

The Lutheran WITNESS

JUNE/JULY 2003

VOL. 122 NO. 6



Civilization Transformed

Also:

*One Woman's Migrant Ministry
For the Children*



The Lutheran WITNESS

Features

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

JUNE/JULY 2003

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Photo courtesy of Peiry family

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Staff: Rev. David L. Mahsman, executive editor; Don Folkemer, managing editor; Joe Isenhower Jr., news editor; Paula Schlueter Ross, contributing editor; John Krus, senior designer; Darla Broste, marketing manager; Pam Burgdorf, coordinator; Marcy Hanewinkel, advertising sales; Carla Dubbelde, editorial manager; district editions; Karen Higgins, editorial assistant; editorial office: 1333 S. Kirkwood Rd., St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; (314) 965-9917, Ext. 1228.

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Only Light' Page 3



Women in combat

If there is a threatening noise at the front door, who do you expect should be the first to investigate?

*Rev. F.A. Hertwig
Lincoln, Mo.*

RE. "WOMEN IN COMBAT: TWO VIEWS" (May '03):

A well-known actress was asked, "What is the first thing you want in a man?" She answered, "I want a man who will protect me!"

If there is a threatening noise at the front door, who do you expect should be the first to investigate? Will the man sit back and send his wife, daughter or mother while he goes to the basement?

When God stood at the door, a confused and fallen Adam sent his wife, Eve, to face the catastrophe. He chose to deny the one who had come from his side. For the rest of his 930 years, he lived with daily contrition each time he looked at his bosom friend. His protecting embrace had all the more fervor mixed with regret that he had failed.

For a man to see his wife, mother or daughter writhing in the mud with a bayonet rifle is repulsive to the core. When Adam retreats, yes even in the face of God, he has in a miserable moment surrendered to the devil. To venture the "absence" of Scripture specifics on our subject is an accommodating detail to the devil's question, "Yea, hath God said?"

*Rev. F.A. Hertwig
Lincoln, Mo.*

THE PASSAGES IN JUDGES 4-5 MAKE IT very clear that God had chosen Deborah—a woman—to serve her country against the barbarous Jabin, and that she did in fact direct the military operations with Barak, a point that Dr. LeRoy Vogel's view disputes. In addition, Jael did in fact help subdue the enemy by killing Sisera. In no place does Scripture

indicate that these actions of either woman was contrary to God's will. On the other hand, what an incredible example of taking Scripture out of context to equate "women wearing the same uniform" as those who fall into the camp denounced in Deut. 22:5!

My prayer is that our church leaders would proclaim what the Word really says, and realize its duty to be caring to a world that needs the Gospel comfort so much and also be thankful rather than condemning to those who know what the word "sacrifice" really means!

*Rev. Robert S. Oeltjen
Brighton, Colo.*

I APPRECIATED DR. VOGEL'S INSIGHT and study on the matter of women in combat. I doubt it necessary to be a theologian to come to this understanding.

*W.E. Benkendorf
Enid, Okla.*

NEITHER POSITION IS VERY CONVINCING. Is one right and the other wrong? Perhaps both are in error. No wonder there's so much confusion within the church. Thankfully, our salvation isn't dependent upon human opinion and errant interpretations over these types of issues.

*Sally Jeske
Wykoff, Minn*

Managers, not owners

I GREATLY APPRECIATED "ONLY ONE Size?" in the April *Lutheran Witness*. Dr. Les Bayer's point that not every ministry opportunity is for everyone is right on target. God has endowed His people with a large variety of interests and abili-

ties, and none of us should presume that everyone else should be involved in the same activities and ministries that interest us.

One of our Biblical stewardship principles states, "God's stewards are managers, not owners." An implication of this principle is that as children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit's help, we will encourage cheerful, firstfruits, proportionate living and giving in all areas of life. Another principle is, "God's stewards are saints and sinners," with the implication that we will offer varying opportunities for Christian stewards to grow, recognizing that they are at different points of spiritual maturity.

*Rev. Larry Reinhardt
St. Louis, MO*

Reinhardt is the Missouri Synod's director of District and Congregational Services—Stewardship Ministry. The eight LCMS Biblical Stewardship Principles to which he alludes, along with their implications, may be read or downloaded by going on the Web to <http://dcs.lcms.org/stewardship> and clicking on "Principles."—Ed.

THANK YOU FOR THE ARTICLE BY DR. Les Bayer on ministry opportunities. It was thought provoking and something that all age groups should read and consider as they undertake programs and challenges within their individual congregations. And may I say that the Missouri Synod has been blessed tremendously by being able to count Dr. Bayer and his precious wife, Lois, as members.

*Marjorie L. Heaton
Austin, Texas*

Shared heartache

THANK YOU FOR PUBLISHING "THE GIFT of Life" ("Lifeline," April '03). I, too,

suffered the loss of our son, David Isaac, last Christmas and I was compelled to write out of love and empathy for Kelly Haack and her family during their time of grieving.

How good is our God that the once unspoken heartache of miscarriage can be shared now in *The Lutheran Witness*! Thank you for this affirmation, a reflection of Jesus' tender compassion for "those that are with young."

*Jennifer Siek
Malvern, Pa.*

One more

IN SPEAKING ENTHUSIASTICALLY OF THE "What A Way" initiative to rebuild a lifestyle of recruitment and retention of church workers, "From the President" ("Who Will Lead Us?," May '03) failed to include a third member of the working group. Seminarian David Gehne is a Concordia Publishing House employee in marketing, and he represents CPH, a full partner in What A Way. David has made a great contribution to this important initiative in the life of the church.

