

THE LUTHERAN WITNESS™

SPECIAL ISSUE:



Sharing
Your
Faith.

God presents us with opportunities to be His witnesses

You have in your hands a very special issue of *The Lutheran Witness*. Its focus is on people and institutions of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a world that needs so very much to hear God’s Good News.

It’s about you and me sharing our faith with others, as God gives us opportunity to do so. This is a topic very near and dear to my heart, as it is for many of us. Frankly though, at times, many of us fear our own inadequacy or fret that someone with whom we want to share the Gospel might ask questions or respond to our words in a way that would leave us speechless, or even embarrassed at our inability to respond properly.

And yet, God presents us with opportunities to be His witnesses. Perhaps you have heard me speak of some of those opportunities in my life, including:

- the shaken and upset 26-year-old wife and mother, a U.S. Marine, who sat next to me on a plane. She was on her way to Iraq with only a few hours notice, leaving her husband and two young children behind.
- the 46-year-old cab driver who had lost his brother to a heart attack two weeks earlier. He had questions and fears about his brother’s eternal destiny—and about his own.
- the Hispanic server I included in my table prayer at a Council of Presidents meal in Chicago. She later turned, unknowingly and almost miraculously, to the only Spanish-speaking district president in the room for further conversation about her daughter’s spiritual condition.

In each case, I saw the hand of God create an intersection between my life and the life of a man or woman who had real fears, real worries, and real needs—all of which could be met or satisfied only with the Good News of God’s love in Jesus Christ. This was expressed in the theme of last summer’s Synod convention: “ONE Message—*Christ!* His love is here for you!”

When I was installed in September to my third term as Synod president, I invited those present to dream with me of a time when this proclamation, “Christ’s love is here for you,” is accomplished articulately and unapologetically on every Spirit-given occasion, with great sensitivity, humility, boldness, and courage. I also invite you now to share this dream.

This invitation to dream, however, is not one that asks you to dream with your eyes closed and simply to imagine what can be. Rather, this invitation asks you to dream with your eyes wide open:

- so you will see the “fields that are ripe for the harvest”;
- so you will see the doors of opportunity God has opened and that you will run through them without fear, in the boldness of the Lord;
- so you will see the undeniable power of God in Christ, who promised we “will see greater things than these.”

Dream with a vision where **One Mission** compels us vigorously to seek the lost for Christ.

Dream with a vision where **One Message** of Jesus Christ alone as the Savior of the world resounds above all other sounds.

Dream with a vision where as **One People** we strive side by side for the faith of the Gospel.

My prayer is that the stories in this issue of *The Lutheran Witness* will provide godly inspiration and motivation for your life and for the lives of those with whom you may be privileged to share the hope that is in you—your faith in Jesus Christ, Savior of the world and Lord of the universe.

God bless you richly in Christ!



Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick
President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Jerry Kieschnick
John 3:16–17

Lives Transformed through
Christ, in Time . . . for Eternity!
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A Special Issue: Sharing Your Faith

To the Reader

If you're wondering, "Why did I get this *Lutheran Witness*?—I don't subscribe," it's because this is a special issue, and you're one of many thousands in addition to our regular readers to receive it. What makes this issue different is that all of its stories ultimately concern the same thing: outreach and faith-sharing, whether on a personal, one-on-one basis, or as a congregation, district, or school.

You may have heard of *Ablaze!*, the Synod's ambitious movement to share the Gospel with 100 million unchurched people, including 50 million in the United States, by 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Our church is committed to *Ablaze!*—not just by convention resolution, but because sharing the faith with the lost or lapsed is our Christian calling.



The goals of *Ablaze!* go beyond the 100 million encounters, or "critical events," of one-on-one faith-sharing. There's also the twin objective of planting 2,000 new faith-communities and "revitalizing" 2,000 existing congregations by 2017. Moreover, LCMS World

Mission, working with our partner churches abroad, hopes to start 3,000 mission outposts in Africa, Asia, Eurasia, and Latin America—again, by 2017. Then there's "Fan into Flame," the fiscal arm of *Ablaze!* that aims to raise \$100 million by 2010 to help fund a great number of *Ablaze!*-generated ministries.

In view of these goals and what it will take to achieve them, *Ablaze!* is a complex movement. Yet, at its heart, it's really quite simple. It's about one person sharing his or her faith with another. It's about having the courage, with God's help, to *want* to reach out. It's about making each and every LCMS congregation in America a "mission outpost" in its own right. It's about realizing that large, long-term goals can only be met when souls are reached one at a time.

The people inside this issue, be they the authors or the authors' subjects, are ablaze about sharing their faith. They are not *doing Ablaze!*, as if *Ablaze!* were a verb or something with a life of its own. *Ablaze!* is not an action but an attitude. It's not an end in itself. Sharing one's faith with another person and leaving things up to the Holy Spirit is an end in itself. Think of *Ablaze!* as a framework of strategies, ideas, and tools to help us do a better job of witnessing.

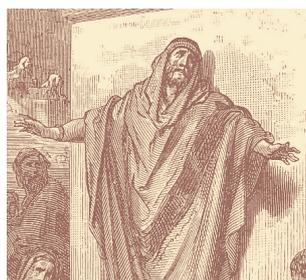
We hope you enjoy this special issue, which was generously underwritten by a grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.

The Lord's blessings in the New Year! May His Spirit set us all aflame with the passion to share His love.

*David L. Strand, Executive Director
Board for Communication Services*



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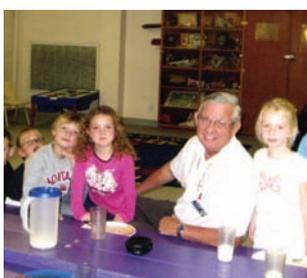
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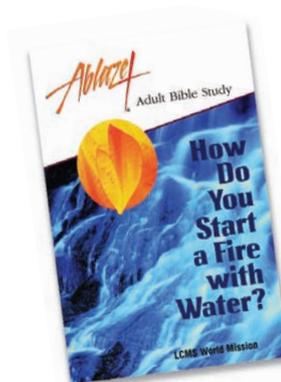
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Confessions of a timid evangelist

There were more than a few occasions . . . when I would stand on the steps of a home . . . and secretly, quietly hope no one would be home, or that no one would answer the door.

I confess I started my journey as a witness for Jesus in a much more timid way than you might expect.

As a young boy, my family moved fairly often. We were always active members of local LCMS congregations, and while it must have taken place, I have no lasting impression of being encouraged to share my faith. I simply don't remember that it was explained to me how, where, and when I might be able to witness.

As the years passed, and especially as I began my training for full-time church work, I was convinced that sharing the Christian faith was the most important task of the church and individual Christians. But I still didn't know how to do it.

I took the one evangelism course the seminary offered when I was there, and I was very involved in preparing and training evangelism callers while I was on my vicarage. But even with this background, truth be told, there were more than a few occasions—on vicarage and even in the first parish I served—when I would stand on the steps of a home, having knocked on



someone's front door, and secretly, quietly hope no one would be home, or that no one would answer the door.

As I look back, I confess that I was nervous and afraid. What if I couldn't remember the outline I had so carefully memorized? What if there were questions I couldn't answer or, heaven forbid, if either my message or I were rejected?

But I remained convinced that Jesus was calling me—Jesus is calling all His children—to share Him with a world lost in sin. So in spite of my apprehension and timidity, I didn't stop praying, going, and trying to tell others about Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

I'm delighted to tell you now that my faith-sharing journey is much different. I *can't* point to one incident, one moment when "everything changed" and I lost my timidity, but gradually it has changed. Now I see witness opportunities *not* as fearful occasions but as Spirit-led moments to grow in relationship with others who also need to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. I can honestly say I look forward to the daily opportunities God gives me to share words of Christian encouragement and Gospel proclamation.

I have come to realize that as important and helpful as they are, it isn't my theological training or my calling to be a pastor that gives me the ability to share my faith. Rather, as I think about sharing faith in Jesus, two things have become most helpful and important for me.

First, I am convinced of the love of God in Christ *for me*. Through faith I am certain that I am a precious, redeemed, blood-bought child of God, and I can't help but share "what I have seen and heard." Second, a great weight has been lifted from my shoulders when I realize that it is not my "job" to convert (or "evangelize circles around") the person with whom I hope to share the Gospel. Rather, it is my true prayer and sincere desire to come to love—

with the love of Christ—the person with whom I am talking. I want to love him or her enough to really listen to them, to get to know them and then through my witness to share God's Word in a way that truly touches their lives "where they are." God is changing lives and changing the world through such Christian witness!

Jesus said, "As the Father has sent Me, so I send you" (John 20:21). He calls each of us in this great church body to be involved in sharing the precious, life-giving message of the Gospel—every grandpa and grandma, boy and girl, mom and dad. Jesus calls us—you and me—to be the "salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13–14). He wants us to flavor our conversations with the message of the Gospel, bringing the light of Christ into every relationship we have.

God puts us in places and in relationships with those all around us who are "unreached and

unchurched." With whom might God be calling you to share the Gospel? Your neighbor, co-worker, or classmate? The person sitting next to you on the airplane? An uncle or cousin? Your parents?

The apostle Paul once encouraged a young pastor named Timothy with words that still encourage us today: "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord" (2 Tim. 1:7–8a).

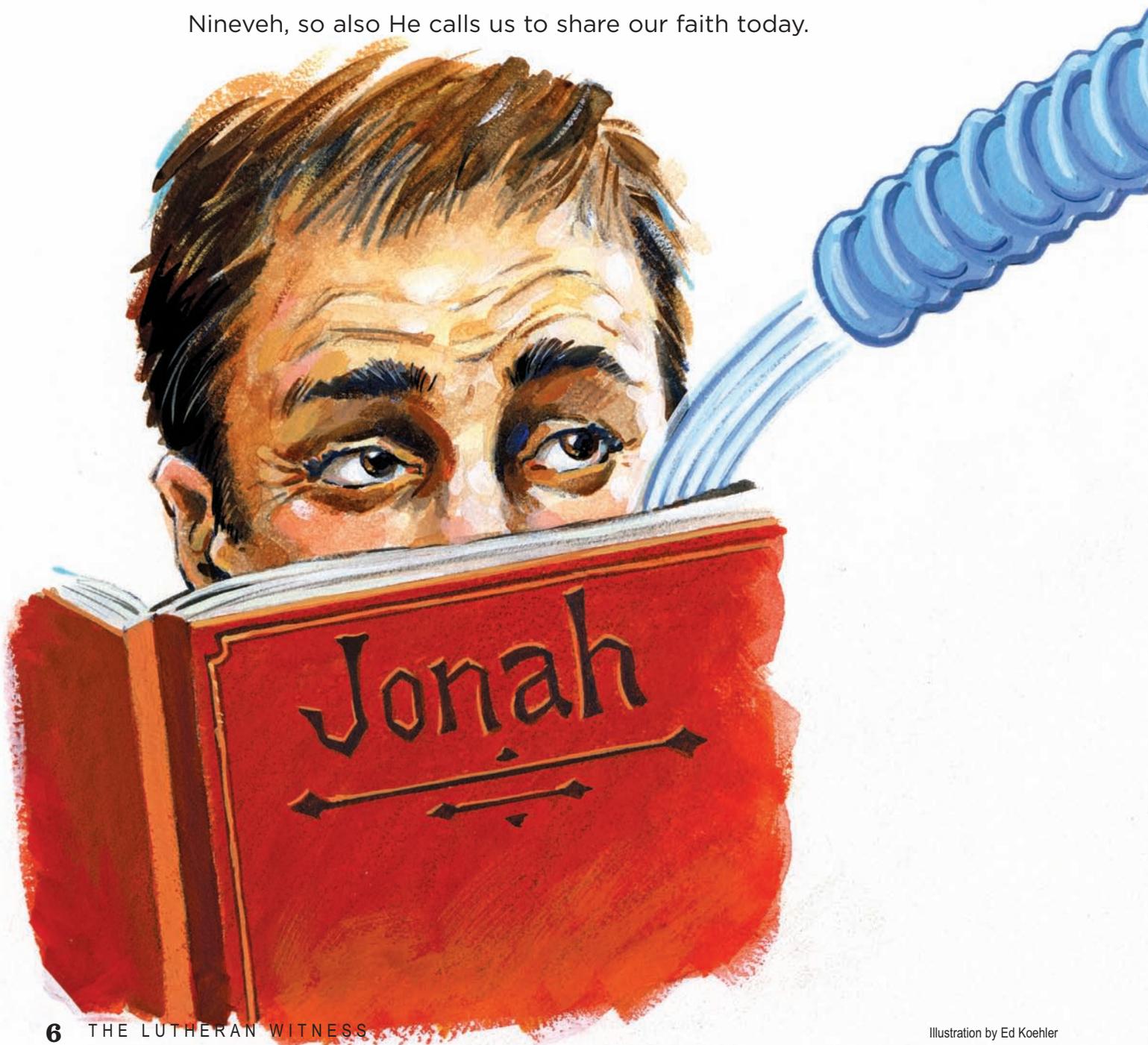
By God's grace, my confession of timid evangelism has now become a strong confession of faith-sharing. My prayer is that God would stir up a mighty outreach movement in the LCMS so that 2.5 million of us hear Jesus personally calling us to frequently, individually, and intentionally share our faith throughout our daily lives as God gives us opportunity! God bless us to that end. ✨

Now I see witness opportunities *not* as fearful occasions, but rather as Spirit-led moments to grow in relationship with others who also need to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.



