

FORUM LETTER

Volume 43 Number 2

February 2014

Defend us from ourselves

Inside this issue:

Book Review: *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* 5

On preparing for worship 6

Omnium gatherum 6



My dear God, to keep myself on a course, I am going to consider Faith, Hope, and Charity. Now Faith. Of the three, this gives me the most mental pain. At every point in this educational process, we are told that it is ridiculous and their arguments sound so good it is hard not to fall into them. The arguments might not sound so good to someone with a better mind; but my mental trappings are as they are, and I am always on the brink of assenting – it is almost a subconscious assent. Now how am I to remain faithful without cowardice when these conditions influence me like they do. I can't read the particular depths of myself that say something about this. There is something down there that is feeling – it is under the subconscious assent – in a certain way about this. It may be that which is holding me in. Dear God, please let it be that instead of that cowardice the psychologists would gloat so over & explain so glibly. And please don't let it be what they so jubilantly call water-tight-compartments. Dear Lord please give the people like me who don't have the brains to cope with that, please give us some kind of weapon, not to defend us from them but to defend us from ourselves after they have got through with us. Dear God, I don't want to have invented my faith to satisfy my weakness. I don't want to have created God to my own image as they're so fond of saying. Please give me the necessary grace, oh Lord, and please don't let it be as hard to get as Kafka made it. – Flannery O'Connor, *A Prayer Journal* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 15-16.

The American
Lutheran Publicity
Bureau is on the web
www.alpb.org

FORUM LETTER is published monthly by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau (www.alpb.org) with LUTHERAN FORUM, a quarterly journal, in a combined subscription for \$28.45 (U.S.) a year, \$51.95 (U.S.) for two years, in the United States and Canada. Retirees and students, \$23.00 a year. Add \$8.00 per year for Canadian, \$12.00 for overseas delivery. Write to the Subscription Office for special rates for groups. Single copy, \$2.50.

Editor: Pr. Richard O. Johnson
<roj@nccn.net>

Associate Editor: Pr. Peter Speckhard
<pspeckhard@hotmail.com>

Member: Associated Church Press.

EDITORIAL OFFICE: P. O. Box 235, Grass Valley, CA 95945. <roj@nccn.net>

SUBSCRIPTION OFFICE: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, P. O. Box 327, Delhi, NY 13753-0327 <dkralpb@aol.com> Telephone 607-746-7511. Postage paid at Delhi, NY and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send changes of address to P. O. Box 327, Delhi, NY 13753-0327.

Copyright © 2014 by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau.
ISSN 0046-4732

Thrivent's choice



Thrivent Financial for Lutherans (and now, I suppose, for other Christians; I wonder when the official name will change?) recently found itself embroiled in controversy with its Thrivent Choice program. Launched in 2010, Thrivent Choice allows Thrivent members to direct "Choice Dollars" to non-profit organizations of their choice – the number of dollars available based on the individual's participation in Thrivent (insurance premiums, contract values, and volunteer leadership). Keep that word "direct" in your mind, as we'll have more to say about it shortly.

A non-profit organization can be eligible to receive Choice Dollars through a three-step process. First, the group must be an incorporated nonprofit organization under IRS Code provision 501(c)(3) (and agree to certain other legal and logistical stipulations); second, it must be "recommended" by a Thrivent member; and third, it must then be approved by a Thrivent chapter. The idea here from Thrivent's perspective was to give a great deal of local discretion over

where these dollars go. According to Thrivent, since the program's inception more than \$120 million has been distributed – about 91% of it directly to congregations, schools, outdoor ministries and social ministries. That leaves 9% that has gone to other kinds of programs – some of them overtly Christian, but others more nebulously “charitable” (such as Habitat for Humanity).

It's a good idea, on the whole, and it does encourage individual Thrivent members (and, full disclosure, I am one) to think a bit about where they'd like to send some money.

Viral concern

But of course where I might want to send some money and where you might want to send some money might be quite different. That became apparent when somebody (just who is not entirely clear) noticed that among the non-profits listed as eligible to receive funds last year (the list apparently changes annually) was Planned Parenthood of Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. Planned Parenthood is a major provider of abortion services in the United States, and so some Lutherans who oppose abortion were outraged. The concern went viral, and soon Thrivent had a problem on their hands at least as big as a New Jersey traffic jam.

