

THE 

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LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



FLY 2019 || ISAIAH 45:5-6



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ARE YOU DISCOURAGED?

BY PASTOR BOB RIETH

Discouragement causes more defeats than opposition. The Bible often pairs the phrase, “Be not afraid” with, “Be not discouraged.”

“Joshua said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous. This is what the LORD will do to all the enemies you are going to fight’” (Joshua 10:25).

When we are discouraged, we are like a balloon that is losing its air. How many special occasion mylar balloons start to fail after the excitement of the occasion has passed? The guests have gone home, the decorations have been put away, and the balloon drifts forgotten in some high corner. What had been light and buoyant, inflated to the limit of its capacity, has now become deflated, sagging, and on the way to being useless.

The situation described above may be the normal cycle for a party balloon, but it is not what has to happen to you. You are not a party balloon.

It is so good to begin a new project—to plan, to dream, to invest ourselves in a new venture. If your goal is worthy and your plans are in accord with the will of God, He has promised to be with you and to see you through to the end.

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria

and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles” (II Chronicles 32:7-8).

Watch out for things that tempt you to be discouraged.

- Self-doubt
- Fear that you may fail
- Fatigue or illness
- Other people’s opinions
- Looking at your own abilities rather than trusting the Lord.

Instead, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:2-3).

If it is worth doing, it is worth doing well! Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.

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 Sept. 27, 2010.

I AM

FLY 2019 || ESTES PARK, CO

BY RUTH GUNDERSON

Have you ever had to describe God to someone? Or tried to grasp who He is yourself? It's a difficult task. Beyond human ability, really. The One who always was, is, and always will be said of Himself, "I AM WHO I AM," all caps—a self-validating epithet. In the beginning, you read in Genesis 1, the I AM spoke, creating the elements of life. Then, He breathed that first breath into Adam, turning a fleshy bag of bones into a living being.

Think about that breath, given to create life. Like every breath you breathe in, He is. And like that breath He gave Adam, you are. Every inhale, every exhale comes courtesy of Him.

It's an easy analogy to grasp when you find yourself scrambling up a 11,909-foot overlook in the Rocky Mountains. When the oxygen is thin within your heavy lungs, you tend to appreciate the process of breathing. You bend over, gasping for breath. In time, when your heart has slowed its rhythm and your lungs have stopped heaving,

you slowly rise, eyes scanning the horizon of mountain peaks, trees, valleys, and a sky so vast it seems that you can finally know a little bit more about Him up there, above it all.

Those tree-covered mountains and valleys are bursting to tell you about Him. "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world" (Psalm 19:1-4).

What creation says without words, Jesus explained in metaphors. "I am the bread of life," He said of Himself, shortly after sating more than 5,000 hungry mouths with two loaves. "I am the good shepherd," He claimed to a culture riddled with hungry wolves and hired hands. "I am the resurrection and the life," he told a grief-stricken sister before He wept, before He told her brother



to get up out of that grave. “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” He told His followers, one who would deny Him, another who would doubt Him. “I am the true vine,” He said, shortly before He died.

Back down at 8,010 feet of elevation, where breathing comes just a bit easier, you join 1,600 teens and adults as they converge on the campus of the YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, Colo., to study those words. “I AM” is the theme of the week at the 2019 FLY Convention, and each nightly message will tackle one of those metaphors, each daily Bible

study will seek to understand God, and each workshop and elective will help a people created in His image to navigate a world He created, but which has rejected Him.

The first message is deep and necessary: Jesus is enough. Taken from John 6:25-36, the message given by Jordan Langness, Ishpeming, Mich., opens the convention by digging into the first metaphor of Jesus, “I am the bread of life.” Langness touches on two major points in his talk. First, in the same way that Jesus fed those who followed Him, Jesus cares about and meets our physical needs. But the much greater gift that Jesus gives is meeting our spiritual needs.

Langness explains that as a kid, he was painfully aware that he was not enough. “I wasn’t funny enough. I wasn’t brave enough. I wasn’t old enough. I just wasn’t enough.”

You feel it, too. You are not enough. You see

it everywhere: your classmates point out every failure, the media shames any misstep. You look in the mirror and say it without words: I am not enough.

But the I AM is enough, you hear that night. “Jesus is like an all-you-can-eat buffet when you were just asking for a cracker,” says Langness. “Jesus is not just enough. He is more than enough. He satisfies.”

You sense a lightness to your breath now, which comes in a steady rhythm as you head back to your dorm room. A peace descends as you lie in your bunk, debating the word picture of Jesus as the living bread—food that is always enough.

The morning dawns bright and cool, as only mountain air can. After breakfast you head off to the Longhouse where each morning begins with a large group workshop, followed by an elective, and then Bible study.



from his friend Jeremy Holm, Ben explains the range of thoughts and feelings that accompany depression and anxiety. Monseth points to the hope and healing that Christ Jesus can bring.

Thursday’s workshop is led by Wade Mobley, president of AFLC Schools, who tackles the area of gender identity. From faddish ideology to the media, Mobley shows how the culture around us is forwarding the concept of gender as non-binary. As followers of Jesus, he says, you can rely on the biblical revelation about creation—including gender. The physical reality of male and female, he says, isn’t changed by what you think of your own gender. Mobley shows how you can demonstrate genuine compassion for those wrestling with these thoughts and provide truth about God’s good design.

The last workshop on Friday is led by Pastor Jonathan Unverzagt, who encourages you to see life in Christ through the lens of the gospel. Unverzagt highlights the distinction between the law (“do”) and the gospel (“done” in Christ). This vital clarification calls believers to know that you are in Christ by His grace (salvation) and that Christ is in you (sanctification). With this biblical guidance, you are reminded that you pursue your walk of faith empowered by Jesus.

After you navigate the legendary lunch line on Tuesday, you head out for an afternoon of free time. Organized events throughout the week include basketball, volleyball, frisbee and Gaga ball tournaments, as well as a talent show and Articulate, where you can interact with professional artists who talk about their process and encourage you to try different types of media.

That afternoon you head out on a trail with other campers and cross a bridge over Glacier Creek, which rushes with the recently melted snow from an early summer storm. Above you on Eagle Cliff, you see some movement: like wandering sheep, climbers are straying off the path on their way to their own summit.

That evening in the Longhouse, following a time of worship led by Katy Dahl, Pastor Andy Coyle makes a simple comparison based on John 10:11-16—the hired hand vs. the good shepherd, the second metaphor used by Jesus.

