



THE LUTHERAN WITNESS™



Revelation and Inspiration

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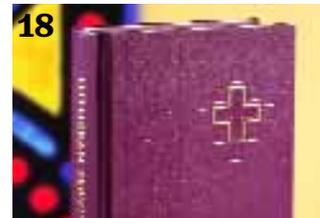
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TO THE READER

Normally, we use this space to draw your attention to a particular article—often the cover story—in the issue at hand. This month, though, I'd like to comment on the regular department known as "Letters."

Each month, we receive far more letters-to-the-editor than we possibly can hope to print. This is both gratifying and a shame. It's gratifying because so many readers take the time each month to share their thoughts on stories, columns, and other letters. But

it's also a shame because, owing to space limitations, we can publish only a handful.

This will change in coming months with the advent of a vastly revised *Lutheran Witness* Web site (www.lcms.org/witness). Right now, the *Witness* Web site is but a collection of PDF files (basically electronic photographs) of the current and past issues. But later this year, the site will become much more multifaceted, dynamic, and interactive—one feature being the inclusion of many letters-to-the-editor not appearing in the print version of the *Witness*.

Even with its current, static, PDF format, the *Witness* site had some 40,000 story downloads last month. This is up from 10,000 last January. The trend is good, and it should get even better once the new site is up and running.

So, please keep those cards and letters coming! And please watch for news in coming issues about the new Web site's arrival, when, among other benefits to readers, more of your letters will be seen.

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

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The Parables

Thank you for Dr. Peter Scaer's "Stories Jesus Told" (July/August '06). I especially enjoyed his interpretation of Jesus' parable of the hidden treasure (Matt. 13:44), in which he states that Jesus is the man being spoken of in the story. I had never thought of the parable in that way before.

Dr. Scaer's explanation helped me realize once again how much Jesus loves me and what He sacrificed for my salvation. It also brought home the truth of

Usually I just scan my *Witness* and am pleased to find an article that's stimulating and challenging. When my July/August issue arrived, I immediately noticed a new look. It was nothing especially radical, but the cover was intriguing and led me to the article on parables. From there, I found myself drawn to all the other major stories. Such intrigue seldom happens.

I commend the *Witness* for the relevance of its features menu of late. You are turning the editorial perspective from the institution-

Thank you for Helen Hartman's "Hasta Siempre." It is a beautiful example of unity in Christ that cuts across denominational barriers. That unity is neither ours to create nor to deny, but to seek and affirm as a gift from God.

*Rev. Arthur Simon
Hyattsville, Md.*

Out of the shadows

It's been more than a year since you published it, but I just read it, and I want to say your article on mental illness ("You Are Not Alone," June/July '05) was inspiring.

I think it's wonderful when a fairly conservative denomination like the LCMS takes a serious look at an issue that usually is not discussed in church—or elsewhere, for that matter.

I am a Christian, a baptized member of the more liberal ELCA, and I have schizophrenia. I pray other denominations will follow suit in discussing this vital issue.

May God bless you.

*Kelly Donahue
Albuquerque, N.M.*

The author of the story, Paula Schlueter Ross, a writer/editor in the Synod's Communications Department, won the top national award in the Associated Church Press' "professional resource" category for this story.—Ed.

Intelligent Design

I was gratified by Dr. Paul Zimmerman's "By Design, Not by Accident" (July/August '06). It's good to hear voices from the Synod's academic leadership confronting the atheistic postulate of evolution.

It has been depressing to come into contact with so many LCMS educators, from primary grades through graduate school, who take offense at questions dealing with origins. Many students, including

'No matter how many times one reads a particular verse or chapter in Scripture, there is always something more wonderful to be revealed.'

*Ken Spiker
Las Vegas, Nev.*



Hebrews 4:12. The Word of God truly is living and powerful. No matter how many times one reads a particular verse or chapter, there is always something more to be learned, always something more wonderful to be revealed.

*Ken Spiker
Las Vegas, Nev.*

Point, counterpoint

The new format of *The Lutheran Witness* leaves something to be desired. The articles are shorter, and too much space is wasted by using huge title pages. In general, the magazine just isn't attractive.

I suspect the *Witness* has received many critical letters but has chosen not to print them. Your reasoning may be that letters regarding format do not concern content. However, I think it's unfair to your readers not to address formatting concerns as well.

*Steve Alan Galayda
Granite City, Ill.*

al ("This is what we want you to read") to the readership (speaking to our interests and needs).

Keep up your pursuit of this new look.

*Robert E.A. Lee
Baldwin, N.Y.*

'Until always'

I was shocked, angered, and saddened by "Hasta Siempre" ("Lifeline," July/August '06). This article's main idea is that if you become friends with someone who is kind, caring, does nice things, has a warm smile, and has memorized liturgy, long prayers, and the Apostles' Creed, it's OK to worship in her church.

I am angry at those who dressed this article in sheep's clothing. And I am saddened to see Lutheranism take a step backward to the errors the early church so strongly opposed.

*Gordon T. Mueller
Bay City, Mich.*

those in the sciences, graduate from LCMS colleges without receiving even a portion of the vast amount of scientific evidence concurring with the teachings of Scripture. Too often belief “by faith” seems to be used as an expression to avoid discussion.

The Lord gave us a few pounds of gray matter. I don't believe it was intended *not* to be used by the Holy Spirit. We live in a fascinating age of scientific discovery, much of which can be useful in strengthening our faith.

*Jerome Michels
Prior Lake, Minn.*

We welcome letters that comment on articles in The Lutheran Witness. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. Send letters to “Letters,” c/o The Lutheran Witness, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; or send them via e-mail to Lutheran.Witness@LCMS.org. Please include your name, postal address, and telephone number.



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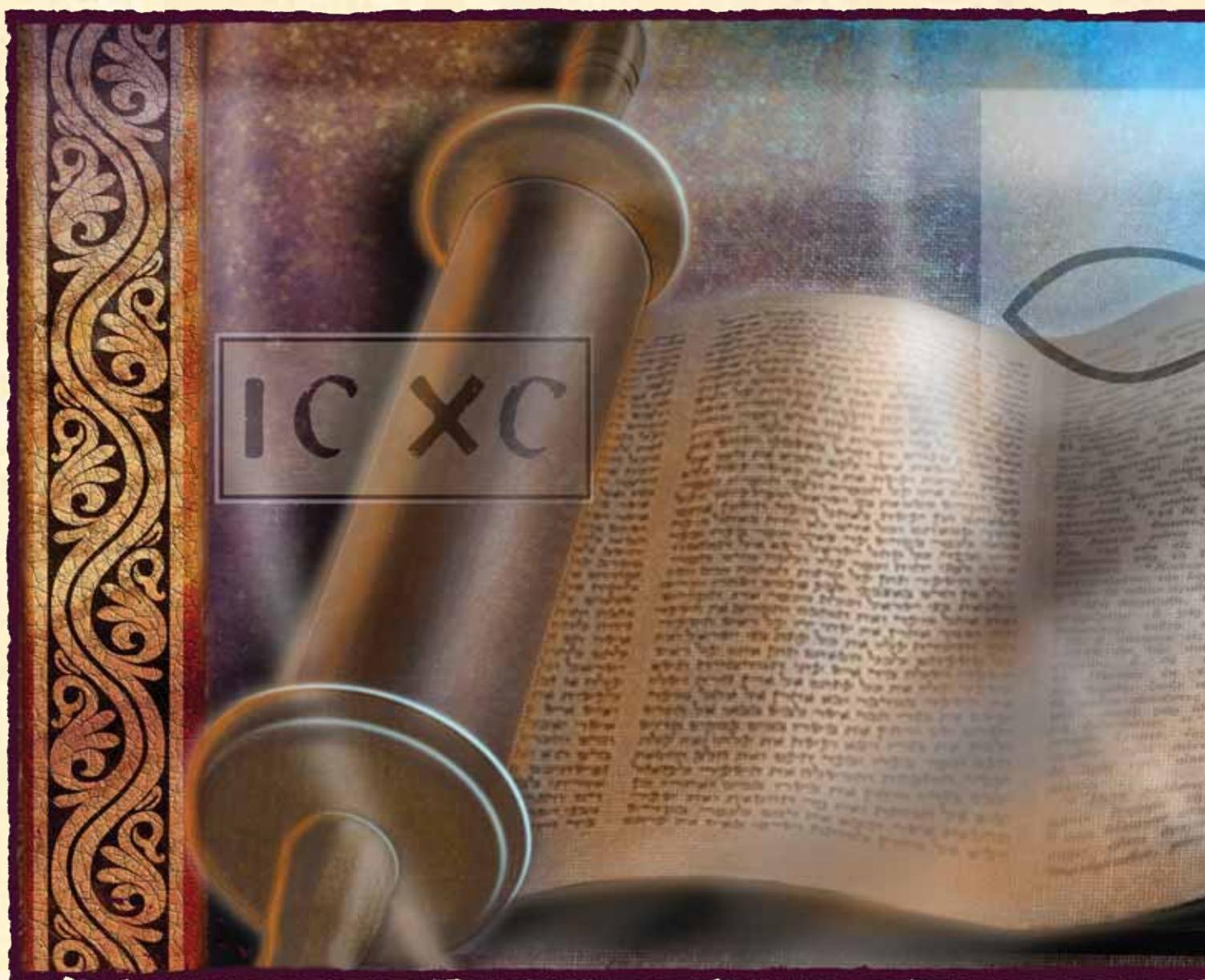
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The Revelation and Inspiration of the New Testament

Why did some and not other writings enter the canon of what became the New Testament?

by Jeffrey Kloha



“The Bible did not arrive from heaven by facsimile!”

