

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLICATIONS AND PARISH EDUCATION

To the Annual Conference of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations celebrating 60 years, June 15-18, 2022, gathered at the Association Retreat Center near Osceola, Wisconsin, under the theme “God Rewards the Faithful” based on Hebrews 11:6:

As an educator always looking for teaching tools and resources, I like to collect examples of bad curriculum (meaning curriculum that distorts or misrepresents Scripture) in order to demonstrate how essential it is to use good curriculum, to avoid confusion and more brightly shine forth the truth. I recently encountered a Bible lesson for children on faith, which equated choosing to have faith with choosing between chocolate or vanilla, brownies or cookies, as though faith were something as trivial as selecting an ice cream flavor or favorite cookie. But faith is not something we select from a menu or a vending machine. Faith is not something we accomplish. Faith is never our work. Faith is always a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). God alone makes us “faith-full.” Like those who have gone before us in the Hebrews 11 hall of faith, we are “looking to the reward” (v.26), desiring “a better country, that is a heavenly one” (v.16), and “a better resurrection” (v.35). And while we wait the consummation, we fix our eyes on Jesus, “the author and perfecter of faith” (12:2). The ministry of Parish Education strives to provide resources for our congregations to teach that faith is a gift of God and to nurture faith in the hearts of all ages.

The most monumental task of our year was completing the long-anticipated Volume V in the AFLC Heritage Series, a posthumous collection of writings by Dr. Francis W. Monseth, beloved former dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary. Although we had hoped to have the published volume in hand at last year’s annual conference, due to insurmountable challenges and related labor and supply shortages in the world of printing, *One Thing I Seek: Selected Writings of Francis W. Monseth* did not arrive from the printer until later in the summer. However, with the conference being held on the campus of our AFLC Schools, we believed it was important to introduce the forthcoming book and give conference attendees an opportunity to honor the Monseth family at the conference. Therefore, at the close of the last evening service of the 2021 conference, a special presentation was made to Ellen Monseth and the 23 other family members who were present, honoring the legacy of Dr. Monseth. Since the books did not arrive in time for the conference, the Board of Publications presented each family member with a certificate in anticipation of the gift book they would each receive later in the summer.

During the presentation, I gave this challenge to attendees to encourage all to continue passing on the faith from generation to generation:

To those of you upon whom God has bestowed the gift of children, for those of you whom God has called to be teachers, and for every member of every AFLC congregation through your educational ministries, you

have this privilege and responsibility too of “holding fast the faithful Word,” shining forth the Gospel, and passing on the faith. May it not be squandered or wasted but invested well, as the psalmist writes in Psalm 78, “that the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children, that they should put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God.”

The service in the auditorium of the new Student Life Center closed with the gathered conference assembly rising to lift their hearts and voices together with all the saints in glory in praise to our God, singing the Doxology followed by the closing hymn, “Crown Him with Many Crowns.” The Board of Publications hosted a reception after the service to allow attendees to greet the Monseth family and celebrate together the forthcoming book and the legacy it represents.

The book title, *One Thing I Seek*, comes from Psalm 27:4: “One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple.” These words of Scripture deeply impacted the heart of young Francis Wesley Monseth, who chose it as his confirmation verse and whose life purpose and ministry was a reflection of his desire to seek after God. Many years later while serving his first parish as a pastor in Everett, Washington, the LORD called Pastor Monseth and his wife, Ellen, to move their family across the country to Plymouth, Minnesota, to teach at the Free Lutheran Bible School and Seminary. Ten years later, he was called to a new role as seminary dean, where he served another thirty-one years until he was welcomed home by his heavenly father on Good Friday, 2013.

With more than forty years of influence in the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC) as Professor of Systematic Theology and Seminary Dean, an anthology of his writings fits perfectly with the AFLC Heritage Series. Writings in this series reflect our Lutheran, pietistic, and Scandinavian heritage and are required to be theological, historical, biographical, or devotional in content. *One Thing I Seek* fills not only one, but generously fills all these qualifications. We are grateful to *The Lutheran Ambassador*, the Free Lutheran Seminary, the Georg Sverdrup Society, and the Monseth family for their permission to publish this spectrum of writings in a collection that makes it accessible to you.

