

The Lutheran WITNESS

JANUARY 2006

VOL. 125 NO. 1

THE VISIT OF THE MAGI— FACT OR FICTION?

Also:

Language of Their Hearts
A Light of One



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

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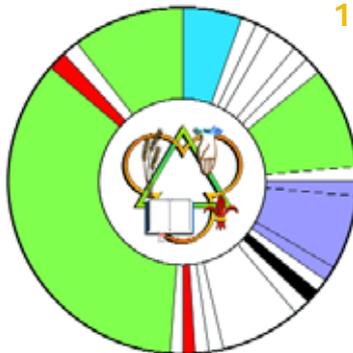
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A 'Point of Truth' on Ablaze!

It's worth noting that LCMS partner and sister churches worldwide [are making] *Ablaze!* a global movement . . .

*Dr. Robert Roegner
St. Louis, Mo.*

THANK YOU FOR HIGHLIGHTING *ABLAZE!* and the eight special *Ablaze!*-related episodes of the Synod's satellite-television program, "Point of Truth" ("Taking *Ablaze!* around the World," Nov. '05).

It probably was not clear from the article that LCMS World Mission entered into partnership with "Point of Truth" and provided the funding to make these eight episodes possible. This was for us a pilot project to test "Point of Truth" as a vehicle for reaching lay people and getting them excited about sharing their faith in Jesus Christ. Viewers were offered a variety of premiums, including the new *Ablaze!* Bible study, "How Do You Start a Fire with Water?"

Satellite television has a potential audience far beyond the borders of the United States. But it's worth noting that LCMS partner and sister churches worldwide already have made *Ablaze!* a global movement by joining the effort to share the Gospel with 100 million unreached or uncommitted people by 2017. For that we can only thank our gracious and loving God!

*Rev. Dr. Robert M. Roegner
Executive Director
LCMS World Mission
St. Louis, Mo.*

Getting our -stans straight

THANKS TO DR. ROBERT ROEGNER AND Rev. John Mehl for recognizing the contributions of the Concordia Mission Society in their letter to the editor (Oct. '05). I would, however, like to correct the statement implying that the medical trailer in

Kyrgyzstan celebrated its 10th anniversary on Oct. 1. Actually, it was the 10th anniversary of the medical trailer in *Kazakhstan*; this trailer was put in place in 1995 and paved the way for the medical trailer to enter Kyrgyzstan in 1999.

I wish *Witness* readers could hear the exciting story of how the Lord opened the central Asian mission field through Kazakhstan. It is a little-known story involving an LCMS ham-radio-operating pastor, a Russian astrophysicist (who is now an LCMS pastor), a political coup, changed travel plans, a German Lutheran congregation pleading for a pastor, the formation of the Concordia Mission Society, the University of Wisconsin (Madison) medical school, Orphan Grain Train, the Kazakh Health Department, a U.S. ambassador and his wife, and many more "players" and events that laid the groundwork for the Lord's work in central Asia.

It would be inspiring if this story also could be published in *The Lutheran Witness* so that more people would be aware of the history of the Lord's work in central Asia and Kazakhstan.

*Jan Meyle
Port Washington, Wis.*

Cover to cover

THE PHOTO ON THE COVER OF THE October issue (a beleaguered Hurricane Katrina victim being hugged by a volunteer) has haunted me since I first saw it. Rarely does one see such an expression of raw

emotion. I looked through the magazine for any information about the man pictured but found nothing. I would be interested to know if he has been helped and what additional support he might need.

*Judy Dolginoff
Carrollton, Texas*

We acquired that photo from Getty Images and, unfortunately, the caption information provided did not include the identity of either the distraught victim or the man consoling him. One would hope, as the picture suggested, that the distressed gentleman would indeed receive some sort of meaningful aid. Lutheran Witness readers should be gratified to know that they and fellow LCMS members have contributed \$11.5 million to date for victims of hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma—and this says nothing about the substantial volunteer hours and other in-kind services provided.—Ed.

MY COMPLIMENTS TO *THE LUTHERAN Witness* for selecting Kathy Lawrence's illustration "The Lord's Blessing" (a little girl praying with her doll and stuffed animals) for the November cover. When I looked at the cover, I wanted to open up the magazine and read the articles. The love of God and the belief in prayer were reflected in the child's eyes and actions. This drawing is a "*Witness*" to the faith of the members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

*Kris Caughey
Campbell, Neb.*

Spectating isn't enough

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIMELY AND INSPIRING article on Michael Antonovich, Los Angeles County supervisor ("The Cross in L.A. County," October '05). It is time that all Christians, not just Lutherans, stop being spectators and take a proactive role in governing our nation. Many on the left side of the political aisle are vehement that no Christian should hold elective office. If every person who is a Christian would take the time to be informed and dutifully go to the polls,

we, as God's people, could remove from office the secular humanists and replace them with godly and righteous men and women, Republican or Democrat, who will uphold our Constitution. Christians, stand up, stand up for Jesus!

*Richard E. Schroeder
St. Charles, Mo.*

"THE CROSS IN L.A. COUNTY" WAS THOUGHT-provoking and well written. Supervisor Antonovich is the kind of public servant our society needs. We all benefit when practicing Christians hold influential positions in government.

I did, though, have reservations about Mr. Antonovich's views on the death penalty. His stated support of capital punishment was based on the fact that Scripture doesn't prohibit its practice. I believe in the culture of life. I believe that everyone, no matter what their sins are, can be forgiven. All souls are redeemable through Jesus Christ. However evil, there is hope to save a soul.

Given the hundreds of convictions overturned since the advent of DNA testing, I wonder if a human system that is flawed should be handing out death sentences. Dozens have been exonerated from Death Row. There can be no doubt that innocent people have been falsely executed.

This is never to say that convicts of serious crime should go unpunished. Life without parole is a slow-motion death sentence. Still, we must remember that the final judge, the only one that matters in eternity, will get it right.

*Steve Spitsnogle
Lee's Summit, Mo.*

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.

THE VISIT OF THE MAGI



FACT OR FICTION?

How much time elapsed between Christ's birth and the visit of the Magi is not known, but they do not seem to have arrived until after Jesus' presentation at the Temple in Jerusalem, 40 days after He was born. Tradition says there were three, probably because of the three gifts they presented. But some earlier traditions set the number as high as twelve, traveling with a large caravan. The names Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar don't appear until the 6th century.

Is this beautiful Epiphany story just a pious tale, or do the evidence and historical context bear it out?

by Paul L. Maier

For years, biblical critics have questioned many details in the Christmas Gospels, such as the Annunciation, the Roman census, the Virgin Birth, the angelic announcement to the shepherds, and the infant massacre at Bethlehem.

While secular evidence from the ancient world actually supports many aspects of the Nativity, one objection is quite formidable. It involves the Magi of Epiphany and runs like this: "How could the (presumably) wise men, who were never in touch with

Hebrew prophecies regarding the star as a Messianic symbol, traipse across the desert following a 'star' and then arrive in Jerusalem asking that too-perfect question in Matt. 2:2: 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him?' It sounds as if they were in a Christmas pageant, being coached by a Sunday-school teacher behind the curtain!"

Ouch! Was the visit of the Magi just a pious tale after all, a device used by Matthew to make of the Nativity a cosmic event, using a great star as the prime prop—a first-century version of Hollywood arc lights?

This needling challenge used to bother me—until I found that the entire argument is based on a false premise. To see if we are dealing with fact or fiction here, we should set Matthew's claims into their historical context.

Who were the Magi?

"We Three Kings of Orient are. ..." So the familiar Christmas carol begins. But already it has made three mistakes in the first line! We don't know that the Magi were three in number, they were not kings, and they did not come from as far away as the Orient, that is, the Far East.

The Greek of the New Testament calls them simply *magoi apo anatolon*, "magi from the East," and the term *magoi* is usually translated as magicians (hence the derivation of that term), wise men, or astrologers. And "the East" has variously been identified as any country from Arabia and Babylonia to Media and Persia (both in modern Iran), but no farther east.

