



# THE LUTHERAN WITNESS™

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In Bethlehem:

# HOPE BEHIND THE WALL

11

EXTREMELY  
LENT

13

ULBRA THE  
UNBELIEVABLE

17

DUELING  
MESSIAHS



Providing Missouri Synod laypeople with stories and information that complement congregational life, foster personal growth in faith, and help interpret the contemporary world from a Lutheran Christian perspective.

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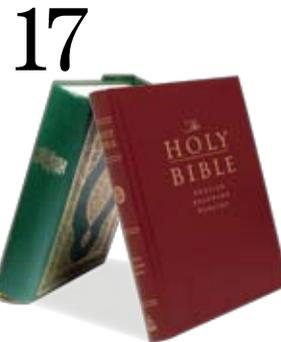
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## TO THE READER

In many respects, the issue of *The Lutheran Witness* you hold in your hands offers an international perspective. In these pages our authors range from Palestine (Bethlehem and the West Bank) to Brazil, Iran, and finally back to our own U.S. Also, in "Extremely Lent," Rev. Jeff Sippy reminds us that the season of Lent

begins this month. (Ash Wednesday is Feb. 25.) We pray that you find this issue informative and helpful, both as good reading and as a reminder of all the gifts with which our heavenly Father has blessed us—including the greatest gift of all: the forgiveness of sins and eternal life won for us by the life, death, and resurrection

of His Son and our Savior, Jesus. As Tim Furnish did in Tehran, may we share that Good News with those we meet.

*James H. Heine*  
Managing Editor  
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# Look at the Birds

The wind whistling through his feathers sounded too close for comfort. I instinctively ducked, but he took no notice. He was not alone. In the shadow of Ramshorn Peak in south-central Montana, three ravens were playing in the wind. I was the sole member of the audience as they dove and tucked and rolled and fell and wrestled with each other and the wind. Who knows how a raven thinks, but it looked like they were having fun. The spectacular aerial display was matched by the sense of playfulness with which they engaged one another.

This was not a day I would have chosen to play in the air. We were high in the mountains. The wind was shrieking. Snow was spitting. The ravens were goofing off. Unconcerned

**Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?**

—Matt. 6:26 ESV

with conserving energy, or finding their next meal, or locating suitable shelter, they seemed to be simply enjoying God's creation. I was blessed to rejoice in their carefree life.

I share this scene with you because the circumstances of our world right now are anything but carefree. For many, they are laden with anxiety and fear. The housing market has crashed. The stock market has tanked. Your house and your 401k are undoubtedly worth less today than they were last year. How is a Christian to think about the financial crisis that dominates so much of the news?

Jesus said, "Do not be anxious . . . Look at the birds . . . your heavenly Father feeds them . . . Are you not of more value than they?" Is this guy for real? How can He just say, "Don't worry"? Does He realize how much money I'm losing? How can I *not* worry?

We sinners have a hard time trusting God under the best of times and a worse time under terrible times. We prefer to trust our home equity, our managed portfolios, our bank accounts, our

credit cards. These are the powers we depend on every day. They readily sneak into our consciousness as that which will save us. As such, they become gods to us. It should not be a surprise that God would send a financial crisis to remind us of the fleeting strength of our financial gods.

When God sends the financial gods into a death spiral, He is sounding a bold call to repentance. You have heard His Word, "There is no god beside Me." And there is none. God did not send the dollar to save you. He sent His Son. Jesus came



to save you from the financial gods, not by guaranteeing your investments but by freeing you from dependence upon them. When Jesus went to the cross, He took that sin, and all others as well, and defeated them. He exposed the false gods for what they are, impotent idols. He rose in victory over it all and shares that victory with you.

Through faith in Jesus you live a forgiven, new life. In this new life you not only look at the birds, you look like the birds. This is what God's Holy Spirit is working in you. Because you are His beloved children, He is at work in you to overcome your anxieties. He is strengthening you to deny the false gods their powers. He is living in you to simply enjoy the wonders of His creation, trusting that He will take care of you no matter what the financial gods do. "Look at the birds."

**Rev. Terry Forke is president of the LCMS Montana District.**

## Christmas wars

I appreciated reading Dr. David W. Loy's article, "The Great Christmas Wars," in the December edition of *The Lutheran Witness*. Dr. Loy did a fine job of outlining the true meaning of the season.

However, I was disappointed that the article seemed to suggest that, because Christ won the "real Christmas war" for us, we Christians need not engage our secular culture when it comes to this issue. I disagree. Now more than ever, Christians need to recognize that secular extremists are pursuing an agenda to remove not just every manger scene, but also every expression of religion from the public square.

American Christians also need to faithfully exercise their rights and responsibilities—in Lutheran terms, their vocations—by studying our nation's founding documents, voicing their opin-



**Now more than ever, Christians need to recognize that secular extremists are pursuing an agenda to remove not just every manger scene, but also every expression of religion from the public square.**

*Rev. Robert C. Baker  
St. Louis, Mo.*

ions to their elected officials, and voting. Civil rights, like the freedoms of speech and assembly, are taken away incrementally, often from under our very noses.

Do keeping and defending our constitutionally prescribed freedoms have to do with hearing and sharing the Gospel? You bet they do. Just ask any of our brothers or sisters in China, the Sudan, the Middle East, former Eastern bloc countries, or even secular Western Europe.

I encourage your readers who would like to learn more about the ongoing Christmas wars and what to do about them to visit my blog, *christmaseverywhere.wordpress.com*. There they will find articles about secular extremism, videos, and legal opinions about how to preserve our rights.

The hearing and sharing of the Gospel is far too important to think that the "Christmas wars," at least those in the public square, will be won with only "a happy heart and a genuine smile."

*Rev. Robert C. Baker, Author  
What Happened to Merry  
Christmas?  
St. Louis, Mo.*

True to Lutheran tradition, I have a criticism regarding the article by Dr. David W. Loy. For the most part, the article is well written and based on Scripture, except for one confusing part. This is near the conclusion when Dr. Loy states: "We don't need to fight the Great Christmas Wars on Christ's behalf. He's still here, and He is fighting these wars for us, and He's quite capable of winning them Himself."

Is there a theological vacuum here, as we know Christ is not here personally? My understanding is that we are

focus on the Christ Child in the sanctuary of our congregations.

Our sanctuaries are often dominated by holiday trees, poinsettias, and shiny ribbons. It has taken a concerted effort to re-establish a place in our worship area for a nativity scene (or a symbolic manger).

Try to remove the secular greenery (with roots in the pagan celebration of the winter solstice) and see what war breaks out!

*Rev. Robert M. Bjornstad  
Peace Lutheran Congregation  
Salem, Ore.*

In "The Great Christmas Wars," Dr. David W. Loy writes: "how you feel about Christmas has a lot to do with how you feel about Christ."

Can it be said: If Christmas means anything other than "good news of great joy that will be for all the people . . . a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10–11), then we are rejecting the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent?

If this is so, how crucial that we, who glory in Christ Jesus "take the opportunity to share the good news of Immanuel, God-with-us," as Dr. Loy wrote.

A day or two after reading Dr. Loy's article, I happened to be in the grocery store, and an elderly gentleman greeted me (I am 81 years old) with the words, "Happy Holidays."

I replied, "A Merry Christmas to you."

He said, "Are you ready for Santa Claus to come down the chimney?"

I answered, "No, I am delighting in Christ."

He replied, "Good for you."

I am thankful for having read "The Great Christmas Wars."

*Helen Leopold  
Baltimore, Md.*

The December issue of *The Lutheran Witness* was excellent. Praise God! I went to seminary with David Loy and always found him kind and very thoughtful.

*Rev. Brian Davies  
St. Peter Lutheran Church  
Macomb, Mich.*

His hands, feet, and voice. If Christ is not physically present, how can He fight those wars here on earth? Or is Dr. Loy taking potshots at "conservative Christian organizations" or other activist Christians who do take a stand?

There is need for a more biblical and well-balanced explanation, as this type of article only causes more confusion and animosity among Christians.

*Cliff Pyle  
Saskatoon, Sask.  
Canada*

"The Great Christmas Wars," featured on the December cover and in the article by Dr. David W. Loy, failed to address a constant concern of mine. In more than 30 years of ministry I have found it a struggle to keep a Christmas

## A poor choice

It was truly disgusting to see the front cover of the December issue of *The Lutheran Witness*. What a shock to see all the secular symbols and not a single Christian symbol. I am so glad that my dad (a faithful pastor) did not live to see such a non-Christian front cover of *The Lutheran Witness*.

Think of the image that cover of this magazine gives to the multitudes that come in contact with it in the mail and elsewhere. This is *The Lutheran Witness* and what a witness you are giving!

Irene (Happel) Armbrecht  
Clemons, Iowa

I received my *Missouri Conservation* magazine today. It had a duck on the cover. My wife received her *Birds and Blooms* magazine today. It had a bird on the cover. I had to retrieve the December *Lutheran Witness* from the trash. I tossed it because I thought it was another Christmas sales catalog. The cover was neither Lutheran nor was it any kind of positive witness.

Rev. Allen E. Geil (Retired)  
Bolivar, Mo.

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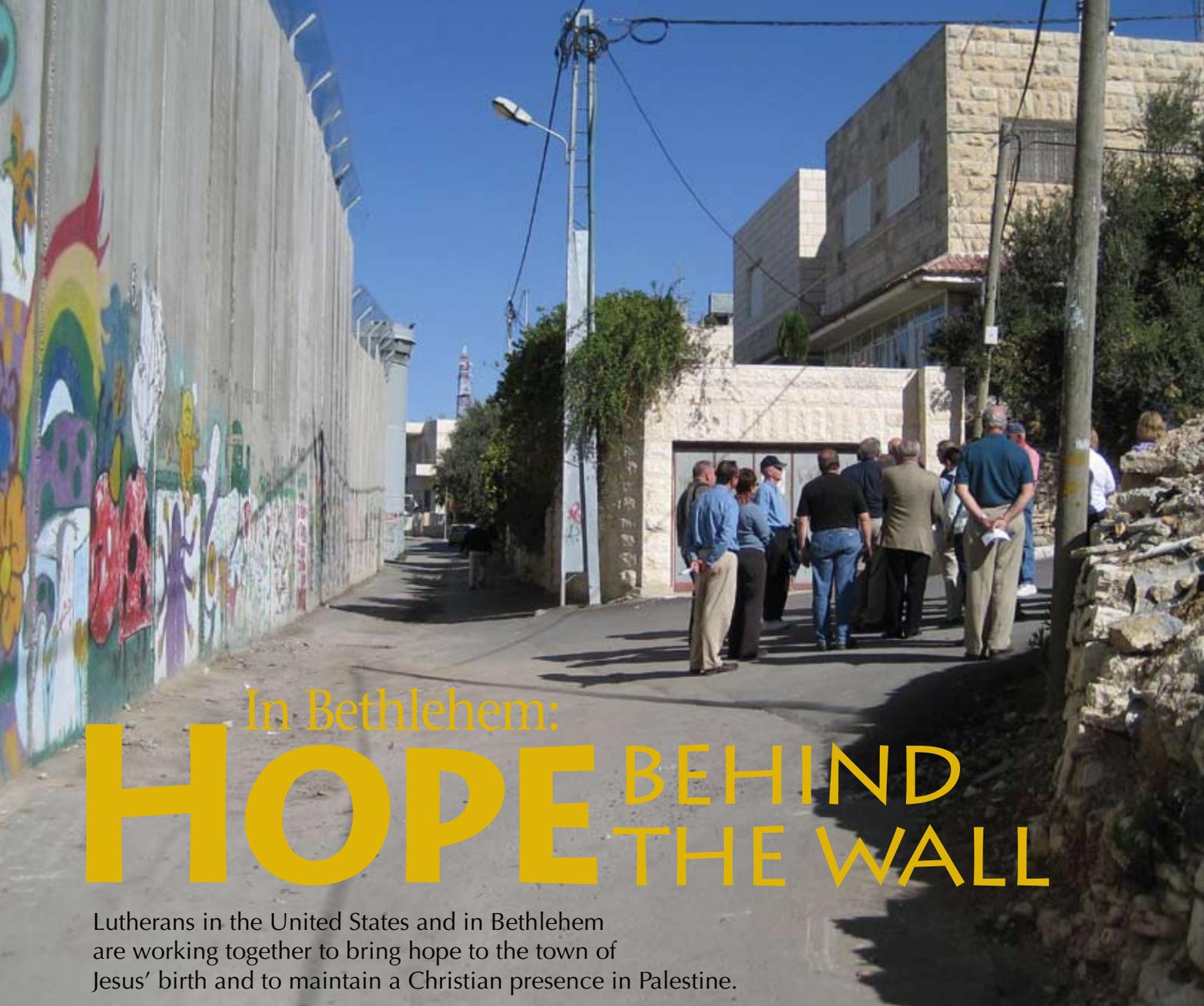
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On the cover: Part of the security wall separating the West Bank from Israel. Photo by shutterstock.com.



