

vANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLICATIONS  
AND PARISH EDUCATION

To the Annual Conference of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations convening at the Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wisconsin, June 9-12, 2020:

As we gather under our conference theme, “Will He Find Faith?” (Luke 18:8), note the bookends in Luke 18 are parables of perseverance in prayer and faith. Today we persevere by faith because the object of our faith—Jesus Christ—is trustworthy, sure, and powerful. Prayer is an expression of that faith. We, the elect of God, call out to Him in our need because we have confidence that He hears and that He is able to provide what is needed. Augustine eloquently expresses the interrelationship of faith and prayer: “When faith fails, prayer dies. In order to pray, then, we must have faith; and that our faith fail not, we must pray. Faith pours forth prayer; and the pouring forth of the heart in prayer gives steadfastness to faith.” Amid days of uncertainty and fear in the world around us, we have a certain hope that compels us to prayerfully persevere through whatever circumstances confront us and to entrust ourselves and our ministries to His care.

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Developing Christ-centered Bible curriculum for all ages to serve our AFLC congregations continues to be a strong focus of the ministry of Parish Education. The Ambassador Sunday School Series for Preschool through Level 6 has been carefully and intentionally designed to help students build a foundation for Christian faith and life as they move progressively through the Scriptures and Luther’s Small Catechism. Ultimately, our desire is that our curriculum will be used by God as a tool for our congregations to promote true and living faith that grows and thrives in the hearts of those who hear and study His Word.

Ambassador curriculum emphasizes Scripture memory, recognizing the significance of God’s Word being written on the minds and hearts of children from a very young age. This curriculum helps students learn these verses in the classroom but also encourages students to work on them at home. Lessons add challenge memory verses for those students who aspire to learn more. In addition, Ambassador curriculum champions the concept of family devotions in the lower levels (e.g. Preschool curriculum has daily Scripture readings on a Parent Page) and challenges the middle and upper grades to have personal

daily devotions (e.g. Levels 5 and 6 provide daily devotional cards that students are encouraged to keep in their Bibles throughout the week as a guide to daily devotions and Scripture memorization). We recognize the value of establishing this habit while children are young so that it becomes a normal practice throughout their teenage years. Hopefully, this practice will also then carry over into adult life when many have families of their own, and they begin establishing the same habit for a new generation. Ambassador curriculum is also designed to be versatile for combinations of different age groups. Educators recognize the reality that every student is different and the dynamics of every classroom is different. But if one starts with a solid foundation, methods can easily be adapted for the particular needs of a particular group. Please share with your congregations the value and benefits of using AFLC Ambassador curriculum to teach the truths of Scripture.

We are planning for the publication of new Level 2 curriculum on the Ten Commandments in 2020. Reviewing and editing student Bible lessons for this curriculum has been the focus of regular online board meetings during the past year. Many volunteers have also contributed in various ways. Ruth Gunderson, who does the graphic design work for our curriculum, has begun work on the layout of lessons for Quarter 1. We hope to have student lesson samples available to distribute at the annual conference.

Many of our resources, including Bible lessons for children as well as youth and adult Bible studies, are available in a downloadable form, and we are continuing to grow these options. We released a Kindle e-book edition of our AFLC devotional, *Threads of Grace*, and intend to keep adding to the existing list of other e-publications. We are continually exploring better ways to use technology to produce appropriate resources to serve our congregations but often lack the tools and time to accomplish them.

Our downloadable confirmation curriculum, *Foundations of the Faith: This Is Most Certainly True*, continues to see strong use. We launched an updated version in 2019 with a few corrections and additions. This will likely be done on an annual basis, and we continue to welcome feedback from its users. Our Jonah and Acts curriculum for youth (though easily adapted for adults) also continues to be widely used by congregations.

After various delays over the past two years, we are looking forward to the completion of Volume V in the AFLC Heritage Series, *One Thing I Seek: Selected Writings of Francis W. Monseth*. We believe this collection of

devotional, historical, and theological writings will be a great blessing to former Bible school and seminary students of Dr. Monseth, as well as to our extended AFLC family. Two other volumes in the Heritage Series are in line for publication in the years ahead: 1) a history of the AFLC by Pastor Robert Lee; and 2) a collection of devotional writings by Georg Sverdrup, founder of the Lutheran Free Church (to be published in cooperation with the Georg Sverdrup Society, which exists to promote the study of the New Testament concept of “free and living congregations”).