In the parable, “the shepherd has the passion, the drive and the commitment to the flock,” says Coyle as he compares the two characters. “The hired hand, it’s just a job.”

Coyle then focuses on the profound declaration made by Jesus, that He is the good shepherd, and gives three lessons to connect to your life. First, “you and I need help,” he says, and you agree silently. “We’re the sheep, and that’s not a complement. ... We’re stubborn. We’re prone to wander. ... We need a good shepherd, because without Him we are easy prey and lost.”

Next, Coyle concludes that hired hands—anything you fear, love, or trust more than

The four morning workshops target common challenges in today’s youth culture. In the first, Dr. Walt Mueller, the president of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding (CPYU), explains how our sinfulness impacts all areas of life including sexuality. God’s design for sexuality in Scripture is clearly good, he says, but our old nature twists it and our culture wants to distract from it. One result is the spread of pornography within youth culture. God’s story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration provides believers a way to think consistently from Scripture about God’s peace in this area.

Wednesday’s workshop is led by Ben Monseth, a licensed marriage and family therapist. Monseth addresses the issue of suicide among today’s American adolescents. The trends are difficult and dangerous, and you know that discussing them is important. With assistance



Videos from the FLY Convention can be found on Vimeo//

vimeo.com/aflcym

Content includes:

- Five evening sessions
- Five highlight videos
- One testimony video



FLY 2019 attendance

- Teens: 1,012
- Staff: 176
- Dorm room leaders: 267
- Children: 52
- Adults: 164

Total: 1,671



Resources

- Center for Parent/Youth Understanding (cpyu.org)
- FLY music on Spotify: Search for: FLY Convention 2019
- FLY on social media
Instagram: @flyconvention
Twitter: @flyconvention
Facebook: facebook.com/FLYconvention



Images in this issue by:

- Ruth Gunderson
- Sophia Rosgaard
- Rachel Parsley



God—can only disappoint you. As examples, he lists image, achievement, money, relationships, approval, materialism, and self, and those thoughts resonate in your heart. “These hired hands, they literally care nothing about you,” he says. “They don’t even know your name.”

But in the last lesson, Coyle says, “Only Jesus can shepherd your heart. In fact, He loves this work. He longs to tend. He longs to gather. He longs to care. He longs to protect. And He longs to carry His children. And because He is God, because He is the Great I AM, He can do it.”

You think about those climbers you saw on Eagle Cliff, and you picture your life without a good shepherd to lead you. You need Him.

The choices are vast for the elective hour each morning, with 45 options ranging from what it means to be a Christian

athlete, to how to manage social media, to other relevant topics such as struggling with perfectionism, depression, or stress.

On Wednesday evening in the Longhouse, Tim Herset teaches on the third metaphor of Jesus, “I am the resurrection and the life,” from John 11:17-43. The Scripture is a compelling retelling of the death and resurrection of Lazarus, a beloved friend of Jesus. But Herset brings out a key point, noting that a span of two days lapsed between when Jesus was told of Lazarus’ sickness and when He went to him.

Why? You wonder. Herset points out that Jesus was with His disciples during those two days. “I highly doubt that it was two days of awkward silence,” says Herset. “He was present.”

It is that presence of Jesus that Herset focuses on as he leads listeners through the story from absence to reunion when Jesus made His way to Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, now dead. “Why does it matter that He is present?” Herset asks. “Two simple words: Jesus wept. ... It’s significant because each of us have a reason for Jesus to enter into our lives and weep with us. ... You might say that Jesus showed up on purpose with a purpose.”

That purpose is twofold, says Herset, who points to Jesus’ words to Martha in verse 40: “Did I not tell you that if you will believe, you will see the glory of God?” God’s glory and our belief, a

simple lesson yet with resounding implications.

Each morning’s Bible study hour is led by Dave and Rennie Garda, who dig into understanding God, the Great I AM. Throughout the week, you go through a series of lessons on what God does, who we are in relationship to Him, and how we can be used by Him as tools for making disciples. (See additional articles in this issue which cover these topics.)

Thursday is youth group day, and as you walk a trail with your friends in adjacent Rocky Mountain National Park, you begin to anticipate tonight’s message on the fourth metaphor: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

That night Pastor Steve Jensen speaks passionately about John 14:6. His simple three-point outline begins with “the way.” He shares about his teen and young adult years when he wasn’t following Christ.

“I’ve seen many, many ways in the world,” he says, speaking of parties with alcohol and drugs, and even an attempt at suicide. “Not once did I ever see in these things the way.”

“There is only one way,” he says, finger raised. “Christ says ‘I am the way.’ One, one way, the only way. The Great I Am. Yahweh. That’s it. One.”

With a growing smile on his face, Jensen says, “The beauty of the truth is that you don’t get to determine if it’s true or not. I love that!”



And our role as followers of Christ, he says, is to speak truth into people's lives. To illustrate, he asks a camper, Micah Holt, to stand up. Just a few rows behind you and to your left you see a tall high school student with shoulder-length brown hair stand with all eyes on him. Jensen tells him that he is created by Christ and loved by Him. It's a poignant moment.

Jensen then challenges you to live in "the life" right now, because God has offered us freedom the moment we are saved by Him. "As soon as belief is sparked and faith is kindled," he says, "life begins. And, oh, that life is powerful!"

Despite the exhausting week, you get up in the dark morning hours on Friday for one last hike up Bible Point. You can tell that you've acclimated a bit to the elevation as you reach the peak, and looking out over the YMCA campus as the sun rises you can't believe that four days ago you were gasping for breath. You hope you remember forever the unspoken words of the mountains and valleys before you.

On Friday night, you join the rest of the camp back in the Longhouse for the final metaphor: "I am the true vine." Pastor Jason Holt enters the stage with arms raised, toting a large boom box over his head. He tells a funny story about visiting a music store with his girlfriend when he mixed her up with another girl. After recounting the

uncomfortable encounter, he asks, "Do you know who you know?" It's an important question which sets the stage for his message on John 15:1-6. Holt brings out three realities from the Scripture. First, Jesus is the start of spiritual life. "The vine is the one that gives life," he says, stopping for a minute to give everyone a chance to look through verse one. "Are you in verse one?" he asks.

No, you answer.

"We want to think that spiritual life starts with us. We're wrong. This is not about us, it's about Him." But verse five, he says, gives us the answer: "Apart from me you can do nothing."

