

The

# EVANGEL

Missions Edition



# From the Editor

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Greetings *Evangel* readers!

This issue focuses our attention on missions. I am grateful for the writers who contributed to this edition. They each present a different perspective for seeing and meeting the needs of the world around them.

What a wonder that the God who made us intentionally gave us all gifts and talents through which He brings His light to the world. Even our personality is a tool God can use.

Take, for example, two of my beloved family members who have vastly different personalities. One is more reserved and holds back in a group setting. Yet I've seen signs that point to her being devout in prayer and generous in financial support of missions.

My other family member is much more outgoing. She once talked about meeting a stranger in the grocery checkout line. They struck up a conversation, found out their kids were the same age, arranged a playdate, and eventually, attended a Bible study together!

Whatever our personalities, gifts, or amount of time or money, take comfort knowing God is the One who works through these avenues to stir in the hearts of these precious people. Yes, we look around and try to identify outreach possibilities or watch for neighbors in need or a chance for a conversation, but it is only God Who can create faith in them. That's out of our hands.

“What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building” (1 Cor 3:5-9).

As you read this edition, I pray you are encouraged in your own life and congregation to look with fresh eyes at opportunities to share the Gospel. And may you rest, knowing that your works and your neighbor's faith are all in God's hands.

In peace and service,

*Gretchen Baker*

Gretchen Baker  
The Editor

- 2 From the Editor
- 3 Missions: Back to the Basics
- 4 Missions: How Can They Believe?
- 6 Missions: Chaplaincy
- 7 Missions: A Call to Missions
- 9 Mission Work at Home
- 10 Missions Home and Abroad
- 11 Ascension Hosts Mission Conference
- 12 Ordinations & Installations
- 13 Student Introductions
- 14 In Memoriam
- 15 CAM Spotlight
- 16 Special Christmas Events
- 17 Prayer Bookmark
- 18 Bearing the Light and Prayer Bookmark
- 19 Foster Care & Adoption

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# Missions



## Back to the Basics

By Rev. Dr. Cary Larson

“In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph 6:16–20).

In his epistle to the Ephesian Christians, St. Paul implored the congregation to be in continual prayer for the outreach of the Gospel. To this day, many missionaries and pastors request the same prayers.

The lingering presence of COVID-19 continues to create exceptional challenges in the missional work of our Association. As I visit our congregations across the country, I understand that many people who once worshipped with you have not returned. We have fewer members willing to plan and conduct special events to gather and to be a light in the local community. If the pandemic was not difficult enough, inflation and related fears of economic security cause many to second guess their abilities to contribute toward missional concerns.

However, despite these difficulties and times of uncertainty, the Holy Spirit continues to guide us, while working blessings through hardship. We give thanks to God that He has equipped His saints and is always faithful to His promises, especially that His eternal Word will not return to Him void (Isa 55:11).

Years ago, when one of my daughters played basketball, they had a heartbreaking loss. They were not rebounding the ball; they were not boxing out their opponents under the basket; they missed most of their free throws, acted sluggish on the court, and were not using teamwork. They lost the game not because the opponent was that much better but because they failed to use the fundamentals of the game. Guess what the coach said when the girls had their next practice? “We have got to get back to the fundamentals!”

The fundamental rationale for the formation of The American Association of Lutheran Churches included four areas of focus “under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.”

1. The Inerrancy of Scripture
2. The Truth of the Lutheran Confessions
3. The Authority of the Local Congregation
4. The PRIMACY [emphasis mine] of Evangelism and World Mission<sup>1</sup>

This is The AALC’s DNA, and we dare not submit any of these areas to neglect. Missional work, locally and internationally, is one of The AALC’s chief concerns. Last year, our congregations came together and generously supported the missional efforts of Rev. Scott Yount and his work for Christ’s sake in war-torn Ukraine. With little fanfare, many of our congregations have supported other overseas missions, missions in the United States, and even supported our own congregations to bring the Gospel to local communities. A testament that for 35 years of our existence, evangelism and world mission is still a primary and fundamental rationale for our work together.

In review of The AALC history book, *To Tell the Truth*, I came across this powerful statement by the 2001 TAALC Convention keynote speaker, Dr. Paul Mueller, indicating that regardless of the times, challenges and uncertainties, missional work is not optional. Mueller observed, “The Church cannot decide to do mission or not; the Church can only decide to be the Church or not.”<sup>2</sup> 22 years later, with conviction, I agree with Dr. Mueller.

I encourage you to keep your eyes on Christ Jesus and not the storm that surrounds us. To hear His command, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46–47). I ask that you boldly trust the Lord God in all things! I ask that you prayerfully consider being actively involved in the missional efforts of your congregation, your region, and at the national level of our Association.

Lead on, Holy Spirit, to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify all into the true Faith. And use us, Thy servants, to be the bearers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, near and far! In Jesus name. Amen. †

*The Rev. Dr. Cary Larson is the Presiding Pastor of The American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC).*

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Dr. Duane A Lindberg, *To Tell the Truth – A 25-Year History of The American Association of Lutheran Churches* (TAALC) 1987–2012, (Fort Wayne: The American Association of Lutheran Churches, 2014), 31

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 105.

A wooden cross stands on a beach, with an open Bible in the foreground. The background is a clear blue sky. The cross is made of two thick wooden beams. The Bible is open, showing text on the pages. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise.

# Missions

## HOW CAN THEY BELIEVE?

*By Rev. Joe Christina*

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Paul tells us in Romans that people simply cannot believe the gospel of Jesus Christ if they have not heard it. “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?” (Rom. 10:14). This scriptural logic forms the very foundation of what the church refers to as “evangelism.” At its core, the work of evangelizing is really quite simple. However, as Jesus said before His ascension, it doesn’t simply stop with “tell them who Jesus is.” He tells His Church to “make disciples,” which implies that when someone is brought to saving faith in the gospel of Christ crucified for their sins, we still have work to do as a church. Newborn faith needs to be nurtured. It needs to be fed through catechizing and instruction. But with that said, there still needs to be a starting point. The following will focus on that “starting point.”

*Asking ourselves who God has placed into our lives that we would say we have a relationship with is a much more realistic approach to finding meaningful evangelism opportunities.*



## RELATIONAL

While some churches may still carry out the practice of door-to-door evangelism from time to time, this can prove challenging and unfruitful in many areas and situations. What is often more “successful” is utilizing this approach to personally hand out materials inviting people to worship or special events. This does provide the benefit of “putting a face to a name” for if/when a neighbor does attend as a result.

In the circumstances of our church, knocking on the doors of strangers may very well be met with a 20-gauge shotgun. Crime is an unfortunate issue that leads many people in our community to be understandably “prepared.” The issue with trying this approach with the express intention of talking about sin and grace in Christ is that you have very little if any time at all to establish a relationship with that neighbor. They don’t know you from Adam and many if not most are often times uncomfortable talking at length about their own death and the Bible. Simply “blurting out the gospel,” as I like to refer to it, is really more appropriate in a dire emergency situation where death may be imminent. In such a case, shout that Jesus from the rooftops if that plane is going down.