The call to Nineveh: Jonah's and ours

To say Jonah wasn't keen on sharing his faith with the people of Nineveh is something of an understatement, but just as God called Jonah to bring His Word to the people of Nineveh, so also He calls us to share our faith today.





Have you ever opened a plain-looking book or can that secretly contained a coiled spring? Opening it innocently, you were probably startled when the spring suddenly popped out!

Jonah is such a surprise. On the outside it appears to be a narrative that we know. We think of it as a double act—"Jonah and the Whale," like "Laurel and Hardy" or "Gilbert and Sullivan." Unlike its slender prophetic neighbors, Obadiah and Micah, Jonah is a story most of us can't remember *not* knowing. We've been acquainted with the book's outline for as long as we can remember: chapter 1, "The Flight"; chapter 2, "The Fish"; chapter 3, "The Fast"; chapter 4, "The Fuss."

Or we might recall the chapters this way: "See Jonah Perish," "See Jonah Pray," "See Jonah Preach," "See Jonah Pout!" The book has inspired *Moby Dick*, *Pinocchio*, and a Veggie Tales cartoon. It is a prime candidate for a Sunday-school flannel-board lesson or a nice, safe bedtime story. Jonah appears to be an easily packaged narrative, effortless to unwrap, read, and then quickly set aside.

But a plain-looking narrative may contain a coiled spring or two. The Lord says to the prophet in Jonah 1:2, "Arise, go to Nineveh."

Shocking indeed! In the eighth century B.C. Nineveh was a leading city in Assyria, and just the mention of "Assyria" would bring on almost any Israelite a nervous breakdown. Note below these blood-curdling words of the ninth-century B.C. Assyrian king Ashru-nasirpal II:

I stormed the mountain peaks and took them. In the midst of the mighty mountains I slaughtered them; with their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool. With the rest of them I darkened the gullies and precipices of the mountains. I carried off their spoil and their possessions. The heads of their warriors I cut off, and I formed them into a pillar over against their city; their young men and their maidens I burned in the fire. I built a pillar over against the city gates, and I flayed all the chief men who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skins; some I walled up within the pillar, some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes, and others I bound to stakes round about the pillar.

The call to Nineveh: Jonah's and ours

What is more, in the Old Testament Assyria is compared to a swarm of killer bees, a razor that shaves and slits, and a rod that maims and mauls (Is. 7:18, 20; 10:5). Assyrians can be seen striding through the Old Testament, hands on their hips, taunting Israelites with words like, "I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able to set riders on them" (Is. 36:8), and proclaiming that Israel is destined to "eat her own dung and drink her own urine" (Is. 36:12).

Dealing with Nineveh—a key city in Assyria—calls for military commandos, an air, naval, and nuclear assault. But a prophet? Come on!

What a jolt this was for Jonah! A mission trip to Nineveh would mean the end of his comfortable and predictable ministry in the court of Jeroboam ben Joash (2 Kings 14:25). The Lord calls Jonah to take off his training wheels and ride his bike down a steep mountain!

Today, for us, Nineveh is any group of people who are walking in the darkness of unbelief, living in the depth of brokenness, and dying with the despair of those who have no hope of heaven.

Nineveh is any group of people who act and dress and look and talk in ways that are so different from us they are threatening to us.

The church's response to "go to Nineveh" is all too often like that of Jonah's: *Run!*

"Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish" (1:3). Another coiled spring leaps out! This is unprecedented in the Old Testament. No one ever completely ignores the call of God. Gideon says, "My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family" (Judges 6:15). Jeremiah protests, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child" (Jer. 1:6). Isaiah insists, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Is. 6:5). But Jonah says absolutely nothing! It's as though he hangs a large "Do Not Disturb" sign outside his bedroom door. To compare Jonah with Moses we would have to envision Moses throwing water on the burning bush. Jonah must have made the 60-mile journey from his hometown in Gath-hepher to Joppa in record time.

Once Jonah reaches Joppa and boards the ship, the surprises come like rhythmic electrical shocks. When everyone else is praying to save the swamping ship, Jonah is sound asleep (1:5). Asked by the sailors his land and occupation, the prophet, *who had sought to escape God's presence*, chants a confession of faith in the Lord, "who has made the sea and the dry land" (1:9). Jonah hits the water and the sea calms instantly (1:15). Jonah prays a

psalm (2:2–9) and the Lord sends him out the front, rather than the rear, end of the fish (2:10). Think about that!

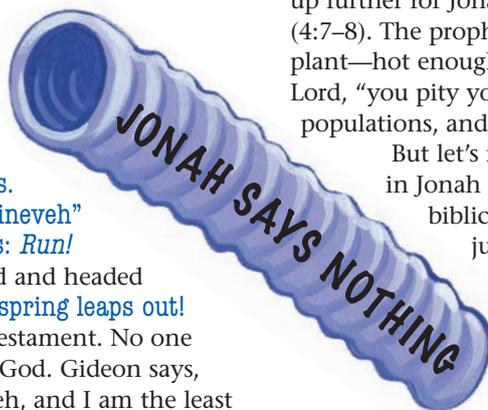
Jonah arrives in Nineveh, mounts the first available soapbox, and proclaims the city's impending doom (3:4). His sermon is a booming command that rattles the rafters of Nineveh, makes the king come down from his throne, and plunges the city into the most famous sackcloth-and-ashes conversion in ancient Near Eastern history (3:5–10). The king commands, "No food, no water—everyone cry out to God with gusto" (Jonah 3:8). Think of the racket unwatered and unfed animals and *children* can make! So the Lord's anger cools down (3:10), but then Jonah's anger heats up (4:1).

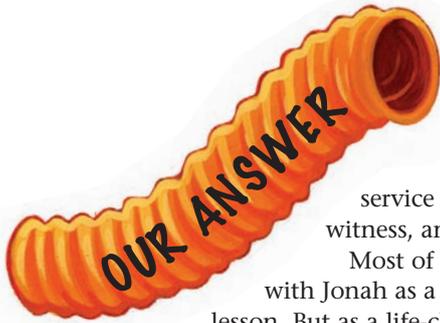
The prophet now proceeds to lecture God. It is as though he says, "Lord, You are too full of love for Your own good because it makes You come across as a wishy-washy capricious oriental monarch. When a city deserves zapping—zap it!" The Lord then proceeds to heat things up further for Jonah, bringing on sun, worm, and wind (4:7–8). The prophet becomes hot over the loss of his plant—hot enough to die (4:9). "Look here," says the Lord, "you pity your plant. Shall I not pity people, and populations, and even their pets?" (Jonah 4:10–11).

But let's not be too hard on Jonah. Why, at least in Jonah 1:9 and 4:2 the prophet articulates a biblical theology of creation and redemption, just like us. In chapter 2 Jonah weaves together a masterful prayer from the Psalter, showing that he loves hymnody and liturgy, just like us.

In Jonah 3:4 the prophet preaches, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be changed," indicating that he knows the Lord is "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Jonah 4:2b; cf. Ex. 34:5–7). Jonah embraces the Gospel, just like us. And yet Jonah is deaf to the missional call of God, *just like us!*

Orthodox theology, biblically based worship, and the pure Gospel may become for us rote and routine, a chore and a bore and a snore. We can so easily articulate, pontificate, and repristinate, but childlike wonder and captivated hearts eager to witness that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19) so often dry up like forgotten fruit in the back of the refrigerator. Smug prejudice, empty creedalism, and solidarity without concern for incorporating those on the outside kills the mission of the church. And this is Satan's strategy. He wants us to have a reputation for being alive, but in reality be dead, even dead in our mission to the world (Rev. 3:1). And so we find ourselves simply giving lip





service to evangelism, witness, and outreach.

Most of us are comfortable with Jonah as a Sunday-school lesson. But as a life-changing call to repentance and mission? That simply takes our breath away.

So what does the Lord do with Jonah? He asks a question (Jonah 4:10–11). “Shall I have compassion upon the great city of Nineveh?” And the narrative ends!

But wait! Does Jonah angrily stomp back to Joppa and board another ship bound for Tarshish? Or does he stick it out in Nineveh, embracing the Lord’s mercy for all people, as well as their animals? These questions assume the Lord is only addressing Jonah. He is not.

Out leaps another spring! The author of Jonah is employing a literary device called “the rhetoric of entrapment” (see 2 Sam. 12:1–12; Is. 5:1–7; Matt. 21:33–46). This means that Jonah’s answer is intentionally left open-ended, leaving the completion of the prophet’s story in *our* hands and hearts. The narrator’s strategy is to withhold the prophet’s answer to the question. In this way he leaves room for *us* to provide *our* answer.

The Lord is asking you, dear reader, right now, “Shall I have compassion upon the great city of Nineveh?” But your answer, just like mine, more often than not, goes something like this. “Lord, those people are so different! I’m just not comfortable talking to them. And besides, there are a lot of other folks who can do the job much better than I can!”

So what does the Lord do? In the fullness of time He sent the Perfect Missionary. His name is Jesus. And Jesus says in Matt. 12:41, “One greater than Jonah is here.” And the narrative begins again!

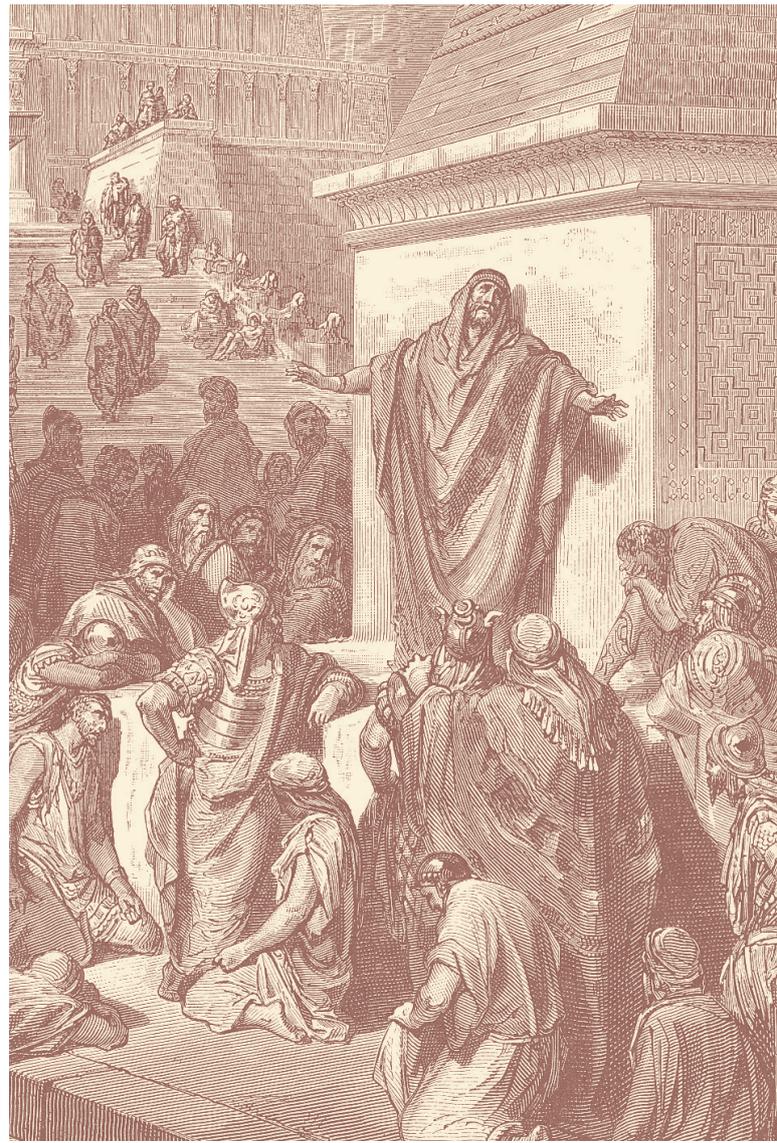
Talk about shock and awe! Compassion for “Ninevites” marked Christ’s ministry. He talked publicly with women (e.g., John 4:1–42, see especially v. 27), socialized with sinners (Luke 15:1–2), exorcized demons (Mark 5:1–20), healed the lame, and gave sight to the blind (Matt. 15:31). Matthew 9:36 describes our Lord with these words, “When He saw the crowds, He had compassion upon them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Compassion is a defining characteristic of Jesus’ missionary heart (Matt. 15:32; Mark 1:41; Luke 15:20).

