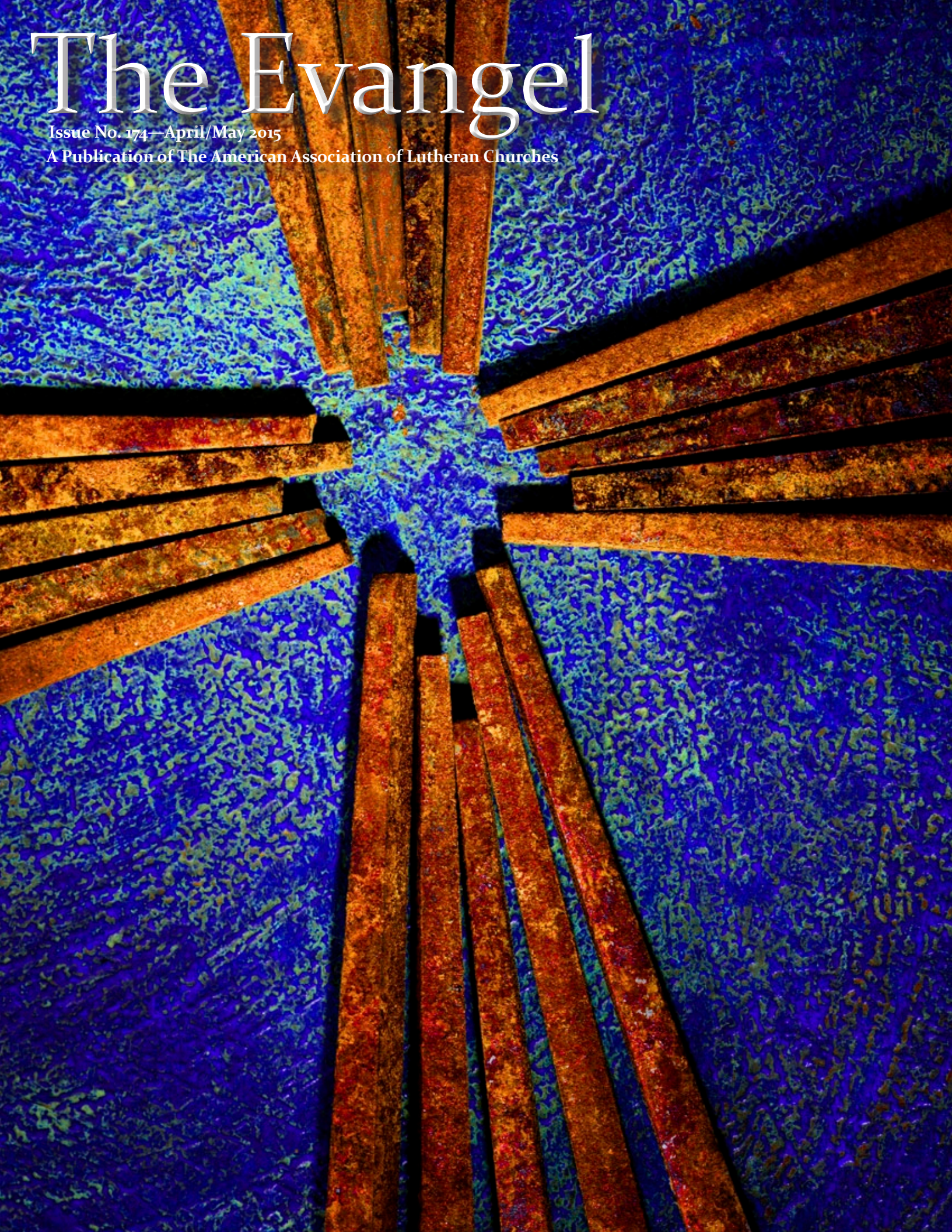


# The Evangel

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# Letter From the Editor

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ! This edition of *The Evangel* comes to you as we await the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord on Easter day. At this time in the church calendar, we participate in a time of reflection and repentance, Lent, to prepare our hearts and minds for Easter morning. The goal of Lent is never to despair over our sin, but rather to reflect on our sin while constantly being reminded that our sins are indeed forgiven. We never have Lent without Easter. Thanks be to God!



Many of our churches have celebrated Sanctity of Life Sunday in the past month as well. Together we mourn the loss of the lives of children, those who have been aborted, and those who have passed prematurely. Though we mourn the evil in our society that has allowed so many children to be aborted, we praise God that He is indeed faithful and ready to forgive. God Himself allowed his own son to be murdered—a gruesome death—in order to bring salvation to all of us. His passion and love for His children is inexhaustible.

As you celebrate with your church families this upcoming Easter season, please keep in mind that your larger church family—the AALC—is interested in what is happening at your churches. Please keep us informed! Send in pictures and short articles to [theevangel@taalc.org](mailto:theevangel@taalc.org).

