



# THE LUTHERAN WITNESS™

VOL. 129 NO. 2 FEBRUARY 2010



## rural ministries vibrant opportunities

**WORD OF GOD  
SPEAK!**

**PHILIP MELANCHTHON  
CONFESSOR  
OF THE FAITH**

**ON FORGIVENESS**

[lcms.org/witness](http://lcms.org/witness)



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.

## To the Reader



Heine

Let me introduce you to someone you know already: Jim Heine, editor of *The Lutheran Witness* for the past three years, has become the director of News and Information Services for the LCMS Board for Communication Services. In his new role, Jim will serve as executive editor of the *Witness* as well as executive editor of the Synod's monthly news-

paper, *Reporter*. Beyond that, he will tend to a myriad of other functions and projects, both print and electronic.

Jim brings a host of credentials and experience to his new job: Nearly 20 years as an editor at Concordia Publishing House, a decade running his own editorial-services firm, and more recently his work as the day-to-day overseer of the Synod's flagship publication (for which he helped to enact a number of improvements, including the *Witness's* Web site) put Jim in good stead to assume his new responsibilities. We consider ourselves blessed to have someone with Jim's gifts and integrity atop our News and Information department.

This issue carries an advertisement seeking applicants to fill the chair Jim leaves behind. Together with our colleagues at Concordia Publishing House, our partner in producing the *Witness*, I pray God's guidance in helping us find a new managing editor with the same standards of excellence and commitment to the task that characterized Jim's stewardship of this 129-year-old publication.

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



## On the Web

To find out the latest information about the LCMS relief effort in response to the devastating earthquake in Haiti, please visit [www.lcms.org/worldrelief](http://www.lcms.org/worldrelief) for the most recent updates.



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# Words of *Life*

**C**all your sister," Paul, my husband, said when I walked in the door from a Saturday meeting. "She's got bad news." I felt a flip-flop in my stomach. "Do you know what it is?"

Paul nodded, "She's got cancer."

I called Marilyn and listened while she described the findings—bladder cancer, an aggressive cancer that offered little hope. Yet, she remained positive. "I don't care what my urologist says," she confided. "I have to have hope."

My sister and I weren't close growing up. She was four years younger, and we didn't have much in common. As adults, we lived a thousand miles apart and didn't see each other often. When our mother became ill, however, I flew home to help Marilyn. During that week, we re-bonded, a sisterly bond that neither of us had experienced before. That only made her news more devastating.

**'The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.'**

During the next months, I followed my sister's progress. She had her bladder removed. She began chemo and radiation. She didn't complain or give up hope. Still, her doctor's grim warning haunted me. I prayed for her daily.

It was the uncertainty that was hardest for me. One day, pouring out my heart to the Lord, I asked Him, if it was His will, to show me words revealing the path Marilyn would take. I opened my Bible, put my finger down, and read from 1 Peter 1:24: "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever" (ESV).

I sat there shaken. I felt the Lord had answered my question: Marilyn was going to die.

Marilyn lived a little more than a year after that. I said my final good-bye at her funeral, knowing she was now free of suffering and home with the Lord.

Two years after Marilyn's death, my husband was diagnosed with esophageal cancer. After chemo and radiation, he endured a nine-hour surgery to remove the tumor. Healing was slow. I begged God to restore his health, and again the ogre of not knowing haunted me. If I asked again for God's direction, would He answer?

I opened my Bible and my eyes fell on Psalm 103: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, and heals all your diseases."

I breathed a sigh of relief. These words were words of life. I continued reading.

Verse 15 of the psalm came upon me unexpectedly. "As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him."

I couldn't believe it. I felt the Lord had shown me almost exactly the same words as before. Paul was getting better. He couldn't be dying.

Less than two months later, I buried Paul in the cemetery outside of town beneath a sheltering tree. Paul had joined my sister in heaven.

I thought about those passages often after losing my husband and my sister, pondering God's words. I know now that I focused on the wrong part of the message. The opening words pointed to death, but the closing words proclaimed life everlasting. In my narrow focus on loss, I'd missed the joy and hope of God's promises: *The word of the Lord remains forever.*

Yes, Marilyn died. Yes, Paul died. Yes, I, too, will die. But God's Word and His love never die. They stand as a beacon leading to eternal life.

Death will come. But God has shown me the rest of the story. Because of the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus, His words, love, and promises of eternal life stand forever.

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



## A joy to read and treasure

I truly enjoyed “Christmas Magic,” Rev. Raymond L. Hartwig’s article in the December *Lutheran Witness*. It brought back memories of my wonderful grade-school days in the 1950s at St. Paul’s Lutheran School.

We had a devout Christian man named Edison F. Onken who taught all four of the lower grades. I remember those beautiful days between Thanksgiving and Christmas when Mr. Onken would have us young students sing all 15 verses of his favorite hymn, number 85 (in *The Lutheran Hymnal*), “From Heaven Above to Earth I Come.” Often we would even sing all 15 stanzas for our Christmas Eve program in church.

Our remarkable teacher knew, as Rev. Hartwig explained so well, the importance of Luther’s entire hymn. I am keeping this *Lutheran Witness* article to read again and

The poll asked the following: “How do you reply when greeted by the words ‘Happy Holidays’? [Do you reply] ‘Merry Christmas’ or ‘Happy Holidays’?”

Because there was no option for “Other,” I submit that *Neither/Other* would be a common response because “Happy Holidays” is shorter than “Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.”

I generally reply with a smile and a “Thank you.”

Since we (Christians) are to put the best spin on things, I choose to appreciate the kind words because so often I get a blank stare and a “here” as I’m handed my purchase. I sometimes ask if s/he celebrates the blessed birth, and if s/he responds, “Yes,” I wish him/her a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Otherwise, it’s often an opportunity to witness.

Just my nickel’s worth!

*D.S. Chapman  
Pittsburgh, Pa.*

Christian? LCMS members endure divorce, depression, grief, job loss, etc. Reading about Reformation leaders may be fine for some, but I would like to see more relevant topics for today—help us in our daily walk with Christ—don’t keep us locked in the Reformation past.

People in our parishes are struggling in this world—they don’t need to get out a dictionary in order to read a church publication. Come down to earth, and reach out to the layperson.

*Lesa Harr  
Sioux Falls, S.D.*

## No timetable for grief

In your December Family Counselor, Theresa Shaltanis answered a question about grieving. I did not write the following, but I copied it after losing my husband and struggling with the feeling of overwhelming loneliness. I don’t know who the author is. However, it made me feel better knowing I wasn’t strange just because I couldn’t seem to get over the empty feeling, even amongst people I loved, when others I knew seemed to cope so much better and so much sooner. The title of the piece I copied was “Grief Doesn’t Run on Schedule”:

*I don’t remember when these words started being said after a loss. But now it seems in every public or private death, every moment of mourning is followed by a call for “healing,” a cry for “closure.”*

*At a Christmas party, a man was concerned about a widowed mutual friend. “It’s been two years,” he said, “and she still hasn’t achieved closure.” The words pegged her as an under-achiever who failed the required course in Mourning 101, who wouldn’t graduate with her Grief class.*

*People can have completely opposite responses. One may say, “It’s time to move on,” and another describe her heart this way: “Sometimes I feel like it is bleeding.” Another may say, “I have an emptiness inside of me that’s there all the time.” Or describe their life as “having a huge hole that can’t be mended.”*



I am keeping this *Lutheran Witness* article to read again and again. I believe a beautiful children’s Christmas program could be written from Rev. Hartwig’s article and Martin Luther’s hymn.

*Dee Dee Kull Batson  
Strasburg, Ill.*

again. I believe a beautiful children’s Christmas program could be written from Rev. Hartwig’s article and Martin Luther’s hymn.

*Dee Dee Kull Batson  
St. Paul’s Lutheran Church  
Strasburg, Ill.*

## Christmas greetings

I’d like to respond to a recent Christmastime poll question on your *Lutheran Witness* Web site [[lcms.org/witness](http://lcms.org/witness)].

## Come down to earth, please!

I have been reading *The Lutheran Witness* since I was young (30+ years) and have often found it to be written in language better suited for seminary professors and pastors. The ordinary layperson in our churches may have to struggle through articles written in a pedantic style and language.

Where are the articles that pertain to the ordinary life as a

*Sometimes we confuse sadness with depression. We expect, maybe insist upon, an end to grief. Trauma, pain, detachment, acceptance in a year. Time's up!*

*But in real lives, grief is a train that doesn't run on anyone else's schedule. There simply are no one-minute mourners. Normal grieving may be a lifelong process. Hearts heal faster from surgery than from loss. And when the center of someone's life has been blown out like the core of a building, is it any wonder if it takes so long even to find a door to close?*

*The pain lasts as long as it has to. We are all different, and we all grieve at our own rate.*

And God will continue to be with us no matter how long it takes.

*Dolores Hatfield  
Spencer, Iowa*

**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.**



Official periodical of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through the Board for Communication Services, Dennis A. Clauss, chairman; David L. Strand, executive director.

Staff: James H. Heine, executive editor; Vicky Schaeffer, senior designer; Robert Sexton, marketing manager and advertising sales; Jim Stange, production coordinator; Carla Dubbelde, editorial manager, district editions; Karen Higgins, editorial assistant; editorial office: 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; 314-996-1202.

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Published 11 times per year by Concordia Publishing House, 3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968. Individual subscription \$22 per year. Organized congregation subscriptions and district editions offered at reduced rate if submitted through local churches.

To subscribe, renew, or to give a gift subscription, call Concordia Publishing House at 1-800-325-3040.

For subscription information or address changes, e-mail: [cphorder@cph.org](mailto:cphorder@cph.org)

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Member: Associated Church Press  
Evangelical Press Association  
February 2010 (ISSN: 0024-757X) Vol. 129, No. 2

## ‘Loaded with Opportunities’

Despite declining populations, rural communities offer vibrant opportunities to joyfully share the comfort of the Gospel.

**R**ural ministry is loaded with opportunities,” observes Rev. Dean Hanson, a pastor in central Nebraska.

His comment reflects the optimism and energy for church life in rural America displayed at the “Reaching Rural America for Christ” conference last November in Nebraska City.

Across rural America, communities and institutions, including churches, deal with concerns about declining population and related issues, but Hanson, pastor of Grace Lutheran



Church, Pleasanton, Neb., and Faith Lutheran Church, Hazard, emphasizes that those communities also need the comfort and hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“Somebody’s got an underage daughter that’s expecting; somebody is living together without marriage; somebody else is dying,” he says. “They all need to hear the Gospel. Not all of them will become members of your church, but some will.”

While participants shared ideas and encouraged each other, the conference was significant because participants also provided input for expanded services and resources to encourage and affirm rural and small-town ministry. Participating were 114 laypersons, pastors, and district and national staff members.