But the Savior’s most outlandish act of compassion was before the creation of the world, when He planned the birth of Judas, who would betray Him, designed iron for the nails that would pierce His hands and feet, and conceived of orchestrating events that would lead Pilate

to Judea, Caiaphas to Jerusalem, and the crowds to repeatedly cry out, “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” This is what John means when he says “the Lamb of God was slain before the creation of the world” (Rev. 13:8b; see also Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:20).

Shall the Lord have compassion upon the great city of Nineveh? The answer Jonah gave is brought to final fulfillment in the answer given by Jesus Christ. He stated the final, definitive answer to Jonah 4:10–11 with His whole heart, and He wrote it in His own blood. Jesus said “yes” to compassion upon the great city of Nineveh, *indeed for the entire world!*

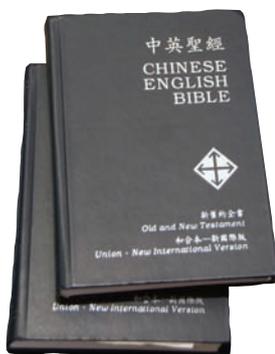
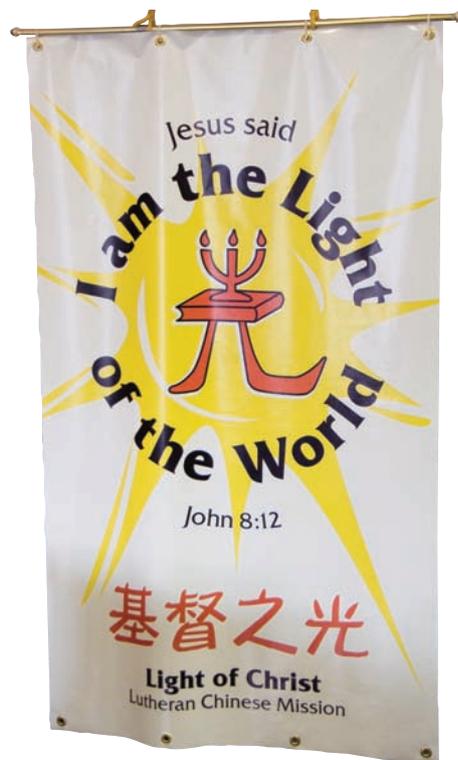
And this means the Father has placed in each of us a baptismal gift. We are daily empowered by the Holy Spirit through faith to open and claim the Savior’s free gift of forgiveness and eternal life. But within the water and Word of Holy Baptism there is one more surprise. You and I are spring-loaded with the love of Jesus to leap out and go in compassion to one place—*Nineveh!* ✨



Light of Christ:

Sharing the faith on Sunday and every day — in Mandarin Chinese and English

In response to a call to serve, a district and a suburban congregation reach out to a growing Chinese community with the Good News of Jesus.



On a Sunday last November, at a crossroads in mid-America, God provided a perspective on the Church in mission. Here, at Light of Christ Lutheran Mission, the predominant language is Mandarin Chinese as people gather in the east building of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Olivette, Mo., on the western edge of St. Louis.

At the high point of this morning, about 150 people pack a central commons for worship and celebrate the baptisms of four adults and two children. As the pastor delivers the benediction, aromas of food drift from the nearby kitchen. It is time for the fellowship meal, a part of every Sunday's gathering.

All morning has seen hectic activity. Adults and families arrive: Some come for the three levels of English as a

second language (ESL) classes. About a dozen adults meet in the Chinese-language Bible class. A pre-citizenship class meets in the same room while others set up for today's potluck meal. Elsewhere, two students meet with a tutor (typically there are four) to learn Bible stories that are essential background for confirmation. Visitors inquire about the ESL classes and worship. Meanwhile, youngsters—often more fluent in their English—attend Sunday school at Immanuel's main building.

Over the past 18 months, the mission has blossomed. Worship attendance has grown from 40 to 120-plus with a small a core of regular members. Others are seekers, visiting several area Chinese churches. Many are university students from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan who want to learn about American culture.

More than 60 people—mostly adults—have become new Christians through Baptism since the mission began in 2000. Two-thirds of the baptisms have been performed during the past 18 months.

“God guides the way,” says Dr. Paul Shaw, pastor of the mission since July 2006. “We share the Gospel; they respond. Only by grace. The Holy Spirit touches their hearts. It’s beyond our ability and our imagination.”

Rev. Paul Rueckert, senior pastor at Immanuel, sees the Lord working here: “China refuses missionaries; yet economics and relationships between our counties allow us to bring these Chinese students here, where they encounter Jesus Christ and go back. Every day we are truly awed by God’s working in all this.”

The mission springs from seed planted by Shiu Ming Lau, a student at Concordia Seminary. A Cantonese who spoke Mandarin, Lau saw a growing Chinese community in the Olivette area, and he urged the Missouri District to start a mission. In 2000 the district asked Immanuel to host the mission. (The St. Louis area Chinese population is now estimated to be more than 40,000.)

In 1999 Immanuel purchased a former daycare building that now provides space for the mission. The building also houses a preschool, kindergarten through third-grade classes, and two youth rooms. The 163-year-old congregation has 1,100 members and 160 students in its elementary school.

Lau served his vicarage at Immanuel and, following ordination, was called as the first LCMS missionary to the Chinese community in St. Louis. The mission sprouted, growing from his family of four to about 40 people before he accepted a call in January 2006 to serve a large Chinese congregation in San Francisco.

A month later Immanuel saw its senior pastor, Rev. Ray Mirly, elected district president. Rueckert, who was then associate pastor, said Immanuel chose to focus on a pastor for the mission, and the Chinese members felt strongly that they needed a Chinese-born pastor.

“We took a leap of faith in saying we need to follow their lead,” Rueckert recalls. “It was ‘O Lord, please bless us. We have to trust Your leading.’ Well, He led us to Pastor Shaw.”

“I have a burden for bringing the Gospel to the Chinese people,” explains Shaw, who served on a Gospel team and organized Christian fellowship as an undergraduate in Taiwan. He taught at the college level before attending Concordia Seminary, Hong Kong. Ordained in 1988, he served Eternal Life Lutheran Church in Taipei from 1988 to 1991. Most recently, he taught social work, counseling, and marriage/family-life classes at Chang Jung Christian University.

Shaw brings both an academic and parish-ministry background. He has also earned master’s degrees in chemistry and counseling. In 1999 he earned a doctorate in education from the University of South Dakota. His

academic experience helps him connect with universities and their students.

During the week, Light of Christ is a resource center for the Chinese community, helping with translation, legal issues, and immigration questions. Adjusting to new cultures is difficult for families, so the mission also offers a Christian parenting class led by a couple from Webster Gardens Lutheran Church. The 18-week video series is Bible-based, allowing opportunities for Christian witness as it assists parents.

Shaw emphasizes the need for ongoing prayer for these new Christians. “Sometimes their family members are not supportive of their new-found faith,” he adds. “I really appreciate the support of the brothers and sisters in Immanuel.”

Assisting the mission is a committee of Immanuel members who find teachers for ESL classes and arrange sponsor families who pray for and give Bibles to the newly baptized Christians. As district funding declines, the committee seeks grants and donors to support the work. It is eager to share a DVD with organizations and individuals who are interested in helping to support the mission.

“Who would have thought that we would have 140 people worshiping in Mandarin Chinese, and we would be growing in leaps and bounds?” asks Norbert Loeb, who chairs the Light of Christ Funding Committee. “It’s incredible! Yet we have to find the funds for this mission to go forward.”

Still, the mission is exciting to Rueckert. “Ten years ago, nobody could have dreamed that Immanuel would be doing this Chinese outreach,” he says. “Some are relocating, and some are here only temporarily, either as students or as parents of the students. And they go back!

“This is the exciting thing about this mission—we are sending Christians back to China.” ❁



As Dr. Paul Shaw preaches in Chinese, Kan Hsu, a member of Light of Christ Chinese Lutheran Mission, translates into English. Hsu, an immigrant from Hong Kong, was influenced by a Christian roommate who prayed for her for four years, even though Hsu once said, “Don’t talk to me about that [Christianity]!” Of Light of Christ, Hsu says, “I’m here because I speak the language. I can’t imagine myself not being part of this mission.”

Taking an extra step in Fresno

Anita Olvera's passion for her 'family' opens doors—and hearts

Anita Olvera still has trouble thinking of what she does as “evangelism.”

As the self-described “social-ministries person” at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Fresno, Calif., Olvera took the congregation’s “adopt a family at Christmas” ministry to a new level when she suggested “adopting” a family for an entire year.

So last January a local social-services agency put the congregation in touch with a young Hispanic couple, former gang members, with two young daughters.

Armed with grocery-store gift cards, children’s clothing, and other items provided by Redeemer members, Olvera drove across town several times a month to visit Domonique Del Toro, her fiancée, Thomas Hernandez, and their daughters, Destiny and Faith.

As the “face” of Redeemer, Olvera routinely drove Domonique and the girls to doctor appointments, helped the couple find jobs, gave parenting advice, and provided a “listening ear.”

A year later, Redeemer Pastor Clarence Eisberg has baptized the two Hernandez children, and Olvera has no intention of ending her relationship with the family. After all, she’s now Faith’s godmother and considers the Hernandez family as friends.

“My goal was to try to get somebody to a place where they could take care of themselves,” Olvera says, something she “would never have thought of as being evangelism.”

But along with the close relationship that developed between her family and the Hernandez family, Olvera says her desire to see children she cared about getting baptized seemed “natural.”

Del Toro says Olvera has “opened up a lot of doors” for her, encouraging her to finish her education and think about the future, and she thinks of her “almost as a mother.”

“When I’m really down, I call her,” Del Toro says. “I can talk to her about anything and I just feel better.”

She says she appreciates the entire Redeemer congregation, too. “If we didn’t have them, we would be struggling a lot. They’re very inspirational to us, and we thank them every day.”

Eisberg says the congregation’s relationship with the Hernandez family is just one example of its “genuinely friendly personality,” a result, he says, of having up to 90 percent of the 170-member congregation in Bible study and encouraging lay people to get involved in ministries they’re passionate about.

Bible study helps members “find out their purpose in life” and makes them more aware of outreach opportunities, Eisberg says, and Redeemer offers nearly a dozen Bible-study options, including classes for beginners, teens, women, men, older adults, and those who are considering joining the church.

“I believe the Word is what changes people,” says Redeemer member Beverly Huggins, who helped organize an “outreach luncheon” last fall at a local restaurant. The luncheon drew 50 women, including 31 nonmembers. Several are now involved in other Redeemer activities, Huggins says.

The Synod’s *Ablaze!* effort is about “building relationships,” says Chuck Huggins, Beverly’s husband and chairman of the congregation’s evangelism board. He believes *Ablaze!* is as much “about the people inside the church as it is about the people *outside* the church.”

“Get people into the Word, and the Word gets people inspired,” he says.