*Dr. L. Dean Hempelmann
Director of Pastoral Education
LCMS Board for Higher Education*

Correction

"The Secret Pain" (May '03) included phone numbers for The Healing Hearts post-abortion ministry of Lutherans For Life. The toll-free number given was correct: (888) 21story. The Illinois number was incorrect. The area code has changed and the new number is (630) 990-0909.

Notice to readers

If you take a look at the date on this *Lutheran Witness*, you will note that it is June/July. We are publishing a combined issue—it's slightly larger than a regular issue—for two reasons: to save money and so keep subscription rates at a minimum, and to allow our small staff more time to plan future issues. We trust that both reasons will serve you well. — *Rev. David L. Mahsman*

Executive Editor

CIVILIZATION *Transformed*

by Alvin J. Schmidt

Does it seem to you, too, that virtually any religion is held in higher regard than Christianity by those who strive to be “politically correct”?

Christianity may get no respect from the world, but the world would be a far different place—and a far worse one—had it not been for the followers of Jesus Christ.

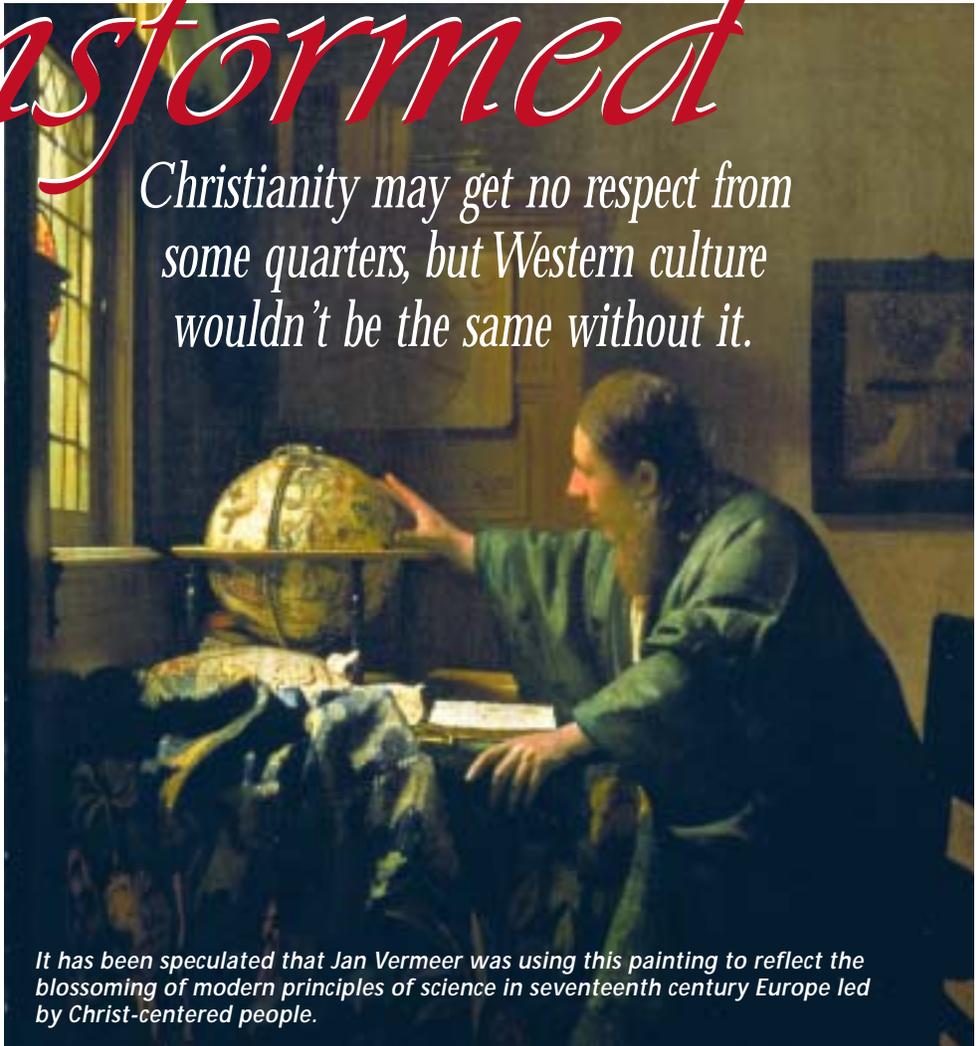
As the early Christians began to spread out into the Roman world of 2,000 years ago, they could not have envisioned the powerful impact they would have on civilization. But their impact was powerful indeed.

Let’s look at a few examples of what Christianity has meant to civilization:

Sanctification of life

Before Christians influenced Roman society during the first century, human life was cheap and expend-

Christianity may get no respect from some quarters, but Western culture wouldn’t be the same without it.



It has been speculated that Jan Vermeer was using this painting to reflect the blossoming of modern principles of science in seventeenth century Europe led by Christ-centered people.

33 A.D.

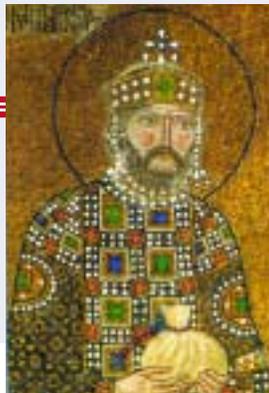
Jesus teaches, preaches God’s love for all men, and that we should love our neighbors.



3rd Century
Tertullian, an African Christian, writes that everyone should be free to worship.