Thankfully, Holt's second point brings relief: Jesus is the Savior of our souls. "The one who says, 'I am the true vine,' is also the one who can make you clean." Last, Holt explains that Jesus is the source for following the Father. In another brief pause, Holt asks everyone to sing whatever they want. The room is filled with loud and raucous sounds before he stops everyone and then leads them in singing a song together: "Jesus Loves Me." The contrast is obvious. "From the craziness of all of us using our own voices and wanting to go our own way, Jesus is inviting us to see Him as the source. And when He is the source, and we're all singing the song of the Savior King, it comes together. ... Do you know who you know?"

After a brief break outside to watch a spectacular sunset, you head back into the Longhouse for one last event, a musician named Micah Tyler is there to lead worship. After a few songs and a skit, he asks, "How will you use the breath that God puts inside you?"

You pause. It seems as though the whole week has been leading up to this moment. You are in awe of the Great I AM, the One who breathed into that fleshy bag of bones giving Adam life. He is the same One who gave you breath, too. And now, at the end of a week of studying about Him, Tyler gives you a challenge that you know the Great I AM is waiting to answer: "Ask God to give you purpose behind the breath that He gives you."

GUNDERSON IS THE MANAGING EDITOR OF *THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR* MAGAZINE.

WHO GOD IS

BY MICHELLE AND PASTOR AARON OLSON

God reveals Himself to Moses in the Book of Genesis. He did it in a very visual and very memorable way. We know the story of Moses at the burning bush (chapter 3); many of us have heard this story for years. As God shows Himself to Moses, Moses responds by asking questions. His first question is, “Who am I ...?” (vs. 11). Interesting first question. Yet most of us have asked the same question at some point. And all of us tend to focus on ourselves—our selfish nature is often displayed. Moses’ second question is, “Who are You ...?” (vs. 13). A much better question in our opinion. God graciously answers by saying, “I AM WHO I AM” (vs. 14).

Who is God? This is arguably the most important question an individual can ask. How a person answers will dictate the course of his or her life. The FLY Convention intentionally addressed this topic with the theme of “I AM.” God graciously shows us who He is throughout Scripture. And He graciously showed us who He is throughout the FLY Convention this year.

Teens (and adults) were exposed time and time again to the Great I AM. On Monday

evening, Jordan Langness began our first evening session together in a bread costume of all things, something I don’t think many of us will forget anytime soon. His message? Jesus is the Bread of Life from John 6. And the week was quickly focused on what really matters—Jesus.

Every night we were able to hear the truth about God’s identity. We got to see I AM as the good shepherd. Pastor Andy Coyle contrasted the difference between the hired hand and the shepherd from John 10. He shared with us how many of us are wandering and the good shepherd longs to gather us to Himself. The Great I AM gladly lays down His life for sheep in order to save them. No hired hand is going to do that.

Tim Herset shared with us I AM as the resurrection and the life from John 11. He taught us how Jesus’ resurrection makes Him present with us, gives us purpose in Him, and empowers us to live a new life.

Pastor Steve Jensen powerfully proclaimed how Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life from John 14:6. He challenged those who were not on the right path to pray with someone about being on the path. He encouraged those on the fence to pick a side. And finally, Pastor Steve encouraged those who are on the path by telling them that they are who Jesus says they are, and that their lives reveal the Great I AM to others.

We closed our week with Pastor Jason Holt asking a question: “Do you know who you know?” Jesus says, “I am the true vine” (John 15:1). Pastor Holt shared with us how Jesus is the start of our spiritual life, He is the savior king that we need, and that He is the source of life and renewal in our lives.

But not only were the evening sessions focused upon I AM, but also the morning Bible studies and many of the morning electives obviously championed the theme of I AM.

Starting that very first morning in our Bible study time, we discovered that I AM is infinite and the creator of all things (beginning in Genesis 1:1), I AM is the finisher and generous (also starting in Genesis 2:1-9), I AM is the one who pursues us and promises salvation (since Genesis 3:8-10, 15), and I AM is love (I John 1). Our instructor said, “God has a name and it means something.” And God wants us to know this name. God goes to great lengths to communicate this name. He even humbles Himself and brings His name to us personally.

Morning electives focused on the Great I AM, as well. Although many topics were offered, getting to know more about I AM in those situations was an underlying theme. In one morning elective entitled, “How to Study Your Bible,” students employed Bible study methods to examine the theme verses for the week from Isaiah 45:5-6, “I am the Lord, and there is no other.” You could not escape facing the question of who God is during this week in the mountains.

Who is God? Who am I? Two of the most important questions a person can ask and needs to answer. And if we want to have abundant life in this world (and the next), we, like Moses, must answer the question, “Who are You?” And the only applicable answer is that the Lord is the Great I AM! We are eternally grateful that we serve a God who wants to be known. We are a part of a fellowship of believers who also values this question and values the lives of hundreds of teens who were given the answer during a week in Estes Park, Colo., this summer at the FLY Convention.

THE OLSONS LIVE IN ARLINGTON, S.D., WHERE PASTOR OLSON SERVES CALVARY FREE LUTHERAN. HE WAS A MEMBER OF THE 2019 FLY COMMITTEE.



WHAT

GOD IS DOING WHAT HE PROMISED TO DO. HE IS NOT DONE. HE IS STILL IN THE ACT OF DOING.

GOD DOES

BY MICHELE SMITH

An AFLC congregation was formed in 1987 and met in the basement of a grocery store in Arlington, S.D. I was a senior in high school that fall when my family became a part of this church plant. I never had a chance to go to a FLY Convention, and I didn't even hear about it until the early 1990s when the atmosphere changed in my home church. The youth of the church were coming back from summer camp and they were on fire for Jesus. Their desire for a relationship with Christ was contagious. I remember many of the songs they taught the congregation and how they shared about how God was working in their lives. I remember the excitement in the congregation as every other year a new group would head to FLY.

I attended my first FLY in 2013 as a staff volunteer. I did not know what to expect, but I have been amazed each trip to see the work God is doing in the lives of our youth and our congregations. I was really struck this year by how many speakers and FLY organizers spoke of the impact FLY had on them. They are a new generation of pastors and youth leaders who were impacted by past FLY Conventions. God started a work in them long ago and is continuing to work through them to bring teens closer to Christ and into a loving relationship with Him.

Isaiah 55:11 says, "... so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

This verse from Isaiah embodies what God has done. He has given us His Holy Word; He has promised His Word will accomplish that which He has purposed; and His Word will succeed where He sends it. God is doing what He promised to do. He is not done. He is still in the act of doing. Many people who don't know God believe the Bible to be an ancient book about things God wants us to do. They see a book of rules and commands no longer relevant today. As Christians we read the Bible and see what God is doing and continues to do for us and through us because of who He is.

