

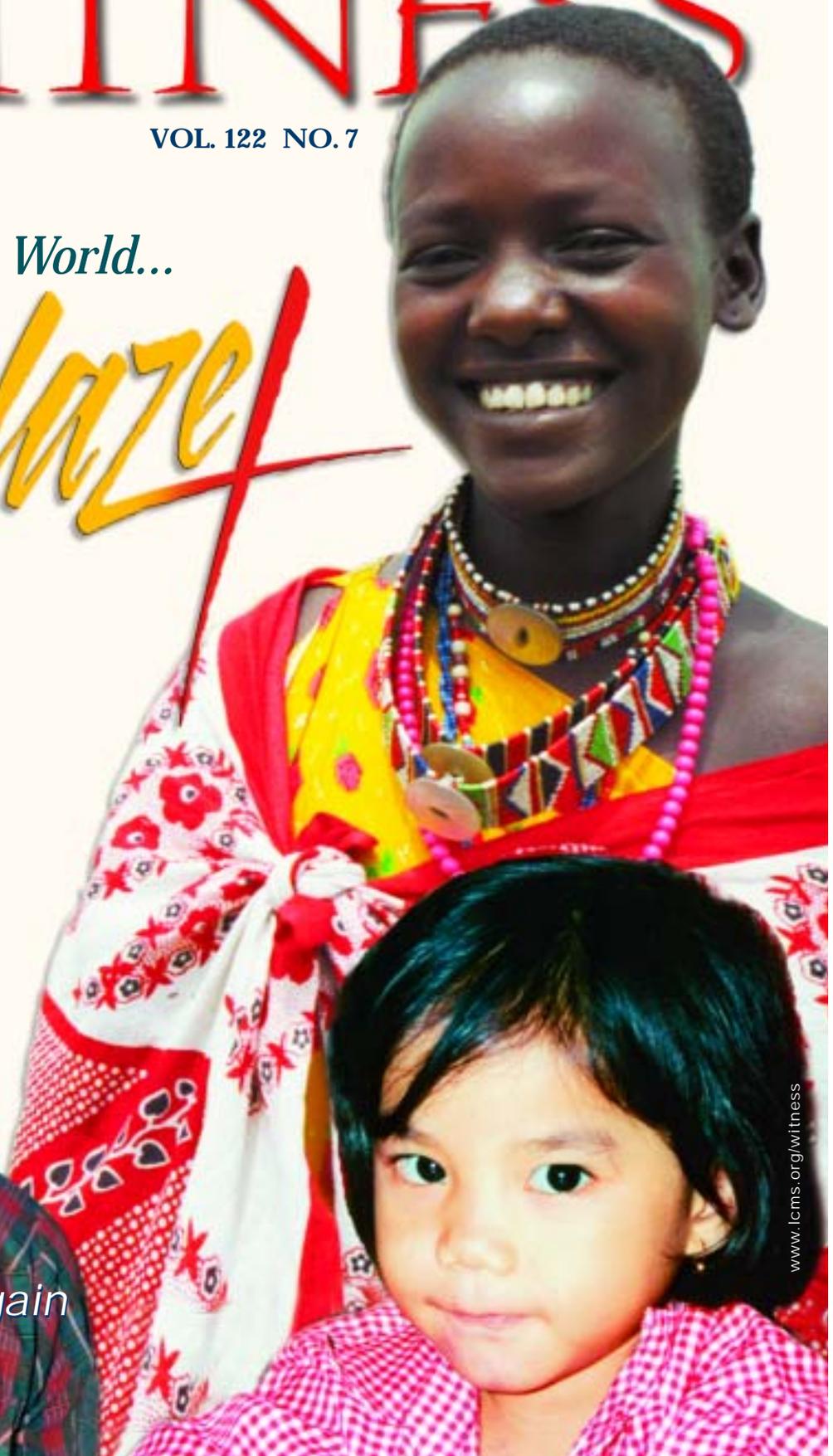
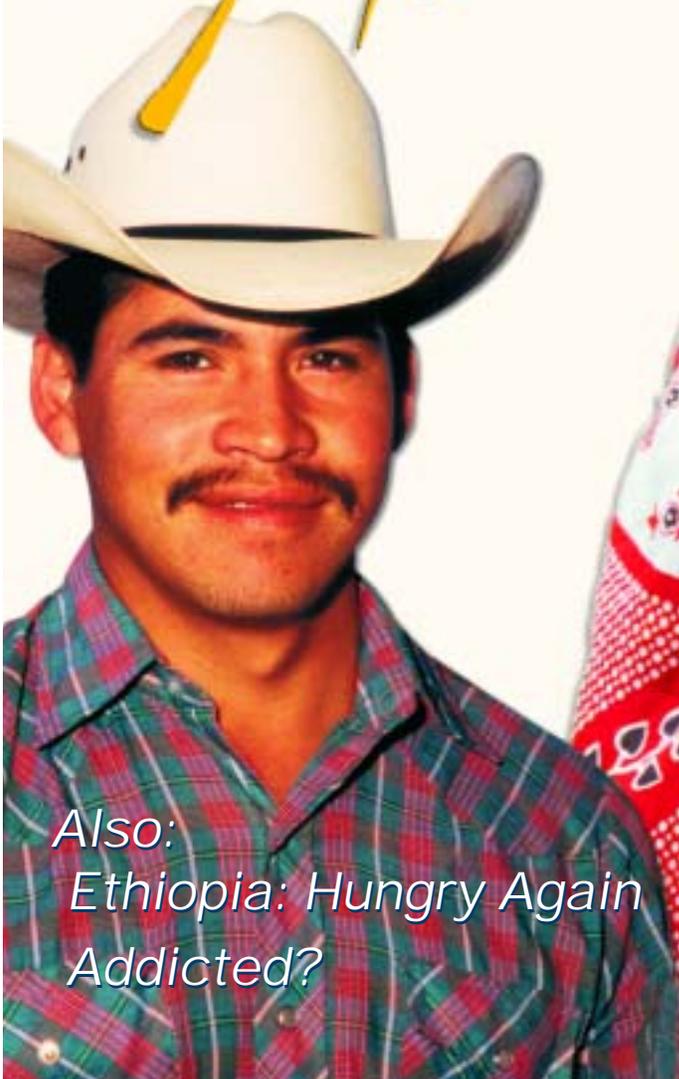
The Lutheran WITNESS

AUGUST 2003

VOL. 122 NO. 7

Help Us Set the World...

