

THE 

NOVEMBER 2019

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

SOLA
FIDE

THANKFUL

SACRIFICE
OF PRAISE

For the beauty of the earth,
for the glory of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies.

Christ, our Lord, to you we raise
this, our hymn of grateful praise.

For the wonder of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale and tree and flower,
sun and moon and stars of light.

For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
for all gentle thoughts and mild.

For yourself, best gift divine,
to the world so freely given,
agent of God's grand design:
peace on earth and joy in heaven.

The Reformation
& Thanksgiving



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

NOVEMBER 2019
VOL. 57 NO. 11

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
Pastor Jerry Moan

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

ARE YOU WILLING TO CHANGE?

BY PASTOR BOB RIETH

Change. If we are not satisfied with our lives as they are now, then we need to do something to alter the course we are on. Change takes us out of our comfort zone, so we fight it. It is easier to continue with the status quo than to make the effort to change. Perhaps you have heard this challenge: “To get something you’ve never had, you have to do something you’ve never done.”

What would you attempt if you knew you could not fail? What would you change if you could just snap your fingers and have it done?

For example, here is one of the things that my wife, Marion, and I would like to change. We would want to be caught up with the mountain of paperwork that there never seems time to do. We would want to get organized and stay organized. Unless we change our schedule, we may continue to fall short of that mark. We need to make a conscious decision to change in order to accomplish this goal.

Unless we change, we cannot grow. Let’s start with these three things. First, we need to examine ourselves and come to understand what in our lives is keeping us from being all that God wants us to be. Second, we need to learn how to make that change. Third, we need to commit to making that change and following through with it.

Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans

I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

Growing can be uncomfortable and frightening. Taking the steps we must take in order to begin to change can be terrifying. Remember this quote, attributed to Billy Graham: “The will of God will not take us where the grace of God cannot sustain us.”

The most important change that a person can make is coming to know Jesus Christ as Lord. Jesus was talking to His disciples in Matthew 18:2-4: “He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: ‘I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’”

Are we willing to change? God has great things in store for us if we go His way. What will the future hold for us if we follow His plan? If you always do what you’ve always done, you will always get what you’ve always gotten.

Rieth, a member of Our Redeemer Lutheran, Kirkland, Wash., is founder and president of Media Fellowship International. Adapted from “Pastor Bob’s Two Minute Devotion,” from May 11, 2009. Rieth’s wife, Marion, recently passed away.

I know not the way God leads me, but well do I know my Guide.

—Martin Luther

It must be an odd feeling to be thankful to nobody in particular. Christians in public institutions often see this odd thing happening on Thanksgiving Day.

—Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.

Luther was the man who, guided by experience in the life of his own soul, again made people understand the original and true meaning of the gospel of Christ.

—Herman Bavinck

Luther's doctrine of justification depends upon two things: the constant preaching of the wrath of God in the face of sin; and the realization that every Christian is at once righteous and a sinner, thus needing the hammer of the law to terrify and break the sinful conscience.

—Carl Trueman

The Law says, Where is your righteousness, goodness, and satisfaction? The Gospel says, Christ is your righteousness, goodness, and satisfaction.

—Patrick Hamilton

Justification
by grace
through faith

G

F o r i t i s

Ephesians 2:8

b y g r a c e

y o u h a v e

b e e n s a v

e d t h r o u

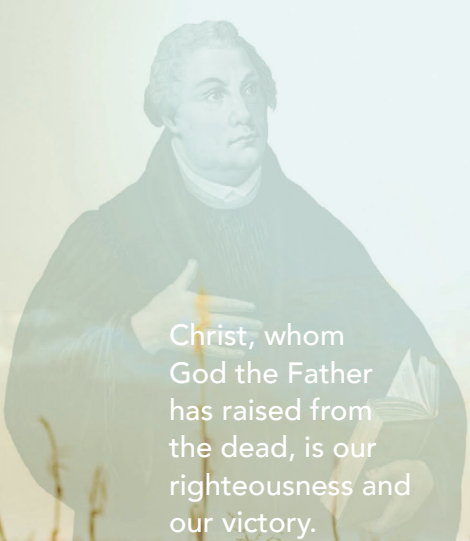
g h f a i t h

R

A

C

E



Christ, whom
God the Father
has raised from
the dead, is our
righteousness and
our victory.

- 5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
- 6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something
to be used to his own advantage;
- 7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
- 8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
- 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and
gave him the name that is above every name,
- 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in
heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is
Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

S O L A
F I D E

T H R O U G H

F A I T H

PASTOR BRIAN RICKE

It is unfortunately too easy to take for granted the value and importance of history, especially Christian history. Too many times, busyness becomes our idol and we become distracted and complacent toward the things that are important. Complacency and lethargy can also find their way into our faith and our preaching and teaching.

As God called me out of the music recording industry and into parish ministry, I embarked on a journey I had no road map for. Sure, there are books on being a pastor and the seminary training I received was wonderful and life changing. However, there is nothing that can truly prepare one for the struggles that come in Christian ministry. One such struggle for me was valuing the Reformation and the important lessons it can teach us.

You can learn about the Reformation in books, reading the history and theology of this incredible event, but the value of its importance can only truly become clear as one begins to see and realize how many in the Christian Church ignore and even distort the important doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone.

As I listened back through the early sermons I preached in the first years of ministry, it became very clear to me how easy it was to mingle law and gospel; how easy it is to allow the doctrine of justification to become muddled and soiled by lack of clarity and diligence to preach salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ Jesus. To my shame I would often sacrifice this diligence by allowing life's distractions and lethargy to get the better of me.

This is where history and brutal honesty became great and important teachers. As I became grieved over the lack of clarity of justification by grace through faith alone in my own sermons, I began to investigate Martin Luther's struggle over this important and often undervalued truth of God's Word. Of course, we studied this in seminary, but if I'm honest, my conviction as to its importance was severely lacking. What Luther struggled with in the Reformation taught me a valuable lesson about lethargy, clarity, and diligence.

Many times we say we are bound by and dedicated to God's Word, but in reality we often follow the teachings of the day rather than test these teachings according to the Word of God. We look to the "paid professionals" of the Christian faith and say to ourselves, "They must be right, this is their profession." When the Church does this, we

allow complacency and lethargy to win the day.

Luther would have none of this! He was determined to not allow the outrage he felt toward the practices of the Church to go unchecked and unexamined. Luther's fight for the truth began in 1517 as he wrote to his bishop, Albrecht von Brandenburg, protesting the sale of indulgences. The more Luther examined the practices of the Church and compared them to God's holy Word, the more his disgust grew and his convictions cemented.

From 1510 through 1520 Luther began to teach what the Holy Spirit revealed to Him about the truth of salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ Jesus. This revelation came through the careful examination of God's Word and a willingness to see the truth of the gospel. Luther's due diligence and his unwillingness to just accept the teaching of the day was used by God in a powerful way. The more I studied Luther's struggle, the more ashamed and inspired I became. I was ashamed at my own lethargy and was inspired to preach and teach this important truth with more clarity and accuracy.