That statement by the fictitious “canon expert” Leigh Teabing in *The Da Vinci Code* is meant to startle and shock us. But should it?

Actually, the author, Dan Brown, got at least this one thing right. It may seem that the Bibles we have grown to love through constant use have always looked the same. Yes, there are many translations, but no matter the version or publisher, the same 66 books always appear in the same sequence. But it may be surprising to many to learn that this familiar form of the Bible did not exist until 1804.

Prior to that, every printed Bible had more books,

including the Old Testament *Apocrypha*. And some of the writings that we regularly read were called into question, particularly at the time of the Reformation. In fact, Martin Luther rearranged the sequence of the New Testament books in his translation. He placed Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation at the end as a sort of appendix, with prefaces that warned readers to use great caution in reading them.

So how did we get “The Bible”?

That question is relevant today. Other “gospels,” which offer alternative views of Jesus, His teachings, and the significance of His death and resurrection, have received recent publicity. You no doubt have heard *The Da Vinci Code* version of how we got the Bible. The true story, however, is not so simple.



Early “Bibles”

For the first few decades after Pentecost, the church got along nicely with a much smaller Bible than ours—the same as Jesus’ Bible—the Old Testament. Since only about 10 to 15 percent of the people in the Roman Empire could read, most encountered the Scriptures not as a book to read at home, but as they heard it read in worship. The apostles and pastors would preach the Gospel based on Old Testament texts (read Acts 17:1–3). So the Gospel was preached, and the Spirit was at work, even though there was not yet a “New Testament.”

The writings that eventually made up the New Testament did not precede the preaching of the Gospel and the formation of the church, but were written by Christians in order to strengthen the faith of fellow Christians. By the end of the 40s, Paul began writing letters to individual congregations. It’s clear that these congregations already knew the Gospel and were able to sort true writings from false writings.

His letter to Galatians, for example, addresses congregations to whom he had already preached and now

What is a “Gospel”?

The word “gospel” initially was used to describe the “good news”—the oral proclamation by and about Jesus, that He came to die and rise in order to restore humanity to its Creator. By the mid-second century, however, the use of “gospel” did not focus on the proclamation about Jesus for salvation, but referred to a specific genre of literature. Eventually, any writing that had Jesus as a character in the story came to be called a “gospel.”

were struggling to understand the nature of the Gospel and its implications for Christian life.

Over the next decade or two, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written, also to specific groups of Christians and for specific purposes. Luke, for example, wrote his account so that a man named Theophilus “might have certainty concerning the things he had been taught.” Luke wrote to further strengthen his faith—and no doubt that of others.

It is likely that all the books which eventually made up the New Testament were written on individual scrolls, much like the writings of the Old Testament scroll of Isaiah that Jesus read in the synagogue (Luke

4:16–21). This was standard practice in Judaism as well as in the Hellenistic world. By the end of the first century, however, a major change took place: Christians started using a book format called a *codex*. Now, for the first time, several writings could be bound together. Once in a *codex*, writings could not be added or taken away without destroying the whole. For reasons that are not entirely clear, only Christians adopted the *codex* format for their writings. The rest of the Hellenistic world continued to use scrolls for several centuries.

The first New Testament writings to be collected together in a *codex* were 13 of Paul’s letters, the same ones that we read today. Early Christians did not call it a “New Testament,” but the *apostolos* or *apostolikon*—the apostle’s writings. Based on references to it in early Christian writings, this *codex* must have existed sometime before the end of the first century.

For the first time, something recognizable as a Bible New Testament existed.

The second *codex* Christians adopted was the four gospels. The date of its creation is somewhat unclear, but references to such *codices* date back to about A.D. 150. For the first time, the same four gospels that we read today were found in a single book. This book was called the *euaggelion* and the *mega biblion*—the “Gospel book” and the “important book.” This gospel *codex* always included—and only included—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Today, we have nine *codices* that were written right around the year 200. Two of these are manuscripts of Paul’s letters (one mostly complete), three are copies of the four gospels (one complete), one complete copy of John, and three small fragments of gospel manuscripts that have only a handful of pages left.

By the middle of the second century, the church had two “volumes” of the New Testament. One was a *codex* of the 13 Pauline letters and the other a *codex* of the four Gospels. Pastors and theologians used these books, in addition to the Old Testament, for their teaching and preaching.

The so-called “lost gospels” were not yet written by 150, when the core books of the New Testament were widely, if not universally, used as authoritative in Christian congregations.

In the fourth century, parchment from sheepskin (called vellum)

Codex Sinaiticus, a fourth-century Greek manuscript discovered in a monastery near Mt. Sinai in 1844, is the oldest complete New Testament. Its well-preserved leaves measure 15 by 14 inches. The writing is in brown ink with four columns per page.



replaced the crude paper woven from reeds (called papyrus) for the writing of *codices*. Parchment was much stronger, so the entire Old and New Testaments could be bound under one cover. Two beautiful manuscripts are preserved from this time: the *Codex Sinaiticus* and the *Codex Vaticanus*. For the first time what we would recognize as a “Bible” existed.

These large *codices* still showed some uncertainty about the extent of the canon (a collection of authoritative writings). While the four gospels and 13 Pauline letters had been firmly established as authoritative for some 150 years by this point, there were questions about the rest of the New Testament. (See the sidebar “Criteria for the Canon.”) Not all churches used or recognized writings as Jude, 2 Peter, and, in particular, Revelation. Some churches used writings that are unfamiliar to us. The Letter of Barnabas and Shepherd of Hermas are in *Codex Sinaiticus* and 1 and 2 Clement are in *Codex Alexandrinus*.

While it’s true that there was some uncertainty about the extent of the canon in the fourth century, the uncertainty is over books that were then, even as today, considered less important for the Christian life. They may have debated whether to read Revelation, but the church never debated whether to read the “Gospel of Judas.”

Other “gospels”

The recent publication of the “Gospel of Judas” seems to throw the question of the canon wide open. Were there other early gospels? Were they suppressed by church officials? Do they offer a more accurate portrayal of Jesus than the canonical gospels? The last

The Criteria for Canonicity

Among the criteria that contributed to the development of the New Testament canon are the following:

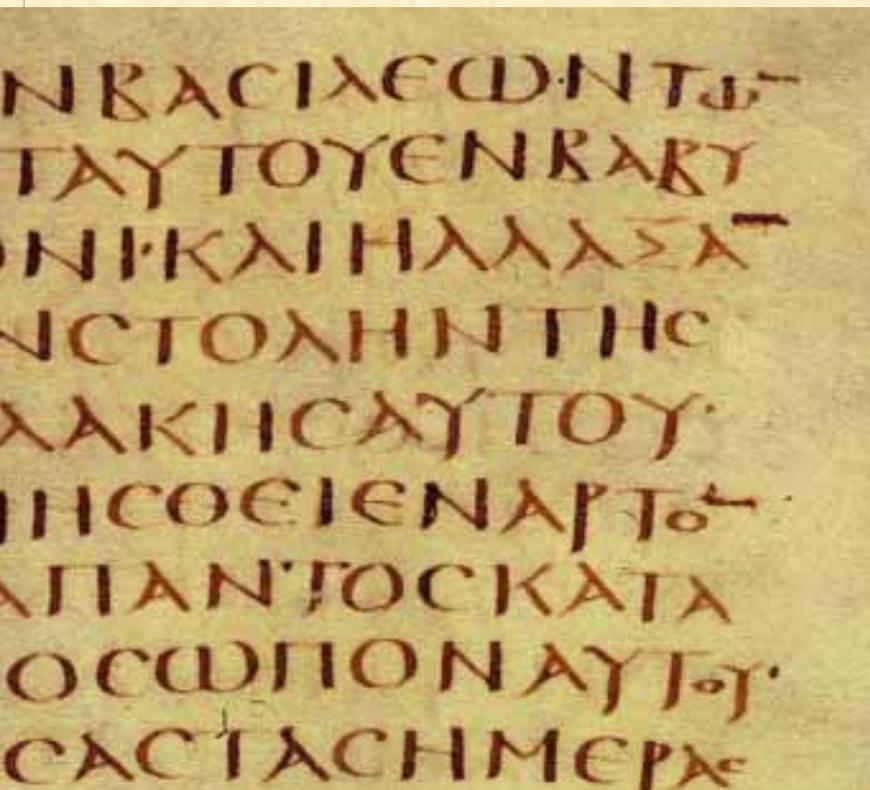
1. **Apostolic Authority** — established for each book, that is, it was written by one of Jesus’ apostles or their closest companions.
2. **Orthodox Message** — consistent with the apostolic faith found in the apostolic writings and preserved in the churches founded by the apostles.
3. **Universal Acceptance** — enjoyed widespread recognition in the catholic (universal) church.
4. **Liturgical Use** — read publicly along with the Old Testament when early Christians gathered for the Lord’s Supper or worship services.

question is the most important, for if the church’s proclamation of a resurrected Christ has been false for 2,000 years, then, as Paul says, “our faith is futile” and we are “still in our sins” (1 Cor. 15:17).

