

The Lutheran WITNESS

OCTOBER 2002

VOL. 121 NO. 10



*They Suffer
for Their Faith*

*Also:
From Cotton
to College
Surprised
by Suffering*



The LUTHERAN WITNESS

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

OCTOBER 2002

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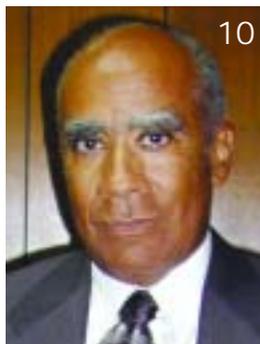
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Ossie Hoffmann

May our Lord grant Ossie, foot soldier of Christ, even more days to confess the only Way to go after 9/11.

*Dr. Albert E. Jabs
Columbia, S.C.*

THANK YOU FOR SHARING “A VISIT WITH Ossie Hoffmann” (Aug. '02). My wife and I have been avid listeners of “The Lutheran Hour,” especially during his tenure. He is truly a man with wisdom of the Bible.

*Thurman B. Munger
Hannibal, Mo.*

OVER AND OVER, DR. HOFFMANN PROCLAIMS, “Know nothing among you save Jesus Christ.” We should hang our heads over the relatively insignificant matters over which we are tearing our beloved Synod apart today. Maybe this article could pave the way to reconciliation and forgiveness. Plaster the article on the walls of every church and office in our Synod and maybe, just maybe, we would get it: It’s the Gospel of Jesus Christ that should be our message.

*Rev. Richard H. Snyder
Bandera, Texas*

AMONG THE OBSERVATIONS MADE BY DR. Oswald Hoffmann was that Synod support for our church’s public and government relations at the national level is “not what it once was.” The article went on to say that an effort to re-open a Washington office for the Synod was turned down in May by the Synod’s Board of Directors.

The continued absence of a synodical Office of Government Information coupled with the recent discontinuation of the Board for Human Services’ “Speak Up” publication is a disservice to civic-minded Lutherans. We deserve to have access to current LCMS information, analysis and guidance on important national issues involved in proposed legislation addressing abortion,

medical research, poverty, capital punishment, government support for parochial schools, etc. We need a clear voice from our church body on these ethical, moral and institutional issues. Instead there is only silence.

Why isn’t our LCMS part of the answer to the need for knowledgeable Lutheran advocates on moral and ethical issues of importance to the church?

*Robert C. Droege
Hyattsville, Md.*

A mission opportunity

THANK YOU FOR LIFTING UP THE NEED for ministry with people who have developmental disabilities and their families (“Jesus’ Special Lambs,” Aug. '02).

As the trend for community-based services continues and states close their large institutions, this need will only increase. Churches must become more intentional in reaching out with the Gospel to the “mission field of people with developmental disabilities.”

In disability ministries, we talk about “inclusion.” Equivalent terms with which churches might be more familiar are “outreach and assimilation.” In either case we’re talking about valuing people; saying to them, “You belong here next to me at the banquet table, and I will do whatever I can to make sure to have a seat next to me.” Isn’t that what Jesus did for us when He died on the cross so that we might be “included” in heaven?

May God continue to open our eyes to “mission opportunities” with

individuals who have developmental disabilities and their families.

*Deaconess Jeanne Dicke
Maplewood, Minn.*

Even better news

I APPRECIATED VERY MUCH THE ARTICLE “Don’t Do This!” (Aug. '02). The author especially excelled in describing the reality of death: “Death is monstrously ugly. It truly is the wages of sin, and each of us will one day know it personally.”

The article moved on to offer comfort, especially “the promise of salvation through Jesus Christ.” But the Good News is even better than the article stated. The author concluded by writing, “Death remains ugly. But now it has lost its terror. It is not the end, but only the beginning of life with God.”

Somehow we seem to forget something very wonderful. Death is not, in fact, “the beginning of life with God.” Yes, when Christians die, our souls go to rest with Christ. But our life with God began when we—body and soul—were baptized into Christ. The Lord Jesus’ answer to the death of our bodies is the resurrection of our bodies when He comes again in glory.

