

The Lutheran WITNESS

FEBRUARY 2004

VOL. 123 NO. 2



Also:

**The Passion
of the Christ**

To Forgive a Thief

**Christian
Influence
On Campus and Off**



The Lutheran WITNESS

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

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Photo courtesy Michael Moreno

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BETHLEHEM TODAY

Unfortunately, many Christians in the United States are so misinformed they think all Palestinians are very violent.

*Doug Willbanks
Beaverton, Ore.*

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK REV. DAVID Mahsman for his article on the forgotten Palestinian Christians (“Bethlehem 2,000 Years Later,” Dec. ’03). My wife and I have been very active in trying to bring peace to that area.

Unfortunately, many Christians in the United States are so misinformed they think all Palestinians are very violent. Not only are Palestinian Christians nonviolent, but Palestinians in general are very welcoming and gracious people when you are not trying to confiscate their land and instead treat them fairly and with justice and respect.

*Doug Willbanks
Beaverton, Ore.*

I KNOW THAT ARAB CHRISTIANS OF ALL nationalities are caught in the no-man’s land of contemporary world politics, but this does not make Israel the villainous oppressor attacking poor Palestinians, as seems to be depicted in your article. Just so that I can be sure I have my mind right, I need to check up on the answers to these questions:

(1) Who targets wedding receptions, restaurants, even school busses to maximize the murder of innocent civilians? A. Israelis. B. Palestinians.

(2) Who responds to suicide bombers by focusing on military targets? A. Israelis. B. Palestinians.

(3) Who celebrated in the streets at the news that thousands of innocent Americans had been killed in the World Trade Center? A. Israelis. B. Palestinians.

This article could have been written by *Al Jazeera*. How can I recom-

mend it to my congregation?

*Rev. John Kayser
Ann Arbor, Mich.*

THE DECEMBER ISSUE OF *THE LUTHERAN Witness* was the best ever, because I am interested in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from firsthand accounts. I am glad that you were able to make the trip and give an honest report of the suffering and fear under Israeli occupation.

*Catherine Bridgman
Palmyra, Mo.*

Christmas in America

WHY DID YOU PUBLISH “THE AMERICAN Christmas” (Dec. ’03)? The author says that Christmas was secularized by Irving Berlin in 1942. These claims are logically absurd. As the author points out, “’Twas the Night Before Christmas” was written in 1822, and it is completely secular.

The author also states that the Magi “were at first non-believers, their heads filled with astrology and New Age-type philosophy, looking for someone whom they did not really know, following an uncertain guide, not having a clue . . .” Nowhere in the Bible are they called non-believers, New Agers or without a clue. In fact, the opposite seems more likely: “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him” (Matt. 2:2). How and why would clueless, unbelieving New Agers be seeking the King of the Jews so that they could worship Him? You should be ashamed of yourselves

for printing this.

*Bruce Finlay
Shelton, Wash.*

I LIKED “THE AMERICAN CHRISTMAS.” I wonder if I might share a few thoughts of my own.

It seems to me that Santa Claus stories crowd Jesus from our Christmas celebration. Parents who let their children write letters to Santa teach them to pray to a false god. When children ask for gifts or for Santa to make a sick family member well, is it anything less than a prayer to a false god? I’ve never heard the Synod speak out clearly on this subject. Might we be afraid of stepping on toes?

*Judy Klingbeil
Tigerton, Wis.*

THE EXEMPLARY “THE AMERICAN Christmas” by Gene Edward Veith should be required reading by Christians of all traditions—Lutheran, Reformed and Roman Catholic.

*Timothy Jaech
Steilacoom, Wash.*

Cohabitation

“CONFRONTING COHABITATION” (SEPT. ’03) asked whether we had ever heard a sermon on this topic. Our pastor opened with this topic just a couple of months ago. It struck home with me because our only daughter, who has been living with her boyfriend for two years, had just called home to tell us they are expecting a child.

Our daughter was raised in a home with no divorce, she went to a Lutheran school through the eighth grade and went on to three years of college. What’s more, the pastor who preached the sermon also has a daughter who had a child before she was married. I guess that all shows that society sometimes has more influence than home or church. But at least some of us are still standing by right and wrong. I will be sending

your article to our daughter. Thanks for keeping the message in print.

Name withheld

A Godly vocation

REV. TIM PAUL'S "IN MY OPINION" ESSAY ("A Godly Vocation," Sept. '03) was on target! It is a clear, succinct and Scripturally principled explanation of our role as Christian soldiers, sailors, Coast Guardsmen, airmen and Marines. I do not know if Pastor Paul has served in the armed forces, but his insight and perception indicate keen understanding and appreciation for the "professions of arms."

I am also reminded of how blessed we are to have chaplains willing to be "warriors of the Word" in support of the spiritual needs of our service men and women. I was privileged to serve with the best, then-Capt. Donald Muchow, USN, chaplain of the Fourth Marine Regiment and Camp Hansen, Okinawa, in 1982. A Missouri Synod Lutheran, he later became chief of Navy chaplains.

