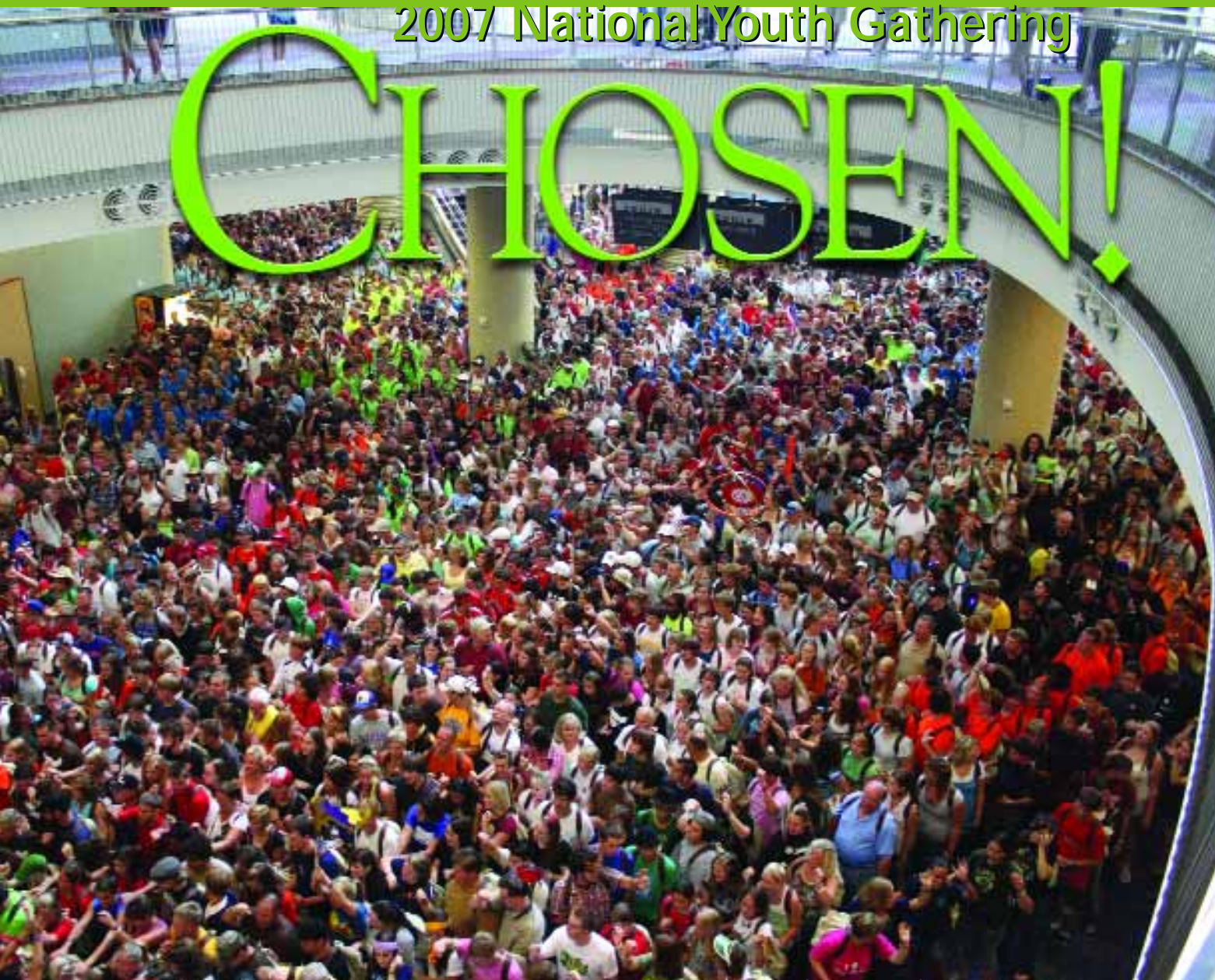




THE LUTHERAN WITNESS™

2007 National Youth Gathering

CHOSEN!



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SEPTEMBER 2007

7

ONE ROAD?

15

IN HIS CORNER

16

POSTER POWER



6 FAN INTO FLAME: IGNITING HEARTS

by Ron Nelson

Expansion begins in Novosibirsk, Siberia. Mosaic—a multiethnic, multigenerational church start.

7 ONLY ONE ROAD TO HEAVEN?

By Gene Edward Veith

Christian exclusivity in a pluralistic age.

12 CHOSEN!

Compiled by Vicki J. Biggs

2007 National Youth Gathering termed “the church at its best.”

15 IN HIS CORNER

by Kim Plummer Krull

NFL Hall of Famer Roger Wehrli cites God’s abiding presence in enshrinement speech.

16 POSTER POWER

by Diane Strzelecki

Urban Sunday-school kids realize they, too, can reach out to children in other countries with the Good News of Jesus.

20 THINKING ABOUT YOUR FUNERAL

by Jonathan C. Watt

A funeral is a time to speak clearly about what we believe, teach, and confess as Lutheran Christians.



TO THE READER

For years, an underlying premise of the Synod’s official periodicals has been that *The Lutheran Witness*, our monthly features magazine, is for laypeople, while *Reporter*, our monthly newspaper, is for professional church workers and congregational lay leaders. This principle has served us well.

Still, don’t a number of pastors, teachers, and other church professionals and leaders read the *Witness* now and then? And don’t a number of laypeople have at

least some curiosity about LCMS news? We can answer “Yes” to both questions.

Witness readers have been encouraged in this space to check out the newly redesigned *Witness* website: www.lcms.org/witness. Allow me now also to encourage you to check out *Reporter’s* newly renovated website, *Reporter Online*: www.lcms.org/reporter

There’s a lot going on at *Reporter Online*, where the content changes constantly. You’ll find a new “top story,” with photo, each week; a “New This Week” section spotlighting recently posted stories;

“pop-up boxes” enabling you to submit messages and letters to the editor as well as ads for “Notices”; an “Online Only” section offering Web-exclusive material; and a beefed-up search engine that will comb every print edition of *Reporter* back to 2003.

Reporter Online provides everything in the monthly print *Reporter* (except advertising), plus a number of stories and pictures not found elsewhere. It is the Synod’s most comprehensive source of LCMS news. If you’re curious, please give it a look.

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

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 LIFELINE
- 4 LETTERS
- 11 SEARCHING SCRIPTURE
- 23 NOTICES

- 25 Q & A
- 27 SHEDDING SOME LIGHT
- 28 FAMILY COUNSELOR
- 29 FROM THE PRESIDENT

COMING IN OCTOBER...

- Luther and World Mission
- The Reformation for Today
- A House in Wittenberg

Saved from Death Three Times— to Hear God’s Word One Final Time

By Linda Krueger

On Aug. 7, 1999, a storm brought 12 inches of rain to Omaha, Neb. A debris-filled creek overflowed near my parents’ home, causing a deep whirlpool to form around the house. My father went to the basement to check on water seepage. He was killed when the basement walls crashed in and the raging water washed him away. Meanwhile, rescue teams tried desperately to reach my mother, who was on the porch. A fireman rescued her just as the porch collapsed.

Saved from death number one.

My mother did not cope well. She had lost her husband the day before their 58th wedding anniversary. She had lost her home and her will to live.

Dec. 17, 2001, was a frigid, snowy Nebraska day. My mother’s ground-level apartment faced the garage at the back of her complex. On a mid-afternoon cigarette break, she stepped outside, fell, and broke her hip. Eventually, two young men who normally were not at home during the day heard her cries and called for help.

Saved from death number two.

The surgeons were reluctant to operate. Mom might not survive. The other option: Keep her bedridden until the break healed. This could be a long time. We opted for surgery.

