting held April 6. A ceremony will be held at 11 a.m. May 11, the morning of graduation on campus. The 24-3 vote weighed increasing costs of construction, the cost of interest on a mortgage, and significant fundraising progress, including \$3.2M in cash and promises to give over the past 18 months.

Bethany Bible Camp 2019 schedule

Bethany Bible Camp, Bemidji, Minn., invites the AFLC church family to participate in its 2019 summer camp schedule.

- Day camp: 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on June 11
- Junior Camp: June 18-22, with Pastor Tom Olson
- Senior Camp: June 22-27, with Pastor Dan Antal
- WMF Summer Rally day: July 11
- Men's retreat: August 16-18, with Pastor Jim L. Johnson

For additional information, visit bethanybible-camp.com. To rent the camp for your event, call 218-751-6094 or 218-556-6600.



Friestad installed at Camarillo

Pastor Chad Friestad was installed Feb. 10 at Good Shepherd Lutheran, Camarillo, Calif. Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiated. Pictured are Pastor Chad and Christie Friestad (center front), Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president (next to Pastor Friestad), and members of the elders and church council of Good Shepherd.



Andrew and Alexis Olson (far left and center) were commissioned for missionary service on April 13.

Olsons commissioned for service in East Africa

Pastor Andrew and Alexis Olson were commissioned as missionaries on April 13 to serve in East Africa with Lutheran Bible Translators. The commissioning service was held at Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn., with Dr. Mike Rodewald, executive director of Lutheran Bible Translators, officiating.

The Olsons plan to work on Ukerewe Island in Tanzania, where they will translate Scripture into the local language. The Olsons plan to leave for Tanzania by the end of May. Olson is a 2017 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary and they are AFLC missionaries serving on loan with Lutheran Bible Translators.



HIS ARMS OF COMFORT

BY KERWIN SLETTO

In Lamentations 3:14-18, Jeremiah’s life is falling apart. He has forgotten happiness. His strength has perished. He has lost hope. Then he remembers the Lord, therefore he has hope. “The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (vs. 22-23). The Lord welcomes us with open arms.

One of my areas of ministry here at Altru Hospital is the cancer center. The patients who come here feel like their lives are falling apart because of cancer. Many are anxious and afraid. I have the opportunity to visit with these patients and many times with their families, too. The patients, who come from a 100-mile radius from Grand Forks, N.D., are strangers to me. Some of the patients have a church home while many others have had a church upbringing but haven’t been to church for many years.

When I come to the patient’s area, I knock on the door and ask to come in. After I introduce myself, I tell them that I don’t have bad news, but that I’m just there to see how they are doing. It’s important to let patients know why I am there.

We talk about where they are from and what their church background may be, and then we talk about the elephant in the room—cancer. If this is the first treatment, we talk about some of the potential side effects. And if the patient has had more than one treatment, we talk about the side effects they may have experienced. They need to express what they are feeling.

Then we talk about the patient’s life, the things he or she likes to do. It could be about UND hockey, farming, cooking, family, books, and so on. Often, the patient visibly relaxes. At the close of the visit, I ask if it would be okay if I prayed. Ninety-eight percent of the people welcome prayer. The law has already done it’s work through cancer and the patient is at the end of what they can do. Through prayer, God invites people to come to Him. We talk about God’s great plan of life and how He has everything under control. We hear how God wants us to trust Him with our futures and that He has promised to cause all things to work together for good. It doesn’t mean that God will work in the ways we expect, but it also means that our circumstances won’t be left up to chance or luck. God will provide the best for us, and He is at work to draw

people to Himself.

I love that as we travel through the challenges of life, we don’t have to hold God’s hand, but He holds on to ours, and nothing will separate us from the love of God through Christ Jesus our Lord.

When I offered prayer to one patient, she was very hesitant but said it was okay. So we had prayer together. The next time I saw her, at the close of our visit, I again offered prayer. She said, “Oh yes, I can always use prayer.” The door that points to Christ has opened.

In our helplessness, Jesus welcomes us into His loving arms.

Sletto serves as a chaplain with Altru Hospital in Grand Forks, N.D.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Kevin Czymbor, who will graduate from the Free Lutheran Seminary this month, has accepted a call to serve St. Peter's Lutheran in Armour, S.D.

Israel Vazques Flores, who will graduate from the Free Lutheran Seminary this month, has accepted a call to serve as associate pastor of missions at St. Paul Apostle Free Lutheran, Leon, Mexico.

Christopher Kumpula, who graduated from the Free Lutheran Seminary in December, was ordained and installed March 31 at Word of Life Free Lutheran, Mankato, Minn., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating.

Pastor Luke Berntson has resigned from serving Maranatha Free Lutheran of Ulen, Minn., and accepted the call to serve Hope and Bethesda Lutheran churches in Northome and Mizpah, Minn.