312

Roman Emperor Constantine converts to Christianity.



390
St. Ambrose declares that not even the emperor is above the law.



393
New Testament is canonized.

able. Infanticide, child abandonment and abortion were legal and common. The slaughter of gladiators and other bloody forms of entertainment were widespread.

Christians courageously opposed Rome's low value of human life. To them, life was a sacred gift of God. It took centuries for their view to win important changes. In A.D. 374, Valentinian (a Christian emperor) outlawed infanticide, abortion and child abandonment. At the same time, St. Basil of Ceasarea mobilized Christians to minister to woman facing unwanted pregnancies.

A generation later, Christian emperors banned the gladiator games, and they have never returned.

Elevation of sexual standards

Sexual life in the Roman world at the time of early Christianity was highly promiscuous. Adultery, fornication, incest and homosexuality were woven into the cultural fabric. Ovid, a Roman poet, said sex relations had become sadistic and masochistic. Many emperors lived debaucherous lives, having sex with many women and often with puberty-aged boys. Much of the populace followed their leaders.

Homosexual behavior was accepted and widespread. Even bestiality was not frowned upon. In the words of one historian, "There was nothing in which they [the Romans] did not indulge or which they thought a disgrace."

But the Christians who believed that "the body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord" (I Cor. 6:13), spurned these sexual sins.

By opposing them, and living a life not given to sexual decadence, the sexual mores of the Christians slowly became the prevailing norms of Western societies. Their influence eventually led to laws to protect children from molestation and women from rape.

Faithfulness in a Roman marriage was largely unknown. One historian has noted that marriage to the

Romans was "detested as a disagreeable necessity." Contrary to Rome's low status of marriage, Christian husbands and wives honored God's Commandment: "You shall not commit adultery."

Christians not only confined sexual relations to marriage, they taught that it made the couple "one flesh," a very radical concept to the people in the empire.

Husbands and wives submitted themselves "to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21). Edward Gibbon wrote in *The History and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, "The dignity of marriage was restored by the Christians."

Dignity for women

Before Christianity arrived, women had little or no freedom or dignity in any culture. At the time of Christ, an Athenian woman, for instance, had to go to her quarters when her husband had male guests. She was not permitted to speak in public. She had virtually no rights. Historians say she had the status of a slave.

In Rome, the laws greatly curtailed a woman's life. For instance, she could not inherit property, appear in public without a guardian or testify in court.

If anyone doubts it was the teachings of Jesus that improved the life of women, let them ask: Where do women have the most freedom, opportunity and dignity? It is in countries where Christianity has had a major presence.

Christianity brought a new and wholesome view of women, which it received from Christ and the apostles. In preparing individuals for membership, the church never discriminated against women. This boldly defied cultural practices of the Greco-Romans. In teaching both sexes, Christians took their cue from Jesus, who taught men and women alike.

The Christian view of women equalized the sin of adultery by no longer defining it in terms of a woman's

400–430

St. Augustine influences Christian understanding.



476

Roman empire falls to German tribes.

537

The Hagia Sophia cathedral with its massive dome is completed, transforming architectural thinking.



610–632

Muhammad starts new religion.

800

Pope crowns Charlemagne as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.



marital status only; a married man having sex with a single woman also was guilty of adultery.

Unlike the Roman woman, a Christian woman could reject a male suitor, inherit property, and she no longer had to worship her husband's gods.

Said one historian, "The conversion of the Roman world to Christianity [brought] a great change in women's status."

Charity and hospitals

Jesus said: "I was sick and you looked after me" (Matt. 25:36). The early Christians took these words to heart, even though Romans saw helping a sick person as a sign of weakness. Plautus, a Roman philosopher in the second century B.C., declared that helping to keep a beggar alive was doing him and society a bad service. In the fourth century A.D., many Romans panicked and fled from a contagious plague in Alexandria, leaving friends and relatives behind to die.

But the Christians were different. They fed and nursed the sick—even total strangers—often succumbing themselves. Their compassion was so remarkable that the pagan emperor Julian the Apostate said, "The impious Galileans [his word for Christians] relieve both their own poor and ours." And he lamented, "It is shameful that ours [the poor] should be so des-

titute of our assistance."

It was in this merciless pagan environment that Christians built the world's first hospital in A.D. 369. By 750, there were Christian hospitals across Europe. They built *nosocomia* (for the sick only), *morotrophia* (for the mentally disturbed), *gerontocomia* (for the aged), *orphanotrophia* (for orphans), *brephotrophia* (for infants) and *typholocomia* (for the blind).

The Christian stamp on hospitals is still with us, for many still bear Christian names as St. Luke's, St. John's, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, etc. Whenever you drive by a hospital, remember its Christian origin.



Red Cross workers unload food in the courtyard at a center for the mentally ill in Bouake, Ivory Coast. Bouake had been running out of food and medical supplies. This work follows Jean Henri Dunant's (the founder of the Red Cross) intent to follow Jesus' example and words to care for the sick and ailing wherever they are.

1215

Christian issues and people in England influence the Magna Carta, the first governmental expression of the civil rights of all people.



1144

Gothic architects bring a grandeur to their work that transforms construction for centuries.

1453

Turks capture Constantinople, end the Byzantine Empire.



1517

Martin Luther revives Biblical authority, begins the Reformation.



Science's Christian connections

Today, Christianity is often portrayed as an enemy to science. How untrue! It was Christian theology that motivated the early scientists to explore God's natural world. Alfred North Whitehead, a non-Christian philosopher of science, once said that "faith in the possibility of science ... is an unconscious derivative from medieval [Christian] theology." Another writer stated that "the monk was an intellectual ancestor of the scientist."