Although Catholic, my mother had not been involved with the church for many years. On the day of the surgery, there were no clergy available. So my youngest daughter and I offered prayers. God heard them, and Mom survived. We moved her to a care facility on Christmas Eve and celebrated a blessed Christmas Day with her there.

Three days later the news turned bad. Complications. My mother was rushed to the hospital. My oldest daughter arrived the same time I did. We found Mom in good spirits. We held hands, said the Lord’s Prayer, and wished her good night.

My home was 25 miles away. As I arrived, the phone was ringing. Mom had gone into cardiac arrest.

Back in the car. The roads were icy. It seemed I would never arrive. When I walked into her room, the nurses were still trying to get her heart started. Mom had been placed on a ventilator. She had been without oxygen for too long, and the hospital staff did not believe she would breathe on her own. A decision had to be



made. Her living will made it clear what her wishes were. The decision was how long to wait.

I called our interim pastor. As I collapsed into his arms, I told him what I feared: that over the years my mother had slipped away from God. I wanted her to hear God’s Word one more time. We prayed and left it up to God. The hospital called the priest on duty. Mom was given the last rites. The ventilator was disconnected.

Unexpectedly, Mom breathed on her own. Although unconscious, she was doing well enough that my husband encouraged me to go home and get some sleep. Reluctantly, I consented.

In the middle of the night, my mother awoke and asked for me. My husband witnessed to her, prayed with her, and read God’s Word to her. It was the gift I had prayed for.

After a while, Mom slipped back into unconsciousness. The next morning, my husband called. “Take your time. Things look good,” he said.

Saved from death number three.

Less than 15 minutes later I received another call. Mom was slipping away. Please hurry.

By God’s grace I arrived in time. I lay next to her, and God gave me the privilege of holding her as her life on this earth ended. We buried her on New Year’s Eve 2001, just 15 days after her fall.

And she was able to hear God’s Word one more time.

Linda Krueger is a member of St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, Scribner, Neb.

Reclaiming our young

From my perspective, the article “Reclaiming the Church’s Young in a Culture of Change” by John W. Oberdeck (June/July 2007) did a great job of diagnosing youth today, but I consider it weak in affirming the power we have available for any and every problem that the devil throws at the church.

I have been shepherding churches for more than a half-century, spanning the dynamic years of church growth in the 1950s and the turbulent years of the 1960s and 1970s, and I am privileged to still interact with God’s saints to this day. During all those years, I have observed that we Christians—

dence—rather, it is simply a matter of degree.

As a teenager in the 1960s, I received terribly flawed advice, given with the best of intentions, from an adult friend of the family: “Tim,” he said, “enjoy this time. These are the best years of your life.” Predictably, with every inevitable adolescent mental and emotional pain that was to follow, I dwelled on those poignant words, depressed in the thought that, like *Candide’s* Dr. Pangloss, “this was the best of all possible worlds” and, therefore, only the worst would follow.

Conversely, the best advice I ever heard at that time was from

hostile opposition to our parental values, driving a relational wedge between parent and child.

Tragically, only parents of considerable financial means, or those who are willing to make tremendous financial sacrifices, are in a position to choose an alternative educational system that builds a harmonious relationship between the student, teacher, and parent.

The poor, of course, have no choice. May God grant someday the implementation of a universal education voucher for the sake of troubled youth and anxious parents.

Tim Utter

New Hope, Minn.


Seeking Ablaze!

I could not agree more with Arlynn Sanders (“Letters,” June/July 2007) about the lack of information about *Ablaze!*, not only in *The Lutheran Witness*, but especially at the congregational level.

Where are the weekly or monthly bulletin inserts that explain what *Ablaze!* is and how the congregation is asked to become involved? Where are the CD video announcements and segments that could be shown on the projectors that almost every congregation now has?

Where are the lesson plans, study guides, Sunday-school and Bible-study lessons, posters, etc., that explain what *Ablaze!* is and how the individual is to carry it out. Especially needed are programs to teach the individual how to witness, similar to Willow Creek’s “Becoming a Contagious Christian” and “Just Walk Across the Room.”

Ablaze! is a wonderful national and international goal, but what is expected at the congregational level? We want to be involved, but we need structured guidance, local goals, and resources in bite-size pieces to mobilize the local congregation and to motivate individual Lutherans who tremble at the thought of even talking to



“God’s answer to all our troubled times is the same as the Spirit revealed in the letters of Paul and Peter and John, namely, the mighty Word of God.”

*Rev. Carl Pullmann
North Platte, Neb.*

whether we are grade-school-age, teenage, or adult—have had a streak of hypocrisy. Adults and youth alike have hidden their fears about the “bumpy roads” they were traveling. Repeatedly, they knew all was not well between them and their Lord and between them and fellow saints. God’s answer to all our troubled times is the same as the Spirit revealed in the letters of Paul and Peter and John, namely, the mighty Word of God.

*Rev. Carl Pullmann
North Platte, Neb.*

I appreciated Professor Oberdeck’s insightful article. I would argue, however, that while Professor Oberdeck is correct in observing how “today’s adolescents feel abandoned by the adult world,” this dilemma is not without prece-

my sainted father. He took me aside one day and flattered me by saying, “Tim, I believe you’re more intelligent than I am” (he obviously had my attention), “but I have one advantage over you—experience. I’ve been where you are now.”

Naturally, my first thoughts were that someone who could not even name the members of the Beatles would have a difficult time understanding my world and teenage mores. Then, again, I realized I had someone who loved me enough that he would not only take the time to listen, but may in fact have some appreciation of the universal challenges of adolescence.

Today’s youth, however, are further handicapped by a challenge that is political in nature. With every passing year, our K-12 educational system continues to grow in

close friends and family about our loving God.

*Chuck Collins
Placerville, Calif.*

Please do not feel obligated to increase stories on *Ablaze!* I feel that I see and hear enough about *Ablaze!* We have *Ablaze!* stuff in our mailbox every week. We have an *Ablaze!* light-up pen from a convention. We have folders and stationery with *Ablaze!* inscribed on them. It seems that all other church teachings and missions have been abandoned while we are fed *Ablaze!* news. I don't know ... maybe I just don't have the same "burning in the bosom" as others do.

*Kathrine Bischof
Paragould, Ark.*

Practice what you preach?

Thank you for the interesting article regarding race relations ("The Sin of the Racially Split Church," June/July 2007). The author makes some excellent points. However, the irony is how the article itself only underscores the problem of

(Continued on Page 28)



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About the Cover: Young people enter the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Fla., for the opening night Mass Event at the 2007 National Youth Gathering.

Fan into Flame: Igniting Hearts

by Ron Nelson

Expansion begins in Novosibirsk, Siberia

Thanks to a designated gift from a donor, *Fan into Flame* has sent \$15,000 for the permits to begin construction of an expanded worship and training center at Christ the Savior Lutheran Church in Novosibirsk.

Located in the Siberian Federal District, Christ the Savior serves as a multiuse facility. It provides areas for worship and instruction, a theological library, and materials distribution. Expansion of the training function means students will not have to travel long distances (up to three days each way) to other training centers. The upgrade will help the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia (ELCIR) gain a greater capacity to manage its own mission outreach.

Remodeling also will enable Christ the Savior to grow and hopefully attract 100 families. The LCMS Board for Mission Services calculates that when the remodeling is completed, the sanctuary will hold 120 people—allowing the congregation to have sufficient resources to become self-supporting.

The entire project will cost \$150,000. *Fan into Flame* will provide the full amount. The ELCIR intends construction to be well underway before the harsh Siberian winter begins.



Christ the Savior Lutheran Church in Novosibirsk, Siberia, was planted by LCMS World Mission to be a model congregation for the entire region.

