

W *The Lutheran* WITNESS

MAY 2002

VOL. 121 NO. 5



'I Will Give You Rest'

*Also: Letters of Love
Another (True)
Fish Story*

J. Reed



The Lutheran WITNESS

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

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MAY 2002

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Courtesy James Lange

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Cover art by Joann Reed. This painting hangs in Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Fremont, Calif.

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At Ground Zero



“God’s Children at Ground Zero” was certainly a work of love and compassion for those who were affected by the tragedy of Sept. 11.

*Walter Gorg
Largo, Fla.*

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR PUBLISHING Dr. David Benke’s moving article, “God’s Children At Ground Zero” (March ’02).

To this Lutheran layman of over 70 years, Dr. Benke represents exactly the kind of pastors and district presidents we need in these critical times. May our Lord continue to bless Dr. Benke and his efforts in New York, as He has done in the past.

*Eugene D. Mossner
Saginaw, MI*

THOSE OF US WHO LIVE AND WORK FAR away from Ground Zero will never fully appreciate the terror of 9/11, nor its sorrowful aftermath. We are truly indebted to men like Pastor Benke and his coworkers for living and sharing the Good News under such tragic circumstances. What a blessing they all are to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

*Rev. David Boedecker
Marshall, Mich.*

More fantasy fare

I WAS DISAPPOINTED THAT DR. GENE Edward Veith decided that Harry Potter should be categorized as “bad” fantasy (“Good Fantasy/Bad Fantasy” and “The Case of Harry Potter,” Feb. ’02). By his own standard, there’s a case *for* Harry Potter.

If we try to assign meaning to the characters and events of Harry Potter from our perspective as Christians, the tale takes on remarkable significance. The witches and wizards of Hogwarts Academy are trained to do good and to fight evil. The witches and wizards are misun-

derstood and marginalized, but still they find acceptance among their own and support each other in not growing weary in doing good. They don’t despise the humans, but they also don’t expect them to fully understand their reality. In fact, Muggles (non-witches/wizards), if they don’t hate the witches and wizards, do deny the truth before them, that is, that there is another world just as real as theirs. Instead of being frightened that our children will associate Muggles with Christians, we could use the world of Harry Potter as an allegory (albeit imperfect) to describe the relationship between Christians and non-Christians (Muggles, of course).

While it’s true that Harry Potter makes witchcraft seem desirable, it’s a different sort of witchcraft, and the difference is significant. Members of Wiccan cults do not fly on broomsticks. They do not go to private boarding schools, and they do not fight dragons. If parents teach their children the difference between pagan cults and fantasy, which is often allegorical, Harry Potter becomes a valuable teaching tool.

*Anna Lavoie
Orlando, Fla.*

MY HUSBAND WANTED TO SEE “THE LORD of the Rings” and I chose to view it with him, largely because I had been informed a Christian author wrote the book.

I am a 39-year-old female. I probably had my eyes and ears closed for two of the movie’s three-hour length because of the grotesque killing, shadows lurking in the darkness and

the nightmarish critters. I didn’t have time to ponder the underlying message. I stayed because I assumed there would be a happy ending. But there was no ending. I certainly would not want my nieces to go see “The Lord of the Rings.”

I’ve listened to many Christian leaders state disapproval of “Harry Potter.” Even though I have had no desire to see the movie, I’m now interested in comparing it with “The Lord of the Rings.” The “Harry Potter” previews certainly do not have me fearful of watching this movie. From what I know, comparing “Harry Potter” to “The Lord of the Rings” is like comparing apples to oranges. Both are fruit, but each has its distinctive taste and appearance.

My point is that we need to discern between right and wrong. We choose what forms of entertainment to view, and we ought to make every effort to view that entertainment that is Christ centered. We need to keep focused on God instead of using to entertainment to take us away, even if that entertainment is written by a Christian.

*Sally Crane
Garnett, Kan.*

Need to know

RE. “BOARD ORDERS HALT TO INFORMATION about charges” (“National News,” March ’02):

The Lutheran Witness is an official periodical of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. We readers need to know the names and addresses of those in the church who have made accusations against our church officials, and we need to know the nature of the accusations. Certainly we should not have to depend on publications of other synods and publicity bureaus for our information.