Browse the religion section of a bookstore and you’ll find books like “The Lost Gospels” and “The Complete Gospels,” with stories and sayings that sound very strange to us. For example, the “Gospel of Philip” claims Jesus taught, “The creation began in a mistake, for he who made it desired to make it imperishable and immortal. He fell short and did not attain his desire. For the world was never imperishable, and neither was the one who made the world imperishable.”

The religion behind these books is not orthodox Christianity. In the second century, some Christians were influenced by Gnosticism, a diverse religion with roots in Persia and in the philosophy of Plato. The name comes from the Greek word *gnosis*—“knowledge.” Its core tenet is that humanity is imprisoned in an imperfect world and body. By receiving a secret spiritual knowledge, a person’s divine nature is awakened and freed from the constraints of the physical world. “God” is not a personal being, but an impersonal divine force that is present in greater or lesser degrees in a whole host of spiritual beings, one of whom created the world.

If you read these other “gospels,” it becomes quite clear that they don’t represent



“Gospels” without the Gospel

Thomas, c. 150. A collection of random sayings attributed to Jesus, some of which are similar to, and may be drawn from, the canonical gospels. Not a full-blown “Gnostic” text, but some sayings lean toward those beliefs.

Judas, 150–170. A Gnostic text with descriptions of Gnostic cosmology and mockery of Christianity. Found in a manuscript with other Gnostic writings previously known.

Philip, 200–350. A blending of Christian and Gnostic thought. Focuses on a unique perspective on the nature of the resurrection. Possibly a Gnostic catechetical text.

Mary, c. 175. A dialogue between Mary Magdalene and the disciples, where she reveals to them things that Jesus told her privately after His resurrection. Much of the revelation discusses a Gnostic view of reality.

Peter, c. 175. Generally orthodox in its outlook, it describes Jesus’ passion as if He were something of a superman. Strong, anti-Jewish perspective.

Infancy Gospel of Thomas, likely 2nd or 3rd century. A fantasy that imagines Jesus as a boy performing miracles and possessing amazing knowledge.

Christian beliefs, but something altogether different. They have no connection with the Jesus who walked the earth. They were written between 125 and 250 years after His death, and they put words in His mouth that would be impossible for any first-century Jew to say. No one who grew up going to synagogue and reading the Torah could believe that God is perishable, or that creation was a “mistake.”

How did Jesus get involved in all this? Ironically, it seems to be the fault of well-intentioned Christians. Marcion, for example, was raised in the church in Asia Minor and Rome. But he concluded that Christianity needed to be preached in a way that was suitable to his contemporaries. Since Gnosticism was popular, he knitted the Christian story to the Gnostic story. Yahweh became the evil demiurge (a subordinate deity) who created the world and trapped humans in their physical bodies. Jesus became the revealer of truth who frees humanity from the physical world.

Jesus is presented very differently in these gospels. He is not Jewish, nor is He the Son of God. He does not walk the earth showing the presence of the Kingdom of God by His miracles. He does not enter Jerusalem on a donkey, undergo a trial and suffering, die on a cross, and rise from the dead. Instead, in these gospels, Jesus is essentially a talking head who brings “knowledge” to those who are worthy.

These texts were written not to testify to the Gospel, but to teach Gnosticism. They were written not by Christians for Christians, nor were they copied and used by Christians. When Christians made their *codices*, they included only Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—never Thomas or Mary or Philip. When Gnostics made their *codices*, they included only Gnostic writings. The *codex* that contains “gospel of Judas, for example, contains three other writings, all of them clearly Gnostic texts.

The Church never debated whether to include these writings in the New Testament. They had settled on Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John before these other gospels had even been written.

Paul’s letters, written before the canonical gospels, portray Jesus as divine and worthy of worship and praise just as Yahweh is divine and worthy of worship and praise. The clearest example of this is Phil. 2:5–11, where Jesus is described as being “in the form of God.” By His work on the cross He serves all, and so “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” This is the same praise given to Yahweh in Isaiah 45:23.

Paul didn’t present a formal argument for the divinity of Christ for the Christians in Philippi; they already seemed to grasp this truth. Those who promote the alternative gospels never mention Paul’s letters, letters that confirm that the Gospel message presented in the canonical gospels matches early Christian preaching. The alternative gospels present something entirely different. They were written well after Jesus’ death and the writing of the canonical gospels. And they were written, read, and copied by people who did not identify themselves as Christian. They are gospels without any Gospel.

The Church’s response

First, we should study history. God acts in history, as attested in the Scriptures, and still does today. Since

the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith through the preaching of the same Gospel, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper to bring forgiveness and new life. Our history does not leap from the book of Acts to the Reformation to the formation of the LCMS in 1847. Unless we recognize God working throughout history in bringing about His Kingdom through the proclamation of the Gospel, we will be confused by those who construct their own versions of history in order to marginalize the Gospel.

But we can't pretend that these aren't genuine issues. The people to whom we must make the Gospel known have seen the movies, read the books, and often assume that what the Bible says about Jesus is only one version of the story. While pointing them to the resurrected Jesus, we may need to have answers to *why* we believe that these gospels are true, and *why* the other gospels cannot be the basis of life or truth.

From the day of Pentecost down to this very day, this Gospel has been preached: The Father sent His Son to die and rise in order to reconcile us to Himself, and the Spirit was sent to create and sustain faith until the Kingdom of God appears in its full glory. This Gospel is attested in the canonical gospels and the writings of Paul. The church wrote and was shaped by these writings long before these other "gospels" were even written—decades before in some cases, centuries in others. The fact is that there was no "debate" about whether or not to include Thomas or Judas in what we now call the New Testament.

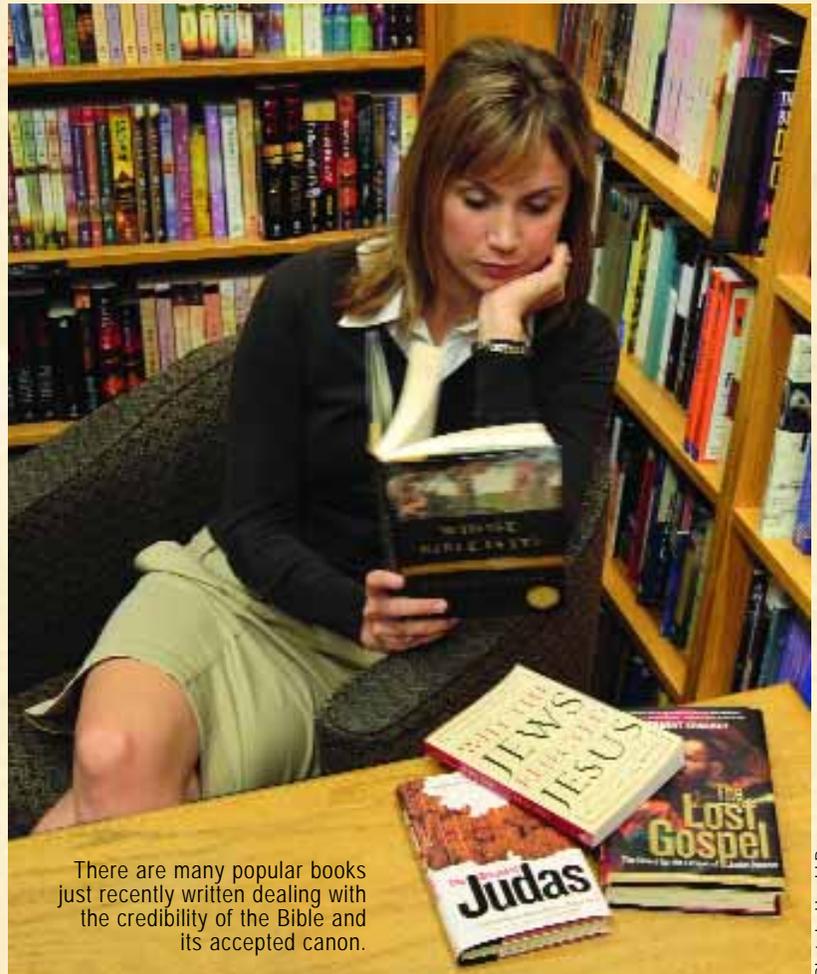
Second, we must recognize the issue. No one, not even the most vehement anti-Christian, is calling for a rebirth of a Gnostic church. Instead, these alternative gospels with their allegedly alternative Christianities are being trumpeted to denigrate Christianity. If orthodox Christianity was only one of many versions of Christianity in the second century, so the argument goes, then the Church cannot make any claims that its Gospel alone can save.