The magi were an ancient priestly caste among the Babylonians and Medo-Persians. These priest-sages, extremely well educated for their day, were experts in religion, history, medicine, astronomy, astrology, divination, and magic. Their caste

eventually spread across much of the East. As in any other profession, there were both good and bad magi, depending on whether they did research in the sciences or practiced augury, magic, and necromancy (reading the future, or changing the course of events, by conjuring up and consulting with the spirits of the dead).

As Gentiles, the magi were our representatives at the Nativity.

The safest conclusion is that the Magi of the Nativity were either Persian or Babylonian, perhaps both, since Persia controlled Babylon for many years. And if the astronomical aspects of the Nativity are emphasized—the great star and its significance—a case could be made that the Magi were late Babylonians, since astronomy reached its highest development in ancient Mesopotamia.

Whatever the origin of these eastern sages, their visit was of great significance for later Christianity: The Wise Men were pagans, not Hebrews, and the fact that Gentile magi performed the same adoration as Jewish shepherds symbolized the universal outreach for future Christianity. "Nations [Gentiles] shall come to your light," the prophet Isaiah had foretold, "and kings to the brightness of your dawn" (60:3).

And so they have. Since Gentiles comprise the overwhelming majority of Christians today, the Magi were *our* representatives at the Nativity, and the light they saw in the baby at Bethlehem pierced the darkness of their paganism, just as the Light of the World can illuminate the darkness of sin, ignorance, fanaticism, and terrorism surrounding us today.

Running with the wrong assumption

The Wise Men could never have been in touch with Hebrew prophecies regarding the star as a Messianic symbol, the skeptics argue. But this premise, which is the foundation of most challenges to Matthew's reliability, happens to be false! The critics seem to have forgotten Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon who conquered Jerusalem in 586 B.C., destroying the city and burning the temple. Many assume that in the notorious "Babylonian Captivity of the Jews" that followed, all Jews were deported to Babylon until most of them returned to their homeland under Ezra.

Wrong on both counts! Nebuchadnezzar took as Jewish captives not the common people, laborers, or farmers, but the professional leaders in the land, including priests and rabbinical scholars. Nor did they all return with Ezra. Many of the Jews fared so well during their captivity that a large Jewish colony remained in Babylon for at least the next 1,000 years. What is the greatest collection of Jewish writings? The Babylonian Talmud, of course, which was edited at Babylon in A.D. 400.

Here, then, is the point: Four centuries earlier, magi scholars—especially the religious historians among them—would certainly have had regular contact with their Jewish counterparts in the scholarly community at Babylon. Accordingly, they, too, would have had access to Hebrew Scriptures involving Messianic prophecies and the star, including rabbinical traditions explaining Balaam's oracle that "a star shall come forth out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel" (Num. 24:17), Isaiah's prophecies cited earlier, and others.

The Magi's question to Herod in Jerusalem, then, was not asked out of a vacuum.



Too far-fetched?

In responding to this evidence, critics sometimes object, “You’re really reaching here, Maier! The surrounding Gentile cultures of the time wouldn’t have been interested in the Hebrew Scriptures or Jewish traditions.” Oh, but they would indeed!

One familiar example should suffice. Ptolemy II (“Philadelphus”), the Hellenistic king of neighboring Egypt, was establishing the greatest collection of scrolls in the world: the great library at Alexandria. In 283 B.C., he wrote the high priest in Jerusalem, asking him to send Jewish scholars to Alexandria in order to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. Eleazar, the high priest at the time, gladly complied, sending 70 scholars, who were accorded a warm and colorful reception in Alexandria.

They were given a beautiful island retreat in the harbor of Alexandria in which to do their translation. The result was the famous Septuagint that rendered Hebrew Scriptures into Greek—the very version of the Old Testament used so often by the earliest church.

Yes, pagans were interested in Hebrew writings and Jewish culture.

An invented star?

Finally, skeptics argue that Matthew “created” the Star of

Bethlehem for literary purposes. Of all the Gospel writers, so they claim, Matthew is the one who loves the sensational effect: the earthquake on Good Friday, the tearing of the temple curtain, saints walking out of opened tombs (27:51 ff.), another earthquake at the Resurrection (28:2), and, earlier, the Nativity star. Matthew, then, goes for the extraordinary, the supernatural, the cosmic.

The star motif, however, twinkles throughout Hebrew history and makes no sudden debut at Bethlehem. The six-pointed Star of David has symbolized the Chosen People from Old Testament times to today’s Israeli flag. The five-pointed Star of Solomon shows up in stone at the archaeological excavations at Capernaum, as does its six-pointed counterpart.

The Star: What might it have been?

Scientists and Bible scholars have offered explanations for the “Star of Bethlehem.” The “Star” could have been a miracle sign, a miracle star, Jesus Himself, an angel, a supernova, a comet, or a conjunction of planets.

In order to use science to test these possibilities, they must be testable. Astronomical records were kept 2,000 years ago, so we can look back for sightings of a supernova, comet, or conjunction of planets. But the appearance of a miracle sign, a miracle star, Jesus, or an angel cannot be tested—or discounted, for that matter.

Where does this leave us?

The Magi probably came from Persia (modern-day Iran) all the way to Bethlehem. Why would they do this? One possibility is that God used the Magi’s fascination with the heavens to draw them to Jesus.



Finally, 130 years after the first Christmas, Rabbi Akiba, the greatest sage of his day, put a Jewish rebel on the back of a white horse and led him through the streets of Jerusalem, crying, "Bow down! The Messiah has come! The Messiah has come!" And the people did. The name of the rebel? Simeon Bar-Cosiba. Yet the rabbi, on the basis of Num. 24:17, had changed his name to

Bar-Kokhbah, which means "Son of the Star."

(The rebel, however, proved to be a falling star, since the Bar-Kokhbah revolt of A.D. 132 was put down by the Romans with utter devastation, after which Jews were excluded from Jerusalem, which was renamed for the emperor Hadrian's family, Aelia Capitolina.)

Here again, the star symbol was

linked directly to the Messiah in Jewish tradition. No, Matthew did not invent the star of Bethlehem. Whether or not the star was a supernatural phenomenon or a natural astral event is discussed in the sidebar story.

So often, skeptical critics are prone to shoot from the hip rather than evaluate all the surviving evidence. And there may have been more evidence. If he had had the time, incentive, and opportunity, Matthew might have written an entire book on how the Magi were alerted to the Nativity. But he had a far more important story to tell: the great good news of how God revealed His Son not just to Jewish people, but to all of humanity everywhere. What began as the light from a single star has now illuminated the entire globe through the One who said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Jupiter, which ancient Jewish astrologers called the "King's Star" (God), and Saturn, which they called the "Star of the Messiah," came together in the constellation Pisces three times between 7 and 6 B.C. Those same astrologers assigned a country to each of the Zodiac constellations, with Pisces, the sign of the fish, representing Judea, or the "House of the Hebrews."

It was certainly noteworthy when the "God" and "Messiah" planets rose in the eastern sky (the east signifying birth) and settled in Pisces, the "House of the Hebrews." The Jewish astrologers, whose thinking may have been known to the gentile Magi (see main story), had predicted that the Messiah would arrive when Jupiter and Saturn conjoined in Pisces. This prediction would have been highly significant to the Magi—it would have alerted them to the birth of Jesus.

Even though this possibility can be tested with computer programs and has a certain logic to it, it remains only an interesting idea. How the Star of Bethlehem, the Star of Epiphany actually happened remains a mystery. That it did happen remains a blessing.

— *Dr. Dale Trapp*
Chairman of the Department of Natural Sciences
Concordia University, St. Paul, Minn.



Dr. Paul L. Maier is professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University and second vice president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

EPIPHANY AND BAPTISM

Christian beliefs and traditions vary on this sacrament.

by David P. Scaer

Epiphaney means “manifestation” — as in the manifestation of the glory of Jesus. One of the first events we celebrate in this regard in the Epiphany season is the Baptism of our Lord.

Although Luther saw Baptism’s institution in Jesus’ command to baptize, he placed its origin in John’s baptizing of Jesus, reported in all four Gospels. Matthew calls John “the Baptist.” Just as Jesus was declared God’s Son at His Baptism, so we are declared God’s children at ours.

Nearly all Christians baptize, but for different reasons. Classical Calvinist churches like the Reformed and Presbyterian baptize infants. But they teach that Baptism, though commanded by God, does not give the Holy Spirit but merely *symbolizes* His work. Because babies and young children are not deemed capable of believing or having faith, Baptists delay Baptism until the children have reached an age of greater maturity.