*Roger Wahls
Major, USMC (Ret.)
Pontiac, Ill.*

English lesson

THIS IS IN REFERENCE TO THE DECEMBER "Q&A," in which a reader questions the propriety of a congregation using a name such as "St. Paul's" because the punctuation indicates "possession."

My understanding is that, grammatically, this is not a case of the *possessive* genitive, but rather the *appositive* genitive case. The latter case is usually expressed in terms such as "the City *of* St. Louis," or "the island *of* Great Britain." But in poetic language, the old "s" genitive is still used in proper names such as St. Paul's Cathedral or St. James' Theater. In other words, when I say I belong to St. John's Lutheran Church, I am *honoring* St. John and Luther, but I *belong* to Christ—I am first of all a Christian!

*Ewald Meier
Clyde, Kan.*

A CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE, ON CAMPUS AND OFF

The Missouri Synod's Concordia University System schools provide a variety of approaches to Christian higher education as they seek to meet the needs of church and society.

by Roland C. Lovstad

Dr. Patrick Ferry has a passion for Christian education that comes from a personal perspective. His first contact with an LCMS college was as a high-school graduate—unchurched and unbaptized—who received a scholarship to play basketball.

“For the first time I was engaged in Christian thought in a meaningful way,” Ferry says, recalling his freshman year at St. John’s College in Winfield Kan., (closed in 1986). During that first year, he was baptized and confirmed and subsequently attended Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne to become a pastor.

“What’s equally joyous for me,” he adds, “is that members of my family, one by one, were also introduced to Christian faith, baptized and brought into our church.”

Today, Ferry is president of Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon, which has the largest enrollment among the 10 colleges and universities in the Concordia University System.

“Every year stories like mine are repeated again and again—here and on other Concordia campuses,” Ferry observes. “The Gospel is powerful and works in people’s lives.”



Dr. Patrick Ferry, president of Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon, was baptized and confirmed during his freshman year at St. John’s College in Winfield Kan., (an LCMS college that has since closed). Later, he attended Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.



Influencing the world

More than 16,000 students are enrolled at the 10 LCMS colleges and universities. About 4,900 declared membership in an LCMS congregation—more than half of them are pursuing careers within the church. (See the accompanying chart.)

Preparation of church-work professionals remains high priority at the Synod’s colleges and universities, says Dr. William Meyer, president of the Concordia University System and executive director of the Synod’s Board for Higher Education. He also points to a wide stream of graduates who bring a Christian perspective to the world of business, health, education and science. And, through extension centers and innovative instructional programs, the “Concordias” are reaching beyond their campuses.

Among its 5,200 students, Concordia Wisconsin has 1,400 undergraduate students and 1,100 graduate students on its campus in Mequon. It also has 2,700 “non-traditional students”—adults who are pursuing studies at 10 locations spread from Milwaukee to St. Louis to New Orleans.

“We’ve been involved in adult learning for a decade and a half. Once the strong emphasis on adult education was considered to be on the fringes of higher learning. Now our involve-

ment in it is very much in the mainstream,” Ferry says. “We feel very strongly about our work with adult learners. It has also been a real enabler—enabling us to be financially strong.”

“No student ever has any question what Concordia stands for,” Ferry states. “The Lutheran component of doctrine and theology is included in all the learning programs. Employers support their employees’ attendance because they know there is an infusion of values and integrity.

“It happens over and over again,” he continues. “Students come looking for a degree and they leave with a meaningful consideration of Christian values.”

Ferry adds that the Concordia University System is unique across the country. “There is real dedication to Lutheran Christian education and we do this unabashedly and with very firm conviction. This is not nominally Lutheran—and that cannot be understated.”

At the same time, Concordia Wisconsin has more than 600 students who indicate intent to pursue careers in

<i>Campus</i>	<i>Fall enrollment</i>	<i>Church work</i>
Ann Arbor, Mich.	477	173
Austin, Texas	1,155	157
Bronxville, N.Y.	710	86
Irvine, Calif.	1,741	320
Mequon, Wis.	5,152	630
Portland, Ore.	1,274	56
River Forest, Ill.	1,706	525
St. Paul, Minn.	2,051	217
Selma, Ala.	850	22
Seward, Neb.	1,317	619
Total	16,433	2,468

full-time church work—one of the largest numbers among the Concordias.

“Concordias are still preparing workers,” he continues, “But we also do many things in providing quality Lutheran education with more than 40 undergraduate and graduate majors to develop leaders in business and health care. I don’t think there is sufficient awareness of the breadth, range and quality of non-church-worker students that we graduate.”

‘... Pick up the work’

At a church in Fort Dodge, Iowa, students gather once a month from Friday afternoon through Sunday as part of an innovative arrangement between the Iowa District West and Concordia University, St. Paul, Minn.