Mosaic—a multiethnic multigenerational church start

The California-Nevada-Hawaii District is an early recipient of *Fan into Flame* funds. One of the district's "Judea" (cross-cultural) projects is its new Mosaic Ministry. This ministry brings the Gospel to several large population groups of "1.5 to 2nd" generation immigrants.

The first celebration event early this year was successful—210 people attended. Represented were people from Brazil, Columbia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Iran, Liberia, Mexico, the Philippines, the U.S., and Vietnam.

Pastor Tesfai Tesema presented the vision for Mosaic. The worship team of one of the host churches, Mount Olive Lutheran, Milpitas, Calif., assisted with the event.

South Bay Mosaic is a multiethnic church plant of the CNH District in collaboration with its Circuit 18 congregations. It is hosted by Mount Olive and First Immanuel, San Jose, Calif.

Mosaic was able to achieve its main goal, which was to rally people for the creation of a new worshipping community. There will be three more events before the public opening of the church.

Mosaic's three-year plan calls for

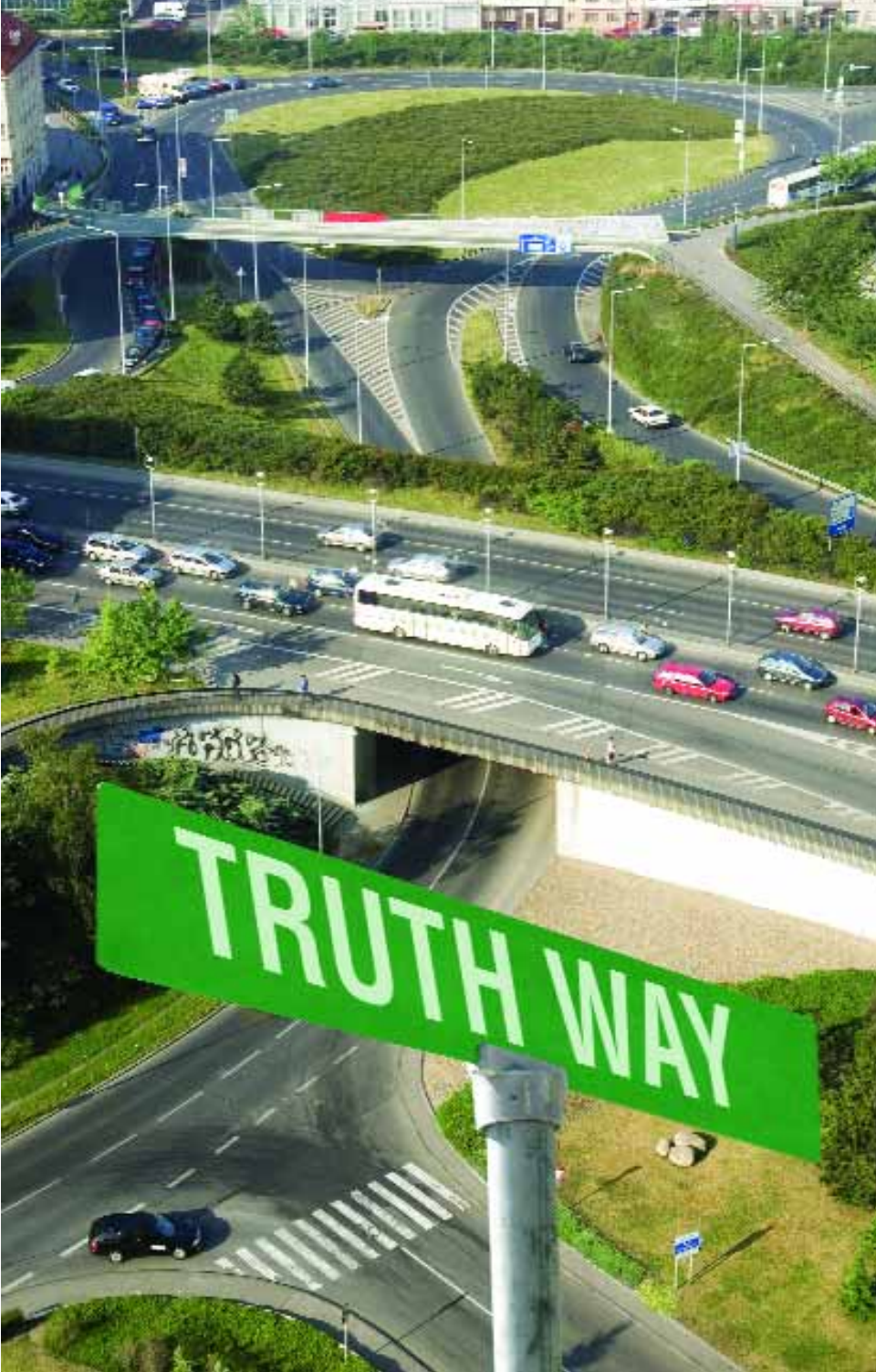
- 150 families gathering for worship, with 20 adult home Bible-study groups;
- more than 100 children in a multiethnic ministry;
- serving 50 or more men and women through GED, ESL (English as a second language), and counseling programs;
- 50 children reached through tutoring, sports, language classes, or spiritual retreats;
- 30 leaders trained.

Rev. Ronald E. Nelson is director of donor communications for LCMS World Mission Support.

Fan into Flame is the national campaign in support of the *Ablaze!* vision of LCMS World Mission and its partners to share the Gospel with 100 million unreached or uncommitted people globally by 2017. The campaign, approved by the 2004 LCMS convention (Res. 1-04), supports outreach activities of *Ablaze!* and seeks gifts of \$100 million by 2010.

Fan into Flame unrestricted funds are distributed quarterly based on an Acts 1:8 model: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem ... Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Of the net proceeds, distributions consist of

- 15 percent to participating congregations;
- 15 percent to the district;
- 20 percent for national mission projects;
- 50 percent to fund LCMS World Mission global projects.



Only One Road to Heaven?

*Christian Exclusivity
in a Pluralistic Age*

By Gene Edward Veith

“I am the Way and the Truth and the Life,” said Jesus. “No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

Those are strong words. The Bible says that Jesus Christ will be a “stone of stumbling and a rock of offense” (Rom. 9:33). Today, especially, people stumble over and find deeply offensive the Christian teaching that “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

We live in a pluralistic culture. Our neighbors, co-workers, and friends come from many different religious backgrounds. They seem just as moral and religious as we are, if not more so. It seems the height of arrogance to think that we Christians alone have the right religion and that everyone else is lost forever.

We also live in a climate of relativism. Because of our pluralism and the dominating worldview of postmodernism, people tend to assume that truth, morality, and religion are relative. According to this

Many today claim that all religions are just different ways to find God, different roads that arrive at the same destination. Yet not all ‘roads’ lead to the same destination. Jesus, in fact, says there is only one ‘Road’ to heaven — through Him.

way of thinking, cultures and individuals construct ways of thinking and acting that give meaning to their lives, but meaning is strictly subjective. There is no objective truth—with perhaps the exception of scientifically determined facts—that is valid for everyone.

“That may be true for you,” we hear, “but it isn’t true for me.” Truth is seen not as a discovery but as a construction. Morality is a matter of “values”—that is, behavior that particular individuals or cultures *value*—rather than a matter of transcendent objective absolutes. Religion has to do with subjective choices and experiences that give meaning to a person’s life. Religion is perfectly acceptable—as long as it is kept private, experiential, and interior. But religious truth-claims, doctrines, and absolutes are out of line. Since religion is seen as purely personal, “no one has the right to impose his or her religion on anyone else.”

This mindset is obviously a huge obstacle to Christian evangelism. The very claim that faith in Jesus Christ is the one way to salvation seems preposterous on its face. Even Christians often find that teaching hard to accept.