God hates death, precisely because it is the wages of sin. And just as surely as Christ Jesus has forgiven our sins through His death on the cross, so also by His resurrection, when He comes again He will perfectly heal, restore and glorify our bodies that we may live with Him as He first intended. On *that* day we will give all praise and glory to the Lord who will give to us the full experience of that for which we now groan and wait, our “adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23). The Good News goes on to the Last Day; let’s remember to believe and rejoice in it all!

*Dr. Jeff Gibbs
Concordia Seminary
St. Louis, Mo.*

In whose hands?

THANK YOU, DAN SCHEER, FOR YOUR letter in the July *Lutheran Witness* about the future of the world. It is good to know there are still a few of us who can see through the agenda being taught our children in grade school and even in preschool.

“He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands” is a song that was once popular. What is now being taught is, “We’ve Got the Whole World in *Our* Hands.” The environmentalist movement is a religion, based on evolutionary theory. I believe that as Christians we have good reason to be afraid of it.

*Darline Kussman
Brunswick, Mo.*

WHILE I AGREE THAT WE CANNOT destroy God’s Creation, I must take issue with some of Dan Sheer’s other points, which may lead people to believe we need to do little or nothing with respect to the ecology of the earth. Because of the fall of man, we live in a world that we can harm. Science, a tool our Creator has given us, has pointed out some of the health and environmental problems we have caused (some inadvertently) and continue to exacerbate.

Are we to do nothing and just observe children suffering with asthma from ozone pollution or apparent rain pattern shifts that are causing severe drought over large parts of the Great Plains? What if we had never tackled the problem of small-pox and just had said, “Don’t worry, God has control over the situation”? That reminds me of the way Christian Scientists shy away from modern medicine.

Our Lord has called us to be caretakers of His creation. He has given us a tremendous responsibility to take care of His world, just as a steward watches over the vineyard until his master returns.

*Bill Griffith
Leavenworth, Kan.*

*In many parts of the world,
our fellow Christians
are enduring persecution
on account of Christ.*

THEY SUFFER FOR THEIR FAITH

by Paul Marshall

Since 1996, an International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP) has been observed globally as a day of intercession for persecuted Christians worldwide. It has since become a special-emphasis week. This year, IDOP will be observed the week of Nov. 10–17. — Ed.

A year ago, Americans learned firsthand how terrorism can suddenly destroy lives and generate fear. But millions of Christians around the world face terror every day for the sake of their faith in Jesus Christ (including in nations and areas where The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has missionaries).

The western world has largely ignored this fact.

Here are just a few stories of Christian persecution from around the world:

Late last year, as the Chinese government increased their attacks on Christians, police surrounded the house of Ye Gong Feng, an 82-year-old Catholic priest. They jailed him and tortured him until he passed out. Among dozens of others arrested was 81-year-old Bishop Zeng Jinmu, who had already spent 30 years in jail. This followed the arrest of 130 Protestants in Henan.

On the second day of the new millennium, in Al-Kosheh, Egypt, Adel Ghattas Fahmy, a 22-year-old deacon at the local Coptic Orthodox church, was dragged to a nearby field and told to renounce his Christian faith and convert to Islam. When he refused, he was forced to kneel and then was shot in the back of his head. Adel's 11-year-old sister, Maysoun, was forced to lie next to her brother's dead body; she too was shot and killed.

In India, a 52-year-old Christian preacher was kidnapped and beheaded by unknown assailants—one of hundreds of recent religiously

motivated attacks on Christians there. Priests have been murdered, nuns raped, and leprosy workers burnt alive.

A Sudanese Christian woman tells of kidnapping, rape and slavery. "I was taken to the north. I was sold to a man who put me to work as a servant. They gave me a Moslem name, and forced me to take part in their Moslem rituals, even though I am a Christian. When I refused, I was harshly beaten."

These personal accounts could go through more than 30 countries where Christians suffer violence for their religion, with 30 more practicing pervasive discrimination.



On July 8, 2002, in Gorua, Indonesia, four homes belonging to Christians were burned. In the attack, school children were taken hostage but were later freed by the military. These attacks were part of violence against Christians throughout eastern Indonesia this summer.