So the question that needs to be asked is: where is my mission field? Or, better yet: who is my mission field? Yes, it’s true that Jesus said “all nations” in His Great Commission marching orders. And it is also true this most certainly doesn’t *exclude* complete strangers who reside among us and our churches. God wants them too. But asking ourselves who God has placed into our lives that we would say we have a relationship with is a much more realistic approach to finding meaningful evangelism opportunities.

A “relationship” is being used in a very broad sense here. This can range from family to friends to acquaintances (in person or online) to co-workers to fellow club members and even to that one guy we just pass all the time on our walks. These people know us, to a greater or lesser degree.

An example of this would be the manager at our local IGA store. My wife does most of the family shopping at big box and bigger name stores. But I stop in our little hometown store practically daily to grab something to throw on the grill. I see him all the time. He calls me “boss” and I call him “chief.” And while I know the man is a Christian, this “relationship” afforded me the opportunity to ask him for a decommissioned shopping buggy (we call them buggies down here) for a receptacle for food items that we collect for a local pantry.

## SIMPLE

When the Lord provides an opportunity for us to share the gospel with someone, it need not be a daunting task. After all, any baptized little one can belt out “Jesus Loves Me” at daycare at any time. We can do the same, in a sense. While the lead-in question that many propose asking

is: “If you were to die tonight, where do you think you’ll go?”, I prefer to shy away from this. I think it is much more non-intrusive to simply ask “May I share with you what I believe?”

Bear in mind that you are not fulfilling the role of a seminary professor in the break room. Keep it basic. Simply tell them, “I believe all people are sinners and cannot save themselves, but God sent Jesus to die for our sins and raised him from the dead. And He did this for you too.” This may generate more discussion or it may not. The Holy Spirit might convert that person immediately or He may not. Your role is simply to tell. As is mine.

## THE POWER

This leads to the final thoughts on the act of evangelism among Christians. The Paul who says you have to tell them if you expect them to ever believe is also the same Paul who says “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). Our role, as noted above, is to tell. His work is to quicken hearts in the act of conversion. And as true God, He does so when and where He pleases to do so. We can mourn over someone rejecting the simple message of the gospel but we need not feel as though somehow we failed. We were faithful.

Finally, let us not look down on those in the faith who simply invite people to church or to special events at the church or who hand out “Portals of Prayer” or even this publication. The gospel of Christ is still being shared in such ways when people accept the invitation or read the material. As the body of Christ, we work together and encourage all efforts to share the gospel with a world that so desperately needs it.

We do this always remembering that we have been called by that same gospel and right now possess forgiveness and life eternal, reminding us of John’s inspired words: “We love because He first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). †

*The Rev. Joe Christina serves Christus Victor Ev. Lutheran Church of Fayetteville, NC, and as the National Home Mission Developer for The AALC. His duties include assisting congregations with outreach and community missions projects, as well as attending to the needs of some of our vacant congregations. He is always willing to share ideas with congregations, as well as always willing to hear other ideas that churches have employed in reaching out to their communities. He can be reached at [cvcprchristina@outlook.com](mailto:cvcprchristina@outlook.com).*



## Chaplaincy: A Ministry of Presence

By Rev. Clark Brown

Have you ever watched paint dry? Usually descriptive of boring activities: this question is an apt description of chaplaincy. When actually watching paint, there are certain things you look for. Defects in the wall, thin applications, heavy volume of new product come to the fore, each offering varied opportunities for timely restoration within a narrow window of opportunity.

Several pastors have aspired to military chaplaincy and sought advance counsel. In nearly every case, false notions of this form of service abounded. Evidently they never learned anything from Father Mulcahy. Any clergyman who expects to anticipate a nice uniform, comfortable office, regular hours, and blissful opportunities for family will ultimately fail to serve effectively.

It is necessary to do most of your work in the utility uniform, being with the service people, where they are. The average serviceman (generic) is so busy, that seeking out chaplain services is far from their minds, especially on Sundays (unless going to church avoids duty). Being alongside the servicemen will rarely result in an immediate and enthusiastic response. Instead, the ministry of presence (watching paint dry) will be your hallmark.

It is necessary to know how the boots feel and empathetically suffer the pains of vocation, family, and heartbreaks these young people endure. Should your face and position already be familiar to them, you will be positioned to recognize their unspoken cry for help. Knowing each of them as a paint canvas in work, the gifts you bear will be embraced, as they are patiently, slowly, and compassionately applied.

Chaplaincy is much like the Gospel itself. The Gospel is always present, working to generate faith through the power of the Holy Spirit. By nature, the fallen will detest the Gospel that speaks of a salvation that exists outside the individual's best effort to earn a place before the Father's throne. Most of the servicemen you may encounter have never experienced the Word itself, let alone unqualified, visceral Love.

By your chaplain service, living a transformative life in their midst, makes you an attractive diversion that creates curiosity within them. When you have been sought out, it is much like raising children. It is wise to answer the question posed, providing little more information than they request, and leave them with a question for future discussion.

The Lord's most recent call for me to serve is as a U.S. Air Force Chaplain, serving in its Auxiliary, known as the Civil Air Patrol. Many of the facets mentioned above apply here as well. Most of the contacts enjoyed are with twelve- to eighteen-year-old cadets, many of whom are considering service in the military. It was personally crushing to find the spiritual neglect these children have suffered, lacking even the most fundamental knowledge of persons of the Bible.

As it is with active duty, exposure to cadets is limited because they age out, just as relationships have begun to bear fruit. However, in the three years of the current assignment, cadets have become comfortable to ask questions they have wondered, but didn't know who to ask. Remaining active in this ministry of presence to the youth, the adult members frequently come for spiritual assistance as well, dealing with all the matters one might encounter in the parish, including graveside proclamations of the certain hope we have in Christ.

Perhaps no experience has been as rewarding as Encampment: a one-week basic training for the cadets. Many of them are enduring their first prolonged absence from home. In the past, the Michigan Wing has not enjoyed having a Chaplain for the entire week. With the consistency of a familiar face and message, worship participation has soared to percentages not experienced before; cadets boldly ask for opportunities to speak of the faith; and adults discreetly pull the Chaplain aside to discuss spiritual matters that have plagued them.

The opportunities to serve this organization are not limited to clergy members alone, and I particularly ask the laity of The AALC to pay particular attention now. If a squadron does not have a chaplain, the opportunity exists for a knowledgeable lay person to serve as a Character Development Instructor: teaching the same lessons, without the same responsibilities.