Reaching out to others in faith, notes Eisberg, “begins with who you are as a congregation—do you genuinely care about people and demonstrate that?” ❁



The Hernandez family poses with “family” from Redeemer Lutheran Church, Fresno, Calif., following the Nov. 11 baptism of Destiny, 2, and Faith, 1. From left are Pastor Clarence Eisberg; Anita Olvera, holding her godchild, Faith Hernandez; Thomas Hernandez, with Destiny; Domonique Del Toro; and sponsors Anthony Del Toro and Katrina Berlanga. At right, front, is Leah Olvera, Anita’s daughter.

Youth



by Roland Lovstad

New York youth events build relationships with Jesus and community among young people.

Imagine: Confirmation classes so enjoyable that young people invite their friends.

"We're blending the lines between confirmation and youth ministry," says Justin Vetrano as he describes "Youth *Ablaze!*"—a partnership involving about 10 congregations in the New York City area. "We are seeking ways for engaging young people in a relational ministry. At the same time we are teaching them the tenets of their faith."

On alternating weekends, a



Vetrano

team of five high-school students packs a van with musical instruments, props for puppet shows, or costumes for skits. They leave St.

James Lutheran Church in St. James, N.Y., where Vetrano is director of youth and family ministry. The team travels to one of eight congregations in Queens that rotate as hosts for teaching, witness, and fellowship.

In Queens, the pastors have decided to use the events for the main teaching points for their confirmation programs. Most congregations have one or two confirmation-age students, but the twice-monthly "Youth *Ablaze!*" sessions usually draw 35 to 40 participants. The host pastor provides the teaching, and St. James youth supply music and skits that coordinate with the lesson. Host congregations also supply food.

Every Tuesday, another team from St. James goes to St. John Lutheran Church in Holbrook, N.Y., for a similar activity. Because the congregation has a vacancy, Vetrano does the teaching.

"Youth *Ablaze!*" is an outgrowth of the confirmation program at St. James. In developing the program six years ago, the congregation has found ways to make instruction enjoyable without losing substance, involve youth during (and after) confirmation, and help them learn to witness to their faith.

On the second and fourth Sundays of the month, St. James youth gather for two hours of skits, games, music, and thematic instruction. Seventh- through ninth-grade confirmation students are assigned to small groups of five or six led by a high-school-age faith mentor.

The confirmation event is more like a mini youth gathering, with a band, confirmation instruction, and small groups in which participants can share about their lives, Vetrano says. "In making this an enjoyable experience, they naturally bring their friends," he continues. "We have young people who bring their Catholic friends, their Jewish friends, and in Queens, they bring their Muslim friends."

Confirmation evenings at St. James usually include about 150 young people with active youth leadership. Vetrano observes, "It's an incredibly powerful experience when you have 150 young people sitting in small groups, praying together."

In addition to Sunday evenings, students have to engage in fellowship and service activities in the church. Service and mission projects involve them in efforts such as raking leaves or cleaning houses for community residents. Summers see middle-school students participate in "servant events" in the area. High-school-age students travel greater distances for servant events and even embark on a Luther tour to Germany.

"Community and relationships, that's what it's all about—our relationship with God through Jesus Christ and how we live that out with people," says Vetrano. "It transcends fun. It gives young people purpose and makes them an active part of our church and the ministry of the congregation. That's who you are here." ❁

In addition to inviting their friends to confirmation classes, young people who participate in Youth *Ablaze!* reach out to their communities through mission activities and servant events such as a recent trip to aid residents in New Orleans.

Photo courtesy St. James Lutheran Church



... Sharing individually, in

ERIK NEIDER: FINDING STRENGTH THROUGH PRAYER

According to LT. Erik Neider of the U.S. Naval Reserve, sharing his faith has never been an easy thing to do.

"I worry about pushing people away or looking like a self-righteous Bible thumper," he says, adding that his work adds unique challenges with regard to everyday evangelism.

"The further I have progressed in my career as a naval officer, the more pressure I have felt to practice leadership over and above faith," Neider says. "That pressure is one of the reasons I felt compelled to apply to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis." After serving a tour of duty that ended in 2005, Neider entered the seminary, carefully balancing his life as a student, husband, and father to two lively boys.

Concordia Seminary was a welcome change for a man who had often prayed to God to "make him His instrument." But Neider's prayers were answered in an unexpected way when he was mobilized to support logistics in Kuwait, supporting, in turn, Operation Iraqi Freedom. The experience forced him to critically evaluate how to be an *Ablaze!* Christian while maintaining the integrity of being a naval officer.

"The manner in which I was mobilized made it very clear that 'making me His instrument' was exactly what He had in mind," Neider says. "I could not hide the fact that I had been mobilized from the seminary and that I was training to become a Lutheran minister. When people asked, I told them."

Because the small size of his unit did not allow for a chaplain to be assigned, Neider was asked to help meet the spiritual needs of the sailors as a lay

leader during the three-month training phase in Virginia. He continued that role once the unit was deployed to Kuwait, conducting a spiritual-needs survey so that he could serve the unit better.

"Two of my sailors asked for instruction in the Christian faith that would possibly lead to Baptism," Neider says. "The base chaplain gave me permission to provide the instruction. Using *Luther's Small Catechism* as the basis for 10 weeks of instruction, we had numerous Gospel-filled conversations leading to both sailors' baptisms on Aug. 12, 2007."

Neider notes that the communities and relationships that developed because he was able to share his faith with fellow service members, Christian and non-Christian alike, are among the most cherished memories of his time in Kuwait. He understands only too well that sharing the faith isn't an easy thing to do, but he does have a recommendation for those who would like to do more of it: pray.

"When you start each day in prayer, in the remembrance of your baptism and the blessing of your faith, you begin your work humbly, knowing that it is only because someone else had the courage to witness the faith that you 'got it' and are now righteous before God," Neider says. "In humility you are able to see Gospel moments—when the Good News of your salvation in Christ is on the tip of your tongue, and it is the only thing the person in front of you needs to hear."

And, Neider notes, because you prayerfully asked God to "make you His instrument," He will give you the courage to proclaim His Word.—D.S. ✻



Neider



Erik and Joelle Neider with sons Ben (left) and Luke. Neider returned recently from duty in the Persian Gulf.

community, at school

AARON REINKING: SHARING OUT OF COMPASSION

Some of the best moments of Aaron Reinking's life have come out of his decision to share his faith. Whether it's being open to spiritual conversations with his co-workers, answering a student's questions about his church, or writing for his Web site, evangelism is an essential part of his everyday life. Yet he's not always comfortable doing it.

"I guess in the last few years I've gotten better at sharing my faith because I've had more opportunities to do so," says Reinking, a member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Athens, Ga. "If you feel a little shy about it, God will give you the strength and the ability to do it."

One of the reasons Reinking wants to share his faith is because he knows he's supposed to do it.

"Jesus tells us many times in the New Testament that we are to share the message of the Gospel—it's what we're commanded to do as Christians," he notes. Yet Reinking's love for the people around him may be his greatest motivation.

"If we really care about people, we need to witness to them so that they can receive God's forgiveness," Reinking says.

He notes that several Bible studies and books about evangelism have motivated him to be more active in sharing his faith, bringing him back to methods of sharing

Jesus modeled in the New Testament. A member of his church's evangelism committee, he often teaches classes on the subject. He is even willing to travel to other churches to help revitalize or begin evangelism programs.

"If you ask most Christians if they should be witnessing, they will say 'yes!'" Reinking notes. "But if you ask them how to do it, they don't know."

Although he's always willing to talk, he has found that actions often speak louder than words. "Sometimes it's just the way that you present yourself, live up to your word, and show enthusiasm for what you're doing that can be a witness to your faith," he says. A public high school history teacher, Reinking tries to be accessible to students and their questions whenever he sees them, whether it's after class or out in the community.

"Sharing our faith shouldn't be something we feel forced to do, it should be something we're excited about doing because we're able to bring forgiveness and life to other people through bringing them God's Word," Reinking says. "If we're not witnessing, we're kind of hoarding the message and keeping it to ourselves when God wants us to go out and share it with others."—D.S. ❁



The Reinking family, left to right, Raegan, Tyler Streetman, Aaron, and Shashana.



... Sharing individually, in community, at school

IN GREAT FALLS: PARTNERS ON THE ROAD

I felt it was time for the congregation to take a look at how we could expand our ministry and go further in outreach in the community," says Rev. Kent Stenzel, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Great Falls, Mont.

As with a growing number of pastors and laity who see a need for outreach assistance, Stenzel contacted "The 72—Partners on the Road," a ministry of LCMS World Mission. Originally known as "Harvesters for Christ," the service trains and sends volunteer teams to help congregations design and meet their outreach objectives.

"The tendency is that you get stuck in a rut, and you can only see things one way," says Stenzel as he describes the visit of Loren and Marge Rehmer.

"The 72" team worked with Trinity's leaders from Sept. 14 to Oct 5. "For someone to come from the outside and to give some type of suggestions, or ask some questions, it gets people thinking," Stenzel says.

More than a century old, Trinity is the "mother church" in the Great Falls area. It averages about 165 worshipers at its Sunday and Wednesday evening services. While Great Falls is growing slowly, new homes are being built and new families—young as well as retirees—are moving in.

With the Rehmers' help, the congregation developed an "assimilation" grid. It reviews current work and plans activities in three areas: spiritual growth through worship and Bible study, involvement in the church through fellowship, and use of gifts and talents in the church. Plans are then charted for nonmembers in the community, people who have shown an interest in the congregation, new members, and those who have been members for more than six months.

"I think the highlight for me was really trying to get them to have a passion in the next year to enhance their ministry," Loren Rehmer says. "We find many congregations that just don't have a passion; they're going through the motions, and they've done things a certain way for many years."

Veterans of 11 such visits since joining the Harvesters in 1997, the Rehmers, both now retired, are residents of Prior Lake, Minn.,

and members of Crossview Lutheran Church in Edina. He has 40 years experience as a principal in Lutheran schools; she taught in preschool and kindergarten for 15 years.

Stenzel encouraged the Rehmers to help congregational leaders and boards begin to think "outside the box." They met with various boards, including the church council, and with the board of "Wee Disciples," which offers daycare, preschool, kindergarten, and first-grade classes.

"Loren is a real dynamic person, and he also is real truthful," Stenzel observes. "We wanted someone to come in and not sugarcoat an evaluation." As a result, Trinity already is working to involve new members and beginning two small-group Bible studies. The school is beginning a focus on encouraging nonmember parents to have their children baptized.

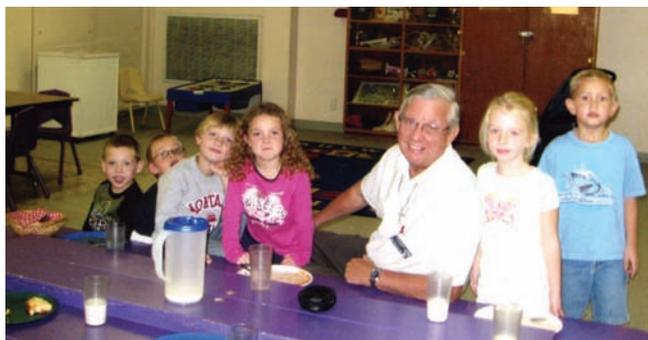
During their visit, the Rehmers also taught a workshop on witnessing, spoke to preschool staffs in the Montana District, taught weekday school classes, presented witnessing scenarios after worship services, and led devotions with the school children.

"It is *teaching*," says Marge Rehmer. "It's not *doing* for the congregation."

Loren Rehmer adds that they're sometimes expected to bring a "magic wand" to fill pews, but "The 72" teams seek to teach skills.

"At times, I think it probably strengthens our faith more than the people we work with," Marge Rehmer says.—R.L. ✿

For more information about "The 72" visit LCMS.org/witness and click on the icon for this story.



Loren Rehmer teaches a class at Wee Disciples Preschool. As volunteers with "The 72—Partners on the Road," Rehmer and his wife, Marge, helped Trinity Lutheran Church look at ways to expand its outreach to the community.



Photo courtesy Marge Rehmer

IN EAST POINT: LIVES CHANGED THROUGH OUTREACH

Christ Lutheran Church and School in East Point, Ga., is all about reaching out, helping out, and bringing in unchurched families.