Some 3,000 of the more than 6,000 congregations in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod fit the rural, small-town category, explains Dr. Ralph Geisler, director of the rural and small-town ministry resource center at the Schroeder Leadership Training Center at Saint Paul’s Institute for Education (SPIFE) in Concordia, Mo. Often cited at the conference was the estimate, based on a Nebraska District study, that perhaps 50 percent of people in rural and small-town communities do not have a church home.

**Some 3,000 of the more than 6,000 congregations in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod fit the rural and small-town category.**





Rev. Dean Hanson

**People who live in rural places are more likely to express contentment with community, family, local church, and trust of their neighbor, but they are likely to regret the lack of services readily available in large communities.**

Geisler classifies rural and small-town ministries as those in towns with less than 15,000 residents. The regional economies these ministries serve are often agribusiness based, but they also may involve forest products, fishing, mining, or tourism.

SPIFE and the Rural Ministry Task Force of LCMS World Mission co-sponsored the 2009 conference.

Flavoring the conference and reflecting Synod's *Ablaze!* goal to share the Gospel with 100 million people worldwide, participants often spoke of serving as "mission outposts" and equipping "missionaries." Geisler explains that congregation members can be prepared to speak about their faith to friends and neighbors. At the same time, young people can be equipped to be "missionaries," whether they remain in the community, go away to college, or leave to work in larger towns.

### **A Community Anchor**

Churches remain one of the most tenacious organizations in rural America, says Dr. Randy Cantrell, a rural sociologist from the University of Nebraska. Cantrell discussed population changes and characteristics of Great Plains communities at the conference. He said the church plays an important role in social networking.

Interactions in small communities are among people who know each

other, Cantrell explained. He emphasized the importance of establishing "biographies"—of listening to understand the background and histories of people, as well as sharing one's own "biography" (story).

The sociologist said people who live in rural places are more likely to express contentment with community, family, local church, and trust of their neighbor, but they are likely to regret the lack of services readily available in large communities. His studies found that population will decline where people don't have access to a town of 10,000. Yes, people move away. But Cantrell also noted that census studies in far western Nebraska revealed that as much as 30 percent of the population said they had arrived in the last five years.

The best thing leaders in rural communities can do is to get people together to form networks, Cantrell said. "If you can get four or five people

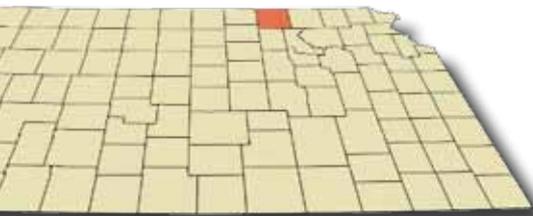
to discuss working together, you are changing the social structure."

According to Geisler, "There is probably not one way to touch all the congregations, especially the dual and three-point parishes, which we call regional ministry congregations." He believes many more congregations will need to come together. "We are working across district lines to put together opportunities for them to look at how they can be strengthened to touch their rural and small-town communities."

Geisler said three groups will be formed as a result of the conference: One will focus on revitalization for congregations. A second will gather resources for regional ministries. A third will focus on Christian education—day schools, Sunday Schools, and adult Bible studies—to equip members to be missionaries.

The stories that follow highlight three LCMS congregations in Kansas and Nebraska. To read about Pastor Hanson's ministry, as well as other rural or small-town ministries, visit [lcms.org/witness](http://lcms.org/witness) and click on the link for this story. For Bible studies focusing on rural and small-town ministry, visit [spife.org](http://spife.org).

**Roland Lovstad ([roland.lovstad@lcms.org](mailto:roland.lovstad@lcms.org)) is a member of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Perryville, Mo., and an editor-at-large for *The Lutheran Witness*.**



# This Is Where I Belong



Rev. Rodney Fritz collects all things John Deere.

**A**s a new pastor, one of the first things Rodney “Sarge” Fritz learned was how to play pinochle.

“I said I didn’t know how to play, and the people said they’ll teach me,” he recalls. “And I learned a lot.” Fritz came to know his members, learn about the struggles and joys of rural America, and hear their questions about faith and life.

And he learned something else: “There’s a respect that comes with the office of the pastor that’s pretty automatic in rural America, but you’ve got to earn the members’ trust.”

Twenty-nine years and counting, Fritz is serving his first call as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Hanover in north-central Kansas. Based on the experience, he has some things he hopes to share as a member of the Kansas District Board of Directors and its Rural Small-Town Ministry Committee. His dream is to develop a presentation to introduce new professional workers to rural and small-town ministry.

“I guess the biggest lesson I would tell them is this: Learn the history of the congregation and the culture where you serve. And that’s going to take a while,” he says.

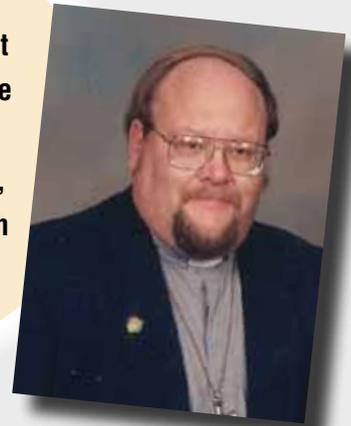
Fritz fears that rural congregations—often the first call for a seminary graduate—are considered by pastors as a stepping stone to some place “bigger and better.” Congregations often develop a sense that their pastor is not going stay for any length of time; so they are hesitant to adopt new programs.

At one time, a majority of pastoral candidates came from rural areas, Fritz observes. Today, the largest number comes from urban-suburban back-grounds. He admits that rural America may not be able to offer large and beautiful choirs, multiple church staffs, parochial schools, or even secretaries—and the nearest hospital or Wal-Mart may be 40 miles away. Yet, a vital ministry can take place.

“There are people who need pastoral care. If you give yourself time to grow in the community and work with the people, they will love you to death,” Fritz says.

His advice for a new pastor is straightforward: If rural ministry is new to you, admit it. Ask your congregation to help you understand. Also, Fritz advises patience, because change in a congregation can come slowly. The congregation needs to understand that a new pastor wants to bring the Word, and that he has a heart to do things for the Lord.

**The best advice he received was to shut the office and accept the invitation to celebrate a birthday with a family, even if work is piled high on his desk.**



Rev. Rodney Fritz

Whether the pastor asks or a member invites, there should be rides on the combine, home visits, circulation among business and gathering spots in town, and lots of conversation. “People here in rural America, they wave,” Fritz explains. “You talk to everybody. They may not be your members, but when you’ve been out among them enough, you gain their trust.”

The best advice he received was to shut the office and accept the invitation to celebrate a birthday with a family, even if work is piled high on his desk.

“It just means being out among them, doing the best you can, laughing with them, crying with them,” he continues. “When you mess up, you say, ‘I’m sorry; forgive me.’ And you continue on, because they will come to you and talk about their hurts and their struggles, and you can always pronounce that good news that Jesus does forgive, and He’s going to be with them through every struggle.”

After 29 years, Fritz wonders if he has been at Trinity too long. But he balances whether his ministry is as fresh as it could be against a deep relationship that has endured good and bad times. So far, he says, “The Holy Spirit has never said, ‘Fritz, it’s time to leave.’”

“I’ve grown up with this congregation,” he continues. “I’m at the point now where you are not just dealing with members; you are ministering to close friends. And that is a good thing!”

—R.C.L.



## A Three-Room School Is a Good Place to Be



**J**udy Bartels, the principal of Zion Lutheran School, Tobias, Neb., believes her school is doing exactly what it's supposed to be doing—training missionaries.

"We are outposts training our children to go out and be the missionaries that God wants them to be," Bartels declares. She also knows that the school—directly or through the children—is sharing Jesus with parents.

"I think that's why we in the church are having difficulty now," she observes. "It's because people haven't been trained to go and share their love of Jesus."

Bartels is one of three teachers in a school with 28 students in kindergarten through eighth grade, plus 10 in the preschool. She teaches grades five through eight, another teacher has grades one through four, and the third teacher has kindergarten and preschool.

"We are in the country, and we have one of the old-time churches, built in 1907," she says. "As a matter of fact, the school probably is the reason why the church started, because the first families wanted their children to have a Christian education."

Once, every child of the congregation attended the school, although that's not the case anymore. Enrollment has declined, because there are fewer children in the congregation.

"At one time, it was a part of this church; it was just what you did," she says. "Especially over the last few years, when we had the new families move in, I think the congregation is seeing the school more as a mission. It seems the Lord just puts them on our



**Judy Bartels, principal of Zion Lutheran School, believes her school is doing exactly what it is supposed to be doing—training future missionaries.**



**'We are in the country, and we have one of the old-time churches, built in 1907. As a matter of fact, the school probably is the reason why the church started, because the first families wanted their children to have a Christian education.'**

doorstep at the right time . . . and we just say, 'Hello, come on in.'"

As for teaching in a classroom with four grades—Bartels endorses it enthusiastically. "I love it," she says, "because the kids teach each other. Plus, they hear the same material over four years." Bartels adds that it's not uncommon to have eighth-grade students raising their hands, saying "I know, I know," when she's teaching a fifth-grade lesson.

Last year, two eighth-grade girls—a class of "go-getters"—worked with the preschool. "They just did wonders with the little kids," Bartels says. "One of them wrote a paper on those little kids and what they meant for her life. She even cried when she read it. I think she will probably become a preschool teacher."

Bartels emphasizes the importance of teaching the faith when children will face many social and world issues, including criticism and perhaps even persecution of the Christian faith. She encourages them to learn their hymns, Bible verses, and catechism, because there may come a day when they may not be allowed to have a Bible.

"I hope we're not frightening the kids by saying this," she comments. "But I think they need to know why it's so important for them to learn what Jesus

has done for them and that He is their strength, no matter what."

Bartels began her teaching career at Zion in 1971. Later, she met and married a local farmer, took time off to raise four children, and taught four years in the public-school system. She returned in 1997 as a teacher and principal.

"The greatest part is being able to share my faith, to share Jesus, and to talk to the kids about what Jesus does for them," she says. "It's so much fun to watch them focus on what we're talking about. This is where I have the kids' attention, more than in any other subject."

Bartels knows it's likely her students will not stay in Tobias—another reason to equip missionaries. "We are not close enough to a town big enough to make it worthwhile for them to stay around here," she explains. "I guess that's the fun part—wondering where God is planning to send them as they grow older."

—R.C.L.



## It's Not All Downhill!

**S**t. John Lutheran, outside Columbus, Neb., has a problem, and Fred Siefken, its head elder, thinks other rural congregations should know about it.

"We are talking about the growth. At times our facilities are overflowing," he says. "With rural small-town ministry, we want to make sure the message of our success gets out there and gives hope to other churches that it's not all downhill in rural America."

Siefken dismisses the notion that everybody in rural areas has a church home: "There are plenty of people to reach in our area. I don't think we are closed to anybody." He says members of St. John make the most of opportunities to witness and to invite friends, neighbors, and co-workers to their church.