Other opportunities exist for our membership to serve in Communications, Search and Rescue, Logistics, Command, and far too many areas to list. Each of these positions will afford you the opportunity to live the faith, allowing these young people to enjoy that which has thus far been withheld from them. Please consider contacting your nearest Civil Air Patrol Squadron to see how you may be of service to young cadets, to your local community, state, and nation. †

*The Rev. Clark Brown serves as a Chaplain for the Northern Michigan Region of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP). If you can serve in this ministry and have questions, please contact Chaplain Clark Brown at [eucharistcab@aol.com](mailto:eucharistcab@aol.com).*



## A Call to Missions and the World Mission Commission

By Rev. Jamie Strickler

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

What did it mean to be a witness for Christ in the first century church, and what does that mean for us as Christ’s beloved Bride the Church today? In a post-COVID-19, post-Christian world, some congregations are struggling to keep the doors open. Some families have neglected the habit of coming to church, and others have just settled for watching online. Regardless, the Church and her physical gathering of saints is very essential to being one in Christ (Heb. 10:25). Most of the New Testament epistles were written to churches to be read, as they gathered for their edification and encouragement. What’s more, the very first message that Jesus delivers to John the Beloved in his Revelation is a message to the churches. Local congregations are witnesses for Christ, as well as His called and chosen Bride.

As Christ ascended into Heaven in Acts 1:8, He described the function of the local church as witnesses to their local community, their region, their territory, and to the ends of the earth. Today the universal church, the body of believers worldwide, remains the same. We are Christ’s witnesses.

For instance, here in wild and wonderful Charleston, West Virginia, St. Timothy Lutheran Church is to be a witness for Christ to our city Charleston, to the Kanawha River Valley, to West Virginia, to our country, and to the entire world. In what follows, I would like to share a little about what we at St. Timothy’s are undertaking in each of these areas, as well as how our AALC World Mission Commission is structured and makes decisions to distribute funds.

Originally an ALC church plant, St. Timothy Lutheran Church joined The AALC this past summer. It has been our great joy to be aligned with a national body that shares our confession of faith. In our context, Lutheranism is not as familiar to our community as it is in some Midwestern states. The first

question that I am asked when I tell people that I am a Lutheran pastor is, “Oh, what do Lutherans believe?” I have come up with a short answer that involves the five Solas of the Lutheran Reformation. Thankfully we are not an isolated outpost of apostolic Christianity in the Kanawha Valley. We have a local LCMS congregation a mile down the road who partners with us in teaching our community the rich theological and biblically sound doctrine of Confessional Lutheranism.

The main thrust of our mission on the local level has been to invite potential new members to come to St. Timothy’s. Our evangelism/outreach strategy is fourfold: 1. tithe, 2. show up and bring a friend, 3. be excited, and 4. get them in the door and meet the people.

Tithing has never been an easy conversation for me as I never want members or guests to feel like we always have our hand out for money. However, it takes money to run the church and do missions. The generous giving of money, time, and talents, is a true and foundational spiritual discipline. It will never make one more or less saved by grace through faith, but the discipline will in fact teach one how to trust and rely upon God. In matters of tithing, St. Paul instructs the local church at Corinth:

“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, ‘He has distributed freely, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever’” (2 Cor. 9:7-9).

Activity builds excitement. Thus, we at St. Timothy’s have made sure to keep our activity level high. In addition to Sunday services, children’s church, and confirmation, we offer many church events which are structured with the idea of teaching our congregants but also have a missional element to them. For example, we offer Monday Night Study, Wednesday evening

*continued on page 8*

## A Call to Missions continued...

services during Advent and Lent, open gym nights the first Wednesday of every month, Men's and Women's monthly breakfasts, OWLS (Older Wiser Lutherans) monthly luncheon, Vacation Bible School, and Reformation Day celebrations, plus our Feed My Sheep ministry prepares a monthly meal for the local homeless shelter, Neighbors in Need hands out gift cards to families in need on holidays with the availability of praying with our elders, and our Women of the Word group has recently sponsored women's self-defense classes.

To each of these events we ask our congregants to show up, and if possible, bring a friend. If one invites a guest and that guest shows up to find very few attendees to the event, enthusiasm may be squashed. One's presence is crucial to the support of these events. Also, we ask that our folks bring genuine excitement when they show up. Stoic moods and/or criticisms of how events are planned or carried out also seems to stifle the Spirit.

In assessing our church, we have concluded that our strengths are our biblically and apostolically sound doctrine, our traditional liturgical worship, our modern and multifunctional facility, and our kind and loving people. Hence, we seek to get visitors in the door and meet our people. If a person has been in a building once, they are more likely to return. Especially if they have connected relationally to someone at the church.

Ultimately, it is up to the Holy Spirit to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify. But God empowers beloved Christians with particular gifts and talents that He expects them to utilize for the sake of the building up of the body. When our Lord Jesus Christ returns, may He not find His Bride sitting on their hands waiting for the Spirit to move.

Nationally, St. Timothy's has invited Grand View University's Choir to come to West Virginia and perform, which was well attended. In addition, each year we fundraise from September 11 through Veteran's Day for Faith Comes By Hearing's Military Bible Sticks. This campaign supplies members of our armed forces with the Holy Scriptures on a mp3 stick which fits the military's camouflage specifications.

St. Timothy has also participated in world missions. Over the season of Lent, we raised money for Rev. Scott Yount and his mission to the refugees in Ukraine. We also collected \$5,000 to purchase motorcycles for the Lutheran Church of Africa Benin Synod. These motorcycles are used by their evangelists to go into the outlying areas to proclaim the gospel. St. Timothy is also the collection site for funding for the Lutheran Church of Norway's church plant in Iceland. I serve on that board alongside several of our LCMS brothers and some Lutheran Church of Norway personnel.



*God empowers beloved Christians  
with particular gifts and talents that  
He expects them to utilize for the sake  
of the building up of the body.*

Over the past few years, as chairman and secretary of The AALC World Mission Commission, the board and I have worked to construct infrastructure. We have created an application process through which ministries from all over the world may apply for funds for specific projects. As one might imagine, the requests and needs are far greater than any one denomination or ministry can fully fund. We must also be aware of fraudulent ministries who seek to deceive goodhearted Christian organizations. Our application process provides us with enough information to vet each ministry, helping us to be faithful stewards of the monies entrusted to our commission. We send what we are able for specific projects as a way of coming alongside their ministries.

The AALC World Mission Commission (WMC) needs you! Our governing documents call for the WMC board to consist of five members, one representative from each region. A quorum of three votes is required for action. Currently the WMC consists of Rev. Dave Spotts and myself. We are unable to hold any votes or take any action. Please consider joining the WMC as your region's representative this year at your respective Regional Conventions.

May the peace of our incarnate Lord be with you all. †

*The Rev. Jamie Strickler serves St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Charleston, WV, and is Chairman of the World Mission Commission of The AALC.*





# Missions



## Overflow Thrift Store: Mission Work at Home

By Cathy Twito

When my youngest daughter and I returned to the U.S. from a mission trip to Haiti in January 2013, the culture shock was overwhelming. The contrast between the material abundance here in comparison to the profound poverty there among our newly acquainted Christian family in Haiti was stark.