Religious intersections

Conflict in the world today very often is concentrated where Christianity intersects with Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism.

Religion is usually intertwined with ethnic, political, territorial and economic concerns. But, since religion is the most profound shaper of human culture, people at these boundaries have different histories and different views of life, and are more likely to oppose one another.

Authoritarian governments take religion seriously; that's why they repress it. In 1992, the Chinese press noted that "the church played an important role in the change" in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. It encouraged the government not to let the same thing happen in China.

The Far East Economic Review, in a 1997 cover story titled "God Is Back," reported one Beijing official as saying, "If God had the face of a 70-year-old man, we wouldn't care if he was back. But he has the face of millions of 20-year-olds, so we are worried."

Radical Islam

While Islam has often shown far greater tolerance than its Christian counterparts, there are now intensifying attacks on religious minorities, mostly Christians, throughout the Islamic belt from Morocco on the Atlantic eastward through to the southern Philippines.

There is direct state persecution in countries such as Saudi Arabia, where any non-Islamic or dissident Islamic religious expression is forbidden. Christian meetings are outlawed and worship services held anywhere other than the embassies of powerful countries are raided by the police. Any Saudi who seeks to leave

Islam faces the real prospect of death. This is also true in some other Gulf States and in North Africa. In Mauritania, the Comoros Islands and Sudan, this is part of the legal code itself.

In Sudan, the radical Islamic government continued its deliberate bombing campaign on schools, hospitals and relief centers in its war on the predominantly Christian and animist south. It still tortures, enslaves and deliberately starves those who do not submit to its form of Islam, including moderate Muslims. This war, which the world has largely ignored, has claimed 2 million lives in the last 13 years. In Iran, Christians who engage in evangelism have been marked for assassination.

In Pakistan, Christians are frequent victims of a law that mandates death for anyone who blasphemes against Allah, Mohammed or the Qur'an. Islamic fundamentalist groups, including *al Qaeda*, have been attacking Christian schools, hospitals and churches. In northern Nigeria, many Christians and many Muslims have been killed in conflict over the introduction of Islamic *sharia* law.

In the Molucca islands of Indonesia, militant Islamic militia have killed thousands of Christians. Others have been ordered to convert. Those who refused were executed. Those who succumbed were circumcised, men and women, often with rusty knives.

In countries such as Iran and Pakistan, the threat also comes from vigilantes, with greater or lesser complicity from the government. In Iran there are strong indications that government death squads have abetted the torture and assassination of Protestant leaders in the 1990s.

There is also widespread communal violence against Christian minorities, often provoked by radical Islamic

leaders. This is true in Egypt, where the Coptic Church is subject to church burnings and local massacres. In January 2000, 21 Copts in the village of El Kosheh were slaughtered by a mob. In Nigeria, hundreds were killed in early 2000 in attacks prompted by northern state government's attempts to impose *sharia* law.

In Indonesia, which has long been a place of toleration between Muslims, Christians and other minorities, there has been an epidemic of church burnings. In Ambon, in the east, communal violence has been transformed by the arrival of *laskar jihad*—a private army of thousands allied with *al Qaeda*—which has threatened to wage a holy war against the region's Christians. Their explicit goal is to kill or drive out every Christian in the area. The death toll is well over 2,000, with more than 100,000 made refugees.

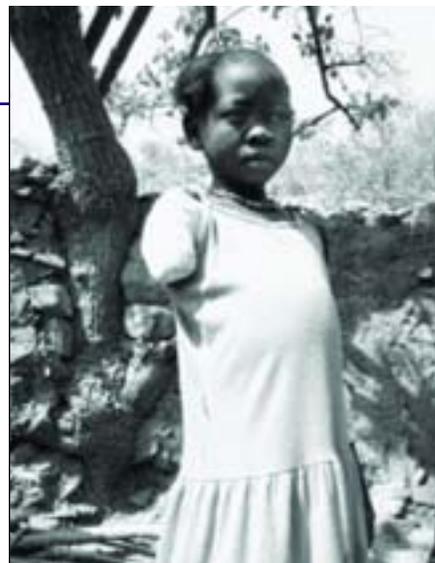
Communist oppression

Communism has not disappeared. It embraces nearly a quarter of

In February, two bombers targeted a heavily populated area around Kauda, Sudan. Holy Cross Catholic school, with more than 360 students, was bombed. One teacher and 19 children died and several others lost limbs and were otherwise maimed. According to a Reuters report, Sudanese government officials said that schools are a legitimate target in the country's long-running civil war, stating, "The bombs landed where they were supposed to land."