The church helps its neighbors by hosting an annual food drive and holiday toy collection. It also serves as an Angel Food Ministries partner, with volunteers from both the church and school collecting and packing food to sell to families at a reduced cost.

The 100-member congregation and 65-student school also participate in community events, fairs, and holiday festivals, but it's their neighborhood walks that make the biggest impression.

Once a month, church members, school parents, and ministry leaders volunteer their Saturday morning to meet and greet people in the community.

"We just talk with them and then invite them to come to the church the following weekend for our 'Friends and Family Sunday,'" remarks Rev. Aaron Dickerson, Christ Lutheran education pastor and principal. "We also give out 'evangelism packets' containing information about the church and school."

Although many children have been introduced to Christ Lutheran School this way, the reality is that many families in the community simply cannot afford a Christian education. That's where the LCMS Black Ministry "Let the Children Come" scholarship fund comes in, notes Dr. Willie P. Stallworth Sr., associate executive director of education networking for Black Ministry. The fund supports Christ Lutheran's outreach vision.

Since Christ Lutheran School became eligible for scholarships four years ago, 65 percent of their scholarship recipients have been baptized. The students and their families are now active members of the church.

Christ Lutheran is a shining example of outreach—bringing students to the school for all the right reasons.

"This scholarship program is not just about a child getting a quality education, it's about reaching the families," Stallworth says. "The focus is winning souls for Christ."

Dickerson credits Christ Lutheran's dedicated staff for being so committed to outreach. "They commit a lot of their time during the week and always attend the monthly Friends and Family Sunday," he says.

In order to receive scholarship funds from Black Ministry, all school staff and church leaders are trained by Stallworth to view the school primarily as an outreach tool. He notes that the Black Ministry Schools program "Outstretched Hands to the Lost" is designed to make sharing one's faith a natural part of one's job and life. "I am certain those scholarship students were baptized as a result of how the Holy Spirit works through the people of Christ Lutheran and this model," Stallworth says.

Children participate in the monthly Friends and Family service, and parents, relatives, and family friends—often unchurched themselves—pack the sanctuary.

Dickerson tells the story of one woman, a faithful worshipper at another congregation, who was at Christ Lutheran for the first time to see her daughter dance at the service. As always, her heart was heavy because her husband was not in church with her.

"Through the preached Word and the worship experience, she was convicted to return home and minister to her husband," Dickerson says. "The next morning he came in to the church to speak with the staff and committed himself to the church and its ministries.

"That's what we try to do here: make families whole."

—D.S. ✪



Left: Christ Lutheran School is a shining example of outreach—bringing students to school for all the right reasons.

Right: Students at Christ Lutheran School await the beginning of a Grandparents' Day chapel service. With the students are teachers Robin Coleman (top left) and Charlene Dickerson.



... Sharing individually, in community, at school

IN IRVINE: A GREAT COMMISSION SCHOOL

Concordia University, Irvine, Calif., describes itself as “The Great Commission University,” offering ways for students to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in local and world mission service. As enrollment grows, there are also more opportunities to witness right on campus, observes Rev. Steven Borst, Irvine’s campus pastor.

Specifically, on-campus witness has received more attention the past three years, he explains. “About five percent of our student body doesn’t claim any church affiliation, and about 15 percent is what we would term spiritually inactive.”

International students—from 40 to 80 a year—present another opportunity, Borst adds. “Most come as non-Christians, and through our witness program we’ve created some events to share the faith with them.”

At least once a year, Irvine’s campus ministry offers a three- to six-hour “Share Workshop,” focusing on witnessing in everyday life and teaching ways to share one’s faith. Borst also has six part-time student staff members who help run the ministries. “I see my job as equipping and training them and empowering them to lead the different ministries,” he says.

Witness coordinator Daniel Vanderhyde has eight to 10 volunteers who meet every week for Bible study and event planning. “We are learning and growing together in Christ, and it is a real joy to have such great support,” he says.

“Loving service” is part of the witness ministry, according to Vanderhyde. On Sunday evenings, for example, volunteers go door-to-door in the residence halls. They offer to take out students’ trash and distribute thought-provoking, Gospel-centered pamphlets. Written by campus-ministry volunteers, the pamphlets follow a recycling theme and explain how Jesus Christ cleans up the “mess” in people’s lives.

“It’s rewarding to see how open people are to hearing about Christ when we initiate the conversation by offering to take out their trash,” Vanderhyde says.

During Halloween, Irvine’s campus ministry presented “Reality House,” its own version of a haunted house. “Our purpose was to explain that this world of pain and death is not all that exists, and that Jesus is the source of hope and life,” Vanderhyde says. “I absolutely love those moments when we get to clearly contrast the world’s view of reality with what we know in Christ.”

From Fullerton, Calif., and Tijuana, Mexico, to China and Hungary, Irvine students reach out to others through service events and mission trips. The goal: to share with others the faith with which they have been blessed.



A monthly witness chapel, called “Ten28,” uses popular music, movie clips, and drama to communicate the Gospel. “Students are encouraged to invite roommates who don’t normally go to chapel, because we see this as a chance to witness the faith to some of these students,” Vanderhyde says.

Response cards invite students’ questions and prayer requests. A Witness Team follows up. Borst may become involved if there are counseling requests. Because of these efforts, several students have asked to be baptized.

Local missions coordinator Kelly Warneke is enthusiastic about opportunities to serve God and others through missions. Many Christians think “missions” means living in obscure locations, she observes, adding, “There are opportunities to do missions all the time, and Christians of all backgrounds, interests, and abilities can be involved.”

Warneke is responsible for coordinating “anything that can be done in 24 hours or less.” Projects include visits to orphanages in Tijuana, Mexico, workdays with Habitat for Humanity/Thrivent Builds, collections for Operation Christmas Child, and assembling nonperishable food and toiletries for homeless people.

The campus world missions program sends students

further. Borst led a group to teach at English camps in Hungary, using biblical materials. This month a group is teaching at English camps in China. During spring break, students participate in servant events in Guatemala and Mississippi. Summer events include trips to South Africa and Korea.

“We train the students before they go,” Borst says. “For my trip to Hungary, we actually created the curriculum, using Bible stories and the message of the Gospel. We’ll meet all semester long, and we bring in an anthropology professor and an English as a Second Language teacher, who talk about communicating in different cultures.”

Borst estimates that 50 students are involved in Irvine’s on-campus witness arm, and more than 250 students—about 10 percent of the student body—participate in world or local mission activities.

“The mission of our campus ministry is making disciples of a new generation,” Borst comments. “We see that as not only nurturing the faith of Christians, but also to call them to discipleship through the call of faith. We see all of this flowing out of the mandate that Christ gives us.”—R.L. ❁



Expressing God's love in

About twice the size of New Hampshire and home to 8.5 million people, the Dominican Republic has one of the fastest economic growth rates in this hemisphere. However, marked income inequality remains, and about 40 percent of people live in poverty. Unemployment is near 28 percent, and the average annual income per person is \$1,600.

The members of St. Michael Lutheran Church, Fort Myers, Fla., became aware of the needs of people in the Dominican Republic when they began mission trips a few years ago to Santiago, their Dominican sister city.

Particularly troubled by the lack of services for people with developmental disabilities and by poor institutional conditions, St. Michael started financial and volunteer support for the Home of New Hope—a small, privately funded residential care facility.

In 2003, St. Michael approached Bethesda Lutheran Homes and Services of Watertown, Wis., an LCMS recognized service organization that serves people with developmental disabilities. Bethesda began providing training and resources for the Home of New Hope. This led to work with other local agencies—such as Dominican Childcare—to train workers in sharing Christ's love with children with disabilities.

In fall 2004, LCMS World Mission, LCMS World Relief and Human Care, Bethesda Lutheran Homes and Services, and the Central American Lutheran Mission Society (CALMS) signed an agreement to expand the work of St. Michael and Bethesda. This first-of-its-kind coalition sought to bring a collaborative approach to opening full-time mission work in the Dominican Republic.

"This is a unique opportunity for Bethesda to partner with the LCMS to establish a Lutheran church presence that tells people the Good News of Jesus and seeks to include people with disabilities and their families from the very beginning," says Rev. Earl Bleke, chief religious-life officer for Bethesda.

By God's grace, in August 2005, the partners celebrated the installation of missionaries in the Dominican Republic. The team includes Brazilian-born and Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil-trained church-planting missionary Rev. Walter Trescher Ries Jr., and LCMS World Mission developmental disabilities outreach missionary Danelle Putnam.

Putnam, who spent six years in Panama organizing Sunday-school and evangelism programs with a special emphasis on women and children, explains that the work in the Dominican Republic involves two main aspects: (1) theological education and servant-leader training for the formation of a Dominican Lutheran church and (2) outreach to persons with developmental disabilities.

"We are currently supporting three Dominican leaders in their church-planting efforts—two in Santo Domingo, the capital city, and one in Santiago, the second-largest city," Putnam says. **"We are also working on raising up leaders in Palmar Arriba, a rural town outside Santiago, to be leaders in a church-planting effort there."**

The following highlights the work in which Ries and Putnam are engaged.



Sharing the faith in the Dominican Republic, from top left, clockwise: Rev. Walter Trescher Ries Jr. leads a chapel service for children in Palmar Arriba; outreach missionary Danelle Putnam with students; baseball camp participants in Palmar Arriba; "Amigos de Jesus" in Santiago.

the Caribbean

LCMS partners bring care, hope, and Good News to the Dominican Republic.

SANTO DOMINGO: MEET JOSEPH

Joseph de la Cruz is a Dominican-Haitian living in Santo Domingo. "From the very beginning, we saw Joseph's commitment to the Lutheran church, but it took time for him to open up," Putnam says. "He came to every single class and devotion time. He was absent only when he visited his family in Haiti. Pastor Ries began to mentor him, suggesting books he could read on Christian leadership. We also began praying for him, and Joseph remained faithful to spending time in God's Word."

In the past few months, Putnam and Ries have observed a change in Joseph's personality. "His whole facial expression has changed," Putnam says. "He is smiling all the time, excited about ministry, inviting people to church and activities, and beginning studies to become a Lutheran pastor."

De la Cruz even lends an important hand to Ries and Putnam. "He has started coming along with me on visits to a home for children with developmental disabilities," Putnam says. "We teach songs, share Bible stories, and help the children learn how to pray."



SANTIAGO: 'AMIGOS DE JESUS'

As a means to reach out to people with developmental disabilities and their families in a community about 15 kilometers (nine miles) outside Santiago, Putnam began "Amigos de Jesus" (Friends of Jesus), a community-based Bible club.

Once a month, participants share a Bible story, play games, sing, pray, do a craft, and have a snack.

"The participants and parents have been thrilled with the activity so far," Putnam says. "Right now, we just have one "Amigos de Jesus" club, but soon we will be expanding."

Community volunteers will lead the clubs, Putnam explains. "The programs are designed to be extremely cost-effective so they are not a burden for parents or leaders. For example, we use recycled materials for crafts and take turns bringing a simple snack. The Lord has also provided four great women volunteers from the local community."

Putnam meets with the women monthly for planning and training. Each became a volunteer knowing she would be leading the group on her own in the future. As many as eight children, youth, and their parents have participated in the initial club sessions.

PALMAR ARRIBA: OUTREACH THROUGH BASEBALL

Ries and Putnam connected with Edward, a 16-year-old catcher, in early 2007 through a baseball clinic in Palmar Arriba. The well-received clinic was hosted by CALMS and a team led by Palmer Muench from the Brandon Sports Academy in Florida.

"Thank the Lord for the commitment of Edward, who has been coming to Wednesday evening services since February and plays drums in the praise [band]," says Putnam. "Please pray for Edward as he develops into a young leader, and praise the Lord for blessing Edward's efforts to share the love of Jesus."

Putnam adds that Edward also asked Pastor Ries to lead a Bible study at his home. The meeting had to be held outside because more than 150 adults attended. "Thank the Lord for all who attended and pray that more people of this community will come to hear God's Word," Putnam says. "Also, pray for the baseball coaches in the Palmar Arriba area. Pastor Ries has been able to form a friendship with all of them, and daily they are responding to God's love and the Holy Spirit's prompting to share this love with the children and youth they coach." ❁



Expressing God's love in the Caribbean

PARTNERS: CHANGING LIVES IN SANTO DOMINGO

During the biennial Dominican Republic Partners Forum in August, Willy and Santa Gaspar were invited to share how the collaborative ministry is changing their lives.