Eli and Elizabeth Neufeld, Mesa, Ariz., will serve on the Alaska VBS team this summer with AFLC Home Missions.

Members of several AFLC churches in the Twin Cities area are working toward a new church plant in the east metro. Called **Resurrection Free Lutheran**, the church plant will begin with a series of Bible studies in May, held at 7 p.m. every Thursday on the campus of the University of Northwestern—St. Paul. The Bible studies will focus on “The Christian’s Mission.” The study will commence on May 2 and continue throughout the summer. For more information, visit the church website at resurrectionflc.wixsite.com.



Dr. Orville Hiepler

Dr. Orville Hiepler, 99, of Oxnard, Calif., died March 17 in Oxnard. Born Feb. 10, 1920, on the family farm near Springbrook, N.D., he was the son of Gustav and Anna Hiepler. He married Florence Borstad on Aug. 22, 1945. She preceded him in death.

He was baptized and confirmed at Springbrook Lutheran Church. He graduated from high school in Epping, N.D., and did his undergraduate work at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minn. He graduated from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. After his marriage, he served a parish in Pasco, Wash. His post-graduate studies included the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, and he earned a doctorate degree from the California Graduate School of Theology, Glendale, Calif. He served Lutheran churches in the California communities of Sacramento, Hawthorne, Camarillo, and Oceanside. He consulted and assisted churches in Wisconsin, North Dakota, and Tennessee. He helped plant churches and schools and served as school principal. He most recently help plant Riverpark Lutheran Church with friends. He delivered his last sermon on Feb. 10, his 99th birthday. He was a long-time member of the Rotary Club International. While living in Hawthorne he was a member of the Mayor's Sr. Citizen committee, Lutheran Social Services, and chairperson of the Ministerial Association of California. In Camarillo, he was the chairperson of the ministerial association.

Surviving are two daughters, Dorene (Curt) McDougall, Golden Valley, Minn., and Ilene (Robert) Bradberry, Lake Forest, Calif.; one son, Mark (Michelle) Hiepler, Camarillo, Calif.; one sister, Marion Bugge, Lacey, Wash.; 11 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.

The service was April 22 at Good Shepherd Lutheran, Camarillo, Calif. Memorials may be given to Concordia College Moorhead, Minn.; Riverpark Lutheran Church, Ventura, Calif.; Trinity Lutheran Church, Hawthorne, Calif.; and Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Camarillo.

Register now for the 2019 WMF Convention on June 11

The WMF will host the 2019 WMF convention on June 11 at Spruce Lake Retreat Center in Canadensis, Pa. Please use the online form for the AFLC Annual Conference to register for the WMF Convention. The registration cost is

\$20. The form can be found at aflc.org/conferences or call 763-545-5631.

Registrations for housing and meals must be made directly with Spruce Lake Retreat Center. Call 800-822-7505 to reserve a room and register for meals.

MARCH MEMORIALS

AFLBS

Ruth Claus
Pastor Einar Unseth

AFLTS

Adeline Hokkanen

Evangelism

Harvey Loftsgard
Pastor Orville

Hiepler
Robert Ritter

Parish Education

David Keller

Vision

Marion Rieth

WMF

Ina Ronningen
Shirley Tvinnereim
Hartman

... in honor of

Parish Education

Beverly Enderlein

Home Missions

Mabel Foster
Jayce Hall

World Missions

Helen Knapp

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-March 31, 2019

FUND	REC'D IN MARCH	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$24,664	\$126,990	\$130,963
Evangelism	7,542	35,558	29,214
Youth Ministries	6,383	31,476	35,764
Parish Education	9,832	42,489	50,674
Seminary	18,332	83,554	82,866
Bible School	30,405	132,058	142,988
Home Missions	19,172	100,987	121,983
World Missions	21,212	149,343	121,539
Personal Support	38,638	149,154	209,353
TOTALS	\$176,179	\$851,608	\$925,345

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

THE MYSTERY OF MYSTERY

“There’s no mystery about it at all!” exclaimed a layman, challenging a guest pastor who spoke of the mystery of our salvation. No one came to the pastor’s defense by pointing out that the



Pastor Robert Lee

word “mystery” is not an uncommon one in the Bible, especially in the writings of the Apostle Paul.

A popular Bible dictionary says that the word denotes not the mysterious, in the way that we may often use it, but something that is outside the range of what we can comprehend naturally; spiritual truth that can be known only by divine revelation. One example is the incarnation of Christ, which Paul calls “the mystery of godliness”:

He who was revealed in the flesh,
Was vindicated in the Spirit,
Beheld by angels,
Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory (I Timothy 3:16).