# In Bethlehem: HOPE BEHIND THE WALL

Lutherans in the United States and in Bethlehem are working together to bring hope to the town of Jesus' birth and to maintain a Christian presence in Palestine.



**I**t used to be that architect Bassem Khoury could stand on his front porch, take in the warm sunshine, and look out over the beauty of the hills and olive groves that have been in his family for centuries. No more.

Khoury can still stand on his front porch, and the sun still shines. But all he can see now is a wall a few yards from his front door and some 25 feet high—slabs of concrete, grey but for some colorful graffiti, topped by a fence and punctuated by guard towers.

It isn't even possible for Khoury, a balding, grey-haired man past middle age, to visit the family lands anymore. The trip of a couple hundred yards would take hours now, if he could get there at all, which he can't. He adds that his home is worth maybe a tenth of what it was before the wall was built.

Welcome to the West Bank in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories. Welcome to Bethlehem, birthplace of our Lord Jesus.

Jesus is Khoury's Lord, too. Khoury is a Palestinian Christian—a Lutheran, in fact—stuck behind a wall and fence built by the Israelis on Palestinian land, ostensibly to keep terrorists out of Israel. It may do that, but it also restricts the movement of all Palestinians, takes their land, and separates many of them from friends, relatives, and employment opportunities.

It could make a person bitter. How does Khoury deal with that?

"As Christians, we are taught to forgive," he answered simply.

"Even as Christians, we can get very angry," says his pastor, Rev. Mitri Raheb. "Whenever I get angry, I start a new project . . . and channel the energy into ministry."

## BRIGHT STARS AND WHEAT RIDGE

Raheb, pastor of Bethlehem's Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church, is involved in a lot of ministries. Besides the church, there is a K-12 school, a health and wellness center, a cultural and conference center, and a college. Programs include elder care, child development, young couples ministry, promotion of the arts, and "authentic" tourism.

A contingent of Missouri Synod Lutherans, including LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick (see "From the President," page 29), was in Bethlehem in late November and early December. The group included parish nurses who would lecture at a medical symposium; others along had been invited by Bright Stars of Bethlehem, a U.S. nonprofit organization, to see firsthand what Lutherans there are doing.

**Opposite: Missouri Synod Lutherans visiting Bethlehem gather around architect Bassem Khoury (opposite bottom). He told them how his home, immediately in front of the group, has been separated by the Israeli security wall from olive groves that have been in his family for centuries. Below: Young students learn to work together at Dar al-Kalima School. School Principal Naila Kharroub says her greatest joy is to see students grow and develop.**

Bright Stars was established by a group of Missouri Synod Lutherans to provide ongoing support for the work in Bethlehem, much of which was started with seed grants from Wheat Ridge Ministries. Wheat Ridge, an LCMS recognized service organization that focuses on health and healing, has invested more than \$2.3 million in projects in Bethlehem since 2000. Bright Stars, which now provides funds for work there, is applying for recognized service organization status through the Synod's Board for Mission Services.

"The overarching purpose of our ministry is to maintain a Christian presence in the Holy Land," says Gregg Smith of Tampa, Fla., chairman of the Bright Stars board.

Bethlehem once was a Christian town. Some estimates say Arab Christians made up 85 percent of the population in 1948, but emigration and a lower birth rate than among Muslims have made Christians a minority today.

"We are trying to create an environment that makes it attractive for Christians to stay and flourish," Smith told me during our visit.

It's not easy to live here, says Raheb. He understands why Christians leave.

"I think we are heading toward an

apartheid system that for two generations will make our lives miserable," he said of the division between Palestinians and Israelis. "At the same time, I am very hopeful," he said, and adapted a statement attributed to Martin Luther: "Even if the world is coming to an end tomorrow, plant an olive tree."

Raheb said he believes that only Christians can bring real hope to the West Bank. They need to stay.

## HEALTH AND HOPE

The first Wheat Ridge grant, awarded in 2000, established the Dar al-Kalima ("House of the Word") Health and Wellness Center, which was dedicated in 2003 to serve the entire Palestinian community. The center today has endocrinology, nutrition, audiology, and psychotherapy clinics. The wellness aspect makes use of an indoor swimming pool, a fitness room, and a gym.

Rami Khader, a Lutheran from Bethlehem who earned bachelor's and master's degrees at Concordia University, Chicago, Ill., is manager of the center. He said that one purpose of the wellness center is to help people relieve some of the stress caused by the circumstances under which the Palestinians live.

In 2004, Wheat Ridge engaged Dr. John Eckrich, a Lutheran physician from St. Louis, to assess medical needs in the area. As a result of previous work, he said he knew that community nursing and the concept of a parish nurse held the



## HOPE BEHIND THE WALL

most promise. So, when he traveled to Bethlehem for the assessment, he took with him a team of nurses, among them Marcia Schnorr, the Synod's national coordinator of parish nursing through its Board for Human Care Ministries.

Eckrich said one of the team's conclusions was to focus on the metabolic syndrome, a group of diseases that includes diabetes, hypertension, elevated lipids, and obesity. Another was to work with the elderly.

Following the team's recommendations, the health and wellness center hired one of only two endocrinologists in the West Bank, as well as a public-health nurse practitioner and the West Bank's only nutritionist.

It was harder to find a parish nurse. The concept was unknown in the Middle East.

Raheb found a Christian nurse, Raida Mansour. For a year, she and several other nurses studied

parish nursing via the Internet with materials that Schnorr adapted for the Palestinian context. Then, with funds provided by the LCMS Northern Illinois District Parish Nurse Network, Mansour traveled to the United States, where she stayed a month at Schnorr's home in Rochelle, Ill.

In November 2007, Schnorr and a team of nurses were in Bethlehem. A pinning ceremony was held for Mansour, who then formally became the first parish nurse in the West Bank.

"It is somewhat difficult to come here and do medical care because of the economic and political situation," Eckrich said. But for four years, he and other medical people, including Schnorr and her teams of nurses, have been making the trip and conducting symposia for Palestinian medical personnel.

"They can't go out, so we have to go in," Schnorr said of those who attend the symposia.

**'Maybe peace will never come, but I will not waste my life and time waiting for something to come. . . . Our Messiah came 2,000 years ago. He is the Prince of Peace.'**

—Rev. Mitri Raheb, Pastor  
Evangelical Lutheran  
Christmas Church



**Clockwise from left: A guard tower on the Israeli security wall in Bethlehem; Pastor Mitri Raheb of Christmas Lutheran Church talks to visitors about challenges faced by Palestinian Christians; students line up at the beginning of the school day at Dar al-Kalima School.**

**Opposite: The spire of Christmas Lutheran Church is a very visible landmark in Bethlehem.**



In May 2008, the nurses lived with members of the elder-care program. One woman told Schnorr, "They can build a wall around our city, but they cannot build a wall around my heart." Schnorr added, "That reminded me of Romans [8:38-39], that nothing can separate us from God's love, including a wall."

## OTHER ENDEAVORS

Naila Kharroub, the principal at Dar al-Kalima School, says her greatest challenge "is to educate students in a peaceful way and keep Christianity here."

The school, a glistening white building high on a hill, adjacent to the health and wellness center, has 270 students from kindergarten through the 12th grade. They come from Bethlehem, from the nearby towns of Beit Sahour and Beit Jala, and from other villages. They are 42 percent Christian (mostly Greek Orthodox, but 6 to 7 percent Lutheran) and 58 percent Muslim.

Each day starts with morning devotions, which, of course, are Christian. The Muslim students attend, too, and their parents are aware of that. Still, the quality education that the school provides brings many applications from Muslim families, Kharroub said.

"More apply than can be accepted," she said. "We look for a balance of Muslims and Christians, . . . between boys and girls, and academic level."

"We are people called to proclaim the Gospel in a fresh way to our people," Bishop Munib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) told us at dinner one evening. Christmas Lutheran Church is one of six congregations in the small church body, which has 3,000 children in its schools.

Younan said education is a priority for the ELCJHL as an avenue for a "Lutheran evangelical witness."

Raheb and his colleagues in an organization called "Diyar" (Arabic for "homes") that operates the church's ministries are moving beyond elementary and high school education and into higher education. Standing on the roof of the school one afternoon, we watched construction workers building two new buildings on the campus—one an extension to the health and wellness center, the other a home for the first Lutheran college in the Middle East.

While the building goes up, the Dar al-Kalima College holds classes at

Christmas Lutheran Church across town. Its initial program was accredited by the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education in 2006 to offer a two-year associate's degree.

Dr. Nuha Khoury, the college dean, said the school started with 22 students and two programs: glass and ceramics and documentary filmmaking. It already is moving into jewelry design, music performance, and tour guiding.

Plans are in the works to seek accreditation to grant the bachelor's degree and, eventually, for a master's degree program "so the college can become a university."

Khoury said current programs teach disciplines that are not already in the Palestinian system.

"We want to keep people on the land; we don't want them to emigrate," she said. "Thirty-eight percent of new students are unemployed. Many others leave. But if we create new disciplines that take people in for two years that have a job market, that's what we aim for."

She added that the college provides yet another way for Lutherans to influence young people, the future leaders of Palestine.

There is still more that the Lutheran Diyar organization is doing in Bethlehem. Its International Center of Bethlehem, for example, has programs intended to preserve the culture of the Palestinian people. It houses a conference center, an arts and crafts center, and a gift shop as an outlet for the artistic output of its clients. A media center there produces documentary films, news reports, talk shows, dramas, and Christian-music concerts for broadcast throughout the Palestinian territories and in the larger Arab world.

"We try to be an incubator for leaders for Palestine," Raheb told us. "This is a clearinghouse for leadership."

Gregg Smith, the Bright Stars of Bethlehem chairman, figures he has been to Bethlehem more than 20 times in the last 12 years. He said that each of Diyar's ministries "is designed to provide a range of opportunities to raise children, educate them well, maintain their health—from womb to tomb."

He refers with a smile to "our 300-year plan," which sees expansion throughout the West Bank. "As a Palestinian state develops, we want a Christian presence to develop with it," he said.



## 'HOPE PEDDLERS'

Dr. Richard Bimler, the immediate past president of Wheat Ridge Ministries, said that Lutherans are offering "hope in a hopeless situation." He called Raheb and his colleagues "hope peddlers."

Raheb acknowledges that he is not optimistic about the future of Palestine or the prospects of peace in the Middle East, "but I am hopeful."

"Maybe peace will never come," Raheb said. "But I will not waste my life and time waiting for something to come . . . Our Messiah came 2,000 years ago." Raheb added, "He is the Prince of Peace."

**Rev. David L. Mahsman is assistant to the executive director of LCMS World Mission and former executive editor of *The Lutheran Witness*.**

## HOW TO HELP AND LEARN MORE

**H**ow can we be helpful to you?" The question came after several days in Bethlehem and seeing what Palestinian Lutherans are doing to bring some hope to their people and to maintain a Christian presence in a Muslim-dominated region.

"Often groups come here, are moved, and want to do something," answered Rev. Mitri Raheb, pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church. "I say you don't need to do anything. Don't feel pressured. I would like you to go away from Bethlehem energized, . . . ready to go, ready to do miracles."