In Christ's Service,  
Lisa Cooper

# Care for Congregations

by TAALC Presiding Pastor Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins

*“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now” (Philippians 1: 3-5).*

## Visit Every Pastor or Congregation

In much the same way that a new Pastor wants to visit and get to know each family in the congregation, I have wanted to visit and get to know each Pastor and congregational family in The AALC. This month (February 2015), I will be visiting two Pastors and congregations in the state of Washington: Pr. Tim Cartwright of Emmanuel Church, Bremerton and Pr. Steve Smeback of Elim Church in Brush Prairie. Please remember Pr. Smeback in your prayers; he has just had knee replacement surgery. Later in the month of February, I will be traveling to the East Coast with Pr. Dean Stoner, our National Home Mission Developer. We will visit with Pr. Jim Weed and Good Shepherd Church in Sebring, Florida; Christus Victor Church in Fayetteville, N.C.; and Hope Lutheran in Hampton, VA. Also, please remember in your prayers Pr. Dennis Cook who resigned from Christus Victor on Feb. 1 due to health reasons.

If my records are correct, by the end of February, 2015, I will have visited all of our Pastors or congregations except eight. I am planning to visit each of the remaining Pastors or congregations before the end of June this year. If I have missed anyone, please let me know.

Pr. Norm Hoffeld and Bible Lutheran in  
Dodge Center, MN  
Pr. Paul Hueter and Community Lutheran in  
Wausaukee, WI  
Pr. Gary Rokenbrodt and Clam Falls Church  
in Frederic, WI  
Faith Evangelical, Columbus, ND  
Emanuel Church, Kelliher, MN  
New Hope Church, Newfolden, MN  
Trinity Church, Galata, MT  
Shepherd of the Valley, Yuba City, CA

Already, I am receiving invitations for the next cycle of visits. Please know that I am most anxious to see each of you.

## Congregations in the Call Process

When a congregational family loses a Pastor, there is genuine grief. It is an unsettling time. Things that were certain, suddenly are not so sure. The congregation relied upon him to baptize the children, confirm the youth, marry the young adults and bury the beloved elderly. The congregation became accustomed to his style of preaching, teaching, visiting, and leading. Now, the congregation is without his leadership. There are new possibilities for vision and growth. But change, even healthy change, can be upsetting.

Please remember the following congregations in your prayers as they move through this time of transition, seeking new pastoral leadership:

Shepherd of the Valley	Galt, CA
St. Peter's	Elk Grove, CA
Hope	Brighton, IA
American	Mandan, ND
Light of Christ	Williston, ND
Christus Victor	Fayetteville, NC
Sonland	Casa Grande, AZ
Christ the King	Chesterfield, MI
St. Paul's	Napoleon, OH

## Congregations Lacking Regular Pastoral Care

As you may know, one third of our congregations average fewer than 40 persons attending Sunday Worship. Most of these congregations have between 25 and 35 persons. In addition to finding the money to pay for their property and utilities, and their programs and ministries, these small congregations must find resources to pay for a full-time, part-time, or supply Pastor. This can be especially difficult. The congregation may be in a remote area, hours away from the nearest Lutheran Supply Pastor or Emeritus Pastor. To make matters worse, some of our congregations are extremely small, with 10 or fewer persons. They may be struggling to keep the doors open with little hope of being able to provide a Pastor's salary or even a stipend for a Supply Pastor.

*(Continued on Page 4)*

*(Continued from Page 3)*

The National Office of The AALC has compiled a list of our congregations in immediate need. We are committed to providing regular Word and Sacrament Ministry to each and every congregation in our Association. Pr. Dean Stoner, National Home Mission Developer, is working in concert with the Regional Pastors, to bring material and pastoral resources to each congregation. In some congregations, lay leaders are reading sermons that have been prepared by our rostered AALC clergy. In other places, congregations are playing audio or video sermons of AALC pastors. Of course, our desire is to provide a Pastor “in person” as often as possible. But, through this technology, we may be able to provide hymns, liturgy, and sermon for congregations without a Pastor.

Also, we are working to provide the Sacrament of the Altar to each of these congregations. This may require that several of our Pastors serve a remote congregation, taking turns as they visit and celebrate the Lord’s Supper. The National Office is exploring creative ways to provide Word and Sacrament for each of our AALC congregations.

### **God’s Hand of Blessing**

There are several things that Our Heavenly Father is doing right now that bring us encouragement and excitement:

**Seminary Students:** God is bringing many new students to our seminary. In the last three weeks alone, I have spoken with five men about a future vocation as an AALC Pastor. President Rich Shields reports that currently we have approximately 20 men in our seminary! This is extraordinary! God has done this. These men will serve our existing congregations and pioneer new ones in the years ahead. God Himself is giving us a hope and future. But, this is not the time to stop praying. Please continue to pray for 50 men in 5 years. Ask God to provide what is needed so that our beloved AALC will carry the Word of God to generations yet unborn.

**Financial Support:** Our latest reports show that God’s grace and your generosity are supplying new life and ministry across The AALC. Dr. Dan Kruger, AALC Treasurer, reports that congregational giving and individual gifts are faithful and strong. Financial resources have been committed to our seminarians, student Pastors, and congregations in special need. But, this is not a time to slow or stop faithful financial support. The needs of our churches are real and the need of our world is enormous. Please continue your faithful financial support. I challenge every Pastor to join me in giving 10% to his congregation. I challenge each congregation to give 10% to the National Church!

