

## The Book of Faith: Our First Language

When I first heard that the vision for the Book of Faith Initiative was 'that the whole church become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture...', I thought of my Grandpa Sandvig. Growing up in a three-generation farm home on the prairie of southwestern Minnesota, I was fortunate to have a grandfather in my daily life—a grandfather who loved to read to me, with me, and who eventually tutored me into the proud position of being able to read to him. It was thrilling! We experienced many stories together, including Bible stories. I was learning my first language in the loving arms of my grandfather as well as from my parents and other grandparents.

My first church home, Clarkfield Lutheran Church, offered Tuesday School for the youngest in the congregation, as a reassuring prerequisite to Sunday School. I can still picture the afternoon light streaming through basement windows into our classroom as Lillian Larson told Bible stories to a roomful of eager 3-year-olds. Her flannelgraph helped our fluency flourish!

Not every child is blessed with a Grandpa Sandvig or a Lillian Larson, but those of us who have been are presented with quite an opportunity to keep our first language alive—by sharing it! No matter where we land on the Biblical fluency scale, any one of us can offer the gift of a Bible to a child, a confirmand, a graduate, or a new adult member of our congregation. Taking time to read



Nicole is reading from the Spark Story Bible to Katelynn (age 7) and Lindsey (age 3), granddaughters of Rev. Rick Rouse and Augsburg Fortress CEO Beth Lewis.

the Bible with that child, teenager, young adult or peer is an even more meaningful gift. Classroom settings, Bible studies, the church nursery, small group Confirmation time, cross-generational events or simply informal unstructured time all offer rich opportunities to open Scripture and join the conversation together.

Three exciting new Bibles can make building fluency in our first language even more fun and fulfilling—they create what we at Augsburg Fortress call 'Bibles for the whole family!'

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*The Spark Story Bible* is designed for kids ages two-2nd grade with engaging art and a rich retelling of the most popular Bible stories. Grandpa Sandvig would have loved it! It has:

- 150 stories
- 554 pages
- 277 illustrations
- words that make wonderful sounds as they are read (woosh, swoosh, gurgle, kerplunk!)

*The Spark Bible* (NRSV) is designed to help kids in grades 3-6 explore the Bible in a personal way. Stickers, activity suggestions and reflective questions make it easy for kids to interact with God's Word. This is a Bible designed to be read and used! It has:

- 300+ Did You Know? Facts
- 300+ Definitions
- 550 "Know It!" and "Think About It!" questions
- 275 "Try It!" ideas
- 231 Stickers in the back (and you can order more when kids use them all!)

*Lutheran Study Bible* features the NRSV translation as well as introductions, notes, and articles written by more than 60 Lutheran pastors and teaching theologians. It is designed for Confirmation-age students through adults. It includes:

- world of the Bible notes, Bible concepts notes and Lutheran perspective notes
- faith reflection questions for individual or group use
- a Bible reading plan
- 15 maps
- Bible history timeline
- articles on Martin Luther, The Small Catechism, Lutheran insights and more

Have you heard that a sign of true fluency is dreaming in that language? If we all open Scripture and invite others to join the conversation, just imagine what the dreams for our Church in this world could become!

– Leslee Nestigen  
Congregational Relations  
Augsburg Fortress

"What should we expect when we read the Bible? We should expect to discover what can be called 'the first language of faith.' The Bible supplies us with a vocabulary to talk about God and what it means to be the people of God. It supplies us with a vocabulary for talking with God through prayer and worship. Biblical language conveys a different understanding of the world than does nonbiblical language. The Bible helps us view the world as a gift from God, and we are called to take care of that gift, for the benefit of others."

– from Lutheran Study Bible,  
article by Darrell Jodock

You can view sample pages of all three of these Bibles at [augsburgfortress.org](http://augsburgfortress.org) or [activatefaith.org](http://activatefaith.org).

They can also be ordered online or by calling (800) 328-4648.