Having said that, though, he offered three suggestions:

- Pray for the people and the ministry in Bethlehem.
- Visit Bethlehem. "Your visits mean more than you can imagine," Raheb said. He said 200,000 Lutherans visit the Holy Land every year "but [they] miss what you witnessed. What a waste. Can't you encourage them to come here and get a small piece of hope before they leave?"
- Support a project. "It could be planting a tree, helping with a scholarship, helping to build a classroom. That makes your passion incarnate."

Information about tours and donating is available at the Web site of Bright Stars of Bethlehem ([www.brightstarbethlehem.org](http://www.brightstarbethlehem.org)). Also, take a look at the video "It's PalesTIME" (there's a link on the Bright Stars home page) to get a better idea about "authentic tourism." Bright Stars board chairman Gregg Smith, a frequent visitor to Bethlehem, says that the recent conflict in the Gaza Strip should not discourage visits to Bethlehem and the West Bank, which are geographically separate from Gaza.

Wheat Ridge Ministries has a "Hearts for Jesus" project called "Bethlehem, We Care!" It supports the Dar al-Kalima School and the adjacent health and wellness center. For information, go to [www.wheatridge.org/Bethlehem](http://www.wheatridge.org/Bethlehem).

—D.L.M.



You also can go directly to Web sites operated by the Lutherans in Bethlehem:

- ➔ For Diyar, the umbrella organization for the various ministries, go to [www.diyar-consortium.org](http://www.diyar-consortium.org).
- ➔ Dar al-Kalima School: [www.annadwa.org/school/daralkalima.htm](http://www.annadwa.org/school/daralkalima.htm).
- ➔ Dar al-Kalima College: [www.dar-alkalima.edu.ps](http://www.dar-alkalima.edu.ps).
- ➔ Dar al-Kalima Health and Wellness Center: [www.daralkalima.org](http://www.daralkalima.org).
- ➔ International Center of Bethlehem: [www.annadwa.org](http://www.annadwa.org).



**Top:** A student choir at Dar al-Kalima School sings during morning devotions. All students, including Muslim students, attend the Christian devotions each morning.

**Bottom:** Construction is under way on a home for the new Dar al-Kalima College, the first Lutheran college in the Middle East.



# Extremely Lent

Lent is extreme. God gives up His Son, Jesus, who then gives up His life, for the sake of those He has come to seek and save. This is extreme. In return, those whom Jesus came to seek and save give up, too. They give up everything that stands between them and the faith that receives God's gifts of forgiveness, salvation, and life. This is extreme. This is Lent—in a sense, one could say, a kind of springtime and rebirth after the deadness of winter.

**O**n May 1, 2003, Aron Ralston cut off his right forearm. This is extreme; perhaps you have heard his story. At the time, Ralston was 27 years old. He had hiked into the beautiful, remote canyons of Utah. What was to be an afternoon outing became a weeklong life-or-death ordeal. Only a short time into Aron's expedition, an 800-pound boulder tumbled loose, fell on his wrist, and pinned his right hand to the canyon wall. No one knew where Aron was located. He had 20 ounces of water, very little food, a small amount of climbing

gear, and a pocket knife. It was an extreme situation.

For six days Aron exhausted every effort to free himself and his hand from the predicament. When the water was finally gone, Aron knew that by the time a rescue team found him, he would be dead. It was then that he realized the *only* remedy to this extreme situation: Aron Ralston would cut off his forearm and hand.

In his bestselling book, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* [New York: Atria Books, 2004], Aron describes the solution with *almost* emotional detachment: It was no longer his arm pinned by the 800-pound boulder—it was his life. Aron made a tourniquet from his climbing gear and performed the "surgery."

For the Baptized of Christ, Aron Ralston's story portrays the extreme death-to-life experience of Lent—of springtime and rebirth. Aron gave up the one thing that stood between him and life. The Baptized do the same. This is the work of the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin and leads us readily—and repentantly—to give up anything and everything that holds us captive. We are delivered. This is extreme.

Romans 6:3–5 says this: "Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by Baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in *newness of life*" (ESV, italics added). This is extreme. This is Lent. This is the springtime and rebirth received through faith in Jesus.

The Scriptures insist upon the extremes of the new life in Christ. In Matthew 5 and Matthew 18, Jesus says, “If your hand . . . causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life a cripple . . . than . . . to be thrown into the eternal fire.” If Aron Ralston had not cut off his arm, presumably he would have been found days later in one piece—and without life.

When the rich young man asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus said, “Sell what you possess and give to the poor . . . and follow Me” (Matt. 19:21). The rich young man’s wealth stood between him and Jesus like an 800-pound boulder. The Scriptures tell us that the rich young man went away sad. He could not give up his wealth.

When Jesus died on the cross, He did so to forgive and deliver us from the 800-pound burden of sin, and when He rose from the grave, He did so to give us victory and new life. This is the extreme death-to-life experience of Lent. Victory and new life are ours in our Baptism, and they are ours to embrace through faith in Jesus. 2 Cor. 5:17 says, “If anyone is in Christ he is a *new creation*. The old has *passed away*; behold, the new has come” (italics added). This is extreme. The old is no longer a part of you. You may need to say that a time or two: This “thing”—this sorrow, this shame, this circumstance and situation—is no longer a part of me. You may need a Christian friend to remind you of the same—not in judgment and condemnation, but with a humble, gentle reminder: You are a new creation in Christ.

Heroic as Aron Ralston’s extreme action was, it pales in comparison to the extreme action of Jesus when He delivered the Baptized from the prison walls of death. St. Paul tells us, in 2 Cor. 5:21, that “He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God!” Jesus took the 800 pounds of every sin, of every person, of every generation so that we would be set free. For six hours the anguished body of Jesus was pinned to the cross of Calvary and “by His stripes we are healed.”

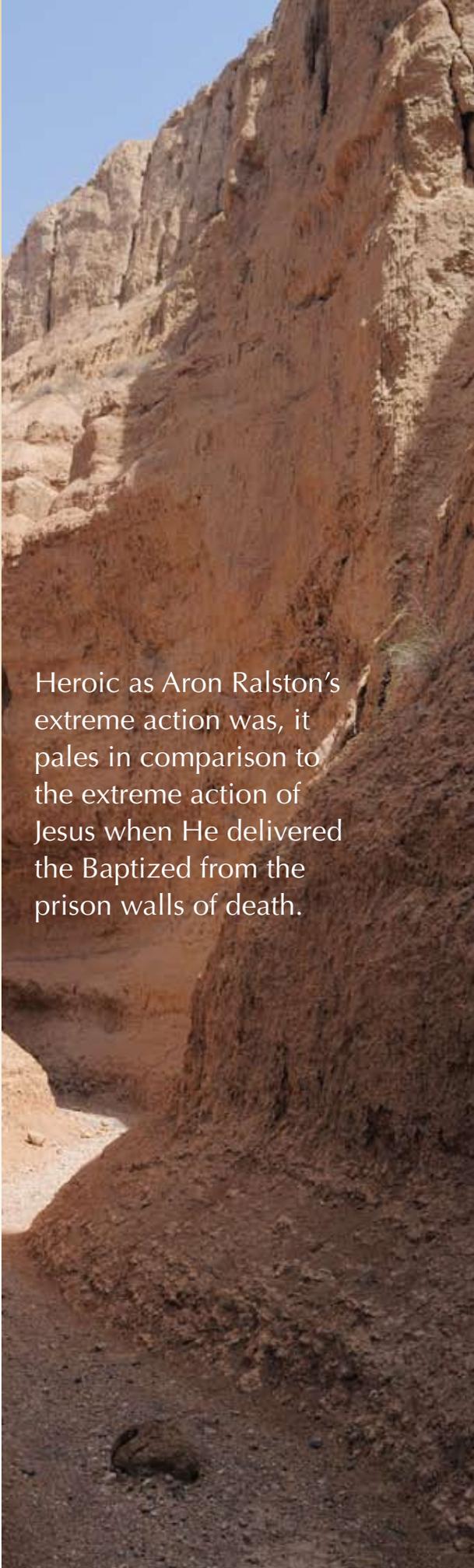
With *almost* emotional detachment Jesus measured the extremes of what He must do to rescue you and me and all people. For your sake and mine Jesus was severed from His Father and damned to hell. “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” were His words. This is extreme. This is Lent.

With extreme measure Christ accomplished an extreme reward for you and me. “It is finished,” He says from the cross. Jesus has delivered you. You are no longer stuck by 800 pounds of anything. In Christ, you are no longer anxious or overwhelmed. In Christ, you no longer live in guilt and shame. In Christ, you do not maintain grudges or grievances. You do not gossip or tell stories that hurt the reputation of others. You no longer carry prejudice and disappointment like a millstone around your neck.

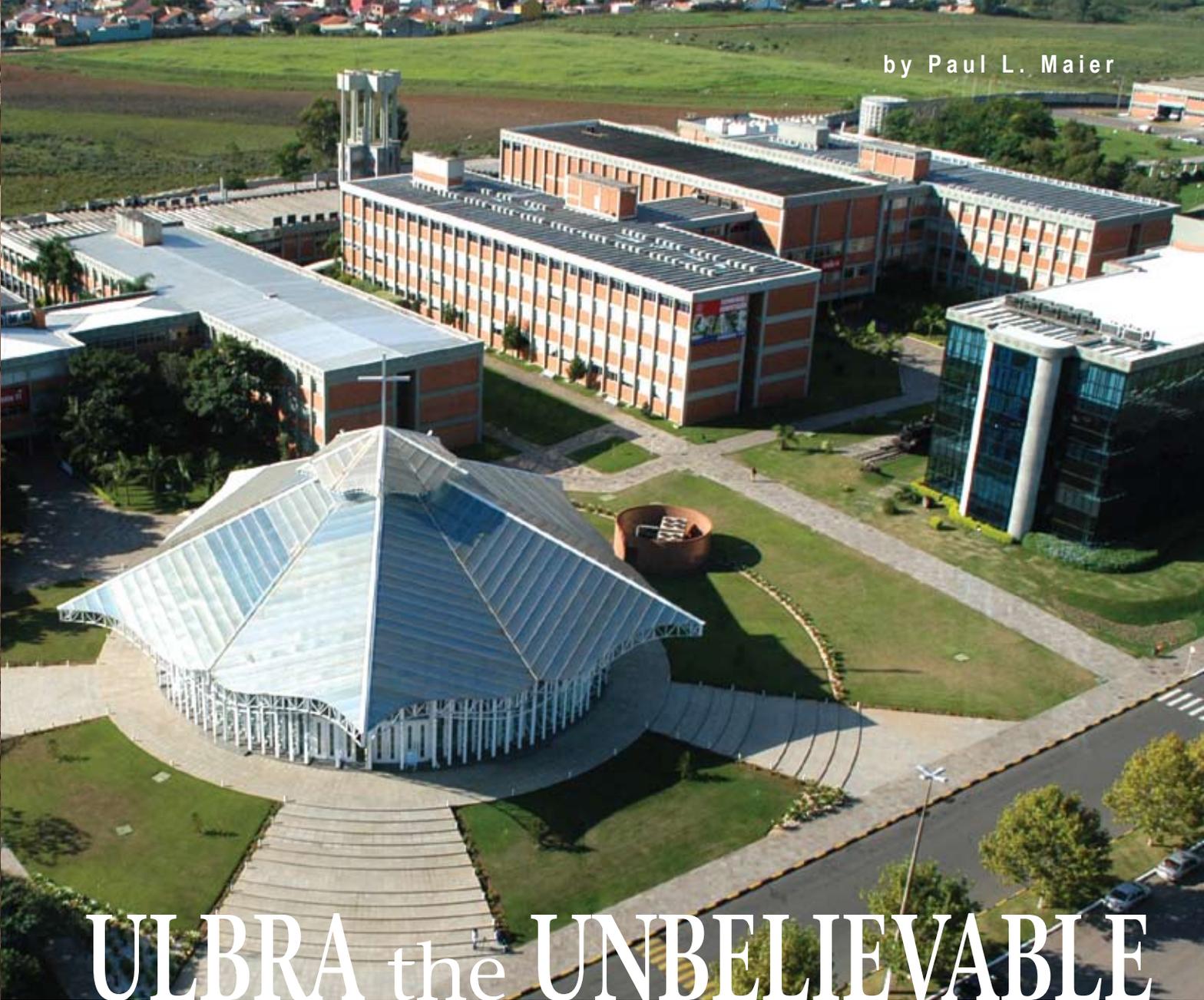
With *almost* emotional detachment you can walk out of the canyon that has been your prison. Fill in the blank for yourself. Do not rely on me to tell you what it is. Whatever your sin, whatever your sorrow, whatever your shame, it no longer has power over you. You may be a hand short or missing something else. It might be a broken heart—or a relationship that was not for you to have. You may have to confess a sin, or right a wrong, or acknowledge a lie and deception. You may need to reconcile a difference or apologize. But you are free. And there is no point in going back to where you have been.