Most of the pioneers of science were committed Christians: Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, Francis Bacon, William Occam, Nicolaus Copernicus, Johannes Kepler, Blaise Pascal, Robert Boyle, Louis Pasteur and countless others. From the 12th century to the early 19th century, before methodological atheism appeared, every scientist tried to relate his scientific theory to Christian theology.

When Martin Luther challenged the authority of church hierarchy with "Sola Scriptura," the Reformation created an atmosphere of intellectual freedom of thought. When Copernicus stated that the earth travels around the sun, not the sun around the earth, it was two Lutheran friends who persuaded him to publish his work despite his fear of ridicule—not from the church, but from other scientists.

This is surprising to many people, because most only hear that Christian theologians condemned Copernicus' work.

It was Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), a devout Lutheran, who brought about acceptance of the heliocentric concept. Kepler's major contributions to understanding the universe included the first three laws of planetary motion.

Education's Christian roots

Universities grew out of the medieval monasteries, whose monks, unlike the Greeks, were not afraid to link



Giotto di Bondone's art heralded an entirely new tradition of painting. This fresco of Christ's Ascension from Giotto's "Scenes from the Life of Christ" (a series of 38 frescoes in the Chapel, Padua, Italy) shows his style that transformed and reinvigorated art for centuries to come.

theory with research, two vital ingredients of a university. While some of the universities' roots go back to the monasteries of the sixth century, the first university appeared in Bologna, Italy, in 1158. Soon others—all of them Christian institutions—appeared over much of Europe. Many colleges still have Christian connections.

While Christians were not the first to encourage formal education, they appear to be the first to teach both sexes in the same setting, and that was revolutionary thinking.

Johann Sturm, a 16th-century Lutheran educator, introduced the grade-level education system to motivate young students to advance to the next grade.

1597

Johannes Kepler, who had studied to be a Lutheran pastor, publishes "Mystery of the Universe."



1632

Galileo attempts to reconcile Copernicus' theory of heliocentricity with Church teachings and Biblical interpretations.



1620

Pilgrims land in Massachusetts to pursue religious freedom.



1700

Isaac Newton, a Christian, discovers the laws of gravity, confirming that God "suspends the earth over nothing" (Job 26:7).

1685–1750

J.S. Bach creates some of the greatest music ever composed as he "set Gospel to music."





The most magnificent characteristics of Gothic style were the use of light and its relationship to structure. Beautiful and enormous stained glass windows allowed more light into the cathedral and gave a sense of warmth and color. The pointed arches and slender columns created an overwhelming sense of height.

Liberty and justice

Democratic countries assert that no one is above the law. How did this principle originate? In A.D. 390, the city of Thessalonica had a riot, and Emperor Theodosius (a Christian) overreacted, killing 7,000 people. Bishop Ambrose told the emperor he had sinned and needed to repent. In effect, he told the emperor that no one, not even the emperor, was above the law. At first the emperor refused, but, after one month, he prostrated himself and repented in Ambrose's cathedral.

The Christian concept of no one being above the law was expanded in 1215 when England's King John was compelled to sign the Magna Carta. Like Theodosius, he was told he was not a law unto himself. Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury, was one of the key figures whose Christian convictions helped give birth to the Magna Carta.

Today, politicians, judges and the news media underscore the importance of no one being above the law, but they fail to note its Christian roots. Centuries later, this declaration became the basis of our American "Bill of Rights."

Abolition of slavery

Christianity has been on the forefront of fighting slavery, and the countries that first abolished slavery were countries where Christianity had the greatest presence. Where Christianity had little or no presence, slavery ended much later or, as in some Islamic-African countries, still exists today.

While some in the early church supported slavery, the early Christians freed thousands of slaves, baptized and received them as members, and communed them at their altars.

Long before the abolition movement in America, the first formal proclamation against slavery was issued in 1688 in Germantown, Pa., by Franz Pastorius, a German immigrant and a pious Mennonite. In the 1820s, William Wilberforce made powerful speeches fueled by his ardent Christian convictions to persuade the British Parliament to end slavery throughout its vast empire.

1741

George Handel, raised Lutheran, composes his oratorio "Messiah."



1791

U.S. Constitution amended to prevent the state from favoring any religion.

1850s

Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin, helping to end American slavery.



1864

The International Red Cross is formed by Jean Henri Dunant, a Christian Swiss.

Other transforming contributions

The length of an article in *The Lutheran Witness* does not allow discussion of the many other Christian contributions that enriched the world. But here is a list of some of the most important:

- + Economic freedom
- + Constitutional government
- + Freedom of speech
- + Magnificent works of art
- + Enlightening literature
- + Separation of church and state
- + Using Christ's birth to record calendar time
- + The invention of the musical scale
- + Inspiring musical compositions
- + The beauty of cathedral architecture

With regard to music, plainsong, operas, polyphony, motets, oratorios, symphonies, sonatas, cantatas and concertos all first appeared in Christian churches and later were adopted by society at large. What would the world be like without them?

Gothic architecture, which began with St. Denis cathedral near Paris in 1144, has been described as the architecture that exemplifies Christianity. With their imposing height towering far above the cities and their pointed arches, they move people to look upward, reminding them of the divine and their humanity.

One observer noted the Gothic cathedrals provide “an actual picture of heaven which the human senses can perceive.” Another has said each cathedral is a “Bible in stone and glass.” The Gothic architects did not just shape pillars and arches of stone, but they adorned them with frescoes, stained-glass windows, statues and engravings depicting Biblical messages.