Iowa District West is seeking to carry on ministry in rural communities. District President Paul Sieveking tells of one circuit with 14 congregations and six pastors,



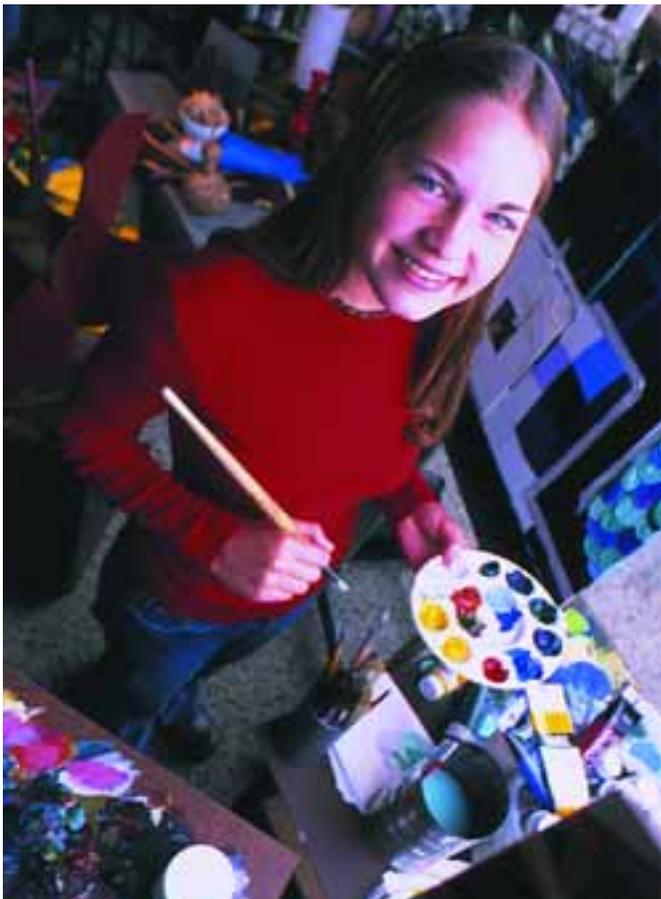
explaining that “laypeople will need to pick up the work.”

The district started the Lay Leadership Institute in the fall of 2002. The university provides theology courses. The district arranges instruction on topics like leading devotions, preaching, counseling and caregiving, as well as practical parish experiences supervised by district pastors.

The two-year program began with a class of 18 students. A second class started last fall with 14 students. The curriculum includes 10 courses that can be taken for college credit. Some students are preparing for the Distance Education Leading to Ordination (DELTO) program. Others want certification as Lutheran school teachers or directors of Christian education.

“It was some of the finest teaching experience I’ve ever had,” says Dr. Stephen Stohlmann, professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Concordia and coordinator for the program. “The first year was outstanding, just





incredible. [The students] were doing a major amount of academic work and doing it well.”

Sieveking is pleased: “From our perspective, we couldn’t be happier. The university sees this as part of their ministry as well as a way to provide distance education.”

“They’ve sent some of the best instructors I’ve ever had,” comments retired banker Cornelius “Connie” Wabeke, who is beginning the DELTO program. “God puts things out there and I follow where He leads. Even if nothing else happens, I’ll not regret going into this.”

The institute, Wabeke says, is providing ways for people with abilities and opportunities “to learn how to go out and do the work. The Lord has got openings out there and you need to fill them the best you can.”

According to Stohlmann, the university also is discussing a lay training program with the North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota North Districts.

‘Like a wide open door’

Garswa Yarmeto ministers to an African-immigrant population in Newark, N.J., where Locasha Evangelical Lutheran Mission, one of the newest congregations in the New Jersey District, provides both the Gospel and resettlement services. (Locasha is short for Love, Caring and Sharing.)

The missionary pastor is a refugee from Liberia and has personally experienced civil war, prison, separation from family, refugee camps and relocation to the United States. He began the ministry in 2001, fulfilling a personal vow to serve God in appreciation for being able to see his family again.

Last August, Yarmeto was commissioned by the district to provide Word and Sacrament ministry, after completing 10 courses to put him on track for the DELTO program. The courses were provided through the Mission Training Center, a cooperative project of nine East Coast districts and Concordia College, Bronxville, N.Y.

“It was like entering into a big, wide open door and stepping into a big theater,” Yarmeto says of his study. “It enabled me to appreciate the history of Christianity and the Reformation. It prepared me in understanding Lutheran doctrine and theology.”

Locasha averages 100 people in worship. In its two-story building, the ministry also provides families with clothing, food, furni-

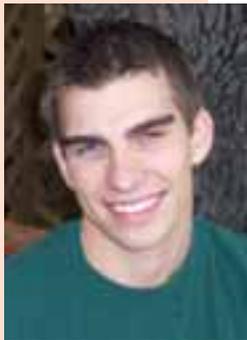


Rev. J. Garswa Yameto (above, left) ministers to African refugees in Newark, N.J., after completing courses provided through Concordia College, Bronxville. Here he discusses his ministry with Rev. Robert Roegner, executive director of missions for the Synod.

Christopher Leslie

Christopher Leslie, an International Space Station planner at Johnson Space Center, calls his education at Concordia University, Austin, Texas, “a golden foundation.”

At the center, Leslie is responsible for providing instructions to the crew as the space station orbits 250 miles above the earth. He also serves as lead liaison with the Russian Space Agency.