Ablaze!



*Also:
Ethiopia: Hungry Again
Addicted?*



The Lutheran WITNESS

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A MAGAZINE FOR THE LAYPEOPLE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD

AUGUST 2003



Photo courtesy of LCMS World Mission

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Women in combat (cont.)

For the woman to take up arms to protect home and family in no way changes her role. No one fights harder in the animal kingdom to protect her young than the female.

*Pearl Rainwater
Marysville, Wash.*

THANK YOU, DR. LEROY VOGEL, FOR your well-reasoned response to the issue of women in combat ("Women in Combat: Two Views," May '03). Thank you for refusing to compromise Biblical precepts in order to accommodate the whims of culture and the "wisdom" of the world.

*Barbara Smith
Portland, Ore.*

THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE ARMED forces need our support in every possible way. They do not need the church debating their right to protect the nation and its freedoms. What will the church debate next—women in the police force?

Read and heed Dr. David W. Wollenburg's closing words, that we "pray for and encourage the men and women who stand in the face of combat," and that we "pray for and encourage those individual Christian men and women who are engaged in the political process. They are addressing the social and civil questions of our age in the proper places, ... in all the places where public policy is decided. That is their job, not the church's. The Savior has given the church other things to do."

*Larry T. French
Johnson City, Tenn.*

DR. VOGEL'S ARTICLE WAS MOST HEARTENING. One does not usually find the word "nurture" in today's vocabulary. The dictionary says it means

"to feed, nourish or support during stages of growth, as children or young." How does a woman manage this while being in the armed forces, or in any other demanding profession?

*Myrtha Witkop
Selinsgrove, Pa.*

DR. VOGEL STATES THAT MAN IS assigned the role of "defender, protector, warrior," and woman is given the role of "lifegiver, nurturer, sustainer." He takes this as his basis to say that women should have no role in combat, because that is man's area. If you continue in this logic, I should be prevented from giving life and nurturing and sustaining others because I am male. If this is true, as the father of two children, I would be sinning constantly.

*Philip Droege
Silver Spring, Md.*

THE WOMEN I KNEW AND SERVED WITH proudly in the U.S. Army were like the men—multi-dimensional, complex individuals. Like our male counterparts, we could be at times both nurturers and warriors. And due to the fluidity of the modern-day battlefield, the idea of excluding anyone (e.g., traditional support personnel) from combat is obsolete.

*Christy Spurlock
Bowling Green, Ky.*

WHEN I SERVED WITH THE 7TH Infantry Division in Korea, I saw men die. I can attest from experience that combat places excruciating physical demands on its participants.

It is clear that due to natural, God-given physical differences, a woman in combat will face far greater hazards than will her male colleagues. Her vulnerability will, in turn, impose unnecessary risks on those companions. Independent of any Scriptural proscription against women in combat, to shed the blood of our young people merely to advance some politically correct, liberal agenda is unconscionable.

*Leon O. Billig
Burnet, Texas*

AS A FORMER NAVY CHAPLAIN, I BELIEVE David Wollenburg is correct: Women in combat is a question for the state, the "Kingdom of Power," to answer. I don't recall the Missouri Synod ever asking a question about vocation in the Kingdom of Power, especially based upon gender. Where are we going here? We, the church, the Kingdom of Grace, have the more urgent mission to accomplish. We are called to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the message of reconciliation to a fallen world.

*Rev. Arden D. Walz
Yakima, Wash.*

I SERVED IN SAUDI ARABIA DURING THE Gulf War. I was away from my wife and children for five months. I did not need the extra stress of women serving next to me—stress that also would affect my wife. That stress would be twofold:

First, when you put men and women together in survival situations such as war, hormones and loneliness can create unwanted results. I am sure your wife or girlfriend would have no problem with you in a foxhole alone with

another woman for a few days! You would not want your wife alone in such a situation with a man, and you know it.

The second issue is one of protection. I was happy with my son for separating from the military after eight years of service, because the future did not look promising for getting the most qualified people in the military to protect my son. I did not want him to become a part of a social experiment—fighting alongside female partners—that could destroy his marriage or cost his life. I wanted the strongest and best fighting by his side, not the politically correct.

*Rennald Worman
Fort Wayne, Ind.*

A new hymnal?

WHY IN THE WORLD DO WE NEED A NEW hymnal (“Another New Hymnal,” May ’03)? Is there something unique and special about change itself that I have missed in my 64 years here on earth?

*Dorothy R. Gray
North Port, Fla.*

OUR SYNOD DESPERATELY NEEDS MORE dollars for missions and for attracting and educating prospective pastors, educators and church workers. How can we even suggest that a new hymnal compete with missions for a congregation’s dollars? I am not alone in preferring to send a missionary to China versus putting a new, slick hymnal in my pew.

*Nelda Peterson
Honolulu, Hawaii*

We welcome letters that comment on articles in The Lutheran Witness. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. Send letters to “Letters,” c/o The Lutheran Witness, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; or send them via e-mail to Lutheran.Witness@LCMS.org



Ablaze

Can a worldwide network of some 4 million Lutherans really share the Good News of Jesus with 100 million people?



by Paula Schlueter Ross

He's been called "crazy," even by other Lutheran pastors. But Rev. Robert Roegner, executive director of LCMS World Mission, could never be called insincere.

And when he leans across the table and tells you that, yeah, it is possible for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and her partners around the globe to share the Gospel with 100 million people over the next 14 years, well, you want to believe him.