The art and architecture of Byzantine churches with their domes and mosaics not only advanced eastern Christian life, but influenced Islamic art and architecture in the design of their mosques. When Islam appeared a hundred years after the construction of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople by the Christian emperor Justinian, it emulated this Christian masterpiece.

Until about World War II, Christians in North America tried to imitate, although limitedly, the Gothic design in their churches. They wanted them to reflect God's majesty and grace.

Carsten Thiede, an academic researcher in Germany, and Matthew d'Ancona, a British journalist, co-authors of *The Jesus Papyrus*, said: “The [Christian] Gospels are the very building blocks of our civilization. Without them Giotto di Bondone would not have painted his frescoes in the Arena Chapel at Padua, considered one of the major turning points in the history of European painting. Dante would not have written the ‘Divine Comedy’; Mozart would not have composed his ‘Requiem’; and [Christopher] Wren would not have built St. Paul's Cathedral [in London].”

The message of these four Gospels—along with the Judaic tradition of the Old Testament—pervades not only the moral conventions of the West, but also our systems of social organization, nomenclature, architecture, literature and education, as well as the rituals of marriage and death which shape our lives... Christian and non-Christian alike.



Dr. Alvin J. Schmidt formerly taught at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and Illinois College, Jacksonville, Ill. He is the author of Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization (Available from Concordia Publishing House. Call (800)325-3040).

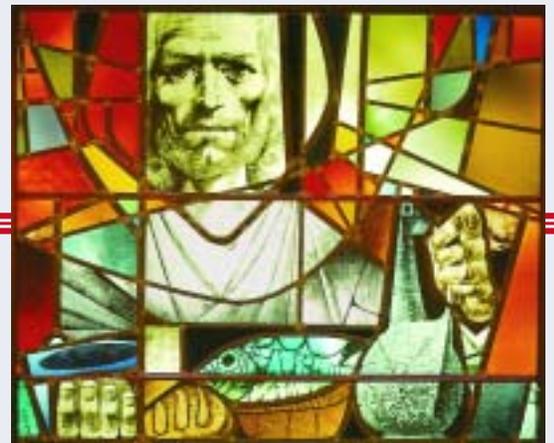
1900's
Scientist George Washington Carver, a devout Christian, diversifies and enriches American agriculture and improves rural economics.



1980–present
New media, television and the Internet, help bring the love of Christ to the world.

2000
Christianity is the world's largest religion with more than two billion followers of Christ.

Its transforming influence is growing rapidly in Africa and Asia.



One woman's dedication to Florida's Mexican migrant workers is touching thousands with the love and hope of Jesus Christ.

MINISTRY TO MIGRANTS

by Paula Schlueter Ross

It's Saturday and Connie Sikkema is standing among rusted and dingy trailers in a community of Mexican migrant workers an hour from her home in suburban Tampa, Fla.

Connie—with one arm wrapped in a makeshift “cast” and leaning on a cane because of an arthritic knee—feels as weatherbeaten as the trailers look. She's had three angioplasties and is a cancer survivor, too. Nevertheless, she is giving last-minute instructions to about a dozen volunteers who have driven in from St. Petersburg bearing gifts—candy-filled Easter eggs, cookies, crosses and beautifully wrapped food baskets—for the working poor who make this rural trailer camp their home.

At her suggestion, the group has shown up at the camp unannounced. Otherwise, Connie explains, the needy residents would invite all of their relatives and the gift-givers might run short.

“It's better to have too much than not enough, and have some kids walk away without anything,” she says.

“These [migrant workers] are very proud people,” Connie tells the volunteers, who are all non-Hispanic “Anglos” from a suburban Lutheran congregation. “They work hard—they all work hard. You'll see that some of them will be drinking beer, but that's the only entertainment they've got.”

As founder and director of the 15-year-old Messiah Lutheran Church Migrant Ministry, Connie Sikkema also works hard.

She spends endless hours at Messiah's Mission House of Hope, a distribution center for donated food, clothing, furniture and other household items in Plant City, Fla.—close to the strawberry, melon, citrus, corn and cabbage farms that employ willing Mexicans for about \$40 a day,



Connie Sikkema, left, talks with a woman who was waiting for her to arrive at Messiah Lutheran Church's "Mission House of Hope," a distribution center for donated food, clothing and furniture in Plant City, Fla. Each Saturday, with the help of an interpreter, Connie leads Bible studies at the Mission House, which is not far from several migrant communities.

then charge them \$135 or more a week to rent on-site mobile homes.

She coordinates the ministry's outreach events—a sprawling Palm Sunday picnic and Easter egg hunts in the spring, a back-to-school giveaway in August, a Thanksgiving dinner in November, and a Christmas party in December—that benefit some 2,000 migrant children and their families each year.

She plans and leads local “servant events” for volunteers from all parts of the country that involve building playgrounds, rebuilding dilapidated trailers, distributing food and clothing, holding Bible studies and teaching vacation-Bible-school classes in migrant communities.

Connie thinks nothing of sharing her own home—jokingly referred to as *Casa de Connie*—with volunteers. In March, she hosted 11 students from Concordia

University, Ann Arbor, Mich., for part of their spring-break mission project.

Her cell phone rings regularly, and when she returns home after a day with the ministry, several answering-machine messages await.

If she wasn't limping around with a cane, jokes a fellow Messiah member, "you wouldn't be able to keep up with her."

