

The Lutheran WITNESS

FEBRUARY 2006

VOL. 125 NO. 2

MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCE

Also:

*Healing Hands of Christ
Special Adoptions
Welcome Back, Dietrich*





The Lutheran WITNESS

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

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'The Lion, the Witch, and the Savior'

What C.S. Lewis wrote was more than allegory. ... Aslan was intended to *be* Jesus in a fictional setting.

*Rev. Don Neuendorf
Ann Arbor Mich.*

PROFESSOR STEVEN P. MUELLER'S ARTICLE about the Narnia movie (Dec. '05) was welcome and well done. However, he fell into a common error about C.S. Lewis. Although it is true that Lewis insisted his Narnia books were not allegorical, Mueller goes even further to say that "Aslan is not equal to Jesus."

Actually, what Lewis wrote was more than allegory. In a letter to Maryland fifth-graders in 1954, Lewis said: "I did not say to myself, 'Let us represent Jesus as He really is in our world by a Lion in Narnia'; I said, 'Let us suppose that there were a land like Narnia and that the Son of God, as he became a Man in our world, became a Lion there, and then imagine what would happen.'"

It is true that Aslan does not "represent" Jesus. Instead, he is intended to *be* Jesus in a fictional setting. This would be as if I wrote a book about Martin Luther as he might be if he were a pastor in America today, imagining how he would preach reformation to our congregations. It would be fictional, but it would not be allegorical since it would be intended as a picture of the actual person's hypothetical actions.

Lewis wrote a story about how Jesus might have appeared if He had become incarnate in a fantasy world so that we could stand back a step and understand better what Jesus has done in the real world.

*Rev. Don Neuendorf
Ann Arbor, Mich.*

KUDOS TO DR. MUELLER ON HIS FINE article, "The Lion, the Witch, and the Savior." Unlike the writer of a letter-

to-the-editor in that same issue—a writer, I must acknowledge, who adopted a good-natured tone—Mueller understands that to be truly Lutheran does *not* require one to find fault.

Are we to find fault with Christ? The Scriptures? The Lutheran Confessions? To be truly Lutheran requires one to be faithful to Christ as He reveals Himself in the Scriptures and as He is matrixed in the Lutheran Confessions. Professor Mueller, I have never met or even previously heard of you, but I thank you for your encouraging article.

*Rev. Philip C. Wottrich
Covington, La.*

HURRAH! I APPLAUD THE ARTICLE BY Dr. Mueller! Now we need an article on the Harry Potter books, warning of the dangers to our children of sorcery and the occult.

*Arlene Demmer
Watertown, S.D.*

The February 2002 Lutheran Witness cover story, "Good Fantasy, Bad Fantasy," included a lengthy sidebar on "The Case of Harry Potter."—Ed.

THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE Wardrobe is the *second* book in the Narnia Chronicles by C.S. Lewis. *The Magician's Nephew* begins the seven-book series.

Otherwise, the article was well-written.

*Dorothy Cockrell
Silver Spring, Md.*

Ostriches

CHRISTMAS IS PAST FOR ANOTHER YEAR, and it looks like we in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have kept our heads in the sand again. Well, *some* of us haven't.

While our officials in St. Louis—along with *The Lutheran Witness* and *Reporter*—apparently said nothing about the situation, we out in the "boonies" went into every store and made a point of saying "Merry Christmas!"—rather than offering the insipid, one-size-fits-all "Happy Holidays." When will we as a church body rise up and fight the anti-Christian movement in America?

Now NBC-TV is airing the atrocious "Book of Daniel." What are we going to do about it? Will we keep our heads in the sand, or will we go on the offensive?

*Rev. David A. Graef
Valparaiso, Ind.*

The Synod's office of Information Services posted a brief comment on "The Book of Daniel" on the LCMS Web site in mid-January. A longer commentary on that TV program will appear in the February Reporter. Also, one might note that the December 2004 Lutheran Witness carried a feature story titled, "What Ever Happened to 'Merry Christmas?': 'Happy Holidays' and 'Season's Greetings' Seem to Have Taken Its Place."—Ed.

O' Blue Eyes

LET ME STATE MY HORROR AND DISGUST over "Rediscover Christmas Carols" (December '06).

Horror and disgust over Christmas carols, you ask? No, horror at seeing the Frank Sinatra CD "Christmas Cabaret" included among the array of Christmas CDs shown in the photo illustrations.

Frank Sinatra doesn't conjure up images of the Christian family at Christmastime. He was a notorious

member of the Rat Pack and probably a misogynist, singing degrading songs like “The Lady Is a Tramp” (“She gets too hungry for dinner at eight; that’s why the lady is a tramp”). If getting too hungry for a late dinner makes one a tramp, there probably are no decent women left.

Whoever approved or was responsible for this detestable error—Mr. Strand or Mr. Folkemer—should be severely reprimanded. As editors, how could you possibly have overlooked such an affront to Christian women and families?

*Carole A. Black
Albuquerque, N.M.*

Thrill of a lifetime

MY BROTHER AND I WERE IN DRESDEN ON that cold, clear, unforgettable weekend last October when the great *Frauenkirche* was rededicated (“A Magnet for Faith,” January ’06). It was the “frosting on the cake” after our visits to the Luther sites in Eisenach, Erfurt, and the Wartburg.

I contributed gifts for a number of years to the rebuilding of the *Frauenkirche*, and so I received two tickets for the Sunday-evening rededication service and the Monday-evening organ concert. On Sunday, my brother and I were two of many thousands participating and singing with tears in our eyes, “Now Thank We All Our God.”

The theme of that glorious weekend was “*Friede Sei Euch*”—“Peace Be with You.” I thank God for my Lutheran heritage.

*William H. Marshall Jr.
New Buffalo, Mich.*

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. Please include your name, postal address, and telephone number.