*Walter M. Buescher
Pewaukee, Wis.*

Solving the shortage

JESUS ANTICIPATED THE CHURCH-WORKER shortage and provided directions to resolve it: "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field" (Matt. 9:38). Each congregation can pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance as to who should be encouraged to become a church worker. The Lord is faithful to provide workers (see Acts 13:2-3).

*Ray Van Buskirk
St. Louis, Mo.*

Another miracle

MY FAMILY, MY HUSBAND AND I WANT TO thank you for the wonderful article, "I am the Mother of a Miracle" (Jan. '02). We brought our own miracle baby home just a few days before the issue showed up at our house. Emily Grace was born under similar conditions, nine weeks early and only two pounds, three ounces and 14.4 inches long. She came home about five weeks after she was born with no health problems at all. Talk about miraculous!

We so appreciated the love and support of our church (Zion Lutheran, Snohomish) and family. They made it possible for Emily to be moved to a closer hospital. They also prayed constantly for us! We know that God used her to be a witness to many through our openness about prayers, about who was really providing life for her, and her baptism. We now have a happy, healthy 4-month-old, 10-pound baby. We hope others were as encouraged by the article as we were!

*John and Kimberly Ovall
Snohomish, Wash.*

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.

‘I WILL GIVE YOU REST’

Tom Lapacka spent 30 years in a cult, trying to please God and earn salvation. Then God’s Word opened his eyes to the refreshing truth.

by J. Thomas Lapacka

Ask a stupid question, get a stupid answer. Another way of phrasing this is, the answer one gets depends on the question one asks.

In my Christian walk, it has taken nearly 50 years to ask the right question. From my youth, my question was: “What does God demand of me in order to be saved?” That question implies that my salvation *depends on me*.

What a frightening thought! But, it is a thought that finds expression in the way many people—even in the Christian church—live out their faith.

There is a popular country-western song in which the songwriter extols the virtues of the people from his home by declaring that they are “working hard to get to heaven.” I guess that is an appropriate way to describe my previous understanding of the Christian faith: “working hard to get to heaven.”

Demanding the impossible

That phrase conjures up images of a demanding God who has long lists of commandments and regulations that one must obey in order to enter into heavenly paradise. The measure of one’s worthiness can be directly equated to one’s performance in law-keeping. The harder you work at it, the better you should become.

That kind of thinking eventually led me to listen very attentively to the booming voice of the late Herbert W. Armstrong. He regularly castigated the Christian community for failing to keep God’s laws ... *all* of His laws. The



During his ministry in the Worldwide Church of God, Tom Lapacka served as coordinator of the Feast of the Tabernacles in Bonndorf, Germany. During this eight-day event, members envisioned the perfect world under the law.

connection Armstrong made over and over again was clear: Keep God's laws and God will protect you from His wrath and bless you here and now as well as offer you entrance into His kingdom. However, fail to obey God's holy and righteous laws and you will suffer in this life as well as be incinerated to ashes at the return of Jesus.

In the early 1930s, Armstrong began a radio ministry that became known nationally as "The World Tomorrow," and magazine, *The Plain Truth*. His Worldwide Church of God had many unusual doctrines, but he preached them so dogmatically that millions listened and more than 100,000 people became members.

As a young, impressionable boy, I believed that Armstrong was giving me the right answer to my question. His mountain of free literature made the path clear. There were, for example, the tithing laws — 10 percent of one's gross income to the church, 10 percent saved for use at the annual festivals, another 10 percent every third year for the poor.

Law regulated clothing materials (no mixed fabrics), rejection of medical help (God is our healer), women forswearing makeup (Jezebel was a harlot who wore makeup), rejection of birthdays (in Scripture, only pagans observed birthdays, an exercise in vanity).