A change of heart

Adella Ramos, a single mother of five who has received assistance from Messiah's Migrant Ministry and now volunteers with the program, says Connie "works so hard for Mexican people and for the ministry. She works so hard. She is sick, but she not stay in the house—she come. So I say thank God for this woman."

"I work so hard at it because I love the people," says Connie, who doesn't speak Spanish but gets along with Ramos' help as a translator.

But she didn't always feel that way. In her past, Connie had what she calls "a deep, ugly prejudice on my heart" toward Mexicans. As one of few white students in a mostly Hispanic high school in Arizona, Connie, now 60, says she despised her Mexican-born classmates: "It was hate," she says, and "I carried that around with me for years."

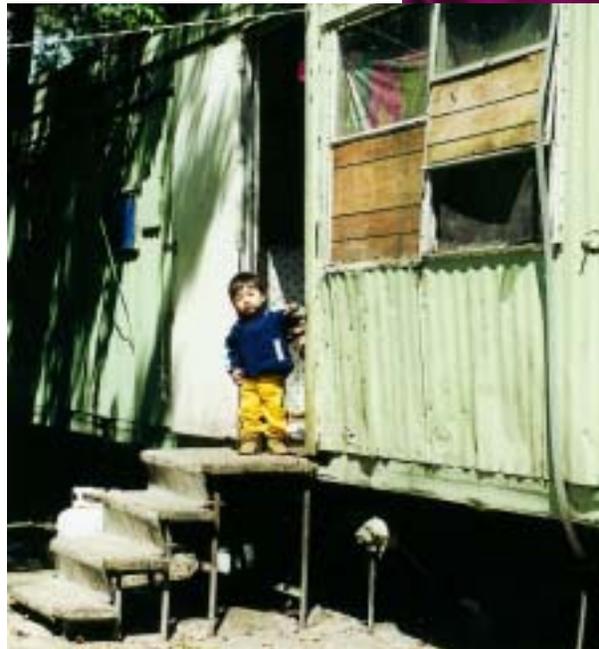
Reversing that attitude "was a total God thing," she says. When Connie was in her mid-40s, a friend of hers had "adopted" a Mexican family—buying gifts for them at Christmas—and Connie decided she needed to help as a "first step" in getting over her prejudice.

"While I was helping her, God was saying, 'Why don't you do this yourself?'" Connie recalled, so she also "adopted" a Mexican family. When it came time to deliver the gifts, the friend was faced with a family crisis and couldn't go, so that duty fell to Connie.

Seeing the broken-down mobile homes and how the migrant families lived on meager wages just about broke her



Above: A child clutches a cross given to him by volunteers from Our Savior Lutheran Church, St. Petersburg, Fla. He and his father, also pictured, took part in an egg hunt sponsored by the congregation a week before Easter.



Left: A child peeks out from the worn mobile home he and his family rent from a farm owner near Plant City, Fla. Some 40,000 Mexicans live in central Florida, according to Connie Sikkema, founder of Messiah Lutheran Church Migrant Ministry in Tampa.



Connie Sikkema shares information about Messiah's Migrant Ministry with a crew leader as workers plant squash on a farm just outside Plant City, Fla. The crew leader, Jose, agreed to pass out Spanish-language fliers about the ministry to his workers.

sheart, she says. “And I just knew that God was speaking to my heart—this is where I needed to be, this is what I needed to do,” she recalls. “And I didn’t stop.”

When she realized that entire families migrated from state to state, looking for work—taking their children out of school to accompany them—Connie knew she had to do more.

Providing the families with free food, clothing and other basic necessities made it possible for the women and children to stay in Florida while their husbands migrated to the northern fields to work.

The family is split up for a few months, but the children can stay in school and aren’t tempted to join their families as field workers, says Connie. It’s especially gratifying at the end of each school year, she says, when she hears that “some of the kids that we’ve helped throughout these years are graduating from high school. And they were able to graduate because their mothers and fathers got some help.”

‘We’re taking hope’

One of them, Josue Sanchez, Ramos’ 18-year-old nephew, has applied to Michigan State University with the dream of becoming a pediatrician. Messiah’s ministry has helped his family “in a big way” for years, he says.

“My dad left my mom when I was 9 years old, so my mom did struggle” with three children, Sanchez said. “Some days she didn’t have enough money to buy food for us, or toys. And Connie was always there for us, even with toys.”

Sanchez, who is Christian but not Lutheran, said

Connie’s work always includes a spiritual dimension, which he believes is “the most important thing—for [migrant families] to receive a message of God, and for them to know who God is, and for them to accept God as their Savior.”

After all, he adds, “if it wasn’t for God, Connie wouldn’t be here helping them.”

“I want them to know Jesus. I want them to know that there’s hope,” Connie says. “And that’s what we’re taking—we’re taking hope through Jesus and the goods. The goods are the least important of the things, but that’s one way to get their attention and to help them physically, too.”

When it comes to Messiah’s

Migrant Ministry, Connie Sikkema calls the shots. At this year’s “Palm Sunday Outreach”—an event held in partnership with the YMCA at its Camp Cristina in Riverview, Fla.—“Connie the Queen,” as her nametag reads, is answering question after question from volunteers who have come to help out. A Messiah member has brought a wheelchair for her to use, so she is rolling from the food tables to the book tables to the prize tables, pointing here, gesturing there, as helpers swarm around her for instructions.

“She’s a dynamo,” observes Diana Niles, the YMCA’s director of volunteers. “When she has a mission in mind, she pursues it no matter what her personal cost.”

