

THE 

OCTOBER 2019

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



faith journeys



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

OCTOBER 2019
VOL. 57 NO. 10

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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
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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

ENCOURAGING
WORD

MY PEOPLE, CALLED BY MY NAME

BY PASTOR BOB RIETH

I don't know of a better challenge than this one that God gave to Solomon in a vision before the dedication of the beautiful Temple in Jerusalem.

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (II Chronicles 7:14).

God asked four things of the people. First, that His people would humble themselves. Second, that His people would pray. Third, that His people would seek God's face. Fourth, that His people would turn from their wicked ways.

Notice this, God puts all of the responsibility on the actions of *His people*. He doesn't say, "If the enemies of God would change their wicked ways," or, "If the opponents of justice would seek God's face." (Or, "If Hollywood or the media would clean up their act.") No. He said, "*If my people, who are called by my name, would humble themselves, and pray, and seek God's face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land*" (emphasis mine).

Notice this, God puts the forgiving of sin before the healing of the land. That reminds me of the time that Jesus healed the paralytic who was brought to him by his friends (Mark 2:1-12). The first thing Jesus did was to say, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (vs. 5). Then half a dozen verses later

Jesus heals him and tells the man to take up his bed and walk.

We stand at the eve of a monumental milestone. What happens next is up to us. If we want healing in our land, then we have a responsibility. If we believe that prayer works, and I do believe that, then it is up to us to heed God's command.

"He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God."

—Micah 6:8

I urge you to take up the challenge. Become the kind of people that God calls, "my people," and turn to Him and away from your wicked ways, then humbly and sincerely pray for our leaders and our land. Pray for all of our elected and appointed officials. How thankful we are for our freedoms and opportunities. May God bless and protect the USA.

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 Jan. 12, 2009.

The testimony I could trumpet simplistically as a teenager, I now declare with a tear in my voice.

—John Huffman Jr.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary.

—Psalm 105:2

One day I was having lunch with two students who were talking about whatever they were talking about—the weather, the movies—when without warning one of them asked the other as naturally as he would have asked the time of day what God was doing in his life.

—Frederick Buechner

The unbelieving world should see our testimony lived out daily because it just may point them to the Savior.

—Billy Graham

If the focus of our testimony is our changed life, we as well as our hearers are bound to be disappointed.

—Michael S. Horton

The background features a complex, abstract composition of overlapping teal and black shapes. A thin, white, hand-drawn line meanders across the entire page, weaving through the various forms. The teal areas have a subtle, grainy texture, while the black areas are solid and provide a high-contrast backdrop for the white text.

adam lee

God's redirection

Often when using the GPS on my iPhone's Google Maps, I can clearly see the pulsing blue dot signifying my location. If I zoom out far enough this dot actually hovers on a God's-eye view of the planet. This image gives me an odd feeling of assurance that I am probably where I am supposed to be.

But when I zoom back down to the street-level of everyday boulevards and buildings, I lose this grand picture amid the looming details of what immediately stands before me. I actually have to pick one direction and move before the GPS correctly configures and an arrow appears revealing the way I'm going and if I need some redirection.

Redirection often causes anxiety when traveling. Roadblocks and detours take us abruptly off our comfortable and familiar paths into the unknown or uncharted. Dreaded "Rerouting" messages on our GPS trigger confusion, delays, and perhaps even panic. The longer I live and the further I travel, I find God far more often redirects my travels in progress than embarks me off on new journeys.

Even before we were married, my wife Annett and I had been individually called to foreign missions. Annett returned to school four years ago to study Product Design in preparation for using these artistic skills on the mission field. I resigned my university position about three years ago to prepare for full-time missions. Since our marriage in 2017, we have marveled as God has merged these missionary callings and directed us towards a future ministry which seemed full of adventure and surprise.

After two years of prayer and seeking God's guidance, this January we purchased one-way tickets to Cairo, and then proceeded in encouraged amazement as God opened one door after another to various ministries for us to serve with and learn from across Northeast Africa. We would take what German Christians, inspired by Joshua and Caleb's reconnaissance in Canaan, call a "Discovery Journey" to explore the directions in which one is sent.

In April, however, we received a phone call from Annett's mom, saying that her husband had gone in for a minor medical examination, but that a large brain tumor had been discovered. A few days later he was in surgery,

and although the cancer was removed his left side was completely paralyzed. The prognostication was grim, and Annett's stepfather, mom, and grandmother would all need our presence and help.

Immediately we saw that "Rerouting" message flash across our future plans. As we had clearly known we were called to fly to Northeast Africa, we now clearly knew that we needed to drive to Saxony and live with Annett's family in Germany.

One of my favorite travel stories in the Bible is when God calls Abraham out of his homeland of Ur. In Hebrews 11:8, it says that when he was called, Abraham "went out, not knowing where he was going." Could any kind of journey have the potential for more adventure and surprise than following God with this much faith and surrender? The best travels on the road and in life often depend on trust and the unexpected.

Redirection doesn't mean that one is on the wrong road or going in the wrong direction. It may mean that God has a better route in accordance with His preparation of us, or a slower route in accordance with His timing for us.



Redirection from God's hands brings the comfort of His direct intervention in our plans and itineraries. He is present with us on this road. He does care how and where we are going. He has a new and better path for us. Perhaps we cannot always have complete confidence with

every step we take in life, vocation, and calling, but during a "redirection" we can have that complete confidence.

So now we settle into a new home, new jobs, and new ministries in the former East Germany. God has already provided a new church family to love, Annett's family to serve, and new neighbors and students with whom to share the gospel. We are confident that this sojourn and service will prepare us further for our calling as missionaries.

Writing that "the journey is the destination" would be a travel-stained cliché, but God indeed does direct us in this intimate step-by-step travel through life. May God continue to redirect us all according to His perfect plans. Lord, direct us again.

Adam and Annett Lee serve with Mission of Christ Network (MCN) in Central Europe, where they currently live in the German state of Saxony. Adam graduated from AFLBS in 1990 and has been involved with international education and often missions for almost three decades.

standing stones

hope unverzagt

I used to think my testimony was not an exciting one. It bothered me I couldn't attest to God's saving grace pulling me from alcohol and drug abuse, wild living, or other traumatic situations. I dreaded being asked to share my boring story. But I've come around.