Not knowing how to make sense of this contrast, I prayed, asking how I live here while extending my hand there, no longer nameless people, but now Christian friends I held dear in my heart. The details of God's amazing work in answer to that prayer will be saved for another time, but for now, here's the condensed version:

After returning from Haiti and praying, the words of Jesus recorded in Luke 12:33 jumped off the page to me like a lighted marquis: "Sell your possessions and give to the poor." Wait... what? Do what?? I practically choked on the words. Oh, my, Lord! Where do I start? "Dear Lord," I thought, "My husband needs this memo if we are supposed to sell the house!" After days of feeling paralyzed and self-condemned by that hard word, I yielded myself to the Lord, asking Him to link arms with me and gently take me wherever He wanted on this.

That point ignited God's plan and vision for a non-profit thrift store. The vision began unfolding in my heart and mind: a store where people donated their excess to be sold giving the profit to help the poor. Sell...and give... as Jesus said.

So, this career-mom whose expertise included changing diapers, making pb & j, and wiping up spilled milk, stepped way out of her comfort zone, armed with prayer and the urging of God's Word. Again, there are many more details to share, but for now let me simply say God's provision to supply far surpassed anything I could have done or even imagined. In short, I was walking in step with two others with the same vision, but for a different part of the world. By divine appointment, we met, put our heads together, and Overflow Thrift Store was up and running by July 2014!

Overflow Thrift Store has been a bee hive of activity for our community ever since. The three-fold tagline of Give-Shop-Serve has been tremendously supported by the community. The giving of donations has been so abundant (or overflowing!)

that the team has struggled at times to keep up. Since our staff and volunteers have been committed to a cute, clean, and creative standard of display of our sale items combined with great discounted prices, shoppers from near and far have been attracted to our store.

In my mind, the wind under the wings of the whole operation is the volunteers under the guidance of our paid leadership who have served with countless hours of time and talent to participate in the mission. Kudos to Diane, Overflow's talented linen lady; Sharie, who patiently works with jewelry; Doug, who helps manage housewares; Shari, who hangs clothes with great care; and Marcy, who brings much laughter while she prices housewares. And there are so many more! Kudos to "The Shoe Crew," a weekly group who brought shoes back to life while conversations "solving the world's problems" ensued. Overflow has also made room for groups and individuals wanting to serve on a one-time or couple-time basis. As you can imagine, there are things everyone can do to move the mission forward.

While the vision initially for the store's profit was to fund some university students in Haiti, some orphans in Uganda, and a community of believers in Zimbabwe, the ministry of giving from the thrift store has exploded to include a safe house for young ladies escaping from sex-trafficking, local youth services, local halfway houses, an un-wed mother facility, a domestic abuse shelter, a pro-life medical center, and grants for adoptions, to name a few. To date, more than a half million dollars has been donated to the world's most vulnerable and local causes. The level of giving increases each year—glory to God!

I would invite you to give, shop, or serve to participate in the mission of Overflow Thrift Store if you are ever in Ames, Iowa. However, I am sure there are many causes in your own backyard that you can support with your time and talent to be Jesus' hands and feet and His light in your own communities. May God bless your many endeavors!

"O Lord, You will ordain peace for us, for You have indeed done for us all our works" (Isa 26:12). †

*Cathy Twito is a member of Ascension Lutheran Church, Ames, IA.*



## Opportunities Around the World and at Home

By Rev. David Huskamp

There are many ways to get involved in world missions. A great way to share the gospel is by your labor of love and service. Jesus said, “Go and make disciples of all nations.” The Bible teaches us that we have been blessed that we might be a blessing to others, and we are to serve one another in love. The Apostle Paul said, “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil 2:4).

The beauty of work trips is you don’t have to know the local language. You share love by your service. The main objective is to share the gospel by helping those in need. I have traveled with different groups. Lifetree Adventures and Experience Mission were organizations that have the locations, logistics, and know the needs of the area. They also have American staff in country to translate and to work with the citizens of the community. They also work to provide a strategy to help the local area and churches.

On one trip to Costa Rica, our main task was building and repairing at a mission center. Another trip had a dual purpose: we were helping to build a home for a pastor at a mission compound, but two days were spent doing a VBS for the local children. For me, I loved the added task of teaching the children and showing them the love of Jesus.

For those who are not able or do not wish to do the hard labor, I have taken teams to Africa and Bangladesh with Jesus Film/Harvest Partners. The main task of those trips was to deliver equipment to local teams which are trained to share the gospel message in their area. Once in the country, we are given the opportunity to see the local team in action and see a portion of the impact of our service.

Most of my teams have been a mix of youth and adults. I have taken members from my congregation and have opened the door for other churches and individuals in the region to participate as well. Young and old are blessed in their service. One 70-year-old grandma went because her granddaughter wanted to go. Her response when she got home was: “It changed my life.”

One of the great beauties of out-of-country experiences is that fellow believers begin to see how truly blessed they are. On one



Left: Rev. David Huskamp traveled to Costa Rica with a team tasked with building and repairing a mission center. Submitted photo.

Right: Another mission trip was within the United States: Lake Charles, LA, to assist with rebuilding homes as part of hurricane relief efforts. Submitted photo.

trip, we ate rice three times a day and had a new experience of beans for breakfast. We have seen children with little or nothing. We ate a meal in a pastor’s home in Africa by the light of kerosene lamps because of a regular occurring blackout.

Don’t be discouraged if members might be slow to join with you in the work God has called you to do. I went on three trips over a period of ten years, and after I kept coming back home, the congregation members must have felt it safe enough to go along. Since then, I have planned a trip usually every other year.

Going to another part of the world is not the only way to serve. I have also served on disaster relief trips in the U.S. Our teams working with Samaritan’s Purse have helped rebuild homes in Rockport and Houston, TX, as well as in Lake Charles and Baton Rouge, LA. As Jesus has said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

On these trips, all the homes being rebuilt are completed at no cost to the homeowner. Once you arrive at the host church, your meals and beds are provided for you at no cost. With Samaritan’s Purse, all tools and a project supervisor are also provided. If you have no previous experience, you can still be a blessing with your hands and feet. †

*The Rev. David Huskamp serves Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church, Sidney, MT. If you have questions about planning, funding, or participating in service to the body of Christ, contact Rev. Huskamp at [svlc@midrivers.com](mailto:svlc@midrivers.com).*

# Ascension Lutheran Church Hosts 2022 MISSIONS CONFERENCE

By Dr. Philip Gassman

Ascension Lutheran Church (ALC), Ames, IA, hosted its fourth annual missions conference from Sept. 30 to Oct. 2, 2022, which was sponsored jointly by Celebrating Global Missions (CGM).

The conference theme was “Discerning God’s Strategies for 21st Century Missions.”

The conference was initiated on Friday evening, Sept. 30, with a prayer session led by representatives of World Mission Prayer League (WMPL), a CGM partner ministry. The WMPL ministry team used The Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) as an outline, which enabled attendees to focus on the Lord before entering into a period of petition for unreached people groups. The WMPL team also closed the Saturday sessions with a similar afternoon prayer session.