"They come, and they like what they see," Siefken says. "It has to be centered on the Word. Some people would say it's style of worship, but no, it's not that. We are using a more traditional worship service. People come to hear the Word."

It wasn't always that way.

### Recovering Joy

Fifteen years ago, the congregation, about 80 miles west of Omaha, was deeply conflicted and had lost a quarter of its membership. "The spirit of joy had really been lost," recalls Rev. Brad Birtell, who became pastor in 1996. "The task that God gave me to do here was to restore hope and joy and credibility to the office of the ministry. The challenge was to bring back what it means to daily celebrate the life Jesus has given in our Baptism."

During his first years at St. John, Birtell made countless home visits to connect with the members. Yet, he believes the congregation's youth were responsible for beginning the turnaround.



On Christmas break, Rev. Brad Birtell visits with St. John youth.

Photos by Mike Whye



Rev. Brad Birtell (above) credits the youth of his congregation with beginning its turnaround.

**Over the years, many of St. John's youth have become church workers. Those who stay in the area become leaders in the congregation. Those who move away become leaders in their new congregations.**

That first summer, nine high-school youth decided to make a mission trip to the White Earth Indian Reservation in Minnesota to teach Vacation Bible School and participate in other activities with children. Their vision was expanded and their hearts were touched by the experience of sharing the love of Jesus.

The St. John-White Earth connection continues every summer. A smaller group also visits during the winter, distributing hats, coats, and mittens while they teach Bible lessons. The youth have made other mission trips, too, including trips to New Orleans for post-hurricane cleanup.

"They got us to look out beyond ourselves," Birtell says. "The kids have

been the catalyst: they keep our eyes on the mission field beyond us."

Over the years, many of St. John's youth have become church workers, Birtell adds. Those who stay in the area become leaders in the congregation. Those who move away become leaders in their new congregations, he adds.

"We are training kids up either for full-time church work or to go into congregations wherever God plants them and be vital living parts of the body. It's an awesome deal all the way around."

Right now, St. John has nine youth attending Concordia universities.

Birtell insists that St. John is hard to find among corn and soybean fields on winding country roads. Yet, the rural congregation is growing, and Birtell calculates the average age of new members "is definitely in their twenties." Young people build relationships, he explains, adding that those who work "in town" tell their friends how St. John has affected their lives.

Organized in 1879, St. John counts an average worship attendance of almost 200. Its Lutheran school has three teachers and enrolls 33 students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

St. John also maintains a preschool and a daycare center.

"I think one of the most important jobs a pastor can do is equip his people with God's Word and then get out of their way and let them use their gifts and abilities for the upbuilding of God's kingdom," Birtell says. "I've been blessed because I've been here long enough to see people develop and use these gifts."

Siefken lives in the house where he grew up. He runs a calving operation and farms 500 acres. A lifelong member of St. John, he observes this about rural ministry: "It's typical of rural ministry and maybe a little bit of our downfall—people think they have to be born into the congregation."

St. John's members, he adds, have learned how to invite: "Many of our members are not from this area, but they feel welcome and a part of the congregation."

St. John's difficult time more than a decade ago may have been a blessing, Siefken reflects. "Pastor Birtell is doing a great job equipping our youth, and everyone here feels empowered by his example."

—R.C.L.

# Discovering Hope and Joy in the Ministry

**P**robably the biggest thing I hear from congregations and pastors is that this has given them hope for the future and joy in ministry," says Dr. Terry Tieman of LCMS efforts to revitalize LCMS congregations in which worship attendance is on a plateau or slipping downward.

**Revitalization . . . helps congregations rediscover God's mission, which is to reconcile all people through His Son, Jesus, and to bring them into a relationship with Himself.**

Revitalization guides congregations through a process of looking outward instead of inward. It helps congregations rediscover God's mission, which is to reconcile all people through His Son, Jesus, and to bring them into a relationship with Himself.

In a special partnership, Tieman serves as director of mission revitalization for LCMS World Mission as well as being executive director of the Transforming Churches Network (TCN). TCN is working with 30 LCMS

districts to train consultants and coaches and prepare study materials.

About 320 congregations are involved in the process, which includes learning communities for pastors who later lead similar communities for congregational leaders. The one- to two-year process includes a weekend consultation to identify five strengths and concerns and outline five "prescriptions." If a congregation chooses to continue in the process, the district assigns "coaches"—one to work regularly with the pastor and another to work with the congregation.

Most current projects involve urban and suburban congregations, and TCN is working with the LCMS

Rural Ministry Task Force to incorporate adaptations to fit the needs of rural and small-town congregations.

"We've seen some remarkable things," says Tieman, citing increases in worship attendance, offerings, Baptisms, confirmations, lay leadership, and community involvement. Most important, he said congregations find hope that they can continue to function and have joy in carrying out the mission of God and the ministry Jesus gave them.

For more information, contact your LCMS district office or visit TCN's Web site:

[TransformingChurchesNetwork.org](http://TransformingChurchesNetwork.org).

—R.C.L.



Dr. Terry Tieman



# Word of God, Speak!

Throughout recorded history, people have beaten a path to places where they expected to hear divine wisdom. The Greeks made the oracle of Delphi their most sacred shrine. Ancient Israel's first king, Saul, consulted the witch of Endor. Psychics, palm readers, and fortunetellers populate cities large and small today. Unreliable sources all—and forbidden by God in the sternest terms, we might add (see Ex. 22:18; 1 Sam. 15:23).

But suppose there were a place where you really could hear from God Himself. Suppose you knew with certainty that God would speak—speak directly to your situation. Imagine that He would tell you precisely what you need to hear at any given moment. Would you go there? Would you open both ears?

## Speak, Lord

You have likely already guessed where this is going. When God's people gather for worship, He speaks to us.

Obvious?  
Certainly.

The problem with “obvious” truths, though, is that we tend to forget them, to overlook them, to take them for granted. We can lapse into habits of thought that make what happens on Sunday morning simply a comforting memorial service for a God who used to speak, who used to act on behalf of His people a long, long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. We would never say this out loud, of course. But often we think and act as though we actually believe it.

Scripture makes it clear that when the communion of saints gathers, Jesus comes in all His fullness among us (Matt. 18:20). He is really present—and *not* simply as a disinterested observer. In colloquial terms, “God shows up—and does stuff!” And the “stuff” He

does is nothing short of miraculous.

In Baptism, He adopts sinners into His family. In the Absolution, He removes our sins and keeps us in that family. In the Holy Supper, He nourishes us with Christ's very body and blood at His family table. (If my heart weren't so hard, all this would bring tears to my eyes—every time!)

The sermon is no exception. God shows up when His Word is proclaimed. And He speaks to His people today no less clearly and truly than He did through the prophets of old.

But perhaps the word *prophet* conjures up images of Elijah the Tishbite (1 Kings 17:1ff)—wild hair, a full beard, a plate of fried locusts for supper, and a wardrobe borrowed from Charlton Heston and central casting. Perhaps, too, we think mainly about the prophets' “foretelling function”—the predictions the prophets of old made about God's coming judgment or about the coming Messiah.

True enough, prophets from Abel to Zechariah did foretell the future. But primarily their messages focused on “forth telling,” on proclaiming God's will for His people, His awareness of, and anger at, their sins, and His consolations of mercy and grace toward repentant, believing sinners.

And it's with that view of the prophetic ministry that the New Testament

Scripture makes it clear that when the communion of saints gathers, Jesus comes in all His fullness among us (Matt. 18:20). He is really present—and not simply as a disinterested observer.

speaks about the “prophets” who serve God’s people still today (Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 4:1). Your pastor and mine stand and minister week by week in that age-old prophetic tradition, not declaring new revelation, of course, but repeating the warnings and the promises in the way God has always dealt with people. So it is that still today God gives “some to be prophets” (Eph. 4:11 NIV). Still today, Jesus promises that when we hear God’s servants, we hear Him (Luke 10:16). This means we can expect to hear God speak—directly and specifically—in every sermon our pastor preaches (1 Thess. 2:13), every time he sets forth God’s Law and saving promises.

## Your Servant Hears

But we don’t always experience that, do we? Or at least, we don’t think we do. Why not? To put it bluntly, our sin gets in the way. Writing about the Third Commandment in his Large Catechism, Martin Luther says this:

*It is not only the people who greatly misuse and desecrate the holy day who sin against this commandment (those who neglect to hear God’s Word because of their greed or frivolity or lie in taverns and are dead drunk like swine). But even that other crowd sins. They listen to God’s Word like it was any other trifle and only come to preaching because of custom. They go away again, and at the end of the year they know as little of God’s Word as at the beginning.*

—Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, *Pocket Edition*

Ouch! I’ve joined “that other crowd” on occasion; perhaps you have, too. Praise God for the cross of His Son, where we find refuge, where we have shelter, safe from the wrath we so deeply deserve!

And praise God that the grace that flows from Christ’s cross not only justifies us but also works in us a joy eager to hear and learn the Word—as we study it privately ourselves and in our families and also as we hear it preached in public week by week.

How would the Holy Spirit “direct [our] hearts” more and more “to the

love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ” (2 Thess. 3:5 ESV) through the preaching of His Word? Here are some things that help me listen and hear. Maybe some of them will help you, too.

**Ask God for an expectant heart.** He will grant it! In fact, He models such a prayer for us in Ps. 119:169–76. All three of our hymnals include this psalm. Consider praying the words before the service begins. In fact, even on your way to church you might think about the promise God has made to speak to your heart. Ask the Holy Spirit to build in you anticipation in knowing He plans to “show up and do stuff”—for you!

**Laugh at Satan’s temptation to doubt that God will speak through a human being.** Your pastor is a sinner. He will be the first to admit that. He may, in fact, have sinned against you in some specific way. As St. Paul defends his ministry, he admits, “We have this treasure [the Gospel] in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Cor. 4:7 ESV). Did you hear it? The great apostle comes to the brink of calling himself “a cracked pot”! Don’t let Satan use trivial quirks or quarrels to close your ears to the glorious and powerful Word of your Savior, the One to whom the “power belongs.”

**Listen intentionally.** I carry my Bible to church so I can follow along during the sermon and make notations in the margins. It sometimes helps to take notes and to review them or even journal about them on Monday morning. (I’m often surprised at how much I’ve forgotten in the intervening 24 hours.) Ask yourself, “What one thing does Jesus want me to carry away for my life this week?” Sometimes the message will apply to an event in the past—a sin to confess, a word of hope in a dark situation. But sometimes the message will help prepare you for something you’ll face in the days ahead. Don’t overlook that possibility.

**Pray for grace to act on what you’ve heard.** Dead orthodoxy sprouts from the ashes of mere intellectual agreement. One translation puts

James 1:22 this way: “Don’t just listen to God’s Word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves” (NLT).