“What Concordia taught was how to learn,” Leslie says. “The U.S. space program is not just a set of technical details and theories. Missions are conducted by individuals who display discipline, competence, responsibility and true leadership. Concordia not only taught me those leadership traits, it demonstrated through each professor these traits. ...”

ture and computer training, as well as after-school help for children. Five upstairs apartments house newly arrived immigrant families until they become self-sustaining.

“The Lord has blessed me,” says Yarmeto, who was introduced to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through experience with an African-immigrant congregation.

Offering courses at several locations, the Mission Training Center trains individuals to assist in the ministry of their congregations and to serve in an immigrant or urban community.

A teaching church

“The power of 10 is really found in the regional influence,” says Concordia University System President Meyer. “The Concordias are beacons of influence that ultimately affect the lives of people, especially youth, while also satisfying the needs and concerns of mature learners.”

According to Meyer, all the Concordias extend their educational offerings beyond the campus—

ranging from courses for Lutheran high-school students to graduate study in education, business, health and theology.

“I really believe a church in mission is a teaching church, especially if it wishes to remain confessional,” Meyer observes. “We need institutions that adhere to these standards and promote them. As we do this, we go beyond only preparing pastors and teachers—we are serving the church.”

Meyer cites a number of accomplishments of the Concordia University System since it was organized in 1992:

- Collaboration—“We now have institutions sharing ideas and supporting each other to enhance various programs.”
- Technology—“We’ve put together a fine process by which we have become technologically astute in being able to share software and information systems.” In addition, the CUenet [Concordia University Education Network] system has established a video-computer instructional system that connects the campuses and beyond.
- Staff development—“The presidents have helped individual staff and faculty prepare for more extensive service in the system.”
- High-school instruction—“Through our CUenet system, we’ve connected with Lutheran high schools by providing them college-level courses, so many students can leave high school with college credit.”
- Fundraising—“We’re

learning how to do development work together and have begun to enhance our endowment funds.”

- Teacher colloquy—“We have created a program and delivery system for teacher colloquy.” (Colloquy allows Lutheran school teachers who are not synodically certified to take courses in Lutheran theology and doctrine. Through CUenet, more than 500 teachers are using the Internet to complete colloquy studies.)

Church-work vocations

At Concordia University Nebraska, Seward, more than half of the students have indicated their intent to enter full-time vocations in the church. President Orville Walz is proud of that tradition and he encourages broader thinking about the concept of church workers.

“Every Christian has church work to do,” Walz says. “When we look at parishes down the road, we realize the need to develop servant leaders who know Jesus Christ as their Savior and who are out in the



Concordia University Ann Arbor is an unmistakably Christian community. It's a home-away-from-home for students seeking to grow spiritually as well as intellectually.

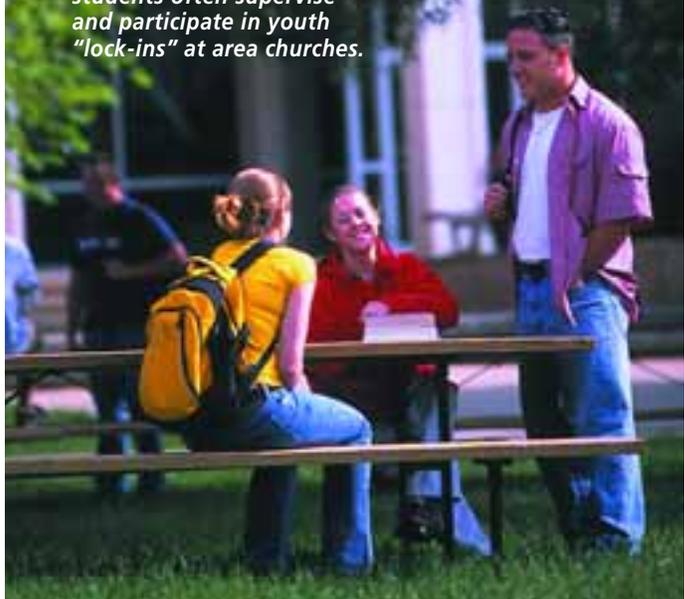
Austin students

"Ever since I was a little girl, I've wanted to be a teacher," said Mary Helen Conway, of Fayetteville, Texas, a senior education major at Concordia University at Austin.

She says her mother, Debbie, a teacher at Mount Calvary in La Grange, Texas, is her role model. "I could see the benefits of sharing spirituality with the children," said Mary Helen, who will begin her student teaching in the spring of 2005.

Chris Brynstad, who is studying to become a director of Christian education, was influenced by his father, Dale, a pastor in Callahan, Texas.

"I got to know the DCE of my father's congregation and saw how he shared the Gospel with the youth and realized that's what I wanted to do," said Chris, a junior. He and other DCE students often supervise and participate in youth "lock-ins" at area churches.



Orville Walz (walking with students in the photo below), president of Concordia University Nebraska, Seward, encourages broader thinking about the concept of church workers. "Every Christian has church work to do," Walz says. "We realize the need to develop servant leaders who know Jesus Christ as their Savior and who are out in the world in whatever task they do."



THE LUTHERAN BUSINESS

world in whatever task they do."