As the head of the Synod's worldwide mission program, Roegner has become one of the church body's most vocal spokespersons for *Ablaze!*, an unprecedented mission initiative that seeks to reach 100 million souls by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, and raise \$100 million within five years.

His vision for *Ablaze* is to "ignite a worldwide Lutheran movement," says Roegner, who admits that reaching 100 million people is a lofty goal for the 2.5 million-member Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

So he and other *Ablaze* planners are

inviting the Synod's partner-church bodies in 27 countries—another 1.5 million Lutherans—to join them in taking Christ's message to the world.

"I've had pastors write me, I've had pastors call me, I've had pastors stop me on the street and say, 'Come on, Roegner, 100 million people? Get real.'

"And I'm saying, OK, I think we're real, but you don't. That's OK."

Five years of research and planning by LCMS World Mission, its missionaries and others directly involved in mission have gone into the *Ablaze* campaign, Roegner points out. As a result, the "100 million" figure was chosen very intentionally, he says, after consultations with mission leaders in the United States and foreign fields.

"We asked them to do the demographics in their area and come back to us with a number that they thought was a legitimate number—how many people they thought could be reached by sharing the Good News of Jesus in their area," he said.

"It was not something we just plucked out of the sky—it was an honest-to-goodness look at where we're at in the world,



what our resources are and where our partners are located," he says.

The figure represents a targeted 50 million people—"unreached" by the Gospel or "uncommitted" to Christianity—in North America and another 50 million around the world.

"And we truly believe that with the [Synod's 35 U.S.] districts participating, our partners participating around the world, congregations, individuals, pastors, that we can do this," Roegner says.

One mission

When Synod President Gerald Kieschnick travels around the country, speaking about his own Gospel-sharing vision, One Mission, One Message, One People, he often will stand at the microphone and snap his fingers, counting off seconds.

"Every second, one person dies without the hope of everlasting life in Jesus," Kieschnick will say.

Those who claim no religious preference represent the third-largest group in the United States—behind Roman Catholics and Baptists—so today, more than ever, it's "critical" for Lutherans to share their faith with others, he says.



Nonbelievers are "all around" us, Kieschnick says, and, though they may not be asking directly, they're searching for hope in their lives in the face of illness and other life struggles.

Only one-fourth of Lutherans in a recent LCMS

survey said they have talked about their faith and their church to others. In the same survey, most of the "unchurched" people polled said they would appreciate a personal invitation to a church from a friend or relative.

"They're open to hearing about faith ... [but] we're not telling them the message," Kieschnick says. "When we fail to share the hope within us, we fail in the mission of God."

The *Ablaze* initiative and One Mission



vision "dovetail beautifully," he says, noting that both are closely and naturally related to the Tell the Good News About Jesus evangelism campaign initiated during the administration of the late Synod President A.L. Barry.

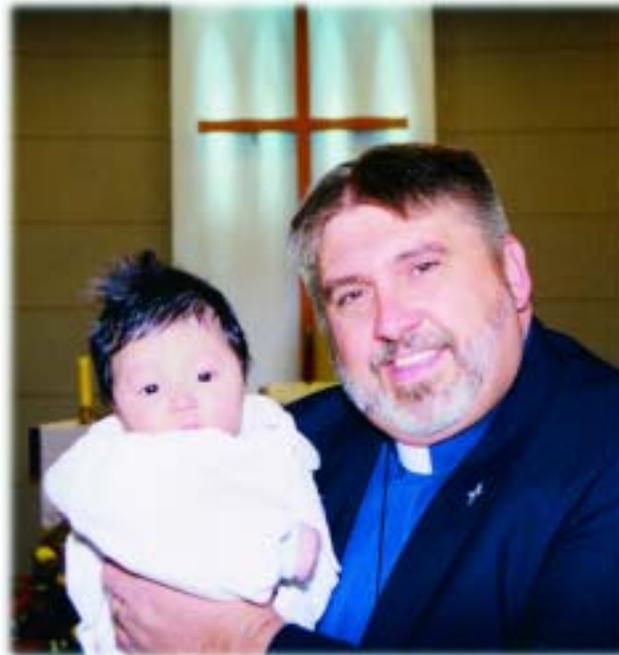


Kieschnick says he's excited about *Ablaze* because

it "establishes a target and a goal" for measuring the Synod's efforts. "A lot of times, we in the church don't have a target, a goal at which to aim."

That target gives the Missouri Synod a "common mission," he says, and he prays that "even those people who disagree on other issues in the church can get behind this effort."

Kieschnick describes One Mission as "an effort to help the people of our church body get focused on the main thing. We've got one mission—to seek lost people for Christ. That's why Jesus came. Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world—that's the message we are to share."



On a recent trip to Asia, Rev. Robert Roegner, executive director of LCMS World Mission, witnessed the baptism of a new member of the Lutheran Church in Korea.

Gauging success

Although the official kickoff of *Ablaze* will take place in July 2004, in conjunction with the Synod's weeklong convention in St. Louis, congregations will receive in September a DVD with a 16-minute program describing the initiative and encouraging them to take part in it. Included will be a music video and a video-based study about how congregations and their members can be involved in mission.