Through the study of Luther's struggle in the Reformation, God convicted me and expressed a love to me that transformed my life and ministry. One valuable lesson that the Lord instilled in me is what Paul expresses in II Corinthians 7:10, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." The biblical and proper use of shame leads us to a place of transformation and redemption. Worldly shame is based in pride and self-pity. Luther had no time for that type of worldly shame. A great travesty was being perpetuated through Christ's Church and something had to be done!

His diligence and tenacity inspired me to carefully examine this important doctrine for which Christ emptied Himself and ultimately died (Philippians 2:1-11). Through the reexamination of this important doctrine, God turned my shame into joy, and lethargy was transformed into passion and conviction.

As we celebrate the rich and important history of the Reformation, I pray that you, too, would be inspired and encouraged to examine the crucial nature of the doctrine of justification and the beautiful truth that we are saved by grace through faith alone because of what Christ has accomplished.

Ricke serves Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis.

PASTOR JARROD HYL DEN

M

My daughter, Winnie, is 3. Since I'm her father, God has called me to teach her the Christian faith. The *Small Catechism* is an excellent summary of the Christian faith and so, of course, I use this wonderful tool. (Who wouldn't? I know, I know ... and we wonder why so many kids don't stay Lutheran!)

Seldom have I read directly from *The Small Catechism* to my daughter. I learned that before Martin Luther wrote *The Small Catechism* he often referred to "the catechism." For him (and the ancient church), "the catechism" simply referred to the basic instruction given to new converts and to children. This basic instruction consisted of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. This is the catechism I've begun to teach my little girl.

I used to say the Ten Commandments to her every day, but now it's about three times a week. Here's what I say: "The LORD our God, who redeemed us out of bondage to sin and death, says to us ..."

"One (I hold up my finger), I am the LORD your God, you shall have no other gods before Me."

"Two (I hold up two fingers), you shall not take the Name of the LORD your God in vain."

"Three (you get the idea), remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

"Four, honor your father and your mother," or I often say, "Honor your daddy and your mommy."

"Five, you shall not kill."

"Six, you shall not commit adultery."

"Seven, you shall not steal."

"Eight, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

"Nine, you shall not covet your neighbor's house."

"Ten, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his oxen, nor his _____, nor anything that belongs to your neighbor." (I let Winnie say, "donkey!")

We always close the same way: "Dear God, thank you for your holy commandments. Please help us walk in obedience to them. And when we sin and break them, please forgive us. Thank you that you sent your dear Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins. In His name we pray, amen."

C A T

By the time I'm finishing the tenth commandment, she's already folding her hands to pray. Also, by now I can leave out many other words besides "donkey" and she knows the right word to say. Whether or not she'll say it is another thing. She'll blurt out, "donkey," or, "daddy," when she knows she should say, "neighbor," or, "adultery." To her this is a funny joke.

I know there's a lot in the Ten Commandments that she doesn't understand, but I also know there's a lot she does. She'll learn it all in time. Lord willing, so will I.

The next part we've begun to teach her is the Lord's Prayer. I don't teach this part as intentionally as I teach the Ten Commandments but, ironically, she knows it better. This is because my wife, Elise, and I pray it together every morning. We don't pray the Lord's Prayer eight times a day like Luther recommends. Just once a day, occasionally twice. And Winnie has caught on. I've heard my wife say the first part of each petition and let Winnie say the rest, and she does really well. For instance,

Elise: "Our Father, who art in ..."

T H E
T E N
C O M
M A N
D M E
N T S

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
forever and ever.
Amen.

ECCHISM LUTHER'S SMALL

Winnie: "heaven."

Elise: "hallowed be thy ..."

Winnie: "name."

Elise: "Thy kingdom ..."

Winnie: "come."

Elise: "Thy will be ..."

Winnie: "done."

You get the idea. A few times we've heard her mutter almost the entire ending, saying, "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for never and never amen."

What about the Creed? Per Luther's instruction, I used to say this with her every day (though, again, not as often as he recommends). But, due to my own laziness, this lasted about two weeks. However, she does hear the Creed each week at church. I know she picks up on it as well as the other things we consistently say week after week. For instance, one morning during breakfast she randomly began a prayer with, "Almighty God ..." We don't address God that way at home. We usually say, "dear Lord" or "Heavenly Father," or sometimes, "dear Jesus." She only

hears "Almighty God" once a week during the confession of sin. But it found its way into her heart and mind and finally out of her mouth as she prepared to eat a bowl of rice Chex. I hope she's picking up the Creed the same way.

What about the other parts of *The Small Catechism*? In time we'll teach her. But I think it's best to start with the main three parts. Once she learns the words to these by heart, we can begin to teach her the meanings from *The Small Catechism*.

We've only begun this lifelong journey. One thing I know is that her little mind is a sponge and it's never too early to start teaching the catechism. Here's the goal: Someday, when we are old and gray, Elise and I hope to say with grateful hearts, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (III John 1:4).

Hylden serves Skreftsrud Lutheran, Beresford, S.D.

Reprinted and adapted with permission from the Servant's Pen blog (servantspen.com) from Jan. 10.

Martin Luther's
Treatise on
Christian Liberty

L

I

B

E

R

T W O

F O L

D N A

T U R

E O F

M A N

A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and
subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful
servant of all, and subject to everyone.

T

Y

"Though I be free from all men,
yet have I made myself servant
unto all" (1 Corinthians 9:19).

"Owe no man anything,
but to love one another"
(Romans 13:8).



PASTOR DAN ANTAL

Imagine going to buy a new car, and the salesman says, “You can either pay 30 grand for this car, or you can take it for free.” How long would that dealership stay in business? The world just doesn’t work this way. But, somehow, the Christian faith does.

At the heart of the Christian faith is the doctrine of justification: God forgives your sins for Christ’s sake, and He declares you innocent. This gift is yours through faith. This necessarily means that it is not on the basis of works (Ephesians 2:9), and it is not according to the law (Romans 3:20, 28; Galatians 2:16).

But if this is true, what becomes of good works? The theologian’s fear is that the masses would just give up on good works. Martin Luther masterfully answers this fear in one of his most significant writings, his “Treatise on Christian Liberty,” which, in his own words, “contains the whole of the Christian life in a brief form” (*Luther’s Works* 31, p. 343).

Luther puts forth this paradox that summarizes the Christian life:

“A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

“A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all” (*LW* 31, p. 344).

This looks like a contradiction, but Luther explains the different sense in which both statements are true.

One thing you will notice about the treatise is how thoroughly scriptural it is. Luther asserts nothing without proving it by Scripture. So this paradox is not really Luther’s invention; he simply recognized it in Scripture. The two doctrines at work throughout the treatise are justification and vocation.