## Welcome to the Synod



Marcia Hahn has joined the Northeastern Iowa Synod office as coordinator for communications and events. She will maintain the Synod website and coordinate publications and events.

Marcia is from Denver, Iowa, and is a graduate of UNI where she majored in public relations, with minors in journalism

and marketing. She worked in health care public relations for a number of years and most recently has served as assistant editor of the magazine *Farmers' Markets Today*.

## Take Time Each Day for the *Book of Faith*

I hope that you have had the opportunity to be a part of a group that has been studying the resource *Opening the Book of Faith*. Our synod staff has used this book as a part of our weekly devotions. We have found it to be insightful and a catalyst for lively discussion. I particularly appreciate the following excerpt.

“The phrase *sola scriptura* became something of a rallying cry for Lutherans in the sixteenth century. It literally means ‘scripture only’ or ‘scripture alone.’ But what does that mean? Obviously, Lutherans don’t believe only things that are in the Bible. There is very little math in the Bible, but we don’t have anything against mathematics. What exactly do we mean by saying ‘scripture alone’?”

I think it helps to use the analogy of a three-legged stool. Christian philosophers have often said that a stool needs three legs to stand up. Actually, it could have four legs or five legs and still stand up, but the point is that a stool with only one leg or only two legs would fall over.

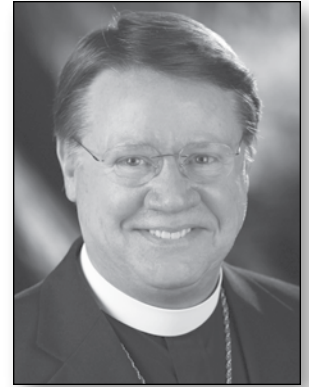
Secular or pagan philosophy often claims that there are two primary sources for knowing the truth: reason and experience. We believe some things are true because experience and observation reveal them to be true. But Christian philosophers sometimes claim that this is only a two-legged stool. If you take everything that it is possible to know through reason and experience, you still do not have a sturdy or reliable grasp of the truth. There is a third

leg: divine revelation. We know certain things to be true because God has revealed them to us.

Let’s consider two examples of things that most Lutherans probably believe are true. First, most of us probably believe that tadpoles, if they live long enough to mature, will turn into frogs. The Bible does not teach this, so why do we believe it? Well, people have observed thousands of tadpoles over the years and, so far, none of them have turned into turtles. They have all turned into frogs and, so, it is only logical to assume that the ones we have not yet observed will turn into frogs also. So, we believe this on the basis of reason and experience.

But most of us also believe that when we eat the bread and drink the wine of Holy Communion, we receive the body and blood of Christ. This is not particularly logical, and it is not something that can be shown to be true through scientific observation or analysis. Our experience does not always point to this truth: the wine doesn’t taste like blood and, after receiving Holy Communion we don’t necessarily feel like we have got more of Jesus in us than we did before. Why do we believe such a thing? By virtue of divine revelation: God has told us that we receive Christ through this meal and we believe that it is true.

Okay, so what do Lutherans mean by *sola scriptura*? They mean that scripture alone has authority to constitute that third leg, to serve as a source of divine revelation. Not councils. Not popes. Not



churchwide assemblies. Not bishops or seminary professors. Only the Bible has the authority of divine revelation.

Thus, we are not rejecting experience or reason. We are not saying, ‘The stool should have only one leg.’ There are Christians in the world who would say that experience and reason do not matter, as long as you have the Bible on your side. That is often the view of fundamentalism.

But Lutherans are not fundamentalists—at least not typically or traditionally. We do not reject experience or reason, but view them as appropriate God-given avenues for knowing the truth. Still, some truth can only be known by revelation, and the Bible is the only source for that truth.”

Our Book of Faith is the source of “divine revelation.” Please take the time each day to read “the only source for that truth.”

