

*From Freedom to Life: A History of the AFLC*

Robert L. Lee book presentation, June 12, 2024 (Annual Conference)

Marian Christopherson, AFLC Parish Education Director

Good evening. I serve as Parish Education Director of the AFLC, and it is a great honor tonight to make a special presentation. On behalf of the Board of Publications and Parish Education, we invite you to rejoice with us tonight that God has brought to completion a very important book, Volume VI in the AFLC Heritage Series, *From Freedom to Life: A History of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations*, by Rev. Robert L. Lee.

The Board of Publications began talking about the need for a thorough history of the AFLC about 20 years ago, while Pastor Lee was President of the AFLC. There was no question in the mind of the board that he should be the one to write it, but the time was not right while he was bearing such a heavy load as President.

We kept it on our list of future projects and years later were very grateful when we approached Pastor Lee and he agreed to write it.

There is likely no one else in the AFLC who knows as many people and not only remembers their names but also knows the interconnectedness of families and congregations and their communities. When you meet Pastor Lee for the first time, he might tell you more history about your family and congregation than you know yourself. If he doesn't know, he will ask questions to discover your family and church history and then figure out how it is intertwined with some other family or congregation. This is a God-given gift, and his gift of memory and love of history equip him to write such a history of the AFLC.

The variety of roles he has served within the AFLC further equip him to write such a book: pastor, teacher, longtime church history professor, editor of *The Lutheran Ambassador*, interim dean of the seminary, AFLC vice-president, and 15 years as AFLC president.

The process of writing such a comprehensive history takes years of research and study, and we are grateful for his perseverance to completion of *From Freedom to Life: A History of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations*.

Though we may have grown accustomed to it, *Association of Free Lutheran Congregations* is a peculiar name to many. Our church body is an *association*—a fellowship of free Lutheran congregations. Our AFLC history begins in 1962. But our free Lutheran history has its formal beginning in 1897 in a movement led by Sven Oftedal and Georg Sverdrup which became the Lutheran Free Church. In his book, *From Freedom to Life*, Pastor Lee explains why it is important that we learn our earlier history. Lee provides a warning through a quote by Carl Sandberg, “When a nation goes down, or a society perishes, one condition may always be found: They forgot where they came from. They lost sight of what had brought them along.” *From Freedom to Life* is intended to help us remember where we came from so that we can flourish rather than perish and stand firm on God’s Word rather than slide into compromise.

In his introduction to the book, we see the lens through which the book is written. “This is the story of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations,” he says, but clarifies, “This is also my story.” Those who know Robert Lee know he is a good storyteller, and this gift shines through in his engaging narrative style.

“The title, *From Freedom to Life*, was chosen to express the conviction of our founders that polity or denominational structure is never an end in itself but a context in which true spiritual life might abound.” Pastor Lee writes, “My hope is that your reading of this book will not only supply the story of the birth and growth of a small Lutheran denomination. A greater goal is that you might catch the vision that captured me as a teenager, of a unique fellowship bound together not by organization but by Spirit-led commitment to the task of building and nourishing free and living Lutheran congregations.” (p. 5)

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 5:17)—true spiritual freedom.

Lee closes the book with this testimony:

“Sixty years ago my heart and mind were gripped by what could be regarded as the impractical and idealistic dream of our founders for a fellowship of free Lutheran congregations, pressing on to become living congregations. . . .

“The purpose of this book is that the same dream of freedom and life might continue to be comprehended and claimed by pastors and lay people, and then gifted to coming generations as long as the Lord tarries.” (pp. 370-371)

*I'd like to invite Pastor Lee and his family to come and join me on the platform at this time.*

For all of you gathered here tonight, we invite you to stay for a Scandinavian dessert reception and book signing in Heritage Hall following the evening service. We have food for all, and Pastor Lee is eager to greet you!

Though many of you would like to spend an hour visiting with Pastor Lee, I am asking you to keep your greetings at the reception *brief* so he can greet MORE of you. We might say quantity over quality tonight.

*(Addressing Pastor Lee:)*

Pastor Lee, on behalf of the Board of Publications and Parish Education; on behalf of the Schools Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, and students; and on behalf of the people of the AFLC, thank you for writing a history of the AFLC for us and for generations to come! Thank you for a lifetime of dedicated service with the AFLC!

As a small gesture of our appreciation, we present you with this book. And we dedicate this book to the glory of God today and for generations to come!

Many of you present here tonight have been students of Pastor Lee. I know it would bring him great joy to see you.

*Please listen carefully to my instructions.*

If you were a student in one of Pastor Lee's classes at the Free Lutheran Bible School, would you please stand, and stay standing.

If you were one of his seminary students, please stand, and stay standing.

If you were one of his students at Summer Institute of Theology, please stand, and stay standing.

If you were a student in one of his sessions at a Bible camp or Bible conference, please stand, and stay standing.

If you were one of his students in confirmation or Sunday school when he was your pastor, please stand, and stay standing so he can see you all.

(He would probably like to name you all, but I'm not going to let him do that tonight.)

There are very few at this conference who have not had Pastor Lee for a teacher in some capacity.

Pastor Lee,

The impact of your teaching is far-reaching.

The impact of your book *From Freedom to Life* may become farther reaching.

We are grateful!

Thanks be to God for this gift that He has provided through you.