the world's population in China, Vietnam, North Korea, Laos and Cuba. While the situation in Cuba has eased somewhat in the last couple of years, the situation in most of the other communist countries has been worsening. Any religious expression outside state-controlled bodies is ruthlessly suppressed.

In Vietnam, the government continues its crackdown on Buddhists and Christians, especially among tribal peoples. Laos has imprisoned dozens of Christians for their faith. These governments repress any religious believer who refuses to submit



to state control on the choice of religious leaders, seminarians, pastors, priests, bishops, sermon topics, religious organizations and membership.

Information about North Korea is scarce and unreliable, but it appears that all forms of religion are, in practice, banned. There are reports that 23 Christians were executed there between October 1999 and April 2000.

Religious/ethnic nationalism

Religious minorities also suffer at the hands of combined religious/ethnic nationalism, commonly by communal violence. Violence and discrimination against minority religious groups is present in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Kampuchea, and in the central Asian republics formerly part of the Soviet Union, especially Uzbekistan.

In India in recent years, there have been hundreds of attacks, many deadly, on Christians by radical Hindu groups. About half of India's 28 million Christians are people traditionally described as "untouchables." The Christians among them are frequently denied access to the programs that the Indian government has to help such people.

In Burma, the regime, lacking popular support, tries to wrap itself in a cloak of Buddhism as part of its war against tribal minorities. Christians constitute a large proportion of these minorities.



The Tagakaulo members of Saligan Lutheran Church in the Philippines gather after a worship service. In June 2001, all LCMS World Mission personnel were evacuated due to the threat posed by the Islamic militant group Au Sayyaf—terrorists in the mountain region.

This campaign includes massacre, rape, forced labor and the use of children to clear mine fields.

Intra-religious attacks

In Ethiopia, Protestants and Muslims have been attacked and sometimes killed by mobs urged on by local clergy of the Christian Coptic Church.

In the Mexican State of Chiapas, Protestants (40 percent of the population) have been driven off their land and killed by local “Catholic” leaders.

In Russia, repressive religion laws, backed by the Russian Orthodox Church, have been instituted at the federal level. Laws are usually even more repressive at the local level, where there also has been violence against religious minorities, including Jews, Protestants, Catholics and dissident Orthodox groups.

Stand with them

The apostle Paul teaches us that when one member of the body suffers, we all suffer (1 Cor. 12:26). So, we want to stand with the persecuted church, even though our hearts will be broken.

We will cry. Sometimes we will be tempted to pull away. But pray for a big heart. Big enough to embrace those who suffer for their faith.

After James, the brother of John, was martyred, Herod arrested Peter. “So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him” (Acts 12:5).

As those in the early church prayed, we too can pray to God for our brothers and sisters in Christ who even today suffer for their faith.



Dr. Paul Marshall is senior fellow at the Center for Religious Freedom, Washington, D.C. His two most-recent books are God and the Constitution and Islam at the Crossroads.

WHAT WE CAN DO

As brothers and sisters of persecuted believers, there are things we can do to encourage and support them. Here are some suggestions:



Prayer

Most important, we need to pray for them and for their persecutors. Add persecuted Christians around the world to your prayer list and request that your congregation regularly hold up to God in prayer the cries of our persecuted brothers and sisters.

- ✦ Observe International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, November 10–17. For more information, see www.idop.org on the Web.
- ✦ Pray in personal devotions, with your weekly Bible study, prayer group or Sunday-school class.
- ✦ Place materials on the persecuted church in your church as a resource for members.
- ✦ Consider a prayer vigil for the persecuted church. Have different people prepare five- to 10-minute informational presentations and prayer requests about different regions.
- ✦ Put a globe or map of the world in your home. Have your family “pray around the world”—perhaps with each family member praying about concerns they have about a particular nation.
- ✦ Prepare a prayer calendar for your congregation, with a special emphasis on where you have missionaries or other special interests.