Chief among the commandments, laws and regulations was the keeping of the Sabbath — a memorial of the creation and type of the wonderful world tomorrow when Christ would reign on earth. From Friday sunset to Saturday sunset we were totally at rest. No work, no play, no frivolity. This was the day of the Lord. Prayer and long church ser-

vices were the order of the day. To violate the holy Sabbath was akin to having one's name expunged from the Book of Life.



Herbert W. Armstrong founded the Worldwide Church of God.

This was the answer to my question, then: I needed to keep the laws—all of them, all of the time.

Over the course of decades, I found law-keeping to be difficult business. Sure, there were those times when I could string two or three good days together and do a pretty good job of keeping the law. I would avoid white sugar or the dreaded white bread, fastidiously pick each bacon bit out of my salad, and race home on Friday afternoon to the safety of my roof as the last rays of sun disappeared over the horizon heralding the advent of the Sabbath. Such punctilious adherence to laws of God and man contributed to the occasional "fat head" as a warm glow of self-righteousness would envelop me.

However, not all days were so good. I often found myself breaking more laws than I kept: that cross word spoken to my wife, that undetected crumb of leaven in my car discovered during the Days of Unleavened Bread, daydreaming about a big, juicy rib-eye steak when my thoughts on Yom Kippur (the annual day of fasting) were to have been drawing close to God through prayer and fasting. Faced with my own spiritual weakness and forced to admit my sinfulness, I sought a way of escape or relief from my depression. I prayed often, asking God for forgiveness and the strength to keep His laws. I believed the solution for my failure to please God through keeping His law was to try harder to keep His law.

The utter foolishness of this

proposition escaped me.

Christ, the answer

After 30 years of laboring to keep the law in order to please God and ensure a place for me in eternity with Him, I began to come to the sobering reality that I was failing. I would still wonder if I had done enough and be forced to respond inwardly that I had not. Wrestling with unresolved guilt because of sin, as well as the total absence of assurance of salvation, I puzzled over a statement Jesus made:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28–29).

What did that mean, Jesus would give me rest?

Right upon the heels of reading that passage, another jumped off the pages of the Bible at me. St. Paul wrote something that helped resolve the puzzle:

"But their [Israel's] minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.



Tom Lapacka's sons, Rhett, left, and Dustin, right, visited with their father after his ordination as a Lutheran pastor in 1998.

But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (2 Cor. 3:14–16).

There it was! Like lightning illuminating the night sky. All of sudden I understood that law-keeping was not the path to eternal life. For decades I had been asking the *wrong* question.

What was the *right* question? This: How can God save a wretched sinner like me?

Notice the enormous difference in emphasis. Now I am *God-centered* in looking for my salvation and not *self-centered*. The answer to pleasing God and entering into eternal life with Him lay outside of me.

John 3:16 now made sense. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” Jesus is the One through whom God reconciles us to Himself (2 Cor. 5:18–20).

No longer did I have to exhaust myself in an impossible effort to attain perfection through keeping the law. Like Luther, “I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.” God the Holy Spirit had used the Word to give me the right answer.

I liken my decades-long experience to living in the shadows. It was in the shadows of the law that I tried to take comfort, rather than in Christ. Paul speaks of the laws, to which I had so tenaciously held, as mere “shadows of things to come” (Col. 2:17) — but the *reality* is Christ in whom “the fullness of God dwells” (Col. 2:9).

Here I am, more than 30 years later, resting in Christ. No longer do I thrash about in the shadows seeking to satisfy God by my own efforts, but I rest confidently in Jesus, believing that He has fully satisfied the Father and that, in Christ, I too, satisfy Him.

The years of hard labor under the law are past. The weariness of soul has been replaced by deep spiritual refreshment in the Son of God. He labored on my behalf so I could be drawn out of the shadows to rest in Him.

A new path

Our Lord in His mercy has freed me from Armstrong’s cult and led me back into His church. Without the strength of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, I certainly would not be a Christian today.

Leaving a cult is not easy. First, there is the inevitable teaching of exclusivity. “We are the one, true church.” To leave Armstrong’s church was to turn one’s back on God, His truth and salvation. In my mind, it was tanta-

Tom Lapacka served as pastor at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Castaic, Calif., for three years after he was ordained into the LCMS ministry in November 1998.



mount to condemning myself to eternal damnation. At all costs, I would strive to stay in the cult (i.e., in the true church), equating membership with a ticket to salvation.