Yet, congregations need full-time church workers, and the colleges have become more deeply involved in recruitment. Walz notes that congregations are confirming fewer young people—while the LCMS student enrollment at the Concordias has increased. (LCMS statistics show congregations conducted 27,399 junior confirmations in 2002, about 3,500 fewer than a decade ago and about 8,700 less than in 1982.)

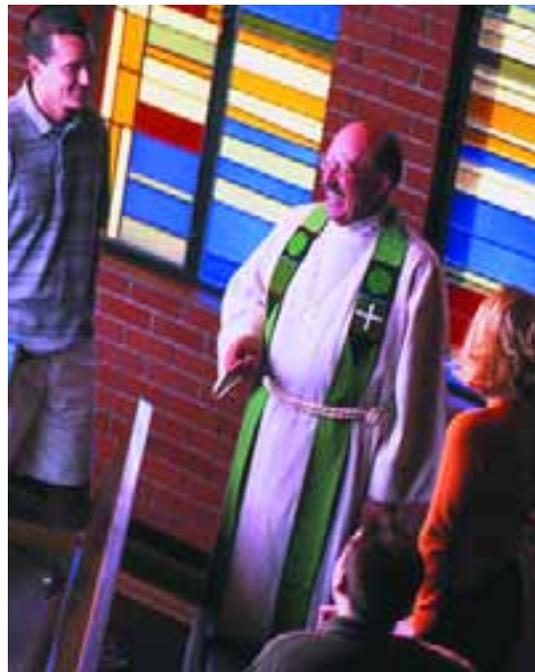
"Church-work students cost us the most," Walz observes. In order to complete their education, many students rely on loans and, once in the field, find their salaries often limit their abilities to repay the loans.

Currently, most of the schools depend on tuition income for 50 to 80 percent of their budget, according to Walz. "We have to devise a way for each institution to have a quantum leap in endowments," he says. "That's why it is so exceedingly important."

A national campaign, "For the Sake of the Church" has dual goals—to raise LCMS student enrollments over 8,000 students and to raise \$400 million in endowments to support their education by 2012.

During this school year, the Board for Higher Education reports that colleges and universities are providing \$20.1 million in financial aid to 2,468 church-work students. That averages \$8,754 per student, covering 57 percent of their tuition.

Commenting on the report, Meyer said, "Much of the financial aid is provided through generous gifts of Lutherans around the country who recognize the need to put the necessary training within reach of prospective students by helping reduce the cost of attending one of our Concordias."



You can access more information about the Concordia University System at the LCMS Web site www.lcms.org, and from the "For the Sake of the Church" Web site <http://sake.lcms.org>. Both sites include links to all 10 campuses.



Roland C. Lovstad is a freelance writer and a member of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Perryville, Mo.

JESUS CHRIST, THE LAMB OF GOD

by Andrew Simcak

During Lent, which begins Feb. 25 this year, we remember Jesus' suffering and death and why God demanded this ultimate sacrifice. Let's look at Scripture to get a clear understanding of what it means when in the Holy Communion service we sing, "O Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us."

Why is Jesus called the "Lamb of God"? The sacrificing of animals played a significant role in the worship life of God's people in the Old Testament. One of the principle animals commanded by God to be used by His people in their sacrifices to Him was the lamb. Since there was a scarcity of meat among the ancient Hebrews, lambs would be killed only on very special occasions. Explain why the following examples of when God is commanding a lamb to be sacrificed are special occasions.

Ex. 29:38-42 _____

Num. 28:11 _____

Num. 29:7-8 _____

Num. 29:13-36 _____

John the Baptist called Jesus the Lamb of God in John 1:29. He also assures us that Jesus is our



Savior from sin. Read verses 29-34. How did John know who Jesus is?

To grasp the meaning of Jesus as the Lamb of God, it is necessary to remember the Passover Lamb, sacrificed when God's chosen people in the Old Testament were delivered from the bondage of Pharaoh in Egypt. Read Ex. 12:1-12 and 21-23. Even as the blood of the lamb saved God's people in Egypt, the blood of the Lamb of God, shed on Calvary's cross, made deliverance possible for all mankind.

Read the following New Testament passages and state what the sacrifice of the Lamb of God means to you.

1 Cor. 5:7 _____

Rom. 5:9-10 _____

Eph. 2:12 _____

Compare those with the Old Testament prophecy in Is. 53:4-12.

We will by God's grace join "many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand" in praising the Lamb of God for earning for us salvation now and forever. Read with assurance and joy the thrilling praises sung to the Lamb of God in heaven: Rev. 5:6-13.

Because Jesus is the Lamb of God, who through His suffering, death and resurrection has taken away the sins of the world, a full relationship has been established between us and the Father, and a guaranteed future awaits us.



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

CTCR shares draft of civic-events guidelines with COP

The Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) has forwarded to the Council of Presidents (COP) a draft of "Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events."

LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick in November 2001 asked the CTCR to prepare the guidelines in consultation with the COP in time for presentation to the 2004 Synod convention. At its Dec. 4-6 meeting, the CTCR reviewed the draft and approved sharing it with the COP "on a confidential basis."

The CTCR is expected

to review the document again at a Feb. 16-18 meeting, considering the COP's comments, and include it in the commission's report to the convention.