Verses 8 and 9 in Isaiah 55 are a great reminder for us to allow God to work in our lives in the way He will guide us: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." He knows better. He always has, and always will.

In faith, AFLC congregations have stepped boldly out of the cultural current to say, "we choose to associate with other churches willing to stand on the inerrancy of the Bible." Some churches—like Calvary Free in Arlington—formed a brand new congregation of like-minded Christians. The church where we now serve, Grace Free Lutheran in Bruce, S.D. (a short hop east from Arlington), was an established congregation that joined the AFLC in 1987. The church in Bruce is celebrating 140 years as a congregation this month. Our "new" building is now 50 years old. Anyone in our congregation would tell you we are not celebrating the land the church is on, the building, or its decorations. We are celebrating what God has done in the lives of our families and in our own hearts, and we are joyfully celebrating what God will continue to do in the years to come. We share with all who enter our church the gift of salvation that God has given us through Jesus.

We continue to encourage our youth to attend the FLY Convention. We send them to play in the mountains. We send them to see the greatest of God's creative powers. We also send them there so that they might be rooted in Scripture, so that might study the Bible and learn who God is and what God can do. We want them to form an everlasting relationship with Him to be His disciples.

I know I missed out on forming friendships at the FLY Convention as a teenager. However, I am encouraged to know I did not miss out on a personal relationship with our Heavenly Father, the Great I AM.

SMITH, GRACE FREE LUTHERAN, BRUCE, S.D., IS A MEMBER OF THE AFLC YOUTH BOARD.

BY ONNIE HIGGINS

I AM

Those two words carry so much weight, so much power. It was a name we heard daily at FLY. As we dug into the Bible and meditated on God's Word, I began to understand the depth of I AM.

I think many teens have a lot of head knowledge when it comes to Jesus and the Bible. We raise our hands in Sunday school. We have the "right" answers. I personally started to realize how much more there is to being a believer when I grew older and began to make my faith my own. Suddenly it wasn't about being the perfect Christian or doing all the right things—it was about having an intimate relationship with God. It was, and still is, a mind-blowing concept for me to grasp. How could a God so vast and powerful know me so infinitely, better than I know myself? How could He want a relationship with such a broken person? Despite hearing all of this, I found myself falling short. I felt as if I wasn't doing enough. I didn't deserve it. Yet He demonstrates His unfailing love for me every day. There's nothing we have to do in order to earn this perfect love. In fact, there's nothing we *can* do. While difficult to accept, this truth is so freeing.

Throughout the many workshops, Bible studies and electives at FLY, more of these truths were driven home. I realized that there is no neutrality, no sitting on the fence. I had two choices: be entirely for God or entirely against Him. Choosing God would mean a radical shift. It's impossible to live for Him wholeheartedly without making significant lifestyle changes. It affects your whole mentality, your whole being. Staying on the narrow path of His will is challenging, lonely, and unpredictable. Yet the peace and fulfillment from being His vessel is well, well worth the hardships.

Being in Colorado, surrounded by the breathtaking mountains, and worshiping with like-minded teens gave me a sense of renewal and direction. I came away with a deeper understanding of who God is, and who we are in Him.

Those two words, I AM, encompass God's entire nature. He is everything we need and more. I don't know about you, but I find that incredibly comforting. We can find rest in His perfect love.

HIGGINS (PICTURED ABOVE WITH HER YOUTH GROUP) IS A MEMBER OF CHRIST IS LORD FREE LUTHERAN, ONALASKA, WIS.



GOD AN



I CAME AWAY WITH A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF WHO GOD IS.



ND ME

BY KALLE KERANEN

During my time at the 2019 FLY Convention, a few things were revealed to me throughout the week. One of the most impactful things was learning that the Great I AM can use anyone and everyone to glorify Him in many different ways.

I was reminded over and over again that He wants my heart, faith, and commitment, but He does not ask for perfection. This is something I struggle with, as I have always been what some would call a “perfectionist.” It can be hard for me to sometimes sit and watch what God is doing in my life when I cannot see the whole picture or how things will play out. But after hearing these things all week at FLY, I went home and my heart has felt at rest. I have not been feeling like I need to be in control of every little thing. And after hearing again and again about how powerful and mighty the I AM is, I am learning to fully trust Him.

I’m not going to lie; it was a lot easier for me to have such big faith and trust when I was at the FLY Convention surrounded by other believers studying His Word than it is to have that same faith and trust here back home when everything

is back to reality and the normal every day. But during the FLY Convention I learned so much and really got a better understanding of who the I AM is. Since I have been home, I have noticed that I have made some changes in my walk and relationship with God. I no longer feel like I need to be in control because I learned that what God has in store is so much bigger and better. I have been remembering to work hard but also that I will never reach perfection. And I have been noticing some of the gifts the Great I AM has given me to use to glorify Him, as well as the gifts and talents of those around me.

I am amazed and in awe at the thought of the most high, all powerful, omnipotent, and creator of all things loving a sinner like me and wanting to use me to bring Him glory. I am forever grateful for the things I learned at the FLY Convention. My prayer is that I will always remember this one thing I was reminded of at the FLY Convention: It’s not the work I am doing, but the work the I AM is doing through me.

KERANEN (ABOVE, CENTER) IS A MEMBER OF HOPE FREE LUTHERAN, ISHPERING, MICH.



ALIEN AMBASSADOR ARTIST

BY PASTOR JASON HOLT

BB. King is well-known as the “King of the Blues” and the late musician had an unexpected term for his guitar: Lucille. For more than half a century, the blues master bestowed the name Lucille on his performance stringed instruments. The “B. B. King 80,” which was a special gift from the American guitar manufacturer Gibson to the artist on his 80th birthday, will be sold at auction this year and is expected to gain a healthy bidding price at around at six figures.

Why would an instrument be worth so much money? The guitar was both created with excellent workmanship and played with exceptional workmanship.

This description parallels the situation of those who are children of God through faith in Jesus. The Creator has both made His creation and redeemed His people, but our great God has also empowered His body through His Spirit. We are reflections of the good creation and we are reflecting His creative acts in this world. Ephesians 2:10 explains the connection: “For we

are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (ESV). The Message translation of this passage reminds us that God does both “the making and saving” as well as inviting us “to join him” in this kingdom work.

For teenagers and adults who are reviewing their time at the FLY Convention, it becomes important to celebrate the Lord Jesus as the “I Am” who was preached about and studied, and then step forward connecting our knowledge of Him to our walk of faith with Him. We correctly discern between knowing Jesus by grace through faith (justification) and following Jesus by His Word through His Spirit (sanctification). Defining these layers are very useful, but accurate information is not the end of the process. The Lord is transforming His people to live in ways that make a kingdom impact.