Mountaintop Experience

As Epiphany comes to a close, our Lord offers us a true mountaintop experience—a glimpse of heaven—in His transfiguration.

by Peter J. Scaer

We live much of our life in the valley and on the plain. In the valley, we walk through the woes of life: loneliness and fear, sickness and sorrow, regret and failure. On the plain, we experience the routine and often humdrum nature of life: getting up early in the morning, getting tired kids ready for school, getting stuck in traffic, cleaning the house, doing the laundry, attending meetings, answering e-mail, making supper, and getting ready to start the whole cycle again tomorrow.

Not that life's all bad and boring. We do well to count our blessings, little and large.

Still, every once in a while, it's good to put away the sorrow and break out of the ordinary. Now and again, we crave a little taste of heaven.

Peter had just confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matthew 16). Our Lord was just beginning to teach His disciples that it would be necessary for Him to suffer and die. What's more, the disciples learned that they too would have to suffer for the sake of the Gospel. It was all a bit much for the confused and overwhelmed disciples to digest. So Jesus

took aside Peter, James, and John and led them up onto a high mountain, a place where the earth seemed to be reaching up into heaven.

What happened next was extraordinary, like some fantastic movie special effects. On that mountain, Jesus underwent a type of metamorphosis. His face changed in appearance, and His clothes became

dazzlingly white (Luke 9:29). Those of you who do the laundry might say, like Mark, that Jesus' clothes "became whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them" (Mark 9:3). For one wonderful moment, Jesus allowed His divinity to visibly radiate His glory. He didn't need a spotlight; He was the Light!





Things only got better. Alongside Jesus, Moses and Elijah appeared. With characteristic enthusiasm, Peter proposed building three tents, one each for Jesus and the two great prophets. Peter's suggestion drips with irony. Having just confessed Jesus to be the Son of God, he now thought he was honoring Jesus by putting Him on the same level as the great prophets of old. Peter still had a lot to learn. God gave His word through Moses, but Jesus was Himself the very Word of God made flesh. Moses freed Israel from Pharaoh's cruel bondage in Egypt, but Jesus would lead His people in an exodus out of sin and Satan's tyranny, out of death and into the life of heaven.

Just then, the heavenly Father descended in a cloud and cleared up any confusion, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him" (Matt 17:5). Though Moses was marvelous, and Elijah was extraordinary, Jesus was greater. God, who in former days had spoken through His prophets, fully reveals Himself in His Son. For this reason, the Church stands in reverence for the reading of the Gospel. It is in the Gospel that we hear Jesus, God in the flesh.

Moses freed Israel from Pharaoh's cruel bondage in Egypt, but Jesus would lead His people in an exodus out of sin and Satan's tyranny, out of death and into the life of heaven.

When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai, his face shone like a moon, reflecting the glory of God. The face of Jesus, however, "shone like the sun" (Matt 17:2). Appropriately, then, Moses and Elijah faded away, and the disciples saw Jesus alone (Matt 17:8).

Naturally, Peter wanted to stay on the mountain, to bask in the glory of the Lord. But it was not to be. The Son of God came not to shine in glory, but to walk through the plains and valleys of our life. He came to this earth to experience hunger and thirst, loneliness and sorrow, not to mention all the daily frustrations of living in this fallen world. He came to walk in our shoes, to live the perfect life on our behalf. So, as He came down from the mountain, the very Light of the world was intent on walking to the valley of the shadow of death. Indeed, this is the true glory of Jesus. Though He was God's glorious Son, He allowed Himself to be bruised and beaten, spit upon and mocked, and nailed to a tree—all for our sake. In the cross, we see the glory of love.

What does the transfiguration mean for us today? As the glory of the Lord is seen in Christ crucified, even now the Lord of glory comes in lowliness. With the ordinary water of Baptism, God's Son forgives our sins and makes us heirs of life eternal. In ordinary bread we feed on heavenly food. True glory is not found in the glitz of Hollywood or Las Vegas, or in any ecstatic experience, but rather in any church, large or small, where Christ crucified is preached.

All who embrace the lowly Savior will one day join Him on the mountain of salvation. There we will gaze upon the face of Jesus, and upon the

glorious scars by which He won salvation for us.

What does the transfiguration mean for us today? We don't need to run this way and that, searching and hoping for some unattainable spiritual, emotional, or physical "high."



All of life's moments, even the most mundane, have been transformed. Our lives have purpose; they have been sanctified by His holy service on our behalf.

So daily and willingly, we pick up our crosses, whatever they may be, and we follow Jesus wherever life may take us. In the valley and on the plain, Christ is with us. His presence makes everyday life worth living. Thank God for the really special and wonderful moments in your life. Then remember that even in life's valleys, we have hope, as we await the day when the Lord who loves us comes again in glory.



Dr. Peter J. Scaer is assistant professor, Exegetical Theology and dean of Distance Learning at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

‘I COULD JUST DIE NOW’

Simeon had waited a long time for God’s promise, and then it was there—the Christ.



by William Weedon

They brought the offering of the poor; they could afford only the turtle doves. But it was an offering commanded in the Law. The life of every firstborn Israelite male belonged to Yahweh and had to be redeemed ever since every firstborn Egyptian male had died in the Passover. Yet even as Mary and Joseph purchased the offering and entered the temple precincts, they knew that the real offering was not the birds, but the Babe. He would be the Offering to end all offerings. In Him the Law would be fulfilled. They thought that they and a handful of others were the only ones in the know.

But then they see him, an old man. He is not looking at them. He is looking at the Babe in Mary’s arms. And he is coming across the courtyard with a familiar look on his face. Mary had seen it before. It was on the face of Elizabeth when she visited her, and Elizabeth looked

in awe at her swelling womb. It was on the face of the shepherds when they knelt beside the manger and told her of the angels and their words and song. Now it was on the face of this old man as he hurried toward them, aged arms outstretched, reaching for the Child.

Mary would not lightly give up her precious package to anyone, but she saw and understood the look. Yet another one in the know. Yet another one who realized that Mary was holding *the* Offering, the Child that would bring to an end man’s long exile and open wide the way home to the Father’s house. She knows she can safely give Him into old Simeon’s arms. He’s been waiting a lifetime.