In 2005, God miraculously brought together dentist Willy Gaspar and Jim Pressnell, then director of the Central American Lutheran Mission Society (CALMS). Gaspar and a group of friends and colleagues had seen the film "Luther." They were interested in studying Lutheran theology and wanted to participate in the formation of a Lutheran church in the Dominican Republic. On the day Rev. Walter Trescher Ries Jr. and LCMS World Mission outreach missionary Danelle Putnam were installed, Gaspar and a group of 13 came to Santiago from Santo Domingo for the worship service.

Now two years later, the Gaspars told the partners how they have seen the power of the Word of God manifested in their marriage and their family life. He had never seen marriage as a life commitment, Gaspar said. Now, he added, he better understood his roles as a husband and father, and this change led to better communication and more unity in the family.

Today, Gaspar is one of three men enrolled in studies with Ries to become a Lutheran pastor for the emerging Dominican Lutheran church body. Both Gaspar and his wife are leaders in Las Americas, a developing Dominican community of about 300 families.

There is only a small Pentecostal church in Las Americas.

"It is our prayer that soon there will be a Lutheran church with Willy as the pastor," says Putnam. "Already, the community sees Willy as a spiritual leader. People have come to the Gaspar's house for spiritual help and prayer in the middle of the night. The activities that we have held in the community have been well received and well attended. People are already seeing Willy as their pastor, as they know he is studying to become one."

Recently, a new building was dedicated in Las Americas, Putnam adds. "At least 300 people attended, and Willy was asked to pray, lead a devotion, and offer the benediction. Willy had the opportunity to speak of Christ's love and salvation and offer himself as a spiritual public servant for the community."

Through the Holy Spirit working in missionaries, Dominican leaders, and partners, hundreds of adults and children are receiving the hope and Good News of Jesus Christ, observes LCMS World Mission Latin America regional director Rev. Jorge Groh.

So great are the opportunities, that at their forum, the partners agreed to call another pastor to help with the work, as well as to involve local church leaders in developing a strategy for the next few years.

"Praise God for His blessings in the Dominican Republic," says Groh. "Pray for the Lord's guidance in the calling of a pastor to be gifted in mentoring and training national leaders, as well as complementing the current mission team." —S.W. ☼



Rev. Walter Trescher Ries Jr. confirms Santa Gaspar. Willy Gaspar (center left), a dentist and Santa's husband, is studying to become a pastor for the emerging Dominican Lutheran church body.

The nations are coming! The nations are coming!

by Terence Groth

Some readers will remember the 1966 film *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!* In this comedy of the Cold War, a Russian submarine accidentally runs aground near a small New England town. Crewmembers come ashore to get help. The reaction of the townsfolk is surprise and fear. They are afraid the Russians have begun an invasion and are going to destroy them and take over—until they discover the Russians are just people like them.

Epiphany season sounds the alarm: The nations are coming! The nations are coming! The non-Hebrew people, the non-Israelites, *all* the people groups of the world are coming into God's family, the Church! Will we welcome them? Will we help bring them in? Will we recognize they are people just like us—sinners for whom Jesus gave His life?

No accident or miscalculation is bringing people from all over the globe into God's family. God let the patriarch Abraham in on the scope of His love and plan for sinners. How broad is God's vision?

Gen. 12:3b

To work out His plan, God picked the ragtag, no-account slave people who were descendants of Jacob (otherwise known as Israel). They were His specially chosen servant to bring the Good News to all the world. They tended to be blind to that and act as if God loved only them. But God's prophets kept telling them: God's love and forgiveness are for all people. He will bring all peoples into His family!

Not everyone was blind to God's universal plan. Who caught the vision and how did they express it in these passages?

Ps. 72:17

Is. 60:3

In his Gospel, St. Matthew shows that Isaiah's foresight was literally fulfilled when Jesus was just a baby. *Whom* did God bring to the baby Savior, from *where*?

Matt. 2:1-12

The Wise Men were the beginning of the nations coming to the Word made flesh, Jesus. What a surprise they must have been to Mary and Joseph! Did they say to each other: "The nations *are* coming"?

How does Matthew bring out this same accent at the end of his Gospel?

Matt. 28:18-20

In his letter to the Ephesians (in modern-day Turkey), the apostle Paul, the missionary to the non-Hebrews, unfolds and makes plain God's eternal plan of salvation. What was the surprise that God revealed to Paul and the early Hebrew Christians?

Eph. 3:6

What was amazing was that God was bringing the Gentiles into His family *on equal footing* with the Hebrews. God did not and does not look upon the Gentiles (that's most of us!) as second-class members of His family of saved people. All who repent of their sin and turn to Jesus for forgiveness are equal members of the same body, the Church.

The nations are coming—because God is bringing them! We—Hebrews and non-Hebrews—are proof of that. God gave His Son Jesus to die for *all* of us. Jesus carried the sins of *all* of us to the cross. Jesus shed His blood for *all* of us. Jesus rose again for *all* of us. God brought *all* of us into His Church through the gift of Holy Baptism. God feeds *all* of us with the body and blood, the treasures of Jesus, kingly food. God gives His Holy Spirit to live in *all* of us.

The nations are coming! The nations are coming! They're just like us—sinners loved by God, forgiven by Jesus. Let's welcome them—as God has welcomed us!



A hand of life-giving love

We ‘make and multiply’ disciples by positively and naturally introducing our good friend Jesus to other people in our everyday life.

so while you are going about in everyday life

2.

Lots of Christians are uncomfortable with the words “go and make disciples of all nations.” Why? Because we have, at times, caught, thought, and taught the Great Commission in Matt. 28:18–20 incompletely and even inaccurately. We have torn it out of its beautiful biblical context and given it a heavy Law orientation rather than understanding it as a noble appointment to live and serve as Jesus lived and served (2 Cor. 5:14–20).

The Great Commission is not “go and make,” two demanding commands. Rather it is an integrated five-part placement into privileged ambassadorship. The idea of a privileged ambassadorship is unpacked by Peter as being “chosen to tell about the excellent qualities of God, who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Let us think of this five-part placement as the fingers on an outstretched hand of life-saving love (see illustration):

All authority has been given to Jesus in heaven and earth

1.

The index finger (2) illustrates our going about in everyday relationships. In these associations, we are supported by Jesus, who has all authority (1, thumb) and is with us in every situation of life (5, pinky). The thumb of authority and power and the pinky of Jesus' stabilizing, comforting, and encouraging partnership bookend the Great Commission palm into a secure place of peace, harmony, safety, and support. In this secure place, believers grow into *disciplined-followers*.

Radiating out of this secure place, disciples, individually and as a group, confess Jesus the Christ and Son of God and make more disciplined-followers from among all the world's people (3, middle finger). Baptizing and teaching everything that Jesus has told us (4, ring finger) is our equipment for carrying out this ministry of disciplining people of all languages and cultures.

[Isaiah 49 and 51 fill in the New Testament Great Commission hand by telling us that God has put His words in our mouth and sheltered us in the palm of His hand.](#) Thus out of the palm of God's hand Jesus commissioned you and me (John 20:21) to follow His example of seeking and saving the lost (Luke 19:10). What a beautiful picture this is of each gathered group of disciplined-followers "gossiping the Gospel" of undeserved love, forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation to make and multiply more disciples! Is this picture reflected in you and your congregation? If not, what needs to happen so that it will be more fully reflected?

'FOLLOW ME'

Before answering that, we ought to pose this question: *What exactly does discipling mean, and how is it done?* In Matt. 4:19 Jesus started the process by saying, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." With these words Jesus invited Peter, Andrew, and then others into a relationship with Himself. He invited them to become disciplined-followers.

The heart of "disciplined following" is accurately identifying and confessing with Peter and the other disciples that Jesus is the "promised Savior, the Son of the Living God" (Matt. 16:16). For the first disciples it took 15-and-one-half chapters of trudging, watching, listening, miraculous signs, learning, interacting, evaluating, being sent, testifying, obeying, and disobeying in the Gospel of Matthew. In Acts 2 and Romans 8, this process is described as being baptized into Jesus' death for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38) and being raised to new life in Jesus the Christ by the glorious power of God the Father (Rom. 6:4). It happens for babies in their baptism and for adults in their Spirit-inspired confession. Basically, it is rescue from the powers of darkness and placement into the

disciple people of all languages and cultures

3.

by baptizing and teaching them everything Jesus has told us

4.

and recalling that Jesus is always with you until the end of time

5.

A hand of life-giving love

kingdom of the Son of God (Col. 1:13). Theologians call this *justification*.

The ongoing process involved in becoming more fully disciplined-followers of Jesus takes place through regularly confessing “You are my promised Savior, the Son of the living God and my Lord” in word and deed. Theologians call this *sanctification*. First Peter 1:3–4 calls it the new life in Christ. This new life is a tug-of-war between the Kingdom of Darkness (Matt. 8:12) and the Kingdom of Light (John 8:12). It is through this daily tug-of-war that the active new-life Christian is used by God to expand the Kingdom of Light and shrink the Kingdom of Darkness by making and multiplying disciples.

The Gospel of Matthew shows us that Jesus initiates this discipling of people into the Kingdom of Light by personally spreading the Good News (Matt. 4:23–25), in order to show His “forming followers” how they could also do it. He also taught them the appropriate attitudes and loyalty of a disciplined-follower (Matthew 5–7) and the actions of godly messengers (Matthew 8–9). In Matthew 10, Jesus gives His followers instructions about how to spread the message that the Kingdom is near. It is interesting to note that “after Jesus finished giving His disciples these instructions, He also actively participated in teaching the message” (Matt. 11:1). He not only taught His disciples about disciple-making in the abstract but also concretely taught it in His own Good News— spreading words and actions.

On the basis of their fledgling kingdom-building efforts (Matthew 10; Luke 10:1–24), the followers of Jesus were ready to learn more about how to confess Jesus as their promised Savior and Lord. Jesus pursued the process by using several “the Kingdom is like” illustrations. He taught His followers to live in the light (Ps. 56:13) on a daily basis by intentionally, unconditionally, and systematically sharing the Good News with those around them.

LIKE CHILDREN

Unconditional trust is a basic mark of discipleship in the Kingdom of Light. **This kind of discipleship blazes up in us, among us, and through us as we enter and engage the Kingdom like children.** The vigorous discipling energy of trust is exposed in the words, “I assure you that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom.” And again, “The greatest in the Kingdom is the one who humbles himself and becomes like a trusting child” (Matt. 18:3–4). The underlying idea here is that ultimate allegiance to Jesus is the necessary heart for a disciplined-follower living in the Kingdom of Light.

When trust flourishes in disciples, the yeast factor of the Kingdom is released. The yeast factor is the working of trust and faithful witnessing and its multiplying effects through the whole of the individual disciple’s life, the communal life of a congregation of disciples, and out into the community of people who are yet-to-become disciples. Jesus said it this way in Matthew 13 and Luke 13: “To what can I compare the Kingdom? It’s like yeast that a woman mixed into a large amount of flour until the yeast worked its way through all the flour.” This Kingdom truth is further clarified in Gal. 5:9, where it says, “It only takes a little yeast to spread through the whole batch of flour.”

‘O YOU OF WEAK FAITH’

The first disciples heard this evaluation—“O you of weak faith”—often from Jesus, seven times in the Gospel of Matthew alone. We also often find that our faith seems weak. However, be encouraged.

“The Kingdom is like” illustration of the mustard seed (Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 13) shows us that even with a small amount of faith much can happen. In this parable Jesus asks, “How can we show what the Kingdom is like? To what can we compare it? It’s like a mustard seed planted in the ground. Notice the mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds on earth. However, when planted it comes

up and becomes taller than all the garden plants. It grows such large branches that birds can nest in its shade.”

The many birds in the mustard-tree branches stand for the congregations of existing disciples, and also the yet-to-become disciples that the Spirit of God draws into the Kingdom of Light as you and I openly share the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus. Romans 10:14–15 tells us that it is this process of “gossiping the Gospel” in the course of our everyday life that God uses to make disciples and multiply congregations of disciples.