In *The Culturally Savvy Christian*, author Dick Staub invites today’s believer in Jesus Christ to stress three approaches for living out one’s faith: alien, ambassador, and artist.

The alien approach understands that there will be times of discernment which will lead the Christian to abstain from cultural involvement. At other times, we participate with what he terms “selective acculturation.” Staub suggests that the culturally savvy Christian’s path is “neither the cultural glutton nor the cultural anorexic.”

The ambassador approach notes the awareness of both who we are as Christians and the audience around us in the world. We are ambassadors from the rightful King who will reign forever!

We are very familiar with these first two dynamics in our free and living congregations. Our pietistic heritage invites us to refrain when the culture is against the things of God Almighty, and our confessional Lutheran heritage invites us to link to culture, just as the reformer Martin Luther borrowed a form of music from his day for his hymns. The alien and ambassador mindsets position us for walking through this world, since it is not our final home.

The artist approach may be a title that repels some of us at first. Those who conclude that they do not have the capacity to create are missing out on what Staub calls the “seer and revealer” roles. Distinct from alien and ambassador, an artist approach includes identifying cultural pieces and aiding others by showing their meanings. For instance, each time a teen explains the meaning involved in a piece of modern music or the implications of a popular movie quote, the artist approach is involved. The artist influences both Christians and those outside of faith in Jesus to see what they have not previously noticed or considered.

Using this approach may remind us of how we think about the arts, but this term is not at all limited to the arts. Every Christian can be involved in this approach in arenas including work, school, friendship, hobbies, and community. The artist approach brings us back to a proper view that we are God’s workmanship. Creation and creative. Reflections and reflecting.

From the youngest child to the oldest senior citizen, all believers in Jesus are kingdom workers. Luther indicated that even a child from the cradle can pray for princes and companions. When we realize this reality, it influences our capacity to see ourselves as God’s instruments. No matter your experiences and expertise (or lack of it), you have something to contribute in Christ’s name. Jesus knows your name! The Lord has indicated that you are worthwhile, and the ways in which you contribute by His strength are also equally valuable. You are an instrument of the Savior King.

HOLT, WHO IS A MEMBER OF LIVING HOPE CHURCH, ROGERS, MINN., IS THE DIRECTOR OF AFLC YOUTH MINISTRIES.



FROM THE YOUNGEST CHILD TO THE OLDEST SENIOR CITIZEN, ALL BELIEVERS IN JESUS ARE KINGDOM WORKERS.







FLY
FREE
LUTHERAN
YOUTH

WITH OUR THANKS

BY ANDREW KNEELAND

The purpose of the Free Lutheran Youth Convention is to provide congregations with a tool to: WIN the lost, BUILD the believer, and ENCOURAGE student discipleship in the local congregation.

That is the purpose of the FLY Convention, and it wouldn't have been possible without you. On behalf of the FLY Committee, thank you.

Thank you, students, for spending a week of your busy summer with us in Colorado. We so appreciate your energy and your enthusiasm. It was truly infectious, and we learned a great deal from you all this summer.

Thank you, adults and staff, for serving sacrificially this summer. I am humbled and amazed when I think of the dozens upon dozens of hard-working individuals who gave

up a week of work to be an unpaid volunteer at a youth convention in the Rockies. You brought your work ethic, your expertise, and especially your hearts to FLY this summer, and we on the committee are extremely grateful.

Thank you, speakers and teachers, for clearly and accurately presenting Christ and the cross during your time at the FLY Convention. Your heart for the gospel was clear and your love of our students was evident. You received “less-than-market value” compensation for your dozens of hours of preparation, but know that the spiritual return on your investment is great.

We also thank the national acts who performed during the convention's Late Hour. They entertained us while pointing us to Jesus. We were reminded that it's not a sin to throw your head back and belly laugh. We worshiped God through laughter, chalk art, illusion, and music at FLY, and we learned that our God—the Great I AM—is creative, artistic, and passionate.

We all are very thankful and appreciative to the YMCA of the Rockies. They are excellent hosts and their leadership and workers roll out the red carpet for us each convention. It was a pleasure to work alongside them for two years to make this convention the best it could be.

We especially want to thank you, youth

workers, for your often behind-the-scenes and sometimes under-appreciated ministry to the middle school and high school students in our local congregations. You work tirelessly with our youth, walking them through the culture and matching their questions and problems with God's answers and God's provision.

The FLY Convention isn't meant to be simply a one-week experience. It's not even meant to be an unforgettable event that forever impacts your students. It often is, but that's not the purpose of the FLY Convention. Our purpose is to WIN the lost, BUILD the believer, and ENCOURAGE student discipleship in your local congregation.

The FLY Convention is a great week, but it's not a silver bullet for your youth ministry. Students won't eat unless they're fed, and they won't grow unless they're led. Continue to talk about the Great I AM. Continue to point your students to the cross, continue to encourage them to look at God's world through the lens of God's Word.

Kneeland, a seminary student serving his internship in Salinas, Calif., is the second vice president of the 2019 FLY Committee.

Members reminisce on closing of Saron Lutheran

BY PASTOR ALAN ARNESON

Members of Saron Lutheran Church, Erskine, Minn., held a closing celebration on July 14 with a full sanctuary of people reminiscing on precious memories built over the years. AFLC President Lyndon Korhonen was on hand to bring some edifying comments on the theme from Psalm 100:5, “His faithfulness endures to all generations.”

The first settlers came to the area in 1883. The first area worship gatherings were held in the homes of these settlers. In 1885 community members gathered for their first meeting on June 29. The new congregation was to be called Saron. It is believed the word Saron comes from the phrase, “rose of Sharon,” found in the Song of Solomon. The rose was considered the most perfect of all flowers, and since Jesus is perfect in God’s nature, He is therefore called the rose of Sharon.

Many records of Saron Lutheran were lost in a fire in 1977. Much of the history of the church is recalled from the stories that have been passed on from one generation to another.

At the first organizational meeting two acres of land were donated. One acre was designated for a cemetery and another acre for a church building, which was built in 1889. A pump organ was purchased in the same year. The church’s original bell tower was erected in 1910. The church hall was built in 1933 as a separate structure not attached to the church.

As is the case in many churches, the Ladies Aid played a vital role in the life of the church. The mission work extended far beyond the walls of the congregation. Sunday school was started in 1896 with the Luther League organized in 1915.