Roman Catholics, while believing that Baptism gives forgiveness of sins to infants, also believe that Baptism is not all sufficient in this regard. Sins committed later in life must be forgiven in confirmation, penance, the Eucharist, and extreme unction. An infant’s lack of faith at Baptism is compensated for by the church’s faith.

Most church bodies, Lutheran among them, do not re-baptize people who already have been baptized in another church. Baptists are the one exception because they insist on immersion and do not recognize infant Baptism.

Lutherans believe that death to sin and birth to life take place in Baptism. We believe that what Baptism symbolizes *actually happens*. We are in the minority of Christendom that believes in infant faith, so infant

Baptism is our ideal.

We are baptized only once, but every day by faith we relive our Baptism by dying to sin and being reborn as God’s children. Baptism sets the boundaries in which our faith lives.



Dr. David P. Scaer is professor of systematic theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

SACRED TIME

Why is the Church year important?

by William Weedon

“What’s up with this observing of days and seasons and times? Didn’t Jesus set us free from all that?”

Other Christians sometimes ask Lutherans to explain why we observe the church year—that marvelous yearly round of feasts, festivals, and seasons that is so dear to us but a bit alien to those unacquainted with our tradition.

The key to understanding the church year is that we do not observe it as a “law” but in the joy and freedom of the Gospel. We don’t see it as something we have to do; it’s something we get to do! There is simply more to celebrate about our Lord Jesus than anyone can possibly squeeze into a single service on a given Lord’s Day.

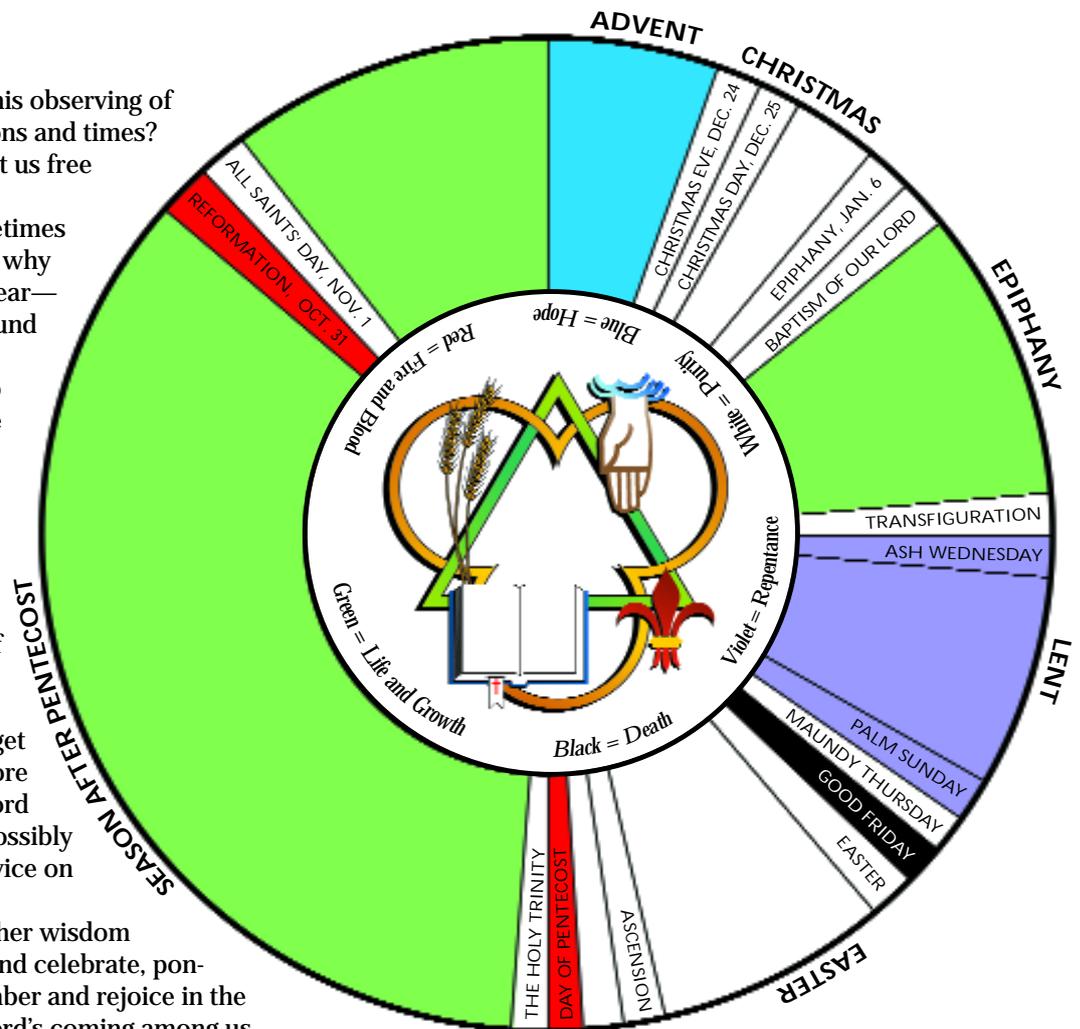
And so the Church in her wisdom devised a way to lift up and celebrate, ponder and proclaim, remember and rejoice in the various aspects of our Lord’s coming among us. Season after season, feast after feast, the Word of God unfolds the richness of what God has accomplished for us in our Lord Jesus Christ. It’s because that gift is so big and so wonderful, that trying to remember and celebrate it all at one time is impossible. Because none of what our Lord did for us is unimportant, each feast, festival, and season reveals something vital about the life God gives us in Christ.

Think of the Church year, then, like picking up a diamond and turning it this way and that, so that the light reflects through its various facets. The diamond always remains the same: our Lord Jesus Christ, our Jewel beyond price! And the Light remains the same: the Word of God. Yet, as the year progresses, the Word reflects differing facets of the salvation He has brought us.

What about this season? In Epiphany, the Church remembers and gives thanks that our Lord came to us in the flesh to fulfill the promise to Abraham that the Promised One would bring blessing to all the families of the earth. Epiphany rejoices that the light that shines in Jesus Christ is a light for all—that none are excluded and all are welcomed. He is indeed “a light to lighten the Gentiles,” as old Simeon sang in the temple, holding the Child.



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



A MAGNET FOR FAITH

One of the wonderful hymns for Epiphany came to mind when I approached the once solidly Lutheran city of Dresden. Here, during 56 years of Nazi and Communist tyrannies, four-fifths of the population turned their backs on their forebearers' faith. Yet today, glistening in the sun, the largest and most beautiful baroque church ever built for Protestant worship towers once again over this Saxon capital after it had been destroyed in allied air raids in 1945 at the very end of World War II.

I stared at this 300-foot sandstone edifice—once lovingly called *Dickmadam* or Fat Lady by previous generations of Dresdners—and thought of the people huddled in the ugly Socialist housing estates surrounding it. Then I remembered the tune I learned in Sunday school:

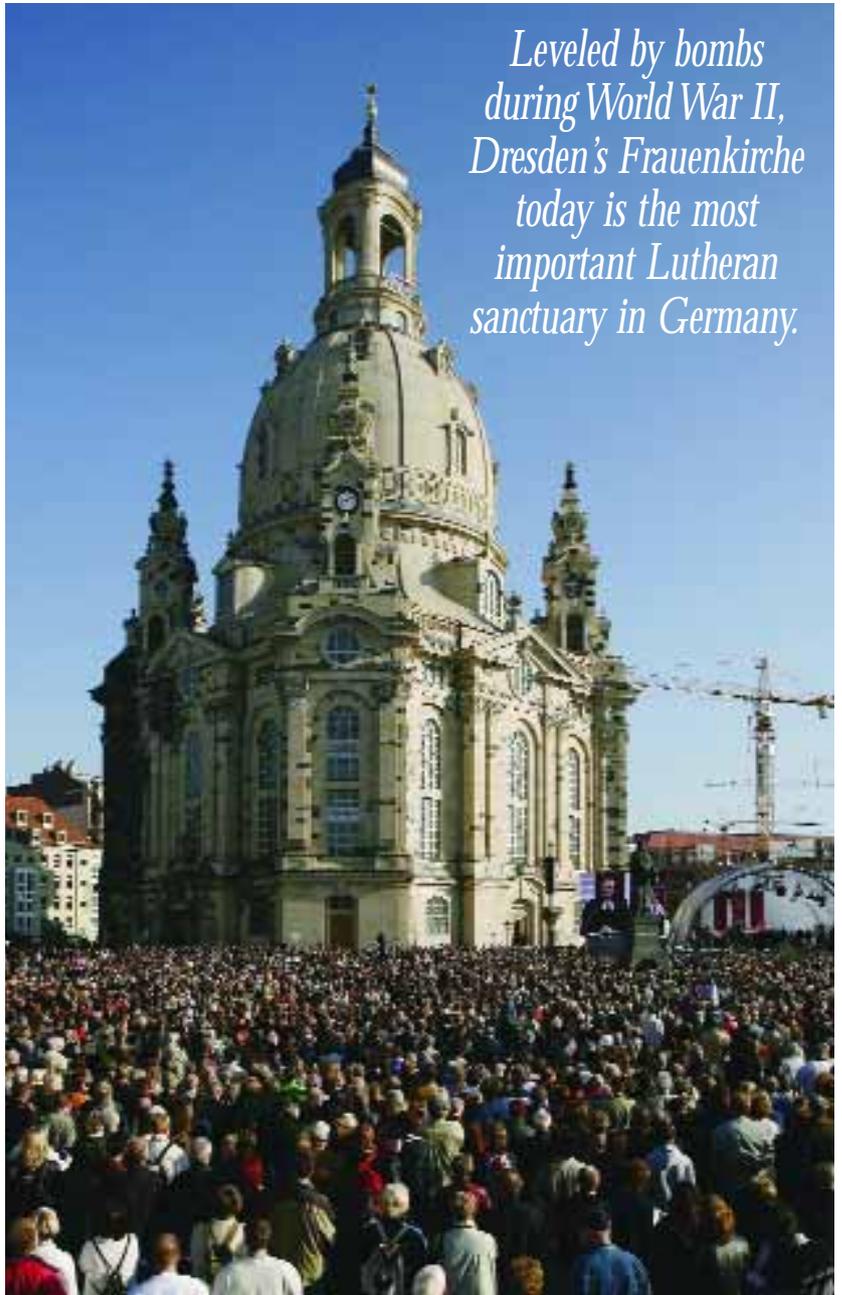
*All ye Gentile lands awake!
Thou, O Salem, rise and shine!
See the day spring o'er you break
Heralding a morn divine,
Telling, God hath called to mind
Those who long in darkness pined.*

On Reformation Sunday this past fall, the Frauenkirche, or Church of Our Lady, was re-consecrated in a splendid service watched by millions around the world on television. First, the toll of its eight bells sent shivers down many a spine. Heaviest among them is the 4,000-pound Peace Bell named for Isaiah ("swords to plowshares," Is. 2:4).

Loudspeakers carried the roar of the Frauenkirche's new 4,873-pipe organ to more than 60,000 visitors jamming the surrounding streets. Bands of 450 trombones intoned some of Lutheranism's most stirring chorales. While a procession of bishops, pastors, and statesmen entered the sanctuary, choirs and congregants belted out one of Christendom's most beloved hymns:

*Now thank we all our God,
With heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
In whom the world rejoices.*

Leveled by bombs during World War II, Dresden's Frauenkirche today is the most important Lutheran sanctuary in Germany.



No anthem could have been more fitting. It was written in 1636 in Eilenburg, another Saxon town, under circumstances comparable to Dresden's torment caused by Allied bombs that incinerated thousand of people, and made the Frauenkirche's unique 12,000-ton dome implode.

The Rev. Martin Rinkart wrote the hymn's lyrics. He was Eilenburg's last surviving pastor at the height of the Thirty-Year War (1618–48). Besieged by Swedish soldiers, this town was packed with refugees — as was Dresden three centuries later by throngs of mainly women and children who fled here before the advancing Soviet Army. In Eilenburg, famine and the plague had decimated the population, forcing Rinkart to conduct up to 50 funerals every day.

Still he penned his famous lines that seemed foolhardy given the situation in which they were written—foolhardy just like the determination of individuals to rebuild this sanctuary that had dominated the Dresden cityscape since the 18th century.

This project created much controversy, particularly within the state-related Lutheran Church of Saxony. Was it right, some asked, to splash \$170 million on the resurrection of such a monumental structure when there were plenty of other sanctuaries about—and most were scantily attended? Should this money not rather be spent on daycare centers and low-cost housing? Should not the 777,000 cubic feet of rubble to which the church had been reduced—with remnants of the statue of an angel mournfully watching over the pile—be preserved for all times as a powerful caveat against war?

In the end, the Saxon synod voted to “heal this gaping wound in Dresden's heart,” as church architect Ehrhard Burger said in an interview. And so in a city where, according to Rev. Stefan Schwarzenberg, most people no longer even know the



People crowd into the Frauenkirche in Dresden on Oct. 30, 2005. Before them is the pulpit, behind it the baptismal font, and the altar behind it, thus presenting the Word and the Sacraments. The altar leaves a deep impression, not only because of its rich artistic decorations and figures, but also its spiritual depth. Almost two thousand fragments of the 18th-century altar were rescued from the rubble, including a figure of Jesus kneeling in Gethsemane.

meaning of the word “miracle,” a miracle did actually occur. Large and small donations from 600,000 benefactors, including New York's German-born cell biologist Günter Blobel (who bequeathed almost his entire Nobel prize of nearly \$1 million) and Britain's royal family, covered most of the reconstruction cost. By 2004, the Frauenkirche was back in the heart of Dresden where it had stood since the 18th century.

Burger describes his task of planning and executing its reconstruction as the crowning of his career—a “one in ten million job.” A fervent Lutheran, he found himself operating simultaneously in the two realms of which all Christians are citizens.

On the one hand, there were worldly tasks such as directing his workmen to salvage from the rubble more than 8,500 pieces of sandstone of which 3,800 eventually were re-used. Blackened by the air raid's flames, they now stand out in the church's brilliant new facade as dark



remnants of the war.

On the other hand, Burger became a leader in the spiritual kingdom. As the sanctuary grew heavenward, he conducted worship services for the masons, many of whom had given up the Christian faith long ago. With tears in their eyes, they sang hymns they had learned in their childhood.

Ask Burger which part of the rebuilt Frauenkirche has the greatest pastoral significance in a “post-Christian” era with its many seekers, and he will point not to its soaring, brilliantly painted copula, not even to the magnificent organ built in the



Anneliese Schiller, 99-year-old resident of Dresden, displays her long-awaited joy for the rebuilt Frauenkirche Cathedral—the “Miracle of Dresden” as the Dresdners have called it—prior to the Reformation service on Oct. 31, 2005. The spectacular, baroque Lutheran church, built in 1726–1743, has become a symbol for Germans of the suffering of war and the peace of reconciliation. The reconstruction took more than 10 years.

spirit of Gottfried Silbermann, whose instruments have graced Saxon churches, including this one before it burned, ever since the 18th century.

No, said Burger, it's the charred altarpiece found under the rubble that is of the greatest relevance to the perplexed in search of transcendence. It shows Jesus kneeling in Gethsemane, agonizing over his impending passion, pleading with the Father to “let this cup pass from me” (Matt. 26:39). This, the architect reported, attracts strangers to a faith they no longer know, directs them to a God sharing man's suffer-

ing, an ideal starting point for pastoral ponderings.

Evangelization emerges as the major charge of this amazing edifice that has already lured 500,000 tourists from all corners of the world to Dresden last year and will doubtless attract even more in the years to come. There were several adult Baptisms even before the Frauenkirche's inauguration. Now the time seems ripe to turn it into a major magnet for mission, said Klaus Kaden, superintendent (regional bishop) of Pirna, a neighboring city.

Kaden told me: “Something is going on here. People have come to realize that there's more to life than money and success. Hence the surge of applicants for parochial schools in Eastern Germany.”

Schwarzenberg confirmed this: “More and more middle- and high-school students opt for religious instruction instead of alternative courses in ethics. And many girls from second- and third-generation atheist families display an amazing curiosity about the Christian faith.