Education

- ✦ Subscribe to materials from organizations that publish on religious persecution, such as

the Center for Religious Freedom at Freedom House.

- ✦ Read a book on religious persecution.
- ✦ Read a book on a Christian martyr of this or another period.
- ✦ Pick one part of the world and learn about it intensively. Read about it in the State Department Religious Freedom reports and gather information from human-rights groups.
- ✦ Maintain a bulletin board on the persecuted church in a prominent hallway of your church.

Action

- ✦ Support groups who work with the persecuted church.
- ✦ Sponsor a refugee family.
- ✦ Reach out to international students studying in your area.
- ✦ Write letters to members of Congress, newspapers, etc.
- ✦ Lead a group of Boy or Girl Scouts in completing a badge on international human rights and religious freedom.

Seasonal

- ✦ Study how Christians in areas of persecution observe Christmas or Easter and imitate them.
- ✦ Thanksgiving is a good time to teach about the religious freedom we enjoy and to thank God for it.

Directors criticize president, BCS for publicity

In a statement adopted Aug. 15, the LCMS Board of Directors says that President Gerald Kieschnick and the Board for Communication Services are guilty of “serious infractions ... with regard to publicity in a dispute case.”

Kieschnick replies that the resolution itself by which the Board makes

Radio station to remodel

Radio Stations KFUA AM and FM, owned and operated by the Missouri Synod and located on the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, are about to begin a remodeling project in their building—the first in 50 years.

The stations raised \$140,000 from donors to be used in the first of three phases of the project, scheduled to start this month.

The improvements will not change the square footage of the building, which KFUA has occupied since 1927.

these allegations “violates not only the very bylaw that it purports to uphold ... but also the binding opinions of the Synod’s Commission on Constitutional Matters concerning the jurisdiction of the Board of Directors.”

At issue are news and other reports related to the case of Atlantic District President David Benke, who was suspended in June by Synod Second Vice President Wallace Schulz in response to complaints filed against him over his participation in a post-

Sept. 11 event last year in New York’s Yankee Stadium.

The Board for Communication Services (BCS) is responsible for the Synod’s two official periodicals, *Reporter* and *The Lutheran Witness*.

At the Board’s direction, the statement was published in the September issue of *Reporter* and on the Synod’s Web page. Both also carried the statement of response that Kieschnick delivered to the Board Aug. 18, three days after it had adopted the statement.

In addition, copies of

the Board’s statement were mailed to every pastor and congregation in the Synod, along with a cover letter from Board Chairman Robert Kuhn.

BCS Chairman Martin Schramm said, “The Board for Communication Services is committed to honoring the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod, as well as the rulings of the Commission on Constitutional Matters. We reported on President Kieschnick’s ‘Pastoral Letter’ and responded to news-media inquiries about it with the conviction that doing so would not be contrary to the Bylaws and CCM rulings.”

Conference papers on Web

Transcripts of presentations to the Aug. 5–7 model theological conference in Scottsdale are posted on the Missouri Synod’s Web site.

To find the documents, go to www.lcms.org and click on “Commission on Theology and Church Relations” at the “LCMS WWW Destinations” bar.

The conference con-

centrated on what Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions say about church fellowship, with a focus on “cases of discretion.”

It was meant to be a model for a series of upcoming theological conferences throughout the Synod to address issues of contention in the church body.

For more news...

For more news—and more timely news—visit <http://reporter.lcms.org> on the World Wide Web. That’s the Web site for *Reporter*, the official newspaper of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Generation gap affects Synod building program

Laborers For Christ (LFC), the Synod’s low-cost building program for churches and other buildings, is experiencing a generational problem.

Curt Connelly, LFC’s director, says that the fact that more than 300 people are in the pro-

gram is workable.