But mere condemnation of those who promote these views accomplishes nothing.

The third response from the Church is to continue to do what the Spirit has always led the Church to do: Testify to "the only name given under heaven by which men must be saved."

Today, society is confused and searching. While studies state that about 80 percent of Americans believe there is a god, far fewer believe in justification by grace through faith in Jesus.

What many do believe, unfortunately, is that the Church's teaching and preaching no longer "works." The real issue is not which gospels are right, but who is God, what is the world, and where do we fit in.



There are many popular books just recently written dealing with the credibility of the Bible and its accepted canon.

Photo by Harold Rau

In a religious culture where Jesus is reduced to a sage, a self-help guru, or a means to wealth and prosperity, it is tempting to make the message more "attractive" and "relevant." We have seen where this led in the Early Church. But in so doing, we risk losing the one thing that the Spirit wants to bring: the forgiveness of sins. This alone restores us to our Father. And this is only accomplished by the death and bodily resurrection of Jesus.

Our faith is not in the Bible, nor is our work finished when we have defended the Bible against detractors. Our faith is in Jesus Christ, and our task is to bring the good news of His salvation to our struggling and confused friends, neighbors, and indeed all people.

Rev. Jeffrey Kloha is assistant professor of exegetical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

‘Who Else Is Going to Do It?’

by Kim Plummer Krull

More than 2,000 years ago, Jesus tended to both spiritual and physical needs. As He preached the Gospel, He also fed the hungry and healed the sick.

Through the years, our Lutheran forefathers said much about the mercy Jesus modeled:

In 1519, Martin Luther defined the Lord’s Supper, saying that belief in the Gospel through Word and Sacrament coincides with care for people in need: “There your heart must go out in love and devotion and learn that this sacrament is a sacrament of love, and that love and service are given you and you again must render love and service to Christ and His needy ones...”

In writing about pastoral duties, the great 17th-century Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhard said, “Ministers of the church should not think that what is related to the care of the poor is foreign to them.”

Today, Rev. Jon Zehnder defines the Lutheran view of mercy a bit more succinctly: “Where we see need, we jump in,” said the pastor of St. Michael Lutheran Church, Fort Myers, Fla.

Throughout the Synod, LCMS members of all ages and backgrounds are “jumping in.” Here are only four examples of Lutherans who are making mercy happen.

*“Where we see need,
we jump in.”*



Retired grandpa leads relief team to Gulf Coast

At 77, Forrest Moeckel could spend his summer traveling or boating (two past pastimes) or cooling out in the air-conditioned comfort of his Brentwood, Mo., home. Instead, he hit the sweltering city streets and cajoled everyone from appliance dealers to a trucking company to help turn his idea for a hurricane-relief expedition into a reality.

"If we don't look at needs and try to do something about them, who else is going to do it?" asked Moeckel, taking a break from the never-ending tasks involved with sending 16 volunteer workers and two 18-wheelers loaded with appliances to Louisiana and Mississippi.

The more the retired businessman and Mount Calvary Lutheran Church member learned about the struggles of Hurricane Katrina victims, the more he pushed to lead his congregation's youth group to the Gulf Coast for the annual servant trek. Then he made making the trip his full-time job.

This grandfather of five convinced a trucking company to donate rigs and drivers to contribute their time. He coaxed deals out of appliance dealers. And he raised more than \$40,000, including donations

from fellow congregants, local schools and businesses, and a \$20,000 matching grant from LCMS World Relief/Human Care.

"Forrest wore out his knuckles to get donations for this great cause," said Rev. Dr. Darrell Zimmerman. "Our mission statement here at Mount Calvary is to share the saving love of Christ that transforms ordinary people into extraordinary servants. Forrest has totally taken that to heart."

On a steamy July morning, Moeckel and his team helped unload washers, dryers, microwaves, and refrigerators in St. Bernard Parish, that section of New Orleans most devastated by Katrina. Only about 10,000 people remain of the 67,000 who once lived there.

As those weary survivors try to clean up and restore their homes, many live in FEMA trailers without appliances. On this particular day, 25 families (all members from nearby Christ Lutheran Church in Chalmette) received the tools they need to once again cook meals and wash clothing.

That's the kind of mercy Forrest Moeckel believes the Lord had in mind when, a few years ago, the retired grandpa knew God had "planted a seed in my heart.

I've done the boat thing and traveled," Moeckel said. "Now I want to do this."



Photos courtesy Forrest Moeckel

The efforts of Forrest Moeckel (far left with hat) bring youth groups, tractor-trailers, appliances, and equipment to "Katrina-land."

Mother/physician makes time for neighbors who suffer

Dr. Anita Scribner was about to leave for a two-week medical mission trip to Kenya. But before she tackled the challenges of providing health care and education in a country with widespread AIDS and poverty, she dealt with needs closer to her Longview, Texas, home: Making arrangements for patients in her infectious-diseases practice and for her duties as medical director of an organization that cares for 700 people living with HIV/AIDS in northern Texas.

While Dr. Scribner teaches and tends to the sick in Kenya, her husband, Ray, will run the household that includes the couple's four children (ages 5–11), plus five visiting nieces and nephews.

"My husband is my rock," Dr. Scribner said. "I just hope he's still speaking to me when I get back after leaving him with nine kids for two weeks."

Jokes aside, making time to help people in need is a priority for this busy mother, physician, and member of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Longview. Last summer, she traveled to Kenya with a medical mission assessment team coordinated by LCMS World Relief/Human Care. She also has volunteered in Guatemala, assisting Refuge International with an effort to rid every young Guatemalan of worms.

This summer, Dr. Scribner was preparing to return to Kenya, a country where she has seen too many children orphaned by AIDS. Many live on the streets or as

servants. "As a mother, the thought of my children trying to survive in similar circumstances makes me nauseated," she said.

This Texas Lutheran is proud that her small congregation raised \$13,676 to buy medications for Kenyan clinics. (They did it, of course, Lone Star-style: with barbecues and chili cook-offs.) She stresses that her "scant amount" of overseas effort pales in comparison to career missionaries who devote their lives to mission fields.

Her pastor would be better able to articulate her motivation to care for the needy in foreign lands, she said, but she agreed to take a stab at it. "I go because we are compelled by the love of Christ to render any assistance we can to neighbors who suffer," she said. "Our neighbors in Africa who lie two in a cot, dying from AIDS, in facilities we wouldn't call hospitals -- they suffer."

Sharing God's love on both sides of the wall

While Lori Wilbert works to enhance the lives of inmates who may never again live beyond bars, she also strives to enlighten people in the pews of Chicago-area churches.

"So many have written this population off," said the deaconess about her work at Stateville Correctional Center, a men's maximum-security prison near Joliet, Ill. "I try to explain that they (inmates) are someone's brother, son, father. They can't all be lumped together as someone who did something hideous. Not every one is the killer who made the newspapers."

No, but her students do include murderers, rapists, drug dealers, and other hard-core felons. That's why her other job—fund-raising—carries its own challenges.

In 1986, the LCMS Northern Illinois District called

Photos courtesy Anita Scribner



The far-flung service of Dr. Anita Scribner takes her from Texas to Guatemala to Kenya.

Deaconess Lori Wilbert reminds inmates at a maximum-security prison in Illinois that they are not "written off."



Photos by Mary Compton



Wilbert to serve as a deaconess in prison chaplaincy. Three years ago, budget constraints forced the district to cut all chaplains from its payroll. Determined to continue her work, Wilbert set about raising her own salary by making presentations in area churches.

She carefully explains what she calls “the theology piece” of her work. “God’s grace is for all of us, and the transformation for all of us happens through the Holy Spirit,” said Wilbert, who earned a bachelor’s degree in theology from Concordia University, River Forest, and was consecrated into ministry service as a deaconess in 1984. “Luther made it very clear: Sin is sin, therefore grace is grace. We are all sinners in God’s eyes, and all sinners are saved by the blood of Christ.”

Wilbert says she always has had a heart for “fringe populations.” As part of her deaconess studies, she volunteered at the Cook County Jail and felt drawn to touch lives “behind the wall.”

Today at Stateville, she teaches a course that explores issues like accountability, grief, parenting, addictions, and spirituality. Her classes are so popular that more than 200 inmates are on the waiting list.

“Traditionally, the Department of Corrections is not the place a person goes to be corrected or to grow in a positive way,” Wilbert said. “I hope to enable positive growth and allow the Holy Spirit to work transformation in the lives of individuals through God’s love and grace.”