A while back I discovered an old, dusty devotional book, and in it I read the story of a primrose. The delicate little flower complained about the shaded, rocky area in which it lived. The beautiful plants out in the full sun in the lush garden seemed much showier, and the primrose envied them. The gardener granted the wish of the little flower, and she was transplanted into the sunny garden. But it didn't take long for the hot sun to become too much for the plant. Her petals quickly started to wither, and she begged to be moved back. The author then pointed out how God knows what each one of us needs in order to thrive and grow in Him. He plants us where we need to be. And He allows the experiences we need in order to draw us to Him. The point struck home.

My story is a simple one. It's one of a faith that has grown stronger through the years as I have seen God work over and over again, and I have no doubt God knows what He's doing when He plants us where He does.

"I have loved Jesus for as long as I can remember" are the words that always began my testimony. (Yet another detriment to having an exciting testimony, I thought. How can you have a real testimony when you have no specific date to point back to?) I grew up in a Christian home where I was brought to the Lord in baptism as a baby. In many ways I felt covered by my parents' faith. My needs were met. I had no major problems. It was all good. So it wasn't until I got to Bible school and was on my own for the first time that I had my initial experience of crying out to God for help. Looking back at the situation now, it was unbelievably minor, but to my 17-year-old self it seemed huge. I had no job and no car to go find one. How would I ever get money? I felt there was nothing I could do to help the situation, so I cried in my bunk and turned the whole situation over to God. He promptly provided me with a job and a ride to that job. But the event made a lasting impression on me. God hears, and He works things out. I can trust Him. Suddenly my faith became deeply personal.

Just as in the Old Testament Joshua directed the Israelites to erect standing stones to help them remember how God had been present in their times of need, I have erected standing stones in my memory. These monuments are built in the shape of stories that we tell again and again to remind us and to teach our children of God's faithfulness. We tell the story of when the four oldest of our eleven children were under the age of five and prayed for a suit to give their daddy for Christmas. We had no money, and I saw no possible way. I tried to direct their prayers toward a necktie perhaps, but they held firm. It had to be a suit. And God unexpectedly provided \$450 so we could surprise my pastor husband with the double-breasted suit he'd always dreamed of. We learned that God hears and not only supplies our needs, but He sometimes supplies our wants, just to show He can. A big stone went on the pile of standing stones, and my faith grew.

A few years later my youngest sister felt led to come and help me after the birth of my fifth baby, so much so that she was willing to skip out of the Bible school choir trip to California. I found it a little odd since my deliveries and recuperations were always uneventful, but I welcomed her company. What I didn't see was the big picture that God saw before He prompted her. At four days of age, my newborn had to be readmitted to the hospital for a 10-day course of antibiotics for an infection. My sister was there to run the household that entire time while my husband worked, and I spent the days at the hospital. God sent her before I even knew I needed her. I praised Him as I heaved another big stone on the pile, my faith growing even stronger.

Through the years I have experienced one miraculous event after another and thrown stone after stone onto the pile of standing stones of faith. God has provided when I saw no way. He has led me on adventures I never expected. He has lifted me up when I was down. I have a huge rock pile now, but it grew little by little. God chose to plant me where He did, amongst the rocks so I would remember. And I wouldn't ask to be transplanted anywhere else.

Unverzagt is a member of Christ is Lord Lutheran, Onalaska, Wis.



hospital stay

daddy's suit

new job

● finding true
joy



bev borgstrom

People tell me I am joyful. This is especially true for those who know all the trials I've had in my life.

I smile a lot. I like to smile. I have the wrinkles to show for it. I consider smiles a gift, both giving and receiving them. But smiles can be deceiving. They can be the courteous type, nervous type, and even a fake type. Being able to smile even in trial and sorrow may seem impossible, but some of the sincerest smiles I've seen come during those times. I could say I don't know how that can be, but I do know. It is because of joy. But what does that mean?

There have been many times that joy seemed to have eluded me in life. My parents divorced, the consequences I suffered because of the poor choices I made as a young adult, the death of a parent, a hard marriage, and financial struggles are just a few examples of those times. Before I surrendered my life to Christ, I can recall only a few times of real joy, including my wedding day and the days my children were born—times when I was very aware of the Lord's presence.

One day our children were visited at their Christian school by the Gideons and they brought home their little orange Psalms & New Testaments. I had been laying on the floor of our living room under a Jesus picture on the wall crying my eyes out from financial stress. After a while, I pulled myself together to sit up and was led to pick up one of those little books and started reading. That day changed my life.

Once I began to have a relationship with Jesus, it seemed the sufferings and trials ramped up: continued difficulties in my marriage, periods of very serious financial trials, health scares, depression, betrayal, times of doubt, battling to hold on to faith and to be obedient. At the time, I was working two jobs, which made it difficult to attend church.

In all of those times however, joy somehow found a way into my life, not from external sources but from deep within. I pressed into Romans 5:3-4, "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope," and 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Sincere sorrow about my sins brought joy because I believed in the promises of God's forgiveness and grace. The joy brought hope. The hope brought courage to persevere. And perseverance brought gratitude, peace, contentment, and freedom to

my soul, strengthening my relationship with Jesus. The sorrows, sufferings, trials, shallow desires, and crushing burdens of this world couldn't drown out joy. Because true joy is from God.

What brings me joy?

- Having the Word of God and the freedom and ability to read it, especially when given the opportunity to read aloud during Sunday service. Attending church on Sunday and singing in worship (though in the earthly realm I am no great singer). Having a caring church family.
 - Being blessed with children who are godly servants, daughters who have godly husbands, and a granddaughter who holds my hand and wants me to read books to her and splash in the water.
 - The privilege of co-leading a youth group for a period of time resulting in lasting relationships founded in Christ. Attending some of their weddings and baby showers, watching some become youth group leaders, and receiving a "thinking of you" text on their way home from the FLY Convention with their own youth group kids.
 - To heed when God leads me to pray for someone and to later learn of the results of those prayers.
 - The desire (since I was a child) to take photos of creation and share with people (Romans 1:20). The purity of rustic camping at the base of a majestic mountain on a 22-degree morning snuggled in a warm sleeping bag listening to the bugling of elk in the near distance. Or hiking through forests in their autumn splendor.
 - Having been given the skills to work at a job that I enjoy (Colossians 3:23).
 - Embracing minimalism to seek more peace in the Lord and to have less things of worldly influence.
 - Being kind.
 - That God has tested me because He loves me and has a plan to bring glory to Himself. That His plan far exceeds mine. That His promises have gotten me through times when hope was faint. The gift of faith.
- These skills, desires, abilities, gifts, and promises all come from within the depths of my soul from the Holy Spirit, outwardly overflowing. Joy is from the Holy Spirit working in us, revealing the beauty of the King of the world. Joy is from the One who loves us, created us, died and rose for us! Individual gifts of joy as individual as we are. Yes! That is joy! That makes me smile!