Some initial calls to Thrivent from concerned members were not answered very carefully. In fact, they were pretty well brushed off with the excuse that if some member had proposed Planned Parenthood and a chapter had approved it, there was nothing Thrivent could do about it. Funds get directed by individuals and local chapters, after all – that's the whole point of the program. And besides, no funds had actually been directed to Planned Parenthood. At least not yet.

It's in the fine print

All in all, the kind of response you might expect to get from a bureaucrat. Or maybe a receptionist. It sounded like an effort to deflect controversy, but it wasn't quite accurate. While Thrivent's admirable goal was to offer a kind of local control over where Choice Dollars go, the fine print in the program's documents makes it quite clear that there are clear limits to that control.

Thrivent members, should they read that fine print, are to understand that “Thrivent Financial retains total discretion as to whether or how all Choice

Dollars are distributed. Any ‘direction’ that I provide to Thrivent to designate recipients of Choice Dollars is a request and recommendation from me suggesting a recipient of Choice Dollars funding which Thrivent is under no legal obligation to approve or follow. The use of the term ‘direct,’ ‘direction,’ ‘choose,’ ‘choice’ or other terms in these Terms and Conditions or in any communications regarding Thrivent Choice, does not provide me with any authority to make any decision regarding the use of any funds . . .”

Deeply concerned

Things got a little more problematic, though, when inquiries started coming from Lutheran denominational officials. We're not privy to just who called whom, but on December 19 a statement was issued by Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod President Matthew Harrison and Maggie Karner, Director of the LCMS's Life and Health Ministries, making clear that the LCMS was “deeply concerned” by the news that a Planned Parenthood affiliate might be receiving Thrivent Choice Dollars.

“The LCMS always has been, and will continue to be, clear and faithful in its proclamation of the sanctity of all human life from conception until natural death,” the statement continued. “We are currently in conversation with Thrivent Financial and pray for a God-pleasing resolution to this matter so that the pro-life witness of individual Lutherans and the LCMS will not be compromised.”

That same day, a statement from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod indicated that their leadership had become aware of the situation and “promptly contacted Thrivent to express concern and opposition after learning of this option, which is in direct conflict with God's message on the sanctity of life.” The WELS statement also sharply distanced the synod from Thrivent; while WELS members of Thrivent could continue to direct Thrivent Choice Dollars to charities of their choice, WELS congregations and schools can view Thrivent “as they view any other business.”

As far as I know, there was no expression of concern and no public statement from the ELCA.

Getting their attention

But questions from the leadership of two major Lutheran church bodies got Thrivent's attention. On December 20, the day after the comments from

the LCMS and WELS, Thrivent issued a statement of its own. "We listen to concerns from all of our members," Thrivent said, "and we are listening now." They allowed as how the membership "holds diverse points of view on faith and social issues," and acknowledged that approval of Planned Parenthood "has been controversial." Nicely put.

So some action was taken. First, the leadership of the local chapter that originally approved the agency's participation (presumably some chapter in Minnesota or the Dakotas) voted to remove Planned Parenthood from the program "effective immediately." This was "after input, discussion and a review of the concerns from Thrivent members." One can only wonder about the nature of the input the local chapter may have received from Appleton. But it's one way to finesse the "local control" issue.

Unintended consequences

Second, and more significantly, Thrivent took an interesting step: they announced that they are "temporarily suspending all pro-choice and pro-life organizations from the Thrivent Choice program, placing a temporary hold on the addition and removal of nonprofit organizations from the program, and conducting a comprehensive program review."

And here we come up against the law of unintended consequences. By suspending "all pro-choice and pro-life organizations," Thrivent has dealt a bigger financial blow to the latter than to the former. A list of several dozen non-profits affected by the suspension reveals that by far the majority of them are crisis pregnancy centers or ministries such as Lutherans for Life. Thrivent says that Planned Parenthood received no Thrivent Choice Dollars; one can pretty well assume that is not the case with the dozens of pro-life organizations.

What is a pro-life organization?

The point was focused admirably by President Harrison, in a statement following the Thrivent announcement. While he expressed happiness that Thrivent "was willing to reconsider this issue," he noted that "the LCMS and every one of its entities and congregations are both pro-life and nonprofit." In other words, if Thrivent has some thought of permanently banning both pro-choice and pro-life organizations from receiving these funds, they will

need to include all LCMS congregations and agencies in the latter category.

That's a not very subtle way of saying that any such move will pretty much end the relationship (and by that, of course, I mean cooperation and good will, not any structural or formal relationship) between the LCMS and Thrivent.