Simeon holds the Child, looks into His infant face, and he begins to pray. Not to any other, but to Him, to the Child in his arms: “Now, Lord! Now you can let your servant go in peace. I’ve seen Your salvation. A light for the gentiles. Glory for Your people Israel.”

Which is all to say: “I can just die now.” Now that I know that the Death of death lives and breathes on earth, I have no fear. How could I fear the displeasure of God when I see the irrefutable testimony of that love right here in my arms. God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son. Gave Him into the flesh. Here is forgiveness! Here is life! Here is the peace that all the world longs for!

It was surely a stroke of genius when some long-forgotten Lutheran suggested that the words of Simeon were the perfect words to sing when we come back from the Table of the Lord. Having received the body and blood of Him whom Simeon held all those centuries ago, we pray with him: “It’s okay, Lord. I can just die now. Take me home! I’ve seen Your salvation. I’ve tasted Your life. My sins are forgiven. My death is destroyed. I have nothing to fear because You have given Yourself to me entirely. I can go home right now.”

Mary and Joseph presented the turtle doves that day, but the true Offering was the Child they held—the Child Simeon held—the Child who is our Lord and Savior and who delights to give Himself to us that we might “depart in peace” according to His Word!



Rev. William Weedon is pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Hamel, Ill.

Why Some and Not Others?

by Robert E. Smith

A son of an active Christian drifts away from church while at college and never returns. A man grows up in a remote Arab village and never meets a Christian, much less hears about Jesus except through the Quran. A busy mother in Japan never fails to honor her ancestors at their family altar, obeying the Buddhist customs she was taught.

As Christians, we wonder if these people could ever be saved. We suspect they may not. “Why are some saved, but not others?” we ask ourselves, God, and our Christian friends.

We’re not the first to ask this question. Bishop Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354–430) taught that people were saved *only* because of God’s grace. In later years, John Calvin maintained that God chose to save some people, but to condemn the rest to hell. Jacob Arminius taught the opposite—*people* could choose either to accept or reject Christ.

Martin Luther believed that the truth is in the middle. God chose to save Christians before He created the world, but those who are lost choose to reject God and His salvation.

From our human logic, the Lutheran view doesn’t make sense. Read the following Scripture passages and write an answer to why can’t we fully understand this teaching and others that probe the nature of God:

1 Cor. 2:11–13; Rom. 11:33–36; Job 42:1–3; and 1 John 2:16.

One of the most comforting teachings of the Bible is that God chose to save His children. Read the following, then in your own words write what God’s Word tells you about this precious truth.

Matt. 25:34; Eph. 1:3–6; 2 Thess. 2:13 ; Matt. 22:14; Acts 13:46–48; Rom. 8:28–30; 1 Peter 1:1–2; James 2:10; John 15:16–19; 1 Cor. 1:26–31; Col. 3:12; 1 Peter 2:9–10; Matt. 24:22–24; Mark 13:26–27; Luke 18:1–8; John 10:28

Since the Bible clearly teaches that God selected Christians to be saved, even before He created the world, it is natural for us to assume two things. We might believe that once a person is saved, he or she cannot be lost. We might also conclude that God must select those damned to hell. Yet the Bible teaches something quite different. God does not predestine people to go to hell.

According to the following passages, how can a Christian lose salvation?

Matt. 13:18–23 _____

Heb. 3:12–15 _____

God does not want people to go to hell. What does He want to happen to the lost?

Ez. 18:23, 30–32 _____

Matt. 18:10–14 _____

John 3:16–17 _____



1 Tim. 2:3–8 _____

2 Peter 3:9 _____

Now read these passages and then write what they tell us about why people reject God.

John 3:18–21, 36; Matt. 23:37–38; Acts 13:44–48; Mark 16:16; and Rom. 2:5 _____

So the Bible teaches two seemingly incompatible truths. Those who wonder if God could ever forgive them learn of the comfort and hope of His Good News—that He loves them and has the perfect plan for their salvation through His Son, Jesus. He promises to keep them safe in His hand. Those who take God’s love for granted, turn their backs on His grace, and wander away from Him learn that they will be allowed to go to hell.

You and I may not fully understand how these fit together, but we trust that God does. We let the question go unanswered. We rejoice in God’s election and bring the Good News of His grace to those who are lost.



Rev. Robert E. Smith is electronic resources librarian at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

HEALING HANDS

Christian medical workers witness the love of Jesus Christ through their medical missions in order to heal bodies and point to the only true healer.

by Gary Dunker

As Jesus and His disciples neared Bethsaida, a blind man was brought to Him. His friends had heard about Jesus, so they begged Him to restore the blind man's sight. Taking the man by the hand, Jesus led him away from the village. There on the outskirts of Bethsaida, Jesus spit on the man's eyes and laid His hands on him.

"What do you see?" Jesus asked.

"I see people, but they look like trees walking about" the blind man replied.

Jesus again placed His hands on the man's eyes. The blind man would later recall the compassionate warmth of Jesus' hands as his eyes cleared and his sight was restored.

The healing hands of Christ—often we picture them when reviewing accounts of Jesus' earthly ministry. May we never forget that those same compassionate healing hands were nailed to the cross, laid limp in death, were brought to life at the resurrection, and ascended into heaven.

Now, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' healing hands live on through the compassionate hands of medical professionals. Throughout The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), thousands of nurses, doctors, pharmacists, medical specialists, and in some cases missionaries, serve as Christ's hands on earth—not to bring glory to but to heal minds, bodies, and spirits—that God might be glorified. This article presents five of them.



Bobbie Lautenschlager

Bobbie Lautenschlager lives in St. Louis, Mo., with her husband, Dr. John Lautenschlager. Bobbie is executive director of Lutherans in Medical Mission, after serving with her husband as a medical missionary for nearly 20 years.