– Steven L. Ullestad  
Bishop, Northeastern Iowa Synod

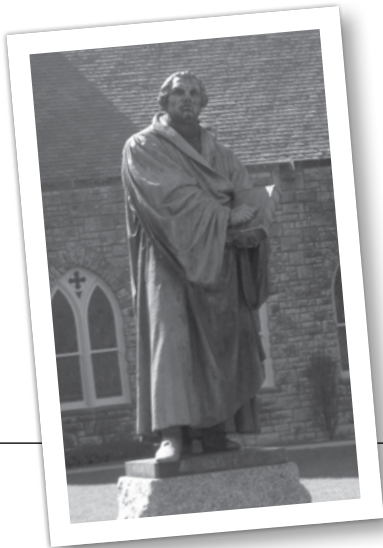
## Lutheran Men in Mission

For the past seven years, Lutheran Men in Mission (LMM) has been encouraging men to study the Bible by offering the *Master Builder Bible for Men* who want to begin or enhance a small group Bible experience.

LMM is expanding this effort by giving a *Master Builder Bible for Men* to each seminary student who is beginning an internship. They are also giving them Pat Morley's book, *Pastoring Men*, which they believe is an excellent resource as they begin their ministerial life.



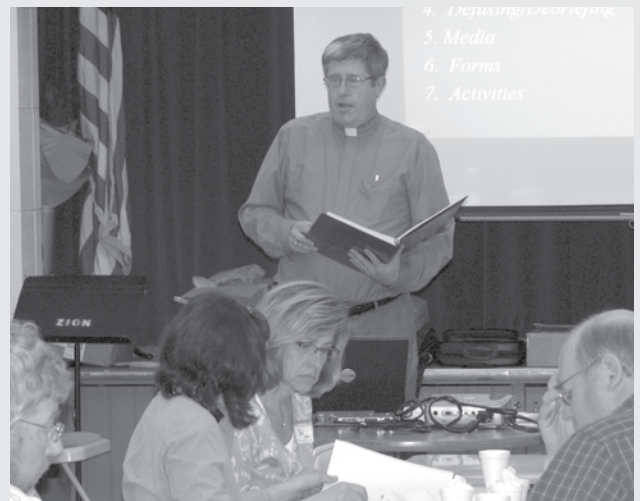
Lon Buss, Region 5 LMM Board Representative delivers resources to 36 interns at Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa.



## Disaster Preparedness

Pastor Michael Stadie leads a Congregational Disaster Preparedness Workshop at Zion Lutheran Church in Waterloo. Thirteen congregations from the area attended the training and are working on their preparedness and response plans.

To schedule a workshop in your area, please contact Pastor Stadie at [Michael.stadie@lsiowa.org](mailto:Michael.stadie@lsiowa.org) or call 563-322-7419.



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Send news for the July/August issue to Linda Hudgins by July 2.



## I Love to Tell the Story: My ELCA

Do you have stories to tell? Stories of God's work in our lives? Stories of your congregation serving its neighbors? Stories of struggles and joys in our work together? The Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is hoping you will share those stories at the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Minneapolis. Held August 17-23, 2009, the ELCA Archives will provide the means to contribute those stories, record them for posterity, and share them throughout the church.

"I Love to Tell the Story: My ELCA" will allow 15-minute time slots to sit down and share your memories, thoughts, frustrations, and joys of the first 20 years of the ELCA. As part of the larger "Voices of Vision" oral history project, the archives is looking for congregational members to talk about their congregations, their synods, their social ministry organizations, their colleges, their seminaries, and their work in the ELCA and in God's world.

**For more information about how to participate, go to**  
**[www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/History/ELCA-Archives/I-Love-To-Tell-The-Story.aspx](http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/History/ELCA-Archives/I-Love-To-Tell-The-Story.aspx),**  
**email: [archives@elca.org](mailto:archives@elca.org),**  
**or call: 800-638-3522, x2818.**