More than a hundred times Scripture uses the phrase, “The Word of the Lord came . . .” By the grace of our saving God, that Word is coming still. It’s a Word of life and hope.

Word of God, speak! Your servant is listening!

A teacher, writer, editor, and speaker, Dr. Jane L. Fryar ([fryarjl@hotmail.com](mailto:fryarjl@hotmail.com)) is a member of New Beginnings Lutheran Church, Pacific, Mo. Her books include Concordia Publishing House’s popular *Today’s Light* devotional materials and other resources for Christian education.



May my cry come before You, O Lord;  
give me understanding according  
to Your Word.

May my supplication come before You;  
deliver me according to Your  
promise.

May my lips overflow with praise,  
for You teach me Your decrees.

May my tongue sing of Your Word,  
for all Your commands are  
righteous.

May Your hand be ready to help me,  
for I have chosen Your precepts.

I long for Your salvation, O Lord,  
and Your law is my delight.

Let me live that I may praise You,  
and may Your laws sustain me.

I have strayed like a lost sheep.  
Seek Your servant, for I have not  
forgotten Your commandments.

—Ps. 119:169–76 NIV

# Philip Melanchthon: Confessor of the Faith

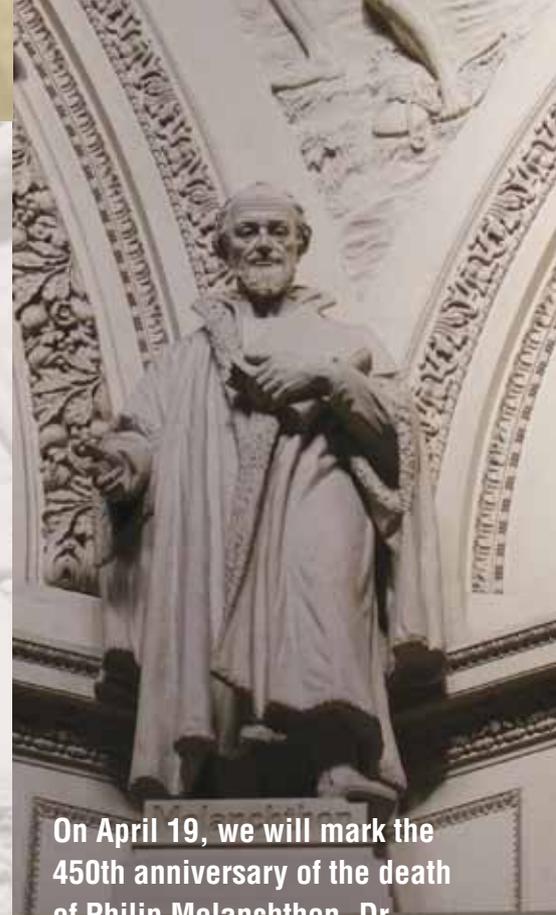
by Robert Kolb

**L**ike Daniel in the lion's den, Philip Melanchthon faced the papal legate Lorenzo Campeggio at Augsburg in 1530. The representative of the pope thundered and flashed bolts of lightning at the Wittenberg professor. The two confronted each other head to head in negotiations over the future of the Wittenberg Reformation sparked by Luther in 1517.

That is how Nikolaus Selnecker, Melanchthon's student and one of the authors of the Formula of Concord (1577), depicted the tension-filled situation at the Augsburg Diet (assembly) of the German empire in June 1530. There, Melanchthon directed efforts to confess the faith of Martin Luther, himself, their colleagues, and the government officials who were introducing their program for reform in their lands. Selnecker was telling his students the story of the confession at Augsburg. He related how Campeggio bared the claws of Satan himself with his intimidating snarl. "Saint Philip stood as if in the midst of lions, wolves, and bears which could tear him into little bits and pieces," Selnecker said. "But he displayed a superabundance of splendid courage in his slight frame, and he answered

boldly, 'We commit ourselves and our cause to God, our Lord.'"

Different opinions of the author of the Augsburg Confession existed in competition with each other when Melanchthon died 450 years ago, on April 19, 1560. He had been Luther's closest aide and associate in reform. But, as Selnecker well knew, some disciples of Melanchthon were portraying him as a shy, retiring man, the victim of other students who had betrayed him. On the other hand, those who had developed deep suspicions and feelings of betrayal toward their beloved "preceptor" (teacher) regarded him as a traitor. The reason lay in his pursuit of a policy of compromise in his effort to save Lutheran reform after Emperor Charles V decisively defeated the armies of the leading Lutheran

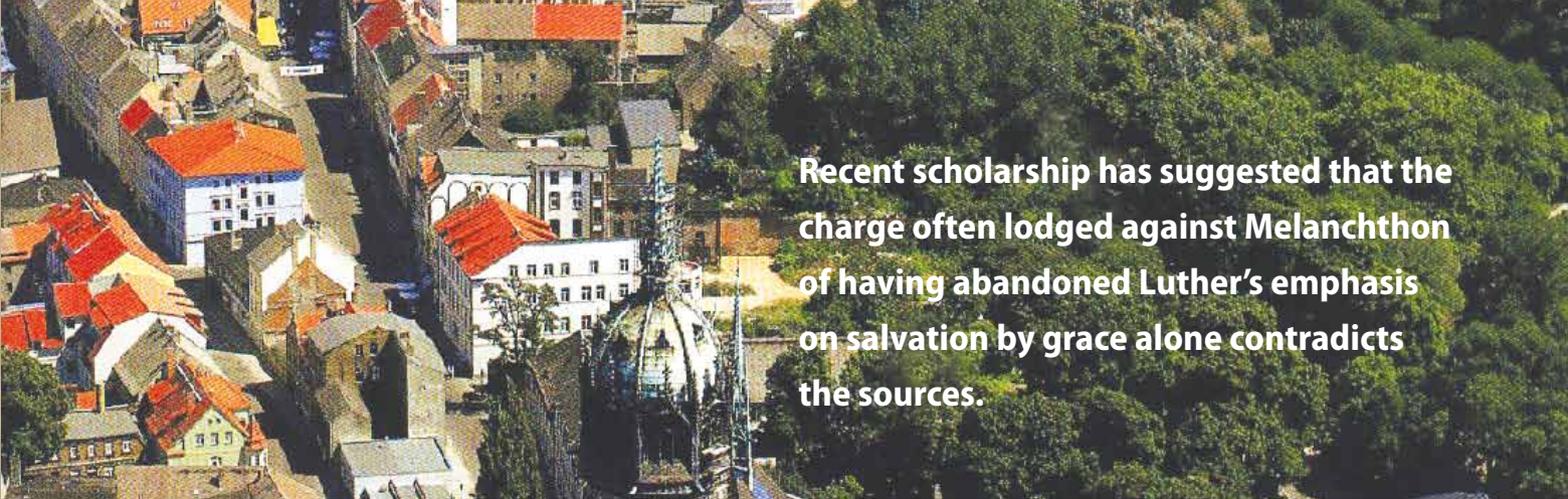


**On April 19, we will mark the 450th anniversary of the death of Philip Melanchthon. Dr. Robert Kolb reminds us of the important role this colleague of Luther and author of the Augsburg Confession played in the Reformation, and of his continuing influence today.**

princes at the Battle of Mühlberg in 1547.

Charles and his imperial government were attempting to force their churches back into submission to the papacy. Melanchthon was making every effort to save Lutheran preachers in Saxony from being driven into exile, but these followers believed his course to be false and compromising. Nonetheless, even they acknowledged him as their preceptor, who had taught them how to think as biblically faithful theologians. They never lost their appreciation for the preceptor who had educated them to preach and teach with intellectual depth and scriptural insight. They used his teaching and his way of thinking in arguing against the policies he was pursuing.

Selnecker belonged to another



Recent scholarship has suggested that the charge often lodged against Melanchthon of having abandoned Luther's emphasis on salvation by grace alone contradicts the sources.

group of those who had studied in Wittenberg. This group sometimes departed from Melanchthon's positions, but their devotion to the man who had shaped the way they thought never faltered. In 1575, Selnecker delivered an oration on the professor who had welcomed him a quarter century earlier into his own home. He recalled the toughness that Melanchthon had consistently displayed when Luther's teaching on the justification of sinners through faith alone on the basis of the death and resurrection of Christ was at stake. But that was only one facet of a complex man who did more to mold the Lutheran church than anyone else other than Luther himself.

### **An Intellectual Leader**

Philip, as Luther called his colleague and friend, arrived in Wittenberg in 1518, a prime catch for a university without a reputation, scarcely a decade old. For at 21, Melanchthon had a reputation as a *Wunderkind*, a young genius who was certain to provide intellectual leadership throughout the German empire and beyond. That he did. His textbooks in communication theory—called rhetoric and dialectic in his day—were reprinted, not only throughout Protestant lands into the 18th century, but also in Catholic regions, where they appeared from Roman Catholic presses, albeit with the name of the author omitted from the title page.

Like any great movement, the Lutheran Reformation was led by a team. If Luther was its captain and inspiration, Melanchthon was his right-hand man. He executed many of the practical tasks that conveyed the teaching of the Wittenberg team to wider audiences. Luther was prophet; Melanchthon, preceptor. He not only taught students how to preach and teach, how to communicate effectively with the gifts God creates and bestows for profitable human exchange, he also encouraged colleagues to explore God's creation, on which both he and Luther focused so much attention, through the study of history and literature, astronomy and botany. His leadership made Wittenberg a

university so famous that Shakespeare took it for granted that his Danish Hamlet would have studied there.

Though never ordained, and shy of preaching because of a slight speech impediment, Melanchthon contributed much to the Wittenberg reform movement. He not only encouraged the study of God's First Article gifts, he also promoted biblical studies and the public conveying of the faith through teaching and proclamation. He mastered Greek and Hebrew early in his career as a student. This gave his lectures on Scripture theological depth. The commentaries published on the basis of these lectures served as aids to preachers who left Wittenberg's lecture halls for pulpits across Germany and Europe. They served as models for professors at other universities in their own training of new generations of pastors. In addition, his adaptation of the "topical" method (in Latin, *loci communes*) for organizing biblical material and selections from the writings of the Church Fathers provided the foundation for Lutheran doctrinal instruction to this day.

### **The 'Variata'**

Melanchthon was a public figure beyond the university. He commanded the confidence of his own princes, particularly Elector John and his son John Frederick, who put their lives on the line with the Augsburg Confession in 1530. Both father and son employed Melanchthon as part of their diplomatic corps. He negotiated with representatives of the kings of France and England, as well as his own emperor, Charles V, on repeated occasions in order to win adherence for Luther's teaching or at least tolerance for the spread of his reforms.