She recounts the story of a West African family with a Christian father, but the mother was not Christian. She had encircled their little mud-



representing spirits or "*jujus*." She believed she needed to manipulate the spirits to act on the family's behalf.

When their young son fell ill, the mother constantly appealed to the clay pot "*juju*" that she believed controlled the child's health. Rice and blood sacrifices brought no healing. In panic the woman took the dying child to the medical mission where the Lautenschlagers were serving. Here the child's chills and fever were diagnosed as malaria, one of the diseases that strikes down young children in undeveloped nations.

Lautenschlager quickly administered anti-malarial medications before the child could go into convulsions and die. Subsequent medications controlled the malaria parasites. By the hand of God, the child was healed.

Lautenschlager vividly recalls watching as the mother came to faith in Jesus Christ. She took a hoe and smashed all of the clay pot *jujus* ringing her home. She no longer needed the worthless shrines.

The retelling of her son's miraculous healing brought an amazing reaction throughout the little village as useless clay pot *jujus* gave way to the true healer, Jesus Christ.

Bobbie Lautenschlager, pictured here with an African child, and her husband, Dr. John Lautenschlager, worked as medical missionaries in West Africa for nearly 20 years.



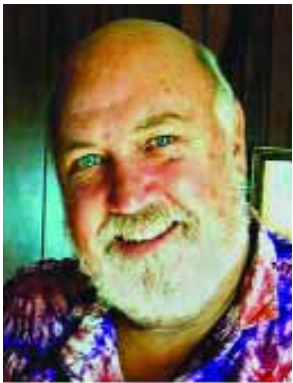
Carol Broemmer

Carol Broemmer, a registered nurse, is manager of Health Ministries for LCMS World Relief and Human Care. "God has given me this opportunity to use the talents, gifts, and life experiences He has provided," she says.

Carol can recall many times when she knew God was present, especially in situations involving life and death. Carol passionately serves as a catalyst to encourage Lutherans to share the love of Christ through their medical vocations, whether in the form of medical missionary, parish nursing, or other opportunities.



Carol Broemmer, manager of LCMS World Relief and Human Care Health Ministries, gives toothbrushes and toothpaste to children at an orphanage in Kenya, Africa.



William Foster

After 20 years of private medical practice in Fort Collins, Col., **Dr. Bill "Doc" Foster** of Norfolk, Neb., served more than six years in Toulepleu, Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa, as a medical missionary with LCMS World Mission and LCMS World Relief and Human Care. Currently, he is director of Christian Medical Endeavor, a program of Orphan Grain Train, the Norfolk-based, LCMS-affiliated relief agency.

Foster recalls morning devotions during his service in Africa. They were spoken in two or three languages so those gathered at their little clinic might know the true source of their healing.

One day, the medical team was greeted by a child with a severe flesh-eating disease known as Buruli's Ulcer. The team knew they could halt the disease, but a plastic surgeon would be needed to repair the damage. By God's hand, a plastic surgeon studying this disease "happened to be in the area," Foster recalls, meaning some 10 hours away. The disease was halted, and after numerous skin grafts, the child reclaimed his life. And God claimed an abundant harvest of souls when the child's whole village became Christian.

Orphan Grain Train/Christian Medical Endeavor sends medical supplies to Nicaragua, Guatemala, Mexico, Latvia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Haiti, and many places in the United States. Wherever they work, the Word of God and medicines are dispensed with caring hands.

Dr. Bill Foster teaches a class in Sierra Leone.



Drs. Bill Foster, left, and Anita Scribner, top right, meet in Kisumu, Kenya, with Dr. Oyeyo (across the table) who works with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya. They met to better understand the medical needs due to the AIDS epidemic. Carol Broemmer is at bottom right.



Dr. Anita Scribner says that this boy at an orphanage she visited was “keen to get cuddled, ... I don’t think that happens much.” The AIDS epidemic is stealing the childhood of thousands of orphans.

Anita Scribner

Dr. Anita Scribner is board certified in internal medicine and infectious diseases. She and her husband have four children ages 5, 7, 8, and 10. Scribner, who currently treats more than 700 HIV/AIDS patients, recently assisted the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya in assessing their HIV/AIDS strategic plan.

In Kenya, as many as 30 percent of women have HIV, and in some places in Africa that number climbs to an astonishing 50 percent. Most are sick widows trying to care for their children before they die. HIV treatment is very affordable, in some cases as cheap as \$6, but in poor African nations even \$6 puts medical treatment out of reach.

Scribner has seen God at work through her, and she says, “HIV/AIDS patients are some of the most appreciative people that you will ever run into as a physician. I pray we sow seeds that others will reap later.”

Scribner often shares her experiences with her home congregation, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Longview, Texas.

John Eckrich

Dr. John Eckrich has “ministered” to LCMS clergy, seminary students, and professors, in addition to his other patients in St. Louis, where he has practiced for more than 30 years. His compassion for Lutheran clergy led him to found Grace Place Lutheran Retreats to assist clergy and their spouses to learn to “live well” with the stresses of pastoral responsibilities.

For 20 years, Eckrich practiced medicine within blocks of the International Center of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. He and his late partner, Dr. Frede Mortensen, noticed that clergy and teachers were “burning themselves up” trying to negotiate the demands of their calling while balancing the needs of their personal and family lives. In response, the Lord led Eckrich to develop a small group of pastoral health advocates to address these needs of Lutheran clergy.

Grace Place Lutheran Retreats chose a different paradigm of helping; instead of treating patients after they become ill, they teach preventative health, wellness, and wholeness skills and attitudes to clergy to “inoculate” them against the physical, emotional, and spiritual disorders that can limit their vibrancy and length of service in God’s Church. Eckrich says, “I am aware of a significant number of our retreat alumni that may not have stayed in their ministry walk without this time of reflection and renewal.”