**Our Heritage:** 27 years ago, our Founding Fathers took some courageous steps. Led by God, they faithfully declared their belief in the infallibility of Holy Scripture, and their subscription to the Lutheran Confessions because the Confessions provide a true interpretation of the Word of God. Under God’s guidance, the Founding Fathers formed our Church body, The AALC. This is our heritage. But, the authority of Holy Scripture and the truth of the Lutheran Confessions are no less true or necessary today. In fact, I believe that today they are even more needful and essential. Another of our strengths is that we are a small and committed family of faith. We are diverse in background but united in our commitment to God’s Word and one another. Finally, we have a history of looking beyond ourselves to carry Christ to the world. We gladly serve our communities and faithfully serve the world in the Name of Christ.

The task ahead for The AALC is to “Keep the Fort and Take the Frontier.” That is to say, we must maintain and strengthen each Pastor and congregational “fort” in our Association. Also, we must extend the Kingdom of God beyond ourselves to the community, country, and world-wide “frontier” beyond our congregations. We will do this because God’s Hand of Blessing is upon us. We will do this because that is the work of the Living Christ resident within us. We will do this because it was for this time that we have been Called by God to serve Him, care for His people, and carry the Gospel.

*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (I Peter 29).*



# Our Partnership in the Seminary

By Rev. Richard P. Shields, President

It is easy to segregate the seminary from all other aspects of the Church. Yet, our seminary is an integral part of The AALC. Dr. Leins, Pastor Stoner, Pastor Benson, and I work closely on all aspects of the seminary relative to the church at large. The Commission on Higher Education (CHE) meets regularly to review and assist the seminary in many ways.

## Faculty

Currently we have three professors: the Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, the Rev. Dr. Craig Henningfield, and myself. Dr. Leins specializes in History classes and Worship, with an occasional class on the Confessions. Dr. Henningfield specializes in Missions, Preaching, Confessions, and as needed, Old Testament. I specialize in New Testament, selected practical courses and Systematics. Seminarian Dave Spotts teaches Greek in the summer for our students; he has been teaching Greek and Latin online for 20 years. This spring, Dr. Adam Francisco (of Concordia Irvine) will teach Apologetics, and after that teach some History classes to complement Dr. Leins.

## CHE

The Commission on Higher Education includes five elected people, three pastors (Pastor Len Brokenshire, Pastor Chris Schroder, Pastor Dan Dapelo) and two lay people (Emily Gerken [Chair] and Deborah Rokenbrodt), plus the Assistant Presiding Pastor, Pastor Roger Twito, and myself as President.

Currently the CHE members are taking on a major project: rewriting the Seminary Handbook. The Seminary has changed from an on-campus seminary (first in Minneapolis, now Fort Wayne) to include the online Seminary program. Thus, many of the sections that applied to on-campus studies did not apply to the online seminary. The rewriting of the Handbook includes all degree programs and the special needs of both on-campus and online peculiarities.

## Pastors and Congregations

One of the joys of serving as Seminary President is to see the Pastors and congregations of The AALC not only support the Seminary, but to see them actively recruiting men to consider the pastoral route to service. Dr. Leins, Pastor Stoner, and I have visited congregations to engage men considering pastoral ministry. Even more we have made many phone calls establishing connections.

Pastors and members in the congregations are critical in opening the path to such contacts. If you know someone who is contemplating such service, email or call one of us. The others will pass the name and information on to me.

## Men Considering Seminary

If you have given some thought about pastoral ministry, you can do several things. Call or email me so we can discuss. If you are still in college, consider taking courses that will help. Courses in history, philosophy, logic, writing all benefit you for preparing for seminary. One thing to keep in mind: our classes are not the same as college level classes; that is, we teach at the master's degree level. Thus, a course in Biblical studies at the college level is great for background, but they cannot substitute for the seminary courses.

## Status and Plans

Currently we have 17 students in courses, two students who have taken a leave of absence. That is exciting! But further, we have 10 seriously considering entering the seminary in the next 6-9 months. Thus, the future of seminary is looking better.

If we work together, encouraging current students, speaking to future students, and supporting them financially and in prayer, then God will continue to prepare men for serving as pastors in our congregations and in future mission plants.

To all of you, thank you!

# The Three Values of The AALC

by The Rev. Dean A. Stoner

As a church body, we are *confessional*, we are *relational*, and we are *missional*. This is who we are. We are a group of individual congregations *confessing* that we “believe in the words of Scripture to be the inspired Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice,” affirming “without reservation the doctrines explained in the *Book of Concord*.”

This is our confession.

We are also *relational*, which means that as The AALC we value our relationships with each other. It means that everyone is important, that as a community of 64 congregations we walk with each other, appreciating and using the many different gifts God has given to us. If we are *relational*, we care for each other.

We are *missional*, always keeping in mind our Lord’s command to “go make disciples” (Matthew 28:19-20). We do this by baptizing in the name of our Triune God, teaching all that our Lord Jesus has commanded. Jerram Barrs in his book, *The Heart of Evangelism*, said “God is the great evangelist.” We must understand that our calling as the Body of Christ is always to be pointed outward, looking onto the mission field and engaging the world where they are and where the Holy Spirit provides opportunity. It is only through God’s help that we will remain faithful to Christ’s mandate to make disciples.

These are the common threads that bind us together as The AALC. Because we are *confessional*, *relational*, and *missional*, we ultimately have the same goals and interests. If we are *confessional*, do we not hold fast to a common faith? If we are *relational*, are we not called to walk together? If we are *missional*, are we not compelled to look beyond ourselves to those who do not know Christ?