Aron Ralston is now an inspirational speaker. He talks to schools, businesses, and civic organizations, telling his story of courage and new beginnings. He gives hope to people who have experienced great losses in their lives. You are an inspirational speaker, too. You are now Christ’s witness and ambassador, telling others of the great death-to-life experience of Lent. You can now tell others how Jesus gave up everything so that you could have eternal life and daily hope. This is extreme. This is Lent.

**Rev. Jeffrey Sippy is the senior pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church and Springfield Lutheran School in Springfield and Nixa, Mo.**



Heroic as Aron Ralston’s extreme action was, it pales in comparison to the extreme action of Jesus when He delivered the Baptized from the prison walls of death.



# ULBRA the UNBELIEVABLE

The largest Lutheran university in the world is also the youngest.



**W**hat is the largest Lutheran university in the world, and where is it located? In Germany? Scandinavia? America? It's not where you think. Try *Brazil*, of all places, where ULBRA (Universidade Luterana do Brasil, the "Lutheran University of Brazil") holds the record with 140,000 students. On its main campus at Canoas, just north of Porto Alegre at the southern tip of Brazil, 32,000 students are enrolled. At its 14 satellite campuses across the nation, 34,000 attend, while 74,000 pursue their studies via distance learning. Not only is ULBRA the largest, it is also the *youngest* Lutheran university in the world, founded only some 36 years ago. And, for good measure, it is also the only Lutheran university on earth *owned by one local church*, namely St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Canoas.

Other astonishing statistics might be listed here, but—more than anything else—this is an example of what can happen when someone's great vision meets great opportunity in a context of divine blessing. The "someone" in this case is the present rector (president) at ULBRA, the Rev. Ruben Eugen Becker.



Previous page: Aerial view of the Canoas campus of ULBRA.  
Above: Interior of the chapel at ULBRA, designed in the shape of the rose on Luther's coat-of-arms.  
Left: Ruben Becker, rector (president) of ULBRA and the author, Paul Maier.  
Opposite: A busy campus plaza at ULBRA.

## An Extraordinary Leader

Becker, the youngest of six children, was born in 1936 in Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost state in Brazil. LCMS Pastor John Muller led him to study for the ministry, and young Ruben graduated from Concordia Seminary, Porto Alegre, in 1960. He married his lovely wife, Luisa, and they have two children, Leandro and Ana. So far, nothing seems that unusual in his biography, but this would all change in 1966, when he accepted a call to St. Paul, Canoas.

The church was struggling with fiscal difficulties, and one way to balance the books—he was advised—was to close the congregation's parochial school that had only



a small enrollment, between 90 and 100. Not only did Becker refuse to close the school, he soon founded five more in the area.

But where were their graduates to get a good Christian secondary education? Several Lutheran academies soon followed, thanks to Pastor Becker's vision, and, finally, a college, oddly named *Faculdades Canoenses*, the Canoas Faculties. But that name was soon changed to ULBRA. In 1979, 1,717 students attended. By 1990, the number grew to 5,500. By 2000, ULBRA had become the fourth largest university in Brazil, and today the student population numbers more than 140,000, including the satellite campuses across all parts of Brazil. This mega-university offers no less than 81 undergraduate and graduate programs. ULBRA's medical and dental schools are among the finest in the nation, with four hospitals on its campuses. Nor should we overlook the elementary and secondary schools that led to all this: There are 17. The statistics, in so short a time, tend to boggle the mind.

Ruben Becker himself, however, is anything but a lofty academic potentate. He is extremely approachable and a delightful conversationalist. His wife and daughter serve as receptionists at his office in ULBRA's administrative headquarters, where he keeps a picture of the original schoolhouse in Canoas that

started it all. Nor does his vision end with ULBRA. The Rector has even greater plans for the university, and envisions future outreach via the broadcast media involving satellite transmission of the Gospel in Portuguese, which, he points out, is the fifth most widely spoken language on earth.

### **A Stroll through the Campus?**

When I was privileged to visit ULBRA not long ago, it turned out that the 620-acre main campus at Canoas was too vast for a stroll. Rather, it was a case of hopping in and out of a car driven by my guide, Dr. Johannes Gedrat, director of church relations at ULBRA. My immediate impression was not merely the extremely well-planned layout of the campus, but something one hardly ever sees at a university today: all the buildings were in the same architectural style, principally, a creative use of red brick. Most colleges and universities in America offer half a dozen different architectural motifs, ranging from Victorian to avant-garde, duly reflecting the age of the institution. ULBRA, however, is little more than one generation old, and can thus provide such a harmonious academic panorama.

At the western end of the campus stands a huge hospital and medical-school complex. Near it is the number-one dental school in Brazil, complete with the very latest in technical



**Students practicing in the dental school at ULBRA.**

equipment. Moving further eastward, one encounters a whole university city full of classroom buildings, libraries, dormitories, dining halls, reflecting ponds, and even brand-name concessions and stores. Spacious athletic facilities dominate the eastern third of the campus, since ULBRA also has a distinguished record in sports, its teams coming home with myriad trophies.

Then there is a lavish glass-walled Museum of Technology, four floors of which house both a string of products developed by science and an incredible collection of automobiles from every era since the beginning of the horseless carriage. Ruben Becker *loves* cars, and a favorite hobby of his is to buy wrecks at bargain prices, then have his engineering-school employees restore them in a handsomely equipped shop at the southeastern edge of the campus. The collection is so well done that no less than Emerson Fitipaldi, after searching the world for *the* museum in which to park his winning Indianapolis 500 race car, chose ULBRA.

## And the Lutheran Factor?

How many, many American colleges and universities founded for Christian purposes have wandered from their religious moorings and are now totally secular centers for higher learning! Has the same happened to ULBRA? The astonishing, heartening answer is no, not at all.

To be sure, no one is claiming that the student multitudes attending ULBRA on its various campuses have even a simple majority of Lutheran students. In fact, only a small percentage of them are Lutheran. Nevertheless, ULBRA serves the cause of Christ in remarkable ways. Structurally, of course, one cannot miss the huge white circular chapel with stained-glass windows in the very center of the university complex. It is designed in the shape of a rose, the white rose in Luther's coat of arms, as is the logo of the university. But more, far more.

There are Lutheran chaplains on all the ULBRA campuses as missionaries to the unchurched. Daily or weekly in all ULBRA units there are devotions or reflection moments and even ser-

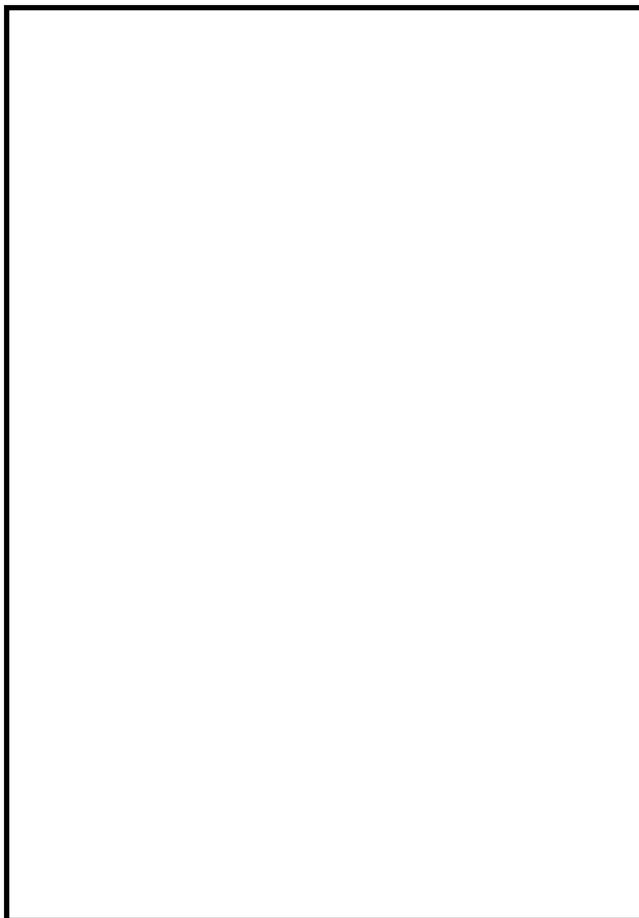
VICES in a variety of styles in order to reach people from all backgrounds, religious or otherwise. Any event at an ULBRA school is supposed to begin with a brief devotion by a chaplain, and most of the campus pastors also teach Religious Culture classes. In every graduation ceremony, the first to speak is a Lutheran pastor, who also hands a Bible to each graduating student.

The new campus of Concordia Seminary is located nearby to the north, and every morning students there are bussed to the main campus of ULBRA where they take general courses free of charge, returning in the afternoon for their theological instruction. A further chapter could be written about the dramatic music ministry of the St. Paul congregation in connection with ULBRA—five choirs, six contemporary music bands, eight organists—as well as their successes in publishing and radio-television broadcasting.

Perhaps of most interest to members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is the fact that all these remarkable successes, obviously blessed by God, are by members of our own partner church, the IELB—*Igreja Evangelica Luterana do Brasil*—the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil. Even *Ablaze!* is very active there also, as is *Cristo Para Todas as Nacoes*—Bringing Christ to the Nations, the Brazil Lutheran Hour.

A warm salute to our brothers and sisters in the southern hemisphere! You have shown us what vision and dedication can accomplish with the help of God.

**Dr. Paul L. Maier is second vice president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo.**



# Dueling Messiahs

## Jesus v. the Mahdi in Iran

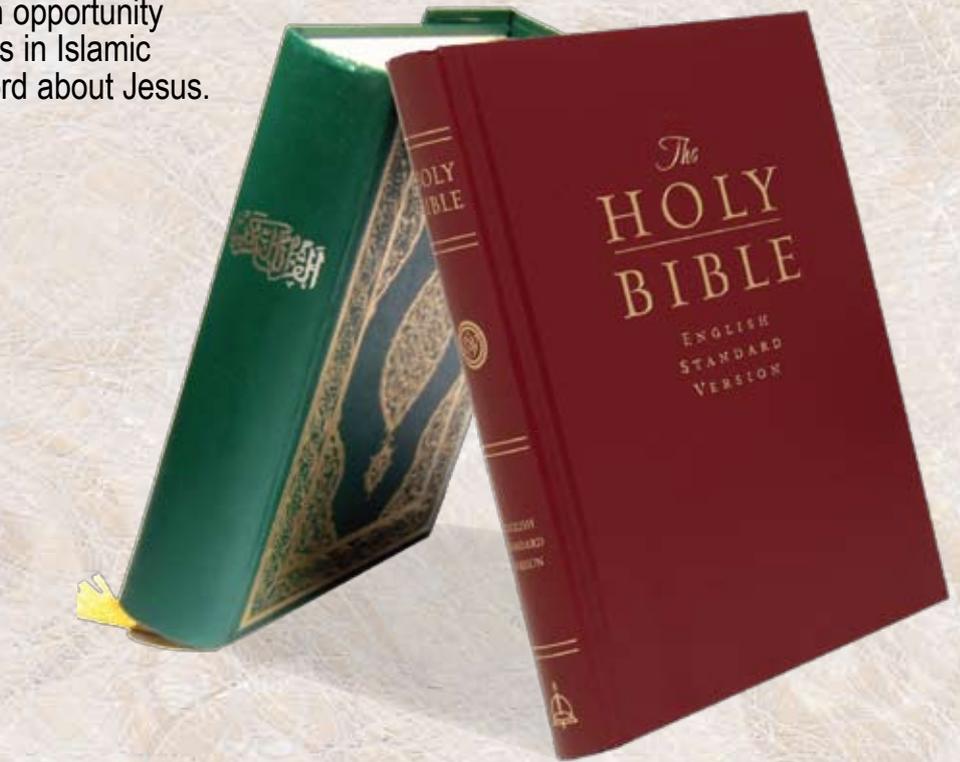
A conference in Tehran offers an opportunity to understand and discuss trends in Islamic eschatology—and to share a word about Jesus.