When he asked the CTCR for the guidelines—just two months after Atlantic District President David Benke took part in "A Prayer for America" at Yankee Stadium—Kieschnick cited three specific questions:

- What constitutes a "civic event"?
- What are the implications of Lutheran

"two-kingdom" theology to participating in civic events with prayer, Scripture reading, hymn singing, etc.?

- What guidelines

should there be for LCMS pastors and other church workers participating in such events?

Synod Web site redesigned

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Web site (www.lcms.org) has been redesigned to improve navigability for visitors.

Launched in December, the updated site consolidates more than 20 individual Synod department Web sites.

Advances in software and Web design since the

site was last updated in 1998 enable the site to have a coordinated look and feel, so that visitors will always know they are on the LCMS site.

Started in 1995 with about 50 pages of information, the site now is viewed by about 11,000 visitors each day.

Housing corporation to help congregations get grants

A new LCMS National Housing Support Corporation is designed to help struggling inner-city congregations receive grants and technical assistance for housing ministries.

The LCMS Board for Human Care Ministries proposed the new non-profit, national charitable organization to help congregations, districts and social-ministry organizations with housing and community development.

In November, the Synod's Board of Directors approved the organization, which has filed for incorporation with the state of Missouri.

Forming a new housing corporation enables access to governmental and private sources of

funding otherwise unavailable, said Marie Kienker, deputy director of LCMS World Relief/Human Care and the former manager of LCMS Housing

Ministries.

Kienker also said one goal is "to partner with [districts and congregations] and to serve as a conduit of resources that will help secure funding to

meet increased needs for revitalized communities."

"This corporation will make it much simpler for congregations to make sure that their neighbors get loans to own homes," said Rev. Matthew Harrison, executive director of LCMS World Relief/Human Care. "The church can bring decency, civility and order to the inner city with more home ownership. And, ultimately, that opens the door for the church to evangelize in the inner city."

Kienker encourages veterans of LCMS housing ministry to share their expertise by calling (800) 248-1930, Ext. 1394, or e-mailing her at marie.kienker@lcms.org.



Christ the King Lutheran Church, Chicago, helped build these houses on the site of a former slum in Chicago. Rev. John Brazeal, the pastor of the congregation, called word of the new LCMS National Housing Support Corporation "welcome news" for congregations involved in housing ministry.

BHE: 12 'themes' to direct pastoral education in LCMS

Twelve "themes" that grew out of suggestions from seminary faculties, board members, focus groups and readers of *The Lutheran Witness* will "be the directive for pastoral education in the LCMS," says the Synod's Board for Higher Education (BHE).

At a meeting last fall, the board passed a resolution saying those themes would give "a planning and guiding focus for

preparation of pastors for the LCMS in the future."

Dr. L. Dean Hempelmann, director of pastoral education with the BHE, developed the themes.

"The need that the themes answer is for a unified vision of pastoral education," Hempelmann said, "starting with pre-seminary education, through the seminary experience and lifelong learning for pastors."

The themes have to do with academic readiness, pastoral practice, spiritual formation, mission outreach, scholarship for the church and the world, an international component, flexibility in approach and delivery of pastoral education, understanding the church within culture and context, faithful faculty with pastoral experience, community of faith, services of the baptized, and church administration.

Hempelmann asked readers of *The Lutheran Witness* for feedback, which led to development of the twelfth theme.

"I am grateful to all those throughout our Synod who helped develop and fine-tune these themes," Hempelmann said.

For the full text of the themes, go to www.lcms.org/?914 on the Web.

Mission partners join World Mission's Ablaze! effort

After a planning meeting in December for the Synod's *Ablaze!* initiative, the leader of a partner church says he is anxious to share *Ablaze!* with his church body.

Dr. David Tswaedi, bishop of the 22,000-member Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, said that after wondering about what made the initiative special, he now realizes *Ablaze!* is important because "it is a concerted effort by Lutherans [world-

wide] to be excited about reaching people with the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ *together*."

Tswaedi is a member of the steering committee for a July 6-9 *Ablaze!* International Conference in St. Louis. Planning for the event also involves LCMS World Mission staff members and other partner-church leaders from Asia, Europe and South America. Dr. Diethardt Roth, bishop of Germany's Independent Evangelical

Lutheran Church and also a member of the steering committee, said that *Ablaze!* is needed to "re-energize mission work worldwide."

Representatives of the Synod's 30 partner-church bodies have been invited to participate in the July gathering, along with mission leaders, delegates to the Synod convention and others. The gathering is designed to:

- affirm the church bodies' common mission focus.

- explore key issues in mission expansion.

- identify and share effective mission practices.

Dr. Allan Buckman, chairman of the steering committee, calls the July conference "a milestone event" because the Synod and its partners will be "coming together for the express purpose of planning for worldwide expansion of confessional Lutheran mission initiatives."

Board of Directors starts Q&A feature

The Synod's Board of Directors has added a new question-and-answer feature to its Web site that says it is intended to "clear up ... confusion and provide assurance" about some of the Board's recent actions.

The first installment of the new feature, called

"Board Briefs," addressed the legal opinions on the Board of Directors' authority under Missouri law that the Board got last year. To find it on the Web, go to www.lcms.org/?3990.