What does all this mean? It means that our congregations must build, or in some cases, re-build relationships with one another. Every congregation is priceless, playing a unique role in the Body of Christ. Not one will stand alone, set apart either by choice or by omission, but rather supported by the entire Church family of The AALC. It is vital that we, as the congregations of The AALC, know *each other*, sharing our challenges and struggles, as well as our joys and victories in Christ. We are not of ourselves, but rather a community of 64 congregations in relationship with one another.

Just recently, one of our smaller congregations conveyed how difficult this winter has been in that their heating bills for the church far outweighed their giving. Such financial challenges led their leadership to question whether to continue operating. However, once this need was expressed to another of our congregations, that faith community immediately stepped in with a financial gift to end this worry. But this story is not alone. Many congregations of The AALC have helped one another in times of need. Perhaps our relationship with each other is our greatest gift. The generosity of our AALC congregations exemplifies the faithfulness that our God does indeed provide.

Such things do not happen, however, without on-going communication and being in true fellowship. The fact is we cannot communicate too much. Building, nurturing, and establishing relationships within our Association is vital to our ministries, but that requires effort and diligence. So, let us talk to each other, love each other, lift up each other in prayer and in deed.

These three values guide and give direction to the Revitalization Workshops provided across The AALC. Here our aim is to provide opportunities for our congregations to discover their identity within their specific communities, inventory those gifts God has placed within the individual congregations, and then see how to put those gifts into action in order to meet the needs of the local areas. For we are more than just an association of congregations, we are the people of God, knitted together and called out to the mission of making disciples. These must be the guiding principles by which every decision of the local congregation is made.

Perhaps most of all, each of these values, what we confess, how we relate, and our work of mission outreach must be understood as being inseparably linked. By seeing that all of our ministries within each individual congregation are also a part of the whole of The AALC, we can better communicate to the world around us what we value most. Integrating, collaborating, these things should not threaten us. They must be an integral part of what we do, not giving up our individual identities, but rather expanding them in new and creative ways in partnership with one another.



# LUTHER'S LENTEN OBSERVANCE

by The Rev. Dr. Curtis E. Leins

Luther's Lenten observance included disciplined attention to the confession of sins, prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Creed. It is true that these subjects always received Luther's careful study, but during the Season of Lent his spiritual attention was even more pointedly focused.

Luther's personal spiritual discipline included extended periods of prayer. He not only recited the Ten Commandments, he prayed them. Luther not only recited the Creed, but prayed it as well. Each served as a mirror for confessing sins. Of course, The Lord's Prayer served as a primary component of his life of prayer and meditation. Yet, Luther was quick to point out that prayer should come freely from the heart. As he writes in his Lenten postil of 1523:

"You will never pray well from a book. You may certainly read it and learn how and what you should pray for, and it may kindle the desire in you. But prayer must come freely from the heart, without any made-up or prescribed words, and it must itself form the words that are burning in the heart."



Luther determined to provide devotional instruction for his congregation, and in 1522 published a *Personal Prayer Book*. It is very interesting to note that though it contained the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Creed, the *Personal Prayer Book* did not contain even one of Luther's own prayers. It included instruction on personal praying and guidelines for the confession of sins.

The *Personal Prayer Book* was extremely popular, requiring some 35 editions in Luther's lifetime. Editions soon included the texts of eight psalms with suggested prayer themes, as well as the Epistle to the Romans, I and II Timothy, I and II Peter, Jude and Luther's Sermon on *Contemplating the Holy Suffering of Christ*.

The church at Wittenberg provided two worship services each weekday, Monday through Saturday. Sunday included three Services of Worship. During Lent, Luther preached on the Catechism on Monday and Tuesday mornings, Epistles on Thursday and Friday mornings, the Gospel of Matthew on Wednesday mornings, and the Gospel of John on Saturday mornings. Vespers on weekday afternoons included Psalms, lessons, and prayers. Sundays included sermons on the Epistles at 6 a.m., the Gospels at 8 or 9 a.m., and Vespers in the afternoon included a sermon on the Old Testament lesson. Though Luther was not the only preacher, he was the primary one.

In this way, Luther preached through the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer each Lenten Season. He finished with the Sacraments by Holy Week. Each component served as a mirror for confession of sins and preparation for the passionate sacrifice of Our Lord. Also, Luther preached through the passion narratives in the Gospels, and related passages in the Epistles, Psalms, and Old Testament.

In short, Luther focused his attention and that of his congregation on the Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer, and Sacraments each Lent. This practice was established in his preaching and study regimen years before he published the Large and Small Catechisms (1529). The careful prayer, meditation and proclamation of each of these components provided Luther and his congregation with contrite confession and penitential preparation for the holy and passionate sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Perhaps, a return to the prayerful study and preaching of these catechetical texts would help to prepare our hearts for a Lenten journey to the Cross of Christ.



# The Wittenberg Door Ministry:

## An Interview with Pastor Dave Spotts

### **Tell me about your background.**

I was brought up in a family that did not honor Christ in any way. As I was growing up everyone kept pointing to “the answers within” or doing “what feels right.” The problem was, when looking within there were no answers. Nothing felt right. If our source of authority and judgment is within ourselves we are headed for disappointment. It wasn’t until I became a Christian that I found a sense of purpose. Through God’s Word working in my life I could finally see what was good and pleasing to the Lord.