“I believe in Jesus—just as a prophet, not as the Son of God.”

I’ve had this discussion numerous times over the years—at Starbucks, in college faculty offices, online with old friends who had “fallen away.” So the subject wasn’t novel; what was new, however, was the location and the speaker: the dining room of Hotel Laleh in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, and a friendly Iranian studying to become a mullah (Islamic cleric).

I was in Iran for the fourth annual conference on Mahdism in August 2008. Mahdism is the Islamic belief in *al-Mahdi*, “the rightly guided one” who will come before the end of time to make the entire world Muslim. Both major branches of Islam, Sunni and Shi‘i, hold this Mahdist belief, despite his absence from the Qur’an. The Mahdi appears, rather, in the *Hadiths*, or “sayings,” attributed to Islam’s founder, Muhammad (d. A.D. 632). Sunnis, the majority of Islam’s 1.3 billion adherents, believe that the Mahdi has not yet appeared; Shi‘is, about 15 percent of the world’s Muslims, believe that the Mahdi has already been here, as one of Muhammad’s descendants through his son-in-law and cousin Ali. The largest branch of the Shi‘a, the “Twelvers” of Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon, believe that it was the 12th descendant—also named Muhammad—who did not die but “disappeared” in A.D. 874 and who will return as the Imam al-Mahdi, of whom President Ahmadinejad of Iran speaks constantly.

Ahmadinejad was the keynote speaker at the opening session, but rather than harping on purely political grievances against the West (Palestine and Iraq, for



**The ayatollahs who rule Iran are also trying to gain influence in the non-Muslim world by pushing Mahdism among Jews and particularly Christians, claiming that the messianic hopes of both religions will be fulfilled in the Twelfth Imam, the Mahdi.**

example), he emphasized the imminent coming of the Twelfth Imam and how the process of globalization was Allah’s way of preparing the world for it. The various sessions of the conference all echoed this theme of the Mahdi’s impending arrival, and how the Islamic Republic of Iran was in the vanguard of paving the way for his coming.

This included some unsettling topics: For example, one Iranian presenter discussed the future status of Jews and Christians under the Mahdi’s rule—would we all be converted or killed? It was not overly reassuring to hear that “most likely, the Mahdi will simply convert Jews

and Christians.” There was little or no differentiation between religious and political (or even military) topics: thus panels discussed issues such as the Islamic “anti-christ” (al-Dajjal, “the Deceiver”); the role of jihad, or “holy war,” in Mahdism; and the type of governors the Mahdi will appoint to rule over non-Islamic lands.

### TWO GOALS

It was clear that the conference—and the sponsoring, government-funded Bright Future Institute—had a dual aim. On one level, it was an attempt to spread Mahdism among Sunni Muslims, to convince them it’s acceptable to believe



in the Mahdi; for despite the existence of Mahdism in Sunni circles, a minority therein has always rejected the belief because of (1) the lack of Qur'anic support for the Mahdi; (2) the near-heretical divinizing of the 12 Imams practiced by many Shi'is; (3) the history of bloodshed between Sunnis and Shi'is, going back to Islam's earliest days in the Seventh Century. Still, Shi'i Iran is hoping to rival Sunni Saudi Arabia as the leading Islamic nation, and is trying—with some success—to use belief in the Mahdi as leverage to do so. But the ayatollahs who rule Iran are also trying to gain influence in the non-Muslim world by pushing Mahdism among Jews and particularly Christians, claiming that the messianic hopes of both religions will be fulfilled in the Twelfth Imam, the Mahdi.

For example, several Americans (both lay and ordained) courted most aggressively by the Iranians were representatives of Christian denominations whom we might refer to as “ecumaniacs”—pursuing “interfaith dialogue” for its own sake. Mahdism is thus being used as both a political and religious “evangelism” tool by Iranian Shi'is.

**I encouraged my Muslim friend to read the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament and compare them to what the Qur'an says about Jesus. Who knows? Maybe someday at least one member of Iran's clerical leadership will have a true view of Jesus as Messiah, or who at least, like Nicodemus, can come to Jesus by night.**

But evangelism attempts can cut both ways. I befriended several of the conference organizers, in particular a mullah-in-training (mullahs are rather like priests, whereas an ayatollah is similar to a bishop or archbishop). He and I began by discussing ways of interpreting the Qur'an, good-naturedly arguing whether the strict literalist Sunnis or the more allegorical-minded Shi'is had the correct approach to issues such as jihad. As the week progressed, our periodic conversations turned to Jesus in Islam and Christianity, and what the Bible and Qur'an say about Him. What my colleague knew was what Islamic propagandists had taught him: for example, that the Counselor, or Advocate, Jesus promised to believers in John 14:16 refers to the eventual coming of Muhammad. Islamic apologists argue that the Greek *parakletos* (“advocate, helper”) should be read *periklutos* (“praised”)—because the Arabic root *hamada*, whence comes the name Muhammad, means “praised.” As former

**Insert at left: At the Hall of Leaders in Tehran, the author stands in front of the Kiswah, the copy of the curtain that covers the Ka'bah in Mecca. (The Ka'bah is the most sacred site in Islam.)**

**At right: the interior of the Jamkaran mosque on the outskirts of Qom, Iran. Many Shi'is believe this is the site where the 12th Imam will rematerialize.**

The exterior of the mosque is pictured on page 20.

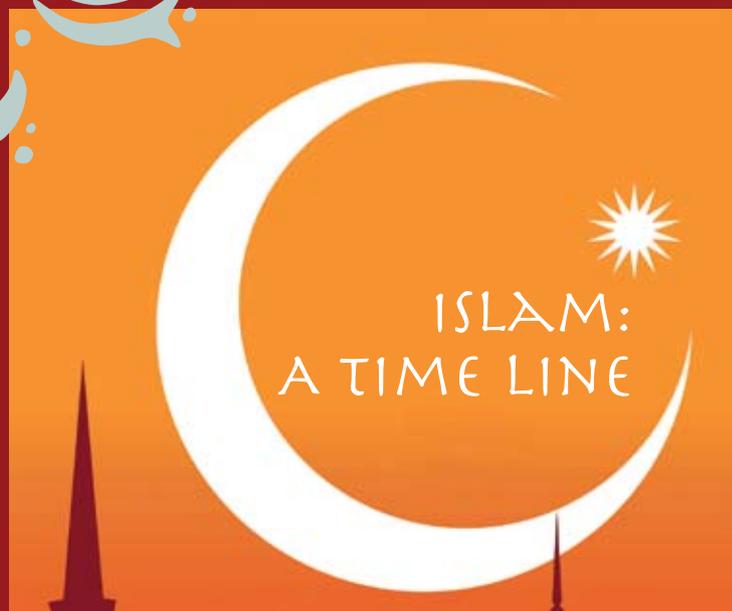
Anglican Archbishop of Jerusalem, and Islam scholar, Kenneth Cragg says: "This charge and the Muslim alteration have no basis exegetically. Nor does the sense of the passage bear the Muslim rendering. . . . However painful the necessity, the Christian must cheerfully shoulder the task of distinguishing clearly between Muhammad and the Holy Spirit, and of appreciating how it comes that the Muslim can be so confidently confused at this point" (*The Call of the Minaret*, 1964, p. 285).



## THE JESUS WE BELIEVE IN

I'm not sure how cheerful I was, but I did try to follow Archbishop Cragg's advice. Mid-week of my stay in Iran I asked my Muslim friend if he'd ever read the Bible. "No," he wistfully explained. "Wait here," I told him. I went to my room and came back with my small volume of the New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs—U.S. Army-issue, with a camouflage cover, ironically—which I gave him. He tucked it away, no doubt knowing full well that while the official government position is that Iranians have complete religious freedom, the reality is quite different. I don't know if he'd had time to read any of it, but a few days later as the dinner dishes from my last meal in Iran were being cleared to make way for coffee and tea, the conversation again turned to Jesus, and my colleague repeated the line about Jesus being a great prophet and how Muslims and Christians could rally around that belief. "No, my friend," I told him, "that is *not* the Jesus we believe in. We believe He was the Son of God, crucified and resurrected to atone for our sins." I was seconded in this by a French Catholic scholar sitting at our table. My Iranian colleague then asked, "How could one man's sins take care of another's?"

Illustration by shutterstock.com



Islam is the youngest of the monotheistic religions, developing some six centuries after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Because both Christianity and Islam claim to be God's true revelation to mankind, and because of the geographical proximity of the states where each was the dominant religion, the two faiths have often been in armed conflict.

For the first millennium of Islam's existence, it was expansionist and often militarily successful (with notable exceptions such as the First Crusade and the Ottoman failures to conquer all of Europe). But starting in the 18th century, Western powers (Russia, Britain, France, and eventually the United States) became militarily and politically dominant over the Islamic world, a status that still exists today.

- A.D. 622/1 AH (after *hijra*) "Flight" of Muhammad and first followers from Mecca to Medina.
- 632 Death of Muhammad.
- 661 Murder of Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law and first in line of Shi'ite imams.
- 632–1000 Islamic conquests across Middle East, Persia, North Africa, and Spain.
- 732 Invading Islamic army defeated at Tours, France.
- 874 Death (disappearance, in Shi'ite belief) of 12th Shi'ite Imam, who will return as al-Mahdi to Islamize the world.
- 1099–1291 The Crusades.
- 1453 Conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turkish Empire.
- 1492 Last Moorish (Islamic) kingdom in Spain falls. Muslims (and Jews) expelled from Spain. Columbus discovers the new world.
- 1501–1524 Iran/Persia forcibly converted to Shi'ism by Safavid Shah Isma'il.
- 1529 Ottomans besiege Vienna.
- 1571 Battle of Lepanto: combined European Christian fleets defeat Ottoman navy.
- 1798–1936 British and French imperialism in Middle East.
- 1918–22 Ottoman Empire collapses after World War I.
- 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran.

—T.R.F.

## Dueling *Messiahs*

“Because,” I replied, “He was not just a man—He was God’s Son.” We discussed this for a few minutes, until some ayatollahs sat down near us—at which point we decided discretion might be the better part of valor. But I encouraged my Muslim friend to read the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament and compare them to what the Qur’an says about Jesus. Who knows? Maybe someday at least one member of Iran’s clerical leadership will have a true view of Jesus as Messiah, or who at least, like Nicodemus, can come to Jesus by night.



Iran is funding and supporting a worldwide effort to spread Shi’i messianic beliefs among Christians, even in the United States, via organizations such as the Islamic Information Center in Washington, D.C. We need to be aware of this, and prepared to share with them “the faith once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3) in the *true* Messiah, Jesus Christ.

**A writer, editor, and teacher, Timothy R. Furnish (above) received his M.A.R. from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in 1989 and a Ph.D. in Islamic history from Ohio State University in 2001. He is the author of *Holiest Wars: Islamic Mahdis, their Jihads and Osama bin Ladin* (Praeger, 2005) and an elder at Rivercliff Lutheran Church in Sandy Springs, Ga. He operates a Web site dedicated to studying Mahdism: [www.mahdiwatch.org](http://www.mahdiwatch.org).**

# The Witness of Matthew Jordan

## Sometimes, Even Small Things Count

Four years ago Matthew Jordan came to our church, apparently looking for something missing in his life. In Bible class, he never said much, but now and then he would ask a question. I am told he asked a lot more questions in the new-member class, where he learned about the tenets of the LCMS, tough questions that sent our pastor back to his concordances. Whatever it was that Matt was looking for, his inquiring mind demanded more answers.