The Saturday morning sessions started with greetings by ALC Pastor Roger Twito, AALC Presiding Pastor Rev. Dr. Cary Larson, and Dr. Philip Gassman. Dr. Gassman provided an overview of ALC missions ministry history and presented some global missions related issues. Pastor Bill Moberly, who leads Awakening Lives to World Missions (ALWM) and is a CGM co-founder, followed with a presentation on global mission trends/needs including: (1) greater focus on The Great Commission, (2) increased outreach to the least-reached people groups, (3) more emphasis on partnership versus benevolence, and (4) recognition of diaspora as missions opportunity: e.g., college students from other countries studying in the United States.

Pastor David Lerseth, Friends of Madagascar Mission (FOMM), and Chris McWeeny of WMPL, shared during the second half of Saturday morning. Pastor Lerseth chronicled the history of missions and growth of the Lutheran Church in Madagascar (now roughly 4 million members). He also described how FOMM supports different ministries in Madagascar by providing financial support, prayer, and strategic planning. Mr. McWeeny shared on unreached people groups from a global perspective and presented the following realities: (1) 7,400 unreached people groups, (2) 1.5 billion people (6,600 languages) without a complete Bible, and (3) 5,000 people groups (2 billion total population) have 0.1% or less professing Christians.

CGM partners Pastor Moberly (ALWM), Pastor Lee Laaveg (FOMM), Neeraj Ekka (WMPL), and Emily Wilson (Lutheran Bible Translators/LBT) provided presentations in the afternoon session. This included overviews of their respective ministries and examples of specific outreaches: (1) ALWM’s partnership with Pastor Sam Chim in Cambodia (0.3% Christian), who is leading Gospel outreach via both church planting and meeting practical needs by building schools, providing food, drilling

wells, etc., (2) FOMM’s support of prison ministry, Bible schools, evangelist training and food production in Madagascar, and (3) LBT’s translation support work in multiple countries including Ethiopia, which hosts the largest Lutheran body in the world with over 10 million members.

Three presenters shared in each of the other two Saturday afternoon sessions, including ALC members Dr. Steve and Carol Anderson (Global Eye Mission) and several ALC-supported missionaries: Tim Tjernagel (World Team), Matt Cline (Cru), and Ruthie Wagner (LBT).

- Paul and Lea Eldred (Damascus Road Ministries) led off one session by providing insights on developing local church missions programs, within in the context of their missions experiences in Turkey.
- The Andersons shared about eye ministry short-term mission trips in Africa and other regions, including eyesight restoring cataract surgeries.
- Phil Schmidt shared via Zoom about his multiple English Bible Camp short term mission trips to Slovakia.
- Ruthie Wagner led off her Zoom session by describing the translation work she was involved in Sierra Leone for the Themne People (with husband Josh) and her current exegete work in support of translation efforts in Tanzania.
- Matt Cline (wife Amy) shared about transitioning from missions in Turkey to relocating to the U.S. to supporting other missionaries (e.g., through businesses) and new outreach in Wisconsin.
- Tim Tjernagel (wife Paula) also shared about transitioning from missions outreach in Spain to a primary focus of supporting development of missionaries in Latin America.

Ascension Lutheran Church (ALC) is planning to host a 2023 missions conference; more information, including dates, will be forthcoming. †

*Dr. Philip Gassman is a member of Ascension Lutheran Church, Ames, IA.*



# Ordinations & Installations



## Salge Celebrates 50th Anniversary of Ordination

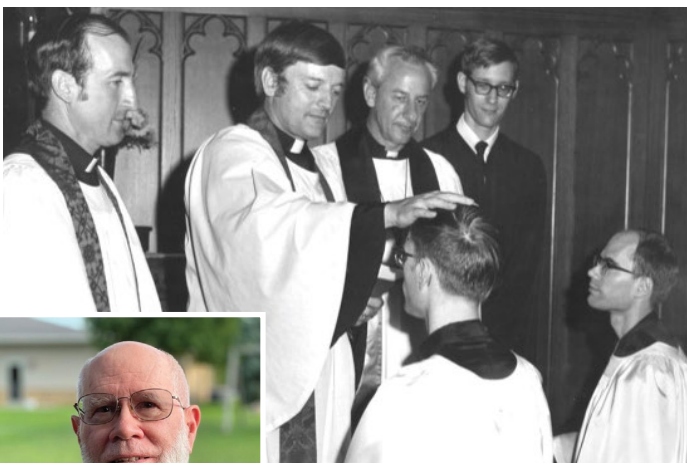
Rev. Robert Salge, Pastor Emeritus, observed the 50th anniversary of his ordination on May 28, 2022, by placing flowers on the altar of St. John LCMS in Waverly, IA. Following the Divine Service, Robert placed one bouquet on the grave of his beloved wife, Kathryn, and the other on the grave of his parents.

Rev. Salge was ordained with his twin brother, Richard, at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Waverly. Robert is still serving part-time at St. John's NALC – Vilmar, Greene, IA, where his grandparents are buried.

Rev. Salge has served these AALC churches: Ascension Lutheran, Waterloo, IA; Redeemer Lutheran, West Union, IA; St. Paul Lutheran Congregation, Tripoli, IA; and St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Elk Grove, CA. †



*The Rev. Dr. Christopher Caughey was ordained and installed at St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church Augusta, KY, on Sunday, December 11, 2022. He will be serving a duo parish – St Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, Augusta, KY (AALC) and Trinity Lutheran Church, Maysville, KY (LC-MS). In attendance were: (front row) Rev. Michael Poynter, Rev. Dr. Kevin Wilson, Rev. Dr. Christopher Caughey, Rev. Dr. Cary Larson, Rev. Allen Stuckwisch, (back row) Rev. Dean Stoner, Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, Rev. Dave Spotts, Rev. Tim Beck. Submitted photo.*



*Rev. Robert Salge at his ordination 50 years ago; Rev. Robert Salge continues to serve a parish part-time in his retirement. Submitted photos.*



*Reverend Gary Koutsopoulos was installed at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Bremerton, WA, on Sunday, November 13, 2022. Pictured: Rev. Tim Cartwright, Pastor Emeritus; Rev. Gary Koutsopoulos; and AALC Presiding Pastor Rev. Dr. Cary Larson. Submitted photo.*

# American Lutheran Theological Seminary

Meet the Students: Introducing a few from our growing student body at ALTS



*Seminary student Alex Lancaster with his wife, Lingyu. Submitted photo.*



*Seminary student Aaron Overly-Graham with his family. Photo used with permission.*

## Alex Lancaster

*Degree pursuing: Master of Divinity*

I was born and raised in Oregon and currently live in the Willamette Valley with my wife, Lingyu. We have been married since 2019 and are expecting our first child in April 2023.

I was raised in the charismatic movement, but exploring Scripture and church history convinced me that the Lord's Supper is more than the empty symbol I was raised to believe it to be, but is truly the Body and Blood of God. I left the charismatic world shortly after making this discovery. I drifted theologically for some time, but discovered Lutheranism through a local LCMS pastor. I quickly found that Lutheran theology teaches the faith more precisely and with more depth than any other Christian tradition. In December of 2019, I received the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, and my wife and I were confirmed at an LCMS parish.