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

missions: a faith

pastor earl korhonen

My childhood was filled with mission stories in church in Sunday school and kids club at our AFLC congregation in Cloquet, Minn. I was also shaped by the visiting missionaries in church and our family Bible camp. The images and stories from the mission field have the ability to fill us with the wonder of God's love for all people. I vividly remember visual aids showing children in tropical climates dressed very differently from me. And the pictures of villages with grass huts or animal skins were stark contrasts to my childhood home. One mission story was set among a countryside with giant mounds of earth constructed by termites. Each mission story held my interest because it was so different from my own life and yet had the common theme of a boy or girl who needed the Bible so that he or she could learn about Jesus. As you consider your faith journey, I pray that you would see how your involvement in world missions can help you keep a proper perspective on your need for the Savior, Jesus Christ.

I have the vision to see each congregation actively involved in praying for one or more of our AFLC missionaries and fields. While serving AFLC congregations for the past 24 years in Washington, Wisconsin, and Iowa, I have found that involvement in missions brings a healthy dimension to both our family and our congregational life. My wife, Joan, and I made it a priority to show our four children the importance of missions by supporting, visiting, and hosting missionaries whenever we had the opportunity. Now as Joan and I visit our mission fields and share about the work throughout the AFLC, I pray that our congregations will continue to be reminded of the need to pray for our missionaries. There is an excitement in sharing fresh news from the mission field. The excitement may be from the news of a Bible translation work, or a story of someone coming to faith in Jesus. Or, when the news from the field is a recent discouragement or need, it gives our congregations a specific request for which we can pray. And when we pray for missions, it brings a different perspective to the challenges our congregations at home are facing. I also pray that the communications in print and digital media from our office will continue to help you know better how to pray for the needs of our fields. Most of all, when we stop to consider the motives for missions, we are reminded once again of our primary purpose in our congregations: to bring the Bible to people so that they can hear the gospel, and by God's grace come to repentance of

sin and faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.

Following our primary task to bring the gospel to all people (Matthew 28:19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ...") is our unique AFLC purpose to establish free and living Lutheran congregations around the world. Currently, the AFLC has work in Brazil, Mexico, India, Uganda, Switzerland, and Paraguay. Additionally, through our AFLC members on loan, there is mission work in Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and support ministries here at home. It is a joy to reaffirm the vision to plant free and living Lutheran congregations as I visit both our mission fields and our congregations. By conviction, our AFLC churches believe that our Lutheran teaching is in complete agreement with the truth of God's Word.

I am blessed to read what the founder of the Lutheran Free Church, Georg Sverdrup, believed about our congregations. In the article *The Free Church Fellowship*, (1877-78), he writes, "Lutheran congregations that federated into a fellowship are also agreed on this truth: that the Lutheran church has in its Confession attained the deepest and fullest understanding of the contents of the Word of God. ... It is thus true that the Lutheran church, through its Confession, testifies both to the truth it has acknowledged and against the error it has seen with Christendom. It is this Confession that is the bond of unity of the Lutheran church fellowship." In very straightforward terms, Sverdrup says that our Lutheran doctrine is in complete agreement with the truth of God's Word. I long to see more congregations around the world find the same fellowship that we enjoy here in our AFLC.

With all humility and dependence upon the Spirit of God for wisdom, we must prayerfully seek to plant these congregations abroad through evangelism and discipleship. Our missionaries in fields where we have established congregations—like Brazil, Mexico, India, and Switzerland—serve as great inspiration to us as we minister in the newer areas like Uganda and Paraguay. Thank you for your continuing partnership in the gospel with AFLC World Missions. I pray that God will use us all for His glory as we carry on the Great Commission to make disciples of nations.

Korhonen was recently called as the director of AFLC World Missions.

journey



cody halverson

Hearing the crackle under my tires, I turn onto a gravel road. The serenity of going home to Grandpa and Nana’s ranch wells up inside of me. I pull into their yard and see all the familiar sights through the big kitchen window. Grandpa is sitting at the table, Bible open. Nana is pulling something out of the oven, and the dogs are barking on the front porch, tails wagging. It all says welcome home.

I had been given a task from Pastor Lee: What would you think of interviewing your grandpa and sharing his testimony? My immediate thought was sure, absolutely. I have heard my grandpa preach and teach many times. I’ve heard his testimony while sitting in the pew and also in the Sunday school classroom. But this time it was just us sitting at the kitchen table.

“Ya know Cody, God is so good,” he says with a smile on his face and a tear in his eye.

Grandpa didn’t grow up like me. There wasn’t devotions and prayer time around the table or at bedtime. His family did go to church, but a personal relationship with God wasn’t there and he knew it. Grandpa had followed the way of the world.

A little over a year after my grandparents got married, grandma was pregnant with their first child. She knew she wanted to be a Christian mother, so she asked Jesus into her heart. She told Grandpa and he thought that was nice, yet he continued to resist the nudge of the Holy Spirit in his life and kept the thought in his head that he would get around to it ... sometime. On December 16, 1971, a son, Smith, was born to my grandparents, but the baby wasn’t healthy. Grandpa was in South Dakota, where he bent his knees and told God that if He would save that baby, he would do anything. He traveled back to North Dakota, praying the whole time, bargaining with God. But by the time Grandpa had gotten to the hospital, Smith had died. Their hearts were broken. It was at that time that Grandpa knew, you don’t bargain with God. He realized that God knew Grandpa wouldn’t keep his end of the bargain.