Matt Jordan was 51 years old and single when he died of a heart attack alone in his apartment. Not many of us got to know him on a personal level, because it just wasn't his nature to socialize following Sunday worship.

After the funeral service that was held in our worship center, I spoke with his father and some of his relatives. He had two brothers, two half-sisters, and no children.

"Had he ever been married?" I asked one of his half-sisters. "A long time ago," was her cryptic answer.

He worked in the building trades. He held a union card in a local carpenter's union and a journeyman carpenter's certificate. Those two items, along with a commendation from the U.S. Army, a homemade model airplane, a surprisingly good self-portrait, and a few photos, were displayed on a table.

I wondered if those few artifacts represented the sum total of a life spanning some 40-odd years, from the picture of a handsome towheaded boy to the man. Not likely, though they may have shown us an ordinary life uncluttered with the baggage of achievement.

Matt was likeable, though not given to opening a conversation. He was always polite, a friendly loner, but by no means reclusive. When he did speak, the words came out in a smooth baritone voice like the rumble of an idling engine. No doubt he was a witness to the neighbors of his apartment complex, who came to his funeral with tales of Matt urging them to attend his church.

At some point, Matt entered into the life of our congregation. He read Scripture, handed out bulletins, ushered, ate the





*But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'*

—1 Cor. 1:27–31 ESV

bread and drank the wine of Communion, and attended a Thursday-night Bible class regularly.

Our pastor, Rev. Dan Buringrud, recalls that Matt was dogged in the pursuit of truth, never asking the easy questions, never accepting the easy answers. Apparently, a seed was planted at an early age, because we learned from his father, a career Navy officer, that Matt was raised in a strict Lutheran home until his parents divorced. Sometime after that, he became unchurched and estranged from his father. For the last 25 years of his life, a spoken word never passed between the two. Matt admired his father, according to Pastor Dan, and he never spoke ill of him. The father honored his son by coming to the funeral, albeit too late to break the silence that existed between them for so many years.

Following Matt's funeral service, we adjourned to the fellowship hall, where, after a light lunch, some testimonials were offered. The most surprising testimonial came from a brother-in-law who stood up with great hesitation and a certain amount of emotion to explain about sorting through Matt's meager belongings and finding a license-plate holder referring to 1 Cor. 1:30. Matt had made the license-plate holder for his truck.

During the week after the service, I wondered why Matt had chosen that particular Bible verse. It seemed a little awkward and out of context, as if his thinking were incomplete, like a house without paint. We tend to think of John 3:16 or Psalm 23 as the more eloquent passages with universal appeal, but why 1 Cor. 1:30?

"It was totally in character with Matt," Pastor Dan told me. "In Bible class, his line of questioning never followed conventional thought."

Still, the verse he chose to frame the license plate on his pickup truck continued to puzzle me until I read the preceding three verses and the verse following. Then it all came together like a mirror held up to Matt's life.

*But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:27–31 ESV).*

We can never know if Matt Jordan saw himself reflected in those words as I did, but of one thing we can be certain: He wanted those who followed behind him in traffic to know that *because of Him you are in Christ Jesus*.

My memory of Matt is of a man standing apart, a diamond in the rough, walking down the walkway away from the worship center on a Sunday morning to the parking lot, alone, without a companion. A lonely life saddens me and, yet, some members of Matt's family who lived far away remarked on how fortunate he was to have his church family close by.

I believe Matt Jordan found what he was looking for after he came to our church, while we members of the congregation learned a few lessons from his life. We confirmed the benefits of a church family. We learned the importance of planting a seed. We saw the powerful witness of small things. We observed the patience and perseverance of someone seeking the truth. We experienced a Christian's commitment to the work of the Church.

Still, there was one thing Matt left unfinished. How do we break the ice of estrangement from someone we love? I have no easy answers, but maybe Matt was on the right track, starting with 1 Corinthians. If we scroll ahead to the 13th chapter, the Apostle Paul reminds us that love is patient and kind; it is not jealous; it does not brag, nor is it arrogant; it keeps no record of wrongs but always hopes, trusts, perseveres, and so much more.

**Earl Rogers is a member of Greenhaven Lutheran Church,  
Sacramento, Calif.**

*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

Peace Lutheran Church, Franklin, N.C., has officially dissolved as of Nov. 16, 2008, and is no longer a member congregation of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.—Rev. Jon T. Diefenthaler, President, LCMS Southeastern District.

REV. JOHN RYDING was appointed circuit counselor of the Ainsworth Circuit, effective Dec. 1, 2008, for the balance of the present term, which ends at the Nebraska District convention in June 2009, replacing REV. ALLEN BERGSTRAZER, who has resigned the position of circuit counselor.—Rev. Russ Sommerfeld, President, LCMS Nebraska District.

## Official Notices— Colloquies

DAVID J. RUSSERT, Montvale, N.J., and EDGAR PALMA, Montgomery, Ill., have submitted their applications for the Pastoral Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. BRYAN OECHSNER, Clinton Township, Mich., and TRACY PARKER, Menomonee Falls, Wis., have submitted an application 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, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295.

PETER M. MONFRE, Milwaukee, Wis., has completed all requirements of the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and is, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Rev. Albert L. Garcia, Ph.D., Director of Lay Ministry/Teacher Colloquy Program, Concordia University Wisconsin, 12800 N. Lake Shore Drive, Mequon, WI 53097-2402.

MARIANNE ALLEN, Hot Springs, S.D., has completed all requirements of the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and is, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Brian L. Friedrich, President and CEO, Concordia University Nebraska, 800 N. Columbia Ave., Seward, NE 68434-1599.

## Official Notices— Requests for Reinstatement

DAVID WELLS, Pfafftown, N.C., has applied for reinstatement to the Minister of Religion—Commissioned roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Correspondence regarding this application should be directed to the undersigned for receipt no later than March 5.—Dr. Raymond L. Hartwig, Secretary, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295.

## Official Notice

Resolution 1–09 was adopted at the 2007 Synod convention, asking “that a detailed annual report of the *Fan Into Flame* funds be written by the Synod’s Board for Mission Service, to be published throughout the Synod.” The Board for Mission Services is pleased to offer The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod this overview of proceeds raised and expended for *Fan Into Flame*, the campaign to provide financial support for the *Ablaze!* movement. You can view and download this document from the *Fan Into Flame* Web site at [www.fanintoflamecms.org](http://www.fanintoflamecms.org), and then click on “Reports.”

## Official Notices— Call for Nominations

**The Board for District and Congregational Services (DCS) of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod** seeks nominations for the position of **Executive Director**. This person administers the activities of the DCS team and its services in accordance with the Synod’s objectives and policies set forth in the bylaws, policies of the LCMS Board of Directors, resolutions of Synod conventions, and policies of the Board for District and Congregational Services.

**Responsibilities:** In overseeing the overall operations of DCS, this person

- establishes a vision, formulates strategies, and implements a plan so that through the blessing of the Holy Spirit, DCS ministry areas can help develop and foster vibrant ministries that share the Gospel of Jesus Christ;
- manages the development of the DCS strategic plan, coordinating it through the DCS operational plan developed by ministry-area director;
- develops and administers the annual budget in cooperation with ministry-area directors;
- assists the board and staff in securing designated funding and fraternal grants;
- prepares meeting agendas and makes policy recommendations to the board;
- administers the application process for Recognized Service Organizations;
- communicates on a regular basis with district staffs, in cooperation with ministry-area directors, highlighting ministry areas, events and resources;
- coordinates the work of DCS with other Synod boards and entities, especially those directly involving district and congregational services.

**Qualifications:**

- A member of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, either an ordained or commissioned minister, with a minimum of a master’s degree, faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions
- Supportive of the Synod’s constitution, bylaws, and

policies and familiar with the structure, policy, organization, policies, and procedures of the Synod

- Proven skill in visioning and strategic planning
- Proven skill and experience and working knowledge of good administrative procedures and fiscal management, especially as these skills relate to district and congregational services
- Ability to work with and coordinate with a variety of related ministries and services in the Synod, in other church bodies, and outside the church
- Ten years ministry experience, with five years as leader of a team ministry

Nominations should be submitted by **March 20, 2009**, to Mr. David Fiedler, Interim Director of Human Resources via regular mail to 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, Missouri 63122; via email to [david.fiedler@lcms.org](mailto:david.fiedler@lcms.org) or by fax to 314/996-1121.

## 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., Feb. 20 for the April issue). Send notices to [karen.higgins@lcms.org](mailto:karen.higgins@lcms.org).—Ed.*

### Division Director, International Ministries

An experienced individual is needed to direct the operation of all international **Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM)** offices around the world.

Duties involve leading the International Ministries Division by setting vision and planning, and by evaluating programming, staff performance, and training. This includes: supervising area counselors and other selected staff team members to prepare and equip the International offices to proclaim the Gospel message appropriately to their local populations; stimulating healthy growth of local support in each country where LHM has an office; controlling division budget by reviewing spending on a regular basis; maintaining productive working relationships with local board and partner-church leadership; and interfacing with the Ministries Committee, Board of Governors, international staff leadership, and LHM headquarters staff.

### Qualifications:

- Bachelor's degree required; advanced degree preferred.
- Experience working with international cultures and laws.
- Background in non-profit management and understanding of administering off-site work facilities.
- Capability to lead employees to FORM a high-functioning team.
- Ability to work effectively with employees at all levels.
- Background in fund-development very helpful.
- Active membership in a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregation or partner church.
- A love for ministry.
- An empowering and positive “can do” attitude and team spirit.

Send resume with cover letter to Jackie O'Guin, Human Resources, Lutheran Hour Ministries, 660 Mason Ridge Center Drive, St. Louis, MO 63141-8557; FAX: 314-317-4291; E-mail: [lhmjobs@lhm.org](mailto:lhmjobs@lhm.org); Website: [www.lhm.org](http://www.lhm.org).

The following institutions of the **Concordia University System** are seeking candidates for positions:

**Concordia University Chicago, River Forest, Ill.**, seeks to fill the following faculty

positions: **biology/anatomy; school counseling.**

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 of no more than 50 words 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., Feb. 20 for the April issue). Send notices to [karen.higgins@lcms.org](mailto:karen.higgins@lcms.org).—Ed.*

**Trinity, Salina, Kan.**, will celebrate its 75th anniversary at the 8:30 and 11 a.m. worship services on March 1, July 12, and Nov. 1. Former pastors will preach at each of the services. A potluck will follow the 11 a.m. service on each date. Contact the church office at 785-823-7151.

**Our Redeemer, Taylor, Mich.**, formerly First Slovak of Delray-Detroit, will celebrate its 100th anniversary on May 17. Contact the church office at [ourredeemertaylor@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ourredeemertaylor@sbcglobal.net) or call 313-291-4400.

**Redeemer, Glendale, N.Y.**, will celebrate its 100th anniversary throughout 2009, beginning Feb. 7, with *Holy Ground* from Concordia College, N.Y., to perform for worship and celebration for youth. The yearlong celebration will conclude with an anniversary service and banquet on All Saints' Day, Nov. 1. Contact the church office at 718-456-5292 or [redeemerpastor@verizon.net](mailto:redeeperpastor@verizon.net).

## In Memoriam

*Obituary information is provided by district offices to the Synod's Office of Rosters and Statistics. Any questions about content should be referred, therefore, to the appropriate district office.—Ed.*

### ORDAINED

**GIOVENCO, JOSEPH C.**; June 20, 1935, East Liverpool, Ohio, to Oct. 31, 2008, Springfield, Ill.; son of Anthony and Rose (LaBarbara) Giovenco; graduated Fort Wayne, 1982. Served 1982–1983, 1984–1997. Ministries/parishes: Abbotsford, Wis.; Boyceville, Marengo, Wis.; retired 1997. Survivors: Frances (Scribner) Giovenco; sons: Edward, Bruce, David; daughters: Lynn Watkins, Vicki Thoen, Deborah Giovenco. Funeral: Nov. 4, 2008, Chapin, Ill.; interment: Nov. 4, 2008, Jacksonville, Ill.