This resulted in careful mental checks upon any errant thoughts that might cause me to doubt the teachings of the cult. Intellectual honesty, open debate, questioning and expressions of disagreement were discouraged. These would lead to what was called a “bad attitude,” which, if left unchecked, could put one on the fast track out of “the church.”

Then there was the compelling, almost mesmerizing, charismatic attraction of a dynamic personality like Herbert Armstrong. He was bombastic and unequivocally dogmatic in his preaching, claiming direct inspiration from God Himself. We were taught that God had raised Armstrong up in these end times to give a warning message to His people “Israel” (the United States and Great Britain) to repent of their sins or face certain destruction at the hands of a resurrected Roman Empire led by Germany and the Pope.

After World War II and during the Cold War, times did seem bleak, and Armstrong’s prophetic warnings rang true to his followers. To break ranks with Armstrong meant facing the coming holocaust cut off from God and His protection.

Another huge hurdle to overcome in order to leave a cult is the personal connections. To leave Armstrong meant leaving friends and family. It meant walking away from a church career that had involved personal sacrifice, accomplishment and finally recognition as a leader in the organization. It meant breaking fellowship with college buddies with whom I had enjoyed great experiences and wonderful times.

Then, there is the question: Where do I go now? For many who did leave the Armstrong web, there was no other place. For them religion was now something to be avoided. It had brought only hardship, pain and sacrifice; it had left them spiritually exhausted and depleted. The experience taught them that churches are not to be trusted, and perhaps God Himself is suspect.

Tragically, many saw their faith shipwrecked. They lay critically wounded outside of the doors of the

Christian Church in need of the spiritual healing and rest that only Christ can give.

After the death of Herbert W. Armstrong in 1986, the Worldwide Church of God made a historic move, rejecting Armstrong’s heresies and embracing evangelical Christianity.

For me, the time had come to move on. There were too many bad memories and there was the need to be taught by a church that was firmly grounded in the historic Christian faith. God was gracious to me. In my last capacity with the Worldwide Church of God, I served as the director of church relations. This gave me the privilege of meeting Christian leaders from many churches, such as Four Square Gospel, Presbyterian, Nazarene, Baptist and Lutheran.

I struck up a friendship with an LCMS pastor, Rev. George Mather, who came alongside me as a friend. He loved discussion and debate. He never seemed threatened nor upset by my pointed questions and assertions. Patiently, he answered my questions from Scripture and drew upon lessons from 2,000 years of church history, especially poignant episodes from the Reformation.

In all the many topics Pastor George and I discussed, one message came through loud and clear: You are saved by grace through faith, not by works.

Where would I go if I were to leave the Worldwide Church of God? Who would teach me? Whose teaching was firmly rooted in the Scripture and the historical understanding of the church? For me, the answer was “Lutheran.” Are only Lutherans saved? Of course not. But the Lutheran Church is a significant member of the Body of Christ, committed to preaching Law and Gospel, demonstrating to all who will hear that only in Jesus, the Good Shepherd of our souls, will we find rest.



Rev. J. Thomas Lapacka is executive director of the LCMS Board for Communication Services.

Kieschnick backs Bush's support of cloning ban

Missouri Synod President Gerald Kieschnick says he applauds a decision by U.S. President George W. Bush to support legislation to ban all forms of human cloning.

Kieschnick was in the audience at the White House April 10 when Bush in a speech urged the U.S. Senate to adopt such a ban.

"I'm pleased that the president's speech was

totally in sync with the position of our Synod," Kieschnick said.

Based on Biblical teaching, the Synod's 1998 convention passed a resolution that rejects cloning.

Among several bills related to cloning that have been introduced in the U.S. Senate, only one would ban cloning completely. Kieschnick voiced support for that bill, the "Human Cloning Prohibition Act" (S.1899) and suggested that others who oppose cloning write their senators to support the bill.