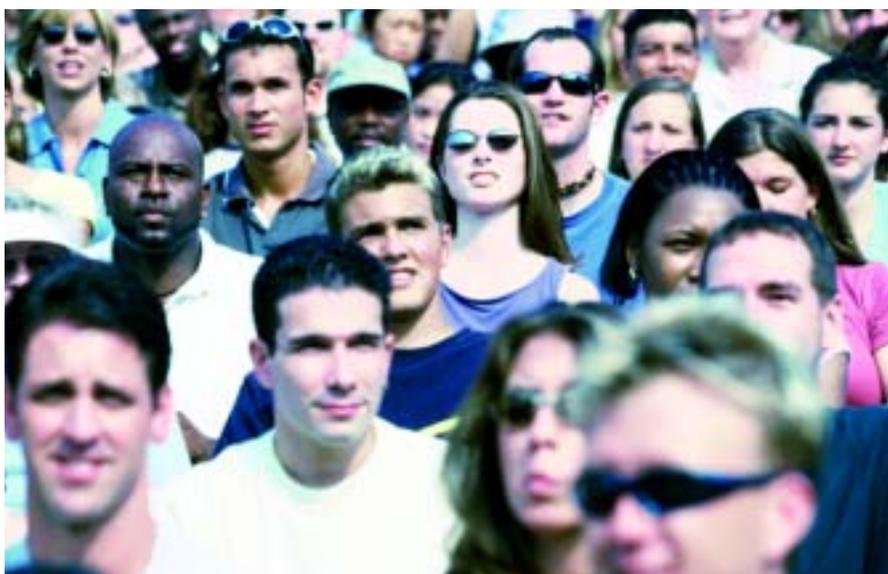
An *Ablaze* Web site also will be set up, to provide information and to track actual mission activities and events in an effort to count how many people are actually being reached for Christ.

Leaders of the Synod's 28 partner churches in Africa, Asia, Europe and North, Central and South America will be invited to attend a meeting July 7–8



in St. Louis; events celebrating the Synod's cross-cultural Pentecost 2000+ effort; and a first-ever LCMS missionary reunion that begins on July 9, just prior to the convention's opening the next day.

The idea is to "engage our partners" in *Ablaze*, according to Roegner, and gather their ideas for making the initiative a success. "I hope we can walk out of that meeting together, committed to do this task of reaching the lost in the world," he said.



Most of the "unchurched" people polled said they would appreciate a personal invitation to a church from a friend or relative.

Partner-church members also will be encouraged to update the *Ablaze* Web site, so that, if a pastor in the Lutheran Church of Nigeria, for example, preaches to a group of 100 in a remote village, he can add that figure to the online total. Congregations, mission societies — even individuals — can do the same.

Roegner defines "sharing the Good News of Jesus" as "when you give a Gospel witness to somebody in which they have an opportunity to respond." Some may respond with a "no," he says, just as the parable of the sower teaches — some seed falls on rocky soil, some on good soil.

"All we're asked to do is share the Word — the Holy Spirit convicts," he says.

Those who go to the Web site to update the witnessing figure also will be asked to share their witnessing situation. That information will be used to let others know "how the Spirit works in different ways, through different gifts, through different people," according to Roegner.

If *Ablaze* is going to be successful, it will have to involve the laypeople, according to Butch Almstedt, chairman of the Synod's mission board. "And the laity," he says, "are going to have to be passionate about this,"

sharing their faith with more people and increasing their financial contributions to missions.

Unfortunately, many laypeople feel unprepared to witness their faith to others, according to Roegner.

"We've got to give people permission to be involved in this *Ablaze* initiative, and not worry about whether they have all the credentials," he says. "It's not about credentials, it's about sharing one's faith. It's about your baptism ... and [how] you've been given the task of sharing the Good News."

Another challenge will be in "creating a greater sense of urgency in the church," encouraging Lutherans "to do something today," he says.

As for finances, 10 years ago the Synod's Board for Mission Services received most of its financial support from Sunday-morning offerings and a small portion from "designated gifts." Today that situation has flip-flopped, with donors preferring to designate how their contributions are used. The problem is that the portion received from Sunday offerings has declined to such a degree that increased designated gifts cannot make up the shortage, Roegner says. So, today's mission board is having to do more with less — fewer missionaries, in fewer countries, with fewer total dollars.

But LCMS partner-church bodies are beginning to take responsibility for mission work within — and even outside — their own borders.

A recent example, Roegner says, involved the Synod's Concordia International School Shanghai, which needed nearly \$6 million to purchase property. LCMS World Mission didn't have the funds, but the Lutheran Church — Hong Kong Synod, a Missouri Synod partner church, was able to guarantee a loan for the school.

The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod is no longer carrying its partners on its shoulders, as it did in the past, says Roegner. "We're sitting on their shoulders now."

Likewise, contributions to *Ablaze* would be used to bolster the mission work of both the Missouri Synod and her overseas partners by building and supporting mission alliances worldwide, including the establishment of the first "Lutheran World Evangelism Network"; increasing the number of LCMS and partner-church missionaries; planting new congregations, at home and abroad; and responding to special opportunities and emergencies, such as sending missionaries to countries that were previously closed to Christian outreach.

'Don't stop'

Roegner says his years of experience as a missionary in Liberia, West Africa, in the 1980s, made a huge impact on him, particularly in shaping his personal dedication to sharing God's Word with people from other cultures.

"There's no way, when I left the seminary, that I had the heart and vision I have today," he said. "Those [African] people taught me a whole lot about life; they taught me a whole lot about ministry."

He turned 50 last month and figures he'll be close to retirement when *Ablaze* climaxes in 2017, so he's giving it everything he's got. "It's who I am," he says, and he shared a story about his first convert in Africa, "Big Joe."

Joe Nyuma, a slightly-built man who was called "Big Joe" because of his respected standing among Liberia's Kisi people, was the first African Roegner baptized as a new missionary. Joe, who was slated to be his village's next "witch doctor," rejected his people's traditional animistic religion and chose Christianity instead. And when "Big Joe" stepped forward to become a Christian, other Kisi villagers followed.

When Roegner left the mission field in 1988, Joe accompanied him to the airport, and reluctantly told him about a dream he had had the night before. In the dream, Roegner had died, so Joe was convinced he would never again see his American friend.

"I assured him that even if [I did die], we'd see each other in heaven because we believed in Jesus," Roegner recalls.

Three months later—on Dec. 19, Roegner remembers—he got a phone call from Liberia. Joe had fallen from the top of a palm tree, where he was cutting palm nuts, and had broken his neck. He was taken to a hospital in Monrovia, where he lay paralyzed for several weeks, but never recovered.

After Joe's death, Roegner received a letter that his friend had dictated from his hospital bed.