Throughout His earthly walk, Jesus Christ revealed Himself as “the great Healer,” a reference to one of God’s Old Testament names, “The Lord who heals you” (Ex. 15:26), and to the Gospel theme for the Epiphany season. By God’s Holy Spirit, the physical, emotional, and spiritual healing continues through the hands of medical professionals. Yet the greatest healing of all is that of the soul. It was at Calvary where “the great Healer” did His greatest work. With hands nailed to the cross He said, “*Tetelestai*” — “It is finished!” healing our souls to spend an eternity with Him.



Dr. John Eckrich (standing) had treated hundreds of pastors and other professional church workers for stress. He and his wife, Kathy, started Grace Place Lutheran Retreats in 1999. The retreats were developed by pastoral-care professionals and Lutheran church leaders.



Gary Dunker is a member of Messiah Lutheran Church, Lincoln, Neb.

*Does the Church on earth
serve as a place of healing
or a place of training?*

HOSPITAL OR GYM?

by William Weedon

In the Church, one has to be wary of phony alternatives—either this or that. This includes debate about the Church as hospital or gymnasium. Truth is, there are aspects of both in the Church.

No question that the Church is first and foremost and always a hospital. It is the place that dispenses God's gifts of healing mercy for sinners who are bound toward death and hell and are unable to do anything about it.

Didn't our Lord say: "It is not the well who need a physician, but the sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2:17)? Is He not the fulfillment of Isaiah's words: "A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench" (Matt. 12:20)?

The Lord, knowing the deep wounds that sin continues to inflict upon His disciples, has set up a hospital where the rich bounties of His grace can continually forgive, cleanse, and heal His people.

In His tender compassion for the human race, our Lord has established His Church to be the healing place, the place where forgiveness of sins flows full and free.

Martin Luther described the Church in these words in the Large Catechism: "Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered toward this goal: we shall daily receive in the Church nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the

Word and the signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here."

A hospital indeed! And written over the doors are the words: "For sinners only."

But is the Church, this hospital for sinners, also a gym? St. Paul speaks of the Christian life as an athletic contest:

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it" (1 Cor. 9:24).

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).

If the Christian life is a race, then indeed the Church is the gym where Christians train to run the race, fed on the nutritious food of the Word of God and the Savior's body and blood alone that gives us the strength to endure the grueling contest and win at last the "crown of life."

The key is that it is always sinners who need to take the medicine



of God's forgiveness, and who are being trained as athletes to run the race. By the grace of God in Word and Sacrament, we are given the sustenance needed to "go in the strength of that food" all the way to the mountain of God (1 Kings 19:8).

Hospital or gym? Yes! The Church is the healing place for sinners and the equipping place for the struggle against sin, death, and the devil that every Christian must endure as he or she runs the great race home to heaven.



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WELCOME BACK, DIETRICH

After decades of misinterpretation and misrepresentation by many for their own purposes, God's purpose for Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life and death is being rediscovered.

by Uwe Siemon-Netto

One hundred years after Dietrich Bonhoeffer's birth, and more than six decades after his violent death, it is high time for Lutherans to reclaim one of their greatest martyrs. We have allowed him to be hijacked by too many unorthodox theologies. Because of his jailhouse musings about "religionless Christianity," he has been portrayed as the apostle of Christian atheism, as the father of the "God is dead" movement of the 1960s. "Seldom has an author, living or dead, been so misrepresented by his commentators and translators," wrote Paul Lehmann, by no means a confessional Lutheran but one of America's most prominent liberal theologians.

Never mind that Bonhoeffer interpreted "religion"—as opposed to faith—as a form of self-actualization and self-justification; never mind that "whatever he meant by 'religionless Christianity,' he certainly did not think it eclipsed the need for prayer, worship and sacrament," wrote Stephen R. Haynes in his recent book, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon*.

Left-wingers such as Father Daniel Berrigan and Beatriz Melano,

a Latin American "sage," altered Bonhoeffer into an originator of "liberation theology." Meanwhile, Georg Huntemann, a conservative German evangelical, stripped him of his Lutheran credentials by claiming that he was actually a Calvinist of sorts. Huntemann, himself of Reformed persuasion, used his volume, *The Other Bonhoeffer*, to rail relentlessly against the Lutheran Two Kingdoms Doctrine, which he thoroughly distorted, clearly not realizing that Bonhoeffer's very life and death bore the markings of this doctrine as none other.

One must be grateful to Gustavo Gutierrez that at least he, the actual founder of liberation theology, did not give Bonhoeffer his imprimatur as a radical. To Gutierrez, Bonhoeffer was, though courageous, a bourgeois.

And that was true. Like most of the men and women who suffered and died resisting Hitler, Bonhoeffer hailed from Germany's upper classes, whose very culture the murderous Nazi thugs violated.

Bonhoeffer was born Feb. 4, 1906, in Breslau, then the capital of German Silesia, now part of Poland, as the son of a celebrated psychiatrist and a noblewoman. At that time, Europe was at peace; it was still the cultured



continent that had no idea its refinement would soon be shattered by the slaughter of millions in the fratricidal first World War and then by World War II, the handiwork of Adolf Hitler. According to his biographer and friend Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer considered Hitler a tool of the Antichrist.

According to Martin Luther, when the Antichrist (or "Beowulf," as Luther called him) enters a village, the peasants have the obligation to slay him; should they fail to do so, they will incur guilt. This was the way Bonhoeffer felt about Hitler. Before his death in 2000, Bethge told me that when his friend became involved in the plot to kill the tyrant, he said, "Of course, Christ's words that those who draw the sword will die by the sword also apply to us [co-conspirators]. But right now, reason dictates that we must do this, and then of course we must still turn to God for forgiveness in Christ."

Then Bonhoeffer added, "Now for the first time I have understood what Luther meant when he wrote [to Philipp Melanchthon in 1521], 'Sin boldly but even more boldly believe and rejoice in Christ.'"