He starts with justification. Being justified freely for Christ sake, “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.” As regards his standing before God, no man can place any obligation on a Christian. He is truly free, whom Christ has set free (John 8:28). And he is truly an heir and king, whom God has declared an heir and king in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:29; I Peter 2:9). He is free from the law. He is free from the traditions of men. He stands above all things, for he is in Christ.

This freedom is granted to the Christian through faith. And if it is by faith, then it cannot be by works.

Faith and works are opposites. We might think of faith and unbelief as opposites, and I suppose this is true, but Luther demonstrates that seeking to be justified by works is really just a pious looking form of unbelief. It is probably the most common form of unbelief. Faith trusts in Christ for salvation. But if you bring your works to God as if they are supposed to give you some benefit that Christ has not already given to you, you are really saying that Christ’s work is not enough. This sort of unbelief damns you before God. It is not a lack of works that God condemns; it is a lack of faith. If all you have are some puny works—filthy rags, really—but you trust in Christ, then you have everything that belongs to Christ. But if you take those puny works and hold them up to God as if they are supposed to count for something, then you stand alone without Christ, and God condemns you.

By faith, “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.” From this it may sound like faith nullifies works, but the opposite is really true. Faith is the beginning of good works. By faith God makes the Christian a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17). There is a new, inner man. With the creation of this new man comes the desire to obey God and serve our neighbors. Make the tree good and the fruits will be good (Matthew 12:33). So the new man undertakes the task of loving and serving those around him. In this way, he is constrained by faith to be “a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” The new, inner man does this freely and joyfully.

But this, I suspect, is not really your experience—at least not always, and never completely. That is because the old, sinful flesh still dwells within us. The new man fights against the old constantly, and good works become necessary in order to restrain the sinful flesh. So Luther identifies two reasons that remain for good works: to restrain the sinful flesh and to serve our neighbor. This is the doctrine of vocation.

Before God, works count for nothing, and faith in Christ is everything, so you are free. Before your neighbor, works are necessary, so you are a servant of all. May God grant us joy in both.

Antal serves Trinity Free Lutheran, Grand Forks, N.D., and Victory Free Lutheran, Park River, N.D.

PASTOR MATT NELSON

T

The Reformation was a time of many changes. We appropriately think of the reforms to the authority structure and theology in the Church. Equally important and influential was the change in congregational music. In a time when reform was needed, the spiritual soil was fertile, and opportunities abounded, Martin Luther and his colleagues helped spur on a reform of worship music.

Before it became a widespread movement, it was a movement within the reformer. Luther had experienced the crushing weight of his sins and the futility of trying to make satisfaction for them by his own works, confessions, piety, and religious devotion. When he discovered the gospel and felt the peace that passes all understanding it was like a dam broke and he was free. Then the teaching, preaching, and singing about this grace burst forth.

For God has cheered our hearts and minds through his dear Son, whom he gave for us to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. He who believes this earnestly cannot be quiet about it.¹

Luther wanted everyone to hear about it. He had a song to sing and he thought that everyone else should join in the song. He believed that this was the primary purpose for music.

The gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music, namely, by proclaiming [the Word of God] through music and by providing sweet melodies with words.²

Music is a beautiful creation of God which is most fully expressed when it carries the praises of its Creator and the good news of the Redeemer.

Conveniently, one of the greatest ways to communicate in those days was through song. Gutenberg's printing press was certainly making a big impact, but many people were still illiterate. Obviously, there were no telephones, internet, or local radio or television news shows, but they did have street singers who would tell stories in song. In fact, the first hymn of the Reformation was written by Luther to broadcast the account of two young martyrs named Heinrich Voes and Johann Esch, who were put to death in Brussels on July 1, 1523, for

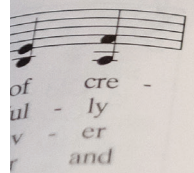
teaching Lutheran theology. There was an attempt to force them to recant, but they did not. After their death, rumors were spreading that they had renounced Luther and his teachings. Luther responded to his enemies and their lies by using mass media in the form of a folk ballad. They printed and sold many copies of the ballad, and wandering minstrels sang them in the marketplaces, taverns, and roadsides.

The printing press was also making it possible for books to be quickly produced and widely spread, including collections of Reformation song books or hymnals. In fact this was when hymnals got their start. Luther put together lead-sheets of hymns for the choir so that they could teach the songs to the congregation. He worked closely with Johann Walter, his friend and musical advisor, to put together the first hymnal. Other friends and numerous other publishers set to work publishing other hymnals, and the effect was global and long lasting, so much so that most of us have grown up with hymnals as the standard in our congregations 500 years later.

Luther believed that the hymns he was writing were important and effective tools for promoting the ideas at the heart of the Reformation. He thoughtfully made his convictions and goals known in his preface to the *Wittenberg Hymnal*.

First, he argued, it is biblical to sing hymns. He pointed out that this was customary in the Old Testament and in the early church. He added, "St. Paul himself instituted this in I Corinthians 14:[15] and exhorted the Colossians [3:16] to sing spiritual songs and Psalms heartily unto the Lord so that God's Word and Christian teaching might be instilled and implanted in many ways."³ Notice that he also emphasized that these hymns are to establish the truths of God's Word into the minds and

us King



A
F
I

I truly desire that all Christians would love and regard
as worthy the lovely gift of music, which is a precious,
worthy, and costly treasure given to mankind by God.

MUSIC

OF THE
REFORMATION



hearts of the people, which is a second purpose. A great example of this is Luther's hymn, "Our Father, Thou in Heaven Above," which teaches each of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer.

Third, he believed hymns should be Christ-focused and glorifying to Him. "Like Moses in his song [Exodus 15:2], we may now boast that Christ is our praise and song and say with St. Paul, I Corinthians 2[:2], that we should know nothing to sing or say, save Jesus Christ our Savior." Last, he described the bonus blessings that are found in the beauty of the arts and sacred music, as opposed to the worldly (sinful) things with which we could otherwise occupy ourselves. He saw this as an important part of how we raise our children to be healthy and spiritually sound.

This reform would surpass all their expectations and become a global movement for the coming centuries. Luther believed music was an important part of the divine

service—a beautiful expression of our faith and a powerful tool for teaching the ideas of the Reformation and making them available to the common people.

Nelson serves Salem Lutheran, Radcliffe, Iowa, and St. Paul's Lutheran, Jewel, Iowa.

1. Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works, Vol. 53: Liturgy and Hymns*. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999). 333.

2. *Ibid*, 323.

3. Gordon Waterman, ed *12 Reformation Hymns by Martin Luther* (Minneapolis: Ambassador Publications, 2017), ii

How God
provided for
the Pilgrims

W I T
H F I
V E K
E R N
E L S
O F C
O R N

F
I
R
S
T

The first kernel reminded them of the autumn beauty.
The second one of the freedom that they held dearly.
The third reminded of their love and care for each other.
And the fourth was for dear friends.
The fifth kernel reminded of God's love and care for all.