In the letter, Joe admitted his dream had been wrong; he, not Roegner, would be the first to die. "But I remember what you said about being in heaven," he said, and he thanked Roegner. "The only reason I'm going to be in heaven is because you came to my coun-

try and my village to tell me about Jesus," he said.

And then Joe added one sentence that Roegner says he'll never forget: "He said, 'Please don't stop telling people about Jesus.'"

Those words, dictated by a dying man in Liberia, have buoyed Roegner's spirits in the midst of Synod budget cuts, and staff layoffs, and church politics.

"When I get discouraged about what's going on, all I



Rev. Robert Roegner and "Big Joe" Nyuma surprised delegates and guests at the 1986 Synod convention in Indianapolis when they appeared onstage following the premiere showing of the Synod's "Big Joe" video. Joe, an elder in his Liberian village, was the first African Roegner baptized as a missionary. Years later, he told Roegner, now head of LCMS World Mission, "Don't stop telling people about Jesus."

have to do is remember that Joe went to heaven because I wasn't afraid to tell people about Jesus," he said. And he shared his vision: "I want to see hundreds, and thousands, and maybe millions of people in heaven because God used us in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod."

Will the Synod and her partners reach 100 million people with the Gospel? Maybe. Maybe not.

"People can tell me all they want that I'm crazy," says Roegner, who's not about to give up on *Ablaze*. "They can tell me that this isn't going to work."

But that's OK, he says, "because I have Joe in my heart, who continually says to me, 'Don't stop telling people about Jesus.'"



Paula Schlueter Ross is contributing editor for *The Lutheran Witness*.



ETHIOPIA: HUNGRY AGAIN

Lutherans are doing what they can to help ease the crisis—now, and for the long term.

One in three children in Ethiopia has had growth stunted by malnutrition. In addition to emergency aid, long-term development aid is critical to help Ethiopia break the cycle of food crisis and famine.

by Kathryn Wolford

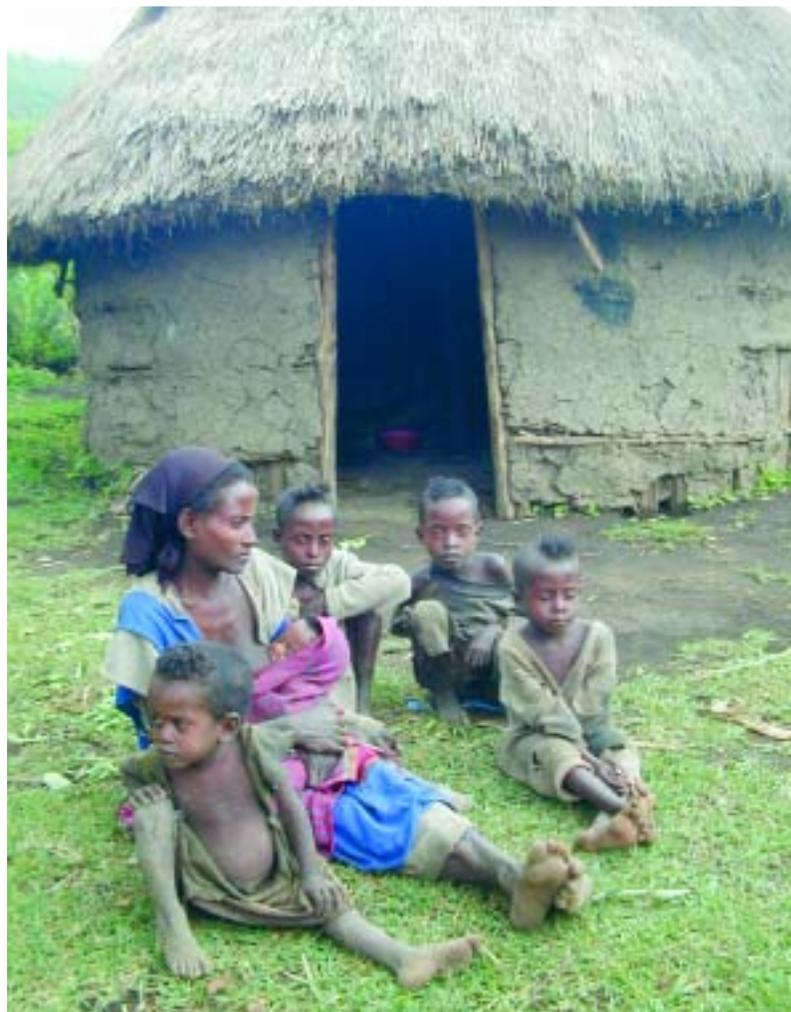
We entered homes where there was nothing more than a cooking pot, a few utensils and well-worn mats on a dirt floor. In their last-ditch efforts, families had already used up their seeds and sold their animals. Most houses had little or no food.

I saw one child, aged 3, who was the size of a 1-year-old and realized that we were seeing what could happen here more and more frequently. It was hard to not think about the famine here in 1984–85, when one million people perished.

I was in Ethiopia. I was feeling a powerful dose of what many of us in America feel on seeing the words “hunger” and “Africa” in a headline.

When I was in Ethiopia early this year to help solve this emergency, there were 11.3 million people at risk from the current food crisis there. Now, the number has climbed to 12.5 million.

Yet such huge and incomprehensible statistics are also the place where good news comes in. Great efforts by the Ethiopian, the U.S. and other governments, by aid organizations, by churches and by local communities have resulted in much success. Without their efforts, the current crisis would be much worse than it is. “God forbid” comes to my lips, and perhaps He is doing exactly that.



Ethiopia's food crisis is found in pockets—within a district, within a community, even within a family when a mother cannot keep a child on breast milk long enough.

Ethiopia on the Edge

I paused while in the country to take in some of the fresh air in Ethiopia's temperate highlands. This country of 68 million people is Africa's second most populated nation. It is one of the few present-day countries mentioned by name in the Bible, and when the evangelist Philip hitched a ride with the Ethiopian official (Acts 8:26-40), he found himself training Africa's first evangelist. Today, 2,000 years later, Ethiopia has some of the fastest growing Lutheran congregations in the world.