Yes, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a strong sinner in this sense of the

word, for he was a confessional Lutheran. He, who at age 21 had earned his Ph.D. in theology, did not act in his capacity as a citizen of the spiritual right-hand kingdom—Christ’s realm—when he conspired to kill Hitler. He did so in his role as resident of the secular left-hand kingdom—the realm of reason where God reigns in a hidden way. In that kingdom Bonhoeffer was not a pastor but an unpaid agent of the *Abwehr*, Germany’s military intelligence service, which actively opposed the Nazis.

Indeed, so adamantly did he insist on making this distinction that he even insisted on having his name removed from congregational prayer lists for pastors suffering persecution for proclaiming the Gospel. As his friend Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann reported, Bonhoeffer did not want these clergymen placed in even greater danger by being associated with him and his conspiratorial activities.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer later coined the phrase that “suffering with God in a godless world” was the Christian’s proper response to “God’s show of solidarity with suffering humanity.” He was prepared to suffer in the extreme as part of his citizenship in the left-hand kingdom, which is still under sin.

He could have avoided this fate. He was in New York in June 1939, trying to avoid conscription into the German military. A stellar career as a professor at Union Theological Seminary awaited him. But a daily Scripture lesson changed his mind: “Do your best to come to me before the winter” (2 Tim. 4:21). So he decided to return to Germany just before the outbreak of World War II to share his fellow-countrymen’s fate.

“I have made a mistake in coming to America,” he wrote to U.S. theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. “I must live

through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. Christians in Germany have the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose; but I cannot make that choice in security.”



A young Rev. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is shown on an outing near Berlin with a church boy’s group in this undated photo.

According to St. Louis mathematician Charles Ford, a leading American Bonhoeffer scholar, “Bonhoeffer returned from America because he did not want to miss his encounter with Christ, who was waiting to form his life.”

Bonhoeffer knew the cross was waiting for him, and he accepted it in true discipleship of Christ, here, in the secular realm. He was hanged April 9, 1945, in Flossenbürg concentration camp, only days before it was liberated by American forces. He died nobly, or so the camp’s physician reported later:

“I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer, before taking off his prison garb, kneeling on the floor, praying fervently to his God. I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and so

certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution he again said a short prayer, and then climbed the steps to the gallows brave and composed.”

This sounds like an almost blissful ending. It seems, though, that the doctor made up this tale in order to avoid punishment later in a war-crimes trial. B. Jorgen L.F. Mogensen, a Danish diplomat imprisoned in Flossenbürg, denied the existence of a scaffold or gallows in that camp. Mogensen is certain that Bonhoeffer died the same ghastly death his two *Abwehr* superiors, Adm. Wilhelm Canaris and Maj. Gen. Hans Oster, suffered.

They were slowly strangled to death by a rope dangling from an iron hook that had been sunk into a wall. When they lost consciousness they were revived so that the procedure could be repeated over and over again. The man who revived them was evidently none other than the camp doctor who later made up the story about Bonhoeffer’s elegant end, Mogensen insisted.

Bonhoeffer’s bitter end was in a sense his personal exclamation mark behind his own Lutheran theology of the cross. So it is time for his radical, atheist, postmodern and other weird admirers to step back and hand him over to us. Welcome back, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, you are home now—finally, 100 years after your birth and nearly 61 after your death!



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Special Blessings



God's healing touch for "special needs" children clearly shows through the vocation of adoptive parents.

by Robin R. Mueller

When you consider that thousands of children will never experience a lasting family connection, I think we need to challenge our Lutheran families," says Rev. Paul Devantier, who was the national director of the Infant Adoption Awareness Training Program from 2001–05.

Abortion in the United States causes 1.2 million fewer babies to be born here annually. So U.S. citizens increasingly seek to adopt infants from Korea, China, and Russia.

Of the nearly 3.9 million babies born in the U.S. each year, nearly one-third are to single women. The majority of women with unplanned pregnancies choose either abortion or single parenting; just 1–2 percent

choose an adoption plan. Infant Adoption Awareness materials help counselors learn how to present adoption as a positive choice for birth mothers and their children.

"Meanwhile, a large group of 'special needs' children—older, bi-racial, and/or infants with medical and drug-exposure conditions that make them difficult to place—desperately need families," explains Devantier.

Paul and Ellen Devantier served as foster parents for 30 years to more than 80 children, and have reared two biological and three adopted children. One daughter they adopted was considered "special needs" because of her age, ethnicity, and the physical and emotional abuse she had suffered. Another was bi-racial and had seizures as

an infant, which she outgrew.

"Labels have nothing to do with the personality, physical ability, or intelligence of a child. Sometimes I'm sure my own flesh and blood would not have been acceptable to anyone else." Devantier adds.

Annually, nearly 126,000 of the 534,000 U.S. children living in foster-care homes become eligible for adoption. Their median age is 10; 38 percent are African-American, 37 percent Caucasian, 17 percent Hispanic, and 8 percent of other races.

Adoption of foster-care children has been increasing since the late 1990s. Nearly 52,000 were adopted in 2002, 59 percent by their foster parents, 23 percent by a relative, and 17 percent by a non-relative. Yet, each year, 20,000 children "age

out” of the system, reaching age 18 with no permanent home or family.

“At age 9 or 10, these children’s chances of being adopted are close to zero,” says Devantier. “Historically, we Lutherans have been good at reaching out to the disadvantaged. If just two families from each congregation considered adoption, we could provide homes for 10 percent of all children in foster care awaiting adoption.

“With our support system of strong families, schools, and congregations, imagine what blessings we could bring to these children. What a marvelous opportunity to live out and express our faith.”

The Lutheran Adoption Network (LAN) includes 30 Lutheran social ministry organizations that are active in both international and domestic adoptions and which are members of Lutheran Services in America (LSA). Counselors at one such organization, Lutheran Family and Children’s Services of Missouri (LFCS) were instrumental in linking together the families described below.

A modern-day “Sarah”

“Sarah” (not her real name) has two children, 36 and 38, from her first marriage. After a hysterectomy at age 26, “I prayed that God would somehow give me another child. I just didn’t know it would be so long!” she laughs.