My Christian life started in an emotion-driven environment. A lot of churches are that way today. It wasn’t all that different from what I had left as an unbeliever. We confessed that the Scripture was what we needed, but we didn’t live like it. We still looked for answers within ourselves. It was not until many years later, when I was introduced to the extra nos (outside of us) quality of the sacramental Christian life that I saw how true it was to confess that Jesus in his Word gives us hope and help for all of life.

### **What are your desires in ministry?**

I was first interested and involved in college campus ministry in the early 1980s. College students are facing a number of special challenges. They are supposed to be among the smartest and most promising people around. Yet they are surrounded by others who are very much like them. You don’t have to look far on a University campus to find people who are smarter, more energetic, and better connected than you are. It’s downright discouraging. Without Jesus and his Word we are left to work out all life’s challenges ourselves, but we don’t have the resources we need. My desire is to bring Jesus and his Word to people who are busy being confronted by their own inability. By bringing a sacramental understanding of the means of grace—Word and Sacrament—we are able to equip others, young and old alike, with the solid foundation they need in their lives. We want to bring Jesus to the community, in good times, in bad times, no matter the need, we know Jesus is the one who can meet that need.

### **Why is higher education important to Christians?**

A pastor once asked me about studies I was engaged in. He then shortly told me, “You need to be careful. If you study too much you might jeopardize your Christian walk.” Sadly, many Christians don’t think there is a place

for a deeply Christian person engaged in higher education, in research, in the arts or sciences. Yet if we look at Western history right down the line it has been Christians who have taken the lead in science, art, literature, politics, and humanitarian work. Pursuing a godly vocation leads many Christians to some challenging areas of study. In the history of Lutheranism this has been especially clear. In the 1500s Philip Melancthon, with some influence by Martin Luther, changed the course of the University system throughout Europe. Universities became places to engage in cutting-edge research and studies of the roots of all manner of arts and sciences. This happened precisely because Christians have always considered learning to be very important. We can do a whole lot more to change our world for good if we are in positions of respect and influence.

This doesn’t mean that there is anything bad about vocations which don’t require advanced education. Those are noble and pleasing to God. Yet the sphere of influence is different in different vocations. We need to be very hesitant to abandon those vocations which the Lord has blessed.

### **Should Christian kids go to secular Universities?**

This is an excellent question. I’m glad you asked it. The Bible doesn’t say anything about where someone will receive training, except that in all of it we should surround ourselves with godly people. Here’s where I’d go with it. The more advanced and specialized your training, the more you want to look at the people who will be training you. When I was at the start of my college education it was not unusual to have a class of 300 people in a lecture hall. By the time I was a senior, it was not unusual to have a class of 20 people in a lecture hall. As I worked on my more advanced degrees it became odd to have more than about five people in a class. We worked with senior professors who were among the best in their field. I have had opportunities to take classes with world class scholars in oral tradition, numismatics, philosophy, and literary criticism. I would not have found those people in another setting. We do well when we encourage young people to pursue learning in discussion with the best of the best, whether in a Christian institution or a secular institution.

### **Why did you call the ministry Wittenberg Door?**

We all know the story of Martin Luther putting a big long notice on the door of the Wittenberg castle church in 1517. What we sometimes forget is that the door of the





church was typically used as a notice board. it was the place where people would post announcements, needs, calls to prayer, and calls for debate. Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry strives to have the same spirit. If it needs discussion, if it needs prayer, if it needs care, we are ready to respond. Martin Luther called his opponents to discuss current issues with him. We are also willing to sit down with our opponents and trust that God's Word will stand and bring clarity to the hurts and concerns of our world.

### **What is happening on your campus?**

Just now we are in the exploratory phase of starting the campus ministry. Picture construction of a large building. It seems for long periods of time as if nothing is happening. Maybe there's a concept, but it takes a while to prepare a blueprint, get the building site, and make sure it has everything needed. Then someone digs a big hole, puts gravel in it, and waits approximately forever. That's where we are. We have some plans. We are working on permissions to engage in meaningful campus ministry using University facilities and their publicity network. We are meeting with various leaders of different departments and organizations on the campus. We have done a little experimental work with a presentation and a worship service on campus, seeking out effective means of contact and ministry. It's going to take some time. Yet we are learning how to reach into the University of Missouri-Columbia community to bring Jesus and his answers to a community desperately in need of the good news of the Gospel.

### **When will you be establishing a church?**

This question comes up a lot. Currently there are six Lutheran congregations in the city of Columbia. Five of them are fairly closely in line with The American Association of Lutheran Churches—subscribing wholeheartedly to Scripture and the Lutheran confessions. These congregations all have empty seats on Sundays. They are already present as intergenerational, fully-functioning places

where Law and Gospel are preached and the Sacraments are rightly administered. We are reaching to a community in constant flux. The student body tends to have a nearly complete change every five or six years. The faculty, staff, and administration are more stable. Because of the high rate of turnover in the University community and because there are faithful congregations in close proximity we are not currently trying to plant a church congregation. Instead, we would like to see people from the campus ministry graduate, move to different places around the world, and be well equipped to involve themselves in their local congregations. Our hope and prayer is that many will find their way to The AALC congregations, that The AALC will be planting more congregations in this country and around the world, and that students we have contact with can take a hand in that work of the Gospel.