In a country of small farms, nine farmers out of 10 depend completely on rainfall to water their crops. But rainfall has been erratic this year, and last year, and the year before that. In fact, research by the U.S. government's Famine Early Warning System recently found that Ethiopia has been getting less and less rain for the last 30 years.

Food production has also been erratic—reflecting drought, erosion and soil degradation. Meanwhile, Ethiopia's population has steadily increased.

Other factors are important as well. AIDS is a catalyst for crisis in Ethiopia and elsewhere in Africa. A protracted and deadly border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea two years ago absorbed the two nation's resources and attention. On the world stage, the two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan upstaged Africa's food crises.

To go to Ethiopia in March as the crisis there deepened was to travel more than miles. Lutheran World Relief (LWR) joined Catholic Relief Services and Africare, the largest African-American charitable organization assisting Africa, in a journey that took us far from the centers of world power. Our mission was to a destination chosen out of humanitarian concern and Christian compassion.



To see who needs food the most, children under five are measured around the upper arm. In a typical village in southern Ethiopia's crisis zone, 18 of 26 children were malnourished, with six severely so.



This pond is the last source of water in the area and therefore vital for people and their livestock.

One end of our journey were households in central Ethiopia that may manage to stand up to poverty in normal times but now find themselves brought low by hunger and by the diseases that travel in its wake.

The other end of our journey was Washington, D.C. We came back to tell churches, the media and policy-

makers what we had seen and learned, asking members of Congress to do two things: sustain our government's food aid for Africa, while boosting long-term development programs that enable countries like Ethiopia to better feed themselves.

In the months since then, the food crisis has rumbled on, quietly.

Gaps in the pipeline of international food aid loom just weeks away. But no bombs go off to announce this kind of disaster. Instead, aid workers stretch aid by reducing rations, families tighten their belts further, they sell their last cow, look longer for “famine foods” out in the wild, or earn 40 cents as day laborers. More and more people are brought to clinics or simply retreat to their huts in silence.

Although the “long rains” (rainfall from April through August, affecting the harvest in September) fell this year in many parts of Ethiopia, they were often too late. Weakened from

three previous years of erratic weather and food problems, those 12 million most vulnerable people have little or nothing to tide them over until the harvest, hence “the gap” that relief efforts are working to fill.

“Things are just burning up. I have never seen the countryside so dry,” said a manager visiting LWR projects in southern Ethiopia at mid-year. “We have faced hunger for four million or even six million people before. But 12 million? It is unprecedented.”

Where possible, relief foods like maize and wheat are purchased in Ethiopia. More food comes in bulk

from governments, like the U.S., through a Lutheran-Catholic-Orthodox relief partnership forged in the 1980s between Ethiopia’s three main churches and their service agencies.

Immediate and long term

The solution to Ethiopia’s hunger crisis has two tracks, emergency action and long-term change. LWR supports both but is best equipped to make a difference in the long term, helping communities secure food supplies and incomes to outlast bad times.

Dr. Asenath Omwega, LWR’s East

Africa director says, "In one project in southern Ethiopia, for example, 100 families are in a micro-credit [program]. Other farmers have put 100 tons of grain in a grain bank." By fattening cows and raising bees, the first group has quadrupled their income. Farmers in the second group have a secure supply of seeds and cereals.

"The added income and the food reserves are helping each group weather the current crisis," Omwega adds.

In another area, three years ago, a community of 2,400 people began a dam and irrigation project designed to assure their food supply for

Erratic rains and depleted soils near Nazeret in southern Ethiopia have meant years of scant harvests. Government and aid-agency response has been strong overall, but more help is needed. In addition to emergency aid, long-term development aid is critical to help Ethiopia break the cycle of food crisis and famine.



years to come. They needed food aid at the time and had suffered erratic rains and crop failures for years. In addition to water-harvesting and irrigation systems, this project addresses drinking water, vegetable crops, soil conservation and financial credit for farmers. A few miles away, it is dry. But in this valley, the river diversion and irrigation have made a life-giving difference. Typical of the way LWR works, part of the \$125,000 we used for that project came from LCMS World Relief.

Dollars spent like this—on long-term, local capacities—are estimated to be seven times more effective than emergency dollars. That explains, in part, why Ethiopia is currently trapped in its emergency. Ethiopian President Meles Zenawi told our delegation that his people are "tired" of receiving aid that does not help the nation break the cycle of crises.

Given the capacity already in place, adequate aid today and sustained help for tomorrow could transform the homes we visited. Future visitors would then see healthy children playing. There would be parents able to farm, able to find work, confident about the future. Even the humblest of homes would have food on hand. And, without a doubt, hosts would invite their visitors to come in, give thanks to God and, together, break bread.



Kathryn Wolford is president of Lutheran World Relief, Baltimore, Md.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Lutheran World Relief (LWR) has two goals in Ethiopia:

1. Assure supplies of food now.
2. Break the cycle of famine with concerted, long-term measures.

LWR is pursuing these goals with Lutheran and other partners in Ethiopia as resources permit:

- Emergency food for some 300,000 people, especially for vulnerable groups and for those able to work on water and farm projects in return.
- Long-term food security and better livelihoods for 14,500 people in drought-prone southern Ethiopia.
- Seeds, tools and livestock replacement for 24,000 people.
- Improved crops, diets and incomes for one newly irrigated valley.
- Advocating with the U.S. Government to sustain its emergency food aid and strongly increase its long-term development assistance for Ethiopia and other nations in need in Africa. Keep Ethiopian people in your prayers.

You can help accomplish both of these LWR goals by supporting LCMS World Relief (please designate your gifts: "Africa Food Crisis").