**GROTHER, KURT VICTOR**; Nov. 13, 1912, Oxford, Neb., to Nov. 4, 2008, Mount Prospect, Ill.; son of Rev. Louis and Bertha (Vetter) Grother; graduated St. Louis, 1937. Served 1938–1977. Ministries/parishes: Foley, Elberta, Ala.; Itasca, Arlington Heights, Ill.; retired 1977. Preceded in death by his wife, Elvira (Meyn) Grother. Survivors: son: Kurt Jr.; daughters: Corinne Ramming, Pamela Dammann, Valerie. Memorial Service: Nov. 9, 2008, Itasca, Ill.; interment: Nov. 9, 2008, Mount Prospect, Ill.

**HOYER, DWAYNE CARL**; Sept. 14, 1938, Fort Dodge, Iowa, to Nov. 5, 2008, Deerfield Beach, Fla.; son of Carl and Helen (Bargston) Hoyer; graduated St. Louis, 1964. Served 1964–2001. Ministries/parishes: Hammond, La.; Fort Myers, Pompano Beach, Fla.; Seoul, Korea; retired 2001. Survivors: Judith (Grabowski) Hoyer; daughters: Kimberly Liebowitz, Michelle Musselman. Memorial Service: Nov. 15, 2008, Coral Springs, Fla.; cremation.

**LARSON, ELMER C.**; Nov. 29, 1929, Stratford, Wis., to Nov. 6, 2008, Sheboygan, Wis.;

son of Otto and Hilda (Olson) Larson; graduated Springfield, 1953. Served 1954–1992. Ministries/parishes: Bowler, Sheboygan, Wis.; Bethel, Melrose, Sauk Center, Minn.; retired 1992. Preceded in death by his wives, Myla (Schrack) Larson and Carla (Kraft) Larson. Survivors: son: Craig; daughters: Kari Longmire, Connie Fritsch; step-son: Donald Kraft; step-daughters: Carol Shull, Diane Kraft. Funeral: Nov. 10, 2008, Sheboygan, Wis.; interment: Nov. 11, 2008, Shawano, Wis.

**O'CONNOR, JOHN ALBERT**; Oct. 16, 1936, Brooklyn, N.Y., to Nov. 2, 2008, Syracuse, N.Y.; son of John and Ruth (Meyer) O'Connor; graduated St. Louis, 1962. Served 1964–1988, 1988–1999. Ministries/parishes: Gambrells, Md.; New York City, Buffalo, Rome, N.Y.; U.S. Army chaplain, Vietnam; Eastern District circuit counselor: 1979–1988; retired 1999. Preceded in death by his wife, Dorothy (Pollinger) O'Connor. Survivors: Sandra (Cagwin) O'Connor; sons: Michael, Timothy, Peter, Paul; daughter: Lynn Larli. Funeral: Nov. 8, 2008, Canastota, N.Y.; interment: Nov. 8, 2008, Rome, N.Y.

**RECKLING, MICHAEL JOHN**; Dec. 5, 1958, Detroit, Mich., to Oct. 1, 2008, Temecula, Calif.; son of George and Mary Lou (Pavlik) Reckling; graduated St. Louis, 1996. Served 1996–2008. Ministries/parishes: Midwest City, Okla.; U.S. Navy chaplain. Survivors: Christina (Wimmer) Reckling; sons: David, Jacob, Nathan; daughter: Mary Anne. Funeral: Oct. 4, 2008, Fallbrook, Calif.; interment: Oct. 7, 2008, Roanoke, Va.

**SIMMONS, RAYMOND L.**; April 7, 1919, Pittsburgh, Pa., to Nov. 12, 2008, Cabot, Pa.; son of John and Clara (Fabel) Simmons; colloquy 1986. Served 1986–1993. Ministries/parishes: Pasadena, Md.; retired 1993. Survivors: Mary (Knapp) Simmons; sons: Eric, Mark, Paul. Funeral: Nov. 17, 2008, Oakmont, Pa.; interment: Nov. 17, 2008, Glenshaw, Pa.

**TASSLER, MELVIN JOHN**; May 25, 1916, Sebeka, Minn., to Oct. 30, 2008, Lincoln, Neb.; son of Rev. Albert and Marie (Kritzmann) Tassler; graduated St. Louis, 1941. Served 1941–1983. English District chairman for Parish Board of Education: 1962–1971; English District circuit counselor: 1983–1991; retired 1983. Preceded in death by his son, James. Survivors: Dorothy (Abel) Tassler; sons: David, Mark; daughter: Judith Weyand. Funeral and interment: Nov. 5, 2008, Lincoln, Neb.

**WOLLENBURG, GEORGE F. DR.**; July 6, 1930, Austin, Minn., to Aug. 18, 2008, Billings, Mont.; son of Oscar and Rosa (Burger) Wollenburg; graduated St. Louis, 1955. Served 1955–2006. Ministries/parishes: Pleasanton, Neb.; Bridger, Belfrey, Billings, Mont.; Montana District president: 1969–1977, 1992–2006; retired 2006. Survivors: Martha (Kannenberg) Wollenburg; sons: John, Mark, Steven, Martin; daughters: Mary Uecker, Ruth Hoots, Susan Deveraux. Funeral and interment: Aug. 26, 2008, Billings, Mont.

### COMMISSIONED

**BLEEKE, RALPH JOHN**, May 29, 1931, Fort Wayne, Ind., to Sept. 30, 2008, Pensacola, Fla.; graduated River Forest 1960. Served 1960–1996. Schools/ministries: missionary Papua, Lae, New Guinea.; New Orleans, La.; Warrington, Fla.; retired 1996. Preceded in death by his wife, Margaret (Albers) Bleeke. Survivors: sons: Jonathan, Steven; daughters: Debra, Lisa. Memorial service: Oct. 18, 2008, Pensacola, Fla.; cremation.

## Whom May I Commune?

I ask this question as a Roman Catholic who by way of marriage is related to many Missouri Synod Lutherans. I am, in fact, a eucharistic minister, and I have been asked by members of my extended family to commune elderly Lutheran relatives residing in assisted-living facilities. I have refused based on my understanding of both the Catholic and Lutheran positions in this matter—that while we share most of the core beliefs of Christianity we are not in “full Communion” and that the communicant is also a “confessor” of the unity and doctrinal understandings of their individual faith traditions. With deepest respect I have explained that such a unified confession does not yet exist between Catholics and Lutherans and so neither does a unified communion. Please help me better explain these differences so as to not offend the sensibilities of people I love. Yet, I cannot with a clear conscience overlook the obvious differences that separate us at the Lord’s Table. *M.S., Florida*

Thank you for asking this question. *The Lutheran Witness* and our LCMS Church Information Center have received several similar questions recently. Our LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) staff has prepared a brief response that includes references to some resources that may be helpful in explaining close[d] Communion to your family members:

*It appears from the information you have shared that our practice has not been fully represented to—or properly understood—by your family members. It is true, of course, that faith in Christ’s atoning death on the part of individual communicants is a necessary*

*prerequisite for a worthy reception of the Sacrament—together with a faith in Christ’s words regarding the Real Presence of His body and blood given and shed for the forgiveness of sins. However, as you are aware, reception of the Sacrament, in addition to an individual dimension, also has a confessional and “corporate” dimension to it. That is to say, Christians commune, not only as individuals, but also as persons who are making a public confession of their faith as they approach the altar with other Christians of a particular church body.*

*We appreciate your interest in determining the LCMS’ understanding of the practice of close[d] Communion. It may be helpful to share the following FAQs from our Church Information Center Web site with your family:*

<http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=422>  
<http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=6629>

**Web EXCLUSIVE!**

*You might also find helpful a Lutheran Witness story written some years ago by Dr. Samuel H. Nafzger, the former executive director of our Commission on Theology and Church Relations. You can find that story, “Who Is Invited to the Supper of Our Lord?” by visiting [lcms.org/witness](http://www.lcms.org/witness) and clicking on the link for this department.*

*For a more complete discussion of this issue from a biblical perspective, we suggest our 1999 study, “Admission to the Lord’s Supper,” which is available online at the following:*

<http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=511>.

## LETTERS

*continued from page 5*

### A real blessing

As a 75-year-old recently new-born Christian, I have so much to learn. “The Best Christmas Pageant Ever,” Dr. Reed Lessing’s December article on Matthew’s genealogy was a real blessing. It reminded me yet again of the depths beyond depth in God’s Word. Though I can never fathom them all, the story of those five women teaches me that I can rejoice in having a Gospel that has so many blessings for me.

I read the *Witness* from cover to cover every month. Thank you.

*Gerald Albers  
Bloomington Ind.*

Great story, I remember being a shepherd in someone’s bathrobe! However,

I think Dr Lessing was referring to *crepe* paper not *crate* paper.

*Ward Hemingway  
Dana Point Calif.*

*Crate Paper is a colorful product often used for scrapbooking and craft projects.—Ed.*

### A great suggestion

My comment is for Diane Strzelecki who wrote “Bringing a Nativity Set to Every Home” (December). This is a great idea—I’m happy to see it publicized in *The Lutheran Witness*. In the past, I have included, along with the nativity set, a child’s book of Jesus’ birth and the story of Christmas to go along with the set. I have also included Bible story puzzles and other books from Christian book stores. It’s always been my hope and prayer

that perhaps an older child in the family would read the book to the younger children as they set up the nativity scene together as a family. Thanks again for spreading this suggestion!

*Carol Thompson  
Tyler, Texas*

### Supporting church workers

I commend the letter which appeared in the December *Lutheran Witness* and suggested that congregations consider assisting pastors with their educational debt. The average educational debt that 2008 seminary graduates carried into the pastoral ministry was more than \$27,300.

*continued on page 26*

## Answering ‘Why?’

**God has blessed us with a son who is a hard worker, talented, and compassionate. He is also gay, and he has questioned why God made him this way. I told him I don’t know the answer, but that God doesn’t make “junk,” and that I will always love him. I have also told him I think he’s going down the wrong road. This has caused friction. I don’t know what to do or what support I have.**

Learning that a son or daughter is homosexual stirs up many emotions for parents. They may wonder why, despite their love and good intentions, things didn’t work out as they had hoped. Many find communication with their child can be productive, drawing him or her closer. But communication can deteriorate if it is laden with criticism and judgment. Christ calls us as parents to hold up all the truth of God’s Word to our children and to continue to love them—including children who experience same-sex attraction.

Jesus set a powerful example of how to relate to those experiencing sexual brokenness of any kind. He spoke freely and clearly with the woman at the well regarding her adultery (John 4). He was direct about her sin, and He was clear about the life-giving, healing water He alone offers.

Unfortunately, some in the Christian community do not respond with compassion and care toward fellow believers who struggle with their sexuality. As a result, those struggling may feel ostracized.

Scripture is clear in its condemnation of sexual impropriety of any kind outside the husband-wife marriage bond; it is

equally clear that God cares for all who seek Him. Jesus faced and overcame temptation, and He is ready to help those who are likewise tempted.

While your son may never get an answer to the “why” of his situation, he can know that his Savior cares for him amidst his strife, and is faithful to His promise of daily renewal in Baptism.

Talk with your pastor and develop a care plan for you and your son. You might find help from *A Plan for Ministry to Homosexuals and Their Families*, a publication produced by the LCMS Task Force on Ministry to Homosexuals and Their Families (see <http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CIC/minhomfam.pdf>). Two Christian organizations that provide help to those struggling with homosexuality and their families are Love Won Out and Exodus International.

Finally, know that the Holy Spirit can work through you to call your son to continual re-examination and growth in his relationship with God. I pray that your congregation will give both of you compassionate care and support as you navigate these difficult waters.