“With a massive [Martin] Luther monument standing guard outside the church, this would be the perfect place to tell seekers the Lutheran message—that Christians are justified before God by grace through faith, and that Christ is the only mediator between man and God,” Kaden said. “But there aren't enough people in this church qualified to do that.”

Two pastors are assigned to the Frauenkirche. They will conduct two worship services daily and two full liturgies every Sunday, though by themselves they will not be able to cope with the masses of tourists. “What this sanctuary needs is the permanent presence of ministers, clearly identifiable by their clerical collars, willing to hear confessions, give pastoral counsel, and

to conduct brief prayer services every hour on the hour,” suggested Rev. Albrecht Immanuel Herzog who heads a Lutheran mission society based in Neuendettelsau, Bavaria. “I stand ready to recruit 10 retired pastors for this task.”

These ministers would have plenty of other chores, too. They could, for example, explain the reason why the key components of the church's chancel are ordered the way they are. Squarely facing the congregation is the elaborate pulpit, behind it the baptismal font, still behind it the altar designed—in Luther's words—to “entice the faithful to come to the Lord's Supper.” Thus the two pillars of the Christian worship, Word and Sacrament, are on the same trajectory here. This is Lutheran theology cast in architecture, just as Johann Sebastian Bach's cantatas are Lutheran theology put to music.

Beyond that, the Frauenkirche will teach tourists one essential Christian message, the message of conciliation. There stands in its crypt a haunting cross, a gift from Coventry Cathedral in England. It was made from nails from the ruins of the original cathedral that had been destroyed in a German air raid.

Even more spectacular is the \$660,000 gilded cross crowning the Dresden church. It is a donation by Britain's Dresden trust and was fashioned by London goldsmith Adam Smith, following faithfully the designs by his 18th-century German forefather, Johann Georg Schmidt.

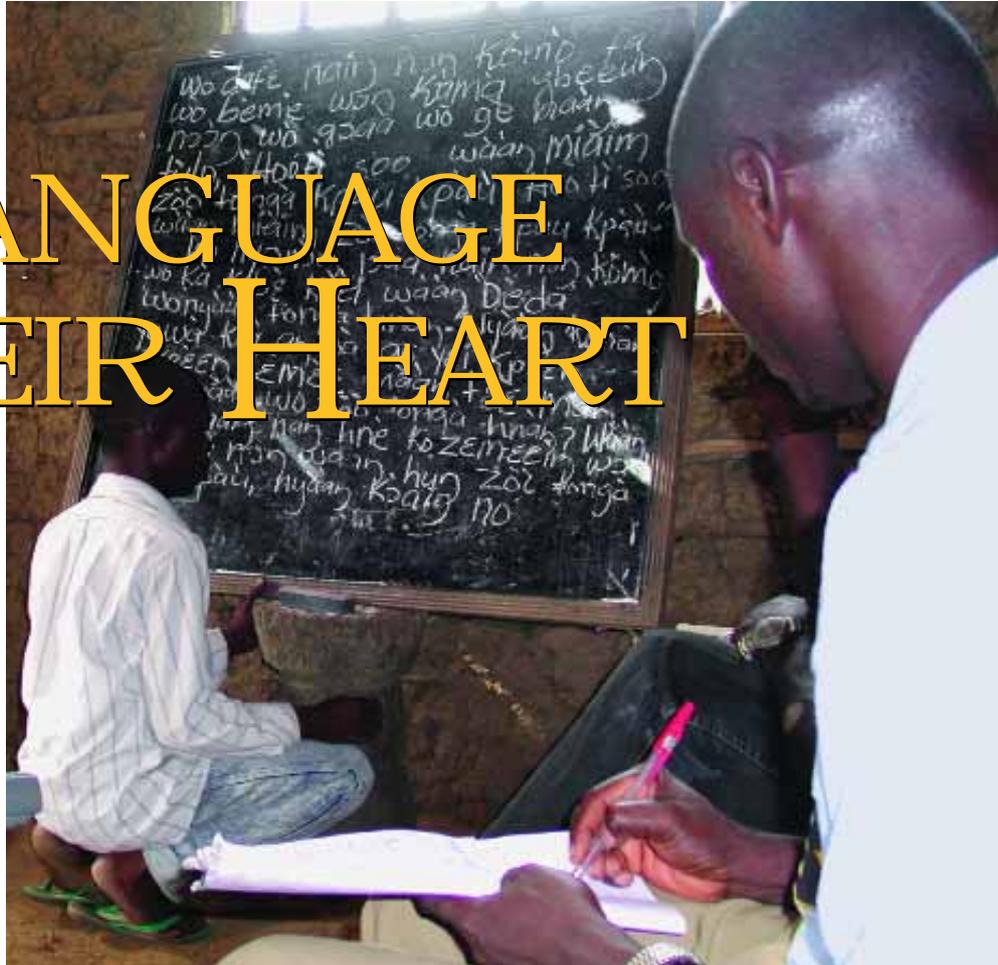
Adam Smith's father was one of the bomber pilots whose deadly cargo had destroyed Dresden, once Germany's most beautiful city, on February 13, 1945.



Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto, a native of Saxony, is a scholar in residence at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and director of the Concordia Center for Religion and the Media at Concordia College at Bronxville, N.Y.

THE LANGUAGE OF THEIR HEART

Lutheran Bible Translators make the Word of God available to people in their own language.



by Robin R. Mueller

If you're able to read this article, you're one of the blessed people in the world who can read the entire Bible—even different versions of it.

Others have just the New Testament. Still others have only portions—more than one book, but less than a whole Testament.

“Of the 6,912 languages in the world, one third have something of God’s Word, and two-thirds have nothing,” says Dr. Marshall Gillam, the executive director of Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT). “That means about 450 million souls have nothing.”

LBT has brought “something” of God’s Word to seven million people via 22 New Testament translations in Papua New Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d’Ivoire, Botswana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Mexico, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Brazil.

Founded in 1964 by Rev. Morris Watkins, an LCMS church planter and leadership trainer, and his wife, Lois, a literacy teacher, LBT today has 82

translators, literacy teachers, and missionary-support personnel working in 19 countries to translate 56 languages.

“Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). But many hear God’s message via the dominant languages of 18th- and 19th-century colonialism—English, French, or Spanish.

“Linguistic imperialism—people believing that another’s language is better because it’s written and they’re forced to learn it to earn money or get a job—distances people from God,” explains Rev. Walter De Moss, LBT’s director of Program Ministries and a former LCMS missionary in Ghana and Togo.

“The Moba people in Togo were surprised that God spoke their language; they thought He spoke only French. They learned He wanted to speak to them directly and intimately. If He values their language and culture, He must value them!”

Value derives from the ABCs of translation—Accuracy, Beauty, and

Clarity—explains Gillam. “Does it properly reflect the true meaning of the original Greek and Hebrew? Are the structure and grammar well-done, and does it have credibility among its target audience? Is the message clear?”

Achieving those goals is “an intricate, time-consuming process, grounded in language learning and cultural immersion, and subject to layers of intensive review,” explains Jim Maxey, a Lutheran layperson who facilitated the Vuté New Testament translation in Cameroon for 12 years. Translations usually take 10 or 15 years to complete.

LBT, like other members of the International Forum of Bible Agencies worldwide, requires its translators to take intensive linguistics training.

“The most important work occurs in the first two years, when you live among the people and build relationships,” explains Maxey. “Translators want to jump right into the task, but the results would not have the depth or quality without first gaining the people’s trust, who then take ownership.”

After analyzing the language, gram-

mar, and daily use, the translator/linguist develops a writing system, tests it among the people, and, with the community, seeks out potential translators.

First, the translator exegetically studies the biblical text. Then the team drafted the first translation, revised it and typed it into a computer. The print-out was read to Vuté people of all ages, faith backgrounds, and dialects.

Questions judging comprehension prompted further revisions. “For instance,” says Maxey, “Baptism was translated to mean ‘the bath of God.’”

Next, a United Bible Societies translation consultant (in this case, the Cameroon Bible Society) reviewed the text through a “back translation” from the Vuté language into French.

After further revisions, the local Bible Society publishes the text.