Dr. Monseth heralded justification by faith alone in Christ alone, trained servant-pastors, and exemplified true and living faith in Jesus his Savior, all of which shine through in his writings. Pastor Robert Lee’s tribute at the beginning of the book conveys Monseth’s heart for the salvation of souls and for free and living congregations. His aim as a pastor and theological professor, writes Lee, was not simply to fill the heads of his hearers with information, but to see that information applied to life. In his notes for the Basic Principles of Theology class, Monseth wrote: “. . . the objective of Christian theology is not mere academics, but intensely and

absolutely practical, since it leads perishing souls to Christ and through Him to fellowship with God now and forever.” That was his desire in his writings as well as in the hundreds of classes he taught, in the sermons he preached, and in his personal encounters with others.

Ultimately, this book is a gift from the Monseth family. Much gratitude is especially due to Ellen who through this long process was always gracious, always kind, always helpful, and ever patient with our delays. Thank you to Ellen and the entire family for generously sharing husband, father, and grandfather with all of us through his longtime ministry on our campus and now for posterity through this anthology. Our lives are enriched because of this great generosity.

We are grateful to the AFLC Women’s Missionary Federation (WMF) and to Calvary Lutheran Church in Everett, Washington, who generously provided financial support for this project. Calvary was the first pastoral call for Pastor Monseth after completing seminary training, and we gratefully acknowledge the Everett congregation’s personal interest and investment in helping to ensure that this collection of Dr. Monseth’s writings will be widely accessible for the people of the AFLC. Finally, thanks be to God for providing all that was necessary to bring this monumental project to completion!

The next volume to be produced in the AFLC Heritage Series, Volume VI, is progressing well. Pastor Robert Lee, emeritus professor of AFLC Schools and former AFLC president, has nearly completed preliminary writing of the chapters. We are in the process of formatting the chapters as well as gathering and scanning a large variety of diagrams, photos, and documents to be included. This book is a personal history of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations and celebrates the 60th anniversary of the AFLC in 2022. The book is expected to be released sometime during the next year.

Another significant book project, *Luther for the Busy Man* daily devotional book, was sent to press in the fall of 2021 but encountered significant delays in the printing and bindery process. The softcover editions were received from the printer mid-January and the hardcover editions a few weeks later. The publication of *Luther for the Busy Man* is a cooperative endeavor with AFLC Schools to make this literary gem broadly accessible across various platforms. We are grateful to Dr. Wade Mobley, President of Schools, for his initiative in this important project. In addition to the print edition published by Ambassador Publications, the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary established a website for the project, produced daily download and podcast editions, and currently maintains a website for online access and subscriptions at www.lutherforthebusyman.org.

Luther for the Busy Man is a reprint, updated edition of the original edition published by the Lutheran Church of Australia in 1974. The Lutheran Church of Australia graciously granted permission to Ambassador

Publications to produce this updated edition. In order to preserve the flavor of Luther and the style of the translator, P. D. Pahl, editorial changes have been restricted to primarily minor punctuation edits for clarity and updating British spellings to American English. Many thanks to Rachel Molstre, Free Lutheran Schools Librarian, who served as co-editor on this project with me. It was a joy to work together, and her creative skills in book design, layout, and organization were especially valuable.

Organized around the Church Year, each week of devotional readings contains excerpts from one of Luther's Gospel sermons in the order he would have preached them during the Church Year. The "Daily Scripture" section each Sunday establishes the sermon text for that week. In order to guide readers through the different seasons, Dr. James Molstre, Dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary, has written introductions to each of the three cycles of the Church Year: Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. The sermon index in the back of the book prepared by Rachel Molstre provides a list of the sermons cited in the daily devotionals and indicates where they may be found in various editions of Luther's Works. The Church Year chart on the last page of the book can help one follow the days and seasons, especially relating to those celebrations such as Easter that change every year. We encourage individuals and congregations to enthusiastically promote this new daily devotional book and to give it generously to family and friends as gifts.