THANKSGIVING
CELEBRATION



MICAH HORNEMAN

Most people are familiar with the general idea behind the first Thanksgiving. The Pilgrims, who had landed in Plymouth Colony (Massachusetts) in November 1620, were celebrating their first year in a new land. They feasted and enjoyed three days of celebrations with Chief Massasoit and his tribe. Could there be more to the story? Was God at the very center of it? Could it be that this group of Pilgrims believed they were following God's leading in leaving England and Holland to traverse the Atlantic and settle in America?

It seems that is the case. I've been reading the book, *The Light and The Glory* (by Peter Marshall and David Manuel), which explores the idea of God's guidance in forming America. It's fascinating and much more than just the Pilgrim's endeavors are explored. The authors set out to see if the founders of our nation really believed that this was one nation under God. The bulk of information in this article comes from chapters eight and nine of the book. I encourage you to give it a read.

Upon exploring the area surrounding where they first made landfall, the Pilgrims discovered a cache of corn buried in a large kettle. After around 60 days at sea, their rations were depleted and lacking in variety. This would be the first of many provisions of food, miraculously provided. The site the Pilgrims decided to settle, they later discovered, was the former home of the Patuxet tribe, all of whom had died of a mysterious illness. This provided the settlers with already cleared land and garden sites.

In their first winter, 47 of the Pilgrims lost their lives. Nearly half of all who landed in November were gone by spring. And yet they prayed for continued strength and praised God, who had provided and kept the remaining ones alive. They had faced sickness, cold, near starvation, a fire in their common house (where their sick were gathered), attacks from natives, and the discouragement of being on their own.

Despite all they faced in trial and tribulation, God was clearly at work. He was providing over and over to sustain their lives and make a way for them to prosper in their new land. This became even more clear when they met Samoset, an English-speaking chief of an Algonquin tribe. He helped them to understand the tribes around them and the provision of settling where they did.

It was Samoset, also, who introduced the Pilgrims to Squanto, who they came to see was clearly provided by God to teach them how to survive off the land they had settled. Squanto taught them how to chase eels out of the

mud with their feet, catch fish, and plant corn with fish as fertilizer. He quickly became a treasured part of their community.

Chief Massasoit and the Wampanoags were the closest tribe to the Pilgrims and one of the only tribes in what would become New England which would have been friendly to the English settlers. Governor William Bradford set aside a day for thanksgiving, to be held in October 1621. He invited the Wampanoags. This wasn't just an act of thanksgiving, it was an act of faith. Chief Massasoit came a day early and had 90 tribal members with him. Feeding that many would greatly reduce the food supplies of the Pilgrims.

The three days of celebration were spent feasting, playing games, learning how to prepare different foods (including popcorn), military ceremonies, and hunting. They also devoted time to thanking God for His provision. And Chief Massasoit did not come empty handed; he had instructed his tribe to bring ample venison and turkey to share in the feast with the Pilgrims.

Even as they celebrated God's provision in health, food, and relationship with the tribe, this was not the end of their suffering. The Pilgrims were headed into a season when they would barely have enough food to survive. In the winter of 1621-1622, their daily rations were reduced to five kernels of corn. And yet God miraculously allowed this to be enough sustenance on which to survive until a ship appeared with provisions with which they could trade with local tribes for more food.

The following spring and summer, ample corn was planted yet drought came. All of their precious corn was drying up and dying. They recognized they must turn to God to seek deliverance. The Pilgrims prayed and fasted until God heard and answered their cries for provision. Rain came and they had an abundant harvest.

At their second Thanksgiving feast, the Pilgrims started the meal with five kernels of corn on each plate and thanked God for His wondrous care in seeing them through the harsh conditions they faced.

What can we take with us as we reflect upon those first Thanksgivings almost 400 years ago? God is faithful. We can rejoice and celebrate in His loving care and know that He will provide for our needs as we walk with Him. Let us give thanks.

Horneman is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont.



ELISE KNOBLOCH

In the Old Testament, God prescribed for the Israelites different types of offerings to accomplish specific purposes. Some were mandatory, such as a sin or guilt offering, which was necessary to atone for sins. Some were voluntary, like a fellowship offering, which was offered as an act of thanksgiving and worship. This “sacrifice of thanksgiving” was shared as a communal meal, with God receiving the best portion, the priests receiving a share, and God’s people sharing in the rest.

A communal meal of thanksgiving—sound familiar? As we consider how we honor God with our best portion at Thanksgiving this year, it may change our perspective to consider the gratitude we offer as a “sacrifice of thanksgiving” unto God.

In Psalm 50, God has a word for His people about their offerings. He reminds His people that He doesn’t need their sacrifices; He already owns all they might bring before Him. He says in verse 12, “If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it.” He owns “the cattle on a thousand hills,” and “every animal in the forest” is His. Furthermore, God has no physical need for the offerings brought to Him. He asks, rhetorically, “Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?” The object of their offering was not valuable to Him in any practical sense.

The offering of a thankful heart, however, was and is precious to Him. Psalm 50:14-15 says: “Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.” The value of the offering came in the way their hearts were drawn to Him. The value was not in what His people offered, but in the way the offering created a deeper recognition of their dependence on Him.

We, too, can sacrifice thank offerings to God, recognizing all we have to offer has first come from Him. And perhaps the recognition of our dependence on Him is the sacrifice. Let me explain.

For my first Thanksgiving with my in-laws, I brought a sweet potato casserole. The family enjoyed it; so much so, my mother-in-law asked me to bring the casserole again the next year. And the next year. Making the casserole took a little bit of work, but I took pride in showing up to the table with something valuable to offer. But then

after a few years, she stopped asking me to make it. In fact, she stopped asking me to bring anything at all. (Nothing makes a person question their culinary skills more than a Thanksgiving host who insists that you need not contribute to the meal.) Even though I knew in my head that my mother-in-law was simply trying to make Thanksgiving with young kids more manageable for me, showing up to the bountiful feast prepared by others with nothing of my own to offer felt uncomfortable.

In the same way, it can be hard to acknowledge—sacrificial, in fact—that we have nothing to offer to God that He has not first given to us. Like bringing food to a family Thanksgiving, I struggle to want to “do my part” in my relationship with God. To bring something valuable to the table. I long to feel that I have done something, or brought something, or sacrificed something in order to deserve His love.

But I fear that misses the point. In a great paradox, the offering most valuable to God is my acknowledgment that anything I offer to Him, He has first given to me. The sacrifice God calls for is a slaughter of my misplaced belief that I am sufficient in myself to bring something of value apart from Him. Rather, my thank offering begins with the understanding that “every good and perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17). My offering of voluntarily laying down my pride and my independence from God at the altar, and thereby recognizing my dependence on Him for all I am, all I need, and all He has already provided to me, honors Him.

Greater awareness of our dependence on Him for all things is also the beginning of a more grateful heart. How profound our sacrifice of thanksgiving becomes when it springs forth from the seed of recognition of all we lack in ourselves! When we more fully understand our need for Him, and more clearly appreciate His bountiful provision in our lives, our humble offering of thanks is invaluable to Him who already owns the world.