Although the House of Representatives last year passed legislation identical to that act, the issue of cloning has been more divisive in the Senate.

Periodicals win 5 ACP awards

The Lutheran Witness and *Reporter*, the Synod's monthly newspaper, won a total of five awards in this year's Associated Church Press (ACP) competition for work done in 2001.

The Lutheran Witness picked up three of those awards. Two were sec-

ond-place "Awards of Merit" for a story in the May issue about the late Synod President A.L. Barry and for "Razing Hell," an article in the April issue. An "Honorable Mention" went to a March story about the "Left Behind" books.

Reporter received a first-place "Award of Excellence" for a front-page news story in September about the terrorist attacks on America and a third-place "Honorable Mention" for its back-page "Ideas" section.

Lutherans, churches victims of Mideast conflict

Lutherans and Lutheran churches were among the victims of Israel's military action in the Palestinian territories in early April, as Israeli soldiers detained Lutheran pastors and searched their churches in an effort to locate armed Palestinians.

One of those churches, Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem, suffered extensive damages from the Israeli army. Pastor Mitri Raheb, who is Palestinian, had to postpone the May dedication service of the church's new Dar al-Kalima Wellness and Health Centers, which were built and equipped with funding from U.S. Lutherans through Wheat Ridge Ministries, a Recognized Service Organization of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Wheat Ridge President Richard Bimler said he was "very much disappointed" by the violence that has delayed the Wellness Center's opening in Bethlehem, but he also thanks God, he said, that Pastor Mitri Raheb "hasn't lost the vision of health

and hope."

"We are here and we will remain here," Raheb said after the attacks. "Nothing will be able to stop us witnessing to the Lord of life. In these Easter days, this is our conviction."

As this *Lutheran*

Witness was going to press in mid-April, Secretary of State Colin Powell was meeting with Middle Eastern leaders with the hope of establishing a cease-fire agreement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In an April 5 letter to President George W. Bush, Missouri Synod President Gerald Kieschnick said the prayers of all LCMS members "are with you and your Administration as you seek ways to curb the violence and bring peace to the Middle East."

For more information about Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church and its ministries, contact Wheat Ridge Ministries at (800) 762-6748; wrmill@wheatridge.org. Or visit its Web site at www.wheatridge.org.



Israeli army soldiers pass next to destroyed cars April 4 as they prevent a group of journalists from passing a small street some 325 yards from the Church of the Nativity in the old city of Bethlehem. Some 200 Palestinians, many of them armed, remained holed up in the church, one of Christianity's holiest sites.

Lutheran Witness hosts six 'Christian Legacy' tours

The Lutheran Witness is hosting six tours yet this year to destinations important in the history of Christianity.

Accompanying tours in the magazine's "Christian Legacy" series will be Synod President Gerald Kieschnick, First Vice President Daniel Preus and faculty members from the Synod's seminaries and universities. Each tour also will be hosted by staff associated with *The Lutheran*

Witness.

The dates, destinations and featured presenters on the tours are:

- June 10-21, "Christian Legacy" in England and Scotland, Dr. Robert Rosin, chairman of the historical theology department at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

- July 22-31, "In the Footsteps of Martin Luther" (Germany), Dr. Timothy Maschke, chair-

man of the Division of Theology, Concordia University Wisconsin, Mequon.

- July 27 to Aug. 9, "In the Footsteps of the Apostle Paul" (Greece and Turkey), Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

- Aug. 6-20, "The Gifts of the Reformation" (Germany, France and Switzerland), First Vice

President Daniel Preus.

- Sept. 18 to Oct. 3, "St. Paul's First Missionary Journey" (Turkey), Dr. James Voelz, director of graduate studies, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

- Dec. 5-15, "Old World Joys of Advent" (Germany), President Gerald Kieschnick.

For information about a *Lutheran Witness* tour, contact LutherTours toll free at (888) 458-8486.

Bush meets with Kieschnick, CPH's McCain

During a March 18 stop in St. Louis, President George W. Bush met with 16 area religious leaders, including Synod President Gerald Kieschnick and Rev. Paul T. McCain, interim president of Concordia Publishing House.