After more than a year of unusual ministry challenges and uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic, most congregations returned to a regular schedule of in-person Sunday and weekday educational gatherings over the course of 2021. Many of the free resources we introduced during 2020-21 to serve our congregations in their adaptive ministries are still available online for broad use. Many churches held traditional onsite Vacation Bible School in the summer of 2021, and we expect even more congregations to restore this valuable community outreach ministry in summer of 2022. Through the 2020-21 school year challenges, sales of educational resources dramatically dropped, so we are thankful that curriculum sales seem to be rebounding and increasing for the 2021-2022 school year.

New Level 2 curriculum on the Ten Commandments is our current curriculum focus in the Ambassador Sunday School Series. Quarter 1 student leaflets were professionally published in 2021. Due to volatility and material shortages in the world of publishing, preliminary printing of Quarter 2 and 3 student material was done in-house for the 2021-22 school year. Our goal is to have professional printing of the materials accomplished in 2022. Preliminary teacher manual lesson plans are currently downloadable online. Greater development and refining of these lesson plans will be needed to prepare the teacher manuals for publication. Songs on the Ten Commandments written and performed by Adam McCarlson are available on our Ambassador Publications YouTube channel to support memorization and internalization of the commandments

and their meanings.

We expect to publish a new Bible study in 2022, *The Gospel in the Congregation: A Study of the AFLC Fundamental Principles*. This study (under the auspices of the AFLC Coordinating Committee) has been edited primarily by Rev. Martin Horn, Rev. Terry Olson, and Mr. Loiell Dyrud. The Coordinating Committee is working towards producing other complementary resources. In addition, Rev. John Lee, Missionary to Brazil, is overseeing translation of this study into Portuguese and has already begun to share the lessons with the AFLC—Brazil churches.

We also look forward to publishing a new study in the Ambassador Bible Study Series in 2022 on the book of First Peter written by Pastor Gary Jorgenson. A study on Second Peter will follow soon after. With the release of First Peter, we will be introducing a new cover design for the study series. Other books in the series include studies on Galatians, Colossians, and I, I, III John.

A study on the Means of Grace begun by Dr. Francis Monseth and a study on the Unity of the Testaments being written by Dr. Phil Haugen may be ready for publication within the next year or two. Work also continues on several youth and adult Bible studies and other resources.

Ambassador Book Nook sales in Heritage Hall have been strong and increasing every year. We are grateful for this cooperative endeavor with AFLC Schools. In the fall of 2021, we again promoted the opportunity to sponsor our annual gift books to FLBC juniors (*The Believer Free from the Law*), FLBC seniors (*A Faithful Guide to Peace with God*), and FLS first-year students (set of Heritage Series books and Catechism resources). We are grateful to those who demonstrated their support of our campus students by sponsoring gifts of these valuable resources. We encourage more people to purchase gift cards or gift certificates in Ambassador Book Nook or through our online bookstore to support Bible college and seminary students and to bless ministry leaders, family, and friends.

Thank you to many individuals and congregations who faithfully support the ministry of Parish Education through prayers and gifts. We are especially thankful for new commitment to this ministry demonstrated through several new, regular givers over the past two years. In addition, we were blessed to receive two grants in 2021:

- \$4,930.95 from the Myrtle, Thelma, Gladys Johnson Fund given through the InFaith Community Foundation
- \$2,000 Foundation Grant towards *Luther for the Busy Man* devotional book

God has provided many faithful and capable workers, for which we are grateful. Volunteers and staff generously give of their time and talents. Thank you especially to full-time Administrative Assistant Diane

Brubakken and part-time Customer Account Specialist Scott Olson for their dedicated and faithful work serving our congregations. Thank you to board members for their prayerful guidance and hours of sacrifice in this ministry unto the LORD: Rev. Dennis Norby, Rev. Ryan Patenaude, Maren Sletten, Suzanne Tietjen, and Leeanna Lunn.

Respectfully submitted,

Marian J. Christopherson
Director of Publications and Parish Education