Future topics to be addressed in the "Board Briefs," said the first

installment, were to include "the role of the Commission on Constitutional Matters over against the Board of Directors," synodical funding issues, and "the Board's proposal for meeting the serious fiscal challenges facing our church."

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.

'THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST'

Mel Gibson's new movie offers Christians an opportunity for Gospel outreach.

by Tom Lapacka

It begins on a dark evening amidst the ground fog of an olive grove. There Jesus, beginning His last 12 hours before the crucifixion, is in agonizing prayer.

From His lips, words stream forth—in Aramaic—as He calls upon His heavenly Father to give Him strength to bear what is soon to come upon Him. Off to the side, half in the shadows, is a ghastly figure, not quite man, not quite woman, clothed in a dark robe. It is the evil one, who whispers to Jesus that it is impossible that one man can bear the sins of all men.

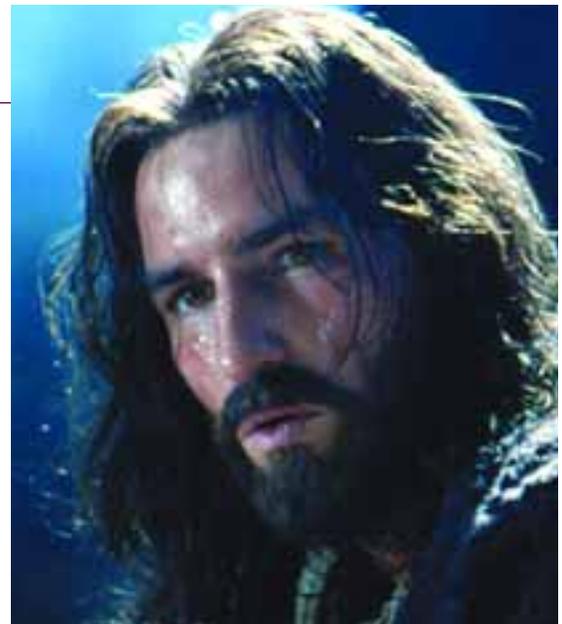
This is the opening scene of Mel Gibson's new movie, "The Passion of the Christ," starring Jim Caviezel

as Jesus. The film will open at theaters around the country Feb. 25, Ash Wednesday. I attended an advance showing Jan. 5.

Mel Gibson directed and has been the sole financier of the \$25 million project. According to Gibson, a devout Roman Catholic, "The Passion" is the culmination of 12 years of meditating on the wounds of Christ.

Great attention is given to historical accuracy, down to period clothing and eating customs. What's more, the film's entire dialog is in Latin, Greek and Aramaic, with English subtitles.

Gibson does allow some poetic license in telling the story. For example, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is seen throughout the ordeal of the



Passion. Mary, like so many of the characters, is played by someone who is not well known—in this case, a Jewish actress from Romania.

When asked why he made the movie, Gibson responds that he "had to." He says that God was more than leading him—He was pushing him. Hollywood has given the project a chilly reception, some even speculating this to be a career-killer for Gibson. Nonetheless, Gibson says he felt this project had to be done; the message has to be gotten out.

The movie has been given an R rating for its graphic violent content. Parents are advised that children under 12 not be permitted to view it. From start to finish, there is



THERE'S MORE TO THE STORY

Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" is a horrific depiction of the ferocious violence of which humans are capable.

Reminders of the human capacity for inhumanity are valuable, because we humans so often forget how near we live to the edge of cruelty to one another. But compared with the Scriptural account, the movie dwells disproportionately on the violence and the inhumane behavior of men who become accustomed to gross abuse of fellow humans and on the horrors of mob psychology.

The Gospels proclaim that Christ's passion is not simply an example of the oft-repeated story of man's inhumanity to man. Rather, this is the central act in God's remedy for all human evil and sin. "There is no difference,

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood" (Rom. 3:22-25). Therefore, we must resist the temptation to identify with the "good people" in the movie (Mary, the beloved disciple, Simon), and we dare not divide humanity into evil people and good people. Christ died also for Mary, Simon, you and me.

Just as we are to identify ourselves as sinners, so we are invited also to identify ourselves with Christ's own death. St. Paul teaches us that the sinful self in each of us is to die with Christ: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Rom. 6:3-4).

In the Small Catechism, Luther vividly applies this teaching. He asks, What does Baptism mean for daily living? Answer: It signifies that the old person in us, with all sins and evil desires, is to be drowned through daily sorrow for sin and repentance, and that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

— Dr. James Bachman
Dean, School of Theology
Concordia University
Irvine, Calif.

a growing tension as the story unfolds, punctuated by flashbacks in Jesus' life that offer a bit of relief before the next surge. Gibson designed the film this way, saying "the audience must suffer to understand it more." However, the violence is not gratuitous; rather it makes the point of the power of evil in men.

Many who have seen "The Passion" are acclaiming it as more than a movie. For some, it has been said to be "a powerful life-changing experience." You find yourself reliving the most important event in human history. Before it is over, you realize that you were there. You were one of those tormenting the Lord. Like Peter, you are captivated and condemned by His penetrating gaze—yet, you hear His words of forgiveness even as the nails

are driven into His flesh.