And, she adds, positive growth happens on both sides of the wall. “I learn as much from the incarcerated as they learn from me,” she said. “Probably more!”

To help support Wilbert’s ministry, contact the Northern Illinois District, (708) 449-3020.

Giving children hope in the Dominican

Jeff Dinkel took a break from repair work at the small Christian school struggling to serve some of the Dominican Republic’s most disadvantaged youth. He ventured into the Santiago slums.

Wanting to see where the school’s street-children students live, he stood overlooking a shantytown. “I turned to walk away and felt this incredible emotional weight. My knees gave out,” Dinkel recalled. “I heard a

voice as clear as a bell saying, ‘You have the time, the talent, the money. You are the one.’”

Since his first mission trip to the Dominican Republic in 1999, this 58-year-old former auto mechanic, schoolteacher, and member of St. Michael Lutheran Church has raised awareness of desperate needs 800 miles southeast of his Fort Myers, Fla., congregation.

“I was deeply moved by Diamela (Pascasio),” Dinkel said, referring to the woman who turned her home into the Christian school. “I had to do something.”

Today, that “something” has grown in several, far-reaching directions in the Dominican Republic. One is a sponsorship program coordinated by Dinkel that matches Fort Myers Lutherans with needy children shunned by public schools. These financial sponsorships first enabled 50 children to get a Christian education; today, that number has grown to 220.

St. Michael members also have supported the remodeling and expansion of Pascasio’s Genesis School and building the new Lutheran Home School in nearby Palmar Arriba. The congregation’s Dominican work got the ball rolling on an ambitious effort by LCMS World Relief/Human Care, LCMS World Mission, and Bethesda Lutheran Homes and Services to improve the plight of children with developmental disabilities and plant the country’s first LCMS congregation.

“Jeff is one of the most passionate people I know,” said Rev. Jon Zehnder, St. Michael’s pastor. “Here’s an example of how God opens a door of opportunity, and a person has the willingness to step through it.”

Dinkel leads two annual congregational mission trips to the Dominican and makes additional visits on his own. “It’s a lot of work,” he said. “But when I see the unbelievably happy, hopeful faces of the children who come out of these schools, it’s worth it.”

Kim Plummer Krull is a freelance writer. She is a member of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Des Peres, Mo.

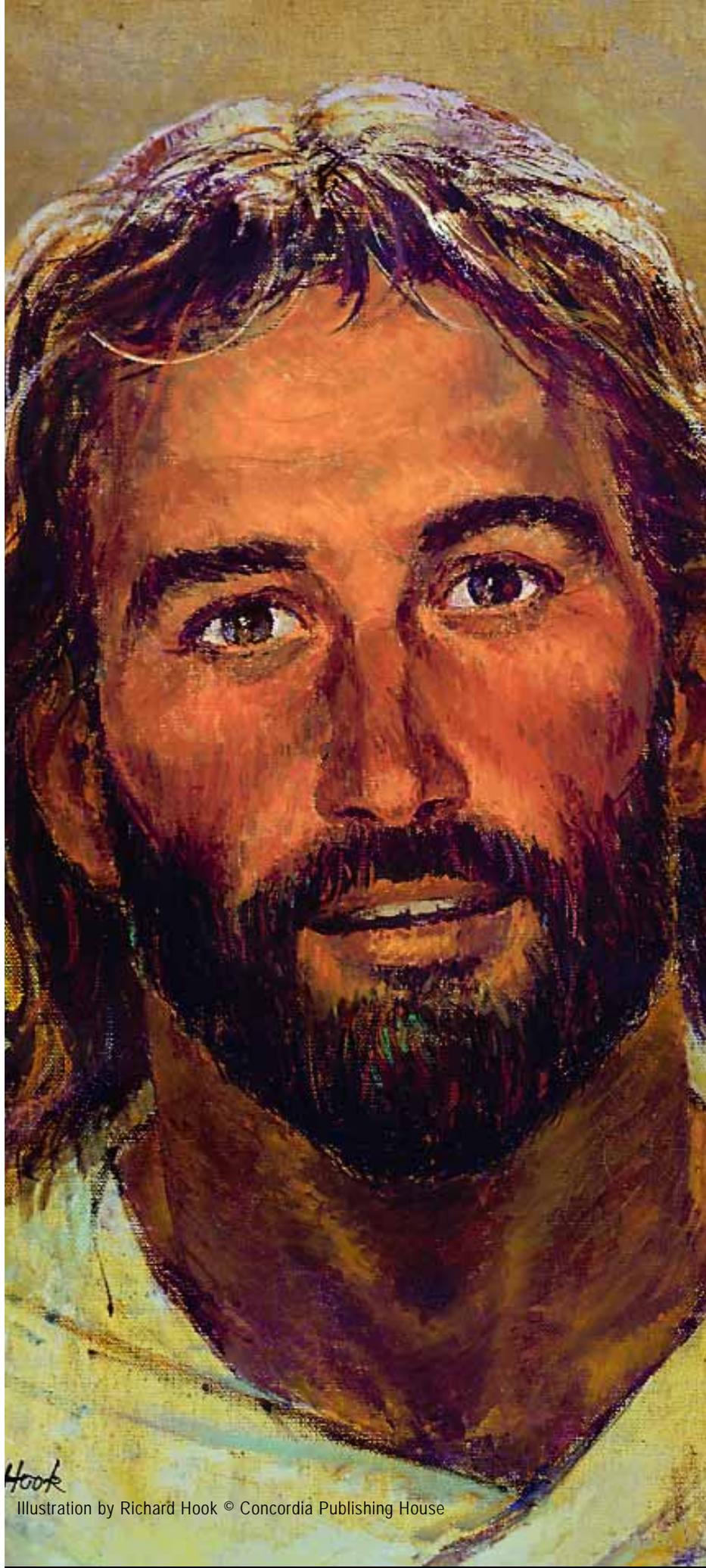
Photos courtesy Jeff Dinkel



Jeff Dinkel (back row in cap) devotes his days to the care and education of impoverished children in the Dominican Republic.

*Loving,
Kind,
Gentle,
Caring,
Gracious,
Forgiving...*

Is Jesus Boring?



Hook

Illustration by Richard Hook © Concordia Publishing House

by Kenneth Klaus

Sitting with the children on the steps of the sanctuary, I have often asked, "What did Jesus do for you?" Proud parents would strain to hear their youngsters reply, "Jesus died to take away our sins."

That simple answer captures the love of the Savior. But as pure and powerful as that answer is, it reflects only part of what the Savior did for sinful souls when He walked among us, as one of us.

In an age of sound bites, when the answers to life's most complex questions are reduced to a single sentence or a catchy phrase, it is easy to begin and end our personal statements of belief with the summary: "Jesus died for me." The fact is, Jesus Christ, true Man and true God, also *lived* for us. That was what Michelangelo tried to get through to some of his fellow artists 500 years ago when he said: "Why do you keep filling gallery after gallery with endless pictures of the one, ever-reiterated theme of Christ: Christ upon the cross, Christ dying, most of all, Christ hanging dead? Why do you concentrate on that passing episode, as if that were the last word and final scene, as if the curtain dropped upon that hour of disaster and defeat?"

There is no record of the artists' reply, although I imagine they would have said something like, "There is power in the Passion of the Christ."

There is. But there is also power in the life of Christ. Michelangelo wanted his fellow artists to see that Jesus had a life before, and after, Holy Week.

When I go out and lead Bible studies, I often ask people to give me one word that best describes how they think of Jesus. The answers are consistent. The first word people toss back is "loving." That's good. Jesus certainly was loving. If He had not been filled with God's love, He never would have started or completed the work of our salvation.

Other words quickly follow. Someone will say, "My Jesus is kind."

Another will add: "gracious" or "caring" or "gentle" or "forgiving." There is nothing wrong with that list; all of these tender words are part of the Gospel's picture of the Christ.

But doesn't this list of the Lord's attributes seem rather one-sided and

Those words could describe Clark Kent. ... They certainly wouldn't describe Superman.

incomplete? If I took all those words together, they could describe Clark Kent, the mild-mannered reporter for the *Daily Planet*. They certainly wouldn't describe Superman.

When I've shared that list with high school boys and asked if they would like to be the person those words described, their reply has been an immediate and resounding, "No way. He sounds like a nice guy who is *really boring!*" They thought the person described by that list would be on the chess squad, not the school's football team.

Is that what we've done to Jesus? Have we made Him boring? The lack of young adults in our churches would seem to indicate that that is exactly what we have done. If you read through Scripture carefully, you will find Jesus called many things, but He was never called "boring." He was accused of being a devil, an insurrectionist, a liar, a party-goer, a sinner, a blasphemer, a tax-dodger, a heretic, and a madman. His words were considered so dangerous that the religious authorities felt He had to be eliminated. But Jesus was never, ever called boring. *Never!*

If you take a serious look at Scripture, something I encourage you to do, you will quickly see that Jesus' personality was more than a litany of meek, mild, and mellow attributes. We need to take a second look at the Gospels and see how the evangelists draw Jesus with a full spectrum of colors from the person-

ality palate. They do not confine themselves to painting the Savior with muted pastels.