LBT deliberately works where Lutheran churches are established, “so the church can follow—through with distribution and use,” explains Maxey.

Meanwhile, specialists in literacy and literature development are training local teachers to help people read the Bible in their “heart language.”

Alvina Federwitz, an LBT literacy specialist in several West African countries for 32 years, is currently facilitating literature development and Scripture use in 16 languages.

“Once the people approve a writing system, a team develops pre-primers and primers,” she explains. “Oral stories are reduced to writing as early books.”

One of Federwitz’s most rewarding experiences occurred at a workshop in Liberia in 2001. “We were recording traditional stories that taught moral values in the culture and then relating those stories to Scripture,” she recounts.

“One of the best storytellers, an elderly woman named Mabel, announced she was going to learn to read and write her own language, as she had never had the opportunity to

go to English school.”

One year later, Mabel graduated from Klao Literacy School, “read fluently from the Klao New Testament and had become an active Bible class teacher. Today she is teaching many women how to read and write Klao. Many have come to the Lord!”

Non-print translation trends include orality and vernacular media. “Orality,” the oral tradition, means storytelling and performance. “In New Testament times and before the Gutenberg printing press, most people were illiterate and God’s Word was communicated by voice,” explains Maxey.



Local people make an audio recording of Scripture verses in the African Gola language using their indigenous musical instruments.

“Paul’s letters were read publicly, and faith comes by *hearing*. Bible scholars have discovered that readers mimicked Greek oratory, using dramatic gestures, facial expressions, and vocal intonations.”

“Vernacular media” includes dubbed videos, Scripture on cassette tapes, photo books, plays, and Scripture and story songs using traditional music (ethnomusicology).

Kedra Larsen, LBT’s ethnomusicologist, travels extensively, conducting workshops with local musicians. “We use the people’s instruments, melodies, and rhythms,” she says.

“We print Scripture word for word on large paper, and the musical team

composes songs. That process helps with literacy and shares the Gospel.”

Musicians often come to faith by meditating on Scripture. In the Themne language in Sierra Leone, “the musical team took the tips and techniques they learned and carried on, setting up a Scripture song association to continue composing songs for the church!” says Larsen excitedly.

LBT, an independent organization, and LCMS World Missions “have always been mutually supportive,” says De Moss. When LCMS World Mission faced budget cuts, the translation work of Chuck and Karen Tessaro in Nigeria continued by transitioning their work to LBT.

Many LCMS missionaries and executives have worked with or directly for LBT. Rev. Robert Roegner, executive director of LCMS World Mission, is a former LBT executive director.

LBT missionaries gather their own support. Individuals, congregations, and groups support missionary families, a country and/or special projects.

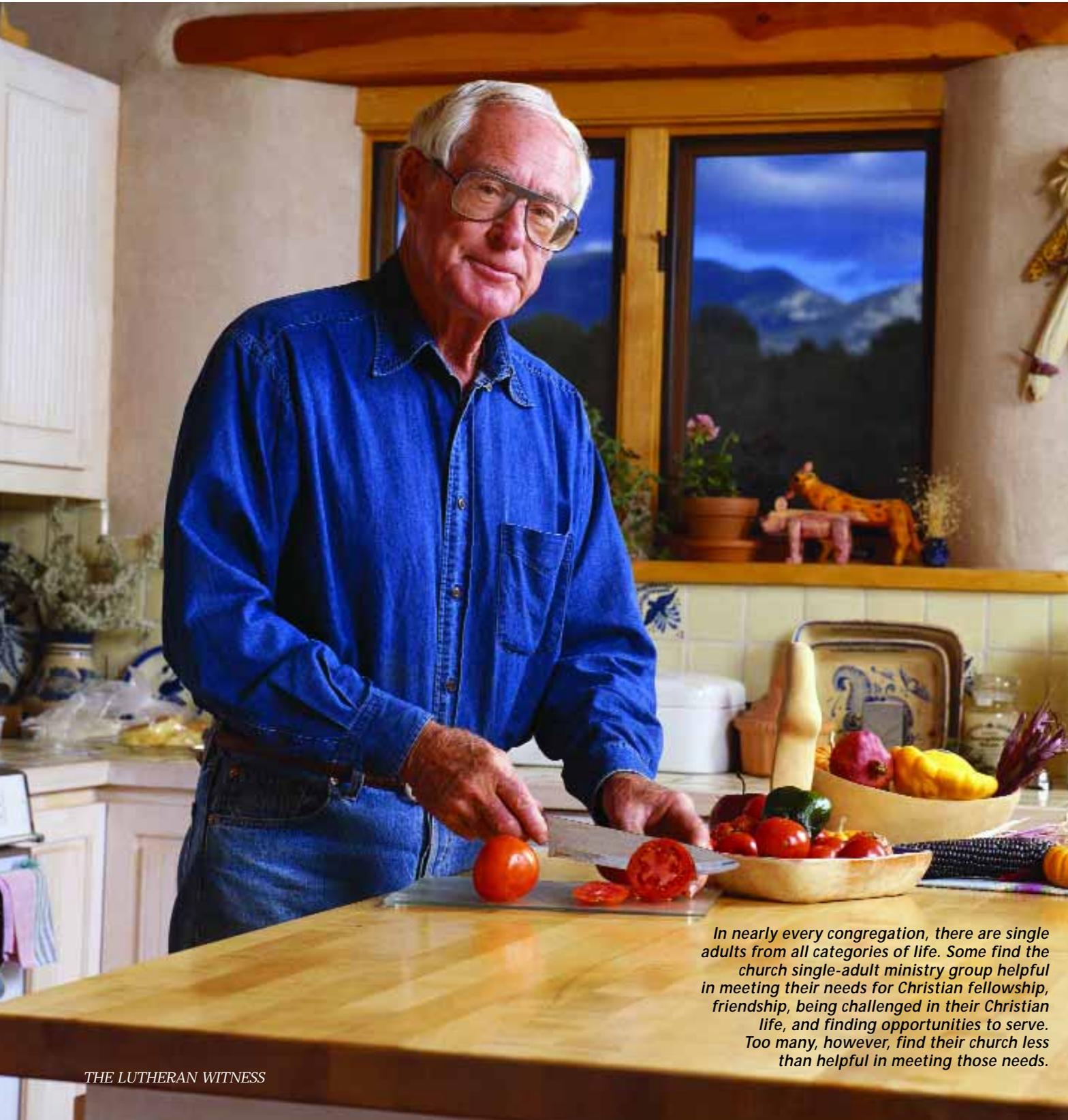
Volunteer Congregational Representatives promote LBT’s mission in nearly 650 congregations. The Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, at local, district, and national levels, has given more than \$2 million to LBT projects during the past 20 years.

Speaking for millions, a Tawaia pastor in Papua New Guinea poignantly expressed what it’s like to read God’s Word easily in your mother tongue: “I have been like Jacob, digging big wells to get a little refreshment. Now I’m living beside a crystal-clear stream, and the water is so refreshing.”



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

A LIGHT OF



In nearly every congregation, there are single adults from all categories of life. Some find the church single-adult ministry group helpful in meeting their needs for Christian fellowship, friendship, being challenged in their Christian life, and finding opportunities to serve. Too many, however, find their church less than helpful in meeting those needs.

ONE

Being single in the church brings challenges to all members to build connections and friendships within the body of Christ.

by Sue von Fange

No one really knows me and loves me for who I am.” ... “No one cares.” ... “We have church committees, but people aren’t committed to one another.” ... “I don’t have any real friends.” ... “I’m having a problem, and I feel so alone.” ... “Does anyone care?” ... “I’ve been so depressed lately.”

Since this is an article about singles in the church, you might think that those quotes are from people who are single, but they aren’t. They’re from people who are married but who are experiencing a lack of significant faith relationships in their church. It’s easy to make assumptions based on a label—in this case: “single.”

At times, we all tend to think that by labeling someone we’re excused from relating to them because they don’t fit into the same category as we do. Yet, there’s a basic human hunger for relationships. We were created for them, and there can be a painful loneliness when we’re excluded, or perceive that we are.

A number of years ago, I was talking with a couple between services, when another couple interrupted our conversation to invite them over for cards. That may or may not seem rude to you, but I felt lonely and left out at that moment. I wouldn’t have if they had found another time to extend the invitation.