So a comprehensive review would seem to be a pretty good idea, but Thrivent needs to be careful about how they define whatever restrictions they might want to add to the program. A blanket "we don't fund organizations that have a position on abortion" is not going to fly with pro-life Lutherans.

And it shouldn't fly. Planned Parenthood provides abortions (whatever other more salutary programs they may offer, if any). They are not simply offering counseling, education, or other kinds of support for pregnant women, which is what most of the pro-life organizations do. Thrivent should be able to understand the distinction, and if the leadership can't, then Thrivent members should help them figure it out.

The tip of the iceberg?

Once one starts looking closely at Thrivent Choice organizations, other things become apparent. The list of approved organizations doesn't seem to be available on the Thrivent web site at the moment; the page where it should be contains a statement: "Updated 2014 Thrivent Choice information coming soon. Please check back for details." But there are allegations floating around that Thrivent Choice Dollars have supported one or another agency supportive of various gay and lesbian causes.

That's probably right. The web page for Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries, the group whose mission is to "expand ministry opportunities for LGBTQ people called to rostered Lutheran ministry," contains an icon suggesting that one can donate to ELM through Thrivent Choice. That probably doesn't have quite the outrage potential as Planned Parenthood, but it also isn't something that would warm the hearts of conservative Lutherans.

In reality, any Lutheran congregation could potentially be a recipient of Thrivent Choice Dollars (or, for that matter, any Unitarian congregation), including the really wacky ones like "Herchurch" in San Francisco. All it requires is suggestion by a Thrivent member and approval by a Thrivent chap-

ter. That's a sobering thought for those of us who would prefer to do business with a company that shares our values. Of course we all do business with companies all the time that don't really share our values; we just don't usually know about it, and we seldom care to find out. But then those companies don't call themselves "Lutheran" and invite themselves into our ecclesiastical life.

And it gets worse . . .

As it turns out, Thrivent Choice is only one mechanism used by Thrivent to distribute funds to non-profit organizations. Another is the Thrivent Gift Multiplier program, sponsored through something called the Thrivent Financial for Lutherans Foundation. It gives grants to "selected projects and missions that reflect the charitable interests of Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, its members, workforce and the needs of Thrivent Financial's key communities." Through this program, current and retired employees of Thrivent can have their gifts to qualified organizations matched dollar for dollar by the Foundation. In 2012, Thrivent employees and financial representatives had their individual contributions matched to the tune of more than \$5.3 million.

What organizations qualify? Well, according to their guidelines, "Thrivent Financial for Lutherans and the Foundation take a neutral position on controversial issues where significant disagreement or debate exists. Therefore, the organization declines grants and gifts to projects that support positions not generally agreed upon in society at large." That's an odd stipulation, and an odder view of Christian values, to be sure. One can think of quite a long list of things that Christians of almost any stripe would support which are nonetheless "not generally agreed upon in society at large." And on the other hand, what exactly is a position "generally agreed upon in society at large"? Even apple pie has its detractors, to say nothing of motherhood.

Some shockers

And yet take a look at the organizations that have received grants from the Thrivent Gift Multiplier Program and there are some shockers. They include at least four other Planned Parenthood affiliates in addition to the one that got suspended from the Thrivent Choice program. More bizarrely yet,

some of these dollars have been given to the NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota Foundation (listed, ironically, in the category of "Public Benefit").

There are likely other examples. For instance, the Women's Foundation of Minnesota in its 2012 Annual Report include Thrivent Financial for Lutherans among its financial supporters (though it gives no information on which Thrivent program might have been the conduit for funds). This foundation in turn gives grants for a variety of kinds of programs, some of them no doubt worthy. But its annual report states quite clearly that through its Social Change Fund "we award grants and provide technical assistance to nonprofits across the state working to achieve equality for women in Economic Justice, Safety & Security, Health and Reproductive Rights, and Political Power." Another example of somebody's Thrivent dollars at work.

What's the bottom line?

The bottom line for me as a Thrivent member is whether the convenient ability to be able to direct my "share" of Thrivent resources to organizations I wish to support is worth the existential angst of knowing that some other Thrivent members are directing their funds to organizations I do not support—even to organizations I think do evil things. There are no doubt some who, if these issues are not resolved satisfactorily, will simply stop supporting Thrivent, though I suspect those are relatively few.