In the past, Saron Lutheran would be adorned with three



Members and friends gathered for a final closing service and celebration at Saron Lutheran, Erskine.

evergreen trees each Christmas season. Candles would be lit on the trees during the Christmas program.

“There was a Luther League boy stationed at each Christmas tree with a damp rag on a stick,” stated longtime member Myrtle Hamrum. “If a candle burned down or if a branch on the tree started on fire, it was the Luther Leaguer’s task to snuff it out with the damp rag!”

In 1986 Saron withdrew from the American Lutheran Church when several Lutheran synods merged. Since 1987 Saron has been a part of the AFLC. The congregation was served by several pastors, including Pastor A.N. Skogerboe, who served for 44 years.

Along with my duties at Calvary Free Lutheran, Fosston, Minn., I filled the pulpit at Saron and served the congregation for 14 years. I admire the resilience of the group of about a dozen who have persevered in these last years. They love the Lord, the preaching of the Word, and have been such a joy to minister to.

Arneson serves Calvary Free Lutheran, Fosston, Minn.

Sverdrup Society hosts discussion forum

Members of the Georg Sverdrup Society held a Summer Discussion Forum at Tabor Lutheran near Webster, S.D., on July 27, with Licensed Pastor Mike McCarlson hosting the event. Pastor Martin Horn, president, spoke on Georg Sverdrup’s background and the freedom of the congregation. Pastor Alex Amiot, membership secretary, spoke on the local congregation as the bride of Christ. And Pastor Raynard Huglen, pictured at right, spoke on the experience of serving as a pastor in the Lutheran Free Church and the AFLC. Pastor Huglen served as Tabor’s pastor from 1963-1972. Tim Larson recorded the



event and gave the benediction. For more information, and video of the event, visit georgsverdrupsociety.org.



Nelson installed at Abiding Savior

Pastor Justin Nelson, pictured at right, was installed July 28 at Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president (center) officiating. Nelson serves as family life pastor under Pastor Kirk Flaa (left), who is the senior pastor of the congregation.



WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION

TWO NEW WMF BOARD MEMBERS

Anne Presteng, first vice president

I am member of Bethel Free Lutheran Church in Grafton, N.D. While I was growing up, my family lived in Canada, Minnesota, and Washington. We moved while serving churches as part of my father's (Pastor Richard Snipstead) ministry.

The Lord spoke to me in a special way during a high school Bible study on John 1:14, "The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory." This verse challenged me to believe in Christ in a personal way. He left heaven and died and rose for me!



Anne Presteng

I graduated from the Association Free Lutheran Bible School (AFLBS) in 1975 and married John Presteng. We celebrated 44 years of marriage this August. We have three grown sons and I love being grandma to our 15

grandchildren. I am a retired public-school speech pathologist and now work part time at a clinic in Grafton.

I am so thankful that Christ forgave my sins through giving His life on the cross. Where would I be without his mercy and grace? My heart's desire is to praise him for who He is and what He has done. Our great God is worthy of praise! I love the direction given in Psalm 95:1-3, "O come, let us sing to the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and great King above all gods."

Karen Floan, recording secretary

I was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, and am the oldest of six children. As a pastor's family, we moved from Canada to Greenbush, Minn., then to Ferndale, Wash., and also Minneapolis. It was while in junior high and attending family camp at Lake Geneva Bible Camp that I came to assurance of salvation and claimed I John 1:9 in a personal way: "If **Karen** confesses **her** sins HE is faithful and just to forgive **Karen** her sins and purify **her** from all unrighteousness."



Karen Floan

After graduating from Armstrong High School in Plymouth, Minn., I attended AFLBS and became more fully grounded in my faith. I also met my husband, Wayne Floan. After our marriage in 1974 we moved to the family dairy farm in Fertile, Minn. We were active members at Maple Bay Free Lutheran Church in Mentor. My interests include Norwegian rosemaking, music, gardening, as well as baking treats for coffee times with family and friends. I graduated in 2000 with an information management degree. The Lord called us back to Minneapolis to serve at the AFLC Schools campus. We are members of Grace Free Lutheran Church in Maple Grove, Minn.

We have four grown children, three married, and one of our greatest joys is spending time with our seven grandchildren. A favorite passage of Scripture is from Colossians 3:2-4, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."



Baby grand piano purchased

Members of Calvary Free Lutheran, Fosston, Minn., recently purchased a 2003 Nordiska baby grand piano from a local owner. The like-new worship instrument will be used to the glory of God.



Ken Sortedahl

Kenneth Sortedahl, 85, of Spring Valley, Wis., died July 27, at the Hammond Health Care Center, Hammond, Wis.

Born Feb. 7, 1934, he was the son of Ole and Eva Sortedahl. He married Melodee Lashua in 1963.

He grew up in Moose Lake, Minn., and joined the Navy during the Korean War, serving as a deep sea diver. He earned a private pilot's license, and owned and trained thoroughbred race horses. He authored and published two books. After graduating from the Free Lutheran Seminary, he founded and directed the Peniel Christian Home and School in Spring Valley, Wis. During the 43 years he ran the boarding school, he helped more than 2,000 young people by introducing them to Jesus and shepherding them through troublesome times in their lives.

Surviving are his wife; two sons, Kenneth (Charlotte) Sortedahl, and Joseph (Kimberly) Sortedahl; four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

The service was Aug. 3 at Christ the King Lutheran, Wilson, Wis. Burial was in Running Valley Lutheran Cemetery, rural Colfax, Wis.



Free Lutheran Seminary hosts Summer Institute



Author and Pastor Karl Vaters (above) led a session on revitalizing small church ministry.

With a focus on church planting and small church revitalization, the AFLC Schools hosted the Summer Institute of Theology (SIT) August 5-9 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus.

The featured workshop, "Small AND Significant," was taught by Karl Vaters, author of *Small Church Essentials*. The course focused on the biblical definition of success in ministry, principles of effectiveness, vision-casting, church health, and leadership development in the context of a small church.

AFLC pastors and church planters Andy Coyle and Matthew Ballmann headed up a course on "Principles of Church Planting and Revitalization." The workshop helped students gain a high level view of planting and revitalizing principles.



Pastor Steve Mundfrom, AFLC Schools faculty, led a course on "Ecclesiology and the Fundamental Principles of the AFLC." Because any effort to plant a church needs a clear, biblical vision, this course answered the question, "What is the church?"

Coyle and Ballmann were joined by Pastor Jim Johnson and Dr. James Molstre in: "Challenges and Opportunities," the final session of each day which featured a different teacher and topic, including the call of the church planter, church revitalization, loving your neighbor, and starting a church from scratch.