Once a former pastor told me, “People find you hard to relate to because you’re not married.” I was labeled and excluded in the very church I was called to serve! Since there wasn’t anything I could do about my marital status, I felt diminished and powerless to find friends in that place, even though making friends hadn’t been an issue for me at other locations.

It struck me that there was an expectation that sin-

gles in the church should be able to and want to relate to people who are married and have children. But there’s not an expectation that married people should relate to singles.

I recently talked with a young couple without children. Their question was, “Where can we find friends at church?” They recognized that once they had children, there would be many connections for friendships.

Churches spend a lot of time and energy providing programs and

resources to build strong marriages and families, and rightfully so. Statistics show, however, that one-third of church members are single. And many Christian singles feel left outside the church, because they see it as a family place where they don’t fit in.

Some churches attempt to meet this need by forming a “singles group,” yet singles don’t necessarily have any more in common with each other than they do

with married couples in the church. Consider the diverse reasons for singleness:

- Widows and widowers of all ages find themselves suddenly outside the social network they once enjoyed with their spouses.
- Never-married people in their 50s have very different perspectives from those in their 20s. Some hope to marry; others have chosen to remain single.
- Divorced people of various ages also have differing needs. I know a woman who had been abused in her marriage and reached a point where she courageously filed for divorce. Today, she is using what she learned

Widows and widowers often feel neglected by their church friends whose company they once enjoyed with their spouses. This is one ministry need that many congregations struggle to meet.





Though some single adults have never married, many are single again as a result of separation, divorce, or death of a spouse. Single parents have many additional pressures and often struggle just to make ends meet or find time to socialize with other members of their congregation.

as a ministry to other women in abusive relationships.

- Men and women whose spouses are in a nursing home are “single” in their daily living and in their church involvement.
- Some church members are “spiritually single”—married, but whose spouses aren’t Christian or don’t attend church.

Each category of singleness represents members who want and need to be called into relationships within the body of Christ, but who may feel isolated and unsure about where to connect in the local church.

While singles groups may help some, I believe we need to form and live out a vision that goes beyond programs. 1 Peter 2:9–12 speaks to our identity: “Now you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God. ... Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.”

Each of us belongs to God, and we are His people together. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are family! In fact, God has arranged the parts of His body just as He wants them to be (1 Cor.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE—MARRIED

“It is good for a man not to marry ... I wish that all men were as I am”—single, that is!

Who wrote this—a Hollywood star, perhaps? A 20-something fellow who doesn’t believe in the institution of marriage? Someone who has been burned in a previous relationship? Although you probably haven’t heard this sentiment used as a sermon text lately, it happens to come from good ol’ St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7.

I’m intrigued that the largest Christian church body in the world, the Roman Catholic Church, insists that its leaders be single. On the other hand, the largest Protestant group (Lutheran) almost expects its leaders to be married.

Single or married? It’s not the first question I ask myself each day. It’s not how I define myself; God already has done that in my Baptism. Truth be told, all of us could find our marital status

changed at any time and for various reasons, very easily. The important thing I like to keep in mind is that being single doesn’t keep me from being loved or sharing love.

I rejoice that I serve a wonderful congregation here in Austin that really doesn’t seem to mind whether I’m single or married.

— *Rev. Kevin Westergren*
Associate Pastor
Redeemer Lutheran Church,
Austin, Texas

12:18). Each of us is integral to God's plan, and He intends that we serve one another in love. That's how His love is revealed in our lives.

We're in the Epiphany season. The term *epiphany* means "to show," "to make known," or "to reveal." The Magi who brought gifts to the infant Jesus were the first Gentiles to acknowledge Jesus as "King," and so were the first to "show" or "reveal" Jesus to a wider world as the incarnate Christ. It was one of the first tangible indications that Jesus came for all people, all nations, all races, and that the work of God in the world would not be limited to a few.

Each of us, whether married or single, is called to make Jesus known through our words and deeds. More than that, each of us is Christ's living presence as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and lives.

Jesus lived here as a single adult. Would He be welcomed and embraced in your church?

When we focus on our differences in marital status, parenthood, age, or a host of other qualifications, the church is simply a collection of individuals, none of whom really fits anywhere. When we focus on our similarities, we discover we're all God's loved and forgiven children with our daily needs and struggles, and our desire to grow in knowing and reflecting Christ in the midst of life's struggles. Community is to be found, and Christ builds it, wherever we're willing to invest in another person and share life honestly. Then we know, whether we're single or not, we're not alone. God speaks a word of grace and instruction to us through one another as we use our gifts to serve others and work alongside others.

Some singles are overwhelmed and overloaded with work and responsibilities. They have no one with whom to share the load and little energy to reach out. They need people to reach out to them and lend a helping hand.

I recently read about an assortment of people who want to build relationships and focus on their ministries, both in the church and in their workplaces. They forge a united group through joint projects, progressive dinners, and socials. They use as good what some thought might divide them: their diversity.

I wonder if we can build these kinds of groups in congregations, groups where diversity is celebrated and everyone belongs. What if each of us found at least one friendship that focuses on helping one another to know God's grace, live out God's high calling, and develop and use the gifts the Spirit has poured into our lives?

Many of my best friends are married. I've learned much from them about the commitment it takes to have a healthy marriage and raise a family. I marvel at those who have found the grace to do it well, and

I weep for those in a difficult or abusive relationship.

I've also learned that in healthy marriages each spouse needs friends of his or her own. People become friends because they share interests and core values, not necessarily because of their marital status. I see the

THE GIFT OF SINGLENES

Gifts. They are wonderful things, given in love and received with anticipation. Well, usually they are. There is one gift of God that often is not wanted, or that some would prefer to trade for a better gift.

I'm speaking of the gift of being single.

I have a wonderful life. I am a single woman whose days are packed with responsibilities, obligations, people I care about, and the independence to make choices on how I use my time and spend my heart. I have the freedom to "adopt" others to create my own circle of family, to love people with an unencumbered heart, to invest my time in causes and ministry.

My singleness is a treasure, a gift from God.

Sadly, though, it's also something that our American culture tends to look down on. Many people seem to think that going through life unmarried is a sign of some inadequacy or a troubled inner life. It isn't. Singleness is a precious gift of the Maker—an intimate walk with the Savior as your partner and co-decision maker. The service I perform in my life and ministry is done in a different way because of this gift. I am able to bless others in immeasurable ways because of it.

Did I ask for this gift? Did I ask to be single? No. But aren't the best presents those that are unexpected? Do I embrace my singleness as good and precious? Yes. Will God ask me to trade in this gift for a spouse someday? Maybe. He is the best giver of gifts, and His timing always is perfect. Using those gifts for all they are worth can be more rewarding than we can imagine.

— Heidi Fingerlin
Director of Christian Education
Redeemer Lutheran Church,
Austin, Texas.

busyness of people's lives and, at times, hesitate to initiate time with someone I'd like to get to know. Yet, generally, I'm richly rewarded when I do, because the desire for friendship is a mutual one. As I invest in friendships, I'm inevitably drawn into family life—I have friends I consider my extended family everywhere I've lived.

The members of a church make up one body; by God's design, that body is diverse. God encourages interdependency so that everyone's needs are met and

everyone's gifts are used to bless one another. Consider the rewards that come with friendships, not just with people who are like you, but also with people who are unlike you.



Sue von Fange is minister for outreach and assimilation at Trinity Lutheran Church, Clinton Township, Mich.