For Thrivent, though, there's a different bottom line to consider, the financial one. And while the number of those who would divest from Thrivent entirely may be small, the larger threat to that bottom line is probably pastors and congregations who might stop cooperating with Thrivent on various matters, even if it means giving up those free napkins. Or perhaps the threat is from those who, though they may hold on to their Thrivent insurance policies, will look elsewhere in the future to purchase additional financial products.

So Thrivent has some big decisions to make, and a "comprehensive review" is a good idea. I'm sure they would welcome comments from members about how best to navigate what will be a tricky decision—and navigate it in such a way that they don't toss the baby out with the bathwater.

— by Richard O. Johnson, editor

Book Review: *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline*



Elesha J. Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (Oxford University Press, 2013) ISBN 978-0199938599. Reviewed by the editor.

While its influence has probably faded in recent years, *The Christian Century* remains important reading for anyone, at least any pastor, who wants to keep abreast of what's happening in the world of the American mainline Protestant community. As the title might suggest, this book is more than just a history of a publication (though it is that). Coffman rightly sees *The Century* as a reflection of the rise – and eventually the decline – of what came to be known as mainline Protestantism.

Coffman tells the reader upfront that the genesis for this book came from a casual question asked at the defense of her doctoral proposal – “Where did that term, ‘mainline,’ come from?” – which no one present seemed able to answer. She spends the first chapter contemplating what we actually mean by “mainline” denominations, and settles on a list of seven: the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), northern Baptist churches, the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, the Disciples of Christ, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. (She allows, however, that some scholars have longer or shorter lists.) She doesn't actually get around to answering the original question specifically until late in the book, when she reveals that the first use of the term “mainline denominations” seems to be in a *New York Times* article in 1960.

An educated elite audience

The larger focus of the narrative is on *The Christian Century*, which traces its roots to a Disciples of Christ publication centered in Iowa in the 1880s. In 1908, about to go belly up, it was purchased by four men including Charles Clayton Morrison, a Disciples pastor who would serve as editor of the magazine until 1947. He steered *The Century* toward a larger Protestant audience (not too surprising, really, given the longstanding ecumenical DNA of the Disciples), but specifically toward more highly educated Protestants, and predominately toward clergy. (*The Century's* efforts to reach a large lay au-

dience never came to much.)

But the audience, and the magazine, came to have a distinctly liberal theological cast. One interesting section of the book relates the conversion narratives of several liberal churchmen – people like Harry Emerson Fosdick and Shailer Mathews. These were not conversions to Christianity, but conversions from a conservative theology to a more progressive view. A similar trajectory was being followed by hundreds of Protestant clergy in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly those who had been educated in university divinity schools. They became the core constituency of *The Century*.

The bane of religious journalism

The 19th century had been a time of very vibrant religious journalism in America, most of it independent of ecclesiastical control. But as *The Century* broke out of its denominational mold, that vibrancy was waning. Many of the best publications had either gone out of business or had succumbed (in Morrison's words) to “the bane of most religious journalism – headquarters mentality.”

That would not happen with *The Century*. Coffman tells a rollicking good tale, using the magazine's history to give us an insight into many corners of American liberalism. She talks about the political/theological conflict between Morrison and Reinhold Niebuhr which led to the founding of *The Century's* rival, *Christianity and Crisis*. She sketches the rising evangelical movement that spawned another rival, in some ways a more serious one, *Christianity Today*. She illuminates many rather unsavory aspects of mainline American Protestantism, such as its virulent anti-Catholicism; but she also describes some of its heroic moments. She discusses the role of one prominent Lutheran, Martin Marty.

Is it our story too?

Coffman's account stops in 1960 – a logical endpoint, since her concern is the “rise of the Protestant mainline,” not its decline. Lutherans may quarrel with the extent to which this is really “our story”; certainly in some ways it isn't, at least in the period she covers, though for the ELCA especially it has become “our story” as American Christians, if not as Lutherans *per se*.

In any event, this is a story that even Lutherans who resist the pull into the mainline should know. Coffman rather charmingly opens the book with a quote from a 1950 novel by Livingston Biddle, Jr. — about a railroad “main line,” of all things! The commuter route, he says, “was called the Main

Line . . . The words had an impersonal, almost bombastic ring — except when you identified them with home.” As Lutherans struggle with just how much at home we feel in “the mainline,” Coffman’s book makes for provocative and informative reading.