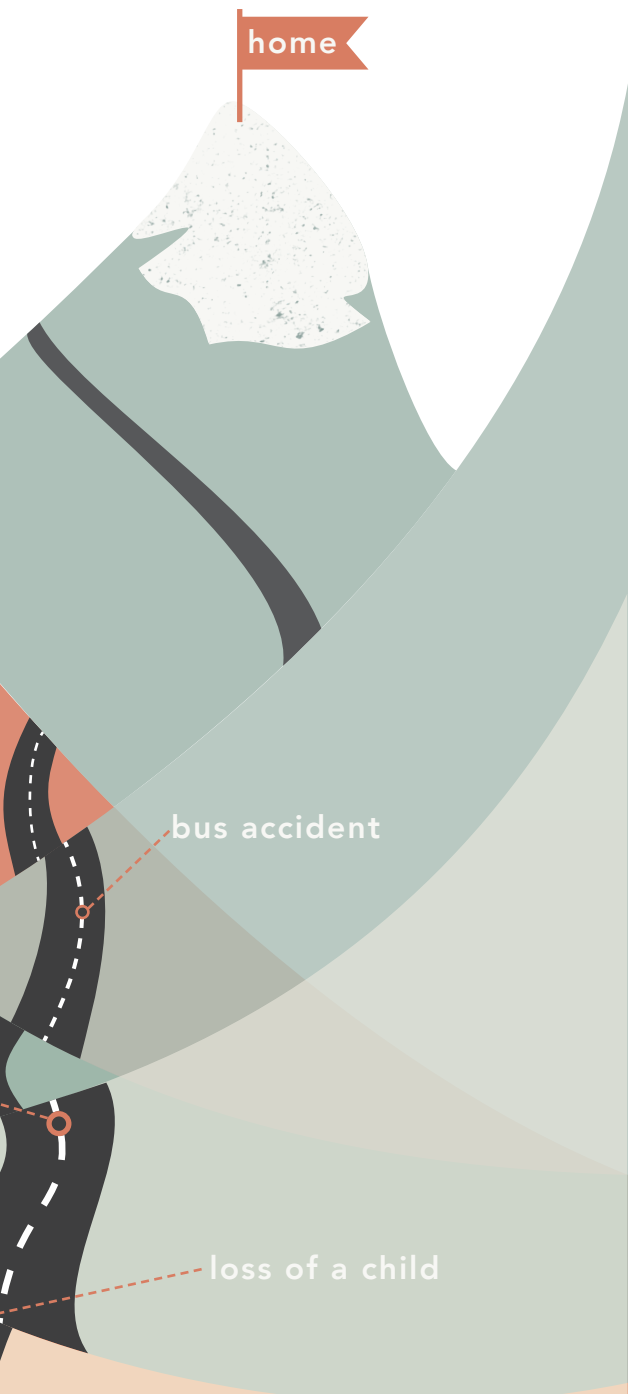
Pastor Harry Molstre came to visit them in the hospital that night, and as he was getting ready to leave, he asked Grandpa if he was ready to get right with the Lord. Grandpa told him he was ready. So they went into the waiting room and prayed. He felt the weight of years of sins lift off his shoulders, and he took a deep breath. You don’t know how heavy your sins are until Jesus comes along and takes them away.

The words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30 reflect this transformation, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

God allowed many trials to come into my grandparents’ lives. Grandpa was a self-employed horse trainer by trade. In October 1984 he was training a horse to cross a stream in the pasture. The horse continued to jump it, so Grandpa continued the process until it went terribly wrong. The horse jumped the stream, but this time its front legs buckled on the other side, sending Grandpa over its head straight into the bank on the other side. As you can imagine, he was knocked

broken back

me of building trust in God



out. When he came to, he was surprised he didn't feel worse for taking such a hard hit ... until he tried to get up. He couldn't move. He was paralyzed from the neck down. Instead of fear overtaking him, he knew he needed to pray. "God you know my thoughts, you know I don't want to be paralyzed for the rest of my life," he prayed, "But if this is how you want to use me, help me to accept it. Amen." A short time later, he was able to get up and walk the hills to the house. Being a self-employed horse trainer and having a broken neck would mean no work. But they trusted God to provide and He did.

May 6, 1987, was a day God would allow another trial in their lives. They received a call that their children had been in a terrible bus accident. They drove the three miles to the scene. On the way, Grandpa took Nana's hand and said, "When our girls were born, we dedicated them both back to the Lord, and He may have chosen to take one or both to be home with Him today."

They both knew God was in control, but nothing could prepare them for the scene. When the bus came into view, it was crushed. There was hardly anything left of the car that had hit the bus. Kids were scattered in the ditch, bloodied and crying. They spotted their oldest daughter, Melissa, her white spring coat covered in blood. Their youngest, Sarah, lying on the ground surround by the ambulance crew, was being fit with a neck collar. Grandpa rode in the front of the ambulance racing to town with Sarah and another young boy in the back. They were the two most critically injured. Nana and Melissa got a ride to the hospital with a neighbor. Later, my mom, Sarah, was flown to Fargo with a broken neck and many other injuries. The young boy passed away.

This was the beginning of a long period spent watching their child in excruciating pain and feeling helpless, but knowing that God was their comfort. Told that their daughter's survival was a miracle, they were thankful that God had spared their children. The blow got worse as they learned that the bus driver was charged with drunk driving. Three days later, Grandpa left his daughter's side to visit the bus driver in the hospital. He gave him a Bible and told him they forgave him.

Throughout the summer, they were able to visit with the young boy's family and be there for them through this terrible accident. They were able to relate to them because they had lost a child, as well. They soon accepted Jesus! Praise the Lord!

God allowed many trials to come into my grandparents' lives. God allows broken hearts so that when the time comes, He can ask you to come alongside of others and show them that He carried you and He will carry them, too. Listening to Grandpa talk about his life, the message of trusting God and clinging to His Word rang loud and clear. When God has taken you through the fire, you know that He is your stronghold and He won't leave you. He touches your heart and molds you so He can use your life and testimony.

Halverson is a member of Solid Rock, Anoka, Minn. His grandfather, Duane Burchill, is a member of Zion Free Lutheran, Green Township, Valley City, N.D.

faith quest



pam olson

Many of us would like our life journey to be like an exclamation point—straight forward, no surprises. We take that last leap to our eternal home to emphasize the point at the end of the exclamation mark—victory! Thank you, Jesus! Home at last! But life is more than that.

Life's journey is more like a quest, a question mark. We are not certain of what is around the bend, but we trust in the Lord as we walk with Him around the corner, trusting we will see more clearly what God is doing in our own life and in the lives of others. Our spiritual bend can cover mountain peaks and deep valleys, grassy knolls, and barren sand dunes. What we'll meet around one bend can bring a smile to the depths of our souls, while others can create a sting of conviction that will send us straight to our knees. We may wonder what God is doing in our lives. We ask, "How do you want me to respond in this situation, Lord? How did I get to this point?" Asking God the tough questions as we walk through a bend, He reassures us, "You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). It is here where God allows you to see with spiritual eyes the Living God at work, to see what He is doing around you when you seek Him in His Word with all your heart. Our obstacle might be high, but God is the Most High. He will take all kinds of circumstances, even those broken pieces torn apart from the enemy, and use them for His glory.