Matthew ends his gospel by exploding discipling into the future as he extends to each of us the Great Commission hand (Matt. 28:18–20). Matthew extends this gracious hand to motivate and guide us in openly introducing our good friend Jesus to others. He encourages you and me to intentionally and positively gossip-the-Gospel, baptize, and systematically hear and obey the words and works of Jesus our Savior and Lord, thus forming disciplined-followers who disciple others into being disciplined-followers (2 Tim. 2:2), so that God’s mission of expanding the Kingdom of Light and shrinking the Kingdom of Darkness in this world may flourish.



Outreach tools, resources and idea

LCMS districts, ministries, congregations, partners, and individuals offer an array of tools to help us share the Good News of Jesus Christ in our homes, neighborhoods, and nation.

Here are a few resources selected by Rev. Scott Snow, LCMS World Mission national director of outreach. Visit www.lcms.org/ablaze for his expanded list and to find links and contact information of partners offering resources for you today.



An initiative to ignite 100 million hearts with the Gospel!

Current world population (estimated): 6,668,516,688.

The number of unreached or uncommitted people with whom the Gospel has been shared and reported is:

As of December 12, 2007

0	0	6	,	7	6	8	,	0	0	0
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Definitions ?	Activities	People Reached
Total	1906	6,768,000

One goal of the *Ablaze!* movement is to share the Gospel with 100 million unreached or uncommitted people by 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Visit www.lcms.org/ablaze and create an *Ablaze!* account. Report your *Ablaze!* activities and submit your stories of how the Holy Spirit worked and moved in you to share your faith in Jesus with someone who does not yet know Him.

Personal Evangelism Tools



The Gospel Story by Colors Bracelet is a colored silicone bracelet complete with a laminated card. You can wear this Gospel-sharing guide wherever you go and always be ready to share Christ's saving grace. Order online at www.ctainc.com or call 1-888-285-3598. Be sure to use the discount code SSGOSP.



Jellybean Easter eggs proclaim the true meaning of Easter. Each plastic egg contains colored jellybeans that share the Gospel story and a special Easter message. A children's Easter sermon is also included with each order. Order this item online at www.creativecommunications.com or call 1-800-325-9414.



The EvangeCube® is an easy-to-use picture puzzle that adults and children alike can use to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is also a great tool for presenting the Gospel across cultures or to non-readers. Visit www.e3resources.org to order this item and to view a four-minute demonstration video.

starters . . . to help you share the hope of our faith

The Gospel According to John (NIV) is a handy carry-along Gospel to keep and refer to, or hand out, as a witnessing tool. Order online at www.ibs.org or call 1-800-524-1588.

The Pocket Cross with Card reminds us of what it means to be a Christian. Order this item online from Concordia Publishing House at www.cph.org or call 1-800-325-2040. Ask for item SO1487.

The John 3:16 coin is a metal coin with a cross etching. The words of John 3:16 are printed around the edge of the coin. Order at www.creativecommunications.com or call 1-800-325-9414.

For by Grace You Have Been Saved is a bronze metal piece with Luther's seal etched on one side and Eph. 2:8-9 on the other. Order this item online at www.creativecommunications.com or call 1-800-325-9414.

The God's Word translation (New Testament) is a pocket version of the New Testament great for sharing with others. The *God's Word* translation is easy for nonbelievers to understand. Order online at www.godsword.org.

Tools for Congregations



Become a registered Ablaze! partner congregation and add a Web icon link from your Web site to the *Ablaze!* Web site. Also, be sure to post your faith-sharing stories online to encourage others. Register and download a Web-ready icon at www.lcms.org/ablaze or call 1-800-433-3954.

Promote involvement in short-term mission opportunities. Hundreds of individual and team opportunities are waiting to be filled worldwide! Call 1-800-433-3954 or visit the LCMS World Mission Web site at www.lcmsworldmission.org/service.

Encourage and promote electronic subscriptions to the "Evangelgram," "Mission News," and other mission lists. Go to www.lcms.org and click on the "E-news" button to subscribe.

Participate in an Ablaze! prayer vigil. Download or view the materials at www.lcms.org/ablaze or call 1-800-433-3954.

Highlight quarterly "Faith-Sharing Tools" during a worship service. Prayerfully distribute these guides at the conclusion of the service, encouraging every member to use them in sharing their faith that week.

Order the "Congregational Tool Kit" from Lutheran Hour Ministries. Learn more from LHM's Web site at www.lhm.org.

Use the "Friendship Ablaze!" materials.

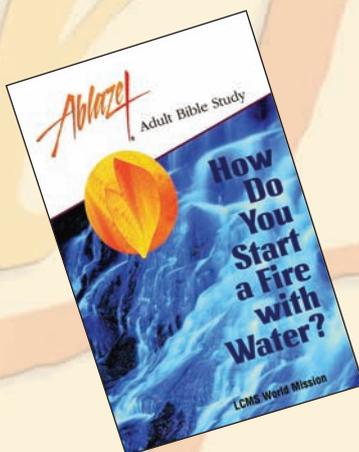
Six weeks of Bible studies, sermon notes, children's messages and more building up to a Friendship Sunday experience. Download or view the materials from the Center for U.S. Missions at www.friendshipablaze.org.

"Daughter" a new congregation.

Contact the Center for U.S. Missions for more information at www.centerforusmissions.org or your local district mission executive.

Invite a team of trained evangelism volunteers from The 72—Partners on the Road to work alongside your congregation for three weeks to begin, revitalize, or expand your outreach ministry. Learn more at www.lcmsworldmission.org/the72 or call 1-800-433-3954.

Sign up for "We Can! Pastor and People Planning Big for Rural America." Go to www.spife.org or call 1-888-463-5127.



Commit to the eight-session Bible study, "How Do You Start a Fire with Water?" published by CPH. This adult study is perfect for your Sunday-school hour or small-group study. Order your copies online at www.cph.org or call 1-800-325-2040.



Take the "50 Days Ablaze! Outreach Journey." The "Ablaze! Crossing the Jordan" DVD sent to each LCMS congregation in the fall of 2005 includes these materials. For more information about the seven-week series, including sermon notes and Bible studies, visit www.stlukecabot.org or www.lcms.org/ablaze.

Host an "Equipping to Share" workshop from Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM). Contact LHM at 1-800-944-3450 or send an e-mail to equipping@lhm.org.

Note: The “official notices” are published for a single purpose only: giving notice of a result, namely, changes in the Synod’s membership rosters by the addition or deletion of the names of individuals and congregations. It is not always appropriate that reasons for the changes be identified in the published notices. Since a change can occur for any of a variety of reasons, no assumptions may be made merely from the fact that a change has occurred.—Ed.

Official Notices— From the Districts

JANET JOHNSON was reinstated to the Commissioned Minister roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod at the September 2007 Council of Presidents meeting.—Rev. Randall L. Golter, president, LCMS Rocky Mountain District.

Official Notices—Colloquies

LUKE WAYNE KASTNER, Palm Springs, Calif., has submitted his application for the Pastoral Colloquy Program through The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. GINGER HINGST, Wisner, Neb.; CHRISTINA O’NEILL, Las Vegas, Nev.; DEANNA SCHMIDT, Sioux City, Iowa; SHELLY WALKER, Lakeland, Fla.; CHRISTINE MOOREHOUSE, Arlington, Texas, have submitted their applications for the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through CUEnet. Correspondence regarding their applications should be directed within four weeks after publication of this notice to Dr. William R. Diekelman, Chairman, Colloquy Committee, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295.

GEMMA RAYMOND, Las Vegas, Nev., and KAREN RUSSO, Las Vegas, Nev., have completed the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Dr. Becky Peters, Director, Colloquy Program, Concordia University, 1530 Concordia West, Irvine, CA 92612-3203.

LE ANN VOGEL, Rapid City, S.D., and LEAH OLSON, Heron Lake, Minn., have completed the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Dr. Stephen C. Stohlmann, Director of Colloquy, Concordia University, 275 Syndicate St. North, St. Paul, MN 55104.

ROBINETTE A. FLACH, Plainfield, Ill., has completed the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and is, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Mark A. Waldron, Director of Teacher Colloquy, Concordia University Chicago, 7400 Augusta St., River Forest, IL 60305-1499.

DIANE HARRIES, Overland Park, Kan.; SHARON ZILM, Godfrey, Ill.; and SARAH KOHLHOF, Lincoln, Neb., have completed the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Brian L. Friedrich, President and CEO, Concordia University Nebraska, 800 N. Columbia Ave., Seward, NE 68434-1599.

KELLY LINEBRINK, Giddings, Texas, and DEBRA JEFFERS, Houston, Texas, have completed the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Dr. Jim McConnell, Assistant Colloquy Program Director, Concordia University Texas, 3400 Interstate Highway 35 North, Austin, TX 78705-2799.

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UMB Bank, n.a. serves as the custodian for the LCEF IRA program.

Always consult a tax professional for tax advice. LCEF is a nonprofit religious organization; therefore, LCEF investments are not SIPC- or FDIC-insured bank deposit accounts. This is not an offer to sell LCEF investments, nor a solicitation to buy. LCEF will offer and sell its investments only in states where authorized. The offer is made solely by LCEF’s Offering Circular. Investors should carefully read the LCEF Offering Circular before making investment decisions.

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Investments • Loans • Services

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Official Notices—Requests for Reinstatement

MICHAEL A. CROON, Niles, Ill., has applied for reinstatement to the Minister of Religion—Ordained roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. WENDY BORCHERDING, Lincoln, Neb., and CAROL WALTHER, Collinsville, Ill., have applied for reinstatement to the Minister of Religion—Commissioned roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Correspondence regarding these applications should be directed to the undersigned for receipt no later than Feb. 5.—Dr. Raymond L. Hartwig, Secretary, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295.

Positions

The Lutheran Witness welcomes notices for positions available at affiliated entities and Recognized Service Organizations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The deadline for receipt of such notices is the 20th of the month two months prior to the publication month (e.g., Jan. 20 for the March issue). Send notices to karen.higgins@lcms.org.—Ed.

Laborers For Christ, a ministry service of the **Lutheran Church Extension Fund—Missouri Synod**, is recruiting **construction laborers** to work for LCMS congregations and organizations, helping them build their own facilities. Construction experience (labor and/or project management) is preferred but not required. Laborers camp at the construction site, are paid minimum wage, and can work seasonally or year-round. Those approaching retirement and looking for a way to put Christian faith into action may call (800) 843-5233 or visit www.lcef.org/services.

Concordia University College of Alberta, Edmonton, seeks to fill three positions listed below. A member of the AUCC, Concordia is authorized to grant bachelor's degrees in Arts, Science, Management, Education, and Environmental Health, and a master's degree in Information Systems Security Management. It also offers the Director of Parish Services as a post-degree diploma program. All qualified applicants are encouraged to apply; however, Canadian citizens and permanent residents will be given priority.

Applicants should submit a curriculum vitae and letter describing their teaching and research experience, and arrange to have their official transcripts and three letters of reference forwarded. Each applicant must also complete a Concordia Faculty Application form, available in PDF format at <http://www.concordia.ab.ca/pdf/concordia-application-faculty.pdf>.

• The **Department of English** seeks an **assistant professor of English** to begin Aug. 1, subject to budgetary approval; salary commensurate with qualifications and experience. A qualified candidate should be a generalist with a doctorate in English, demonstrated excellence in undergraduate teaching, the ability to maintain a research program, and teaching qualifications in medieval literature and at least one other area. The successful candidate will have a commitment to the educational mission and values of Concordia University College of Alberta as a Christian liberal-arts university college. Review of applications will begin Feb. 19 and continue until the position is filled.

Send all application material to Dr. Ruth Glancy, Coordinator, English, c/o Human Resources, Concordia University College of Alberta, 7128 Ada Blvd., Edmonton AB T5B 4E4; fax: (780) 479-2793;

tel: (780) 479-9214; humanresources@concordia.ab.ca. Online applications are not accepted at this time.

• The **Department of Religious Studies** invites applications or nominations for two permanent-stream positions at the **assistant professor** level to begin Aug. 1, subject to budgetary approval; salary commensurate with qualifications and experience; Ph.D. or Th.D. required. (1) A specialist in New Testament studies. The ability to teach classes in Hebrew Scriptures or Patristics is desirable. (2) A specialist in Reformation Theology and History from a Lutheran perspective. The ability to teach classes in Medieval Theology and History, or Modern Christian Theology and History, is desirable. The successful candidates will have the ability to maintain a research program, the potential to teach effectively at the undergraduate level, from introductory to senior courses in the Christian faith, and the

desire to contribute to the development of the Religious Studies program.