T

he last time I attended a FLY Convention was 14 years ago. I had the opportunity

to attend three different FLY Conventions in my life, each was a great experience. They were great times of growth and encouragement to be with like-minded believers. I still remember a workshop led by a farmer who had lost his arm. The farmer shared about what had happened and how it was God's provision that saved his life. What a powerful testimony. It made me aware of how mortal we are.

Our lives are not our own. God will call us home when it is time, and if He does not, then He will use the trials we face to help strengthen us, and He will use us for His purpose.

Another blessing of being at the FLY Convention was being able to appreciate the beautiful creation in and around Estes Park, Colo. There is something special about being in the mountains and realizing that God created all of it for

REIGNITING A LOVE FOR GOD

BY HANNAH LEE

everyone to enjoy. It is wonderful to know that creation did not just happen by chance but that our amazing world was made by a Creator who cares for us and all things.

Every year the Free Lutheran churches in Brazil have a youth camp similar to FLY on a smaller scale. This year it was held in Campo Mourão at the *Retiro Fazenda*. This last March my family had the opportunity to attend. Those who attended included not only youth but also some couples and families. What a blessing it was to see people excited to learn and grow closer to God. It reminded me of the excitement of FLY Conventions and camps where God would reignite the fire to live for Him. What a reminder to always live for Christ in our lives.

Romans 12:11 says, "Don't burnout; keep yourselves fueled and aflame." This is a great Word to remember to be in the Word and continue in a life that is on fire for Christ. What a challenge this can be in our daily lives. As a mom

of three, soon to be four, little girls I get tired and things that should be a priority fall to the wayside. But what a difference it makes when I am daily in the Word; it helps me to not only grow closer to God but it also shows my girls the importance of knowing God and dwelling in His presence.

Many of you, I'm sure, can relate. But there are also many distractions that keep us from our devotional time with God. Whether it be work, social engagements, or media distractions, may God help us to set those distractions aside so that we can grow and fellowship with God in our daily lives. May we live lives that are honoring to God and become examples to the world, which is in desperate need of a Savior who truly can save them. God can use anyone and has used many of you to impact Brazil for His kingdom.

Lee and her husband, Pastor John Lee, are AFLC missionaries serving in Campo Mourão, Brazil.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Matthew Pillman was installed as associate pastor on Aug. 25 at Christ the King Free Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn.

Pastor Tom Olson, Golden Valley, N.D., has accepted a call to serve Hope Lutheran, Enderlin, N.D.

Pastor Del Palmer has accepted a call to serve as interim pastor at Triumph Lutheran, Ferndale, Wash. Palmer recently stepped down as director of AFLC World Missions.

Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee have accepted the **Waikiki Beach Gathering**, Hawaii, as a new AFLC congregation. **Brady Arneson**, who serves the church, was added to the licensed pastor roster.

Pastor Phil Rokke has retired, and has stepped down as pastor of Westaker Free Lutheran, Newfolden, Minn., and Hegland Lutheran, Strandquist, Minn.

Members of **Trinity Lutheran**, Paige, Texas, (formerly Bastrop) have changed the name of their congregation to CrossRoads Christian Fellowship

Pastor Patrick Charles, from Missouri City, Texas, has accepted a call to serve Good Shepherd Lutheran, Pleasanton, Texas. **Pastor David Jore**, of Roseville, Minn., has accepted a call to serve Maple Bay Free Lutheran, Mentor, Minn. Members of the Coordinating Committee have added both men to the AFLC fellowship roster.

Members of **Abiding Savior Lutheran**, North Royalton, Ohio, voted to leave the AFLC and join the LCMS.

Pastor Luke Berntson was installed July 21 at Hope and Bethesda Lutheran churches in Northome and Mizpah, Minn., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, president, officiating.

Pastor Rich Ramsbacher will retire in September. Members of Immanuel Lutheran, Springfield, Mo., have called **Pastor Christian Andrews** to serve as interim pastor.



Pastor Ron Pulscher

Pastor Ronald LeRoy Pulscher, 71, of Rapid City, S.D., died July 17 in Rapid City. Born May 16, 1948, in Flandreau, S.D., he was the son of George and Anetta (Tompkins) Pulscher. He married Doris Kasson Aug. 11, 1973.

He grew up in rural Brookings, S.D., and graduated from high school in Volga, S.D. He received a call to the pastoral ministry at the age of 16. Ron attended Miltonvale Wesleyan College, earning a degree in theology in 1970. He served as a youth pastor in Sioux Falls, S.D., and Brookings. After marriage, they served churches in South Dakota, Wyoming, Iowa, Colorado, and Minnesota. He most recently served Pukwana Free Lutheran, Pukwana, S.D., and St. Olaf Lutheran, rural Chamberlain, S.D.

Surviving are his wife; one son, Aaron (July) Pulscher, McPherson, Kan.; one daughter, Ruth (Scott) Franke, Rapid City; four brothers, Wayne Pulscher, Brookings, Robert (Sharon) Pulscher, Palmer, Neb., Jim (Priscilla) Pulscher, Brookings, and Calvin (Tweenee) Pulscher, Aurora, S.D.; one sister, Linda (John) Palmer, Wayzata, Minn.; and three grandchildren.

The service was held July 27 at St. Olaf Lutheran, Chamberlain, S.D. Memorials may be directed to Shiloh Free Lutheran, 11700 JB Road, Black Hawk, SD 57718.

Three men join youth apprenticeship program

The following three people were received into the AFLC Youth Ministries Apprenticeship Program for 2019-2020: Jordan Frandle will serve at Living Word Lutheran, Eagan, Minn., Tyler Richardson will serve at First Lutheran, Ellendale, Minn., and Ignacio Dávalos will serve at Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D. These growing leaders will participate in the 12-month apprenticeship, which began in August, with weekly, monthly, and quarterly required components from AFLC Youth Ministries.