“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (II Corinthians 9:15).

Knobloch is a member of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.

Sacrifice
of Thanksgiving

F E L
L O W
S H I
P O F
F E R
I N G

O
F
F
E
R
I
N
G

"Listen, my people, and I will speak;
I will testify against you, Israel:
I am God, your God.

8 I bring no charges against you concerning your sacrifices
or concerning your burnt offerings, which are ever before me.

9 I have no need of a bull from your stall
or of goats from your pens,

10 for every animal of the forest is mine,
and the cattle on a thousand hills.

11 I know every bird in the mountains,
and the insects in the fields are mine.

12 If I were hungry I would not tell you,
for the world is mine, and all that is in it.

13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls
or drink the blood of goats?

14 "Sacrifice thank offerings to God,
fulfill your vows to the Most High,
15 and call on me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you will honor me."

THANKSGIVING

G

WAITING IN CONFIDENCE

RUTH GUNDERSON

Lately, I've been around a lot of transition. On the campus where I work, our schools are going through the process of changing their name, updating their identity, and even building a new student center. A missionary friend's plans for ministry have changed. And fall, my favorite season, is rapidly waning as winter approaches and another new year is on the horizon.

What will the future bring? We can't answer that, of course. Each of us has an uncertain path that we must navigate as we leave one threshold and grasp God's hand as He leads us to the next.

That step is scary, I think. Not scary in the sense of impending doom. But it's the kind of unknowing that fills up your waking thoughts if you let it. A fear that comes from the uncertainty of life—a loud reverberating march of time.

It's been awhile since I've had to go through a marquee life change myself. But I've been driven back to certain landmarks as I've mentored students at our Bible college. As they face decisions about jobs and summer plans, I've found myself a bit puzzled by how big these choices seem to them. "It's just a summer," I'd think.

But then, we have different perspectives, don't we? I look on my past as a blur of mostly inconsequential decisions marked by several major turning points. College students see nothing yet but possibilities. And those possibilities loom large.

Wallace Stegner compared this dissonance of time to the Doppler Effect in his novel, *The Angle of Repose*. "The sound of anything coming at you—a train, say, or the future—has a higher pitch than the sound of the same thing going away."

I remember how that idea struck me so profoundly the first time I read it. Stegner's metaphor helped me understand my own tendency to hyper focus on what was before me and even create balance in how I looked back on those decisions.

Sometimes, the decisions aren't even in our court. Like my missionary friends, there are times when we feel like we are languishing in limbo, both feet off the threshold of the past with no sure landing pad. I have a deep respect for Christians who faithfully live through these times. It would be so easy, I think, to step out of that void and choose the closest toe hold to grasp. But there is something about that void that God uses to His own purpose.

Consider the Rev. John Ames, the protagonist in *Gilead*, written by Marilynne Robinson. Ames, 76, is a widower who has recently remarried and born a son. But he is also dying of a heart condition. As he nears death, he writes to his young son about those lonely years before fatherhood.

"Now that I look back, it seems to me that in all that deep darkness a miracle was preparing. So I am right to remember it as

a blessed time, and myself as waiting in confidence, even if I had no idea what I was waiting for."

Waiting in confidence through unknowing takes courage. Gospel courage, I think. The character of that waiting, as Ames describes it, is darkness. Yet at the same time, a blessing. A preparing. But he doesn't come to that realization until he looks back through time, through years of God's faithfulness, through the lower pitch of his own history. But while he waited, God acted.

"No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written:

'What no eye has seen,
what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived'
the things God has prepared for those who love him—
these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit."
(I Corinthians 2:7-10).

Are you waiting in darkness? Take heart, He is working.

Gunderson is the managing editor.





Y

oung children were asked about their favorite parts of the Thanksgiving holiday. Comments quickly flooded forward about school being on recess. After that,

memories were enthusiastically offered about family and food. Wearing a large smile, one young man with an appetite answered, “Seconds ... and thirds!”

In his book *Youth Ministry that Lasts a Lifetime*, veteran student ministry professor Richard Ross makes the case for those involved in youth ministry to look at the role as a combination of “thirds.” Instead of three helpings of the same thing, this set of thirds incorporates three vital areas. Dr. Ross explains that one-third of healthy ministry with teenagers is the biblical encounter in a youth group, one-third is the encouragement of spiritually influential parents, and one-third is the engagement of American adolescents in the life of the congregation.

When teenagers encounter Jesus in Scripture among peers (youth group), receive encouragement from the home (parents/family), and engage in congregational life in worship and service (congregation), then maturing teen disciples follow. These maturing teens can

THANKFUL FOR THIRDS

BY PASTOR JASON HOLT

become spiritually vibrant adults who testify to the next generation about the greatness of God.

Psalm 71:17-18 expresses the voice of the maturing child of God. “O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.”

All ages are invited through the gospel of Jesus Christ to know the Lord. The Word calls people by God’s power to grow in the knowledge of Him and His mighty acts. There are always difficult seasons in life, but Ephesians 4 points to the fact that God’s Word, God’s Spirit, and God’s people are active in the hard times. The mature Christian can look back seeing Jesus’ faithfulness, and look ahead knowing God will never let us down. The family and the family of God can echo

these realities.

I am praying for today’s teens to know Jesus, grow in His Word and His love, and to show their faith in Christ to their neighbors. Then they will join in with the psalmist, “O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.” Anticipating Dr. Ross is correct, each time I see maturing teens, I will be thankful for thirds.

Holt, a member of Living Hope, Rogers, Minn., is the director of Youth Ministry for the AFLC.



Apologetics theme of Spotlight

Schools host Stand
to Reason speaker

Tim Barnett, an apologist with Stand to Reason, was the featured speaker during the Spotlight conference Oct. 9-10 on the campus of the AFLC Schools in Plymouth, Minn. Barnett focused his teaching on biblical apologetics in a secular culture, beginning his session by role playing as an atheist professor, challenging students to defend their faith in God. Barnett then revealed his true identity, and gave students tactics meant to help believers engage both friends and strangers about issues of faith. Barnett also tackled major philosophical issues such as the problem of evil and the existence of God. At the end of the three-hour Thursday session, students were given a chance to ask questions and talk through past experiences of sharing their faith.



Students from the Free Lutheran Bible College (above left) took notes as they listened to Barnett give practical ideas on how to have engaging conversations with unbelievers. Junior Rose Zeltinger (above) listened during the session.



Tim Barnett (top) an apologist with Stand to Reason, was the featured speaker during the fall Spotlight conference on the camps of the AFLC Schools. Juniors Colt Cox (middle) and Sophie Burtman (above) asked questions at the end of the three-hour morning of sessions taught by Barnett.



‘P lease send me money. I am being troubled by demons and need money to go to

the witch doctor for help.” The phone call had come to Henry, one of the church leaders of the newly planted congregation in the village of Nabukosi. The call was from his cousin who lived several hours away. He told her, “I cannot send you money to go to the witch doctor, but I will send you money for your transportation so you can come here. There is a prayer service at my home on Monday. Please come and we will pray for you.”