Part of the problem is the way the issue is framed, even in our own minds. We need to make clear to people we are witnessing to—and to ourselves—exactly why and how the Gospel is such radically “good news” to people of every culture and religion. This will involve clearing up some misconceptions.

Don’t all roads lead to the same destination?

In John 14:6—one of the passages that causes so much trouble—Jesus says, “I am the Way.” Literally, that means, “I am the Road.” This is countered by the oft-heard assertion that all of the different religions are different ways to find God: “There are different roads, but they all arrive at the same destination.”

But different roads *do not* always go to the same destination. If you are trying to get to, say, the Grand Canyon, if you head north on I-35, you will never get there. It will not matter how sincere you are in your drive. I-35, though passing through



many interesting parts of the country, just does not go to the Grand Canyon.

Similarly, the world’s different religions do not even claim to arrive at the same destination that Christianity does. To say that all religions are paths to heaven is to fail to respect what the different religions themselves teach.

The very concept of “heaven,” referring to a realm of eternal life in which the individual person survives after death in a state of perfect joy, is a distinctly Christian belief. Supplemented with the belief in the resurrection of the body, the Christian teaching about the afterlife means that you yourself, in all of your personality and memories and relationships, will live forever, purged of all your sins and weaknesses, and that you will know your loved ones and be in communion with Christ Himself.

In contrast, most Eastern religions—such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and the Westernized New Age versions—reject the survival of individuals altogether. In Hinduism, souls are reincarnated into other individuals until they are purged of their distinctions and ultimately merge all together into a vast cosmic oneness. But, as C. S. Lewis pointed out, using one of Hinduism’s own metaphors, when a drop of water falls into the ocean, the individual drop ceases to exist.

The destination of Buddhism is “Nirvana,” meaning, literally, “nothingness.” When, after much meditation and reincarnation, the soul finally loses all of its desires and finds enlightenment, it will escape the bounds of the material world—the realm of things—and experience “the void” of “no-thingness.”

In the classical pagan religions—and in other pagan religions today—all of the dead go to the same place. The ancient Greeks believed that all souls, good or bad, cross over into Hades, the word used in the Greek New Testament that is translated into English as “hell.” Here the desperately wicked are tormented, while the rest wander in melancholy darkness.

The ancient Germanic tribes had much the same belief, with the added notion that warriors would spend their eternity fighting every day, with their wounds



healing each night, so they could fight again the next morning. The Germans' name for the place of the dead was "Hel."

In the days of the early church, Greek and Germanic pagans had no difficulty with the idea that everyone when they died went to hell. That was what they themselves already believed. When Christian missionaries taught them that, through Christ, they could enter into a realm of eternal joy, that was good news indeed.

Monotheistic religions often teach something similar to what Christians believe about the afterlife, but the similarity tends to be superficial. Mormons teach that when you die, you will get to be the god of your own solar system, begetting with your wife spirit children to be born as inhabitants of the planets you will rule. Muslims teach the existence of a paradise in which the inhabitants get to enjoy sensual pleasures, including those the religion forbids on earth. Some of the most orthodox of the Jewish sects believe in some kind of afterlife, along the lines of the hints in the Old Testament, but many Jews believe this life is final, with no survival beyond the grave.

Those who want to go to heaven would do well to embrace the religion that teaches that there is such a place and that, through Christ, offers a Way to get there.

Isn't it unfair for God to condemn non-Christians?

But even so, it does not seem fair that God would condemn people to hell just because they do not know Jesus. Many people throughout the world have never heard of Jesus. It would be unjust for God to condemn them. And surely, whatever his religion teaches, a good, moral, saintly person who follows another religion should not go to hell, but should receive an eternal reward.

We, as well as the people we are witnessing to, need to realize that no one is condemned for not believing in Jesus. People are condemned for their sins.

At the end of time, the Bible tells us, everyone will be judged by their *works*.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. . . . If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:12, 15 NIV)



Everyone's deeds are recorded in the books. It is on this basis that judgment comes. But there is "another book," the book of life, which records the names of those saved by Christ (Phil. 4:3). They and they alone, through the work of Christ, can escape the punishment due to their sins.

It is, however, true that God would never condemn a good, moral, saintly person, someone with no faults and with abundant virtues. A person without sin has no need to fear God's judgment. Christianity, though, is skeptical that there is anyone who is sinless, denying that there is anyone so virtuous as to deserve eternal life in heaven. "None is righteous, no, not one . . . All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:10, 23).

The Bible does teach that nonbelievers can demonstrate exemplary virtue (Rom. 2:12–16). We may indeed know of a holy man from another religion who exhibits the highest moral qualities. Again, if he actually *is* holy and moral and sinless, then he would have no need of Christ's forgiveness. But, though we might see external signs of goodness, God sees also his heart. And, if you talk to the holy man, he himself may well admit to the sins and imperfections that rage in his inner life.

As for those who have never heard of Christ, they are not condemned for that omission, but for their sins. In Romans, which we have been citing, St. Paul explains that every human being has enough of an innate knowledge of God and of His moral law to render everyone "without excuse" (1:18–20).

We can be confident that God is fair. That is to say, He is *just*. And *that* is why we should all, if we are honest, tremble. But God, in His love, has satisfied His justice. By becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ and atoning for our sins on the



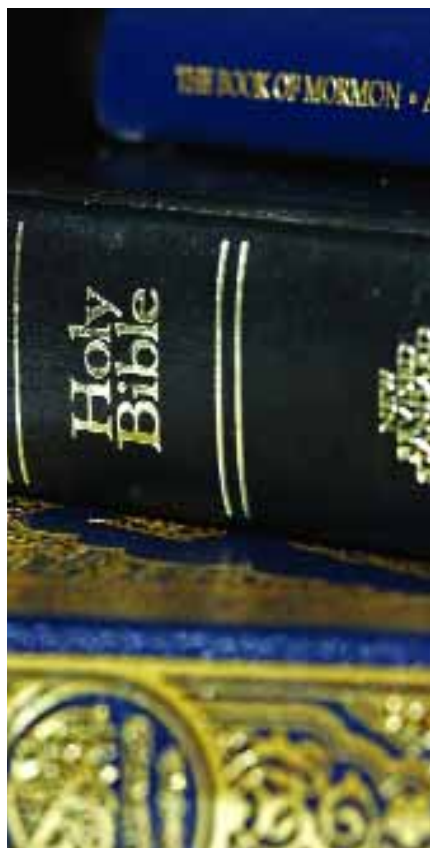
cross, God offers us His grace. To those with faith in Jesus, God is *not* fair, giving us mercy rather than the punishment we deserve, and for that, we can only praise and obey Him.

Christianity is precisely for sinners. People who think they are righteous, whether through their own virtues or their religious observances, can never understand Christianity. They must be broken by God's Law, made to realize how sinful they really are. While Christ, our Great Substitute, taught both Law and Gospel, He must not be presented as Law, in the sense of representing something else people have to do or face divine punishment. Rather, Christ is a lifeline, a means of rescue. He must always be proclaimed as Gospel, as Good News.

Aren't all religions about just being good?

It has been said that there are only two religions in the world: Those that teach that we are saved by our own efforts, and the one that teaches that we are saved by God's effort. Those that teach how to ascend to God, and the one that teaches how God *descended* to us.

Though the world's religions differ about what salvation is and what God is, they do tend to agree on the centrality of human merit. Somehow, we must do things—rituals, meditation, good works—to reap the spiritual benefits of that religion.



Christianity really is the only religion in which God, through Christ, does it all: He reveals Himself to us through His Word, forgives our transgressions, and empowers us to live as we should. Faith itself is His gift, which He creates in our hearts through His Word and Sacraments.