Here are a few examples:

Before the days of power tools, Jesus was trained as a carpenter in Joseph's shop. That took some muscle; but Jesus is seldom described as being powerful.

Walking the rough, up-and-down roads of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, Jesus took His disciples on numerous cross-country trips; but who will say He had endurance?

Jesus could proffer gentle words of forgiveness to an adulteress and dole out dire words of warning to foolish Pharisees.

The Savior could pick up the little children in His arms and bless them, but He could also pick up a whip and drive the sellers out of His Father's house.

Jesus could command wind and wave to cease; command a friend to come out of his grave; and command the attention of thousands of listeners for hours. Still, I have never heard anyone refer to Jesus as being "commanding."

Ultimately, Jesus is the warrior-king who, on the cross, took on and defeated the powers of sin, death, and hell!

Thirty-five years ago, when I married my wife, I was sure I knew her. In some ways, I did. But the sharing of years has taught me that she is far more than I had thought on the day we exchanged our vows. In a similar way, to know Jesus' love is a good thing, a blessed thing. But the more you see Him, the more time you spend with Him in the Scriptures, the more you will find Christ to be more than you could have ever imagined. As we come to see the many facets of our Savior, we will find He shines with greater brilliance than we had thought possible—more brightly than we deserve.

The Rev. Kenneth Klaus is speaker for Lutheran Hour Ministries, a ministry of the Lutheran Laymen's League.

Hymnal & Concrete

A hot and humid week in St. Louis is a wonderful time—thanks to a workshop on the new hymnal and a few trips to Ted Drewes.

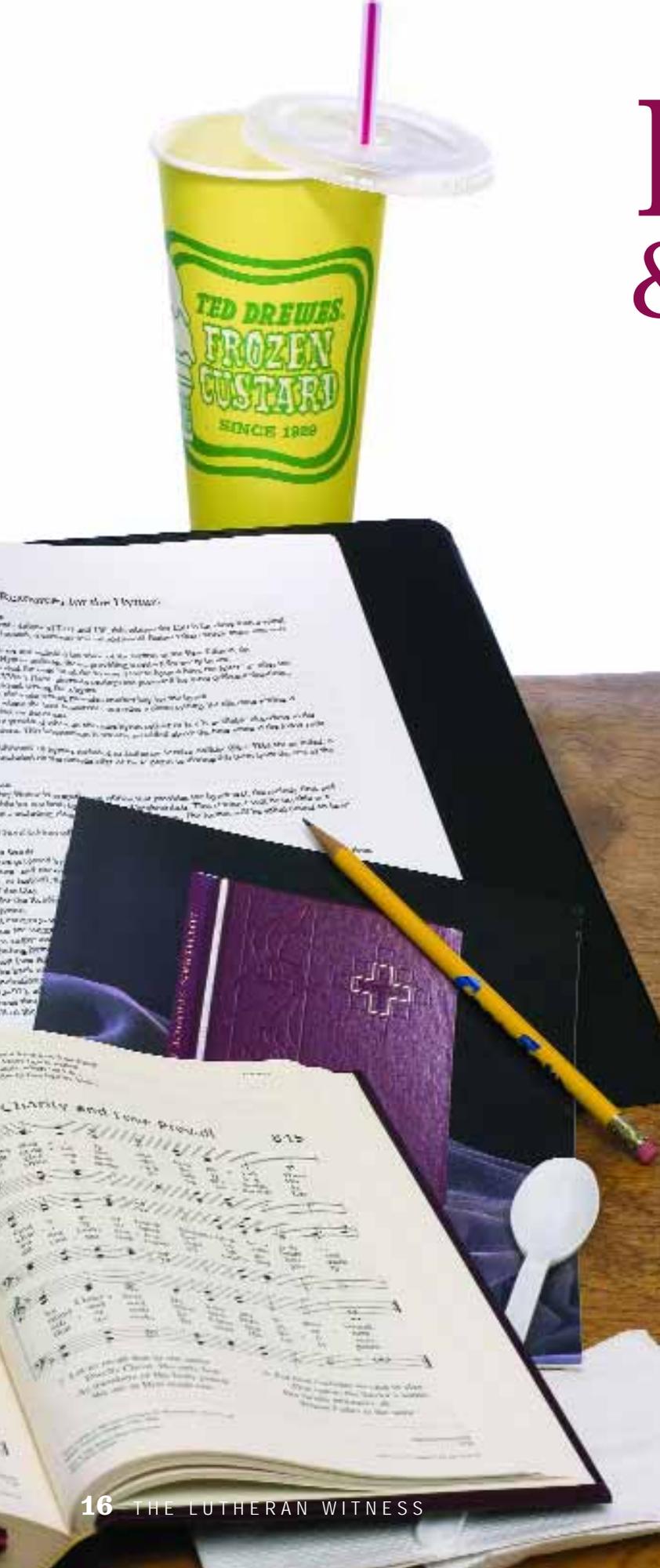
by Tim Shoup

Ted Drewes frozen custard—every seminarian (and pastor-alumnus) from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, can tell you about it. Most anyone in St. Louis can tell you it's near the corner of Chippewa and Jamieson. No, my family and I are not driving from northern Wisconsin into 100-degree St. Louis heat and humidity just to get to Ted's. But so long as we are coming down for nephew Matthew's wedding, ...

Sure enough, it's just as I remembered it. As we pull into Ted Drewes' parking lot, our kids see the lines going from the counter out to the street corner. The "concrete" is the specialty—smooth, creamy, filled with fresh strawberries or blueberries or your favorite flavor. As Ted Drewes says in his commercials: "It really is good."

That was Friday. Now it's Wednesday.

Nancy and the kids are heading back to Wisconsin today. I'm remaining in sunny (read: muggy and hotter than I can possibly describe) St. Louis. I'm going to the LCMS International Center, where our Commission on Worship will introduce to pastors from around the country the *Lutheran Service Book*—*LSB* for short—our denomination's new hymnal. This three-day workshop will equip us to lead three-hour *LSB* workshops in our respective districts.



Tom Openlander © Concordia Publishing House

The elegantly embossed cover is impressive. Now we'll see what is inside.

That was Wednesday. Now it's Friday.

I've learned that *LSB* and the many accompanying tools offer a lot. The electronic version is amazing. Called *Lutheran Service Builder*, it has the entire hymnal on computer, worship, planning software, and a blanket copyright license. The *Pastoral Care Companion* book is full of Scripture and helpful thoughts and prayers and psalms. It's small enough to fit in my pocket, but with print large enough to see. I look forward to using it.

After the liturgies, including the *Lutheran Worship (LW)* Divine Service II settings and the "Page 15" service from *The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH)*, are the hymns—bundles of them—including many that we have sung all our lives, newer ones we have learned from the *Hymnal Supplement*, other well-liked hymns that, until now, were not easily accessible, and a sprinkling of new hymns—all in one hymnal.

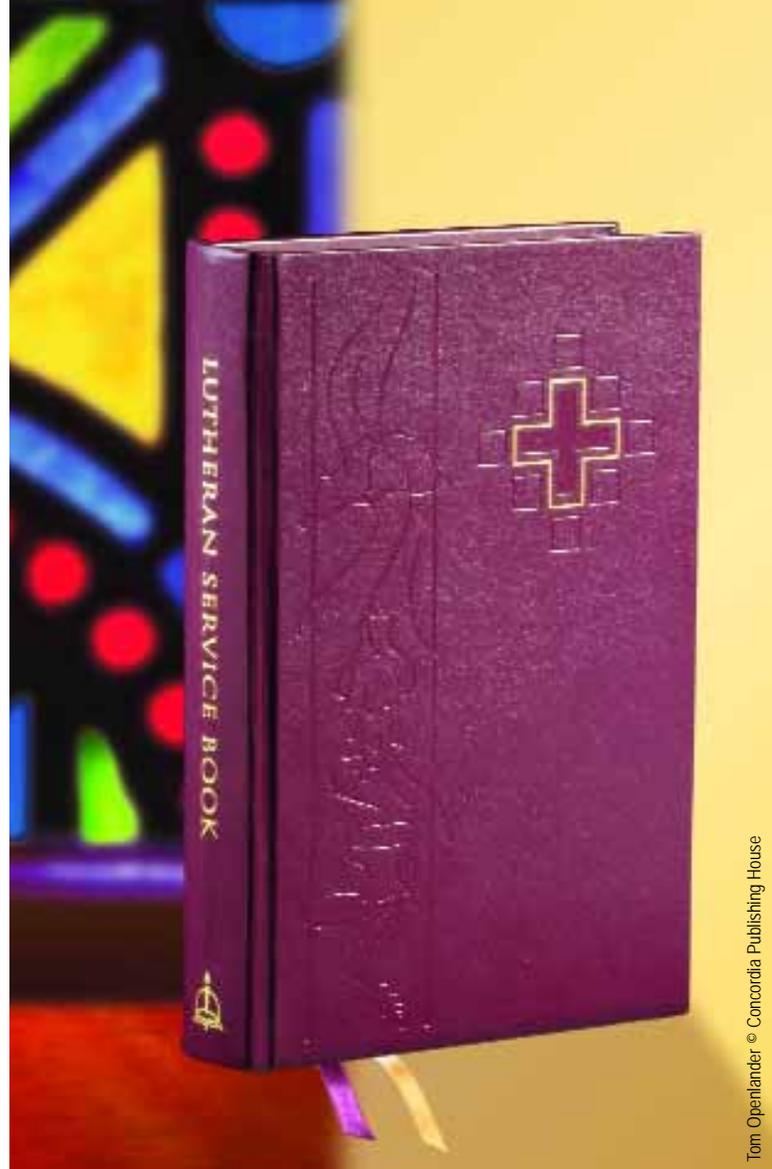
From "The Church's One Foundation," to "I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus," to "My Hope Is Built," to "Lift High the Cross," to "Thine the Amen," to "The Lamb," to "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," to "Holy Spirit, the Dove Sent from Heaven"—it is a wonderful collection.