To donate over a secure web connection hosted by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, go to: <http://catalog.lcms.org/newdefault.htm>

To donate by mail:
LCMS World Relief
P.O. Box 66861
St. Louis, MO 63166-9810

To donate by telephone:
Credit Card gift line:
1-888-930-4438

See this green valley in "Banish Hunger," an LWR video. The video comes with a discussion guide for lay leaders and is part of the inter-Lutheran "Stand With Africa" campaign. — K.W.

Stuenkel accepts school position

Mark Stuenkel left the presidency of the LCMS Foundation

July 15 to become the chief financial officer for Orange County (Calif.)

Lutheran High School.



Stuenkel

Stuenkel announced his decision in June.

Wayne Price, the Foundation's vice president, finance, will serve as interim president until a new president is in place.

"This has been a difficult decision but I believe this is a good time for the Foundation to seek leadership to move it forward in the future," Stuenkel said.

Hymnal-material evaluations due for Sept. 2 return

Congregations must return by Sept. 2 evaluation forms for field testing material being proposed for the Synod's new hymnal.

The LCMS Commission on Worship sent a booklet of material for the field test to congregations in mid-July.

Included in the booklet

are samples of proposed new hymns, revisions of worship services currently in use, and a new Service of Prayer.

This is the worship commission's second field test of material for the hymnal. The first one took place last year.

All the hymnal fieldtest material is on the Commission on Worship's Web site, <http://worship.lcms.org>.

CTCR mails workers, parishes report on 'divine call'

"Theology and Practice of 'The Divine Call,'" a new report from the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), was mailed in June to all rostered LCMS church workers and Synod congregations.

The CTCR adopted the report in February but held it for distribution until after it could discuss

two minority opinions at a meeting in late April.

The new report addresses a number of contemporary issues regarding what historically has been known as "the divine call."

It says that the New Testament says very little about the exact procedures for placing someone into, or removing someone from, the

office of the public ministry. But the report lists three features of the process that can be drawn from the Holy Scriptures and have been regarded by the church as nonnegotiable: preparation of an individual that certifies him as competent and fit for the office; his selection by the church; and his ordination and installation

into the office.

Although the report focuses on "a man's call within the office of the public ministry," it notes that what is said about "the divine call" of pastors may be applied to the "calls of individuals into auxiliary offices to the extent that they participate in and support the office of the public ministry."

Directors cut Synod spending plan 12.5% to \$77.5M

The Synod's Board of Directors adopted a 2003-04 spending plan in May that totals some \$77.5 million—\$11 million less than the Board budgeted for the national Synod last year.

In addition to adopting the budget for the fiscal year that began July 1, the Board at its May 15-17 meeting also discussed ways to address the continuing trend of declining revenue and to provide future funding for national and international ministries.

With the Synod operating at a deficit, the new budget also provides a \$2.9 million surplus "to start building toward the Synod again having a positive net worth," according to Chief Administrative Officer Brad Hewitt.

All the Synod's program boards are receiving fewer unrestricted dollars in the new fiscal year than last year.

The Board is considering more than one proposal to address the continuing income decline.

One is a proposal called "Funding the Mission" that would encourage congregations to take an active role in deciding how their funds should be spent—such as for district mission projects, international mission work or church-worker education. Other Synod functions, such as communications, theology and church relations, synodical officers and utility bills, would be funded by allocating a percentage of every direct-giving contribu-

tion made.

The Board also asked Vice President-Finance/Treasurer Tom Kuchta to bring to its Aug. 14-17 meeting "a proposal that would result in all money contributed by congregations being deposited with the national Synod and then allocated to the districts and other ministries of the Synod."

Currently, congregations' funds first go to their districts, which then decide how much to send on to the Synod.

LWML elects new president, adopts mission goal

Delegates to the 30th Biennial Convention of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League, June 19–22 in Oklahoma City, elected a new president for the next four years, approved a new mission goal and picked 14 mission projects to fund with LWML contributions.



Reiser

Linda Reiser of Grand Island, Neb., was elected LWML president, to suc-

ceed Virginia Von Seggern. Reiser was the LWML's vice president of servant resources.

Delegates adopted a mission goal of \$1,575,000 and chose projects to fund for the next two years.

The new goal—less than the 2001–03 goal of \$1,650,000—was proposed by the LWML board of directors as more “realistic,” since the previous goal was not met. However, members contributed \$1,478,056 in the 2001–03 biennium—a record amount.

Von Seggern said that

the 2001–03 gifts were laudable “even in light of depression, and war brewing, and layoffs, and poor economy, and drought, and war really happening, and conflict in the church.”

The shortfall of almost \$172,000 for 2001–03 will be paid from gifts over the next two years.

Among mission projects for 2003–05 LWML funding are the Lutheran Adoption Network, continuing ministries in remote areas of Alaska, help for impoverished families in Guatemala, training for pastors in high-risk areas

of the Philippines, and 10 programs for children in Minneapolis.

Delegates chose Peoria, Ill., as the site of the 2011 LWML convention. The next convention is set for Tampa, Fla., in 2005.

For more news...

For more news—and more timely news—visit <http://reporter.lcms.org> on the Web. That's the Web site for *Reporter*, the official newspaper of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Storms hit Midwest Lutherans, fires burn in West

Three LCMS families in Deshler, Neb., lost their homes when four tornadoes ripped through the town within four hours on June 22.

Rev. Duane Fahr, pastor of St. Peter Lutheran Church in Deshler, said that no members were seriously injured—“just scrapes and bruises.”

In all, nine homes were destroyed in Deshler.

At Hubbell, Neb., 20 miles from Deshler, heavy rain the same day caused a creek to overflow and flood the south end of town. News agencies reported one death and extensive damage there.

Rev. Richard Kelm, vacancy pastor at Zion Lutheran Church in Hubbell, said flood waters came to within a few feet of the church doors. He

also said that one member lost his home to a fire started by lightning and another home had “substantial” water damage.

Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR), a

cooperative venture of the Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, was managing its response in both towns through Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska.