Candidates must demonstrate a commitment to the educational mission and values of Concordia as a liberal-arts university college of the Lutheran Church—Canada. Review of applications will begin Feb. 11 and continue until the position is filled.

Send all application material to Dr. Steven Muir, Chair of Religious Studies; steven.muir@concordia.ab.ca; c/o Human Resources, Concordia University College of Alberta, 7128 Ada Blvd., Edmonton AB T5B 4E4; fax: (780) 479-2793; tel: (780) 479-9214; humanresources@concordia.ab.ca. Online applications are not accepted at this time.

• The **Department of Sociology** seeks an **assistant professor of Sociology** to begin Aug. 1; salary commensurate with qualifications and experi-

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(Continued from Page 33)

ence. The successful candidate will be qualified to teach theory and preferably criminology as well as one or more of the following: social problems, mass media, health care, gender studies, family, and sociology of religion. Requirements include a Ph.D. in Sociology, demonstrated excellence in undergraduate teaching, the ability to maintain an active research program, and a commitment to the educational mission and values of Concordia University College of Alberta as a Christian liberal-arts university college. Review of applications will begin Feb. 19 and continue until the position is filled.

Send all application material to Dr. John Jayachandran, Coordinator, Sociology; john.jayachandran@concordia.ab.ca; c/o Human Resources, Concordia University College of Alberta, 7128 Ada Blvd., Edmonton AB T5B 4E4; fax: (780) 479-2793; tel: (780) 479-9214; humanresources@concordia.ab.ca. Online applications are not accepted at this time.

The Board of Directors of the **Texas District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS)** is accepting nominations for a district staff position as **Mission and Ministry facilitator**.

The function of a district mission and ministry facilitator is to assist congregations in reaching the lost, discipling the saved, and caring for people. This is done through planting new congregations and strengthening established congregations in their outreach.

Candidates must be "team players" who are committed to the historic theological position of the LCMS and be active members of an LCMS congregation or on the roster of the Synod.

Candidates must possess the personal and professional abilities to assist congregations in:

- church planting;
- strategic planning and process formulation;
- leadership development;
- organization and management;
- effective communication.

Church planting experience is helpful.

The mission and ministry facilitator will be "in the field" working with congregations a majority of time.

Candidate resumes should be sent to Rev. Ken Hennings, President, Texas District, LCMS, 7900 E. Highway 290, Austin, TX 78724-2499. Deadline for submitting an application is Feb. 15.

Lutherans For Life (LFL), Nevada, Iowa, a pan-Lutheran, pro-life educational ministry, seeks a **director of operations**. Duties include supervising staff, developing programs to enhance LFL's efficiency, working with LFL's director of development to implement fundraising activities, and, in collaboration with the executive director, developing action plans to implement LFL's strategic plan.

Requirements: A member in good standing of a Lutheran congregation, a minimum of a bachelor's degree and/or business or project management experience, solid experience in administration, personnel management, marketing, and development. Another skill necessary is keeping LFL growing as an effective organization and at the same time desiring to serve the Lord of Life in a vitally important pro-life ministry that equips Lutheran pastors and congregations to share a Gospel-centered, "For Life" message.

Send resume by Jan. 31 to Lutherans For Life, 1120 South G Ave., Nevada, IA 50201-2774; (888) 364-5433; fax: (515) 382-3020; info@lutheransfor-life.org.

Children's Christian Concern Society (CCCS), Topeka, Kan., an RSO of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, seeks to fill the position of executive director. This person reports to the

Board of Directors and must be committed to the mission of the CCCS of "Sharing the love of Jesus with children around the world through Christian education." This position requires a self-starter with management and organizational ability and a willingness to work with volunteers. Experience in business management, skill in writing and public speaking, and a willingness to travel domestically and internationally in underdeveloped environments is required. For a complete job description, visit www.ccskids.org or call (620) 564-2422.

Send resumes to Marlene Ernsting, Search Committee Chairman, 173 S.E. 100 Ave., Ellinwood, KS 67526; ernsting1934@embarqmail.com.

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, has an opening for a **graphic artist** who will design and produce seminary publications, brochures, and other communication pieces for release to the seminary community and the public.

Duties include planning and creating graphic images, participating in the development of all printed and electronic/Web-based materials, such as brochures, magazines, newsletters, academic catalogs, news and promotional materials, and event-related material required for the seminary. Additionally, the graphic artist will develop and maintain a searchable and retrievable archiving system for all seminary publications and photographs, monitor various phases of the production process, such as checking printer proofs, and remain current on emerging technology and techniques in the graphic-arts field. This position requires a strong attention to detail and the ability to work on multiple projects with tight deadlines.

The ideal candidate will have a bachelor's degree in art, graphic art, or a related field, and a minimum of three years of experience as a graphic artist in academia or the publishing industry. A candidate with excellent graphic-design skills is preferred. A combination of work experience, training, and education commensurate with a bachelor's degree may be substituted. Proficiency in Quark Desktop Publishing, PhotoShop, Illustrator, and font-management software such as Suitcase, and experience developing and maintaining material archives is required.

Concordia Seminary offers comprehensive benefits including medical, dental, 403(b), and pension. For consideration, mail, E-mail, or fax a resume along with salary requirements to Human Resources, Concordia Seminary, 801 Seminary Place, St. Louis, MO 63105; humanresources@cs.edu; fax: (314) 505-7001.

The following institutions of the Concordia University System (CUS) are seeking candidates for positions described below:

• **Concordia University, Irvine**, seeks to fill the following faculty positions: **associate dean**, School of Business and Professional Studies; **Nursing**.

• **Concordia University Nebraska, Seward**, seeks to fill the following faculty positions: **Music Education; Education (Special Education)**.

• **Concordia University Texas, Austin**, seeks to fill the following faculty positions: **History; part-time Biology; director of Nursing; Accounting; Management; Education** (deployed to Houston).

• **Concordia University Wisconsin** seeks to fill the following faculty positions: **associate dean, Graduate Education; Social Sciences; Clinical Psychology**.

For more information about these and other CUS positions, including complete job descriptions, qualifications, and application process, visit <http://www.lcms.org/cusjobs> and click on "Positions Available at Our Campuses."

Anniversaries

The Lutheran Witness *welcomes notices 50 words in length from LCMS congregations about their upcoming "milestone" anniversaries. The deadline for receipt of such notices is the 20th of the month two months prior to the publication month (e.g., Jan. 20 for the March issue). Send notices to karen.higgins@lcms.org. —Ed.*

Saint John's, Fort Collins, Colo., will begin its year-long 100th anniversary celebration in January. Former pastors and sons of congregation will be guest preachers each month. May 4 will be the festival service with former pastor Ron Nickel preaching at the 10 a.m. service. A catered dinner and reception will follow.

Fountain of Life, Tucson, Ariz., will celebrate its 50th anniversary with two special services, followed by a banquet, Jan. 13. Tickets are required for the banquet. Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick, president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, will be guest speaker. Contact the church office at (520) 747-1213 or visit www.follutheran.org.

St. John, Vancouver, Wash., will celebrate its 100th anniversary throughout 2008, beginning with a dinner Feb. 1. Dr. Robert Sylwester will be keynote speaker. Other monthly guest preachers include Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick, president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. For more information, visit www.stjohnlc.com or call (360) 573-1461.

Peace, Rockport, Texas, will celebrate its 40th anniversary beginning Feb. 2 with a time of fellowship and lunch. Divine Service will be at 3 p.m., Feb. 3, followed by a catered meal at the VFW hall. For more information, contact Rosanne before Jan. 14 at (361) 727-0249 or rose1802003@yahoo.com.

Christ The Vine, Damascus, Ore., will celebrate its 30th anniversary Feb. 3. The Christi Crux Vocal Ensemble from Concordia University, Portland, will sing, and Rev. Jim Pressnell, also from Concordia, Portland, will be guest preacher. A reception will follow. Contact the church office at (503) 658-5650 or visit www.christthevine-lutheran.com.

Immanuel, Okawville, Ill., will celebrate its 100th anniversary throughout 2008, beginning with the 10 a.m. service Feb. 3. Other celebration services include June 1, July 20, Aug. 24, Sept. 28, and Nov. 16. Guest preachers include the district president, a former pastor, sons of the congregation, and a seminary president. Contact Janet Lange at (618) 243-6216.

Faith, Dunedin, Fla., will celebrate its 50th anniversary with a festival worship at 10 a.m., Feb. 3. Rev. Gerhard Michael, president of the Florida-Georgia District, will be guest preacher. A banquet will be hosted in the fellowship hall Feb. 2. Contact the church office at (727) 733-2657.

Salem Church and School, Jacksonville, Ill., will celebrate its 150th anniversary throughout the year, beginning March 2. Rev. Frederick Riemer, pastor emeritus, will be guest speaker. Rev. Paul Deterding, son of the congregation, will be guest speaker Sept. 14. Contact the church office at (217) 243-3419.

St. Paul's, Independence, Mo., will celebrate its 100th anniversary throughout the year. Rev. Harold Luckritz will preach at 9 a.m., April 20. Retired pastor Rev. Al Engler will preach at 9 a.m., June 22, and retired former pastor Rev. Robert Huelse will preach at 10:30 a.m., Oct. 19, with a dinner to follow. E-mail Iadrheil@juno.com or call (816) 924-4936.

'Matrimony-back' Guarantee?

A jeweler was getting married. When it came time to slip the ring on his bride's finger, he hesitated.

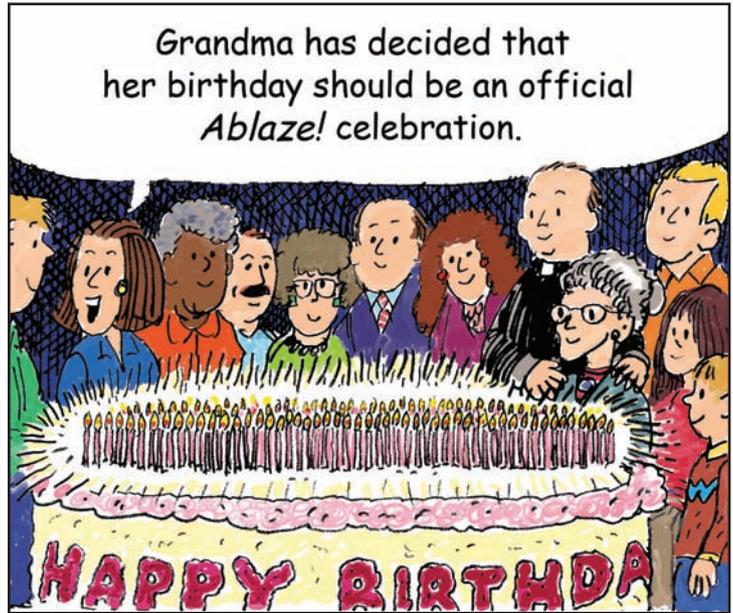
"With this ring ...," prompted the pastor, noting the jeweler appeared more than a little nervous.

"With this ring ...," the jeweler began haltingly. "With this ring ..."

"Well?" said the pastor.

"With this ring ... we provide a written guarantee, reminding the customer that the price will be refunded if the ring is not as represented, and the ring is returned."

Courtesy of George Kottwitz
Trinity Lutheran Church
Edwardsville, Ill.



Meet the authors



Dr. Eugene W. Bunkowske is the Feichtner-endowed Chair Professor of Christian Outreach at the Oswald Hoffmann School of Christian Outreach (OHSCO), connected to Concordia University in St. Paul, Minn. Introducing his good friend Jesus to others is the "beating heart" of Christianity worldwide for Dr. Bunkowske.



Roland Lovstad is a free-lance writer and a member of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Perryville, Mo.



Diane Strzelecki is a Chicago writer and a member of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Palatine, Ill.



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Stacey Welcenbach is director of communication services for LCMS World Mission.



Dr. R. Reed Lessing is director of the Graduate School and associate professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Concordia Publishing House recently published his commentary on Jonah.



Rev. Scott Snow is national director of outreach for LCMS World Mission.