Belief in a religion of works, however construed, may be the “natural religion” so many people look for. Even ostensibly Christian theologies sometimes devolve into religions of works.

If religion just has to do with works, then all of the religions of the world really *are* pretty much the same. All religions can produce their holy men and women and examples of moral heroism. And Christians, since we too believe in the moral law, can appreciate them.

But for those who crave not just good works but forgiveness for bad works, for people who feel guilty for violating the tenets of their own religion, for those who feel that they merit condemnation, then Christ comes as a blessed relief.

Dr. Gene E. Veith is provost at Patrick Henry College in Purcell, Va., and the author of *The Spirituality of the Cross* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999) and other books. He is a member of St. Athanasius Lutheran Church, Vienna, Va.

A Hindu metaphor suggests that when a drop of water falls into the ocean, the individual drop ceases to exist.



Good News for Today

By Rodney Rathmann

Regularly we interact with friends, neighbors, and relatives who are living unfulfilling and rebellious lives outside of God's grace, with little or no understanding of God's love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus.

Such was the condition of the woman Jesus met one day at a Samaritan well (John 4:1–40). As with that Samaritan woman, people today seem to have a great deal of interest in things spiritual, just as they did in the days of Jesus, and later, of the apostle Paul (Acts 17:16–34). Though not necessarily relating to Christianity, spiritually frequently emerges as a popular topic of conversation around the table, during breaks at work, and over the talk-show airwaves.

As we think about those we meet daily at “the well” who remain firmly held in the grasp of sin and unbelief, God's Word guides, equips, and encourages us. It prepares us as God's people for the eclectic and even oppositional spiritual climate we often face.

What do all people have in common, regardless of age, race, condition, or circumstance?

Rom. 3:23

Acts 4:12

Freed and forgiven through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, we are changed (2 Cor. 5:17). Empowered by God's Spirit, we profess Christ (1 Cor. 12:3) and bring the

Good News of His heart-changing, reconciling peace to others (2 Cor. 5:18–21). We are now Christ's ambassadors!

What counsel and direction do the following verses provide as we think about our ambassadorship to a spiritually alien, ambivalent culture?

Ps. 51:12–13

Col. 4:4–6

Jer. 23:28

1 Peter 3:15–16

Acts 1:8

Jesus met an unbelieving woman at a well and asked for a drink of water. They began talking about spiritual things. Jesus confronted the woman with her sin and announced Himself as the Messiah. Soon the woman and her neighbors were confessing faith in Him as their Savior (John 4:39–42). Paul once spoke to group of Athenians beginning with “I perceive that in every way you are very religious” (Acts 17:22). He went on to tell them about Jesus. Some came to believe.

But bringing people to faith is God's work. We need never lose heart when our words of witness seem to go unheeded. At times, faith comes after a succession of contacts with God's Word over long periods



of time. Speaking of the coming to faith of the people at Corinth, Paul writes, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow” (1 Cor. 3:6 NIV).

When our philosophical, unbelieving friend says in conversation, “Aren't all religions basically the same?” when a despondent co-worker asks what we believe, or when our words about Jesus seem met with rebuff, we can take a deep breath, pray, and speak simply and naturally what God has told us in His Word, trusting that faith comes from hearing the message (Rom. 10:17). It is God who brings the miracle of faith according to His good time and plan. We need only to be faithful.

Dr. Rodney Rathmann is senior editor of school, midweek, and confirmation materials for Concordia Publishing House.



C H + S E N

2007 National Youth Gathering Termed "the Church at Its Best"

Attendance—more than 25,000

Service project participants —7,500

Bibles to be distributed—3,500
to Florida prisoners

Blankets assembled—2,500
for Southern District families
displaced by hurricanes

Pints of blood donated—64

Food collected and sorted—
2 tons for Second Harvest

**Eyeglasses donated, washed,
inspected, calibrated, sorted,
and packaged for the needy
in Nicaragua**—10,000

Colorful spotlights illuminate the main stage for the opening night Mass Event. This stage on the main floor of the Orange County Convention Center served as the focal point of the daily Mass Events and the Gathering worship service. Inspirational speakers, singers, dancers, musicians, actors, and a praise band specially organized for the Gathering performed on this stage.



Chosen!

Compiled by Vicki J. Biggs

Some 25,000 youth and adult paid participants from all 35 LCMS districts and several nations, along with 1,500 volunteers, met in Orlando at the Orange County Convention Center July 28–Aug. 1 under the theme “CHOSEN,” based on 1 Peter 2:9. The 2007 event marks the 10th triennial National Youth Gathering sponsored since 1980 by LCMS District and Congregational Services—Youth Ministry.

“You are all chosen. You are also the church at its best,” Rev. Terry Dittmer, director of LCMS Youth Ministry, told participants at the close of the event. “You are the church with a smile on its face and the joy of Jesus in [its] heart; and it’s time to go back out into the world and tell the world what we know about being chosen in the name of the Chosen One.”

LCMS President Gerald B. Kieschnick addressed all the participants at the Sunday evening plenary session. “The focus of these National LCMS Youth Gatherings is on your relationship with the God of the universe,” Kieschnick said to them. A number of teens expressed their delight in meeting with so many others from across the country—Christian Lutherans “just like me all here in one place.”

The Gathering included daily general sessions for all participants, workshops, fellowship, and service projects. Service projects included 7,500 participants serving 39 elementary schools, 17 parks and community-based senior centers, and nine private facilities throughout the greater Orlando area. At the Orange County Convention Center, eight sheds and 250 door or window headers were constructed with Thrivent Builds! and Habitat for Humanity. Key verses were highlighted in 3,500 Bibles to be distributed throughout the Florida penal system, and 2,500 fleece blankets for hurricane-impacted families of the Southern District were assembled; 64 pints of blood were donated;

Rejoice in the Lord Ministries, a gospel group from Orlando, Fla., performed at the Sunday night Mass Event. The band closed the event with a rousing rendition of “My Redeemer Lives” that moved the audience to clap, stomp their feet, and sing along.

Photo: Nathan B. Harrmann



Youth arrive for the Sunday night Mass Event. A close look at the photo shows that most teens sport the ubiquitous backpack each received upon arrival at the convention center. This year’s model was tan canvas that many youth quickly decorated with their names, drawings, and free-hand designs.

Photo: Abi Shields



COUNTERCLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

Teen claps at the Sunday night Mass Event. While the music compelled the audience to clap, cheer, and dance, the event speakers were met with close, focused, contemplative attention. Photo: Abi Shields.

Mike Lewis, known as the “Jesus Painter,” drew thunderous applause and a standing ovation for his moving portrait of Jesus painted on stage in five minutes or so during the Monday night Mass Event. Photo: Abi Shields.

One of the many youth who arrived in Orlando with donations from home for the needy. The boxes contain canned goods for distribution by Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida. Photo: Abi Shields.

Three teens from Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Land O’ Lakes, Fla., model their congregation’s customized National Youth Gathering apparel. Many youth groups from across the country wore custom-designed T-shirts at the Gathering. Photo: Abi Shields.

Member of the liturgical dance troupe that performed Tuesday night at the worship service. The dancers, all LCMS members who auditioned to perform at the Gathering and practiced every day in Orlando, lent beauty and inspiration to the dramas they illustrated. Photo: Nathan B. Harrmann.

Rev. John Nunes, president of Lutheran World Relief, Baltimore, Md., was the featured speaker at the opening Mass Event. His topic, “The Indestructible Chosen Community,” based on 1 Peter, 2:4–5, focused on “the Living Stone,” an analogy for Jesus Christ. Photo: Nathan B. Harrmann.