In this role, as the one who was designated to lead negotiators in conversations with Roman Catholics from the emperor's entourage in 1539–42, Melanchthon followed John Frederick's order to update the Augsburg Confession. The so-called "Variata" was later seen as an evil attempt by Melanchthon to subvert the Lutheran teaching on the Lord's Supper

through a change in the wording on the Sacrament. In fact, Philip revised the princes' confession most extensively by expanding its rather brief explanation of the doctrine of justification. He did that because John Frederick wanted that doctrine more explicitly set forth in what the Elector regarded as his public statement of faith. In fact, that is what Melanchthon had composed it in 1530 to be.

It was to preserve the proclamation of justification by faith in Christ that Melanchthon made one of the most serious moves of his life. Caught in political crosscurrents after John Frederick's imprisonment by Charles V a year after Luther's death, Melanchthon contributed to efforts by his new overlord, John Frederick's cousin, Elector Moritz, to stave off an invasion of his lands by the emperor. Melanchthon and his colleagues in Wittenberg fought against excessive concessions to Charles V, but they did formulate certain compromises in "adiaphora," neutral practices neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture. Many of his students regarded these concessions as a betrayal of the truth and the Reformation because of the impression they would convey to the common people. Melanchthon in turn felt betrayed by these students. He thought they should have understood his striving to prevent Lutheran preachers in north Germany from being driven from their pulpits, as had already happened in 1548 in south Germany.

### **Disappointment and Tragedy**

Melanchthon's bitter disappointment over the sharp attacks from these students was not the only tragedy that haunted his life. One son died in his second year. Acrimony over marriage

plans clouded the relationship of his wife and himself with their older son. A trusted student married one of his daughters and maltreated her so badly that she died when she was but 24 years old. He did not live to see his other son-in-law, Caspar Peucer, who had become his staff and stay after the death of his wife in 1557, go to jail for "crypto-calvinistic" ideas.

Peucer taught astronomy and then medicine at Wittenberg. He may have influenced Melanchthon in his last years to depart from his earlier understanding of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. That stance earned both Peucer and his father-in-law harsh criticism from other students of both Luther and Melanchthon himself. They condemned him sharply for abandoning Luther's way of affirming of the true presence of Christ's body and blood in the bread and wine. Melanchthon had never used exactly the same language as Luther did; neither he nor his senior colleague realized that Melanchthon was supposed to be Luther's clone.

While Luther lived, the two taught and worked alongside each other without public friction. Both confessed faith in the atoning work of Christ and spread the message they had developed together. But Melanchthon did develop new perspectives and convictions in the 14 years he lived after Luther's death.

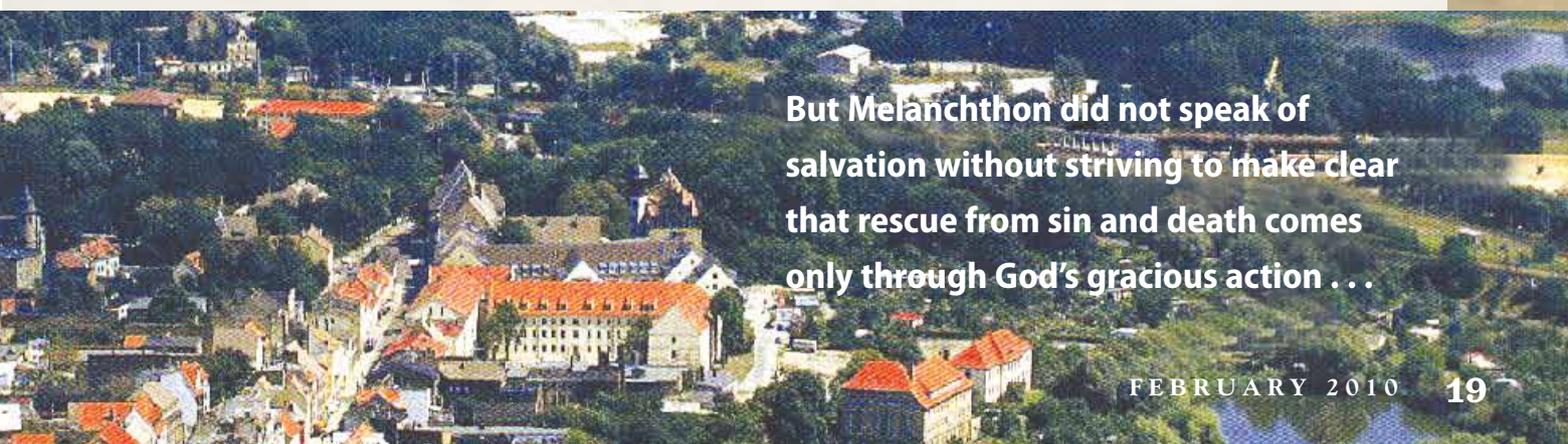
Recent scholarship has suggested that the charge often lodged against Melanchthon of having abandoned Luther's emphasis on salvation by grace alone contradicts the sources. It is true that Melanchthon did use different expressions than Luther in using God's law to call sinners to exercise their God-given responsibilities to trust and obey their Lord. But

Melanchthon did not speak of salvation without striving to make clear that rescue from sin and death comes only through God's gracious action, totally undeserved as the Holy Spirit bestows a living faith upon those whom God calls into his kingdom through the Word of the Gospel of Christ.

The censure of Melanchthon that developed toward the end of his life, largely around the issues of his views of the role of the human will in conversion and of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, have clouded "the Preceptor's" reputation for much of Lutheran history. Nonetheless, he stands as the one who expressed Wittenberg teaching in the Augsburg Confession of 1530, a document that remains the fundamental definition of what it means to be Lutheran. As parts of the Book of Concord, his defense of that confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531), and his Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (1537) continue to determine the Lutheran expression of the biblical message.

Therefore, as we reflect on his death 450 years ago, we thank God that he confessed our faith in the Augsburg Confession. We recognize Philip Melanchthon as one who has put words of confession of the faith in our mouths, as one who remains our preceptor as well.

**Dr. Robert Kolb ([kolbr@csl.edu](mailto:kolbr@csl.edu)) is missions professor emeritus of systematic theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Along with Dr. Timothy J. Wengert, he is the editor of the 2000 translation of the Book of Concord published by Fortress Press.**



**But Melanchthon did not speak of salvation without striving to make clear that rescue from sin and death comes only through God's gracious action . . .**

## What Was Crypto-Calvinism?

Toward the end of Melanchthon's life, as some of his students at the University of Wittenberg and in the Electorate of Saxony pondered their preceptor's lectures and conversations about Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper and the relationship of Christ's divine and human natures, they developed Melanchthon's ideas in a direction that seemed to others, and perhaps even to themselves, as similar to those of the Genevan reformer John Calvin. Their ideas probably did not derive as much from their reading of Calvin as their listening to Melanchthon.

The Crypto-Calvinists, led by Christoph Pezel, a young professor of theology who had studied only brief-

ly under Melanchthon, and Melanchthon's son-in-law, Caspar Peucer, taught that Christ was spiritually present in the Lord's Supper, and that the believer's soul received all the benefits of His death and resurrection when the believer ate the bread and wine of the Supper. Also, they taught that Christ's human body and blood were situated in heaven and could not be in more than one place at one time.

Their Lutheran opponents held, as Luther had taught, that because the divine and human natures of Christ share their characteristics (the ancient doctrine of "the communication of attributes") Christ's body and blood could indeed be present in whatever form, including sacramental form, that God willed them to be. Led by Martin Chemnitz, they repeated Luther's conviction that in the unique union of bread and wine with Christ's body and blood, based on His own words, He gives believers forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

—R.A.K.

## Melanchthon: A Timeline



We commemorate Philip Melanchthon on Feb. 16, his natal day (*Lutheran Service Book*, xii).

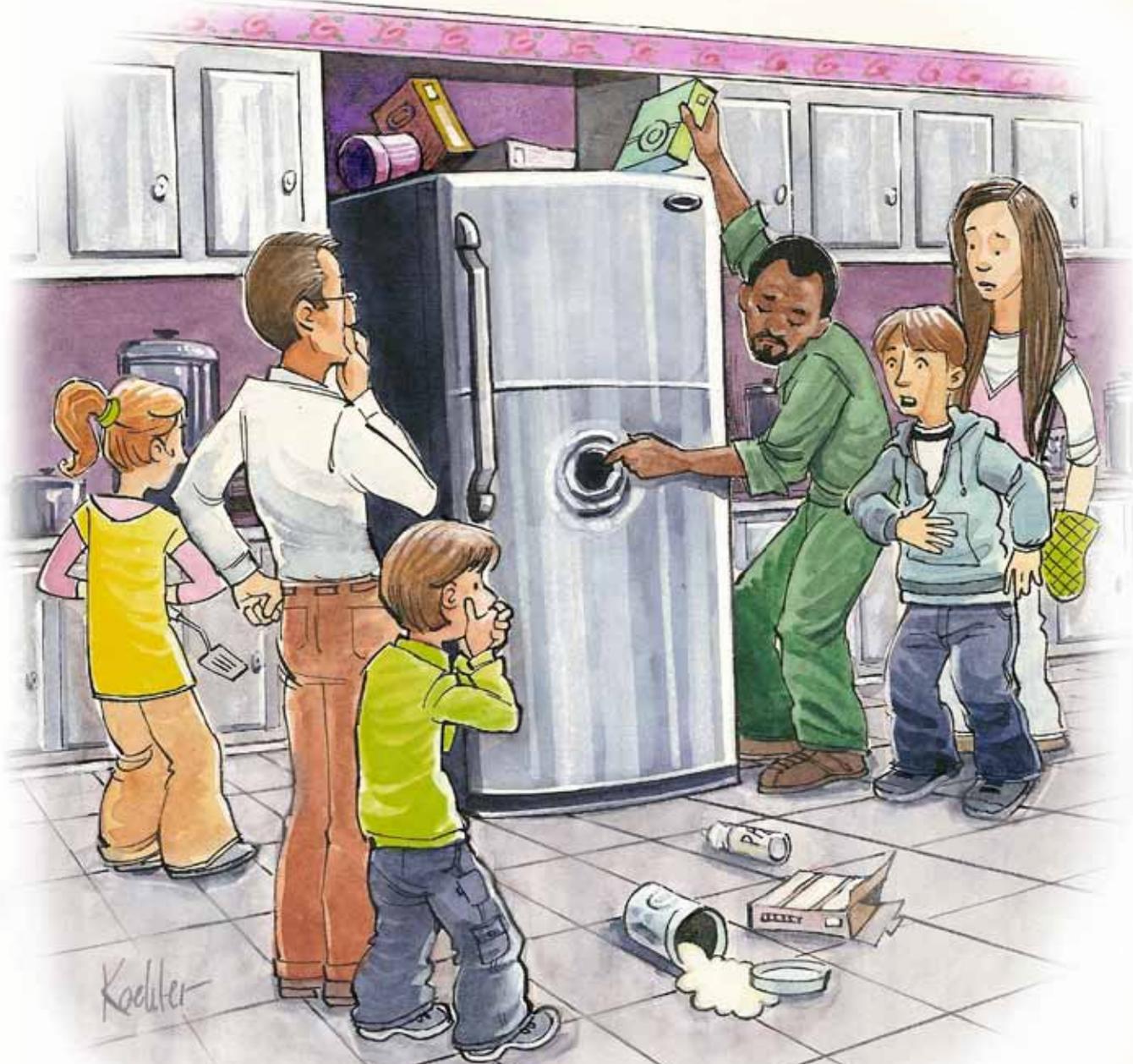
- 1497** Born Philipp Schwartzerd in Bretten, in southwest Germany.
- 1518** Appointed professor in Wittenberg after study in Heidelberg and Tübingen.
- 1520** Marries Katherina Krapp, daughter of the mayor of Wittenberg.
- 1521** Writes the first edition of his *Loci communes theologici* as a guide to reading Romans.
- 1530** Composes the Augsburg Confession, and in 1531 the Apology of the Augsburg Confession.
- 1546** Praises Luther in his funeral oration for his mentor.
- 1548** Aids in writing the "Leipzig Proposal," which earned him much criticism.
- 1557** Death of Katherina, his beloved wife.
- 1560** His own death.