After receiving the Lord's Supper for the first time, I was hit by an epiphany: my whole life, I had sought to feel at peace with God, but after baptism and first communion, I knew beyond all doubt that God was at peace with me. My deep turmoil over sin was utterly quieted by Jesus and the promises of His Sacraments. Spurred by desire to preach this peace of Christ to others, I enrolled at the seminary.

My experience at ALTS has been superb: spending my days studying Scripture, reading the best theologians, learning Greek, and discussing the Word of God with classmates and professors has been profoundly satisfying. I have never been surer that I am where I belong. Thanks be to God! "The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad" (Ps 126:3). †

## Aaron C. Overly-Graham

*Degree pursuing: Master of Divinity*

I was born and raised as the eldest of a family of seven on a farm located in East-Central Illinois. My parents came from Lutheran and Presbyterian backgrounds, making personal decisions to move into the Assemblies of God (AG), prior to my birth. Their faith has always been a big part of who they are, and, conversely, been a major part of how they raised my siblings and me.

Although we were part of the AG brand of American Evangelicalism, growing up I have a distinct memory of my father lamenting the lack of catechetical training within our church at the time, thus taking it upon himself to walk us through his Lutheran Catechism booklet he had gone through as a youth.

I did not fully appreciate this at the time, but now see that it was efforts like this, as well as a deep reverence for Scripture and its retention, that form a significant core of my identity even today and led me in no small part ultimately back into the Lutheran fold. I am so grateful to have had the chance to express this appreciation to my parents as an adult.

These values I am now passing onto my four children, as my wife and I strive to raise our beautifully blended family in the heart of Chicago.

When I was around seven years of age, I felt the strong call to be a pastor, but horrible experiences of both a pastor's infidelity and the horrors of human tragedy that can accompany a chaplain's role (which a later pastor was pursuing at the time) soured me to the idea of becoming a pastor. However, the call never fully left, and has only continued to grow, until Rev. Chris Rosebrough, whom many will likely know from his Pirate Christian Radio podcast and/or Fighting for the Faith YouTube channel, graciously agreed to meet with me virtually to discuss the Pastoral Office; his recommendation at the end of our long conversation was to begin attending ALTS with open hands, hence why I now am.

I am only on my very first course, but am already finding plowing through Luther's theology so rich, and each class of our Theological Prolegomena is more like a two-hour exegetical sermon delving deeply into Holy Scripture; our instructor's love of the Word is readily apparent and enduringly contagious in the best ways. †



## Rev. William Henry Van Duzer

February 19, 1926 - December 7, 2022

William Henry Van Duzer was born in Woodbury, NY, on February 19, 1926. He was baptized into Christ in the Presbyterian church of Little Britain, NY. After graduating from Washingtonville, NY High School, where he won awards on the debate team, he attended Cornell University. In 1944, he left school to enlist in the Army. He was very proud of his time in the 10th Mountain Division. When the war ended, he visited a Lutheran church-sponsored USO in Austin Texas, where he met Ruth, the daughter of a Lutheran pastor. They were married at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Austin, TX, in 1950, the afternoon following Bill's confirmation into the Lutheran Church that Sunday morning.



Bill received his Juris Doctorate degree from the University of Michigan and soon purchased a law practice in Scottville, MI. In 1964, the family moved to Lansing, MI, where he worked with the State Bar Association, as the City Attorney for Lansing, as a partner in another law firm, and finally in his own practice. He was admitted to the United States Supreme Court. He was most proud of a case involving a lack of protections in the prison of a youthful offender, a case that still affects prisoner rights today.

Bill and Ruth were blessed with two children, Tom and Beth. In between Tom and Beth, they lost three children to premature childbirth. They later became grandparents to six grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Bill and Ruth attended Lutheran churches wherever they lived. Bill was involved in leadership in many of these churches. Having experienced the joy of proclaiming the Gospel, Bill felt called into full-time ministry. He closed his law practice and studied for the pastoral office at Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary in St. Catherine's Ontario, Canada. Upon ordination in 1983, he was called to Trinity Lutheran Church in Lake Placid, FL, where he served until 1988. They then moved to Sebring, FL, where they eventually started Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, which associated with The American Association of Lutheran Churches. He served on The AALC's Commission on Doctrine and Church Relations. Bill was also a child protection professional for the State of Florida's Department of Children and Families.

In 2013, Bill and Ruth moved to Kansas City, Kansas to be near their son Tom. Ruth passed away in 2017 and Bill on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 2022.

Bill was fearless in proclaiming the Gospel, even in his law practice, telling more than one young man, "Yes, I can be your lawyer, but who you really need is Jesus Christ!" †

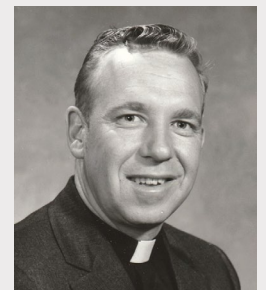


## Rev. LeRoy Cecil Holmes

June 18, 1934 - November 5, 2022

Rev. LeRoy Cecil Holmes, Pastor Emeritus, age 88, of Soudan, MN, died on November 5, 2022, at the Cardigan Ridge Senior Living in Little Canada, MN.

LeRoy was born June 18, 1934, in Embarrass, MN. He grew up and attended school in Tower-Soudan, graduating from high school in 1952. He then worked as an apprentice electrician with Oliver Mining company for a year and proceeded into the Air Force in May 1953. He was honorably discharged as a sergeant in April 1961. From there he went to pre-seminary study at both Gustavus and Augsburg, then attending Northwestern - Luther from 1961-1964. He was ordained at Gustavus Adolphus on June 6, 1964. Churches served in ministry were Embarrass-Pike Lutheran, Gethsemane Lutheran (Virginia, MN), Mount Carmel (St. Paul), and Trinity Parish (North Dakota) from 1964 to 1996. In addition, he served multiple congregations as Interim from 1996-2010.



His interests included fishing, woodworking, hunting, and camping. In retirement, he was an active member of the Tower Soudan Historical Society.

He is survived by his three daughters, Dori, Karleen, and Lisa; six grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his wife, Katheen. They were married for 51 years.

A memorial service was held at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Tower, MN. A graveside service with full military honors will be held in the Lakeview Cemetery sometime in the summer of 2023. †



COLUMBIA



## CAM Spotlight

### Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry

The Commission on American Missions (CAM) supports Church plants, Mission starts, and other ministries of The AALC within the United States. One such ministry CAM supports is the Rev. Dave Spotts and Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry of Columbia, MO.

The Commission on American Missions has supported this very worthwhile endeavor for quite some time, believing and trusting that our heavenly Father has called Rev. Spotts to minister and serve the Columbia, MO, area.