Questions are forced into the viewer's mind: Who is this Jesus? Why did He die? Did He do this for me? Does God love me this much?

So, "The Passion" can serve as a wonderful outreach tool for you and your congregation. Invite a friend or family member to view the film with you. Then invite them to church during the Lenten season to find the answers to these questions.

Information on the movie can be found on the Web at www.ThePassionOfChrist.com. And Concordia Publishing House has pulled together some resources relating to Christ's Passion (see advertisement, Page 18).

By all means, see the movie. Experience "The Passion."



"The Passion of The Christ" is a vivid depiction of the 12 hours of Jesus Christ's life before his death on the cross. Jesus is played by American actor James Caviezel; Monica Bellucci plays Mary Magdalene. The actress who plays Mary, Maia Morgenstern, is from Romania.

Dialogue in the movie is spoken in Latin, Aramaic or Hebrew. English subtitles are used.



Rev. Tom Lapacka is executive director of the Synod's Board for Communication Services.

LUTHERAN SCHOOLS IN AMERICA AND BEYOND

Some call them “the crown jewel” of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. I’m speaking, of course, of Lutheran schools at all levels, including pre-schools, kindergartens, elementary schools and high schools. Our LCMS reports 2,481 Lutheran schools, including 1,361 early-childhood centers, 1,028 elementary schools and 92 high schools, with total enrollment of 287,395 students.

Also, congregations of our Synod operate 5,229 Sunday schools, with 469,003 students enrolled; 4,230 weekday religion schools, with 195,198 students enrolled; and 3,968 vacation Bible schools. The number of Sunday schools and their enrollment have been decreasing for more than a decade, with the number of weekday religion schools and their enrollment increasing during that same time.

In addition, our Synod owns and operates 10 colleges and universities and two seminaries, with total enrollment of 17,568 students and 1,556 teaching staff members. These educational institutions and ministries are truly gifts of God to our church!

Many who read this article have experienced firsthand the love, care and quality instruction provided by Lutheran-school teachers at all the levels referenced above. The loved ones and family members of many others have had the privilege of a formal Lutheran Christian education. Terry and I are among those so blessed.

Prov. 22:6 reads, “*Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.*” That’s what Christian education is all about.

Of course, the Christian education of children is a primary respon-

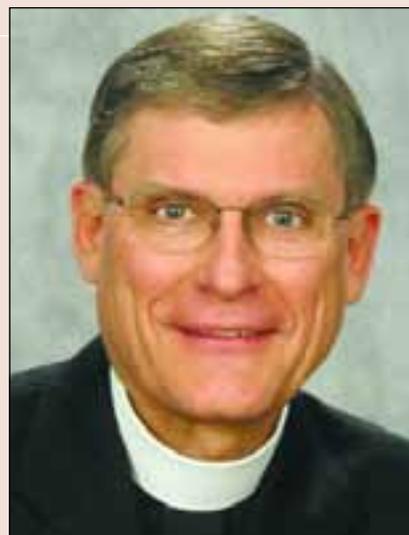
sibility of parents in the home, supplemented in many ways by the congregation’s various agencies and ministries that involve children. These include all the educational ministries mentioned above.

In addition to providing Biblical instruction and development of Christian values in the children of members of LCMS congregations, our agencies of Christian education also provide a point of contact and connection between the Christian faith and the significant percentage of children in our schools whose parents and other family members do not yet know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Indeed, our Christian schools are critically important centers of Christian outreach into the lives and hearts of children and their family members who are not yet committed to the Christian faith.

In recent trips as president of the Synod, I have experienced firsthand the vital importance of this mission aspect of Christian education in congregations of our Synod and in LCMS partner churches in countries around the world.

For instance, an LCMS volunteer teacher, who served for only two months, started Santa Cruz Lutheran School in Hohenau, Paraguay, in 1992. When the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Paraguay heard she was coming, they decided to build a classroom. From that simple beginning, the school developed and grew.

The Santa Cruz (Holy Cross) school was founded and accredited on Feb. 26, 1993, with 32 students the first year. Today, the school has 15 classrooms, 350 students and a faculty of 30, including upper grades that are collectively referred to as “Concordia” school. The Santa



Cruz and Concordia schools also have a children’s choir and a youth choir that have competed in several competitions at the national and international levels.

LCMS World Mission helped with project funding for part of the construction, but otherwise everything has been paid for locally. The school enjoys the enthusiastic support of the local congregation and has helped to project the congregation into the community.

This is just one example of many such Lutheran mission schools in South American countries, in many parts of Asia, and around the world, including right here in North America. Lutheran schools at all levels will continue to play a vital role in the mission of our church in the years ahead!

On behalf of our Synod, I express the sincere appreciation of a grateful church for the faithful and fruitful ministry of the 16,000 professional teachers and the 65,000 volunteer teachers of the educational ministries of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and for their counterparts in Lutheran schools around the world!

Jerry Kieschnick
**Lives Transformed through Christ,
in Time ... for Eternity!**

John 3:16–17

e-mail: president@lcms.org

Web page: www.lcms.org/president