“Christ in you, the hope of glory,” is called a mystery, and Christ Himself is called “God’s mystery” (Colossians 1:26-27 and 2:2). Paul also used the word “mystery” in Romans 11 to describe how salvation has come to the Gentiles, and he concludes with a doxology that praises God while confessing his own feeble understanding: “O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” (v. 33). Like Paul we believe, and yet our understanding is so meager.

Evangelism is a mystery, in the true biblical sense of the term. The “evangel” is the good news of the gospel, revealed to us in the pages of Holy Scripture. God by His Spirit has opened the eyes of our hearts to believe. It is part of the new nature

to want others to believe, too, and it is the command of Jesus to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:18-20). Christians are called “witnesses” (Acts 1:8) and “ambassadors” (II Corinthians 5:20), and both of these words mean that we have something to say. It is the message that Paul summarizes in I Corinthians 15:1-4, it is the good news that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures.

So, where’s the mystery? It seems quite plain and simple, doesn’t it? Oh, look again and prayerfully ponder the mystery of the gospel that is so far above and beyond our human understanding! If we believe that our salvation is a plain and simple matter, then we are seriously lacking a sense of wonder. Does the miracle of God’s grace amaze me? Why did I respond to God’s call when others ignore it? How do I dare to believe that Jesus paid the price for a sinner like me? Daniel Webster Whittle puts it well in his hymn, “I Know Whom I Have Believed”:

I know not how this saving faith to
me He did impart,
Nor how believing in His Word
wrought peace within my heart.
I know not how the Spirit moves,
convincing men of sin,
Revealing Jesus through the Word,
creating faith in Him.
But I know whom I have believed,
and am persuaded
That He is able to keep that which
I’ve committed
Unto Him against that day.
(*Ambassador Hymnal*, 525)

Evangelism is not collecting scalps, boasting about those whom we have

converted. Evangelist Dwight Moody spoke of revisiting a city where he had conducted evangelistic meeting, and a drunkard cried out to him, “Hey, Moody, I’m one of those you converted when you were here!” Mr. Moody replied, “You look like someone who I converted.”

Evangelism is not convincing or manipulating someone to buy your product. It is being a part of what God by His Spirit is doing. It is accomplished not by my powers of persuasion but by the power of God’s Word.

“Evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread,” explained evangelist D.T. Niles.

There’s a tragic spirit in our world today

If we believe that our salvation is a plain and simple matter, then we are seriously lacking a sense of wonder.

that seems to say that no one needs to be saved, that everyone is going to heaven. This is called universalism, and it has been rejected by biblical Christianity throughout church history. To the multitudes who do not know they are lost, God’s law needs to be proclaimed in all of its sternness, and to those awakened to repentance, we say, “Come to Jesus! No matter how great a sinner you are, there is still room for you!” (C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*).

The mystery remains, and God’s believing people may rejoice in it as we seek to be His instruments unto the salvation of others, not because of the depth of our understanding of His works and ways, but because of the depth of His grace.

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ETERNAL AIM, EARTHLY IMPACT

BY PASTOR GIDEON JOHNSON

It is always encouraging to hear young ones express their faith through the things they say, especially when they happen to be your own children.

Numerous times our 4-year-old has told us that it is okay if we die, because then we will go to heaven and be with Jesus. Initially, I wondered if he maybe had an unhealthy grasp of his own mortality. However, after thinking it over I have to say what a wonderful expression of faith and hope this is, to have the assurance that there is life after death. And how wonderful to know that in Christ we each have this same hope.

Last month we were all given the opportunity to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior on Easter morning. Once again we were reminded of the great hope we have of a resurrection like His and an eternity to be had with Him. As Paul writes in I Corinthians 15:17, 19, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins ... If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all

people most to be pitied." Thankfully the passage doesn't end there. Paul goes on to say, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (vs. 20-22).

As believers in Christ we have this hope and are given a new aim in life. That is, our minds are to be fixed on eternity. We eagerly long for the day when "this perishable body ... puts on the imperishable, and this mortal body ... puts on immortality" (I Corinthians 15:53). As C.S Lewis says in *Mere Christianity*, "This thinking [is] ... one of the things a Christian is meant to do." Or, as Paul models for us, we "press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14).

Now, unless we think that this focus on eternity somehow gets us off the hook or will in some way limit our impact on the world and the lives of others, C.S. Lewis

expresses the contrary in *Mere Christianity*. He says, "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their marks on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven ... Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither." Or to say it another way, if our aim is eternal, we can't not have an impact on the temporal.

I am so thankful that in Christ we have the most hopeful of aims, an aim that longs to leave this world, but will never leave this world alone. So, having faith and hope like a child, earnestly aim for heaven and greatly impact earth.

Johnson serves the Kenyon, Minn., parish (Hauge and Emmanuel Lutheran).