On preparing for worship

by Mark Birkholz



Editor’s Note: Over on Forum Online, there has been a thread entitled “How do you prepare for worship?” It generated some interesting comments, including some frustrations about distinctly unworshipful pre-service activity, loud conversations, etc. Pr. Mark Birkholz, Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church in Oak Lawn, IL, shared this piece which he includes periodically in the Sunday bulletin. I thought it an excellent resource, and he has graciously allowed me to share it with you. Note that Pr. Birkholz serves an LCMS congregation, so references to page numbers in the hymnal may not apply in your setting. You are welcome to use it or adapt it; don’t forget to give Pr. Birkholz credit.

On Preparing for Worship: In the Divine Service, the Lord God of heaven and earth comes to meet with you, to speak and to listen to you, to give and to receive from you, to bless you and to make you holy. This is a special time, a holy time. Here are a few suggestions for you to make best use of the time before the service to prepare yourself for worship.

Come: It is best if you can find your place a few minutes before the service. When you come late, you may distract those around you who are in the midst of singing or praying the liturgy. When you come early you have time to prepare your heart, mind and body to meet with the Lord without being rushed.

Pray: Use the first few moments to pray. Pray for

yourself, that the Lord would prepare you to meet Him. Think over the week that has passed. What sins have you committed to be confessed? What blessings have you received to thank God for? There are suggested prayers in the inside cover of your hymnal. Other prayers begin on page 305. Pray particularly for:

- Those serving in worship: the pastor, musicians, readers, ushers, and altar guild.
- Those who may struggle during the service, such as older members who have difficulty seeing and hearing, or those with young children.
- Those who are unable to join us on Sunday or have been absent for some time.

Meditate: Read slowly and carefully through the texts to be used in the service, especially the readings and the hymns. You may also meditate on the Psalms (front of the hymnal) and the Catechism (p. 321). Especially helpful are the “Christian Questions with Their Answers” for those who will be communing (p. 329).

Rest: Use the music of the prelude to quiet your mind. This is a haven, a place of peace and refreshment from the cares and busyness of the outside world.

During this sacred time, please try to limit casual conversation to the church narthex and basement before and after the service.

Omnium gatherum



Roe v. Wade backstory • Clark Forsythe has written *Abuse of Discretion: The Inside Story of Roe v. Wade* (Encounter Books, 2013). In an interview recently posted on

christianitytoday.com, Forsythe summarizes his research into the papers of most of the judges who decided the case; such papers can often reveal the thinking of the justices more vividly than the final

decision itself. In this case, Forsythe argues that when the Court agreed to take the case, they were under the mistaken opinion that it concerned state criminal prosecutions, not the right to abortion, but it was turned into an abortion case after the unexpected retirement of two justices (Harlan and Black) who would probably not have signed on to *Roe v. Wade*. Forsythe's research also reveals that the justices based their views in part on "popular opinions" in the 70s that had little basis in reality, e.g. that the U. S. was facing an imminent population crisis, and that abortion is "safer than childbirth."

New executive • American Lutheran Publicity Bureau Executive Director Fred Schumacher will be retiring at the end of this year, but his successor has already been named. He is Pr. Paul Sauer, currently associate editor of our companion publication *Lutheran Forum*. He is also the Pastor/Executive Minister of The Lutheran Church & School of Our Saviour in Bronx, NY, a congregation of the LCMS. In his letter accepting the appointment, he writes, "As a Missouri-Synod Lutheran who has always had a broader vision of Lutheranism's place within the church catholic, the ALPB has provided one of the few homes for me, and indeed for many within the various jurisdictions of Lutheranism, where reasonable, faithful, evangelical catholics can come together across the ecclesial divides in support of the shared mission of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. In today's uncertain and challenging theological and church-political climate I believe that the ALPB stands uniquely ready to provide continued leadership for the ongoing realignment within the church." Congratulations to Pr. Sauer, and to the ALPB.

Say something nice • I've tossed a few tomatoes at *The Lutheran* through the years, for one thing or another, but this month I'd like to say something nice. It recently occurred to me that I hadn't seen an issue in a while, and as I began to investigate, it seemed that my last issue was in March. Apparently the church secretary of my former congregation had dropped us from the every member subscription list after I retired (even though I was paid up for the year, but that's not *The Lutheran's* fault). The complimentary copy I received as a pastor had always gone to the church, and I never sent in a change of

address. So I contacted *The Lutheran*, and got a very quick reply, not only acknowledging the change of address but offering to send me all the issues I had missed. Never one to pass on an opportunity for something free, I accepted, and within just a couple of days I had nearly a year's worth of the magazine in my mailbox. Kudos to *The Lutheran* for excellent customer service!