Unfortunately, popular English biographies of Melanchthon are rare. (Heinz Scheible's biography in German is very good, but it is not available in English.)

Perhaps the best English resource is Heinz Scheible's "Philip Melanchthon" in *The Reformation Theologians*, edited by Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

It is not much, and it is, perhaps, not easy to find. If you would like to become more familiar with Melanchthon, a good place to begin is with his writings: the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, all from the Book of Concord.

—R.A.K.



# On Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a treasure God gives to His people to share with one another.

**O**n Sunday, a bomb went off at church. No, it wasn't the kind of terrorist bomb one hears about in news reports or reads about in the newspapers.

It wasn't even a colloquial "bomb"—you know, the way we use "bomb" in everyday language: Someone you don't like sat next to you, or in the next pew, or overtly shunned you; the choir sang off key—way off key; the sermon was horrible; or all of the other "unforgivables" that wreck our day and make us ask why we go to church at all.

No, it was an actual bomb, the kind that could hurt people, but it wasn't intended.

A young-adult group was making pancakes for the new-member reception. In the rush to get everything done, someone put an aerosol can of Pam on a hot griddle and forgot about it. It exploded and blew a gaping hole in a stainless-steel refrigerator. In a truly miraculous way, the can missed everyone standing in the crowded kitchen. If it had hit someone, we can only presume it would have killed them. After all, the refrigerator is presently in rough shape.

It was a real mistake. A real blunder. But you know what? All that has been said is this: What a miracle it is that no one was killed! God had His hand on us. God was there. *Forgiveness.*

Every day and every moment "bombs" go off all around us. Like the aerosol can left on the griddle, people make mistakes. They forget things. They say things they shouldn't. They do things they shouldn't. It makes a mess, like a hole blown through a stainless-steel refrigerator. These are blunders and gaffes that rub us the wrong way, get under our skin, annoy us, frustrate us, and even anger us. In most instances, no one is killed. God has His hand on us. God is there. *Forgiveness.*

## Extreme Forgiveness

On Good Friday long ago, a real "bomb" went off. An angry Jewish mob handed Jesus over to an unsympathetic Roman guard. People lied about Jesus. They hit Him. They slapped Him. They spit on Him. The actions were deliberate. You could hardly say they were mistakes. You might say they didn't know what they were doing. I wish I could say no one was killed, but someone was: Jesus was killed. Rusty, gruesome nails blew holes right through Jesus. A spear pierced His side. Rejection and disdain pierced His soul. Yet, God's hand was upon Him. God was there. *Forgiveness.*

Forgiveness is the chief work of God in the lives of His people. Forgiveness is the chief instrument, or product, of God working reconciliation and closeness with those otherwise

separated from Him. Forgiveness is God's gift and His means of amending mistakes and gaffes and blunders, and the greatest offenses. God puts His hand upon us. God is there. God forgives.

Forgiveness is also the treasure God gives to His people to share with one another. This is not something we can do on our own. It is something we do in the certainty of God's presence and with His hand upon us. Forgiveness is where we learn to keep life and circumstances in perspective. It is where we learn to say, "Thank God, no one was killed." Oh, blunders abound and mistakes really mess things up. But in the end no one was killed. God's hand was upon us. God is with us. *Forgiveness.*

## Matters of the Heart

What are some things that get in the way of our forgiveness? Here are a few from my list:

**An overpersonalization of the offense.** For instance, terrible as the aerosol bomb at church was, no one intended for it to happen. Often, the things that offend us most are/were never meant to happen. Sometimes people, their manners and mannerisms, are a matter of who they are, their generation, and their culture.

**Escalation.** This is where the given offense is ramped up. It is given unnecessary negative energy and attention. This most often happens when we dwell on the matter. It is amplified when we talk to others about it again and again—and again. With an event such as the kitchen accident, a person might continue to say, "Can you believe it? How did this happen? What were people thinking? Who were those reckless idiots in charge?"

**A preoccupation with self.** Ultimately, a lack of forgiveness is born in an angry, jealous, and envious heart, or in a heart that has a different set of expectations than what is being met. "Unforgiveness" takes place when we see ourselves as victims. Unforgiveness happens when we are consumed with how we have been unjustly and unfairly treated, or when we feel out of control of a situation—others just don't measure up.

## Climbing Mountains

So, what might be helpful in learning to forgive? How might we work together? How might we partner together? How might we "high five," cheer, and encourage each other?

**You must know Jesus.** True forgiveness can only take place in the knowledge and certainty of what God has done for us, and what He is doing in us. It is God who leads and empowers forgiveness.

**You must know yourself forgiven.** You must quietly, humbly, graciously look at yourself in the mirror of God's grace and say, "No one was killed. God's hand was upon us. God was with us." You are forgiven. You blunder. You make mistakes. You mess up. And you know what? You are forgiven.

**You must know that God commands and expects your forgiveness.** This may be tough to hear. But much as we have expectations of others, God expects our forgiveness. He expects us to look more to Him than to the offense of others. He expects us to take hold of Him and let go of some other things. You may need to practice. You may need to work at it.

*Here's a "mountain man" challenge:* Let's rope up together. Let's help each other. Forgiving others is as tough, or tougher, than climbing a mountain. But working together as a team, forgiveness is made as possible as reaching the summit. Forgiveness takes good communication. It takes practice. It takes effort. Perhaps our greatest forgiveness is for those who are just stuck. Perhaps our greatest forgiveness is for those who just won't forgive. But if our goal is to reach the summit together, and to leave no one behind, we may have to leave ourselves and our pride behind. We look at people in their hurt. We look at people in the complexities of their lives. We walk a mile in another person's shoes. We look at life from another point of view: God's hand is upon us. God is with us. We are forgiven.

**Rev. Jeffrey Sippy ([jsippy@rlcmail.org](mailto:jsippy@rlcmail.org)) is the senior pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church and Springfield Lutheran School in Springfield and Nixa, Mo.**

*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—Colloquies

LINDA K. TRIPP, Omaha, Neb.; CHERYL A. WITEK, Racine, Wis.; and SHARON R. PORTERFIELD, Park Ridge, Ill., have submitted their applications for the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through CUEnet. Correspondence regarding their applications should be directed within four weeks after publication of this notice to Dr. William R. Diekelman, Chairman, Colloquy Committee, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295.

JOHN LU, Ph.D., Irvine, Calif., has completed all requirements of the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and is, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Dr. Becky Peters, Director Colloquy Program, Concordia University, Irvine, 1530 Concordia West, Irvine, CA 92612-3203.

MARC PAUL, Maplewood, Minn.; and PATRICIA BRYNGELSON, Dodge Center, Minn., have completed the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Dr. Stephen C. Stohlmann, Director of Colloquy, Concordia University, St. Paul, 275 Syndicate St. N., St. Paul, MN 55104.

## Official Notices—Requests for Reinstatement

DANIEL M. CLOETER, Lincoln, Neb., has applied for reinstatement to the Ministers of Religion—Ordained roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. VICKI L. HOWELL, Mondovi, Wis., and LORI LOSSER, Salt Lake City, Utah, have applied for reinstatement to the Ministers of Religion—Commissioned roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Correspondence regarding these applications should be directed to the undersigned for receipt no later than March 5.—Dr. Raymond L. Hartwig, Secretary, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295.

## Call for Nominations/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.—Ed.*

**Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT)** seeks an experienced **director of Program Ministries** to provide leadership to Program Ministries, its staff and missionaries, and to liaison with partner organizations.

The successful candidate will have a strong background in administration and strategic planning,

as well as being a team leader handling sensitive issues. Essential duties and responsibilities include being a relationship builder, especially with staff, missionaries, co-workers, and partners both international and domestic. This relationship building is to ensure understanding of issues impacting the mission of the organization. Candidates must be good in networking with other agencies involved in Bible translation activities and have seven-plus years experience, especially as a Bible translation missionary in a cross-cultural setting. Candidate must hold a graduate degree (theological or academic) in a field related to the position. Salary is negotiable.

Submit cover letter with salary history and resume soon but no later than Feb. 15 to [dmehl@lbt.org](mailto:dmehl@lbt.org) or mail to Dean Mehl, Human Resources Manager, Lutheran Bible Translators, 303 N. Lake St., Aurora, IL 60507. Visit [www.lbt.org](http://www.lbt.org).

**The LCMS Board for Communication Services (BCS)** is seeking candidates for the position of **managing editor of The Lutheran Witness**. The managing editor is responsible for the gathering and editing of materials for inclusion in *The Lutheran Witness*, the Synod’s official magazine, as well as supervising its production.

Responsibilities include keeping abreast of mission and ministry activities within the Synod, taking into account the Church Year, special events, contemporary issues, geographical coverage, Christian education, mission outreach, variety of format, reader research and feedback.

In addition, the managing editor is responsible for commissioning and overseeing the work of writers, photographers, and graphic artists whose work is to be published and working with freelance writers, photographers, and graphic artists as needed.

The managing editor also is responsible for submitting articles through the Doctrinal Review process and making the necessary changes as determined by the doctrinal reviewer. He or she works with members of the Board for Communication Services in maintaining *The Lutheran Witness* Web site and serves as liaison with Synod’s departments, institutions, and agencies for the purpose of gathering news and other information.

The essential qualifications for this position are a bachelor’s degree in communications or a communications-related field, preferably journalism; a minimum of seven years practical experience in the field of communications; demonstrated ability to work with internal and external customers; demonstrated ability and interest in writing and editing as evidenced by published materials and other written pieces; good listening skills; broad-based biblical knowledge; and a solid understanding of LCMS doctrine, practice, structure, and governance.