Kieschnick, who took the opportunity to speak during the meeting, said, "My words to [Bush] were words of pastoral encouragement."

Among topics Bush discussed with the leaders were the war on terrorism and his faith-based initiatives.

McCain, who heard Bush speak at a briefing in Washington last summer, said he noticed this time the U.S. President's "resolve." Bush "has definitely risen to the challenge he faces in this era

of world terrorism," McCain said.

In an e-mail about the meeting to Synod leaders, Kieschnick wrote, "It was a great privilege and humbling opportunity to spend one hour and 10 minutes with the leader of the free world, a man who regularly, consistently and courageously testifies to the power of God's love in his life. Please remember President Bush in your prayers."

Missions seeks more volunteers

LCMS World Mission has 190 short-and long-term overseas mission slots to be filled by volunteers.

Most overseas volunteers teach English as a second language, which requires some college work. But, a variety of assignments are available.

Any healthy, active

member of a Synod congregation, at least college age, may be eligible for volunteer service with LCMS World Mission.

Short-term mission assignments are for less than six months. Those serving in long-term positions of six months to two and a half years have free health insurance.

The Synod has more than 350 missionaries in some 40 countries. More than half of them are volunteers who get financial help from their congregations.

"It's important for the congregation to be a part of that ministry," said Sean Harlow, LCMS World Mission's counselor for recruitment.

For more information about volunteer mission service, contact Harlow at (800) 433-3954, Ext. 1746; sean.harlow@lcms.org.

Nurse joins staff

Dr. Marcia Schnorr, a leader among parish nurses in the Synod, has been appointed to the LCMS Health Ministries staff.

She is national coordinator of LCMS Parish Nurse Ministries, a part-time position in which she will continue.

Schnorr, of Roselle, Ill., also is professor of nursing at Kishwaukee College, in Malta, Ill. She is a parish nurse for her home congregation, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Rochelle, Ill.

On the LCMS Health Ministries staff, Schnorr will lead initiatives for and serve as a consultant to parish nurses.

For information about parish nursing, contact Schnorr at mschnorr@roselle.net.



Schnorr

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

This month's "Searching Scripture" is from Part 4 of a five-part Bible study titled "The Way of Life: A Beginning." The entire five-part study is available online at <http://www.lcms.org/the-way/>.

— Ed.

by Jerry M. Kosberg

So far in this study, we have examined a few basic truths about God. It's time to turn our attention upon ourselves for a moment.

If there is a God and if He made me, then it follows that I have a relationship with Him. The next logical question is: Who am I and what does this mean for me?

1. Humanity is depicted in the Bible as God's crowning achievement in creation. We are created to give God glory and honor. Yet, the sad story of human history and our personal history shows a different picture. Let's start this lesson by looking at the bad news. Read Rom. 3:23. What is the truth about all of humanity?

2. Read 1 John 3:4. How does this verse define sin?

Whose law is being broken in this verse?

3. Read John 8:34. What does Jesus say happens to people who sin?

In verse 36, what does He say He can do?

4. Read Rom. 6:23. What is the consequence of sin?

What is the free gift of God?

5. The word "grace" has a particular definition in Christian terminology. It means undeserved love. When we didn't deserve it, God loved us. It is His grace.

Read Eph. 2:8–9. What is the startling truth in these verses?

6. Read Rom. 5:8. How did God demonstrate that grace?

7. The "Gospel" is the good news that Jesus died to pay the price of our sins and rose from the dead to conquer our sin and death. Read Rom. 1:16. What is the power in the Gospel?

8. Read Heb. 11:1. What is the definition of faith?

9. Turn again to Eph. 2:8–9. What is the role of faith in our salvation?

Both our salvation and our faith are called what?

Why can we not boast?



10. "Jesus is Lord" was the first "creed" of the New Testament Church. Read 1 Cor. 12:3. What is essential for us to confess Jesus as Lord?

Questions for thought/discussion:

1. Analyze the saying, "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere."

2. Is it easy for you to trust others? If so, why? If not, why not?

What bearing might that have on your spiritual journey of trusting God?