Working side-by-side, an adult chaperone and a teen join the group of volunteer carpenters assembling a side wall for a shed. This activity was one of the many on-site service projects at the Gathering. Youth at the Gathering helped assemble eight sheds for Thrivent Builds!, the charity arm of Thrivent Financial, and Habitat for Humanity. Photo: Nathan B. Harrmann.



4,000 pounds of food were collected and sorted for the Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida; and 10,000 pairs of eyeglasses were donated, washed, inspected, calibrated, sorted, and packaged for the needy in Nicaragua.

The Gathering also offered many opportunities for worship and Bible study. Ascension Lutheran Church, Casselberry, Fla., served as the host congregation for the opening worship, and Ascension’s senior pastor, Dr. David Mulder, served as the presiding minister.

“The service was awesome,” Mulder said, “but something the youth knew impressed me the most—25,000 very excited youth would go from thunderous applause to reverent response to a portion of the liturgy in a matter of seconds. And

during Tuesday’s extremely well-crafted message by Dr. (Reed) Lessing, they were as quiet as church mice when they heard the Law but applauded at the first and repeated Gospel statements. Thank God for the faithful pastors who have taught their youth how to worship and how to distinguish Law and Gospel.”

Planning is under way for the 2010 National LCMS Youth Gathering. The event’s location will be announced in the coming months as contract negotiations are completed. Watch for more details at www.lcmsgathering.com.

Vicki J. Biggs is the manager of public affairs and media relations for the LCMS Board for Communication Services.

In His Corner

Roger Wehrli deflects a pass during an August 1980 St. Louis Cardinals victory over the Chicago Bears. Photo: Bruce Dierdorf/Gettyimages



NFL Hall of Famer Roger Wehrli cites God's abiding presence in enshrinement speech



The Wehrlis joined St. Paul's in the 1970s when children Shannon and Michael attended school there. Today, daughter Shannon Watkins teaches at Messiah Lutheran School, and the three Wehrli grandchildren attend Messiah and Immanuel Lutheran schools, all in St. Charles, Mo. The former cornerback is now vice president of FormStore Inc., a manufacturer of printed business forms.

For this self-described man of few words, spotlighting his faith in the biggest speech of his life came with the same conviction as making a touchdown-saving tackle.

"Obviously, you have to thank God for the talent He gives you in the area of athletics," Wehrli said. "Sure, the coaches and your parents have a big influence on your life, but the bottom line is that it all comes from God. That was important for me to say."

Kim Plummer Krull is a St. Louis writer and a member of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Des Peres, Mo.

by Kim Plummer Krull

"God was in the first draft."

Star National Football League cornerback Roger Wehrli isn't talking about the annual NFL selection of quarterbacks, linemen, and such, but about his painstaking choice of words for the eloquent, moving speech he gave at his induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

After thanking coaches, teammates, fans, and family, the former member of the St. Louis Cardinals (1969–82) and current member of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Des Peres, Mo., thanked the Lord.

"Finally, many of you know me as a man of faith," Wehrli, 59, told the thousands who attended the Aug. 4 ceremony in Canton, Ohio, and the millions more who watched the nationally covered event. "I believe that God has guided each and every move I've made. He's put the right people in the right places to

bring me here, and I thank Him with all my heart for taking a little guy from a little town (King City, Mo.) with little dreams and making me fit to wear the title of Hall of Famer."

While such a witness by a famous professional athlete on such a celebrated platform may surprise some, the more than 50 St. Paul's members who attended the ceremony probably expected it.

Soon after the seven-time Pro Bowler was invited to join the NFL elite in Canton, Wehrli and his wife, Gayle, extended an invitation to their congregation to come along.

"Certainly, God gifted Roger on the athletic field, but that's who he and Gayle are—Christian people," said Rev. Jeremy Schultz, who got to know the couple when he was associate pastor at St. Paul's, Des Peres, and trekked to the induction festivities from his current church, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Royal Oak, Mich.

"It sounds funny, but the whole experience was a somewhat spiritual one," Schultz said of the enshrinement. "Roger identified himself as a man of faith, and also referenced his class of inductees (six fellow football stars) and their collective faith and that deep bond they share. It was a strong, Christ-centered witness."

Roger Wehrli's family watches as he is inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Left to right, from center: Jane-Ann Keenan, Hall of Fame volunteer and the Wehrli family's assistant for the Canton, Ohio, induction activities; Gayle Wehrli; grandson Drew Watkins; daughter Shannon Wehrli-Watkins; and granddaughter Ellie Watkins.



POSTER POWER!

After a visit from an LCMS World Relief and Human Care staff member, urban Sunday-school kids realize they, too, can reach out to children in other countries with the Good News of Jesus.

by Diane Strzelecki

The children at Hope Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Mo., were likely expecting only a mildly interesting “grownup” presentation when Sally Henrickson, medical/material goods resource coordinator for LCMS World Relief and Human Care, came to talk about her work in Kenya. Yet Sunday-school superintendent Pam Nielsen thought it would be a great opportunity to enhance the mission focus of Hope’s new *Growing in Christ* Sunday-school curriculum and help that emphasis resonate with the kids.

“Sally was scheduled to leave for Kenya in less than a month, to accompany medical supplies, teaching supplies, and a Mercy Medical Team,” explains Nielsen, who is also a senior editor at Concordia Publishing House. “This seemed like the perfect opportunity to connect our students with mission work, because we could have a firsthand account of the work being done.”

The visit turned out to be more than mildly interesting.

Henrickson told the students about her trips to Kenya and the needs there. “I have been working with the women’s center that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya just put together in Dago, which is a rural and extremely poor part of the country,” she explains. “They have a preschool there with one teacher and 52 children—ages 3 to 5—mostly orphans.”

Henrickson says she also told the students that children in Kenya have very few resources—such as worksheets, stickers, pictures, and crafts—compared to Sunday schools in the United States.



Top and bottom: Students at the Lutheran preschool in Dago, Kenya, and at Hope Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Mo., display the *Growing in Christ* Bible Story Posters Hope’s Sunday-school students sent to Kenya.

The *Growing in Christ* Bible Story Posters donated by the Sunday-school students at Hope Lutheran Church in St. Louis will help students who attend the schools of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya learn about the Good News of Jesus.

“Many pastors have multiple parishes—six to eight congregations is not uncommon—and they walk great distances to serve the congregations,” Henrickson recalls telling the children. “The kids and I ended up talking about how the *Growing in Christ* Bible Story Posters from their new Sunday-school curriculum might be good tools for the pastors to use with their children.”

Henrickson adds that the conversation developed into excited chatter as the students decided they wanted to use their offering money to help the pastors teach about Jesus.

Nielsen was pleased by her students’ response. “They did the math and were immediately excited that they could afford to do this for children in Kenya,” she remembers. “Knowing that their nickels, quarters, and dollars would be used for this purpose, they remembered to bring an offering every week.”

Before she left for Africa, Henrickson made another stop at Hope. “We took a photograph of the kids with the posters so that the African children could see who sent them,” she explains.

A chance to spread the Word

Sunday-school materials often include plenty of encouragement for children to share their faith with their neighbors. Yet it might be hard for kids to make the leap from the local mission field to foreign mission work. If a kid’s not allowed to travel to the next subdivision, how can he imagine traveling to the next country? If a child is told not to talk to strangers, how can she think about telling people in a strange land about Jesus?

If a student’s allowance is only \$2.50 a week, how is it possible to raise enough money to dig a well or build a house? For a young person between 3 and 4 feet tall, some things just seem, well, out of reach.

“They did the math and were immediately excited that they could afford to do this for children in Kenya. Knowing that their nickels, quarters, and dollars would be used for this purpose, they remembered to bring an offering every week.”

— Pam Nielsen

Nielsen notes that one of the purposes of Concordia’s *Growing in Christ* materials is to provide ways that children can actually support and be involved in spreading the Good News. “The *Growing in Christ* website includes a section

Students at Hope Lutheran Church in St. Louis sample typical Kenyan foods.