It was to be the very first meeting of its kind. Henry and the five other young men who had been meeting together to study the Word for the past year and a half had just decided to begin another meeting in which they gathered their families and invited their neighbors to come. As the group began to pray for Henry’s cousin, the demons manifested by throwing her to the ground and crying out. After a time of prayer, she was delivered and came back into

HE BUILDS HIS CHURCH

BY PASTOR NATE JORE

her right mind. She heard the gospel and received salvation. God had showed up with power to their first gathering and had delivered Henry’s cousin from the power of darkness to the kingdom of light. A sense of wonder and excitement gripped the six young leaders as they stood amazed at how God had used them, ordinary men from the village. The group continued to meet weekly since that day and has seen others receive salvation.

Opposition soon came. Another two of the six leaders, Rob and Mulongo, are cousins. Their aunt had fallen sick and had refused to allow them to pray for her in the name of Jesus. She preferred to get help from the local witch doctor instead. She and another aunt who had come to help her in her sickness became very antagonistic toward Rob and Mulongo because of their faith in Jesus. They wanted them to leave their village and threatened an action that would publicly humiliate and shame the two in front of the village. The threat was so great that both men felt they needed to leave the village immediately and look for another place to stay. Thankfully,

as we prayed, the Lord answered. The two aunts relented and Rob and Mulongo have been able to remain in the village.

The young church of five months recently sent out their first missionary. Salim, one of the six and a fisherman by trade, decided he would relocate to the islands in the northern part of Lake Victoria where the fishing is better. These islands have a reputation for attracting some bad characters who are living for the pleasures of the day. We laid hands on Salim and sent him out as a sower of the seed in the islands of Lake Victoria.

Jesus promised that He would build His church, and indeed He does. Let us pray that the light of Jesus would shine on those walking in the shadow of death here in Uganda and around the world.

Jore is an AFLC missionary serving in Nabukosi, Uganda, with his family.

Space available on work trip to Brazil

Journey Missions is hosting a short-term mission trip to Brazil Jan. 17-Feb. 1. Spaces are still available for this work-focused trip to Campo Mourão. Team members will work with Pastor Jonathan and Tamba Abel at the AFLC-Brazil Bible school and with missionary Jonni Sliver at the Miriam Home. Work will include expanding a cafeteria. All skill levels are welcome, as well as those who have experience in concrete, roofing, welding and general labor. The team will work alongside members of local congregations. The cost is \$3,000, which includes airfare and all transportation in country, room and board, and project expenses. For more information contact Jon Nelson at journymissions@aflc.org.

The 2020 schedule

Below is the 2020 schedule for *The Lutheran Ambassador*. Please be in prayer for each issue. Note the deadlines and special emphasis of each issue. If you have an idea regarding a general article, a certain issue, or have an interest in writing, please contact the editors. Email us at ruthg@aflc.org or call (763) 545-5631.

ISSUE DATE	DEADLINE	ISSUE THEME
January	November 29	Life
February	January 2	Christian Ed.
March	January 31	Evangelism
April	February 28	Lent/Easter
May	March 20	AFLC Schools
June	May 1	Money Matters
July	May 29	Missions
August	June 29	Conference
September	July 31	Youth
October	August 28	Bible Camps
November	October 1	Thanksgiving
December	October 30	Christmas

Please note, information regarding the Annual Conference, scheduled for June 9-12 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis., will be featured in the May issue, with a deadline of March 20. This issue will include the schedule, board and committee nominees, registration, and WMF Day schedule and registration. Other conference information will be printed as it is available, including youth and children's activities.



Members of Tabor Lutheran, Webster, S.D., held their first worship service (above) in the newly purchased storefront (left) located on the main street.

Congregation purchases storefront

Members of Tabor Lutheran, Webster, S.D., recently purchased a vacant storefront on the main thoroughfare through town. The congregation, which owns a sanctuary 11 miles northwest of Webster, plans to remodel the building for use as a sanctuary and fellowship space and add classrooms and kitchen facilities. Members had their first worship service there on Oct. 6.

Tabor Lutheran was founded in 1902, and their original church building has served the congregation for many years. However, the congregation has used temporary worship sites for several years, only worshiping in the church building on special occasions. The purchase of the storefront will allow the congregation to have space for fellowship events and Sunday school classes in the same space that they worship.

Mission Corporation holds elections

After failing to form a quorum at the AFLC Annual Conference in June in Canadensis, Pa., members of the Mission Corporation gathered during the All Boards meeting in September to ratify elections, hear reports from the World and Home Missions directors, and discuss changes to corporation by-laws.

A motion to change the bylaws was approved, in which corporation officers will be elected for one-year terms who are not members of the World or Home Missions committees. The change will be implemented at the 2020 meeting. The following elections were held.

World Missions Committee

- Pastor, five-year term
Pastor Kent Sperry, Beulah, N.D.

- Layman, five-year term
Ken Sletten, Duluth, Minn.
- Layman, one-year term
Steve Deysher, Fleetwood, Pa.

Home Missions Committee

- Pastor, five-year term
Pastor Mark Richardson, Faith, S.D.
- Layman, five-year term
David Strand, Kindred, N.D.

Bay Broadcasting Board

- Pastor, three-year term
Pastor Joe Ocker, Frost, Minn.

FLAPS Board of Directors

- Pastor, five-year term
Pastor Henry Mohagen, Reva, S.D.