Now 57, Sarah and her second husband, “Jim” (also in his late 50s) have adopted “Rose,” 2 years old, and “Michael,” 1.

Rose, born three months premature, had brain damage at birth and was later diagnosed with mild cerebral palsy. Her birthmother was addicted to methamphetamine.

“When we got her, Rose didn’t really have a will to live,” Sarah recounts. For seven months, the tiny infant needed constant care, suffering from severe acid reflux and seizure-like symptoms.

*We’re blessed to have them.
God gave them to us.
We’re meant to be doing this.”*

“She was so stiff, I couldn’t even change her diaper,” says Sarah. After therapy and enrollment in a First Steps program that gives assistance to children, birth to age 3, with special needs and to their families, Rose’s mobility improved.

Sarah visited LFCS to show counselors Rose’s progress and to request a sibling for her. They told her about a bi-racial Native American infant. “They didn’t know if he would live, but I couldn’t stop thinking about him and praying for him,” says Sarah. She wrote a letter

to the infant’s parents, explaining why she and Jim wanted to adopt him.

Michael, whose right side barely functions, also was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Frequent appointments with medical professionals and behavioral counselors for both children “are sometimes overwhelming. You can read all kinds of books and gather information, but until you get into it, you don’t know,” Sarah admits.

“When people see all the work, they say we’re crazy; some say ‘They’re blessed to have you.’ But I say we’re blessed to have them. God gave them to us. We’re meant to be doing this.”

Sarah describes Rose as a “little bookworm” who enjoys singing and loves her day care and Head Start teachers. Michael is “a beautiful boy who loves to give hugs and kisses.”

“If I were younger, I’d take in more,” she adds. “They have special needs, but their greatest needs are love and care, just like any other child.”



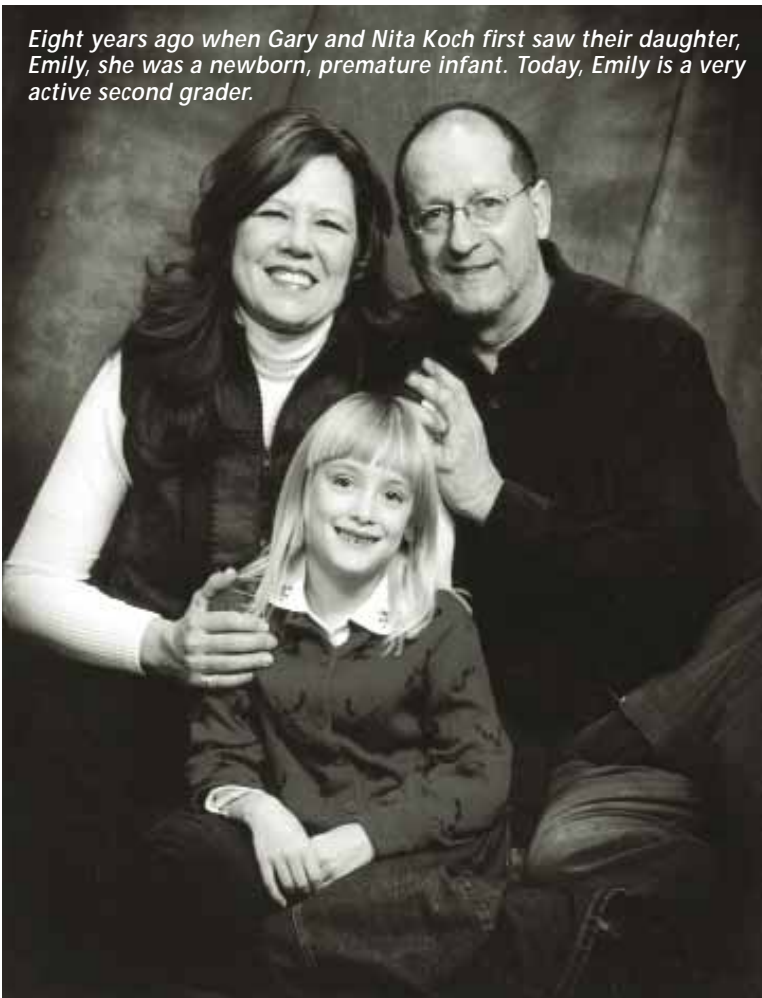
Rev. Paul Devantier is surrounded by some of the children who appeared in the “Thanks for Considering Adoption” mass media campaign that he directed for the Infant Adoption Awareness Training Program of the National Council For Adoption in Washington, D.C. All are children who were adopted.

Two of Ellen and Paul Devantier's children eagerly greet their newly adopted sister.



“[God] has given us an opportunity to do something special with this precious child.”

Eight years ago when Gary and Nita Koch first saw their daughter, Emily, she was a newborn, premature infant. Today, Emily is a very active second grader.



‘Here’s your new child’

John and Faith Marsalek have three grown children and one grandchild. “We discovered we were pretty good at parenting. We thought raising good kids was one positive way to lead a life,” says John.

Seeing friends at church and school enjoy serving as foster parents, the Marsaleks, who live in Manchester, Mo., decided to do the same 15 years ago, when their children were 8, 11, and 13.

Since then, they have parented 20 babies, who have stayed with them for a week to 10 months. “One of the thrills in life is handing someone a baby and saying, ‘Here’s your new child,’” says John.

Then along came Jacob, an African-American, 10-day-old infant. He was born with spina bifida and hydrocephalus.

When Jacob became eligible for adoption, “We lobbied heavily for him to remain with our family,” explains Faith. “We were very bonded. We knew there would be hurdles with his physical and cognitive development, but we accepted who he is and how he is. He was ours.

“He was filled with determination; at 4 years old he was using a walker,” says Faith. [Today], Jacob walks without crutches, though his gait is not normal.”

At 6, Jacob was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome, a form of autism. “As a baby, he had issues with bright lights and loud noises,” says Faith. “He enjoys interacting with adults, but interacting with kids is more challenging.”