Recently a letter was written by Jary and Nancy Reppen, of St. John's Lutheran Church of Pocahtontas, MO, an AALC congregation, in support of Wittenberg Door Campus Ministries. They described Pastor Spotts' commitment to this ministry in great detail:

Pastor Spotts is a missionary campus chaplain for the collegiate communities in Columbia, MO. He gives "face to face, on site care for every person" and brings "life and hope where sin, death and despair have ruled before."

Take a mini-look into the ongoings of this dedicated Pastor working in and around Columbia, Missouri, with three colleges totaling over 35,000-plus students, as well as thousands of professors, employees and more! See if you could keep up?

- Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays are "Campus Visibility and Office Hours" where he is often at a table in Memorial Hall on the Campus of University of Missouri, at 10 am. Wearing his clerical collar, he is well-recognized and respected as a member of the clergy. He offers "free listens and prayers." This is important as many students are away from their homes, and the new surroundings are often a challenge. Pastor Spotts brings the good news of Jesus Christ, and is there to guide and help students, professors, university employees, visiting scholars, exchange faculty, and families...anyone who stops by. And note: as he talks with people at the table, you never know how often others at nearby tables get an inkling as they hear this caring Pastor bring the Gospel of Christ to individuals.

- On Mondays, he is with the men of Beta Sigma Psi for dinner. (This is a national Lutheran fraternity and has a Luther Rose on their emblem!). Pastor Spotts has gained a very special relationship with these men, although, each year, all over the city, students graduate and leave, and new ones arrive. There is so much Kingdom work to do.
- On Tuesday evenings, he meets with students at The Heidelberg restaurant for BOGO appetizers and a discussion of Christian theological topics.
- On Thursdays, he has a Lunch and Learn Bible Discussion Group at the MU Student Center. Then he's back at Memorial Union for campus visibility and office hours. And then a two-hour ALTS Greek class on Thursday evenings!
- On Fridays, he has a 10 am Coffee Group at Eatwell, a Schnuck's subsidiary in Columbia, where a lot of the workers are college students. Then he's back at Memorial Union for more campus visibility and office hours.
- Two Fridays a month, he leads "Debrief and Brainstorming" to wrap up ideas and consider what's coming up and how to make much of Jesus in future activities, events, and life in general!
- And... on another two Fridays a month, he and his dear wife, Martha, host WDCM Dinner and Conversation Evening in their home. Everyone is invited to bring a friend, make a friend! To meet people from around the world, practice speaking English, learn about American culture, and participate in a brief chance to explore the historic ideas of Christianity after trying out some typical American foods. Pastor and Martha Spotts have a heart for foreign students and work hard to help them adjust when they arrive at Mizzou. August is very busy time for them with meeting planes, help with finding housing, how to shop at stores, so much care and guidance for strangers in need.

TAALC National Home Mission Developer and Advisor for the Commission on American Missions Rev. Joe Christina also thinks quite highly of this ministry:

"Dave has a heart for outreach on the University of Missouri, working to serve both students and faculty across the campus. Because of his contact and relationship with so many international students, the Gospel proclamation has potential for worldwide impact, as these students return abroad. Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry is a ministry CAM will continue to rally behind. I encourage you to do the same." †



**St. Paul's Lutheran Church**, Napoleon, OH, hosted a live nativity event on December 11, 2022. The event began in 2020 because the church was unable to have the typical Children's Christmas Eve program due to COVID-19. The first year the event was held Christmas Eve and had 64 youth and 40 adults participate. There were 235 vehicles that drove through. The last two years, the event was moved to a Sunday evening in early December. This year over 60 kids participated from ages three through high school, and many adults volunteered to help. The children recorded the Christmas story and songs that people listened to on their radio as they drive through. There are seven scenes: Caesar Augustus, Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph at the inn, Angels, Shepherds, Wisemen, and full nativity. The adult choir also participates and provides live caroling, as cars wait to drive through. Submitted photos.

## \* Christmas Events Around The AALC \*

Left: **Ascension Lutheran Church**, Ames, IA, hosted a live drive-through nativity on Friday, December 9, 2022. Photo by Wendy Steenhoek.

Right: **Abiding Grace Lutheran Church**, Gillette, WY, created this parade float last Christmas. Every year the city of Gillette, WY, has a parade on the first Saturday of December called the Parade of Lights. Dawn Hardy shared, "Each year we say, 'We (Abiding Grace) should have a float in the parade.' Well, this year we did! It was simple, but got the message across." Submitted photo.



Left: **St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church**, Traer, IA, hosted a special display of nativity scenes on Sunday, December 4, 2022. Members brought in their nativities and enjoyed sharing the stories of each one, as they set up for the event. Over 30 nativities were on display. Photo by Gretchen Baker.

Right: One special nativity set included a stable built by charter member Frank Wendt from leftover paneling when the church was remodeled. Photo by Gretchen Baker.







# March 2023 PRAYER BOOKMARK



1. Rev. Dean Stoner, Administrative Assistant to The AALC
2. Rev. Gary Benson
3. American Lutheran Theological Seminary
4. Greater Heartland Region
5. College & University Campus Chaplains
6. Rev. Carl Groh
7. For all Seminary Students
8. For those grieving or lonely
9. Rev. Fred Balke
10. Commission for Youth Activities
11. Christ Lutheran Church Chetek WI
12. The Persecuted Church
13. Rev. Daniel Dapelo
14. Future Needs of ALTS
15. Rev. Joseph Christina
16. For paramedics and firefighters
17. Faith Lutheran Church Holstein, IA
18. Rev. Joseph Dapelo
19. Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Franklin, NC
20. For law enforcement officers
21. Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche (SELK)
22. Rev. John Anderson
23. Lutherans For Life
24. Hope Lutheran Church Brighton, IA
25. Rev. Kevin Beard
26. Rev. John Morley
27. TAALC Foundation
28. For those who are ill
29. Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
30. National & Local Governments
31. Pastors and Church Workers

## St. Peter's Women's Circle

*Above: St. Peter's Women's Circle hosted their annual craft fair in November 2022. They raised \$8,200 for the Tuition Assistance Fund for St. Peter's Lutheran School. Photos by Jane Blakeslee, Service Circle Member and Coordinator.*

St. Peter's Women's Service Circle has been in operation for close to 30 years. What began as a small group of women who just wanted to sew and knit together, and enjoy each other's company blossomed into a ministry of nearly 20 ladies who worked every Tuesday, crafting and giggling.

It was quickly decided when St. Peter's Lutheran School was founded that the ladies should have an annual craft fair (although at that time it was called a bazaar) to benefit the Tuition Assistance Fund.