**Theresa M. Shaltanis, M.A., L.P.C., is a marriage and family therapist and a member of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Falls Church, Va.**

**Send your questions to Family Counselor, *The Lutheran Witness*, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295. Please include your name and address.**

## LETTERS

*continued from page 25*

Since this is the average amount, there are many new pastors who have much higher educational debt levels. While not uncommon for those who have completed eight years of undergraduate and graduate-school education, this average level of debt is a matter of concern when compared to the average first-year salary of nearly \$38,000 for seminary graduates in 2008.

This debt can certainly affect the emotional well-being of recent seminary graduates and their families. It can also have a negative impact on longevity of service in the pastoral ministry. While some pastors might be reluctant to discuss their educational debt load, I encourage leaders in congregations served by recent seminary graduates to initiate the discus-

sion of this issue in a spirit of love and concern.

The LCMS seminaries and the Synod’s Board for Pastoral Education are addressing this issue. It is complex and challenging. Thanks to a grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, three separate groups will address the challenge in three separate component parts: (1) Debt incurred prior to seminary enrollment; (2) debt incurred during seminary enrollment (coupled with the necessity to maintain the fiscal vitality of the seminaries); and, (3) creative ways of assisting pastors with educational debt following seminary graduation.

Let me be quick to add that what I have noted above is also applicable to teachers, directors of Christian educa-

tion, and all commissioned workers. Once again, I commend the letter published in the December *Lutheran Witness* and encourage congregations to implement its recommendation.

*Dr. Glen Thomas  
Executive Director  
LCMS Board for Pastoral Education*

## Thinking economically

Several years ago, my congregation, a bedroom community of upper-middle-class people, wrestled with the idea of continuing blanket subscriptions to *The Lutheran Witness* for all members due to your huge increase in price. At the same time, I noted that you began using glossy,

## Thoughts for the New Year

- The most important thing in communication is to listen for the things not being said.
- Happiness comes through doors you didn't know you left open.
- When someone says, "That's a good question," you can be sure it's a lot better than the answer you're going to get.
- Don't expect God to use you as a lighthouse somewhere else when you won't let Him use you as a candle where you are.

Courtesy of George Kottwitz  
Trinity Lutheran Church  
Edwardsville, Ill.



## Waste Not, Want Not

Old Ole was dying. On his deathbed, he opened his eyes and asked quietly, "Is my wife here?"

"Yes, Ole, I'm here," whispered Lena, his wife.

"Are my children here?" Ole asked.

"Yes, Daddy, we're all here," his daughter said.

Ole was quiet for a moment. "Are my relatives here?" he asked.

"Yes, they're all here," his son said.

Ole paused again. "Then why is the light on in the kitchen?"

Courtesy of George Kottwitz

## Charity Begins at Home

Janet was preparing Saturday morning pancakes for her sons, Kevin, 5, and Ryan, 3. As Janet poured the batter into the skillet, the boys began fussing about who would get the first pancake. Sensing an opportunity for a moral lesson, Janet said, "If Jesus were here, He would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.'"

Kevin saw the light immediately. His eyes sparkling, he turned to his brother and announced, "Ryan, you can be Jesus."

Adapted from *The Big Book of Church Humor*  
Compiled by Ken Alley

heavy paper, which surely added considerably to your costs.

I submit that this is not a good use of resources, especially if this is indicative of our overall attitude toward an economical operation. I am aware that costs have increased, but I would hope that the *Witness* would consider the budget constraints of congregations and keep costs as low as possible.

Eunice Hafemeister  
Minneapolis, Minn.

*As stewards of the church's resources, we seek to use them wisely, and we are especially aware of our responsibilities in these uncertain economic times. The current individual subscription price for The Lutheran Witness is \$22 per year, which works out to \$2 per*

*issue or about six cents per day. CPH also offers The Lutheran Witness at significantly reduced rates when subscriptions are organized through districts or congregations, or when readers opt for two- or three-year subscription cycles. For more information about subscriptions—including a special \$11.50/year offer—call CPH at 800-325-3040 or visit cph.org and click on "Magazines."—Ed*

## More Dr. Siemon-Netto, please

We have enjoyed reading Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto's articles in *The Lutheran Witness*. We have not seen any in a while and would like to see more of them. They are thoughtful articles, very

meaty and powerful messages.

Robert and Marie Heckmann  
Richmond, Va.

Dr. Siemon-Netto is working on a story that is schedule to run in the April issue of *The Lutheran Witness*.—Ed.

Read more letters to the editor at [LCMS.org/Witness](http://LCMS.org/Witness). 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](mailto:Lutheran.Witness@LCMS.org). Please include your name, postal address, and telephone number. Letters without this information cannot be considered for publication.

# We Have Seen *His Majesty*

Read 2 Peter 1:16–18.

*He was an eyewitness.* St. Peter said he saw the majesty of Jesus.

The word *majesty* is a kingly word. It has to do with greatness and power. *Glory* is another word for majesty. That's what Peter says he and the other disciples saw. He recalls a specific example. Read Matt. 17:1–8, Mark 9:2–8, and Luke 9:28–36. In each instance, what is the example? What are the signs of Jesus' majesty? What does the majesty of Jesus on the Mount of the Transfiguration tell us about Him?

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Jesus shows His majesty (or glory) to tell who He is. The Transfiguration isn't the only event the disciples witnessed.

Our Savior was a preacher and teacher. The Gospel-writer Matthew records one of Jesus' most significant sermons. The Sermon on the Mount runs from Matthew chapter 5 through chapter 7. What kind of majesty, or glory, does Jesus show in His preaching? Read Matt. 7:28–29.

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The first miracle Jesus did was at the wedding feast in Cana. What does this miracle tell us about who Jesus is? In John 2:1–11, what is the reaction of the disciples to the showing of Jesus' majesty?

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Jesus also showed His majesty when He healed people. Read Mark 2:1–11. What is the first thing Jesus does for the man? Why does Jesus say He does it?

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Are the people amazed at Jesus' healing, or is something else amazing to them? What does Jesus do that He hasn't done yet, according to Mark?

Read Mark 1:29–34; 40–45.

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Jesus forgives sins, something only God can do. He shows Himself to be God Himself sitting among the people and teaching, healing, and forgiving.

Our Lord has power even over the spiritual forces of Satan. In Luke 9:37–45, He heals a young boy who is demon-possessed. The people are astonished. Where does Jesus immediately direct the disciple's attention?

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The disciples don't seem to understand the real implications of Jesus' majesty. Jesus, God Himself in human flesh, has come to accomplish a specific task. Read Mark 10:35–37. What do the disciples want? How do the disciples see Jesus' majesty and glory?

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What is Jesus' response (vv. 38–45)? When does Jesus say His majesty and glory are going to be displayed most clearly? Compare Mark 10:37 and Matt. 27:35–38.

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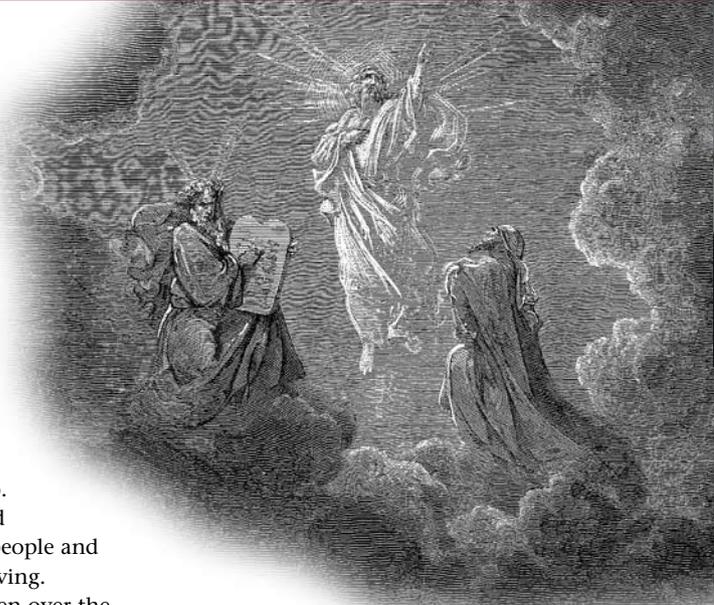
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After His death on the cross and burial in the tomb, Jesus shows His majesty once again. Read John 20:1–18. What does Jesus reveal about Himself in His resurrection?

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Jesus is God. He reveals Himself in many ways. He preaches with authority. He shows His power over the physical and spiritual world. He heals people and forgives their sins. He offers Himself as the Sacrifice for human sin and rises again from death.

Why is it important that we see Jesus as God? What do the following verses tell us? Read Ps. 49:7, Mark 10:45, 1 Peter 1:18–19, 1 Cor. 15:57, 2 Tim. 1:10, and Heb. 2:14.

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Jesus' most important work is earning the forgiveness of sins for us through His life, death, and resurrection. But His majesty and glory don't end on the cross or with His resurrection. Read John 18:36–37, 2 Tim. 4:18, Rom. 8:34, and Eph. 4:10–12. What important work does Jesus continue to do, showing His majesty and glory?

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**Rev. Jonathan C. Watt is pastor  
of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church,  
Creston, Iowa.**





## The 'Little Town' Today

Despite its current economic or political climate, Bethlehem is still the place where Christ was born—where many still travel to remember a night long ago in this little town when the Light of the World came into its 'dark streets.'

**H**aving visited Bethlehem just two months ago, I have a new perspective on the words from the familiar Christmas carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem." The small town about which we sing, "how still we see thee lie," today reflects the scars left by the action verbs that mark her history—"sacked," "rebuilt," "conquered," "captured," "fortified," "expelled," "demolished," and "rebuilt." (See related story, page 6.)

Life in Bethlehem today lies in sharp contrast to a place where the nights were marked with "deep and dreamless sleep. . . ." The "little town's" 30,000 residents are vividly reminded that any serene days of the past will not return any time soon as a 24-foot concrete wall is erected to separate the people of this West Bank Palestinian community from their Israeli neighbors.

The current reality was strikingly visualized when our group visited the Bethlehem home of an architect who had drawn plans for new ministry buildings in the city. His home at one time was valued at \$2.8 million, largely because it overlooked the olive groves that have belonged to his family for hundreds of years.

Standing on the porch of that home, one now can see only the 24-foot concrete wall less than half a stone's throw away. The acres of olive groves are quite inaccessible. To check the centuries-old trees and to harvest their produce requires that the owners exit through one of three gates in that wall—no simple task—and travel many, many miles around that wall.

The gray starkness of that concrete wall only too accurately reflects the atmosphere hovering over present-day Bethlehem. With outside access becoming increasingly difficult, the tourism market, an economic staple for the region, continues to dwindle. Unemployment in the area tends toward 50 percent. Meanwhile, the Israeli "security barrier" that eventually will stretch about 550 miles continues to be built, marking yet other verbs in their history—"separated" and "isolated."

Somehow, in the midst of these challenges, a sense of expectation remains in Bethlehem, echoing the words of the carol, "Yet, in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light." While the Christian leaders and people we visited there did not exude overt optimism for the future, they still were filled in a quiet way with hope.

Their hope was exhibited in service to others in a K-12 school, a college, a health and wellness center, and The International Center of Bethlehem, all sponsored originally by the pastor and people of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, and all of which gain support from a U.S. group known as "Bright Stars of Bethlehem." These acts of service reminded me of how so many respond in our own country during tough or troubled times.

Although Bethlehem today is far from the way we picture it on our Christmas cards, there still is something special about being on the streets made prominent in the carol. As one stands in Manger Square, one still gets the sense that "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

Regardless of one's personal circumstances, challenges, setbacks, or anxieties, the fears of the day still seem to melt away in that place. Despite its current economic or political climate, Bethlehem is still the place where Christ was born—where many still travel to remember a night long ago in this little town when the Light of the World came into its "dark streets."

Lasting peace in the Middle East may, or may not, be achieved in my lifetime. But I am thankful that one night in Bethlehem my fellow travelers and I had a taste of its transcendent meaning once again.

"O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.

Yet, in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.

The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

**Jerry Kieschnick**  
John 3:16–17

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