Connie “will do whatever she needs to do to make sure that these families are taken care of,” says YMCA Senior Program Director Donna Albert.

At the YMCA event, more than 150 Mexicans take part in the day’s activities: a meal; a first-aid course with a bag



A child shows off the Spanish-language Bible he received at this year’s “Palm Sunday Outreach” co-sponsored by Messiah Lutheran Church Migrant Ministry and the YMCA at Camp Cristina in Riverview, Fla.

of supplies, including a digital thermometer, bandages, tweezers and antibiotic cream; an egg hunt, pinata and other games for the children; bingo and prizes for the adults; offers of Spanish Bibles and other Christian literature; a prayer service with music by Hispanic musicians and singers; and four sacks of groceries to take home.

There is no charge because “we receive it [from donors] in Christian love, [so] we give it back in the same way,” explains Connie. “And we know it’s going to be multiplied.”

Faith in action

The ministry has grown and become widely known over the years, and today receives support from numerous churches, businesses and organizations. It owns two trucks, including one purchased three years ago with funds from the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, and its Mission House was donated by Hope Lutheran Church in Plant City. Employees at one local company annually buy and wrap 400 Christmas gifts for the ministry, and the YMCA provides more than 500 backpacks for Messiah’s back-to-school outreach. Volunteers provide free haircuts, shoes—even underwear, purchased by congregations at “Undie Sunday” events.

Still, there are needs. The most pressing, according to Connie, is for a bilingual Lutheran pastor—ideally, a Mexican—who could begin a Word-and-Sacrament ministry among the migrant families and perhaps oversee the human-care component as well.

Every Saturday, Connie and a translator lead a Bible study for up to 50 people at the Mission House—practically a “built-in congregation,” notes Messiah Pastor Jim Guelzow. “How many of those children would be baptized if we had a clergyman?” he asks.

Guelzow has seen his own con-



Children in a migrant trailer camp in central Florida listen as Katie Benjamin, right, a member of Our Savior Lutheran Church, St. Petersburg, presents an Easter Bible story in Spanish. Volunteers from Our Savior also distributed food baskets and held an Easter egg hunt in the camp.

gregation grow from 23 people to more than 800 over the past 20 years, and some of those members have told him they joined the church because of its ministry to migrant families.

“They see faith being put into action by a congregation,” Guelzow says, “and they want to be part of it.” No migrant families have joined Messiah, because the church is located an hour’s drive from where they live—near the ministry’s Mission House in Plant City.

“We would love to have a new mission in that area where we could partner up and a bilingual pastor could carry out that work on site,” he said, adding that he hopes Messiah members and circuit congregations would help support such a pastor.

Rev. Dean R. Pfeffer, pastor of Hope, Plant City, says he would gladly lend his church to a group of Hispanic worshipers. The Hope congregation already provides goods and services to the migrant ministry, Pfeffer said, and it is anxious to sponsor a spiritual component as well.

Connie, too, worries about the salvation of the people she once hated.

A Mexican pastor, she says, “could start Bible studies in the trailer camps and develop cell groups that would help form a Lutheran church” among some 40,000 Hispanics who live in the central-Florida area.

She has no plans to leave the ministry, even though she admits “the body is slowing down.” But, she adds, “the spirit is still there, and the passion is still there, and the need is still there.” So, she’ll “just keep going,” she says.

“I just know this is absolutely the way I am supposed to be spending my life—taking God to the migrant people,” Connie says. “I just want to take them hope through the Gospel.”



Paula Schlueter Ross is contributing editor for The Lutheran Witness.

GOD PLANTS HIS GARDEN

by Robert E. Smith

God likes to speak to us in the Scripture using stories and images to which we can easily relate. One of His favorite ways to explain how to grow as a Christian is to speak about gardening and farming.

When it comes to planting God's Garden and making it grow, God works through us. He plants His word in our hearts, He waters it and causes it to grow. While He uses His servants to preach the Gospel and offer His Sacraments, it is God Himself Who plants and waters us with His word, Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Look up the following Bible passages. What does each say about how God "plants" and "waters" His garden? What are the analogies to how He saves His people and makes them a part of His family?

Is. 55:9-11

Matt. 13:24-30 and 36-43.

Mark 4:1-20

1 Cor. 3:4-9

In the Gospel readings above, Jesus tells us that God plants good seed—seeds of faith that can grow to bear fruit of everlasting life. He wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2:4) But the devil does not want anyone to believe and inherit eternal life. And he also plants seeds—the weeds to choke out God's good seed and bring destruction to us.

What conditions favor or hinder the growth of the crop, so that it produces fruit?

The garden of our lives

Read the following verses, then explain what God tells us He wants us "to plant" through the power of His Spirit in our lives? What do you harvest when you plant these things? What does your life yield if you choose other seeds to plant?

Hosea 10:12

Gal. 6:7-10

God's garden grows

When we plant a flower or vegetable garden, the rain and sun God sends cause it to grow. We help by weeding and fertilizing, but it is really God who does the growing. In the following verses, God speaks about how His people grow. According to these verses, what do Christians need to grow well?