God has shown Himself faithful on my quest. I call His work my life faith stones. I can look back and see mile markers of God at work, moments when He showed Himself more deeply than I knew previously. Through these moments He has refined character in me, taught me a spiritual truth, gave me opportunities to help others, presented disciple making opportunities, or helped me step into a faith moment. In these faith moments, I can't personally change or fix something on my own. Instead, I live beyond my circumstances, where I totally trust the Lord for the outcome. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). I can't ask God to guide my footsteps if I'm not willing to move my feet. It's there, in the faith moment, where I trust Him at His Word.

Recently, I sensed upheaval in the workplace and asked the Lord during my morning devotions, "How should I respond in this situation?" There, in the Scriptures, He reassured me that He's not far away. I read from Isaiah 43:19, "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." Why do I have personal quiet times? Because it is there, "not in the

wind ... not in the earthquake ... not in the fire, nor the thunder" (I Kings 19:11-12) but in a "gentle whisper" (vs 12) that the Lord reveals what He is doing. He tells us to keep walking forward. Just take a step of faith. He tells us to pray, "thy will be done" (Matthew 6:10). We must be willing, if the answer requires, that our will be undone.

I was put into a senior position at an international learning center where I work with predominantly Hindu coworkers. Previous experience the Lord gave me in India has allowed me to have inroads with my coworkers, where I have been able to share my faith with them. Over time, my boss has seen how well Christians work with integrity. Now, he relies on me to recruit Free Lutheran Bible College (FLBC) students for increased staffing. God redeems the time, providing opportunities for faithful FLBC students who are employed there to share their faith with their coworkers. God is doing an incredible work in the lives of others, and He is empowering me to help make the connections.

I continually have to remind myself that my life's quest is not only for my benefit, but for the benefit of others, for God does not put us on life's journey alone. "Pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up" (Ecclesiastes 4:10).

A few months ago, a new family moved into our neighborhood from out of state. Immediately, my husband and I befriended them. After talking with the woman, she said she was homesick and lonely. We hosted a neighborhood party so others on our street could introduce themselves and develop relationships. After time, I asked her if she would consider a church to help be her support network. They have felt loved.

God reveals Himself at work when He gives us spiritual eyes to see others in their need and the compassion to respond. He may not have given those eyes to anyone else but you to see someone needing a helping hand, or those who are lost, hurting, depressed, confused, lonely, overwhelmed, oppressed, or dying. Don't wait for someone else to take action, for God is asking you to move your feet and love as Jesus loves you. God is at work in you and all around you. He's asking you to be involved in what He's doing. The question is, will you join Him on the quest? May we all respond, "Yes! Thank you, Jesus!"

"He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

Olson is a member of Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn.



All boards meet, set ministry goals



After meeting with their respective groups on Sept. 16 on the AFLC campus in Plymouth, Minn., members serving on AFLC boards and committees met Sept. 17 to report on ministry activities and goals for the next year (top, Pastor Craig Johnson gives a report for World Missions). Pastor Eric Rasmussen, AFLC Youth Board chairman, and Pastor Jason Holt, director of Youth Ministries, shared a session (top left) together on encouraging unity, order, and teamwork within boards and committees. Applications included suggestions on the clarity of mission alignment, the management of meeting times, and the involvement of all members. Pictured above is Dean Nelson (front, Board of Trustees) and Pastor Ken Moland (behind, Benefits Board). At left is Deanna Larson, from the WMF Board.



WHERE HE LEADS, I FOLLOW

BY PASTOR JIM JOHNSON

The longer I follow Jesus, the more I believe that's exactly the right verb. Follow. I follow Jesus. It's a journey. He walks, we get behind Him. He goes, we trail.

A case in point: Europe. I never wanted to go there. My former pastor kept bugging me, "Would you join me on a mission trip to Europe to meet a few of my friends?"

It wasn't in my budget. It wasn't on my radar. I couldn't afford the flight. I don't like airplanes.

"We can raise the money," he said.

"I don't feel comfortable doing that," I said.

"I can raise it for you."

Next thing I knew, I was on a plane to meet my former pastor's friends in Europe. We went to a conference in Germany. We traveled to a mountain retreat center in Poland. We met "Pastor Stanley" in a steel mill city in Czech Republic. I was so historically behind, I was still calling it Czechoslovakia. But Stanislav became my new friend, and I went with him to Slovakia for a visit and met some new friends. He also

introduced me to a young couple at a Bible camp, and a 19-year-old missionary wanna-be, Tomasz. The three of them wanted to study at our Bible school in Minnesota.

I can't speak Czech, Polish, or German. They could hardly speak English. But Jesus was going to Europe with my former pastor, and I was learning to follow. That journey was the first of ten trips I have made to Europe, sometimes preaching, sometimes teaching kids to play baseball, usually talking to people who hardly speak English, always making new Christian friends.

One day Jesus told Peter, "Follow me." It was an awkward conversation at the beach. You can find a description of the meeting in John 21: 15-25. Jesus was telling young Peter how he, his friend of three years, was going to die.

Peter pointed to John and said, "What about him?" (vs. 21).

Jesus must have shaken his head. "What is that to you?" He said. "You follow me" (vs. 22).

That's what I'm learning to do. I'm on a faith journey. Same with you.

Pastor Stan is still my friend. The young couple came to Bible school. One night they came to my house, thinking they had to go home to Czechia. "We're pregnant," they told my wife Linda. "We should go home." Linda told them we have babies in Minnesota all the time. They stayed.

Today that couple serves a large church in Czech Republic. The baby is 18. He's our close Christian friend. Tomasz lives with his family in Ukraine, leading youth to the Lord through a hockey sport called floorball. I learn from all of them. And from my former pastor friend Don Richman, too.

But mostly I learn to follow Jesus, my friend and Savior. He speaks English to me all the time. And he leads me on journeys of faith.

I follow.

Johnson, who is the director of AFLC Home Missions, is a member of Living Hope Church, Rogers, Minn.