But as the 18-year-old effort changes hands from the post-World War II generation to the “baby-boomer” generation, there are fewer workers available. That’s because younger retirees seem to have longer and more

varied retirement agendas than senior LFC workers.

As a result, LFC needs Laborers at about half of its project sites, Connelly says. And he says that many projects are getting by with half the number of workers needed.

Typical projects need

Laborers (who are paid a modest wage) for three to six months, and LFC completes about 30 to 35 projects a year.

For more information, contact Laborers For Christ at (800) 433-3954, Ext. 1331; laborers@lcms.org.

Synod announces drive to find, retain church workers

“What A Way,” a new Synod campaign to boost recruitment and retention of professional church workers, begins next year.

A kickoff event March 13–15 in St. Louis will involve teams from districts and representatives of departments at Synod offices.

Synod President Gerald Kieschnick will head the initiative and Dr. L. Dean Hempelmann, director of pastoral education with the LCMS



Board for Higher Education, chairs a working group to set the course for the initiative.

The working group is taking over the reins from a recruitment and retention action group that ended its work last April.

In an address to last year’s Synod convention, Kieschnick said that in

recent years, the LCMS has lost 4,500 more pastors and teachers than it has gained.

Hempelmann said that the campaign will focus on providing “new material and programs to help us be about rebuilding a lifestyle of recruitment and retention in our church.”

Member losses slow, contributions drop by \$12M

Statistics reported by Synod congregations at year’s end 2001 show a leveling off of membership losses from the year before and a drop in financial-gift totals after a dramatic rise reported for 2000.

The baptized membership total reported for 2001 is 2,540,045, or 13,926 less than for 2000. The baptized membership total for 2000 was 28,469 less than the year before.

Congregations reported that members gave a total

of \$1,217,157,294 last year, or \$12,087,353 less than last year. Total giving for 2000 reportedly had risen by more than \$119 million over 1999.

The Synod’s Office of Rosters and Statistics released 2001 statistics in

August after gathering them from congregations earlier this year.

Statistics for 2001 will be in *The Lutheran Annual* for 2003, which will be distributed by Concordia Publishing House near the end of this year.

LCMS World Mission seeks to place more missionaries

LCMS World Mission staff say they could easily place 500 people into short- and long-term missionary posts next year, and they encourage more LCMS members to consider such service.

No experience is necessary for “relationship builder” positions, in which volunteers teach conversational English in more than a dozen countries.

Volunteer missionary Jennifer Jackson of Ann Arbor, Mich., worked with young children at an English-language school in Taiwan last year, and says she believes she “made a difference” in their lives and knows

that “they’ve touched my life.”

Jackson, 27, said volunteer service is ideal for those who are “flexible, who can adapt to anything” and who are “willing to try new things.”

“Most people have something to offer as a missionary,” said Kurt Buchholz, counselor for long-term volunteer missionaries with LCMS World Mission.

Buchholz said that opportunities for service are available in a variety of positions for various lengths of time—from two weeks to one or more years.

For a list of missionary service opportunities,

visit the Web site <http://mission.lcms.org/service/index.htm>. For more information or an application

form, contact Sean Harlow at (800) 433-3954, Ext. 1746; sean.harlow@lcms.org.



Jennifer Jackson of Ann Arbor, Mich., teaches English to young children in Taiwan during her seven-month stint as a volunteer missionary last year. LCMS World Mission says it could place 500 people as missionaries during 2003.

Searching **SCRIPTURE**

THE CHANGELESS ONE

by Carol Albrecht

I was going through boxes in the basement when I came across old yearbooks and notes my friends and I had exchanged in high school. I laughed at my 50s-style ponytail and at the trials of my teenage years. How much I've changed. How different my life is now.

Nothing in this life remains the same. Some changes are gradual as we age and mature. Some changes are instant and dramatic. Change, whether we like it or not, is part of our human existence; it is inherent in our sin-filled world.

What effect does sin have even on nature according to Rom. 8:20-21? _____

As we see changes in our lives and in the world, it's easy to feel that everything is out of control. No amount of money or hard work can stop the changes. We need to remember that in all this change, one thing remains the same. What does Malachi tell us will never change (Mal. 3:6)?