Friends and family of Shelly Thomas salvage what they can around her house, which was lost to the June 22 tornadoes that hit Deshler, Neb. Thomas, who was in the basement of the house with others at the time of the storms, is a member of St. Peter Lutheran Church in Deshler. Three of the nine homes lost in the town that evening belonged to members of the congregation.

The same week, record numbers of tornadoes struck areas of South Dakota and Minnesota where there are no LCMS congregations.

LDR also was working through Lutheran Social Ministry of the Southwest to provide services for those affected by Arizona forest fires in June.

To help the storm or fire victims, designate gifts for “Midwest Tornadoes” or “Western Fires” and mail them to LCMS World Relief, P.O. Box 66861, St. Louis, MO 63166-9810. Or, call the credit-card gift line at (888) 930-4438. Or, go to the Synod's online “giving catalog” at <http://catalog.lcms.org>, click on “Begin Search,” then on “KEYWORD,” and type in “Tornado.”

‘HE SITS ON THE RIGHT HAND’

by Andrew J. Simcak Jr.

One of the most misunderstood phrases in the creed may be that Jesus “sits on the right hand of God the Father.”

It’s easy to conclude that this means Jesus and His Father are literally sitting next to each other in heaven. However, this is not the true meaning.

In order for us to understand what it *does* mean, we need to search Scripture for the meaning of “God’s right hand.” Look up John 4:24 and explain why “sits at the right hand of God” cannot mean that Christ is literally sitting on a throne next to the Father.

God the Father is a spirit. His “right hand” is His *power* and *honor*. The warrior wields the *power* of his sword with his right hand. The guest of *honor* sits to the right of the head of the house.

Read the following verses then write the key words or phrases that describe God’s unlimited power and dominion—His “right hand.”

Ps. 89:13 _____

Ps. 118:14–16 _____

Ps. 139:9–10 _____



Jesus Christ was, is and always will be true God. He became also true man when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary. Forty days after His resurrection from the dead, He ascended into heaven and is now in a position of *power* and *honor*, not only as Son of God, but also as “Son of man” and rules as predicted in Ps. 8:1–6 and explained by Heb. 2:6–9. What phrase in the psalm is repeated in Hebrews and refers to Jesus?

Read Eph.1:15–24 and explain how Jesus not only possesses this infinite power, but how He fully exercises it. What words and phrases does Paul use to describe this power?

Our Savior not only rules the entire universe from the right hand

of the Father, He also governs the church. Read about this very comforting fact in Col. 1:18.

When Jesus ascended into heaven He withdrew His *visible* presence from us. We cannot see nor touch Him as His disciples did. Yet, we are assured that He is here and watching over us just as He promised, and that He will one day return visibly in all of His glory to judge both the living and the deceased.

What great enduring comfort and assurance it is for us to know that Jesus “sits on the right hand of God”! He is in heaven as both true man and true God, and He governs all things in the interest of His church.



Rev. Andrew J. Simcak Jr. is vacancy pastor at St. Luke’s Lutheran Church, Houston, Texas.

'GET OUT YOUR CHECKBOOKS'

Those were the words of counsel spoken quite matter-of-factly into a microphone by a lay delegate to the Northern Illinois District convention in late June. Delegates had been discussing fiscal concerns—a common theme of conversation these days in the congregations, districts, agencies, entities and auxiliaries of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and at the national offices, too.

This particular delegate, Mr. Kirk Farney of Hinsdale, Ill., had a simple and rather forthright solution for the problem of cutbacks and deficits: *"Get out your checkbooks!"*

His brief speech reminded me of another one, the favorite of a long-time friend, Rev. Ray Schkade, who shares his three-point speech regarding the stewardship of money: *1. You've got it. 2. We need it. 3. Let's have it!*

Who among us is not much more richly blessed than the majority of the people of the world?

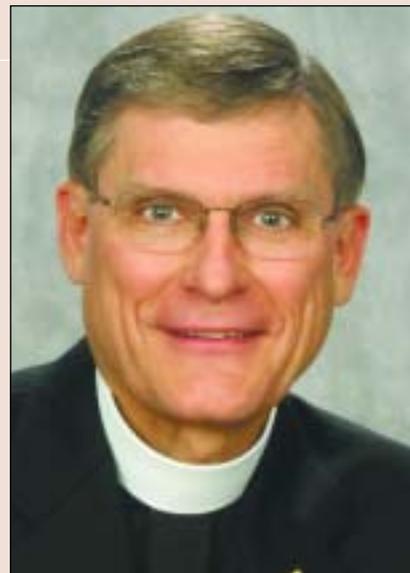
The Holy Scriptures proclaim the same message, though in much more spiritual terminology. Consider, for example, the following passages concerning the relationship between a person and the financial resources with which God has blessed him or her:

- The prophet Malachi writes: "Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?' 'Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing

me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it" (Mal. 3:7–10).

- Jesus said: "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:38).
- Paul remembers the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).
- And Paul writes, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God" (2 Cor. 9:7–8, 10–11).

Recent reports have indicated the fiscal challenges being faced by corporations and businesses across the country and around the world. Other reports point to similar challenges experienced by the church, at all levels. Although the counsel referenced at the beginning of this article may seem simplistic to



some, it bears repeating: *"Get out your checkbooks!"*

Seriously, my friends in Christ, in spite of significant levels of unemployment and other anxiety-producing financial realities in our lives, it is more than important to remember the many blessings we have received from our heavenly Father. Who among us is not much more richly blessed than the majority of the people of the world?

Pastors, I encourage you to take the lead in sharing with your people the joy of Christian giving, in your preaching, teaching and personal example. Lay leaders, I encourage you to follow that lead and to provide leadership of your own, as Kirk Farney did at a district convention, challenging others in your congregation to see Christian financial stewardship as a way of expressing love, thanks and appreciation to your heavenly Father for His many gifts in your life, the most important of which is His love, grace, mercy and peace, poured out upon us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

God's grace, mercy and peace be with you all!

Jerry Kieschnick

Lives Transformed through Christ, in Time ... for Eternity!

John 3:16–17

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