Dr. Herman Stuempfle wrote the hymn "O Christ, Who Shared Our Mortal Life." He is now in his 80s. He writes with an artistic but simple style for the little child in each of us to understand. The middle two stanzas of "O Christ, Who Shared Our Mortal Life" paint a word picture of Jesus raising the Widow's Son (Luke 7:11–17). The Commission on Worship asked him to compose four more stanzas, two for the miracle of the raising of Jairus' daughter, and two for of the raising of Lazarus, thus providing us hymn stanzas for each of Christ's resurrection miracles in our three-year lectionary.

"I am intrigued by the invitation; however, I am busy with other deadlines to meet, and we have family functions to attend, ..." went the gracious, but noncommittal response from Stuempfle. Then just five days later came four new stanzas. Only three weeks ago we heard the story of the miracle of Jairus' daughter raised to life by Jesus (Mark 5:21–43). Next time, we will have Stuempfle's hymn ready to sing:

A ruler proud but bent by grief
Knelt down before Your feet:
"My precious daughter's gripped by death!
Come now and death defeat!"

A multitude had gathered round
To hear the truth You taught,
But, leaving them, You turned to help
A father sore distraught.



Tom Opentander © Concordia Publishing House

You pressed through crowds to reach the child
Whose limbs with death grew cold.
"She is not dead; she only sleeps!"
The weeping folk You told.

And then You took her hand and called,
"My child, I bid you rise!"
She rose! And all stood round You, Lord,
With awed and wond'ring eyes! ©

Words like this bring me Jesus. And that's the best thing about *Lutheran Service Book*. With Scripture woven into song, verse, canticle, and prayer, it brings Jesus into my heart and soul.

Unfortunately, it may be a while before we again taste Ted Drewes frozen custard, but for a little less than the price of one of our family stops for "concretes," we will have a copy of *LSB* in our own home to stay.

Rev. Timothy Shoup is pastor at St. Paul
Lutheran Church in Bonduel, Wis.

The theme of outreach predominates at the 89th Lutheran Laymen's League convention.

'A Powerful New Direction'

by Joe Isenhower Jr.

At lunch under a big white tent outside the Montana Convention Center, Kim Nestor said she finds it “refreshing to see how the International Lutheran Laymen's League (Int'l LLL) concentrates on supporting congregational outreach.”

Attending the Int'l LLL's 89th convention in Billings with her husband, Chris, Kim said she planned to tell her pastors and family-life minister at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Richmond, Va., “what a great event this is” and to be on the lookout for congregational resources from Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM) — another name for the Int'l LLL.

Close to 1,200 people registered for the July 6–9 convention — LLL members and their families from the United States and Canada, and representatives of LHM partner organizations in more than 40 other countries.

“Glorify the Lord” was the convention theme.

Outreach was the predominant convention topic, as LHM leaders described a new five-year strategic plan to help Lutheran congregations and mission partners around the world equip members for outreach.

Approved in January by the League's Board of Governors, the LHM strategic plan provides an array of resources for congregations, including advertising, media programming, consultations, evangelism training, and outreach workshops that target the unchurched.

“I am excited about this powerful new direction,” LHM Executive Director Greg Lewis told the convention. “It's lay driven, has a simple approach, and measurable effectiveness.”

In videotaped remarks, LCMS President Gerald B. Kieschnick, who was attending a district convention at the time, urged LLL members “to participate in this new partnership that celebrates and deploys the resources God has given us to use in His service.”

Kieschnick said the League's offering congregations outreach tools to reach unchurched people “will go a long way in helping us attain our *Ablaze!* goal of reaching 100 million uncommitted individuals worldwide with the Gospel by 2017. LHM is taking the right steps.”

Besides hearing about LHM programs and outreach worldwide, convention goers worshipped, browsed exhibits, and learned about outreach

In the convention exhibit area, Isaac Owusu-Hemeng, right, of Ghana, tells a couple about volunteering and outreach there. He is one of several international advocacy board members of Lutheran Hour Ministries who participated in the Int'l LLL convention July 6–9 in Billings, Mont.





As the 2006 Int'l LLL convention assembly sings "Lift High the Cross," a participant raises one of 1,200 commemorative mahogany crosses made for registrants from wood saved after a 1980 remodeling project at St. John Lutheran Church, Laurel, Mont. Howard Guenther, a St. John member, headed the project to make those crosses.

More than 70 teenagers and young children at the convention assembled Global Care Packages with school supplies and toys for school children in Uruguay.



and other volunteer opportunities in a dozen workshops constituting a first-ever "Outreach Expo."

Delegates re-elected to two-year terms Int'l LLL President Jack Kidwell of Bay City, Mich.; Financial Secretary H. Werner Essig of Starkville, Miss.; and seven of 15 regional governors.

On Saturday, the convention featured a rally for "The Lutheran Hour." It was taped for later broadcast. Later that day, a convention banquet and celebration capped off the 18-month 75th anniversary of "The Lutheran Hour."

In his rally message, Dr. Ken Klaus, "The Lutheran Hour" speaker, declared that he would preach "Christ without compromise, the cross without concession. I shall preach nothing less than God's true Word, His plan of salvation, His assurance of forgiveness, and His hope for heaven."

Next year's Int'l LLL convention is set for July 26-29 in Duluth, Minn.

Joe Isenhower Jr. is managing editor for the Synod's REPORTER newspaper.

Truth on Demand

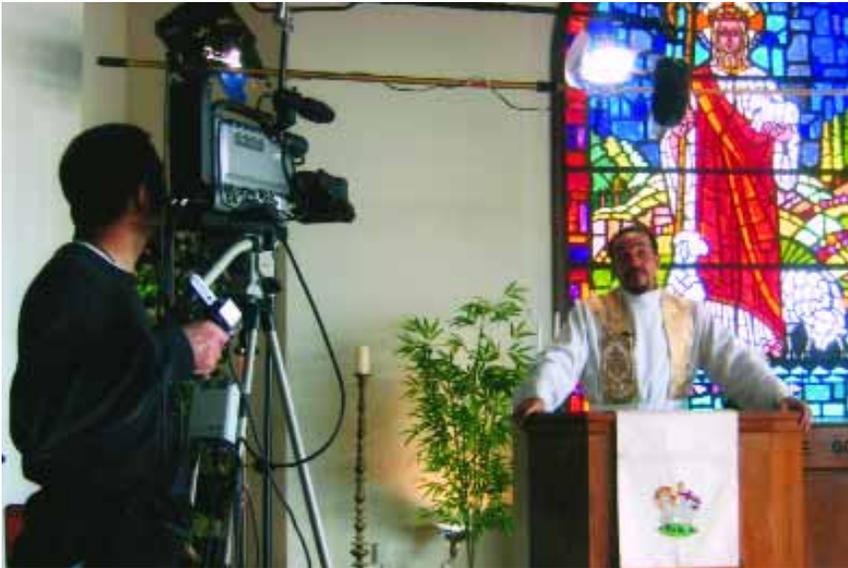


Photo courtesy of author

Dr. John Nunes was the featured speaker for the "Point of Truth" program during its fifth television season.

"Point of Truth" will continue its outreach ministry as on-demand programming on the Synod's Web site.

by Charles Manske

Synod's televised worship program "Point of Truth" went off the broadcasting schedule at DIRECTTV this past July after five seasons. It was broadcast over The Church Channel every Sunday on DIRECTTV, channel 371, and at its peak, was reaching five continents. Some industry professionals estimated that it was available in more than 100 countries.

To continue its ministry, "Point of Truth" is now available in two formats as video-on-demand, accessed via the Synod's Web site. One format, a half-hour program with music and a sermon in a full church setting is suitable for shut-ins, those who may be away from their church home, and others looking for a Lutheran worship experience online. The second format, titled "Point of Truth Brief," is about 20 minutes long. It does not include the music, interviews, announcements, or special offers. These are well-suited for people searching for devotional materials, and for pastors and other church workers searching for spiritual thoughts-for-the-day.