Sometimes people change in ways that hurt and disappoint us. Family members no longer show love; former friends move apart; a once-trusted confidant betrays us. God has promised to be our friend forever, to love us unconditionally. How does 1 Sam. 15:29 confirm God's eternal love for you?

In James 1:17, God is described as the "Father of heavenly lights." Why do you think James linked God's changelessness with "every good and perfect gift" that He gives us?



As we see changes in our lives, it's easy to feel that everything is out of control.

From the passages below, list some of God's promises to you.

Is. 46:4 _____

Matt. 28:20 _____

Heb. 13:5 _____

How does the changelessness of God reinforce His promises?

God never changes. But there is one thing He has promised that involves change. However, this is a change we look forward to. Read 1 Cor. 15:51-57. How will we be changed? And why is this change a good thing?

Read verses 56 and 57 again. Why are we able to be changed in such a wonderful way?

We, as sinful humans, are victims of change. God, who is perfect, cannot change. Through all the uncertainties of life, we can rely on His promises. How wonderful to know that in every time of change, we can cling to the Changeless One!



Carol Albrecht is a member of Centennial Lutheran Church, Superior, Neb.

LIVES TRANSFORMED THROUGH CHRIST (CONT.)

Last month's column, "Lives Transformed through Christ, in Time, for Eternity ...," stated: "A deep spiritual crisis exists today throughout the United States and across the face of the globe." This month adds another difficult observation: *A deep spiritual crisis exists today throughout the Christian church, including The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.*

Statistics do not always paint the complete picture of an organization's health, but they do indicate the direction in which an organization may be heading. Here are some examples:

- There are six billion people in the world. Two billion claim to be Christian, 63 million of whom are Lutherans, including the 2.5 million in the Missouri Synod.
- The LCMS accounts for less than 1 percent of the 281 million people of the United States. In the past 30 years ...
- The LCMS has declined by 300,000 baptized members while increasing by 100,000 communicant members, which indicates the "graying" of our Synod.
- The total number of worshipers in LCMS congregations each week has declined from an average of 1,140,000 to 970,000.
- While the average of 30,000 adults confirmed each year has remained fairly constant, nearly 50 percent of LCMS congregations annually confirm only one adult or no adults.
- Fifty percent of the infants baptized in our congregations are not confirmed in them. And

50 percent of the young people confirmed in our congregations are not active in them at age 21.

On my travels across the Synod, I have heard concerns about a lack of love, joy, harmony and unity of purpose in some corners of the LCMS. This concern is often described as a theological crisis, pitting "pure doctrine" against "godly behavior." To the extent that these observations are correct, we indeed are faced with a deep spiritual crisis, which can be resolved only by the grace of God at work in our hearts and lives through His holy Word and His precious Sacraments.

Thankfully, Terry and I have personally experienced many congregations whose members are full of love, joy, harmony and unity of purpose, who cherish both pure doctrine and godly behavior. We pray that such is your experience, as well.

As sinful human beings, though, we all are in need of proper motivation and God-given commitment to the process of transforming lives through the power of the Gospel.

May I be so bold, then, as to remind you, as I regularly remind myself, of the purpose for which we exist as individuals and as a church? This purpose is well articulated in the mission statements of the Synod and its wonderful auxiliary organizations, the Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) and the International Lutheran Laymen's League (Int'l LLL).

The LCMS: *In grateful response to God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacraments, the mission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is vigorously to make*



known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities and the world.

The LWML: *The LWML focuses on affirming each woman in her relationship with Christ to enable her to be in ministry among the people of the world ... encouraging and equipping women to live out their Christian lives in active mission ministries and to financially support global missions.*

The Int'l LLL: *Our mission is "Bringing Christ to the Nations—and the Nations to the Church." Our vision is that we will become a growing number of involved and enthusiastic supporters who evangelize an increasing number of people worldwide, connecting them to the church.*

Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:16–17).

May these words of our Lord give us great joy and courage in proclaiming Christ to those who do not yet believe that through His love, lives are transformed, in time ... for eternity!

Jerry Kieschnick

John 3:16–17

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