Gray Havens headline opening weekend on campus



The Gray Havens, a husband and wife singer-songwriter duo, were the featured guest musicians on Sept. 2, after students at the Free Lutheran Bible College converged on campus for their first of a two-day of orientation. Dave and Licia Radford (pictured above)

specialize in a narrative pop folk music focused on biblical themes of faith. FLBC student Grant Jones (above, center) and a member of the public joined the duo on stage for one song. Opening for the duo was musician Katy Dahl, a 2012 graduate of the Bible college.



Free Lutheran Seminary begins new school year

The Free Lutheran Seminary opened classes on Wednesday, Sept. 4 with 13 students in its three-year classroom program. Pictured are (from left) front row: Joe Freck, Kyle Smith, Scott Erickson, Lance Morrison, Jeremy Nikunen. Second row: Joe Dombrowski, Sam Willard, Patrick VandenBos, Joe Larson. Fourth row: Michael Onstad, Alex Woodworth, Josh Johnson, Ganzo Enkhjargal. Fifth row: Andrew Hanson, Pastor Jerry Moan, Pastor Wade Mobley, Dr. James Molstre. Back row: Pastor Steve Mundfrom, Pastor Adam Osier, Pastor Robert Lee, Pastor Brent Olson, and Dr. Nathan Olson.



“O may all who come behind us find us faithful. May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe. May the lives we live inspire them to obey” (by Steve Green).

FOOTPRINTS OF FAITH

BY BECKY ABEL

The closest real-life example of a “faith adventure” in my life has been witnessing the lives of my dear in-laws, John and Ruby Abel. Since I met them in 1976, I have been amazed over and over again by hearing stories of their adventures of faith from the past and by witnessing in their daily lives their passion for sharing the gospel.

Both John and Ruby came to know the Lord Jesus in a personal way in their late teen years. Little did they know at that time all the adventures God had planned for their lives—pioneer missionary work; establishing numerous churches and schools (including a Free Lutheran Bible School and Seminary in Brazil); investing in a Bible camp ministry that continues to this day; visiting 28 countries and most of the

states in the U.S.; interacting with very influential people as well as working with the poor; and evangelizing the lost, discipling new Christians, and training Christians leaders. John (93) and Ruby (90) have lived full lives serving the Lord with joy and faithfulness.

They were privileged to celebrate 70 years of marriage with their whole family at the Association Retreat Center in Osceola, Wis., in September. Imagine the joy of this once-in-a-lifetime experience, uniting all seven children and their spouses, all 28 grandchildren and most of their 27 great-grandchildren for the three-day celebration! God brought family members together from Florida, New York, Texas, Arizona, Colorado, Minnesota, Brazil, and Paraguay.

During the Sunday celebration with other friends and relatives, Pastor Abel shared from Psalm 16, commenting on the psalmist’s words: “The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance ... The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. ... Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (vs. 5, 6, 11).

John and Ruby have passed on a legacy of love for Jesus and His Word, a love for people, and a love for music. The family reunion was filled

with joyful singing, including special numbers by each of the four generations. The four-hour campfire on Sunday night was a highlight for the family to share and sing and pray together.

It is evident that John and Ruby have left indelible footprints that are being followed down to the third and fourth generations. Three of their sons are pastors and have served on the mission field in Brazil. Their grandson, Matthew, and his family are fulfilling a vision cast by Grandpa John to start a pioneer missionary work in Paraguay. Most of the family uses their gifts and talents to serve the Lord in various ways. It humbles us to realize that Grandma Ruby prays daily for each of the family members by name, and Grandpa John daily reads the Word of God and encourages his family members at each opportunity to know Jesus. Their desire is that one day we will all be united in a family reunion that lasts forever.

Note: To read more about John and Ruby’s faith adventures read the Ambassador Publications book entitled, *Footprints of the Faithful*.

Abel and her husband, Paul, are AFLC missionaries serving in Curitiba, Brazil.

Webinars focus on curriculum

Ambassador Publications recently began hosting a series of online webinars to serve AFLC congregations. These Christian education webinars can be attended from anywhere where access to a computer and the internet is available. The goals of the webinars are to:

- help increase biblical literacy at a congregational level, thereby helping people to grow in their faith.
- challenge congregations to pursue higher standards of excellence in their educational ministries, to the glory of God.
- provide encouragement and support to educators in AFLC congregations.

The first live webinar introduced the Ambassador Sunday School Series and launched on July 23 with options for attending at 3 or 7 p.m. This online session presented by AFLC Parish Education Director Marian Christopherson demonstrated the purpose and plan behind the curriculum and provided an overview of each level. The session was presented again on August 27 at 3 and 7 p.m.

Another live webinar on August 29 focused on new confirmation curriculum produced by Ambassador Publications called *Foundations of the Faith: What Does This Mean?* Christopherson introduced the topic by telling about the history and development of the new confirmation material and then interviewed Pastor Christian Andrews, the curriculum writer. Pastor Andrews explained the educational approach and principles behind the curriculum and guided students through a sample lesson, showing them how to use it in a classroom setting. All the webinars were well attended by viewers from across the country.

What other topics would be helpful? Ambassador Publications is seeking input from you. Go to their website at ambassadorpublications.org and take the five-minute survey about future webinars. Send your e-mail or phone number to parished@afcl.org if you would like to receive information about future webinars, and follow their Facebook page or subscribe to their e-news to see regular updates.

Statement of ownership

The Lutheran Ambassador

Publication No. 588-620, Filed 09-03-19

Issued monthly. Twelve issues annually.

Annual subscription price \$25.00

Mailing address of Office of Publication and headquarters of General Business Office: 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55441.

Publisher: The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations.

Editor: Pastor Robert Lee, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441

Managing Editor: Ruth Gunderson, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55441

Owner: The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55441.

Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders: None.

The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal income tax purposes has not changed during preceding 12 months.

Publication Name: The Lutheran Ambassador.