### **How do you want people to pray?**

Yes, please pray. Pray that the Lord will give us many opportunities to bring the Gospel to this highly diverse, international community. Pray that the Lord will bring people from many of the over 100 nations represented on the University of Missouri-Columbia campus to Christ and then will send them back to their native lands bearing the Gospel. Pray that administration, faculty, and staff will have minds and hearts that are open to the Gospel, rather than thinking that any mention of Christ is closed-minded and hateful. Pray for students who are in need—discouraged, unhealthy, lonely, and hurting—that they may find through Christ and his Word all the riches of grace and mercy they need. Pray that I would guard my life and doctrine well, ministering without flinching in the face of opposition. Pray for your local congregations and pastors as well as those in other communities, that they may be filled with all the Lord would bring them. Pray that the Lord will give opportunities in your very community to love and serve your neighbors in Jesus' name.



# Three Post-Conversion Conversions

by The Rev. Nathan Hoff

“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him” (Colossians 2:6, ESV).

“When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said ‘Repent,’ He called for the entire life of believers to be one of penitence” (1st of the 95 Thesis by Dr. Martin Luther).

The whole Christian life begins with an explosive, overwhelming flood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’s love washing, claiming, promising, and forgiving self-oriented sinners. I should know, that gracious God found me and made me His own. Now I “believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children” (*Luther’s Small Catechism*, Introduction to the Lord’s Prayer).

It would be no addition to say, “As you received Christ Jesus the Lord by faith, so walk in him by faith.” Many Christians have a faith-based belief about their conversion, but a works-based belief about their walk. After our conversion, there is more conversion, and after that more conversion. Indeed, the entire life of the believer is to be one of repentance. Let me share three of my post-conversion conversions.

**Prayer.** Initially I thought prayer started with my mouth, now I know it starts with my ears, or better, God’s mouth.

Prayer is a great struggle when I try to speak first. What should I talk about? I wonder if my agenda is His? When God speaks first, however, then I know I can pray His will. I’m not talking about conjuring up what God might be saying. “The richness of the word of God ought to determine our prayer, not the poverty of our heart” (*Psalms: the Prayer Book of the Bible*, Bonhoeffer, 15). Eugene Peterson says “Prayer is answering speech” (*Working the Angles*, 47).

I no longer start with my own words, but with God’s word. The core for me is the Moravian Daily Text (which you can find at [www.Moravian.org](http://www.Moravian.org)). Today God broke into my life and converted me again! He said to me, “In your presence there is fullness of joy, in your right hand are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11). God’s word is all initiation, and my word is all response. I respond, “Thank you Lord for Your presence, for there I find full joy. Please forgive me for looking for ultimate joy in other people, places or things. Please help my loved ones delight in you. Today, I plan to recognize how good the good news is, in Jesus’ name.”

This form of prayer follows the TRIP method for which you can find a video tutorial at this website: <http://trinitypastor.blogspot.com/2012/06/how-to-hear-and-pray-daily.html>

**Worship.** Initially I thought worship was primarily our service for God, but now I know Jesus didn’t and doesn’t come “to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

The headings in my bulletin used to say things like: We come into God’s presence, We confess our sins to God, We hear His word, We offer ourselves to the Lord, We prepare to receive the Lord’s Supper, We are sent to go and serve the Lord. They all started with “We” which is a corporate way of saying “Me, Myself, I.” These statements are not untrue, but there is a deeper truth at work in worship. Peter was insistent that





he should wash Jesus' feet, but Jesus' agenda was different. It sounded so pious and generous at the beginning of my life of belief to want to do something for God, but it turns out, His agenda is different. Instead of magnifying my generosity toward Him, He desires to magnify His generosity toward me and toward you. So, God is most glorified in us, when we receive and believe His promises.

So now instead of starting with "We" or "Me," I recognize that "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8) and "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19) and "Love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (John 13:34).

Bible. Initially I thought the Bible was primarily something to interpret correctly, now I know it correctly interprets me.

Certainly the Bible is revelation about God and words about God, but more importantly it is the Word from God! Steven Paulson says, "Mere words about God will be of a quite different sort and function than words from God" (*The Captivation of the Will*, 26). So what it says is more important than what I say about it. What does it say? From nearly the beginning to nearly the ending, the Bible correctly interprets me as profound idolater. I am prone to hear the serpent's whisper and believe his lies, trusting myself more than God, like Eve and Adam. I am prone to care more about myself than my brother like Cain. I am prone to assimilate to my host culture like the churches in Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira (Revelation 2). I am prone to complacency like the churches in Sardis and Laodicea (Revelation 3). God's word correctly points out my (and the church's) profound brokenness. This is God's word of law that always says "do" and is never done, revealing clearly my longing and neediness for a finished work.

Here it comes! Because right in the middle of the darkest night, into our deepest shame and despair, while we were yet sinners, "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4-5). "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). It is clear that the Word comes to us! Jesus comes, Word incarnate. Interpret this! "For you, for the forgiveness of sins." "For you, not against you." "Nothing can separate you from God's love in Christ Jesus." The Gospel is, then, not something to pick at or pick apart, but something that speaks clearly to you, beloved son, beloved daughter: "though deeply broken, I love you even more deeply."

Are you converted? Are you being converted?