Getting Your Sunday School Involved

Deaconess Pam Nielsen, Sunday-school superintendent at Hope Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Mo., and an editor at Concordia Publishing House, believes that sending Concordia’s *Growing in Christ* Bible Story Posters to churches in need of resources is a great way for children to become involved in mission work.

“Churches purchasing these posters can check a box on the order form to request an additional set, or sets, for mission use,” Nielsen says. “That prompts CPH to work with Concordia Gospel Outreach to send the materials to a missionary, mission church, or school that has need of them.”

The poster packs sell for \$11.99, and each set contains 13 posters. Concordia Gospel Outreach covers the cost of the postage to mission locations around the world.

For more details, visit www.cph.org/growing, or call CPH at 1-800-325-3040 and ask for the *Growing in Christ* Bible Story Poster sets.



KENYA TODAY

According to Rev. Walter Obare, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK), it's been nearly 60 years since the first Lutheran missionaries started their work in Kenya—and the church is still growing.

“At present, our population numbers about 90,000 members divided into four dioceses, and dioceses are divided into districts, and districts divided into parishes,” Obare says. “A parish is five congregations or more with one pastor. The average congregation has 50 to 60 children attending Sunday school.”

Sally Henrickson, medical/material goods resource coordinator for LCMS World Relief and Human Care makes regular trips to Kenya.

She enjoys her work with the people of the ELCK.

“They have been a wonderful partner to us, just opening their hearts to us,” she says. “When we come to visit, they're very helpful and very thankful for how we've been able to serve them with regard to orphans' and women's projects, and also the medical teams.”

Henrickson notes that both the countryside and the people make Kenya a beautiful place to visit. “The people are very gracious and excited when we come,” she says. “The last medical trip we went on, we probably saw 1,500 people in a week's time, mainly in rural areas.



ELCK Bishop Walter Obare greets LCMS World Relief and Human Care staff member Sally Henrickson during Henrickson's recent trip to Kenya.

“The people are so neat, and they're very poor, and they have a very rough life, but they're appreciative and supportive. So it makes it worthwhile,” she adds.

called ‘Mission Connection,’ and this features links to other mission organizations connected with the LCMS,” she says. “This Web address is on the back of every student leaflet so that children and families can find opportunities for prayer and support.”

According to Nielsen, the posters were designed to provide vibrant illustrations of significant events in the Bible. The back of each poster contains a summary of the Bible story in six languages: English, Spanish, French, Russian, Chinese, and Arabic. Nielsen says that CPH consulted with LCMS World Mission and LCMS World Relief and Human Care when selecting the languages to include.

“The art is intentionally realistic, to show that these people really lived and the events depicted really occurred and were part of God's plan for our salvation,” Nielsen says. “We wanted to provide a visual message that God's Word and our Savior Jesus is for all people, in all times.”

Nielsen adds that English-speaking children can see what the Bible story looks like in other languages, while children who speak those languages “will be glad to see the Bible story in their own language.”

Nielsen says CPH is encouraging Sunday-school classes to purchase sets of the posters to be sent around the world. “If a Sunday school elects to purchase mission sets, CPH has an agreement with Concordia Gospel Outreach that ensures the sets will get to a missionary or mission church,” she says. “We hope this gives the children a sense of the wider church, the need to share the message of salvation with all people, and a way to be actively involved in spreading the Good News.”

‘A beautiful asset’

Once in Kenya, Henrickson presented the posters to Rev. Gordon Alex in Dago and gathered the children at one of the preschools of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) for a photograph with their new materials.

“He was excited to receive the first collection of posters and thrilled to know that more were coming for other pastors to use,” Henrickson says. “He said they were a beautiful asset to the parish, to help instruct the children—and all the people, really—in the stories of the Bible, and in their knowledge of Jesus.”



Rev. Dennis and Deaconess Lorna Meeker of the ELCK recently visited the United States and told CPH editors what a blessing the posters have been to their fellow church workers.

“Pastor Alex received a set of these posters and carries them with him wherever he goes,” Rev. Meeker said. “He has 10 congregations, assists with widows and orphans at Dago, and teaches the Bible at local schools.”

Meeker also explained that like most pastors in Kenya, Alex does not own a car or a bicycle, but walks or takes public transportation (if he has the funds) to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“It may take him up to five hours to reach his destination. So with pictures speaking a thousand words, this tired pastor can share the Gospel message more effectively with these posters,” Meeker said.

Rev. Walter Obare, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, notes that the posters have been helpful. “Often, we don’t have sight materials—and the ones we have, we use over and over again,” he says.



During Hope’s Sunday-school mission festival, Josephine Bahr inspects a basket made by the women of Dago, Kenya.

“These materials make it much easier for our Sunday-school teachers to reach our students.”

Alex agrees. “God richly blessed us when He made these durable teaching tools available to us,” he says, noting that pastors in Kenya are free to preach and teach the Gospel in school classrooms. “The poster durability and the carrying bag is also of great value,” he adds.

Alex goes on to describe the condition of the schools: “Most schools are of mud construction with dirt floors, and the children walk far and are undernourished,” he says. “The posters are very helpful in that they prolong the attention span of the children to enhance learning under less-than-favorable conditions.”

After Henrickson returned from Kenya, Hope held a mission festival so she could share her experiences with the congregation’s Sunday-school students. In addition to learning songs and tasting food from Kenya, the children were able to see photos of the mission field they had served—as well as a photo of the first Kenyan children to receive the posters.

“It’s not possible for our Sunday-school children to visit Kenya, but their quarters and dimes in the offering plate can help send Bible posters to the children there,” Nielsen says. “Seeing the photos of the African children and their posters made it real for our kids.”

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



Thinking about Your Funeral

A funeral is a time to speak clearly about what we believe, teach, and confess as Lutheran Christians.

by Jonathan C. Watt

Dear Pastor,

I'm trying to make plans for my funeral, but whenever I talk to my children about it, they won't listen. Can you help me understand what a funeral is all about, so I can talk to them?

This question may cause your pastor's heart to beat faster. He'll quickly answer, "Yes!"

No, it's not that your pastor has a morbid fascination with death; rather, he knows funerals are a time to speak clearly about what we believe, teach, and confess as Lutheran Christians—that is, a time to proclaim what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. Planning your funeral service before your death is actually a gift to your family. It is your last confession of faith in our Savior, and, focused on Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, it brings comfort to them in their grief.

To help people understand the role of a funeral service, I began offering "Funeral Service Planning Seminars" in my first parish. The idea came to me while I was sitting in a funeral director's office, trying to explain the details of the upcoming service. The director

had already picked the hymns for the family—well, at least he had suggested some. Yes, they were fine hymns, but I thought, "We can do better than that!"

It wasn't the first time I'd had that thought. In fact, the director suggested the same hymns for *every* funeral. I concluded my best defense was to have something written down from my congregation members themselves.

A fellow pastor gave me a booklet he'd put together, "Planning a Christian Funeral at Our Church." I began by sitting down with shut-ins and walking through the material. They were delighted to have something set down on paper. An LWML member suggested I conduct a seminar for their whole group. So I did. That's how I got started.

A Christian funeral is different

A colleague once observed that many people believe weddings are a pastor's prime opportunity to proclaim the faith we cherish. That's not so, he said. "Nobody listens to the pastor at weddings," he observed. "Everybody listens to him at funerals."

What is a funeral? A time to say goodbye? To have a family reunion? To grieve?

Yes, we say goodbye to a loved one; families gather more faithfully at funerals than any other time; and we grieve because of the separation that death brings.