The Heritage Series was not the only delay we experienced during the past year. After a disastrous incident damaged the main campus internet server at the end of 2018, it took several months to recover data, update computers, and deal with other related lingering issues. Challenges such as these are unpredictable and perhaps inevitable, but they cause undesirable delays in our regular work and in publication progress. It is not uncommon to have at least one or two significant unpredictable challenges every year that, from our limited perspective, hinder our goals, but we must trust that the LORD is able to accomplish what He desires in His time and rest in His faithfulness.

In response to the need for greater teacher training and out of a desire to better inform our congregations of what we have available to serve them, we decided to experiment with offering online webinars relating to Christian education in 2019. Webinars can be attended from anywhere you have a computer and access to the internet. Our goal through the online webinars is:

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

Our webinars in 2019 focused on 1) introducing the Ambassador Sunday School Series—demonstrating the purpose and plan behind the curriculum, and providing an overview of each grade level; and 2) familiarizing people with the new confirmation curriculum—explaining the educational approach, guiding students through a sample lesson, and showing them how to use it in a classroom. The feedback we received from these webinars was very positive. We appreciate those who have submitted ideas for future webinars and hope to utilize this tool more in 2020. If you haven’t filled out a survey for topic ideas, you can do so on our website or send us your requests through email.

We have accepted the AFLC Schools’ invitation to continue another year managing the Ambassador Book Nook, so we are now in our second school year of this cooperative effort, which has proved beneficial to both parties. Note that Ambassador Book Nook gift cards are now available for purchase. We invite individuals and congregations to consider giving these gift cards to seminary and Bible college students to help them afford their textbooks. Faculty members, pastors, teachers, and friends also benefit from new resources and would likely welcome a gift card to the Book Nook. (Regular gift certificates can also still be purchased through our online bookstore.)

We attempt to communicate regularly with individuals and congregations through e-news updates, facebook, email, our website, and online bookstore. But one of our greatest challenges is connecting with the specific individuals in our congregations who are serving in educational roles. These individuals are constantly changing. Please encourage members of your congregations, and especially teachers, to help us stay connected with them so that we can learn better how to serve them well.

We are thankful for opportunities throughout the year to lead Christian education workshops and to share about the ministry of Ambassador Publications in local congregations, at conventions, and at WMF rallies.

Thank you to individuals and congregations who commit to supporting the ministry of Parish Education through prayers and gifts. In addition to your gifts, we are thankful for the benevolence of two grants received in 2019:

- \$4,233.81 non-designated grant from the Myrtle, Thelma, Gladys Johnson Fund
- \$1,000 Foundation Grant for webinar equipment and expenses

We have lots of ideas and lots of projects we would like to do and are even trying to do to serve our congregations. But we are also aware of our limitations of staff and funds. There is much more we would like to accomplish, but we are a small staff with a small budget. We are doing as much as we can with the time that we have with the staff that we have with the money that we have. Please pray for wisdom for us to accomplish the most important things, to be good stewards of what God does provide, and to trust God to bless and multiply our labors for His honor and glory.

Thank you to numerous volunteers who assist regularly with projects and curriculum development. Thanks to our office staff for their dedication to serving our congregations well. Our full-time Administrative Assistant

Diane Brubakken is skilled and efficient in multiple ways and accomplishes an incredible variety and volume of tasks. Our part-time Office Assistant, Cynthia Lohse, left her position last summer to pursue another opportunity. We are thankful for her years of dedicated service. We welcome Scott Olson as our new part-time Customer Account Specialist. Scott has quickly adapted to his new role and is doing exceptional work. Thank you to members of the Board of Publications for their diligent and prayerful service, guiding the ministry of AFLC Parish Education: Maren Sletten, Solveig Hjermstad, Suzanne Tietgen, Rev. Dennis Norby, and newest member, Rev. Ryan Patenaude.

Respectfully submitted,

Mrs. Marian J. Christopherson  
Director of Publications and Parish Education