*Nathan Hoff, pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in San Pedro, California and instructor at Canadian Lutheran Bible Institute in Camrose, Alberta.*

*\*This article first appeared in the September/October 2013 issue of Connections magazine. Reprinted with permission.*

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# Hope Lutheran Church's Annual Valentine Dinner

by Karla Rebling

Approximately 60 family, friends and neighbors of Hope Lutheran Church gathered together on the evening of February 13th for our annual Valentine Dinner. The candlelight dinner featured Chef Raeanna Crile, assisted by Chef Seth Simmons. Both are students in the Culinary Arts program at Indian Hills Community College.

Adam and Carrie Rebling, youth sponsors, helped coordinate the evening's set-up and activities. Several youth and young adults also helped. The free-will offering is to help fund the youth's AALC National Convention, this summer, in Colorado.



Adam Rebling opened the evening with prayer and then turned it over to Chef Raeanna, who announced and described each course we would be served for the evening. Each course was cre-



atively presented as well as quite delectable! The men served the ladies meals at each table, while the youth served drinks throughout the evening.

The first course consisted of: Cheesy Broccoli Soup, a salad of Mixed Greens with Lemon Vinaigrette, and Honey Buns with Honey Butter. The main Entrée was Stuffed Chicken with a Lasagna Roll and for dessert we had Raspberry Chocolate Mousse Cake.

The enjoyable evening concluded with the musical, guitar talents of brothers, Adam and Alex Rebling, who serenaded the audience with various genres of "Love Songs."

## The American Lutheran Theological Journal

The second edition of the American Lutheran Theological Journal (ALTJ) is now available! This publication is the second of many to come out of the American Lutheran Theological Seminary (ALTS), and seeks to speak into the larger theological context of Lutheranism. With both Rev. Shields and Rev. Jordan Cooper working as editors of this publication, this scholarly journal provides articles written by other TAALC pastors and seminarians.

The theme of this second journal is *The Two Kinds of Righteousness*: our passive righteousness before God in Christ, and our active righteousness in love toward our neighbor. Articles in this edition are written by: Rev. Jordan Cooper, Rev. Michael Badenhop, Lisa Cooper, Rev. Mark Surburg, and Dr. Eric Phillips, along with a sermon by Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins.

This publication brings The American Association of Lutheran Churches into discussion with other confessional Lutheran church bodies regarding the doctrines of Holy Scripture, and will hopefully be a blessing to you as well.

Please visit [www.JustandSinner.com](http://www.JustandSinner.com) and click the "Publications" tab to order your copy.



# Christian Martyrs

by The Rev. Jordan Cooper

We have all heard a lot about the radical Islamic group ISIS in recent months. This group of angry and militant Muslims has taken to murdering several groups of people, including Muslims who they disagree with, and Christians. Recently there were twenty one Christian men who were taken captive from their homes in Syria, and they were subsequently beheaded. The terrorists filmed this event and posted it online for all to see. In the video, you can see these men crying out to Jesus Christ as they face their deaths.

The idea of martyrdom is one that horrifies us. We struggle with anger and frustration over the fact that our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world are suffering because of their confession of faith. It might be the case that we too have to suffer ridicule or bias because of what we believe, even though we do not face persecution in such a blatant way. Sometimes we can get rather discouraged, thinking that radical Islam has won a military victory over Christianity as we see faithful people losing their lives to men in black masks crying out the name of Allah. Yet we must remember that the victory belongs to Jesus.

The worst thing that ISIS or any other terrorist group can do is destroy someone's body. This may seem, to them, like they have defeated God's people. Yet, it is through death that God actually wins. When God's people are killed, they pass from death to life. They are received into God's heavenly kingdom with all the saints. No one can defeat Christians. More than that, these people's deaths serve as a testimony for generations. The twenty one Coptic martyrs are now permanently on the calendar of the Coptic Church. Egyptian Christians will commemorate these men for generations to come, as their deaths serve as a testament to their great faith.

The ultimate victory also came through the death of a man. The end of Jesus' life sure didn't look like a victory from a human perspective. It looked as if Satan had defeated him. Yet, what looked like a defeat was ultimately the greatest victory. Through death, Jesus won life for the entire world! As we hear about Christians getting killed throughout the world, let us not get discouraged, but instead let us praise God for the testimony of his saints, and await the day when we too will receive true life when our bodies die.

## Prayer Requests

The Prayer Request Bookmark was suggested by the Evangelism Committee as a way to encourage prayer within TAALC population for certain people, churches, or other Christian concerns worldwide.

**April:**

***Please pray for:***

1. Your local AALC church
2. Rev. Leins, Presiding Pastor
3. The future of our seminary
4. The AALC Foundation
5. Unity in the Church
6. Pastors and church workers
7. The persecuted church
8. Your local AALC church
9. Rev. Twito, Assistant to the Presiding Pastor
10. Rev. Shields, seminary president
11. The Commission for Higher Education
12. Unity in the Church
13. Pastors and church workers
14. The Wittenberg Door Ministry
15. Your local AALC church
16. Rev. Irvin Stapf, Secretary
17. Our seminarians
18. Commission on Doctrine & Church Relations
19. Unity in the Church
20. Pastors and church workers
21. The persecuted church
22. Your local AALC church
23. Rev. Dean Stoner, Mission Developer
24. Christian Martyrs
25. The families of Christian martyrs
26. Unity in the Church
27. Pastors and church workers
28. The persecuted church
29. Your local AALC church
30. Regional Mission Developers