A Christian funeral encompasses all of this, but it is also different. For we know that though we are separated temporarily through death, we are spiritually united as one in the body of Christ and shall be physically reunited at our Lord's return.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. (1 Thess. 4:13–14 ESV)

So what does this mean? What is it your pastor wants you to know about planning your funeral service?

It is important to understand that a funeral is a worship service. We do not worship the person lying in the casket; rather, we worship the One who died and rose again. Jesus Christ is the center of all Lutheran worship—especially a funeral—because Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the devil is clearly proclaimed. The whole funeral service echoes this truth over and over, reminding us of what Jesus did for us at our Baptism.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. (Rom. 6:3–5 ESV)

There are three parts of a funeral service that provide an opportunity to clearly proclaim Christ to the grieving heart. The first is the speaking and hearing of God's Word. Through the four readings—a Psalm, the Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel—the faith and hope we have in Christ Jesus are confessed. Understanding the purpose of each reading will help in selecting a Scripture passage.

As part of the church's prayer book, a favorite Psalm can express the depth of our feelings, as well as confess our faith in a loving and merciful Savior. Consider how Psalms 23, 31, 42, 121, and 130 communicate this.

The Old Testament reading reveals God's plan of salvation for His creation. Like us, God's people in the Old Testament trusted in the Messiah who would come to save them from their sins and raise them to eternal life. See Job 19:25–26, Is. 25:6 and 49:13–16.

The Epistle reading has several purposes. It can give a clear confession of our Christian hope in the

Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:51–52). It can show that not even death can separate us from God (Rom. 8:38–39). It brings out the peace we have with God because of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins (Rom. 5:1–6). And it can state how in death, through Christ, we gain everything (Phil. 1:21–23).

In the Gospel reading, Jesus comforts us with His own words, deeds, and prayers. "I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet

Planning your funeral service before your death is actually a gift to your family.



It is your last confession of faith in our Savior, and, focused on Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, it brings comfort to them in their grief.

shall he live" (John 11:25). "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

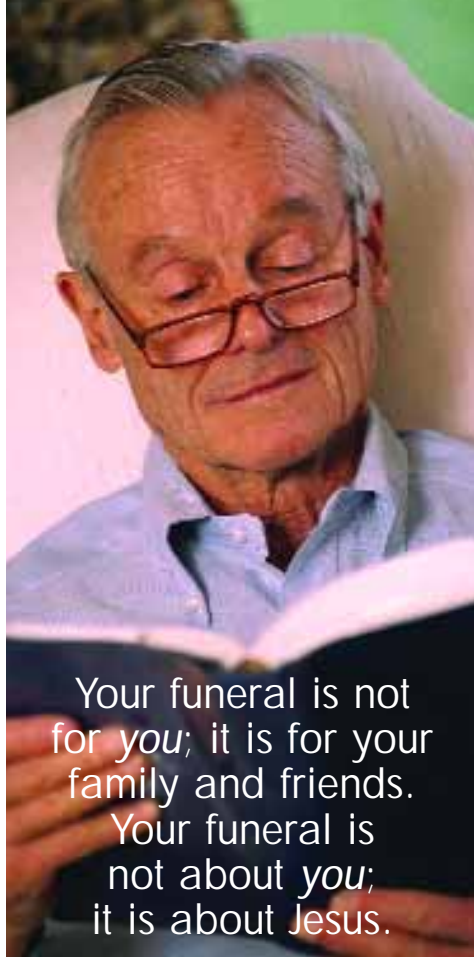
The singing of hymns at a funeral service is the second part where the comfort of Christ is heard by those attending. Like the Psalms, hymns can express the

depth of our faith. St. Paul says that through them God's Word "dwells in us richly" (Col. 3:16). Your pastor may suggest that you select Easter hymns. Your favorite hymn may be beautiful, reflecting God's work for us in Jesus, but Easter hymns speak so clearly to grieving hearts.

*Jesus lives! The vict'ry's won!
Death no longer can appall me;
Jesus lives! Death's reign is done!
From the grave will Christ recall me.
Brighter scenes will then commence;
This shall be my confidence. (LSB 490)*

A focus on the cross

Your pastor's primary task in the funeral sermon is to preach Christ crucified. His message may be made personal by showing how faith in Christ was revealed in your life. But remember, while your pastor may relate stories of your life during the sermon, that is not the reason for his preaching. The proclamation of God's Word at your funeral service is to point those who grieve to Jesus



PhotoDisc

and the hope that is found in Him alone.

One final thought: You won't care what is done, said, or sung at your funeral. You will be rejoicing in the presence of the Savior. Your funeral is not for *you*; it is for your family and friends. Your funeral is not about *you*; it is about Jesus. Those who have gathered will be comforted when they hear all that He has done to give you, and them, eternal life.

Rev. Jonathan C. Watt is pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church, Howard, S.D. He conducts seminars on funeral planning on a regular basis.

Young People Chosen and Blessed

Have you prayed for a young man or young woman—or for all our young people—today?

Young people are on my mind because I have

just returned from our Synod's National LCMS Youth Gathering in Orlando. The July 28–Aug. 1 event brought together some 25,000 young people and leaders— from more than 1,780 congregations in all 35 districts— along with thousands of volunteers.

This is also the time of year when our young people go back to school, where they are preparing for the various callings in life— vocations— that God has in store for them.

That's not to say that our youth do not already have God-given vocations. They do. God has called them to be sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, students, and Christians, just for a start. But I am thinking about the work they will do when they reach adulthood.

Some will become professional church workers. Recruiting young people for church-work careers is absolutely vital for the future and health of our congregations, schools, and other ministries. Please encourage young people who you believe have the necessary gifts to consider careers in church work.

We can thank our gracious God, too, for all those Christian young people who are called to other careers. They, too, are gifts of God.

Many thanks to you pastors, teachers, directors of Christian education, parents, and others for your godly support of young people in your particular spheres of influence as they address the question, "What am I going to do when I grow up?" Your counsel and guidance will help them gain clarity about the vocations to which God is calling them.

Through Holy Baptism, we are children of God. Young people, no less than we older Christians, are included in the words of Peter: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

"CHOSEN" was the theme of this year's National Youth Gathering, and it was based on that passage. It is a major purpose of our youth gatherings to help our young people grow in their understanding of who they are as CHOSEN ones of our gracious God.

Over the past 30 years, more than 200,000 young people directly and many more people "back home" have been blessed by 10 LCMS youth gatherings. This year's Synod convention adopted a resolution of support for these events, which, the gathering purpose statement says, are to "provide opportunities for youth and adults to boldly come together in the name of Jesus Christ to proclaim, celebrate and witness their salvation through Him, rejoice in the fellowship of their church and be affirmed and nurtured in their lives as God's people through Word and Sacraments."

The convention resolved that:

- "the LCMS give thanks to God for His blessings on the National LCMS Youth Gathering and for the literally thousands of persons who have participated in these events and worked on behalf of these events."
- "the LCMS express its continued support for these significant events in the lives of young people, their congregations, and in the Synod as a whole."
- "we express our appreciation and support to the LCMS Board for District and Congregational Services and the National LCMS Youth Gathering Executive Team (Steering Committee) for their faithfulness in providing opportunities for our youth through the National LCMS Youth Gathering."

When I read this to the young people at this year's gathering, they applauded, shouted, and raised the roof—they made a loud and joyful noise of appreciation, knowing that these words had come from representatives of their congregations and circuits.

Then I reminded them, and I remind you now, that because of God's love in Jesus, you and I are included in the words of the gathering's theme verse. You, too, are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

CHOSEN. That's you! That's me! Let's declare His praises!

Lives Transformed through Christ, in Time ... for Eternity!

e-mail: president@lcms.org

Web page: www.lcms.org/president

Jerry Kieschnick

John 3:16–17