Members elected to 2021 FLY Committee

The 2021 FLY Committee was elected during the last national youth gathering in July. Pastor Gideon Johnson, Kenyon Minn., was elected as the president. Aaron Arneson, Fargo, N.D., was elected as the first vice president. Cassie Moan, Pipestone, Minn., was elected as the second vice president. Julia Pillman, Pipestone, was re-elected as the secretary. Bryce Timmerman, Jamestown, N.D., was elected as the devotional life secretary. The new committee members will choose a treasurer.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-July 31, 2019

FUND	REC'D IN JULY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$28,661	\$251,102	\$254,525
Evangelism	7,891	70,259	62,109
Youth Ministries	10,128	69,190	87,464
Parish Education	10,198	99,455	125,141
Seminary	17,041	151,732	166,611
Bible School	41,838	334,423	348,444
Home Missions	25,434	221,180	234,484
World Missions	23,790	259,039	230,687
Personal Support	52,172	361,644	460,465
TOTALS	\$217,152	\$1,818,025	\$1,969,929

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

JULY MEMORIALS

AFLBS

Ruth Claus
Prudence Hokanson
Nystuen

Home Missions

Esther Nyquist

Vision

Carol Hensrud

AFLTS

Catherine Kordahl

... in honor of

Evangelism

Marcella Rasmussen
David & Ben Temte
Pastor Ron Pulscher

AFLBS

Pastor Wade Mobley

CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

One of the gifts of advancing years can be a long-range perspective, and it's instructive to apply that perspective to youth ministry. Perhaps a few readers may recall a time when the congregations did not engage in any special ministry to youth at all, other than confirmation instruction

(reading for the minister).



Pastor Robert Lee

Public school education ended for many after eighth grade or even earlier, and then you were an adult, expected to go to work. The whole concept of adolescence is fairly new; you were either an adult or a child.

The family night concept was an early effort to provide activities for the youth of a congregation. They were called "Luther Leagues," and officers were elected, sometimes a combination of youth and adults. I recall hearing about the tension in one rural congregation where the office of president had always been held by an adult, when a teen was nominated for president and elected. The summer district Bible camps became an important arm of the congregations in winning and holding their youth for Christ, and district Luther League organizations scheduled area rallies.

The national youth departments of our church bodies provided resources and structure for youth ministry as it developed. The Lutheran Free Church (LFC), parent church of the AFLC, provided leadership training for local and district officers, and the biennial national convention (held for several years at Mission Farms on the shores of Medicine Lake near our current headquarters and campus) was a high point in the spiritual development of many youth. The late Dr. Wilton Bergstrand, leader of the youth department in the Augustana Synod, once visited our campus and spoke of the significance of the leadership training offered in the various Lutheran groups and its role in producing future leaders of local

congregations. He lamented that this has virtually disappeared today.

During the 60s and 70s in the AFLC, the pastor was the youth leader; I am not aware of any of our congregations during those years who hired/called someone to work with the teens. If the pastor was fortunate there might be some parents who would assist him. Personally, I cherish the relationships with teens established during my years as a pastor. A pastor who did not do youth work was a rare exception. A congregational leader once told me about an interview with a prospective pastor who did not feel gifted to work with youth, and he wondered if they should even consider him. Also, congregations in smaller communities customarily had the cooperation of local schools, who usually scheduled a youth night free from organized activities (and sometimes even from homework).

Today efforts to minister to youth have radically changed, just as our world has been transformed. Anyone born after 1997 is not a teenager anymore but a part of Generation Z, or iGen, and there is evidence that parents and grandparents may feel a much greater generation gap than in the past. Any cooperation between the church and local schools has virtually disappeared in most places, and many parents are deeply concerned about the secular world view that seems to be promoted. A home-centered or private school education has become the choice of many Christians. Years ago in my little world, a big family almost always meant Roman Catholic; today it probably means conservative homeschoolers.

Instead of Luther Leagues we have FLY (Free Lutheran Youth) groups. Many of our congregations today have a youth worker/

pastor, full- or part-time, and it seems to me (and I'd be glad to be challenged on this) that parental and pastoral involvement may have decreased. Do the local FLY groups elect officers? Is there training provided for them? Are there still active district youth organizations? I don't know, and it may be that what has worked for previous generations no longer works today.

The most visible project of AFLC youth ministries is surely the biennial FLY Convention at Estes Park, Colo., the photos and reports from which fill this issue of our magazine. The national youth office also plans the FLY Beyond gathering on alternate summers, which attempts to work with local church youth leadership. Both of these events are well-planned and

Our goal is still to win, build, and equip youth for Christ, and we should be reminded that ultimately this is accomplished by the working of the Spirit through the Word ...

attended, as well as incredibly organized and operated, and they are surely a gift to our whole church family.

Changes and challenges ... there's nothing new about either for the Christian, but perhaps the changes may be coming more rapidly and the challenges growing more difficult. Our goal is still to win, build, and equip youth for Christ, and we should be reminded that ultimately this is accomplished by the working of the Spirit through the Word and not by our programs, activities, and events. We are called to give priority to relationships as the truth is taught and modeled, so that the coming generation is prepared for a challenging world.

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

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

something to share

GOING BEYOND GREENER GRASS

BY SARAH NELSON

Recently I enjoyed a meal and conversation with a lifelong friend. We rarely get to see each other, so when we do, we make the most of every moment, catching up on all of the happenings in our lives. As we shared joys, we also shared sorrows. The reality is that for both of us, life has held some very hurtful and trying situations in recent months.

My friend honestly asked, “Why do you think some people seem to go through so many difficulties, while others seem to have picture perfect lives?”

It is a question that I suspect most of us have asked. I know that I have. We can look at another person’s social media posts and photos and come to the conclusion that they are living a golden life free from conflict, pain, or sadness. We can see our church family members with smiles on their

faces, and not see the pain in their eyes.

I told my friend, and at the same time reminded myself, that if we really could see into peoples’ homes, lives, and hearts, we would see that everyone faces pain of some kind. It might be a health challenge, a broken relationship, a hidden addiction, a financial crisis, or any number of items on a long list of situations. Sometimes those who are hurting most are the ones who are most silent about their challenges.

As our conversation continued, we both agreed that the important thing is to realize that we are not the only ones experiencing pain. Everyone around us is in pain in one way or another. Our desire as Christians is to extend patience, kindness, understanding, and grace to others. When we do, jealousy and false perceptions about “everyone else’s perfect lives” quickly disappear.

We are called to “rejoice with those

who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15, ESV). The command is a verb for us to carry out, and not just a feeling. When we truly are happy for others when they are experiencing abundance, we take our eyes off of ourselves and recognize God as the giver of all good things.

The next time we are tempted to turn a shade of green with envy at the good life our neighbors appear to have, let’s be thankful with them for the good in their lives. If we do, we will much more likely be invited into their pain, and then to weep with them when they weep. More than likely, there are people in your life who need you not only to rejoice with them, but also to share in their sorrow. May we be faithful in doing both.

*Nelson is a member of the Badger Creek/
Oiland Lutheran parish, Badger, Minn.*