To watch either format, go to www.lcms.org/pointoftruth and click on "Watch Now with Video-On-Demand." Then click the link for the program you want to watch. The video and description will appear on your screen. If the program does not begin playing automatically, click the play button in the video control window. It may take a few minutes for the video to begin.

Periodically, new programs will be added to the Web site, featuring new speakers. Each worship experience clearly focuses on the Law and Gospel approach that is distinctively Lutheran.

During the five seasons of broadcast, 113 new programs were produced with 58 LCMS clergymen presiding. Generally, they appeared in their home pulpits from across the United States. The speaker for the fifth season was Dr. John Nunes of Chicago, by

many accounts one of our Synod's most dynamic and compelling preachers. The choir of Concordia University, River Forest, Ill., provided much of the music for the fifth season.

Many of the Synod's leaders, as well as many university and seminary professors, provided sermons that currently are or will be featured through video-on-demand. Included among these speakers are the last four presidents of the Synod: Dr. Jerry Kieschnick, Dr. Ralph Bohlmann, Dr. Robert Kuhn, and Dr. Al Barry.

A regularly televised worship service from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was a vision of Synod's early radio and television leaders. Dr. Walter A. Maier, the widely heard speaker of "The Lutheran Hour" in the 1940s, dreamed of the radio program making the transition to TV. Dr. Rudy Bertermann began a TV worship program on a St. Louis station in the mid 1950s.

"Point of Truth" represents Lutheran worship in urban, suburban, and rural America, as well as in Asian, Black, and campus ministry settings. It is a ministry of Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Santa Monica, Calif.

The Synod's Board for Communications Services continues to be the sponsor for the program. Additional funds have been provided by the Board for Mission Services, Thrivent Financial, Wheat Ridge Ministries, and the LCMS Board of Directors. However, the program's annual production and air-time budget of \$175,000 was not available for the 2006–2007 TV season.

Dr. Charles L. Manske is the executive producer and host of "Point of Truth." His email is: USCLuther@aol.com.

Laughter Lifts Burdens

by Raymond J. Keating

When was the last time you laughed so hard that your eyes watered and your back actually hurt? That happened to me while attending a comedy show starring two regulars from the improvisational television show “Whose Line Is It Anyway?” After enjoying the improv antics, I reflected on laughter, its effect, and what it means in relation to God.

Why is it that a good chunk of the world views Christians as party poopers?

Part of the answer to that question might be that the party has gone too far, and Christians live within certain moral bounds. On the other hand, though, some Christians do have rather humorless outlooks.

Writing a few years ago in *Touchstone* magazine about a period of chronic pain in his life, Leon Podles noted that his wife tried some Katherine Hepburn screwball comedies. Podles observed that “the brain cannot laugh and feel pain at the same time.” Take a look in Prov. 17:22 where the writer notes: “A joyful heart is good medicine. ...”

Indeed, Holy Scripture does have some things to say about humor and laughter. It presents a balanced take overall that does not send us off into grim severity on the one hand, or mindless hilarity on

the other. In Luke 6, Jesus says, “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh,” and then a bit later, “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.” In Eccl. 3:4, we are reminded that there is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh.”

Born to Sarah and Abraham in their old age, Isaac was given a name that means “He will laugh.” After giving birth, Sarah said: “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me” (Gen. 21:6). And in Job 8:21 we read: “He will yet fill your mouth with laughter. ...”

A friend recently pointed out the humor exhibited by the blind man cured by Jesus in John 9. Knowing that the Pharisees were trying to entrap Jesus, when asked a second time by them about Jesus curing his blindness on the Sabbath, he wryly replied: “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Do you also want to become his disciples?” Apparently, the Pharisees did not appreciate the joke, as John writes that “they reviled him.”

Some leading Christians over the centuries also commented on laughter. Martin Luther simply declared: “If you’re not allowed to laugh in heaven, I don’t want to go there.”

Writing in *The Magician’s Nephew*, one of the novels in “The

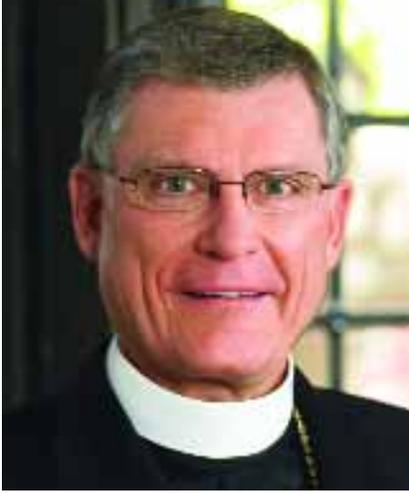
Chronicles of Narnia,” after giving certain creatures the power to speak, C.S. Lewis had Aslan declaring: “Laugh and fear not, creatures. Now that you are no longer dumb and witless, you need not always be grave. For jokes as well as justice come in with speech.” That’s good advice for those Christians who err on the side of being too somber.

Finally, 20th-century theologian Reinhold Niebuhr struck an appropriate balance. As quoted in a *Touchstone* piece by Steven Faulkner, Niebuhr stated: “Laughter must be heard in the outer courts of religion, and the echoes of it should resound in the sanctuary; but there is no laughter in the holy of holies. There laughter is swallowed up in prayer and humor is fulfilled by faith.”

In the end, most Christians I know, with a few exceptions, love a good laugh. In fact, they rank among the most joyful people around. That makes sense since they should understand both the sometimes-amusing weaknesses of human nature and the ultimate joy offered through Jesus Christ.

Raymond J. Keating, a member of Christ Lutheran Church in East Moriches, N.Y., is a columnist with *Newsday*. He can be reached at ChurchandSociety@aol.com





A Great Joy

“What is your greatest joy as president of the Synod?”

This or a similar question was asked me on a number of occasions during

“Q&A” sessions at this year’s district conventions.

Although my answer sometimes varied, many times I said that attending district conventions is my greatest joy! These gatherings, which take place every three years, give me an opportunity to meet people who represent nearly every congregation in the Synod. They are occasions to hear stories of the faith journeys taken by faithful people of God. They give me a chance to hear about the joys and challenges of *their* ministries.

Some of you may not be familiar with the structure of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The Synod is organized into 35 regional administrative units called “districts.” All 35 have conventions in the year before a Synod convention. At district conventions, each member congregation has two votes, one cast by the pastor and one by a lay representative.

The purpose of these gatherings is outlined in the Synod’s Bylaws: “Conventions of the districts shall afford opportunities for worship, nurture, inspiration, fellowship, and the communication of vital information. They are the principal legislative assemblies, which amend the district’s articles of incorporation and bylaws, consider and take action on reports and overtures [proposed resolutions], and handle appropriate appeals.”

It was my privilege personally—often with my dear wife, Terry—to attend 19 of the 35 district conventions. I really wish I could have attended all of them, but this was not possible. There were 24 in June alone. At one point, I attended five conventions in six days. I am grateful for the assistance of the Synod’s vice presidents, who represented my office at those I could not attend myself.

A highlight at many of the conventions was the dynamic and inspirational worship services that took place. They brought together more people for singing, praying, and worship, often with wonderful choirs and other special music, than the typical congregation would have on a given Sunday.

Certainly, there was business to conduct. In addition to considering a variety of resolutions and reports, each district elected or re-elected a district

president, other officers, and various board members. Ten of the 35 district presidents were elected to their first terms. I congratulate and affirm these brothers in Christ—indeed, all those elected at the conventions—and urge your prayers for them as they carry out their important responsibilities.

In a number of districts, it was apparent that there is a desire to develop closer relationships with our overseas partner churches. The leaders of some of these churches were guests of some districts, who brought them here with the assistance of LCMS World Mission. Listening to the stories of faith and of the challenges they and their people face made me grateful not only for the freedoms and blessings that we enjoy in this country, but also for the faithfulness of fellow Lutherans in other lands.

Many of the conventions had a mission theme, and quite a few had themes that tied directly into *Ablaze!*, the worldwide movement to reach 100 million unreached or uncommitted people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ by 2017. Most, if not all, of the conventions adopted very fine and encouraging mission resolutions that urge ever greater concern for the lost and efforts to reach them with the Good News.

This certainly is fitting, proper, and consistent with the Synod’s mission statement: *In grateful response to God’s grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacraments, the mission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is vigorously to make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities, and the world.*

Many thanks to those who planned the conventions, worked at them, and served as delegates. It is my prayer that our Synod will be blessed—and that many others will be blessed through us—as a result of what happened at these gatherings of faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which reads "Jerry Kieschnick". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Lives Transformed through
Christ, in Time ... for Eternity!
e-mail: president@lcms.org
Web page: www.lcms.org/president

Jerry Kieschnick
John 3:16–17