THE 2020 BIBLE STUDY

WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION

W

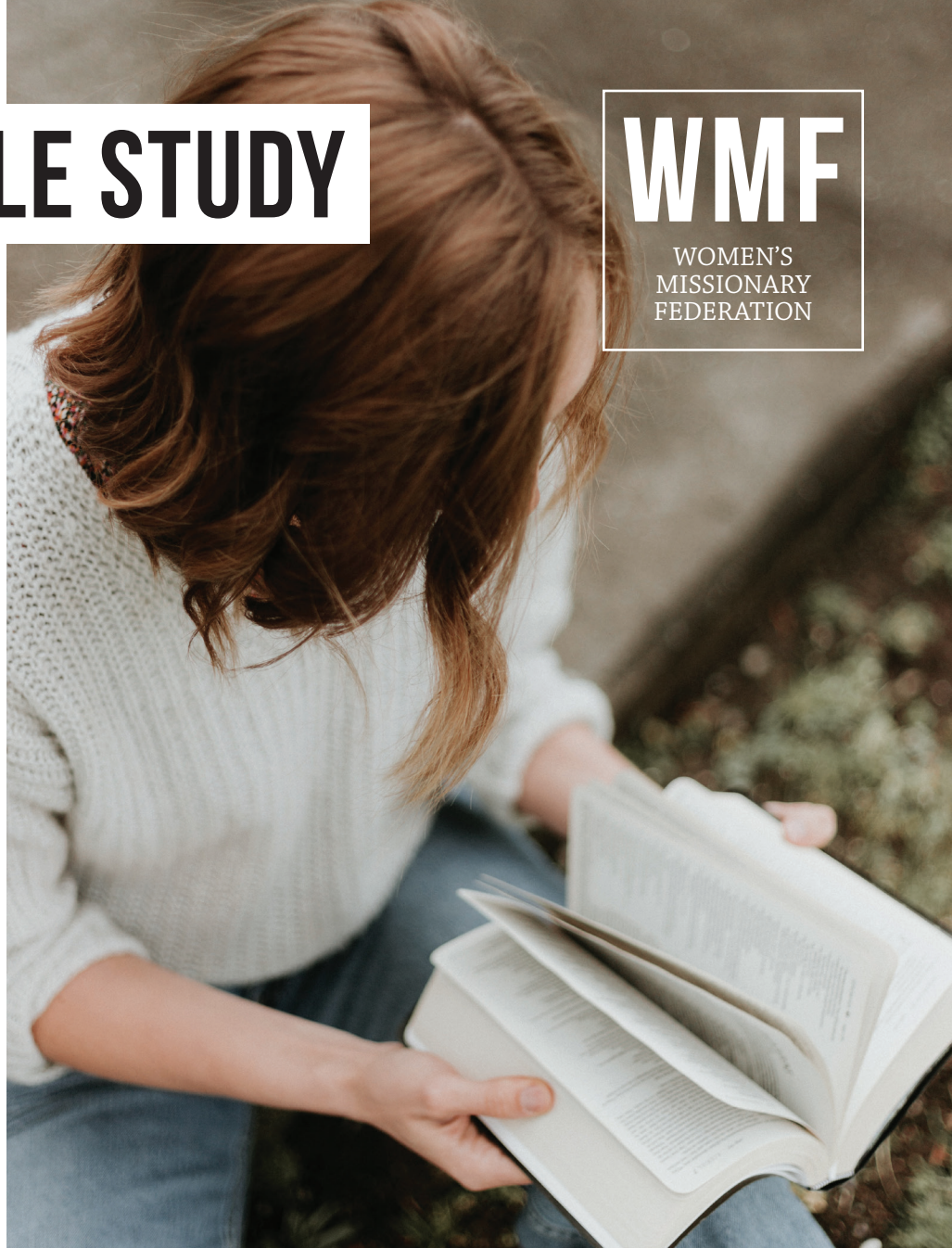
e live in a culture that elevates the importance of feelings over facts. Young people today are facing confusion like never before because truth is being denied in order to allow any thought or feeling to be in control. What is the answer for such deception? The truth of God's Word gives us a sure foundation for life and how to live it.

"Don't Follow Your Feelings" is the title of the new women's Bible study for 2020, written by Linda Korhonen. The study includes 11 lessons:

- The truth about feelings
- When I doubt if I'm saved
- When I feel hopeless
- The poison of unresolved anger
- When I can't understand why
- Love is not just a feeling
- The lure of sexual sin
- Choosing death is not the answer
- Becoming a slave to fear
- The infection of bitterness
- Knowing God's will

These relevant topics are important for every generation. We cannot ignore them. Feelings are not our masters. Our world is desperate to know the truth.

Every woman in our churches—from teens to senior citizens—needs to be equipped to know the truth of what God's Word says, and how to share the truth with those around them. We encourage you to invite new women to join in your monthly WMF Bible studies. Perhaps you can reach out to others by beginning a new weekly or biweekly study in your home or church with neighborhood women. Maybe you have teenage grandchildren you can train to follow God's Word instead of their feelings. Our world



is bombarding us with lies every day. It's the truth that will set us free.

The 2020 women's Bible study is now available to order. Each book costs

\$12. To order, please fill out the form below and send it to Dawn Johnson, executive secretary of the WMF. Please include payment with your order.

2020 WMF Bible Study • Don't Follow Your Feelings

Please use this form to order the 2020 WMF Bible Study. The cost per copy is \$12, which includes shipping.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Church name: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Number of copies: _____

Make checks payable to "WMF of AFLC" and mail to: WMF Executive Secretary, Dawn Johnson, 2991 30th Ave., Wilson, WI 54027.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, and **Pastor Dan Giles**, Mesa, Ariz., traveled to San Juan, Puerto Rico, Sept. 20-23 to meet with a congregation interested in joining the AFLC. The congregation is moving forward with the necessary changes to its constitution.

Katrina Nielsen, a 2014 graduate of the Free Lutheran Bible College, is serving a three-month term as a short term assistant in Campo Mourão, Brazil, with Journey Missions. She is living with Pastor John and Hannah Lee.

Pastor Eric Swenson was installed Oct. 13 at Stavanger Free Lutheran, Garden City, Iowa, with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating.

Pastor Steve Berntson, who serves New Hope Free Lutheran, Jamestown, N.D., and **Pastor Joel Kangas**, who serves Resurrection Free Lutheran, Beltrami, Minn., traveled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo Aug. 4-16 where they taught at two pastor training conferences with College of Prayer.

Resurrection Free Lutheran, a new church start by several Twin Cities AFLC churches in St. Paul, Minn., has begun meeting at Advent Lutheran, near the campus of the University of Northwestern-St. Paul.

Pastor Andrew and Alexis Olson, AFLC missionaries on loan to Lutheran Bible Translators, were installed Sept. 29 during a service in Nansio, Ukerewe Island, Tanzania. Olson is coordinating the Kerewe Bible Translation Project.

Members of the Coordinating Committee have approved **Peter Ford Jr.** as a licensed pastor on the fellowship roster. Ford has accepted a call to serve St. Paul's Lutheran, Mansura, La.

SEPTEMBER MEMORIALS

FLBC ... in honor of
Ruth Claus **FLS**
FLS Dr. James Molstre
Carola Davidson **World Missions**
WMF Pastor John and
Cecil Loe Ruby Abel
Marlis Overdorf
World Missions
Clyde Swenson



Pastor George Knapp

Pastor George Knapp, 94, of Willmar, Minn., died Oct. 9. Born April 15, 1925, in Oakes, N.D., he was the son of Ed and Helen (Walter) Knapp. He married Helen Loucks on Sept. 19, 1948, in rural LaMoure, N.D.

He attended school in rural Oakes and graduated from Oakes High School in 1942. After graduation, he moved to Guelph, N.D., where he farmed with his father. After marriage, they farmed near Ft. Ransom, N.D., until 1958, when heeding God's calling, they moved to Brazil as self-supporting agricultural missionaries. In 1968, they became AFLC missionaries and worked in Brazil until retiring in 1990. He was ordained in 1975. While on the mission field, George worked on a coffee farm, taught English in the public school, worked in the construction of a Bible school and several churches, helped establish and pastor several churches, and was a teacher at the Free Lutheran Bible School and Seminary. He and Helen were also house parents for missionary children for six years. Upon retirement, George and Helen moved to Willmar.