DATING AFTER 55

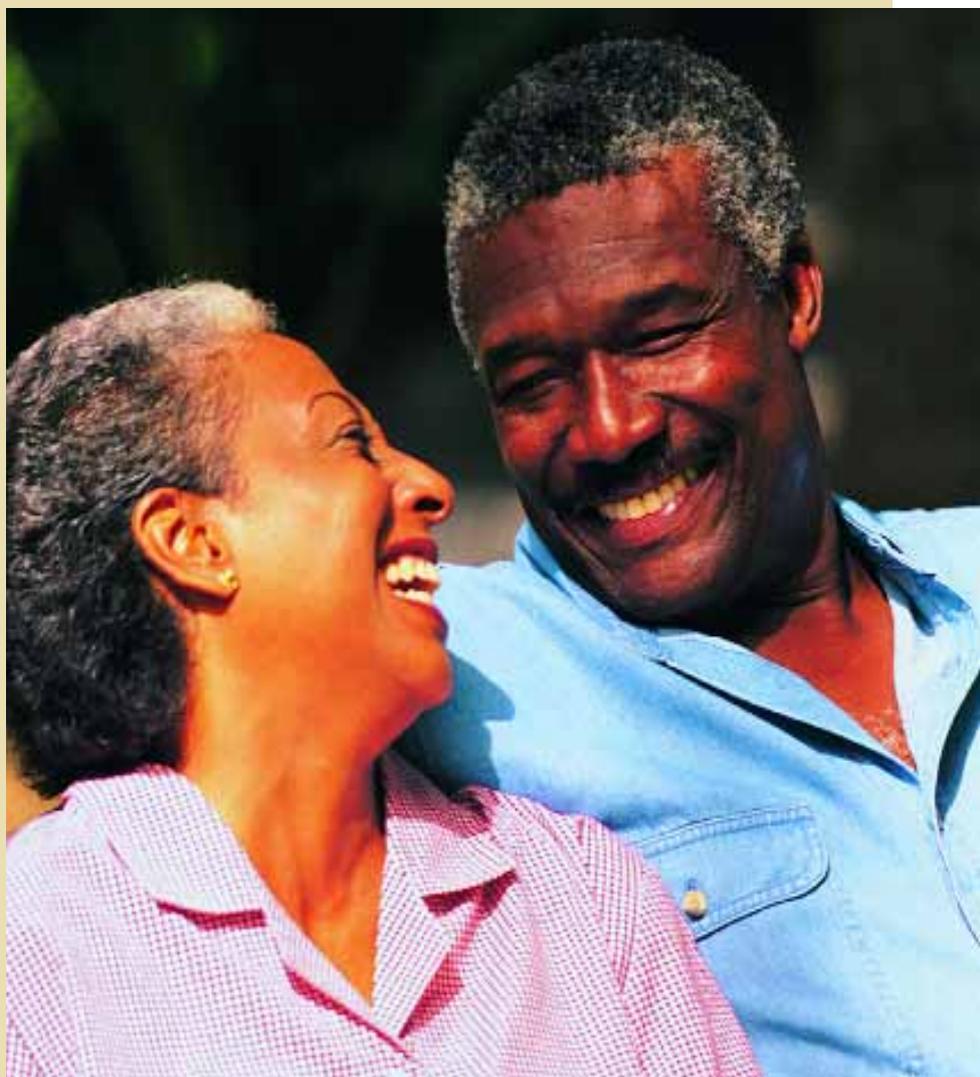
Someone once told me, "Every adult is a junior-high kid with wrinkles." If that is true (and so far, from my own observations, I'd have to say it's a pretty fair assessment), then whether one is 15 or 55, the longing for love, romance, intimacy, passion, and connection is crucial to life.

Dating after 55 might seem peculiar because we think we have outgrown those desires—or at least we think we should have outgrown them. But passion for intimacy and connection does not cease when one reaches a "respectable age."

In fact, the passion for intimacy and connection is God-given. Dating after 55 is a reminder that all of us are made in God's image and, with that in mind, we recall His words: "It is not good for the man to be alone."

The only thing not good in the Garden of Eden, the only thing that God did not like about Adam, was his aloneness. He provided the remedy in creating Eve and giving her to Adam.

These passions that drive us to be with other people, to ask others out on "dates," to connect, are really signs of a deeper, human longing for love that is most fully realized in the Passion of Christ. Christ's love for us shows a profound kind—the most profound kind—of sacrificial love that finds expression in the witness of the church, in the benevolent acts of the Christian community, and even in the self-giving love we show to those we care about—or want to care about—most deeply.



So go ahead and date. Go ahead and be open to your passion, your desire for connection. Maybe your passion for intimacy can be a reminder of God's passion in Christ for all of us.

— *Dr. Bryan Salminen*

from the PRESIDENT

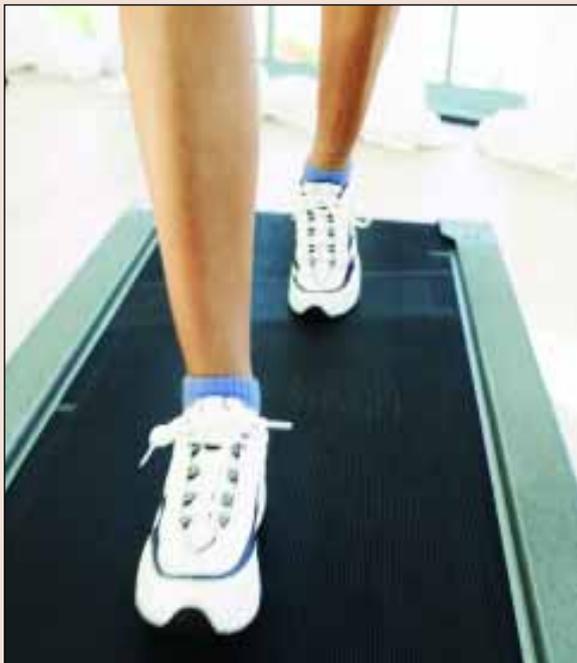
NEW BEGINNINGS

Why do people make New Year's resolutions?

One study found that the most popular resolutions are to spend more time with family and friends; to get fit; to lose weight; to quit smoking; and to get more enjoyment out of life.

At the same time, a survey of 12,000 people, taken a couple of years ago, found that three in 10 said they don't keep their resolutions even into February. Only about 20 percent said they last six months.

So why do they bother with resolutions in the first place? A logical answer is that for many people, a new year represents a new beginning. Between feeling guilty about eating too much over the holidays and a sense of optimistic hope that *this time* will be different—that this time resolutions *will* be kept—the tradition continues for making these annual commitments.



The idea of making a new beginning in the New Year may explain why people make such resolutions as to get fit or lose weight. Through the forgiveness of our sins in Jesus Christ, God constantly gives us the new beginning we really need.

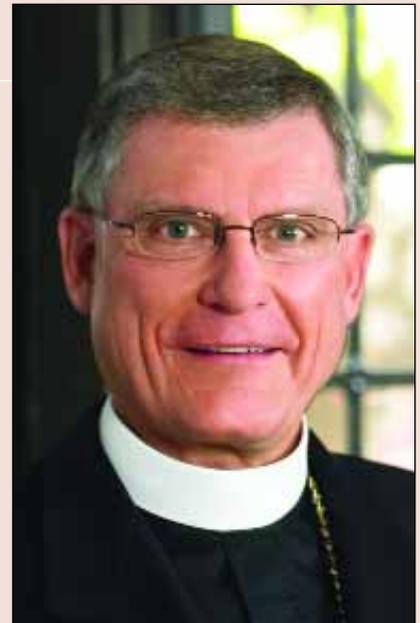
The fact is that we all need new beginnings—every day. That's because we all are guilty of a lot more than eating too much. Each one of us is infected with the disease called sin, and we are guilty of sin against God every day of our earthly lives.

God our Father is constantly giving us the new beginnings we so sorely need. For the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, He continually forgives us all our sins. By His grace, our slate is clean, and not only on the first day of the year.

This is why Christmas, just past, is such a joyful time for us. It was for us that God sent His Son, the Christ Child, God incarnate, God made flesh—living among us, fulfilling the Law for us, redeeming us from sin by His perfect life and innocent death on the cross. And thereby, He gives us the peace that passes all understanding.

For Christians, the Good News that we are at peace with God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ moves and motivates us to commend our hands and lips in service to God. And so in our daily lives—in our various vocations or callings, our professions, our work, our worship, our conversation, our service, our witness—we are privileged to impart and radiate the joy that we have to the people around us.

The apostle Paul tells us, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through



Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:17–20 ESV).

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, many people in the world today are longing for the peace that is available only through faith in Christ. I encourage you to think specifically, to be alert constantly, for what might be considered "divine appointments" with people to whom God may be leading you—people to whom you can reflect Christ's light and Christ's love in your life.

God's blessings to you as you share your Christ-centered joy and peace with others. Among all of your New Year's resolutions, what could be greater than that?

Jerry Kieschnick

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

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