Say something else nice • Among the back issues I received was January 2014, which featured something of a makeover of the magazine – different paper, redesigned masthead, new picture of editor Daniel Lehmann for his column, etc. I liked it very much. Maybe they were responding to suggestions from the Associated Church Press that they needed to modernize their appearance. Probably not, though; more likely they just thought it was time for a change. Maybe this is just an editor thing, but I appreciated and found fascinating the little graphic showing how the typeface of the masthead has changed since 1861. The new version is the ninth in 152 years. Just for the record, the *Forum Letter* masthead has changed eight times in its 42-year history, and that's not even counting the years of green ink as a change. So will someone please tell the Associated Church Press that *FL* gets a redesign way more often than *The Lutheran*, and so they should get off our case?

Bishop Eaton • Another nice change in *The Lutheran* is the back page column by the presiding bishop. Of course that change is due to the fact that there's a new one, but her contributions so far have been a vast improvement over those of her predecessor, in my opinion. She quite winsomely writes about the faith and about the church. Her Advent reflection was a gem, and it was actually about Jesus. She also has a very welcome sense of self-deprecating humor. For instance: "I decided to order tulip bulbs. . . . Tulip bulbs must be planted in the fall. (They must also be planted right side up I discovered, but that is another story.)" As far as I can recall, I never accused Bp. Mark Hanson of being self-deprecating. Bishop Eaton continues to strike me as a breath of fresh air.

A grand idea • My colleagues at *Lutheran Forum* have issued an interesting declaration called "An

Exhortation to Deep Reading in the Church.” It is a challenge to pastors who “excuse the atrophying of their minds on the grounds of their ministerial duties” and congregations who “resent the time their pastors spend reading, on the assumption that it would be better spent on other more ‘practical’ things. Editors Sarah Wilson and Paul Sauer “exhort pastors and laypeople alike [to] partner together in making deep reading a priority in their shared life of Christian ministry.” Certainly a provocative challenge, and one that I hope many pastors and congregations will take to heart. To help them along, Wilson has provided a great supplementary item at LF’s web site lutheranforum.org: “The Second Annual Lutheran Forum Reading Challenge.” Here Wilson proposes an eclectic variety of theological and literary texts for you to read in 2014, and invites you to join in conversation on the site about this reading. I think it’s a grand idea. As Dr. Seuss once wrote, “The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go.” That’s from his book *I Can Read with My Eyes Shut!* But go ahead and open your own eyes and take up the challenge.

The freshest and fairest • You may be receiving this issue just a tad later than usual. This is due in part to my having spent a couple of weeks in Houston over the twelve days of Christmas, attending the birth of our first grandchild, a beautiful little girl, on January 2. As those of you who are grandparents know, there’s nothing quite like it! I returned home and jumped right into a new academic quarter, of course breathlessly telling my students about the

happy event. One of them was kind enough to send me a quotation from Frederick Buechner that I’d never read, or at least it had never struck me: “To have grandchildren is not only to be given something but to be given something back. You are given back something of your children’s childhood all those years ago. You are given back something of what it was like to be a young parent. You are given back something of your own childhood even, as on creaking knees you get down on the floor to play tiddlywinks, or sing about Old MacDonald and his farm, or watch Saturday morning cartoons till you’re cross-eyed. It is not only your own genes that are part of your grandchildren but the genes of all sorts of people they never knew but who, through them, will play some part in times and places they never dreamed of. And of course along with your genes, they will also carry their memories of you into those times and places too— the afternoon you lay in the hammock with them watching the breezes blow, the face you made when one of them stuck out a tongue dyed Popsicle blue at you, the time you got a splinter out for one of them with the tweezers of your Swiss army knife. On some distant day they will hold grandchildren of their own with the same hands you once held them by as you searched the beach at low tide for Spanish gold. In the meantime, they are the freshest and fairest you have. After you’re gone, it is mainly because of them that the earth will not be as if you never walked on it.” The quote is from Buechner’s *Beyond Words: Daily Readings in the ABC’s of Faith* (HarperOne, 2004), and I say, “Amen to that!” – roj

Address Service Requested

DELHI, NY 13753-0327
POST OFFICE BOX 327

LUTHERAN FORUM / FORUM LETTER

AMERICAN LUTHERAN PUBLICITY BUREAU

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
MASON CITY, IA 50401
ALPB