Decades later our group has shrunk, but the passion remains the same. We are blessed to have so many talented women and a few men to help us with our endeavor. St. Peter's Lutheran Church is in Elk Grove, CA. †



April 2023

PRAYER BOOKMARK

1. Rev. Edwin Mendivelso
2. Women of L.I.F.E. Committees
3. Kongsvinger Lutheran Church Oslo, MN
4. Rev. David Huskamp
5. Sunday School Kids
6. Rev. Dr. Cary Larson, Presiding Pastor of The AALC
7. Rev. Dean Johansen
8. For those who care for the sick and dying
9. Abiding Grace Lutheran Church Gillette, WY
10. Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry
11. Our Savior Lutheran Church Piqua, OH
12. The Sending Place
13. Men's Groups
14. Rev. David M. Johnson
15. The AALC Ministerium
16. Rev. Andrew Virkus
17. Persecuted Christians
18. For the families of Christian Martyrs
19. Rev. Clyde Awtrey
20. For God to raise up Church Leaders
21. For Call Committees
22. Prison Chaplains
23. Rev. Eric Ishimaru
24. For kids in sports
25. For those who are homebound or in nursing facilities
26. New Congregations
27. St. Paul Lutheran Congregation Tripoli, IA
28. Rev. Harold Johnson
29. Youth Groups
30. DSS. Kathy Awtrey

## Bearing the Light in Season

By Brian Ruuska

The congregation at Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church was delighted to host the Pastor's Conference in October 2022, as the fall season began in earnest. The overall theme this year was "Bearing Christ's Light in a Culture of Darkness." The session presentations were insightful and highly relevant, given the progressive post-modern culture that challenges the Church today.

After a session ended one afternoon, as a member of Calvary's hosting team, I began to survey the fellowship hall for small chores to keep myself busy until dinner time. As the crowd began to depart, I took inventory of all the faces that were now familiar to me. Then, making her way against the departing stream, I spotted an unfamiliar face of a woman that I assumed was a pastor's wife whom I had not yet met. Somewhere in the crowd I heard my wife Barbara's voice cry, "She's looking for a pastor!" I thought it was the most ridiculous statement I have ever heard, since the whole building was overflowing with pastors, and I've rarely known a pastor to be tongue tied!

This woman continued her way against the stream and told a pastor nearby that she was looking for a Bible-based church. He said, "Talk to him, he's a member of this church," while pointing to me. I selected a little pamphlet nearby that described Calvary as a Bible-centered congregation. "You've found the place," I said, as I handed her the pamphlet. I invited her to follow me to visit the nave, away from the din of the crowd, and to hear more about her quest.

She explained she lived in the neighborhood and had been attending a megachurch, but began to realize it was all focused on the experience of entertainment. They had recently preached about homosexuality and transgenderism, but never once mentioned that such cultural lifestyles were sinful. "Don't they remember that God destroyed two cities with fire and brimstone for such behavior?" she asked. She shared a story about a recent family tragedy that made her realize that our time on earth is short and insignificant compared to eternity. She had enough of it; she badly needed a church based on the Bible's clear teachings, not on worldly distractions while continuing to ignore sin. Such spiritual darkness made her feel isolated, alone.

Her journey sounded familiar, one that has been traveled by many others, yet illuminated by the light of Christ's Word. By this time my eyes began to well up, my throat constricted, my tongue tied. "Why are you crying?" she asked. I managed to creak a response, "I'm happy..." I was indeed overjoyed that she was searching for a faithful church. She needed to be ministered to, yet how could I bear the light when I was so woefully out of season?

"Be ready in season and out of season... with great patience and instruction" (2 Tim 4:2b).

It seemed she ministered to me more than I to her. I could only trust that God would provide what was necessary, for His Word shall not return void and accomplishes what pleases Him. I invited her to our next service.

She attended our worship service on Reformation Sunday and talked to several more of our members. We pray she will continue to be led to where the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered, for God wants all to come to the knowledge of the truth. She said she would return. We pray that she does. †

*Brian and Barbara Ruuska worship with the saints at Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church in St. Paul, MN.*

# Serving through FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION

By Rev. Richard Sunderlage

There are currently 430,000 children in foster care in our country. Many of these children will age out of foster care when they turn 18 years of age, and 40 percent of them will end up homeless, incarcerated, or dead.

They age out of foster care because no one wants them. Once out of the foster care system, they have no where to go. They have no family to support, encourage, and celebrate them. They have lost their birth family and no other family will take them in. Without hope, many will turn to gangs, prostitution, drugs, and crime. Agencies and organizations designed to help aged-out foster children are rare.

Babies and small children are the most likely to be adopted. Children age 10 and older begin to worry that they will never be adopted. They desperately want to be part of a family. They want to be loved. For many of them, these things will never happen.

Preteens and teens have difficulty bonding with families because of their fear of abandonment. They were abandoned by their birth family physically or emotionally, or both, and they are afraid of being abandoned again. If their parents abandon them, who will be there for them?

All foster children and adopted children have a lot of anger and grief. They have lost their families to death, drugs, alcohol, or irresponsibility. They grieve over this loss and are angry with those who have left them and should be caring for them.

We adopted Micah when she was five. She was our foster daughter since she was two. Marcy and I committed ourselves to do what was best for Micah, regardless of the cost. As time passed, we learned she had trauma. I am convinced Micah would not be alive today if the Lord had not made us available to take her into our home.

Social workers at that time were saying that kids are incredibly durable and resilient. Kids bounce back, they said. They are survivors. The social workers were wrong. They since have

changed their tune. Now they say that parents seeking to adopt need to know and understand the effect trauma has on children.

As the Church, the Body of Christ, we are learning how to help save unborn babies from abortion. We need to reach out to another segment of our population that goes unnoticed: children in foster care. These children of God need homes. They need families who will love them and care for them. They need someone to believe in them and care for them, regardless of the cost.

I am 70 years old and my wife is not far behind. We are preparing to adopt another child – or children. Friends and some relatives have said, “At your age? Are you out of your mind – taking on more children when you’re old enough to be grandparents?” To them I say, “We’re not doing this for us. We’re doing it for THEM! It’s not about us and what we want. It’s about giving a home to children who have no home.”

After adopting one child, we feel compelled to adopt again. To us, there is nothing more rewarding than to welcome a child who has no home, into our home, and into God’s Kingdom. We need more Christian families to open their hearts and homes to those children who will soon be on the street because no one will believe in them. More than once in the Scriptures, God mentions children, orphans, and widows, and He urges us to comfort them. If you haven’t considered adoption or fostering, maybe you should.

Adoption is a blessing for everyone involved. If you are unable to foster or adopt, find ways to support foster care and adoption. You will be a blessing to them and you will be blessed in more ways than you could imagine. God is good! †

*Rev. Richard Sunderlage is on The AALC Pastors Certified for Call Roster.*



## The American Association of Lutheran Churches

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## UPCOMING EDITIONS...

Please be in prayer for and consider contributing to these upcoming editions:

**May/June 2023: Congregational Life & Holy Scripture** (deadline March 1)

**July/Aug 2023: Seminary** (deadline May 1)

**Sep/Oct 2023: Youth Edition** (deadline July 1)

**Nov/Dec 2023: Advent and Christmas** (deadline Sept. 1)

### Church News:

*The Evangel* welcomes submissions of what's happening in your congregation. To submit content, **email the editor** Gretchen Baker: [theevangel@taalc.org](mailto:theevangel@taalc.org)

**Or mail:** St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church, Attn: Gretchen Baker  
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