Ps. 1:2-3

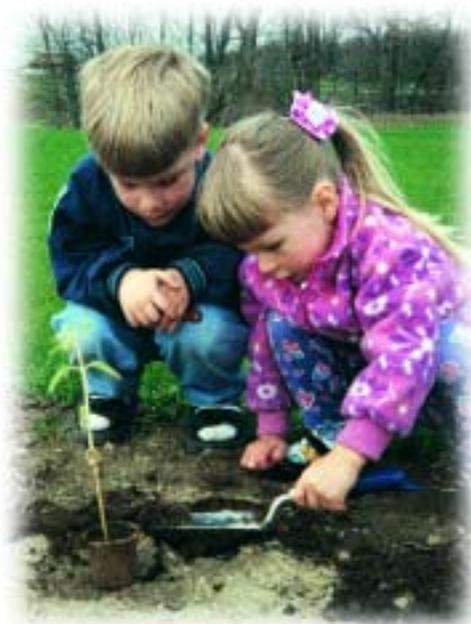
Jer. 17:7-8

Matt. 6:25-34

John 15:1-17

The Fruit

While gardeners enjoy their pastime, the primary reason for their



work is to enjoy the fruit, the flowers and the vegetables. So, too, God has something more in mind for us. What is the fruit that we produce when we grow God's way?

Gal. 5:13-26

Eph. 2:8-10

The Harvest

Sometimes, when we look at what we have planted, all we see is weeds. We wonder if we will ever produce fruit that will please our Heavenly Father. Because our Lord Jesus died to pay for our sins, we are forgiven, the weeds will be pulled by His Spirit, and our lives will be pruned to bear good fruit.

We can look forward to the day of the Harvest, when the angels will gather us into His barn forever.



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

from the PRESIDENT

A DECISION IS REACHED

As many of you are aware, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has experienced controversy following the events of Sept. 11, 2001.

In that regard, a decision has been reached by the three-member Dispute Resolution Panel charged with deciding whether suspension of Dr. David H. Benke, president of the Synod's Atlantic District, should be upheld or overturned. Dr. Benke was suspended by LCMS Second Vice President Wallace Schulz on June 25, 2002.

In a unanimous decision, the panel ruled: *"On the basis of the testimony and evidence received, the Panel concludes that there is not sufficient reason or evidence according to the Synod's Constitution and Bylaws for suspending Rev. Benke. Therefore, the Panel concludes that the decision of Rev. Schulz for expulsion of Rev. Benke under Article XIII of the Constitution of the Synod is not substantiated. The suspension of Rev. Benke is lifted and his LCMS membership in good standing is continued."*

This decision, dated April 10, allowed Dr. Benke to resume immediately the duties and responsibilities of his office.

It also brings to an end a lengthy period of controversy surrounding the appearance of President Benke at Yankee Stadium on Sept. 23, 2001, following the Sept. 11 acts of terrorism. Now that a decision has been reached, it is important that all of us in the Synod honor the result of the dispute-resolution process provided in the Synod's Bylaws.

When disputes arise within the church, we have a process for dealing with them. While that process may seem long, intense and protracted, it is the process adopted by

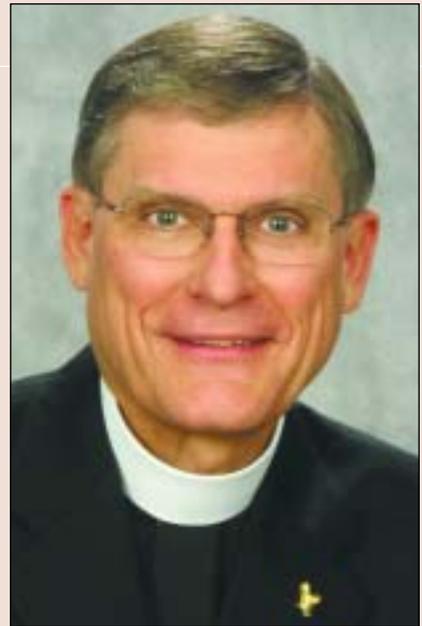
the Synod for the purpose of providing *"protection for congregations, pastors, teachers, and other church workers in the performance of their official duties and the maintenance of their rights"* (LCMS Constitution, Article III Objectives).

Much time, energy and attention have been expended on this case over the past 18 months. The personal lives, professional careers and respective constituencies of two duly elected officers of the Synod (Dr. Benke and Dr. Schulz) have been affected in ways that they alone can fully comprehend. The identity and reputation of the Missouri Synod and one of its highly valued, long-standing auxiliaries (the Int'l Lutheran Laymen's League) have been misinterpreted and misunderstood by many. Conflict and consternation have been witnessed and experienced by pastors and laity throughout the Synod.

As president of the Synod, I am grateful that this particular case is concluded.

At the same time, I know that much work remains in the months and years ahead as we seek to improve the way we walk together as a Synod. This case has brought to light the deeply held and divergent convictions of pastors, educators and lay people on how we can and should appropriately proclaim the Gospel in public places without violating our Scriptural and Confessional understandings. I pray that our gracious God will bless our efforts in achieving a God-pleasing consensus in this regard.

Although disagreements in a church body of 2.5 million people are bound to occur, by the grace of God we in the Synod are, thankfull-



ly, very much in agreement on the chief parts of Christian doctrine. For that wonderful and God-given harmony and concord, I know you join me in giving thanks to our Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I trust that you will also join me in continuing to pray for God-pleasing resolution of the areas of disagreement that remain among us, on the basis of Holy Scripture, *"the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice"* (LCMS Constitution, Article II Confession).

Now is the time for our Synod, one of America's 10-largest church bodies, to close ranks and unite in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and continuing our 156-year tradition of mission, Christian education and human care. We are called by God to be **One People** (Phil. 1:27), about **One Mission** (Matt. 28:18-20), proclaiming **One Message** (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

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

Jerry Kieschnick

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

John 3:16-17

e-mail: president@lcms.org

Web page: www.lcms.org/president