## May

### *Please pray for:*

1. Thank God for all of the saints who have gone before us
2. Unity in the Church
3. Pastors and church workers
4. The persecuted church
5. Your local AALC church
6. Dr. Dan Kruger, Treasurer
7. The future of our seminary
8. Board of Appeals and Adjudication
9. Unity in the Church
10. Pastors and church workers
11. The persecuted church
12. Your local AALC church
13. The online ministries associated with the AALC
14. Our seminarians
15. The Clergy Commission
16. Unity in the Church
17. Pastors and church workers
18. The persecuted church
19. Your local AALC church
20. Pr. Gary Benson, Administrator
21. Our seminary professors
22. The Commission for Commissioned Church Workers
23. Unity in the Church
24. Pastors and church workers
25. The persecuted church
26. Your local AALC church
27. Mrs. Bonnie Ohlrich, Secretary/Coordinator
28. That God would raise up church leaders
29. The Commission for Evangelism
30. Unity in the Church
31. Christine Stumpf's ministry in the Philippines

## Ministry in the Philippines

*By Christine Stumpf*

Sometimes when you least expect it God gives you an opportunity to be his hands and feet in a place you never expected. My name is Christine Stumpf. I am a corporate trainer, and travel is part of my job. When I was first asked to travel to the Philippines, I had no idea what lay ahead. The Lord really does work in mysterious ways!

I was given an opportunity to train a class in Manila. This left my husband and four children home alone for 6 weeks during the busy Easter season. When I arrived in Manila, work had scheduled a driver to take me to and from the office each day. The first week, the driver, Rodel, and I tried to converse during the 45 minute commute. I had not learned Filipino, and his English was limited, but we attempted to make small talk. About a week later I began to feel alone and out of place. On the way to work the day a new Pope had been appointed for the Catholic Church, I asked Rodel about the event (I had learned that the Philippines is predominantly Catholic). He said he wasn't Catholic, but he is a Christian. We started talking about Jesus and the Bible, and our language barrier wasn't an issue any longer. After that our trips would commonly include praise and worship music and singing, and sharing our beliefs. God sent Rodel into my life at that time to remind me that God is always with me, even in a foreign land. This really opened my heart and mind to the people of the Philippines.

There was one person in my training class that "adopted" me as part of his family. Armichael John (AJ) and I had many conversations during breaks and lunches. I found out he had family in California, he had a brother with Down Syndrome, and he had been on his own since he was about 16 years old. I was amazed that he had such a good attitude with all he's been through, and he said he knows God has a plan for him, and that everything happens according to God's timing. I kept in contact with him after leaving the Philippines and learned even more about him and his strong faith. On his birthday, and for Christmas, he and some friends take food and gifts to different shelters in the area. Seeing how these young men, who don't have a lot, are willing to share what little they do have with those less fortunate than themselves moved me to want to do something similar if I ever had another opportunity to travel to the Philippines again.

Due to budget cuts at work, we switched to doing most training online. However, in August 2014 I was asked to do training in the Philippines again. I felt that God was giving me an opportunity to do the outreach that I had prayed about. With the help of my congregation at Christ



Lutheran Church, Duluth, MN, in a short period of time I was able to raise funds and collect supplies to complete some outreach work on the weekends. With the help of AJ as my guide I was able to: deliver food, supplies, and toys to an abandoned children's home, an abandoned special needs children's home, and an abandoned elder home; we also sponsored approximately 150 youth at a Youth For Christ conference, many of which would not have been able to attend. It was their first time hearing the word of God. AJ and I also were able to attend Rodel's church and provide them with some funds to assist in rebuilding after a typhoon ripped the roof off their building, and provided Bibles for their congregation. During the service I was asked to give testimony about what it was like to grow up in a Christ centered home and how to raise children in that type of home. Many in Rodel's congregation are new Christians. We were also able to give Bibles to several others who had not had a Bible of their own.

God has really opened a door for me in the Philippines. There are so many opportunities to share the word of God and to show His love to the people in the Philippines. Please pray for me and my family as we work towards gathering the funds to send all six of us to the Philippines to do more outreach this summer. We know that through God all things are possible and our work there has just begun.

## The Evangel - Online

Any of you who are familiar with TAALC official web site probably know that *The Evangel* is posted there in PDF format. You can read it online. In an effort to make further progress into the electronic media age, we are now offering an opportunity for you to get the link by e-mail to this on-line copy when it comes out.

If you would like to avail yourself of this opportunity, please visit [www.taalc.org](http://www.taalc.org), scroll down to where you see an image of the most recent *The Evangel* cover. To the left, you will see "To receive future editions of *The Evangel* via email, [click here](#)." Click the link to register yourself to receive the link to the on-line version of *The Evangel* when each issue comes out.

What are the advantages? You can read *The Evangel* with the free e-reader from Adobe called Acrobat. You can enlarge text and pictures for easy reading. Also, you can save the cost of postage and printing *The Evangel*. If you request this option, *The Evangel* will no longer be mailed to you (if you currently receive it by mail).

This is a small step in the direction of the inevitable – that most reading will soon be done electronically. At the same time, it keeps those of us struggling to keep up with the trends in technology in the loop.



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