Qualified applicants must possess a commitment to accuracy, integrity, clarity, and ability to meet deadlines, as well as a strong sense of graphical quality in the presentation of covers and story layouts.

Applicants must be active members of an LCMS congregation, faithful to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, and supportive of the Synod’s Constitution, Bylaws, and policies.

Candidate information should be submitted by Feb. 26 to Brenda Haverly, HR Manager, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122; [brenda.haverly@lcms.org](mailto:brenda.haverly@lcms.org); fax: 314-996-1121. LCMS Application for Employment may be accessed online at <http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/LCMS/application.pdf>.

*(continued on page 26)*

## Did Jesus Really Visit Hell? If Yes, Why?

**In the Apostles' Creed (and also the Athanasian Creed), we confess that after Jesus died He descended into hell. Where in the Bible is this taught? Why did Jesus go there?**

From earliest times, Christians have believed that Jesus' descent into hell is most clearly taught in 1 Peter 3:18–19. In the context of encouraging Christians who were in danger of suffering persecution for their faith, the apostle Peter writes: "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison" (ESV).

Christians also have seen references to this doctrine in other scriptural passages such as Eph. 4:8–9 and Rom. 10:6–8. In an April 1533 Easter sermon at Torgau, Martin Luther spoke of Christ's descent into hell and quoted Ps. 16:10 with reference to Him: "For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol. . . ." (ESV).

In the 1 Peter 3 passage, the apostle Peter refers to a sequence of events: Christ died, was made alive (KJV: "quicken"), and went to preach to the spirits in prison. A variety of interpretations have been given to Peter's words (also in early centuries), but a key question is this: Why did Jesus, after He came to life before His resurrection appearances, preach in the presence of departed unbelievers and the devil and his angels in hell? Was it to give unbelievers a "second chance" through a proclamation of the Gospel? Did Jesus visit hell in order to suffer further? Did He descend to deliver those who died before the Flood, or Old Testament patriarchs and saints, as some have thought? Or, is the reference to Christ's descent no more than a figurative expression for Christ's suffering for humanity? Lutherans have held that none of these explanations is acceptable.

Lutherans have understood the Bible to teach that Christ went to hell to declare His triumph as God's Messiah over death and the power of the devil. The Lutheran confessional writing, the Formula of Concord, states in summary: "We simply believe that the entire person [Jesus Christ], God and man, descended into hell after the burial, conquered the devil, destroyed hell's power, and took from the devil all his might" (Solid Declaration, Art. IX).

Although Christ's descent into hell lies beyond our understanding, we can derive great comfort from this important teaching of Scripture, especially in times when our faith is being tested. We who believe in the exalted Christ can be confident and certain that "neither hell nor the devil can take captive or injure us" (Solid Declaration IX).

Until his retirement, Dr. Jerald C. Joersz was an associate executive director of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations.



**Send your questions to Q & A, *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 and address. While we look for questions that have broad interest among our readers, no question is unimportant. Unfortunately, the volume of questions we receive makes it impossible to answer every question individually.**

## A Prime Opportunity for Conversation



**My sixth-grade son asked me recently if there is life on other planets. This came from news reports that scientists have discovered water on the moon. I know it's more of a scientific question than a "Family Counselor" question, but what can I tell him about what the Bible has to say?**

Many people, including Christians, have no doubt asked the question your son raised. The Bible does not say specifically whether there is or there isn't life on other planets. What we have

for certain are the opening words of the Book of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Everything that exists, therefore, is the result of God's creative power. We affirm in the Apostles' Creed our belief in "God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible." He fashioned the entire universe—planets, solar systems, and every particle of matter—as He desired.

That scientists have found water on the moon, then, is truly a discovery—an uncovering of something previously unknown, but that has always been there as part of the creative act of God. We cannot begin to comprehend the height, breadth, depth, complexity, magnificence, and mystery of all He created.

Your son's question about life on other planets shows a healthy human curiosity. Out of such inquisitiveness have come many great discoveries. His question also is a prime opportunity for ongoing conversation. He has opened the door to the wonder of his sixth-grade mind, as he "sorts out" his faith; his invitation is for you to walk through the door with him. I would encourage you to share his curiosity; ask him what he was thinking about when he asked the question. What was important for him to know? He is at an age where he might be trying to understand how he fits into the universe—is he merely one of countless other created beings, or is he uniquely made by a personal God who places great value on him?

Assure your son that he is the Lord's child through Baptism. Regardless of the chaos and uncertainty of this world and of the vast universe, he can be secure in knowing the God of the universe chose to relate to him intimately in the gift of a baby, His Son, Jesus, whose birth we just celebrated. In Him, "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28 NIV).

**Dr. William B. Knippa is pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church, Austin, Texas, and a licensed psychologist.**



Send your questions to Family Counselor, *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 and address. While we look for questions that have broad interest among our readers, no question is unimportant. Unfortunately, the volume of questions we receive makes it impossible to answer every question individually.

## NOTICES

(continued from page 24)

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

**Concordia University, Ann Arbor, Mich.**, seeks to fill the following faculty positions: **Elementary Education; Mathematics; Kinesiology; Criminal Justice; Business; Biology/Life Sciences; Registrar.**

**Concordia University Chicago, River Forest, Ill.**, seeks to fill the following faculty positions: **Physical Education; English; Psychology.**

**Concordia University Nebraska, Seward, Neb.**, seeks to fill the following faculty positions: **History; Chair, Health and Human Performance.**

**Concordia University Texas, Austin, Texas,** seeks to fill the following faculty position: **Elementary Education.**

For more information about these and other CUS positions, including complete job descriptions, qualifications, and application process, visit <http://>

[www.lcms.org/cusjobs](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.—Ed.*

**Mount Olive, Milpitas, Calif.**, will celebrate its 50th anniversary at 12:30 p.m., Feb. 14, with an after-church pizza party in commemoration of Mount Olive's early days of worshipping in a pizza parlor. To attend the luncheon held in the multi-purpose room, contact the church office at 408-262-0506. For more information, contact Vicar Chuck Hoffman at [chuck@mt-olive.org](mailto:chuck@mt-olive.org).

**Good Shepherd, Gainesville, Ga.**, will celebrate its 50th anniversary at a 4 p.m. special service March 10, with a catered dinner to follow. Dr. Gerhard Michael, past president of the Florida-Georgia District,

will be the guest preacher. Contact the church office at 770-532-2428.

**St. Matthew, Norton, Ohio**, will celebrate its 100th anniversary with a special 2:30 p.m. Sunday service March 14. Call the church office at 330-825-4100 or e-mail [stmatthew@raex.com](mailto:stmatthew@raex.com).

**Faith, Easton, Pa.**, will celebrate its 60th anniversary with a birthday party on April 10 and a catered dinner on April 18. RSVP for the dinner, or for details, visit [www.faithlcms.com](http://www.faithlcms.com), or contact the church office at 610-253-1625; e-mail [faithlcms@verizon.net](mailto:faithlcms@verizon.net).

**Good Shepherd, Glencoe, Minn.**, will celebrate its 50th anniversary at the 10 a.m. service, April 25, followed by a meal and program. Guest speakers include Rev. James P. Lauer, Rev. Layton L. Lemke, Rev. Philip Penhallegon, former pastors, and current pastor Rev. James F. Gomez. Contact the church office at 320-864-6157.

### 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.*

**Say What?**

On a Sunday evening, Jason, age 5, was stalling going to bed. As usual, first it was one thing, then another. Just as Dad's patience began to fade, Jason asked for a glass of juice. After a pause, the request was granted by a tired Dad, who then successfully guided Jason in the direction of his bedroom.

Inside, Jason stalled again. "I want another glass of juice," he said.

"No, sir," Dad answered firmly. "No more juice. I'm king of the juice in this house, and you've had enough tonight."

"That's not right, Daddy," Jason retorted.

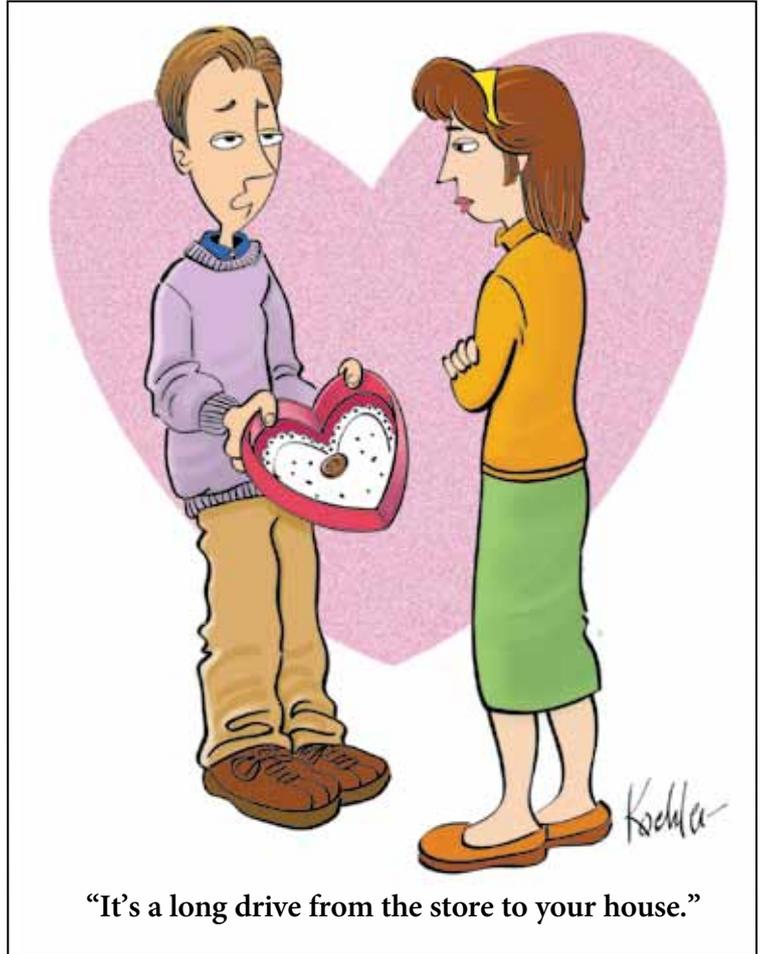
"Today, our Sunday School teacher said Jesus is the king of the juice!"

—Anonymous

**Thanks for the Warning!**

- Never hang curtains while standing on a rocking chair.
- Never snack in a dark kitchen during ant season.
- Never install a pet door if you live in skunk country.
- Never roast a turkey without inspecting the neck cavity.
- Never hide a pie in the clothes dryer.

George Kottwitz  
Trinity Lutheran Church  
Edwardsville, Ill.



"It's a long drive from the store to your house."