Surviving are his wife; three daughters, Karen de Santos, Willmar, Carol Knapp, Willmar, and Cida, Londrina, Brazil; four sons, Charles (Joyce) Knapp, Mason, Wis., Halvor (Ginny) Knapp, Spicer, Minn., Calvin (Terry) Knapp, Paynesville, Minn., and Carlos Knapp, Atlanta, Ga.; 20 grandchildren; and 47 great-grandchildren.

A memorial service was held Oct. 18 at Hope Lutheran, Sunburg, Minn.

Have a feature story idea? Let us know

The editors of *The Lutheran Ambassador* are asking our readers for help in sourcing feature stories for the news section of our publication. These stories could include unique congregational ministries either within the church body or tied to the local or worldwide ministries. We would like to focus on personal stories of God at work within our churches.

We know that every congregation

is filled with unique members who have stories of their own. If you have a testimony that you would like to share, let us know. Or if you know someone who does, we'd love to hear about it.

Contact us by email. Managing Editor Ruth Gunderson can be reached at ruthg@afcl.org. Pastor Robert Lee, editor, can be reached at rlee@afcl.org.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES September 30, 2019

FUND	REC'D IN SEPTEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$23,492	\$303,420	\$301,290
Evangelism	12,794	94,955	85,589
Youth Ministries	7,097	99,942	108,987
Parish Education	8,518	112,896	138,198
Seminary	13,730	192,238	204,753
Bible College	21,913	392,245	412,369
Home Missions	34,787	275,811	318,879
World Missions	29,434	305,409	289,089
Personal Support	41,965	452,043	543,474
TOTALS	\$193,730	\$2,228,959	\$2,402,629

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

THANKFUL FOR THE TENSION

There is an important tension in Reformation theology and I, for one, am thankful for it. In my writing project on the history of our fellowship, it seems to me that each side of every controversy threatens to over-emphasize one aspect of theology and lose sight of the other. Let me try to explain.

At the heart of Martin Luther's biblical teaching is something called a paradox, and it's difficult to understand him unless we take this into consideration. My old dictionary defines paradox as a statement that seems contradictory but may actually be true. Here's an example: He looked at John 10:28-29 and read, "They shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand," and said, "That is enough for me," comforted that the Lord would keep his soul in safety. But what about scriptural words of warning that speak of departing from the faith (I Timothy 4:1) or falling away (Hebrews 6:6)? I believe that the great reformer would preach these words with full confidence, too, without necessarily believing that they must be rationally reconciled with the words of comfort. So, the believer is eternally secure, but the believer may fall away. The Bible teaches both, the paradox stands, and we accept the tension between the two by faith. (See Pastor Antal's article on page 9 for a great example of another paradox.)

There is also a tension between the objective and the subjective ... between fact and feeling, the solid facts of one's faith and our acceptance of them ... and it strikes me that one or the other may be more dominant in various phases of our spiritual journeys. New believers and younger Christians may tend to rely more on feelings, and it is vital that they are

grounded in the truths of God's Word lest their emotions lead them astray. But we must also be warned of the danger of being led astray by a cold acceptance of truth filling the head but never seeming to warm the heart.

Many years ago a teacher pointed our class to the first chapter of Ephesians, where it reads that we were chosen before the foundation of the world, predestined to adoption as sons (vs. 4-5). Then he told us to underline every instance where Paul wrote "in Christ" or "in Him," reminding us powerfully that together with the objective eternal decree of God there is a subjective personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Georg Sverdrup, father of the free Lutheran movement in America, feared that a wrong emphasis on the objective could lead to a cold rationalism which threatened true congregational life. The question must be asked, "whose sins are forgiven and when?" (*Georg Sverdrup: Educator, Theologian, Churchman*, Hamre, p. 65). Putting it in the words of our catechism, "Justification is the gracious act of God whereby He for Christ's sake acquits a repentant and believing sinner of his sin and guilt, and looks upon him, in Christ, as though he had never sinned" (q. 218). Whose sins? "The repentant and believing sinner." When? When the sinner believes. "Who get a share in the redemption of Christ? Those who repent their sins and believe in Him" (q. 170). Sverdrup was convinced that this personal emphasis was essential to true spiritual life and awakenings.

I recall the strong impression that a

couple of hymns that were new to me made on my mind and spirit during differing times of spiritual need. When my heart seemed cold, the words, "Jesus, I am resting in the joy of what Thou art," ministered to a personal need. When wayward emotions threatened to control and undermine assurance, I was encouraged and comforted by the words in a different hymn: "I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me; it was not I that found, O Savior true; no, I was found by Thee."

Probably I am guilty of trying to simplify a theological issue that can be very

... I sincerely believe that there is life and even joy in preserving the paradox and resting in the tension.

complicated, but I sincerely believe that there is life and even joy in preserving the paradox and resting in the tension. Both the objective and the subjective are true, and the second depends on the first. Your salvation and mine was completed when Jesus died on the cross and rose triumphant from the grave. Hallelujah! And our salvation is experienced when we repent and believe ... not adding one thing to what He has already done, because He has done it all for you and me. "It is finished" (John 19:30). Praise God!



Pastor Robert Lee

building the base

WHEN WE ARE WASHED WHITE

BY PASTOR GIDEON JOHNSON

“Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Psalm 51:2, 7).

One of the items my wife gives to our children to keep them occupied during church is a whiteboard book with dry-erase markers. Recently, one of my sons pulled out his book and marker at home with the intention of working on some numbers and letters. However, a struggle soon erupted. To his horror, instead of finding a nice clean surface to do his work on, he found that the old dry-erase marker was stained on the book and wasn't too interested in coming off. So, for at least 32 seconds he worked feverishly with water and a rag to get the marker off, but to no avail. He then turned to me and asked if I would help him clean his book. Not seeing much hope in the situation, and in true dad wisdom, I simply shrugged off his request and told him to just write on the stained book. However, he wasn't interested in

ignoring or adding to the stain. He wanted the stain to be gone. He wanted the book to be washed clean, but he couldn't do it on his own and in his strength.

Our lives are stained with sin, and unfortunately, we are prone to jump back and forth between the notions that we can either get rid of the stain in our own strength or should simply shrug it off and keep adding to the stain. But neither makes us clean nor satisfied in the end.

As my wife heard the commotion over the not-so-white whiteboard book, she came over to our son and, in true mom wisdom, told him that all he needed to do was add some new marker over the stain and the stain would be lifted, could be wiped clean, and the book would be ready to be worked on again. Shortly thereafter, all was right with the world.

We cannot clean the stain of our sin away on our own, and there is no hope in simply shrugging it off and adding to the mess. What we need is something new and better to come. Something that can be

given to us that will not simply cover our mess but actually make us clean. We have that in Jesus. He came to cover our sin with His blood and to wash that sin away. He continues to come to us in Word and sacrament, offering to do the same so that whoever confesses their sin, hearing and believing the promise of God in Christ, is washed and made whiter than snow and is now being sanctified in the truth.

The Apostle Paul writes in Titus 3:4-6, saying, “When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”

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