Issue date for circulation data: September 2019

Total number of copies (net press run):

Avg. copies each issue during past year: 2470

Copies September 2019 issue: 2467

Paid circulation:

Mailed outside-county paid subscriptions stated on Form 3541:

Avg. copies each issue during past year:

1760

Copies September 2019 issue: 1759

Mailed inside-county paid subscriptions

stated on Form 3541:

Avg. copies each issue during past year: 110

Copies September 2019 issue: 108

Through outside mail sales:

Avg. copies each issue during past year: 310

Copies September 2019 issue: 311

Total paid and/or requested circulation:

Avg. copies each issue during past year: 2180

Copies September 2019 issue: 2178

Free distribution by mail:

Free distribution outside the mail:

Avg. copies each issue during past year: 150

Copies September 2019 issue: 150

Total free distribution:

Avg. copies each issue during past year: 150

Copies September 2019 issue: 150

Total distribution:

Avg. copies each issue during past year: 2330

Copies September 2019 issue: 2328

Copies not distributed:

Avg. copies each issue during past year: 150

Copies September 2019 issue: 139

Total:

Avg. copies each issue during past year: 2480

Copies September 2019 issue: 2467

Percent paid and/or requested circulation,

average and September 2019 issue: 94%

Publication is required and will be printed

in the October 2019 issue of The Lutheran

Ambassador.

/s/ Ruth Gunderson, Managing Editor



WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION

STORY OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

BY MADI DEMO

"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" (Jeremiah 29:11).

No one likes to think that God's plan includes cancer, but that is one of the ways I've seen Him work in my life.

Before I was diagnosed with cancer, God gave me close relationships with family and friends to rely on during trials. So, when I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer in 2016, I had a solid foundation to lean on. My mom had also gone through the same cancer surgery a few years before me, so I also had her experience to rely upon, too.

One of my favorite Bible

passages is found in James, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance" (1:2-3). Cancer was quite a trial for both myself and my family. It would have been very difficult to have joy during that time without a close relationship with God. I knew He was there right beside me through surgery, hospital stays, and blood draws at 2 a.m. One of the side effects of surgery was that my body stopped producing the calcium I needed. It took two years for my calcium to finally regulate, so I was in and out of the hospital a lot during those years. If I felt even a little sick at school, I was nervous that I might have to go to the hospital. It was always hard to decide if I needed to leave or if I could stay at school, but God was always faithful to get me to the hospital whenever I needed to be there. I saw His faithfulness during that time, and I have continued to see it in my life since then.

I have been so blessed in the past few years. In 2017, my family and I got to go to Hawaii through the Make-A-Wish Foundation, and this

was a gift from God. It was an amazing display of His compassion and mercy to our family. As I finish up my last years of high school and move on to Bible College, I know that His faithfulness will never fail, and I have nothing to fear. After Bible College, I am planning on going to school to become a nurse. Through my cancer experience, God has given me a desire to become a pediatric oncology nurse, so I can help children who were just like me, who might be afraid. Now I can face the future without fear because I know how powerful God's faithfulness is.

"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:21-23).

Demo, a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn., is a junior in high school.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor David Nelson, Badger, Minn., has accepted a call to serve part-time as interim pastor at First United Lutheran (LCMC), Roseau, Minn. Nelson will continue to serve Badger Creek Lutheran, Badger, and Oiland Lutheran, Greenbush, Minn.

Pastor David Niemela, a 2019 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, was installed Aug. 4 at United Free Lutheran, Greenbush, Minn., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating.

Pastor Steve Berntson, who serves New Hope Lutheran, Jamestown, N.D., and Pastor Joel Kangas, who serves Resurrection Free Lutheran, Beltrami, Minn., traveled with College of Prayer in August to the Democratic Republic of Congo for a teaching ministry.

Pastor Harold E. Hosch, 90, died June 26 in Iowa. First teaching at Crown College, he served as the Old Testament and biblical languages instructor at AFLC Schools from 1972 to 1977, then teaching at the Lutheran Brethren Seminary and The AALC Luther House of Studies and seminary. He is remembered by his students as one who passionately and clearly opened the Old Testament Scriptures to them.

Pastor Omar Gjerness, 97, Fergus Falls, Minn., died on July 19. Professor of Systematic Theology at the Lutheran Brethren Seminary for almost 30 years, he served as a guest instructor at the AFLC seminary during the 1967-68 school year as well as on other occasions, and has been a valued speaker at several pastors' conferences. He authored *Baptism & Related Doctrines*, which was adapted from his graduate thesis.

Leah Erickson, a 2018 graduate of AFLBS, will serve as a parish worker with a new church plant in Killdeer, N.D.



Merton P. Strommen

Dr. Merton Peter Strommen, 100, born March 31, 1919, died Sept. 2. A funeral service was held on Sept. 13 at Bethlehem Lutheran, Minneapolis.

Some of our readers will remember him as the national youth director for the Lutheran Free Church, and it was in that capacity that we first met. He was my "youth work" instructor in college, too, and still recalled who I was and where I was from ... impressive memory!

"Mert" conducted a national study of the beliefs of Lutheran youth as a doctoral dissertation, and this led to the founding of Lutheran Youth Research, which was eventually broadened to become Search Institute, earning him an international reputation in his field. His studies revealed that most Lutheran youth lacked an understanding of salvation by grace through faith, trusting instead in a works-based religion. I have never forgotten his story of a man from the community where he served as pastor. "I'm afraid that if you were to die today, you would be spending an eternity in hell." These hard words were used by the Spirit to awaken the man to hear and believe the gospel.

In 1983 he was a guest instructor during our seminary Summer Institute of Theology. One of the insights that we gained was from the 30 years plus that he and his wife Irene (sister of AFLC Pastor Raynard Huglen) conducted a high school Bible study in their home. It seems that the Sunday schools were no longer teaching basic Bible knowledge such as Old Testament accounts, and so stories like Daniel in the lions' den, for example, were completely strange to the students. It's not enough to discuss contemporary issues in our Sunday schools or youth groups, we learned, without a biblical basis to address them.

He wasn't afraid to go against the stream, and took a principled and professional stand against the normalization of homosexuality within the ELCA and other denominations, writing *The Church and Homosexuality* (2001). Someone called him a sociologist who was still a pietist, for he believed that the old Lutheran confirmation practices and Bible camps taught the faith best by stressing a living faith in Jesus.

Mert authored at least 20 books (some together with Irene), including *The Five Cries of Youth* and *The Five Cries of Parents*. After the sudden death of their son David in 1986, they co-authored *The Five Cries of Grief*. A gifted musician, he is also remembered for founding and directing a male chorus called the Augsburg Centennial Singers. Blessed be his memory.