**ORDAINED**

**BUSH, LELAND ELWOOD;** Nov. 18, 1925, Britton, Mich., to Nov. 3, 2009, Brighton, Tenn.; son of Leland and Hazel (Theeke) Bush; colloquy 1998. Served 1998–2006. Ministries/parishes: Memphis, Tenn.; Forrest City, Ark.; retired 2006. Survivors: Margaret (Wood) Bush; sons: Rev. David, Daniel, Darwin, Darrell, Douglas, Dwight; daughters: Delphine Avery, Dawn Wyse, Deborah Frederick, Dorothy Witt, Dianna Warren, Dara Bahlmann. Memorial service: Nov. 7, 2009, Memphis, Tenn.; cremation.

**HOFFSCHNEIDER, DALE W.;** Dec. 19, 1932, York County, Neb., to Dec. 2, 2009, Fort Wayne, Ind.; son of Elmer and Amanda (Staehr) Hoffschneider; graduated Springfield, 1962. Served 1962–1971, 1989–1997. Ministries/parishes: Ironwood, Mich.; Newark, Flatbush, Brooklyn, N.Y.; Slippery Rock, Pa.; Maywood, Calif.; retired 1997. Preceded in death by his sons, Fred and Charles. Survivors: Gertrude (Steffen) Hoffschneider; sons: Joel, Jonathan. Memorial service: Dec. 4, 2009, Fort Wayne, Ind.; cremation.

**MILLER, HARRY FREDRICK;** July 16, 1918, Tacoma, Wash., to Jan. 30, 2009, Alhambra, Calif.; son of George and Edith (Ball) Miller; graduated St. Louis, 1944. Served 1945–1970, 1970–1985. Ministries/parishes:

Medaryville, Winamac, Ind.; Crescent City, Sebastopol, Santa Rosa, Glendora, Reseda, Calif.; Brookings, Ore.; Southern California circuit counselor: 1959–1963; retired 1985. Preceded in death by his wife, Mildred (Germann) Miller. Survivors: son: Gordon; daughters: Claudia, Constance. Funeral: Feb. 15, 2009, Reseda, Calif.; cremation.

**REHWALDT, EDGAR FREDERICK;** Oct. 3, 1920, Kewanee, Ill., to Oct. 31, 2009, McAllen, Texas; son of Albert and Agnes (Bergemann) Rehwaldt; graduated St. Louis, 1945. Served 1945–1984. Ministries/parishes: Rochfort Bridge, Anselmo, Alberta, Canada; Fairmont, Lakefield, Minneapolis, Minn.; Battle Creek, Anthon, Iowa; retired 1984. Survivors: Frieda (Huse) Rehwaldt; sons: Anthony, Sidney, Jonathan; daughter: Carolyn Shaver. Memorial service: Nov. 6, 2009, Crosslake, Minn.; interment: Nov. 6, 2009, Brainerd, Minn.

**SCHULTE, EDWARD NORMAN;** Dec. 4, 1916, Detroit, Mich., to Nov. 25, 2009, Detroit, Mich.; son of Oscar and Martha (Hagen) Schulte; graduated Springfield, 1941. Served 1942–1985. Ministries/parishes: Stillwater, Okla.; Brookland, Detroit, Mich.; retired 1985. Preceded in death by his wife, Florence (Balke) Schulte, and sons, Dale and Norman. Survivor:

son: Leon. Funeral and interment: Dec. 1, 2009, Port Sanilac, Mich.

**SCHWANE, WALTER HENRY;** Sept. 8, 1914, Lakewood, Ohio, to Nov. 6, 2009, Ferguson, Mo.; son of George and Anna (Druschinski) Schwane; graduated St. Louis, 1938. Ministries/parishes: Cleveland, Ohio; Ossian, Kouts, Ind.; Warrenton, Jonesburg, Mo.; Strasburg, Manito, Ill.; retired 1983. Preceded in death by his wife, Helen (Kramer) Schwane, and daughter, Marilyn. Survivors: sons: Walter, John, James, Thomas; daughters: Grace Poertner, Lois Schmidt, Helen O'Neal. Funeral and interment: Nov. 14, 2009, St. Louis, Mo.

**COMMISSIONED**

**JAECKEL, WALTER EDWARD;** May 21, 1922, Milwaukee, Wis., to Nov. 12, 2009, New Berlin, Wis.; son of Otto and Clara (Eggert) Jaeckel; graduated Milwaukee, 1977. Served 1977–1987. School/ministry: Kirkwood, Mo.; retired 1987. Survivors: Jeanette (Braun) Jaeckel; son: Daniel; daughters: Paula Gohde, Ruth Rose. Memorial service: Nov. 16, 2009, Brookfield, Wis.; interment: Nov. 16, 2009, Milwaukee, Wis.

# Lent

## A Message for a Post-Church Culture

I served a parish in the mountains of Colorado for eight years in the 1990s. While there, I volunteered in the local school district. The school superintendent and a principal, and numerous teachers, were congregation members.

Each winter for five years, along with another community volunteer, I cared for a group of 10 students who were dealing with alcohol- and drug-related school problems. During those five years, I made 50 high-school friends. (I am familiar with the addiction and recovery journey. I had been in a similar place.)

The 10-week course (one session a week) started before Ash Wednesday. Usually, we would end our sessions after Easter. The proximity of our church to the high school enabled me to host the sessions in our church basement.

We started in the dark of winter. As winter gave way to spring and the days lengthened, our friendships would deepen. The light and hope of spring paralleled the end of our sessions. During those years, my journeys with these young people shed a great light on my Lenten seasons.

### A Lenten Glossary (Abbreviated)

**Lent.** Old English for spring, “Lenten” (lengthening of days).

**Quadragesima pasche.** Latin for “40 days prior to Easter” (minus Sundays). These days correspond to Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–12; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1–12).

**Mardi Gras.** French phrase meaning “Fat Tuesday.”

**Fasching.** German word meaning “fasting.”

**Shrove Tuesday.** English word (“shrove”) indicating forgiveness for confessed sin.

**Ash Wednesday.** The day draws attention to the Old Testament practice of “sackcloth and ashes” worn by worshipers, indicating contrition for sin and error.

*Fat Tuesday* (Mardi Gras) precedes Ash Wednesday. It was the day when the faithful would clear the house of cooking fat. (Unused lard would turn rancid during the “fasting” days of Lent.) Fat Tuesday became a big feast, hence “Carnival.” Confession and absolution would be emphasized on “Fat” or “Shrove” Tuesday. Folks would gather for Ash Wednesday’s service, cupboards bare and absolution anticipated.

### A Lenten Journey (Acts of Change)

Identify the “trouble” and note the “rescue” in each Bible reading.

**Week 1:** “Rubble in the Church—Broken Life” (Acts 16:16–34)

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**Week 2:** “Jealousy in the Church—Uncontrolled Envy” (Acts 6:1–7)

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**Week 3:** “Asleep in the Church—Numb Life” (Acts 20:7–12)

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**Week 4:** “Change in the Church—Life Adjustments” (Acts 9:1–19)

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**Week 5:** “Disappointment in the Church—Personal Disappointment” (Acts 15:36–41)

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**Week 6:** “Tumult in the Church—Turbulent Life” (Acts 27:27–44)

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As winter gives way to spring, consider the above texts. *The Lutheran Study Bible* is a great resource. The days will lengthen. You will have 40 days to hear Lent’s timeless message. Easter is the great hope for all people. It is a message for a post-Church culture. It is a message for students, teachers, adults, congregations, and clergy—for all of us—who each deal with difficult life issues. Winter’s dark hold—sin’s dark hold—is remedied by the reality of Christ’s resurrection.

I remain grateful for 50 courageous students in Colorado. We shared a common journey of hope and renewal, and of abundant grace.

Rev. Timothy C. Cartwright ([primc@aol.com](mailto:primc@aol.com)) is pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, Ashland, Ore.



## Matters of the Heart

*In the context of Ash Wednesday, we see that God's treasure and heart . . . are in the same place.*

There are two observances this month that may seem to have little to do with each other, but they do, in fact, have something in common. Both deal with matters of the heart.

Feb. 14, of course, is St. Valentine's Day. It probably should be *Saints* Valentine—plural—though, because the Roman Catholic Church recognizes a number of saints with that name. Two or three of them (depending on your source) are associated with Feb. 14. What they have in common is that all of them were martyred.

Sending cards, candy, or flowers to your spouse or sweetheart—I'm assuming they are the same person if you are married—doesn't seem to have much to do with any of these saints. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, these secular customs have more to do with the time of year during which Valentine's Day is observed. It seems that in England and France during the Middle Ages, there was the belief that halfway through the second month of the year, birds began to seek their mates. So, Feb. 14, St. Valentine's Day, began to be seen as having some special meaning for lovers.

Even this explanation for associating St. Valentine's Day with love and lovers is challenged by some scholars. But it's clear that this holiday is culturally significant in the United States and elsewhere. An estimated 1 billion valentine cards are sent each year. One source says some 85 percent of them are purchased by women! I don't know if this is true, but in any case . . . men, *hello!*

Also observed this month—on the 17th—is Ash Wednesday. This is a day, too, on which matters of the heart are very important to believers in Christ. In this case, though, it is God's heart about which we speak.

The date for Ash Wednesday is determined by the date of Easter, which this year is April 4. Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, which lasts 46 days if Sundays are counted. But we don't count the Sundays, because Sunday is celebrated as the day of Christ's resurrection. That leaves Lent with 40 days, a reminder of the 40 days our Lord spent in the wilderness, where He was tempted by Satan.

Lent is a time for meditating on the passion of Christ and preparing for the great celebration of Easter. The *Lutheran Service Book Agenda* tells us that “from ancient times the season of Lent has been kept as a time of special devotion, self-denial, and humble repentance born of a faithful heart that dwells confidently on [God's] Word and draws from it life and hope.”

More and more Lutheran congregations include the imposition of ashes, an outward sign of inward penitence, during the Ash Wednesday worship service. Generally, the pastor applies the ashes with his thumb to the forehead of each worshiper, making the sign of the cross as he does and saying these words: “Remember: you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

During the penitential season of Lent we are reminded that God bends His heart toward sinful humankind—toward *us*. He has such compassion and loves us so much that He sent His only begotten Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity, to bear our sin. God restores us to Himself and our hearts bend toward Him in response.

Jesus said that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21).

This is true on many levels. We spend money, for example, on those who are the objects of our “valentine love.” Cards, flowers, or other gifts are tangible ways of expressing our love for sweethearts and spouses, children, and parents.

In the context of Ash Wednesday, we see that God's treasure and heart also are in the same place. Out of love, He gave everything for us so that we might have everything, including His forgiveness of sins and eternal life with Him. There can be no more profound matter of the heart than this!

**Jerry Kieschnick**  
John 3:16–17

Lives Transformed through  
Christ, in Time . . . for Eternity!  
e-mail: [president@lcms.org](mailto:president@lcms.org)  
Web page: [www.lcms.org/president](http://www.lcms.org/president)