Rev. Jerry M. Kosberg is mission and ministry facilitator for the Pacific Southwest District.

from the **PRESIDENT**

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM— A BLESSING TO THE LCMS!

As president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, I am privileged to represent the Synod in many different places, on many different occasions. Some of the most enjoyable and stimulating of such places are the campuses of our Concordia University System (CUS).

Composed of the 10 colleges and universities, CUS serves as a coordinating and collaborative entity responsible for the efficient and effective operation of these wonderful institutions of higher learning in our Synod.

It's interesting—and appropriate—that our 10 CUS and two seminary campuses include “Concordia” in their names.

“Concordia” is Latin and means unity, harmony, agreement and accord. The objectives of our institutions include the fervent endeavor to prepare future leaders of the church who will lead in the accomplishment of its mission and assist in the development and maintenance of concord among our congregations and people. This is a worthy endeavor indeed!

This article was begun on an airplane while I was returning from a visit to Concordia University in Seward, Neb. I have also recently visited our Concordias in Bronxville and Irvine, and our seminaries in Fort Wayne and St. Louis. During my 32 years of ministry in the LCMS, I have had the privilege of visiting all of our Concordias at one time or another, with the exception of Portland. In the next several months, I am scheduled to visit Portland, as well as Austin and Ann Arbor, with plans to visit the rest of our institutions as soon as possible.

This month, all across America,

millions of children, teenagers, young adults and older adults will graduate from high school, college, university and seminary. Many of them will graduate from LCMS institutions. For years, they have studied and worked hard to earn their diplomas or degrees. With great joy and proper pride, they march down the aisle to receive recognition for their hard work.

Education of one kind or another makes a significant difference in the lives of people. We Lutherans have always modeled education as a major part of our ministry and witness. Today, we have more than 2,300 preschools, kindergartens, and elementary and high schools.

What makes Christian education, especially from our Lutheran perspective, so valuable is the fact that it is Christ centered. Scripture strongly supports Christian education, both in the school and in the Christian home, and emphasizes the value of children of all ages in the sight of our gracious Heavenly Father:

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ...” (Ps. 111:10 and Prov. 9:10).

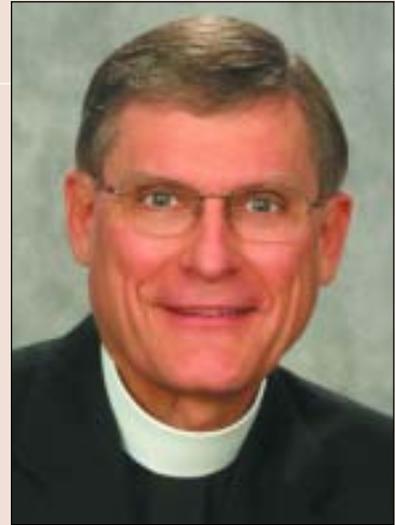
“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Prov. 22:6).

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these’” (Matt. 19:14, Mark 10:14, Luke 18:16).

What can you do, especially this month, to make a difference in Lutheran education?

- Give a graduation gift or send a note of congratulations to a graduate.

- Give a gift or send a note of appreciation to a Lutheran-school



teacher.

- Consider making a special, generous offering to a Lutheran school and/or to “For the Sake of the Church,” our Synod’s initiative to double the number of LCMS students at our CUS schools and to raise \$400 million in endowment funds for the colleges and universities.

- Speak and act in a supportive way of Christian education at all levels.

- Encourage the leaders and members of your congregation to tangibly demonstrate proper respect, honor and appreciation—including appropriate compensation—for the wonderful teachers, principals, pastors, secretaries, custodians and other personnel who are so critical for the success of our Christian-education endeavor.

- Express in a meaningful manner your thanks and respect for the many volunteers who also make such a valuable contribution to Christian education, including school board members, parent-teacher organizations, volunteers and parents.

May God richly bless our Concordia University System and all our Christian-education endeavors, to His glory and for the growth of His Church!

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John 3:16–17

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