—Pastor Robert Lee

AUGUST MEMORIALS

- AED** Hensrud, Scott
Janice Schmitke Nelson, Barbara Zak,
- FLAPS** Florence Halvorson,
Janice Schmitke Pastor Ken Sortedahl
- Phillip Lund **FLS**
- Home Missions** Eddie Hinze, Pastor
Carol Hensrud, Ken Sortedahl,
Janice Schmitke, Janice Schmitke,
Phillip Lund, Pastor
Bell, Donna Hines Ron Pulscher
- FLBC** **WMF**
Ruth Claus, Carol Carola Davidson

AFLC BENEVOLENCES August 31, 2019

FUND	REC'D IN AUGUST	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$28,826	\$279,928	\$283,811
Evangelism	11,902	82,161	81,180
Youth Ministries	23,655	92,845	102,754
Parish Education	4,923	104,378	130,913
Seminary	26,775	178,507	187,791
Bible College	35,909	370,332	391,723
Home Missions	19,845	241,025	291,438
World Missions	16,935	275,974	253,425
Personal Support	48,434	410,078	502,057
TOTALS	\$217,204	\$2,035,229	\$2,225,090

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

EVERYONE HAS A STORY

What do we all have that relates to faith journeys, the theme of this issue? The answer is a story. Everyone reading these words possesses a collection of life experiences as far back as memory permits. For some the story is a brief one; for others it has many chapters. A special privilege for pastors is to hear portions of life stories from our older saints, telling of times long ago. I recall the lady who told me of holding the claim on a homestead in western North



Pastor Robert Lee

Dakota when she was a teenager by living alone through winter months in a sod house, hearing the wolves scratching by the door. Another lady told me that she had to wash clothes in a nearby creek, and “thought she had died and gone to heaven” when her husband bought her a hand-cranked wringer.

Some are hesitant to tell their stories, not sure that anyone would be interested. It seems to me that this is often true of those who served in the military. Things may have been done or witnessed that one would like to forget.

One of our readers told me that his family is encouraging him to write his story for his children and grandchildren, and there are surely others who have received the same request. There is an autobiography on the internet by a pastor who taught at a Lutheran Bible school for several years, and I was blessed by reading it. Like me, he grew up in a “churched” home but not a Christian home, and it was great to hear of the influence that one congregation and several pastors had on his spiritual life. He wrote that “it was the warmth and freedom of a Lutheran congregation that came out of a Norwegian background, representing a beautiful amalgam of theological orthodoxy and ‘pietistic’ warmth and fervor, that confirmed the truth of the Gospel for me” (from *Memoirs*, by Pastor Don Baron).

We all have a spiritual story, too, which is usually called a testimony. The first ones that I heard were in my home church, when on a couple of Sunday mornings two men acquainted with my family told of the recent change that a relationship with Jesus Christ brought into their lives. Our Bible camps and youth conventions usually provide an opportunity for these spiritual stories, and they can encourage others to be bolder in their witness. A new believer comes to mind as he stood before a congregation: “Wild horses couldn’t drag me up to speak to all you people. But Jesus did.”

Some testimonies may be quite dramatic. There was a speaker at youth rallies during the early ’70s who was remembered for burning down a school building and serving a jail sentence as a result. Jesus saved him! Now he had a story to tell of a changed life, and now he looked for opportunities to point young people to the Savior before decisions were made that would scar their lives. A few may recall the remarkable and detailed memory of a lay pastor and his interesting accounts of his years ministering at a Chicago mission and the men who were rescued and restored.

The spiritual journeys of many or even most are not very dramatic. An older lady said that she did not like “testimony meetings” because they made her feel like she did not have a very good story to tell. “I’ve always loved Jesus,” she said. “That’s a great testimony,” I told her, because it could be a great encouragement to those whose stories are not very dramatic, either.

There was a tendency in the past to limit our spiritual stories to how they

began, and I remember pastors at camps and conventions reacting to this by inviting people to tell something about their relationship to the Lord that was no older than a week or a month. How we are being saved is as important—or maybe more important—than how we got saved. Our faith journeys are always a life-long process, often with many twists and turns. Something that happened in your life may be just what someone who is struggling needs to hear.

The late Dr. Iver Olson, AFLC seminary professor, wrote that in his 15th year he passed through a prolonged spiritual crisis

Everyone reading these words possesses a collection of life experiences as far back as memory permits.

that was determining for his subsequent life. This he took to be a conversion, but later came to regard it as maturation. He gave special credit to the lay pastors during his boyhood in Saskatchewan for the clarity with which they proclaimed the whole counsel of God unto salvation. For him the journey was more important than the point in time.

What has been your faith journey? Write it down. Tell someone about it.

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

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

association retreat center

BOASTING IN THE LORD

BY KIRK RAUTIO

God is good. He is proving that repeatedly in the activities at the Association Retreat Center. The blessings that have been poured out on this facility are overwhelming and humbling. Taking a quick look back on the last few months, we see that God has answered prayers in so many areas that it cannot go without responding with II Corinthians 10:17 in mind, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

God has sent three new team members to our staff who are looking at making long-term commitments to the mission here. This is an answer to the prayers of many people. These three are already seeing how the ARC is being used in the kingdom of God. One has stated that is amazing to see the impact on the guests this place has, and he is humbled that he gets to be a part of it.

God has been moving in the hearts of donors for specific projects in recent months. The ARC received a donation

for sporting equipment that went toward updates to volleyball courts, acquiring many new lawn games for all ages, sport balls, and even a new addition of a teeter-totter to Peter's Playground. Another donor felt led to make an improvement to the RV park. With this donation, five new RV pads were made, new grass is being planted, and upgrades were also made to the electrical connections of the RV area, enabling larger units to have full-power hookups. A proposal for an addition to the House of Jacob was answered by a donor. This will double the square footage of that building and, once finished, will be another wonderful place for people to come, rest, and commune with God.

God is good and the support for the ARC is blessing more than the ARC itself. The outpouring of support that is still coming in today for the 40th anniversary enabled a tithe of more than \$4,500 to go to the ARCA in Curitiba, Brazil. They will be able to finish projects on their

campus that will be used to reach people for Christ. Donations were also used to enable families to attend Family Camp this summer, where they were able to rest and be nourished by the Word. Because of other donations made, multiple volunteer groups had materials to use and thus were able to answer their call from God to serve here. They left blessed through their service and the ARC is blessed doubly by their presence and service.

God is good, I must state it again. His hand is moving through the ARC and the many people supporting it. Having the blessing of seeing His hand in motion and being able to see His people respond is a great honor. The ARC will continue to "boast in the Lord" for the provision He has made available and look to the future with joy and hope. God is good!

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