Now 10, he enjoys Scouts, video games, baseball, and yard work with his dad and says he’d like to be a “professional football player.”

Despite Jacob’s challenges and a dozen surgeries, John praises “his amazing strength and happy outlook. Kids with special needs also have special abilities other children don’t! You know ‘perfect’ has its problems, too,” he teases.

“Jacob lights up a room when he walks into it. When a problem comes up, he just swallows it and goes on. He has many abilities and very few disabilities!”

God's Plan for a Preemie

"I believe that God created this child for us; that's how I felt the first time I saw her," says Juanita ("Nita") Koch.

Gary Koch tears up as he describes his first sight of Emily: "I was not looking at a child or someone else's child. I was looking at *my daughter*. I'll never forget it." Eight years ago, the Kochs saw a 2-pound, 7-ounce, premature baby in an incubator.

Today, Gary sees "a very sweet, caring child who loves to learn." Nita describes second-grader Emily as a "loving, social, family-oriented" girl who enjoys Girl Scouts, swimming, and the library.

How does Emily see them? "It makes me feel special that I'm adopted," she says. "They really wanted me and they love me a lot."

Emily had laser surgery for retinopathy of pre-maturity and has mild cerebral palsy. She experienced some developmental delays and "her legs get weak when she runs a lot," says Nita. "But what a blessing—she runs a lot!"

When they adopted Emily in 1998, Nita, a nurse, was 44 and had prayed for years to become a mother. Gary, a college professor who teaches counseling and psychology, was 50.

Living in northern Illinois, "We're blessed to be in a diverse church and university setting with many friends who are older parents of adopted special-needs children or foreign infants," says Nita. "Emily keeps us young!"

"And it's such a privilege to instill faith in a child. Our Christian legacy will live on through our daughter. It's a joy to see her grow physically, emotionally, spiritually."

"I wish we had three or four more kids," adds Gary. "I understand life and God's plan much more now than when I was younger. He's given us an opportunity to do something special with this precious child."



Robin R. Mueller is a freelance writer for various Lutheran, non-profit, and corporate groups.



The Devantier family sets quite an example of what can be accomplished when a Christian home is open to foster parenting. In their case, over the years, more than 80 foster children have joined their two biological and three adopted children.



THE LENTEN JOURNEY

The transfiguration of Christ is receiving heavy emphasis in this month's issue of *The Lutheran Witness*. That's appropriate, since Transfiguration Sunday is Feb. 26.

And, following close on the heels of Transfiguration Sunday—only three days later—is Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent.

The joy and ecstasy experienced by the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration at seeing Jesus Christ in His glory is a joy to which we ourselves also look forward. The day will come when we, too, will see the glorified Christ face to face. We wait for that day in joyful expectation!

The season of Lent brings us face to face with the reality of what was required of Jesus for us to receive such a wonderful blessing. I speak, of course, of His life of perfect obedience to God's Law, His terrible suffering, and His sacrificial death on Calvary for the whole world.



The ancient custom of being marked with ashes on Ash Wednesday is a gesture of repentance and a reminder of our need for cleansing.

Seeing Jesus transfigured, His face shining like the sun, then seeing Moses and Elijah with Him, led Peter to blurt out, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah" (Matt. 17:4).

Peter and the others were in no hurry to leave the mountaintop. It was a wonderful place to be! But all too soon, Moses, Elijah, and the visible glory of Christ disappeared, and back to "real life" they went.

For us, "real life" includes facing the reality of our sin and its devastating impact on our lives. That's precisely the focus of the Lenten season.

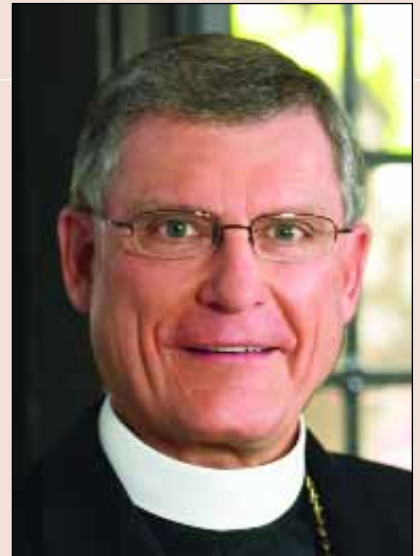
Even on the mountaintop, the disciples became well aware of their sin. When the voice of God came from the cloud, the disciples "fell facedown to the ground, terrified" (Matt. 17:6). Being in the presence of a holy and just God was too much for these mortal and sinful men. We would have had the same response.

There are times, of course, when we are especially aware of our sinfulness as we see ourselves in the mirror of God's holy Law. But there are other times when we fall victim to our human nature, which tends to pay scant attention to what we may consider to be relatively "minor" sins.

Were we to experience God's presence in the way the disciples did on the mountain, you can bet that we, too, would fall to the ground, terrified, aware that *all* sin—even that which we consider of little account—is offensive and repulsive to our Maker.

God's mercy intervenes, however. "Get up," Jesus said to His disciples. "Don't be afraid."

There is no need to fear, because Jesus left His glory on the mountaintop and set His face toward



Jerusalem, intent on making the final sacrifice that had brought Him from heaven to earth. The Lenten season brings us to the renewed awareness that the death of Christ made payment for *all* our sin.

It's particularly appropriate and important during Lent that we take seriously the opportunity, whether in weekend or weekday worship, for self-evaluation in light of God's Holy Word and for the assurance of Christ's forgiveness. This assurance is made very personal in the simple earthly elements of bread and wine—in, with, and under which Christ's true body and blood are received by us "poor miserable sinners," who are freely and completely forgiven as a result of Christ's perfect obedience and His sacrifice on the cross.

So, as you prepare for and participate in your Lenten journey, may you be blessed by Word and Sacrament for a life that gives praise, honor, and glory to our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Jerry Kieschnick

Lives Transformed through Christ,
in Time ... for Eternity!
John 3:16–17

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